

Sergeant Charles F. Handorf | Cincinnati Police Division

Fifty Years Ago, on December 8, 1974



Badge: S-64
Age: 46
Served: 22 years
September 15, 1952 to December 8, 1974

OFFICER

Charles was born August 6, 1928, the first of 15 children born to Charles Joseph Handorf, Jr. and Rose Mary (Kramer) Handorf in South Fairmount. He attended Roger Bacon High School from 1942 to 1945 and then earned his diploma at Western Hills Night School in 1946.

While attending high school and after graduating, he worked for Brighton Spring Service.

Charles joined the Cincinnati Police Division's 24th Recruit Class on September 15, 1952. On November 17, 1952 he was promoted to Patrolman, issued Badge 269, and assigned to District 2 (314 Broadway). On January 1, 1953, Patrolman Handorf was rotated to District 7 (813 Beecher Street) then rotated a year later to District 4 (7017 Vine Street). During 1956, he served as the District 4 representative on the Fraternal Order of Police Dance Against Delinquency Committee. By 1957, District 4 Commander Captain Clemens Merz determined him to be one of the most reliable men in the district and detailed him to plain-clothes investigations within the district and continuously prodding him to become a sergeant.

Hardly a year went by that Patrolman Handorf and later as a Sergeant was not in the newspapers multiple times for arrests, shootouts, and achievements.

On December 19, 1958, the Cincinnati Civil Service Commission announced that Patrolman Handorf finished second on a promotional examination for Juvenile Bureau Investigator, but the list expired before he could be promoted. After his next promotional exam, he was promoted to Detective on December 11, 1960, issued Badge D-36, and assigned to the Crime Bureau (City Hall). He competed in his third promotional exam, this one for Police Sergeant, finished fourth, was promoted three months later, issued Badge S-64, and reassigned to District 2.

On December 1, 1961, Sergeant Handorf completed the prestigious Administrative Officers Course at the Southern Police Institute at the University of Louisville, widely regarded as the finest secondary law enforcement course in the country, and usually reserved to lieutenants and above. During August 1964, Sergeant Handorf was selected to attend another of the top four police administration courses at the Northwestern University Traffic Institute (NUTI).

On February 27, 1966, Sergeant Handorf transferred to Central Vice Control. He was then transferred to District 3 (3201 Warsaw) during October 1966 to take over the District 3 Tactical Unit.

On March 12, 1967, his brother, Larry Handorf, joined the Police Division.

By December 1974, Sergeant Handorf had served his community 22 years and earned 18 letters of appreciation and/or commendation, seven of which from Cincinnati Police Chiefs. During his last seven years he earned performance ratings of 95% to 98%. District 3 Commander Captain Gary U. Neville described him as "one of the best – if not the best – plainclothes undercover sergeants [that Cincinnati] ever had."

Sergeant Handorf was assigned to start work at 8 p.m. on December 7, 1974. Having taken the last four hours off, he was walking out the front door to go home by 12:15 a.m. on the 18th.

MURDERER

Herbert "Herbie" Merz, II, was born November 30, 1937. He joined the Cincinnati Fire Department about 1957. Ten years later, he was charged administratively with falsifying a statement that he was sick and that he disobeyed an order to report to the Fire Surgeon for examination. A disciplinary hearing was scheduled, and he threatened Assistant Fire Chief Vernon Armstrong when he tried to serve the notice. Merz then failed to show for the hearing and the Safety Director terminated him in March 1967.

Merz later had several run-ins with various people resulting in three arrests for Assault and Battery, two for Menacing, one for Disorderly Conduct, and one for Driving While Intoxicated. He also had problems with his wife, ending in his

divorce. Then he had problems with his common-law wife, Nancy Woefle, and other girlfriends. He was known to his neighbors as a "strange character" with a lot of troubles. Merz had been undergoing treatment for kidney and liver ailments, possibly cirrhosis.

On Saturday night, December 7, 1974, he staggered into his home at 6438 Home City, barricaded himself inside, and began discharging one or more handguns. At 12:15 a.m. on December 8, 1974, George Rose, a neighbor, called Cincinnati Police

Communications.

INCIDENT

Cincinnati Police Communications dispatched District Three Police Officers Hiawatha Hampton (Call No. 301) and David Holloway (Call No. 301A) to a report that the man living at 6438 Home City had just discharged a firearm. Upon his arrival, Officer Hampton, stepped onto the porch, heard a shot fired inside the residence, left the porch, crouched down behind a rock wall, and radioed Communications with the report of an armed, barricaded man. Officer Holloway arrived and called for a supervisor to respond. Police Communications dispatched Sergeant Harvey Freeman (Call No. 319).

Sergeant Donald Andres (Call No. 320) also responded. Sergeant Handorf, although off duty, responded in his personal vehicle. Captain Neville (Call No. 300) was off duty and also in his personal car. He heard the call on his police radio and also responded from Sidney and Covedale Avenues.

Having a nearly direct route down Cleves Warsaw Avenue, Captain Neville was the first supervisor to arrive, and he conferred with Officers Hampton and Holloway. Many other District Three and Delhi Township officers responded. They were all instructed to surround the house and observe from secure positions.

Captain Neville asked Delhi Sergeant Redman to position his cars with their spotlights fixed on the windows of the home (Cincinnati's vehicles were not so equipped). He directed officers to surround and observe the house from safe positions. He made numerous attempts to communicate with Merz by phone and by bullhorn. Patrolman Robert Schlinkert was dispatched to pick up and bring Miss Woefle to the scene, but she proved to be too emotionally distraught to communicate with Merz.

