Police Officer William Lee “Billy” Johnson | Springboro Police Department



Badge: 5
Age: 48
Served: 8 years

May 17, 1975 to September 1975	Springboro Police Department
September 1975 to July 1976	Clearcreek Township Police Chief
July 1976 to June 27, 1983	Springboro Police Department

OFFICER

Billy was born on October 17, 1934 to Ottis Spencer and Mattie (Hill) Johnson of Lemon Township. He grew up there in the Mayville Subdivision and graduated from Middletown High School during May 1952.

As soon as he graduated, at 17 years old, Billy joined the

United States Marine Corps to fight in the Korean War. He made a career of the Marine Corps, including fighint in Vietnam from April 7, 1967 to March 5, 1968. His last promotion on January 1, 1970 was to Gunnery Sergeant. Gunnery Sergeant Johnson was honorably discharged on October 31, 1972 with 20½ years of service, 2 letters of appreciation, and a Good Conduct Medal.

Within 24 months, he found the urge to serve yet again. He graduated from the Lebanon Police Academy on January 17, 1975 and joined the Village of Springboro Police Department as a part-time Police Officer. The Clearcreek Township Police Department hired him full time in September 1975 and promoted him almost immediately to Sergeant in January 1976. Then, a month later, the Clearcreek Police Chief resigned and Sergeant Johnson was named to be the interim Chief. He continued as such until he returned to Springboro as a full-time Police Officer during July 1976. By June 1983, Officer Johnson had served his country and communities for more than 29 years.

INCIDENT

On June 27, 1983, about 12:27 a.m., while driving westbound on West Central Avenue (SR 73), Officer Johnson observed two subjects, Richard “Eric” Grimm and Jonathan D. Collins, by the bridge on the south side of the road near Fairway Drive. He doubled back and drove east, stopping at the bridge between Edgebrook and Fairway. He exited his vehicle with his flashlight in hand.

Grimm and Collins began to walk towards his patrol car. They saw Patrolman Johnson turn the flashlight toward the rear of his vehicle and yell, “Hold it! Stop!” They then saw the headlights of a pickup truck, driven by Michael L. Jennings, 3624 Knollbrook, Franklin, Ohio. The truck struck the left rear

of the patrol car, at almost 57 miles per hour, and then Patrolman Johnson, throwing him almost 39 feet and killing him instantly. Patrolman Johnson was rushed by life squad to Sycamore Medical Center in Miamisburg where he was pronounced dead at 1:57 a.m.

FUNERAL

Patrolman Johnson was survived by his wife, Brenda Sue (Conley) Johnson; children, Karen L. Johnson (20), Sherry L. Johnson (18), Syndra J. Johnson (8), and William D. Johnson (5); and mother, Mattie Johnson. His layout was held at the Unglesby Funeral Home in Franklin on June 29, 1983. Burial followed in the Royal Oaks (now Heritage Hills) Memory Gardens in Springboro with full military honors on June 30, 1983.

JUSTICE

Also on June 30, 1983, police charged Jennings with Aggravated Vehicular Homicide. His blood alcohol content at the time of the crash was 0.16 – at the time 60% over the limit for Driving While Intoxicated.

On November 3, 1983, Judge Paul Herdman allowed Jennings to plea “no contest” to a misdemeanor Vehicular Homicide and Judge Paul Herdman fined him the maximum of $1000 (half of which he suspended), ordered him to pay court costs of $98.50, sentenced him to six months of “work release” in the Warren County Jail, and suspended his driver’s license for two years. He then gave him another weekend with his family before he had to start. By then, Officer Johnson’s family had been without a husband and father for five months. Jennings continued his livelihood at

Armco and ate and slept at the jail at night and on weekends – much like a traveling salesman and a hotel.

The National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial added Officer Johnson's name on May 15, 1984, etched on tablet 55-W:14. During 2017, Ohio State Representative Scott Lipps presented to the Legislature a bill to rename a portion of State Route 73 to "Officer Bill Johnson Memorial Highway." To our knowledge, the name is still West Central Avenue.

If you know of information, artifacts, archives, or images regarding this officer or incident, please contact the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum at memorial@police-museum.org.

© This narrative was revised March 8, 2017 by Cincinnati Police Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Museum Director, with assistance from Cincinnati Police Homicide Detective Edward W. Zieverink III, Greater Cincinnati Police Museum Historian, and Brenda Sue Johnson-Flugman, Officer Johnson's widow. All rights are reserved to them and the Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society.