

Sergeant Carl Frank Hille | Cincinnati Police Division



Age: 35

Served: 13 years

February 1, 1929 to July 15, 1942

OFFICER

Carl Hille was born February 11, 1907 in Cincinnati to William (of Connecticut) and Anna (Schlueter) Hille. He attended Sands Grade School (Poplar Street and Freeman Avenue) and Bloom Junior High School (Dayton and Baymiller Streets) in the West End, and the Ninth Street Continuation School downtown.

As a teenager he was a legendary fast-pitch softball pitcher for the Cincinnati Police Athletic League. In 1922, he started 69 games and lost only one. Also as a teenager, starting at 16, drove a truck for the Liggett Brothers Coal Company. He then worked for a couple of years driving a truck for Adam Ungerbeuhler Company and 2½ years driving for the Kroger Grocery and Baking Company.

On January 25, 1929, Cincinnati City Manager C. O. Sherill announced the first 21 names of those taking a recent civil service examination for Substitute Patrolman. Carl was on that list and one week later, at 21, on February 1, 1929, he was appointed Substitute Patrolman, issued Badge 384, and assigned to District 4 (754 W. 5th Street). He was later promoted to Patrolman.

He continued to play baseball, now on Price Hill amateur teams. He also played on and coached a nearly undefeated police basketball team. He played on police baseball teams, sometimes playing City Hall or Hamilton County Sheriff teams. During August 1933, a softball team he played on, the Dunlap Clothes Team, traveled to Chicago for the world softball championship tournament. He was incredibly involved with sports, sports leagues, and important tournaments for years. By March 1936, as the center of the Cincinnati Police basketball team, Patrolman Hille, was the oldest man still playing in the Industrial League and was third among the league's highest scorers. He also entertained competitive walking, managed policemen in track and field competitions, and continued to manage athletic teams when he could not play at their level, until his death.

On June 13, 1935, he transferred to the newly formed, sixteen-man Safety Patrol Bureau operating out of the District 2 stationhouse (314 Broadway). While acclaimed for his off-duty activities, Patrolman was also lauded in his auto accident investigations, including a personal letter of commendation from the City Manager on October 5, 1938. His investigations were documented almost weekly in local newspapers.

During December 1938, Patrolman Hille organized a Police Memorial Athletic Association, with ninety percent of the Police Department participating, to raise funds for annual police memorial ceremonies.

Early in 1942, Patrolman Hille competed in an examination for

promotion to Sergeant. The Department announced the results on April 3, 1942 and he finished fifth. The first four were promoted immediately. He was promoted to Sergeant on June 1, 1942 and assigned to District 2 (314 Broadway).

By then, he had served more than thirteen years. He, his wife, and four children had just moved from downtown up to 1857 Ashbrook Drive in Western Hills.

Forty-five days after his promotion, on Saturday, July 15, 1942, he was settling into his new position. With only one off-day every week, Sergeant Hille was looking forward to his two-week vacation starting on the 17th. He and Sergeant Willard Ortman were assigned to split the desk and a flip of a coin decided that Sergeant Hille would supervise the district from 11 p.m. to 3 a.m.

INCIDENT

Just after 11 p.m., John Rehe (51) of Norwood, the night attendant at the Hodge Drive-it-Yourself Company at 511 Sycamore, directed a helper, Perry Sell (30) of the West End, to move a large truck inside the garage. Mr. Sell accidentally backed into a gasoline pump that was inside the garage, cracking a pipe. Either Mr. Sell or Mr. Rehe ran downstairs to shut off the electricity and the other one called the police.

When a trouble run was broadcast regarding a report of a strong odor of gas at the Hodge Drive-it-Yourself Company, Sergeant Hille had Patrolman Charles Kasselmann drive him to the scene. Upon arrival, Sergeant Hille got out of the car to go inside while Patrolman Kasselmann parked the car.

Albert J. Bass (33) of Clifton had driven to the garage to return a rented car. He pulled into the garage and got out of the car. His passenger, Kenneth Bottorf (24) of Tusculum, saw the gasoline flowing from the pump. It was too late.

At about 11:25 p.m., just as Sergeant Hille opened the pedestrian door to the business and Mr. Bass got out of the rented car at the garage, the gasoline fumes ignited causing one of the largest explosions in the history of Cincinnati. All the glass blew out of the garage, as well as some of the concrete walls. The concrete sidewalks in front blew up leaving a crater. Glass was broken out of windows up to four blocks away.

Patrolman Kasselmann ducked back into the patrol car as rocks and chunks of debris rained down on the car. Messrs. Rehe and Sell were killed where they stood. Mr. Bottorf was severely burned but was the only survivor from inside the garage. Sergeant Hille and Mr. Bass were gone. They just disappeared.

Fourteen people outside the garage were cut and otherwise injured by flying glass and falling building debris. Patrolman Kasselmann escaped injury, but afterward could be seen, apparently in a state of shock, wandering around, looking for Sergeant Hille and carrying Sergeant Hille's smashed uniform cap that he found lying on the ground.

Without evidence of Sergeant Hille's or Mr. Bass's remains in or near the building, Detective Captain Patrick Hayes and Detective Charles Auckerman went onto the roof of the four-story St. Xavier Commercial School across the street. There they found Sergeant Hille's left shoe, laces still tied, and a bloody print from where his body had apparently bounced off the back corner of the roof. Patrolman John Wilson found Sergeant Hille's body lying in a narrow alley just outside the wall enclosing the rear schoolyard and Mr. Bass's body at the end of the alley where it intersected with Convent Alley. Sergeant Hille's body had been hurled more than 50 feet in the air, over the school, and more than 200 feet from Sycamore Street. It was later determined that he died from a comminuted skull fracture.

FUNERAL

Sergeant Hille was survived by his wife, Alice (Efland) Hille; four children, Betty Jane Hille (17), Audrey May Hille (15), Carl F. Hille, Jr. (9), and Carole Sue Hille (3), and siblings, Luella Hille, Arthur Hille, and Louis Hille. His funeral took place on July 18, 1942, from the Busse-Borgmann Funeral Home at Central Parkway and Clifton Hills Lane and he was buried in Section 24, Grave 1157 of Vine Street Hill Cemetery. His pallbearers were Patrolmen Stanley Heber, George Karman, William McDermott, Howard McMiller, Louis Noll, and Edward Stine. Detective Henry Zimpleman and Patrolman Harry Batter were honorary pallbearers.

EPILOGUE

Sergeant Hille's hat, revolver, utility belt, chemical irritant cannister, whistle, et al. were located in various places between the front door of the business and the alley where his body landed. They are on display at the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum.

Fire Marshal Louis Schraffenberger's investigation determined that there were three possible points of ignition; an electric switch, lighting a cigarette, or a gas water heater in the basement.

Sergeant Hille's brother, Louis Hille, a U.S. Army Captain, died two years later in another explosion. He stepped on a mine, six weeks after D-Day and while saving the life of a war correspondent.

In 1954, the Cincinnati Recreation Commission converted what was once known as Lucky Circus grounds into a baseball field and in 1960 dedicated the field in Sergeant Hille's memory. Over the years the field fell into disrepair. During the mid-1990s, Elder High School repaired the field and used it as

its home field. On April 18, 1998, the field was rededicated as the Carl F. Hille Memorial Field. Since then, Elder moved their home field to a location in Price Hill and the City sold the property. The Cincinnati Recreation Commission promised the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum, Cincinnati Police Department, and Sergeant Hille's family that they would dedicate a field on Beekman Street to Sergeant Hille, but that hasn't happened.

Twenty-five years and one week after Sergeant Hille's death, his grandson, John Ott, joined the Cincinnati Police Division as a Police Cadet on July 23, 1967. He retired, also a Sergeant in 1997. Seven years later, Sergeant Hille's great grandson, Luke Putnick, became a Cincinnati Police Officer during 2004. On July 26, 2017 he was also promoted to Sergeant and still serves.

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

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