

# Police Officer William J. Loftin | Cincinnati Police Division



Badge: P465

Age: 36

Served almost 9 years

September 25, 1966, to August 26, 1975

## **OFFICER**

Bill was born August 6, 1939 in Newnan, Georgia to Paul and Nellie (Maddox) Loftin. He attended Central High School in Newnan, graduating in 1957.

Bill entered the United States Army on October 26, 1960 and served in the Artillery as a Rocket Missile Gunner. He was honorably discharged in 1962 as a Sergeant (E-5).

Bill wanted to be a policeman since he was 7 years old. His mother had always been against the idea. She was concerned about the dangers of the job, but he said, "Mom, this is just

what I want to be. It's right for me ... If I should die in the line of duty, I'll die happy."

Bill joined the Cincinnati Police Division as a Police Recruit. He was promoted to Patrolman on December 27, 1966, issued Badge 465, and assigned to District 5 (1012 Ludlow Avenue). He served there and in District 7 (813 Beecher Street) and District 1 (310 Lincoln Park Drive) for 5½ years. By the time he was transferred to District 1 he had become "a dedicated and dependable worker" and his production was "above average in all categories," according to District 1 Commander, Captain Howard Espelage.

Officer Loftin was transferred to Central Vice Control Section on June 18, 1972. By 1974, his supervisor, Sergeant Paul E. Guthrie, described him as "one of the most capable, dependable, loyal, and fearless officers I have had the pleasure to work with." During his last six years, he earned extremely high Efficiency Ratings of 91% to 96%. He took off so seldom that he had more than 1200 hours (7 months) of unused time on the books. He had also received twelve letters of appreciation and/or commendation in his 8+ years of service, including four by the Police Chief. Another commendation, this one for a failed attempt to revive a child who had drowned in a pool, was on the Chief's desk.

Shortly after 8 p.m. on August 26, 1975 at Criminal Investigation Section, Homicide Detectives ribbed Officer Loftin about an arrest of three naked swimmers that had hit the newspaper the day before. Always affable, Officer Loftin took the kidding as intended and walked away laughing. Little did anyone know that a few hours later, the Homicide Detectives would be investigating his murder.

## **INCIDENT**

On August 26, 1975 Officer Loftin and his partner, Police

Officer Claude Dell, conducted an investigation in the area of the Clock Bar at 3450 Burnet Avenue. About 10:45 p.m., Cleophus Collins (53) of 123 Ehrman entered the bar and told the bartender that he wanted a gun and that he was going to shoot a cop. Collins had a criminal history including several arrests involving weapons and shooting with intent to kill. He walked back to his car, retrieved something from it, then walked back into the bar. Then he left the bar again.

Minutes later, in front of the Burnet Fruit Market, also in the 3400 block of Burnet, a citizen approached Officers Loftin and Dell sitting in a car and pointed to Collins, who was close to the car, stating that he had a gun. As the witness said this, Collins pulled a .38 caliber revolver and fired a shot in the air. The officers came out of their car and Collins shot another round into the air. The officers, from a few feet away, yelled, "Police Officers! Drop the gun!" Collins wheeled and shot Officer Loftin in the abdomen at point blank range; completely severing his aorta and damaging his lung, liver, diaphragm, stomach, and spleen. Both officers returned fire – Loftin 4 shots and Dell all 6 shots – hitting Collins's in the abdomen.

Officer Dell chased Collins to his car. Collins gave the empty revolver to his sister, who was by his car, and drove away. Officer Dell gave a description of the auto Collins was driving.

Officer Loftin crawled back to his car and called over his police radio for assistance, "I'm shot! I'm shot!" Before collapsing, he gave a description of his assailant.

District 7 Officers William Robb and Jeffrey Payton found Collins's car and pulled it over south on Melish Avenue. They found Collins unarmed.

Officer Loftin and Collins were transported to General Hospital. Collins was initially listed in Serious Condition.

## **DEATH**

Officer Loftin was unconscious before he was taken from the scene and word went out immediately to find and bring his mother to the hospital. When she arrived, she looked up at the officer who was escorting her in and asked, "Is my son dead?" The officer quietly replied, "Yes," and she collapsed, sobbing on the floor. Officer Loftin had died at 11:15 p.m. becoming the third officer gunned down in little more than a year.

Officer Loftin was survived by his grandmother, Sally Maddox; both parents; fiancée, Janet Walker; and sister, Dianne Loftin. Visitation and FOP services were held on the night of August 29, 1975 at the First Baptist Church at 6210 Betts Avenue in West College Hill. On August 30, 1975, at 9:45 a.m., 175 police cars, 66 from out of town and as far away as 200 miles, formed a procession at Cincinnati Police Headquarters, 310 Lincoln Park Drive, to the church for the 11:00 a.m. funeral services. From there, they escorted Officer Loftin to his grave at Spring Grove Cemetery. Pallbearers were Police Officers James Simon, Lawrence Handorf, David Steinwert, James McCain, Marvin Johnson, and Arthur Manigan. Honorary pallbearers were Police Chief Carl V. Goodin and the five assistant chiefs.

## **JUSTICE**

During a search at 6:30 a.m. the next morning, August 27, 1975, investigators found Collins's revolver, with all its ammunition expended, with the help of Collins's sister, in a wooded area near the scene of the murder. Sergeant Paul Morgan, Acting Homicide Squad Commander, advised that Collins was charged with Aggravated Murder and that Hamilton County Prosecutor Simon L. Leis intended to take the case directly to

the grand jury. By the night of the 27<sup>th</sup>, Collins's condition had taken a downturn. Listed as Critical, he was said to be near death.

On August 29, 1975, the Hamilton County Grand Jury indicted Collins on charges of Aggravated Murder and Attempt Aggravated Murder, both with Police Officer specifications and one with a potential death sentence. The cases were assigned to Judge William A. McClain. On September 2, Judge McClain appointed noted attorney Bernard J. Gilday, Jr. and John West to defend Collins.

Collins remained in Critical Condition until September 1, 1975 when he was listed in Fair Condition. More than a month after the murder, Collins was released from the hospital on September 29 and taken to the Hamilton County Jail.

On October 1, Collins plead Not Guilty at his arraignment and a trial date was set for November 24, 1975. During his trial he testified that he had not fired the revolver since July 4, that he took the revolver from the vehicle for safekeeping, and that he thought the officers were going to rob him. The jury was given the case and sequestered at 10 p.m. on September 5, 1975. They came back with a guilty verdict the next morning. On February 18, 1976 he was sentenced to die in the electric chair.

During March 1977, Attorney Gilday won for Collins a new trial, but this one ended September 23, 1977 in the same fashion with the same sentence – death.

Even though after two trials, two juries, and two judges, in accordance with the peoples' law of the State of Ohio, had called for his death, the United States Supreme Court struck down the death penalty and, in effect, commuted his sentence to Life Imprisonment with possibility of parole.

Each time he came up for parole, numerous citizens wrote

letters to the parole board and he was never released. Shortly after a failed attempt at parole in 2007, Collins died of natural causes.

## **AFTERMATH**

After the murderous deaths in the previous 35 months of Detective [Howard Smith](#), Patrolman [David Cole](#), Sergeant [Charles Handorf](#), and now Police Officer William Loftin, the first politician to express concern, two days later, was Mayor Theodore M. Berry who urged that the City should enact gun controls. Berry noted that “the accused simply had too much to drink” and if he had not been able to buy a handgun, all we might have had were “a couple of bloody noses.” Soon after the funeral, Steven Reece, Berry’s assistant and City Council candidate, continued the chant asking the City Manager to convene a community-wide program to battle crime and “tell us what additional laws we need.” Before long, Councilman Charles P. Taft called for a registration of firearms owners. Chief Carl V. Goodin informed them that it was already illegal for Collins to carry concealed the firearm with which he murdered Officer Loftin.

The deaths Patrolman David Cole and Sergeant Charles Handorf in 1974 and Police Officer William Loftin and Sergeant Lally in 1975 forever changed the tactical responses of law enforcement officers in the country. A Cincinnati Police Division Police Officer Survival training program grew from these four tragedies and soon received national attention. One aspect, the move to include shooting from within arm’s reach in firearms training, was groundbreaking in the mid-1970s. It is now common in almost all law enforcement officer firearms training across the country and it is required training for all Ohio law enforcement officers. The Division’s Police Officer Survival program was used as a model for the national Street Survival Program.

During 1995, Cincinnati Police Captain Christopher M. Robertson, Training Section Commander, and Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer, Assistant Planning Section Commander, noting a 1950 Cincinnati ordinance calling for the retirement of badges of officers who died in the line of duty and petitioned Police Chief Michael C. Snowden to retire Badge 465; which he did. At the same time, they requisitioned plaques for all Cincinnati officers who died in the line of duty since 1950 and erected a memorial at the Cincinnati Police Academy.

If you have information, artifacts, archives, or images regarding this officer or incident, please contact the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum at [Memorial@Police-Museum.org](mailto:Memorial@Police-Museum.org).

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