During all of this, Merz did not respond. He continuously walked around on the second floor of the house and occasionally fired a shot inside. Then, suddenly, he threw open a window and had a dialogue with Sergeant Andres and Police Officer Cleon Wingard on the side of the house. He refused to throw down the semiautomatic pistol he held in his hand stating that he did not wish to see the pistol harmed.

An hour and a half into the situation, at 1:45 a.m., Captain Neville determined that his passive options were exhausted. He directed Sergeant Freeman to discharge a projectile of tear gas into the residence using a 37mm launcher. The projectile did not fly true, drastically veering upward, and struck the exterior wall about two feet above the window. Merz immediately began firing at the officers in front using a .32 caliber revolver and Mauser P. 38 9mm semiautomatic pistol. Every officer in the front of the house returned fire: Captain Neville, Sergeant Handorf, Specialist McCurry, and Delhi Patrolmen Roebel and Scarborough with revolvers, and Officers Wingard and Holloway and Sergeant Redman with shotguns. In all, 29 shots were fired by police officers Cincinnati and Delhi officers.

Seconds later, Sergeant Handorf lay dead with a bullet wound to his right eye. The bullet had come through his thumb and into and through his eye. Several officers rushed inside and found Merz dead with multiple bullet wounds.

Two other handguns were found with Merz, a .380 caliber semiautomatic pistol and a .38 Special revolver. He was transported to the hospital and the morgue. An autopsy revealed that he had alcohol and drugs in his system and two fatal wounds, both from .38 Special Super Vel bullets. It was determined that Delhi Officer Roebel had been using Super Vel ammunition, a copper jacketed hollow point, high velocity round. Cincinnati officers fired round nosed, lead bullets which were far inferior to the Super Vel.

FUNERAL

The Cincinnati Fire Division's Rescue 1 transported Sergeant Handorf to General Hospital, where he was pronounced dead on arrival by Dr. Troop at 3 a.m., and then to the morgue at 3:10 a.m.

Sergeant Handorf was predeceased by his brothers, Ronald Handorf, John Handorf, and Robert Handorf. He was survived by his wife, Joann (Johnson) Handorf; children, Jean Marie (Robert) Even and Denise Handorf; granddaughter, Ann Katherine Even; parents, Charles J. and Rose M. Handorf; siblings, Rose Marie (Robert) Von Hagel, Gerald (Patricia) Handorf, Marilyn Hill, Shirley (Richard) Hartmann, Phillip Handorf, Thomas (Katherine) Handorf, Carole (Guido) Dipilla, Jeffrey Handorf, Cincinnati Police Officer Lawrence Handorf, Patricia Ann Schultz, and Nicholas (Carol) Handorf; stepchildren, Victoria, Sandy, and John; parents-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Frank L. Dinn; and sister-in-law, Mrs. Micheal L. Parker.

Visitation was held for four hours on the evening of December 10, 1974 at Niedhard-Minges Funeral Home in Westwood. A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated at the Church of the Little Flower in Mt. Airy on December 11, 1974. Police Chief Carl V. Goodin and six assistant chiefs served as honorary pallbearers as 800 mourners, including 750 police officers, followed

Sergeant Handorf to Spring Grove Cemetery.

EPILOGUE

During the Annual Banquet of the Hamilton County Police Association in January 1975, Special Awards were posthumously awarded to Sergeant Handorf and [Patrolman David Cole](#).

On May 14, 1975, District 3 personnel unveiled a bronze plaque honoring Sergeant Handorf. The plaque was affixed to a new flagpole at District 3 (3201 Warsaw Avenue) and paid for by District 3 residents, merchants, and civic groups. Nicholas Handorf, held an annual vigil there every year on or near the anniversary of his brother's death. For three decades, these vigils were relatively private, but in 2007 all the uniformed personnel in the stationhouse filed out in their Class A uniforms and stood at attention during the vigil. Subsequent vigils were public, with a similar ceremony attached. On the 40th anniversary in 2014, the Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society helped plan an enhanced ceremony. Nick's vigils continued thereafter, even after District 3 moved to Ferguson Road. During 2021, Cincinnati City Council gave Warsaw and Considine a secondary street name in Sergeant Handorf's honor. Nick's final memorial will be held December 6, 2024 in honor of the 50th anniversary of his death.

Sergeant Handorf's other brother, Lawrence, went on to be promoted to Sergeant in 1981 and Lieutenant in 1986. Lieutenant Handorf retired September 6, 1986.

The deaths of [Patrolman David Cole](#) and Sergeant Handorf in 1974 and [Police Officer William Loftin](#) and [Sergeant Robert 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 required training for all Ohio law enforcement officers. The Division's Police Officer Survival program was used as models for the national Street Survival Program.

Sergeant Handorf's mother, Rose, died in 1985 at the age of 75; his father, Charles, in 1993 at 86; and his wife, Joann, in 1998 at age 60.

During 1995, Cincinnati Police Captain Christopher Robertson, Training Section Commander, Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer, Assistant Planning Section Commander, and Sergeant Thomas Waller, Recruiting Unit discovered a 45-year-old Cincinnati Ordinance requiring the retirement of badge numbers of those who died in the line of duty. They created a Police Memorial at the Cincinnati Police Academy and caused the retirement of all their badge numbers. Some badge numbers had, however, been reissued in the interim. Sergeant Daniel Gerard was assigned Badge No. S-64 and voluntarily surrendered it so that the Police Division could retire it.

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

© This narrative was further researched and revised on November 22, 2024 by Cincinnati Police Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society President/CEO, with assistance from Cincinnati Homicide Lieutenant Thomas Oberschmidt (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Museum Volunteer, who supervised the investigation of this incident; Cincinnati Police Sergeant William T. Beuke (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Museum Director, who worked in District Three on the night of the incident; and Nicholas Handorf who provided much genealogical advice. All rights are reserved to them and the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum.