

Special Deputy Elmore "Elmo" David Pressley | Hamilton County Sheriff's Office

Age: 53

Served: 1 year

1943 to October 21, 1944

OFFICER

We believe Elmore was born about in the early 1890s in Georgia, the fifth child born to Austin and Carrie (Carroll) Pressley. Austin and Carrie were probably born into slavery. During 1900, the family was living in Cobb County, Georgia.

By 1923, he was living in Atlanta and working as a Janitor.

On February 9th of that year, his father was killed in an auto accident. He married Maggie Auest, we believe either in Alabama or Arkansas. Between 1929 and 1933, they were living in Arkansas and he fathered three children.

By 1937, he had moved his family to Cincinnati and was working for Acme Construction Company on Ridge Avenue and living at 904 Bank Street and we believe he continued as a laborer until 1941.

During 1941, he began working as a Special Policeman, but we do not know for which agency. Also in 1941, on September 5th, he lost his wife to Tuberculosis. Three months later, on December 10, 1941, he married a minister and widow, Ellie Willie Lee. During 1910 in Georgia, his and her families were neighbors.

During 1943, he was appointed as a Hamilton County Special Deputy and living at 933 West Seventh Street.

MURDERER

John Dudley was born September 15, 1908 in Bessemer, Alabama, the oldest of nine children born to a miner, William Dudley of North Carolina, and Laura Smiley of Alabama. By 1920, the family had moved to Birmingham, Alabama. We do not know how he came to be in the Cincinnati area, when or why he began using aliases, or when and where he married his wife, Ethel Dudley. But he was in Cincinnati during October 1944 using at least two aliases; Clarence Griffin and James Shaw.

INCIDENT

On October 18, 1944, Deputy Pressley was assigned to Valley Homes, an unincorporated Lockland subdivision (now a part of Lincoln Heights). That evening, he responded to 9885 Douglas Walk to assist two boys, William Malone (14) and Alphonso Harvey (11), locked out of their home. While he assisted them, John Dudley was loudly whistling from across the street. Neither Deputy Pressley nor the boys knew the man. Deputy Pressley asked him to stop and Dudley replied, "I will whistle if I want, and no one will stop me!" Deputy Pressley warned him that he would be over to talk with him when he was finished assisting the boys.

Deputy Pressley could not get the boys into their homes, so he walked to the Valley Homes office, retrieved a duplicate key, went back to the home, and unlocked the door. Dudley was gone.

Having completed his task, Deputy Pressley continued his foot patrol, going south on Douglas Walk. At the intersection of

North Leggett and Douglas Walk, at 10:05 p.m., Dudley suddenly burst forth with a .22 caliber rifle and yelled, "Throw up your hands, God damn you, for I am going to shoot you!" Instead, Deputy Pressley pulled his sidearm. Dudley shot and the bullet entered Deputy Pressley just above the navel and traversed his liver and a kidney. He returned fire at the running man, but one shot misfired and the other four missed.

Dudley ran to 9887 Douglas Walk and tried to get into the home giving his name as James Shaw. Miss Cors Daniels, the resident, refused him entry.

Deputy Pressley walked to 749 South Leggett, the residence of William Baughman. The Sheriff's Department was called at 10:08 p.m. and Deputies Bowersox, Piening, and James A. McDonough found Deputy Pressley laying on the living room floor.

Houston & Sons, a Lockland ambulance service, transported Deputy Pressley to Good Samaritan Hospital. Almost immediately, at 11:19 p.m., he was transferred to General Hospital where he underwent emergency surgery to repair his liver and remove his kidney.

The deputies conducted a preliminary investigation, including interviewing the two boys, Miss Daniels, and Mr. Baughman.

DEATH

Deputy Pressley died three days later on October 21, 1944 from peritonitis of the upper abdomen. He was pronounced dead by Dr. Alt at 3 p.m. and immediately transported to the Hamilton County Morgue.

Ellie Willie Lee Pressley was widowed a second time. His children, Pearline Pressley (15), Obie Pressley (13), and Alfred Pressley (11), were orphaned. Deputy Pressley was

buried in a single grave, without a marker, in the Union Baptist Cemetery – and apparently without fanfare.

INVESTIGATION

Hamilton County Sheriff's Office Captain William J. Wiggeringloh, Lieutenants Elmer Jansen and Charles Yoas, and Deputy Joseph McDonough worked throughout the day looking for the suspect.

Sometime later, investigators found the rifle at a pawn shop and that it had been pawned by Curless Ammons of 1133 Jackson Street; also in Valley Homes. Ammons told police that Clarence Griffin, also known as John Dudley, had also come to his home on the night of the shooting and told him that he had just shot a police officer. Griffin (Dudley) left the rifle outside Ammons' home. Investigators determined that the rifle fired the bullet taken from Deputy Pressley's abdomen.

By the end of the year, probably fleeing the state that night, John Dudley (alias, Clarence Griffin) moved to 22nd and Broadway in Gary, Indiana without his wife or mother.

On March 15, 1945, Dudley was a suspect in another shooting, this one in Gary. Gary Patrolman Hazel Fletcher was questioning him about it on Washington Street when Dudley became abusive, pulled out an iron blackjack, and began striking Fletcher, knocking him to the ground. At 6:30 p.m., Patrolman Fletcher pulled his sidearm to defend himself and shot Dudley through the heart, killing him. Dudley was buried in Oak Hill Cemetery in Gary on March 19, 1945.

Eventually, Dudley's presence and death in Gary became known to Hamilton County Sheriff investigators and Hamilton County Special Deputy Sim Thompson took Dudley's wife and mother to Gary. His body was exhumed and identified and, on April 3, 1945, Sheriff Handman announced that the Pressley homicide

case was closed.

EPILOGUE

On January 15, 1946, Patrolman Hazel M. Fletcher, Gary Police Department, was given a medal as "Outstanding Policeman of 1945" by the Gary Council of Consolidated War Veterans.

Ellie did not marry a third time. She died in Drake Hospital on January 16, 1988, at the age of 76, and was buried in Vine Street Cemetery in the Mueller Heights Section, Lot 8, Grave 4.

The disposition of his children is currently lost to us.

HONORS DUE

During April 2010, the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum Registrar, found old newspaper articles written at the time of the original incident and an investigation into his death. Most of the rest of the research was completed by the Communications Director for the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office.

On October 4, 2010, the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office applied to the National Law Enforcement Officer Memorial to have Deputy Pressley's name added to the Memorial Wall. The Greater Cincinnati Police Museum found no living relatives and arranged with Schott Monument Company for a headstone at no cost.

On May 4, 2011, at 1 p.m., hundreds attended Deputy Pressley's grave and monument rededicated at a ceremony emceed by Cincinnati Police Sergeant Thomas A. Waller, Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society Past Vice President, featuring Hamilton County Sheriff Simon Leis, FBI Special

Agent Stephen Barnett, Communications Director for the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office, and Cincinnati Police Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society President. On May 13, 2011, Deputy Pressley's name was added to the National Law Enforcement Memorial.

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

© This narrative was further researched and revised on September 26, 2019 by Cincinnati Police Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer, Greater Cincinnati Police Museum Historian, with most of the research provided by FBI Special Agent Steve Barnett (Retired), and SORTA Superintendent Philip Lind (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Museum Registrar. All rights are reserved to them and the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum.