

A Forgotten Death at the Mouth of the Mississippi

By Steven W. Hooper

Wayne State University Police Officer Collin Rose was described as a “cop’s cop”. Federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies often requested his assistance when searching for suspects, narcotics, or explosives because of his expertise in handling police canines. Officer Rose’s care and respect for his fellow officers led him and his canines to frequently attend the funerals of Detroit area police officers. His enthusiasm, caring nature and love of animals made him a popular officer with both his co-workers and the public.

Officer Rose met his fiancée while attending the Ferris State University criminal justice and law enforcement academy and proposed to her at the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington, DC after completing a fundraising bike ride. But before the marriage could take place, the 29-year-old officer with an “engaging smile and generous spirit” was slain while on patrol in Detroit on November 23, 2016. Sadly, Officer Rose’s name would be added to the very memorial wall where he had proposed to his fiancée.

In 2017, Officer Rose’s fellow workers and friends formed a committee to remember and honor the fallen officer. The outpouring of support led to the founding of a non-profit organization with the purpose of honoring fallen law enforcement officers, supporting current law enforcement officers, and assisting animal welfare organizations.

The Officer Collin Rose Memorial Foundation (<https://www.collinrosememorial.org>) also undertook a mission of identifying fallen officers who have not been properly memorialized on

the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial (<https://nleomf.org/>) in Washington, D.C. or on other state, local and online memorials.

In 2022, St. Clair Shores Police Officer Chris Powell of the Foundation contacted the National Customs Museum Foundation (NCMF) to inquire about the death of a “Customhouse Officer” in New Orleans on January 3, 1880. Several newspapers reported that Customs inspector (Revenue Boatman) Kuntz Stahlberger had been fatally injured when he fell into a hold on the British vessel *Commander* while engaged in sealing the main hatchway.

The tragedy took place at the mouth of the Mississippi River at an inspection station located at Port Eads, Louisiana in an area known as the Passes. It was reported that Stahlberger was a former New Orleans police detective who had been working for U.S. Customs for many years. Despite Stahlberger’s line of duty death, he had not been honored on local or national law enforcement memorials.

Upon receiving this information, the NCMF reviewed the documents that the Officer Collin Rose Memorial Foundation had uncovered related to Stahlberger’s U.S. Customs employment and tragic death. The documents clearly substantiated that Stahlberger’s sacrifice had not been properly recognized and honored. Stahlberger’s name did not appear on the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Wall of Honor in Washington, D.C. Somehow his sad death had been overlooked.

The NCMF immediately contacted the CBP Historian’s office and asked for their review of the information collected on Stahlberger’s death. After a thorough review of the records related to Stahlberger, CBP Historic Preservation Officer Anne Saba contacted the NCMF. She advised that CBP is in the process of planning a new Wall of Honor and that U.S. Customs officer Kuntz Stahlberger’s sacrifice would be honored on this new memorial. CBP will also submit Stahlberger’s name for inclusion on the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial.

Thanks to the efforts of the Officer Collin Rose Memorial Foundation, U.S. Customs Officer Stahlberger will be properly honored for his sacrifice which he made 142 years ago. Officer Rose would be immensely proud that a Foundation created in his honor identified a law enforcement officer who had not received proper recognition for the loss of his life. A grateful nation will now be able to remember the ultimate sacrifices made by both Wayne State University Police Officer Collin Rose and U.S. Customs Officer Kuntz Stahlberger.

Primary Sources:

"Death of a Customhouse Officer," *New Orleans Item* (New Orleans, Louisiana), January 3, 1880, p. 1.

Dixon, Jennifer, "Slain WSU Officer is saluted as cop's cop, good guy," *Detroit Free Press* (Detroit, Michigan), November 27, 2016, p. 1.

"Fatally Injured," *Virginia-Pilot* (Norfolk, Virginia), January 4, 1880, p. 1.