

Charles Cole Gerber, Class of 1929. Never forget, still no closure.



**PROMINENT MEMPHIS
BUSINESS MAN AND
EMPLOYEE KILLED**

A bullet hole in his right temple, Charles C. Gerber, 38, socially prominent Memphis business man and yachtsman, was found dead in a muddy ditch south of Hernando, MS, at 4:30 yesterday - apparently the victim of a hitch hiker wearing an Army suit. On the

other side of the road was the body of Mark Stevenson, 30, of 575 Pontotoc, his employee, also dead with a bullet hole in his right temple. Almost simultaneously Mr. Gerber's beige Packard sedan in which he was returning from New Orleans was found 180 miles south of the murder scene, 12 miles below Yazoo City. Its front seat was bloodstained.

SHOT FROM THE REAR

The man Mr. Gerber had befriended by giving a ride apparently forced the Memphian to drive west off Highway 51 onto the lonely, tree-bordered gravel road sometime Thursday night. He is believed to have shot

them from the seat in the rear, robbed them and threw their bodies out, then race away in the darkness.

Apparently, Mr. Gerber had less than \$25 in his pocket when he was slain. A man wearing an Army suit was seen abandoning the car at 7 yesterday morning about two miles north of Bentonia, MS, by a Mrs. Whitehead, a farmer's wife who lived nearby. Bentonia is 16 miles south of Yazoo City; 27 miles north of Jackson, MS.

The killer suspect was seen to throw a pair of gloves about 300 yards down the highway from where he had abandoned the Packard. Those gloves were found later by officers. Shortly after he abandoned the car the man approached G. B. Crocker at the Hancock garage in Bentonia and asked if he could wash his hands. Mr. Crocker said the man went to the washroom, then started walking south toward Jackson. By a strange quirk of fate Sherriff Sam Parker of Yazoo County, who lives in Bentonia, yesterday morning did not follow his usual habit of stopping at the Hancock garage at 7:15 to have his car filled with gas. If he had he would have been there at the same time the killer suspect was.

CAR PARKED ON HIGHWAY

The car was noticed parked on the side of Highway 49, headed toward Jackson by State Highway Patrolman Morgan at 7:30 Friday morning. He thought it belonged to hunters and passed it. At 5 pm yesterday afternoon when he repassed and saw the car still there, he stopped and examined it. He said it had engine trouble.

The covers on the back of the front seat had been cut away and thrown down on the seat, apparently to hide the blood stains on the front seat. Patrolman Morgan said It also appeared as if the rubber mat on the floor had been washed. Patrolman Morgan said one of Mr. Gerber's bags was found intact in the rear of the car, but some of his clothes had been dumped on the floor, indicating that the slayer took a second bag when he abandoned the car. The employee's clothes were still packed in a cardboard box. Mr. Gerber had recently purchased a boat in New Orleans from Anker Fred Hansen, Memphis architect, and had gone there to inspect the craft with Stevenson, whom he employed to work on the yacht and as a handyman at his home, 704 East Drive. Hans Rasmussen, owner of the Canal Marine Repairs, New Orleans, told the Commercial Appeal by telephone last night that Mr. Gerber and the employee arrived at the works Tuesday morning to look over the boat again. The two remained in New Orleans until about 3:30 Thursday afternoon when they left for Memphis. Earlier in the afternoon Mr. Rasmussen had cashed a \$25 check for the Memphian who remarked at the the time, "This is all the money I have, but it'll be enough to get me home. The Memphian yachtsman said before leaving that he planned to drive direct to Memphis because he had promised Mrs. Gerber to be home yesterday. However, he had planned to return to New Orleans Monday to arrange for additional changes in the boat. He and Mr. Hanson were in New Orleans together last week completing the sale, Mr. Rasmussen related.

NO SIGN OF STRUGGLE

Grover Cleveland, who lives on Gaines Road about 200 yards from the scene of the crime, discovered the bodies as he walked along the road yesterday afternoon. He notified Sheriff W. A. White of Hernando who immediately called a coroner's inquest at the scene. Sheriff White said that Mr. Gerber's billfold was found near the body, but that there was no money in it. There was a small amount of change in his pocket and in addition, he was still wearing a cameo ring. The employee also had a small amount of change. "It looked like Mr. Gerber and the employee were shot with either a .22 or .25 caliber pistol and then were thrown out of the car," Sheriff White said. There was no sign of a struggle and the road is so heavily traveled that it was useless to try to reconstruct the crime. However, there are signs on Gaines Road, about one-half mile from the murder scene where a car had turned around." Mr. Cleveland said that he was returning from the School of Aeronautic at Whitehaven, where he is a G. I. student, when he noticed Mr. Gerber's shoes sticking out of the ditch. He ran to his home about 200 yards away and told his wife and then rushed back to use the telephone in a filling station. It was while he was running back down the road that he noticed the employee's body. D.F. Scott, a farmer living on the beyond Mr. Cleveland's home, said that he had passed by the scene several times yesterday, but did not see the bodies.

HEAD WAS NEAR BRIDGE

Mr. Cleveland said that Mr. Gerber was lying with his head almost under the bridge and right angle to it. The other man was lying parallel to the structure.

Bloodstains on the road were discovered when the Whitehaven student returned with the Sheriff. The bodies were taken to the Hernando Funeral Home after the inquest, where they were identified by Mr. Gerber's brother, John, and his business associate Douglas Partee. The young business man operated filling stations at Highland and Poplar and at Cooper and Central, and in addition owned several pieces of downtown property. His wife was at the home of Mrs. Sylvanus, 2281 Court, where Mr. Gerber was expected for dinner last night when she was notified of the tragedy.

WAS BOAT ENTHUSIAST

Mr. Gerber was an ardent boat enthusiast, having owned craft on the river since he was a high school student. He had recently sold his ocean-going yacht on which he had several trips to Nassau, the final one was last summer. During the war Mr. Gerber commanded a Coast Guard boat and participated in the invasions of several Pacific Islands. His family has long been well-known in Memphis, the John Gerber Co. department store having been founded by his grandfather. His father the late William Gerber was president of the department store and of the Cole Manufacturing Co. at the time of his death

about 25 years ago. His mother, Mrs. Floy Cole Gerber, was until her death about 20 years ago one of the social leaders of Memphis. Mr. Gerber's paternal grandmother was a member of the Hein family, long prominent in the business life of the city and the owners and developers of Hein Park.

He leaves his wife, the former Beatrice Scheibler, Memphis social leader known for her acting in the Little Theater productions. In addition, he is survived by a brother, John, owner of a plantation at Arlington and operator of a hangar at Municipal Airport, and a sister, Mrs. Emily Gerber of Franklin, TN. Mr. Gerber was a member of the Memphis Country Club and the Tennessee Club and was a former president of the Memphis Yacht Club.

PROMINENT SOCIALLY

Mrs. Gerber is president of Le Bonheur, philanthropic group of Memphis society women that sponsors Memphis annual horse show. The Gerber's were both active in Memphis Little Theatre circles prior to the war and had this season resumed their participation after a five-year absence during Mr. Gerber's service period. In January, Mrs. Gerber took her first Little Theatre lead since Pearl Harbor in the starring role for "Joan of Lorraine" created on Broadway by Ingrid Bergman, and Mr. Gerber had a dual supporting role, appearing in the opening scene as Jacques d'Arc, father to Joan, and in the last act as Bishop of Beauvais, her chief prosecutor at the trial that sent the

French heroine to her death. They first appeared together on the stage of the Playhouse in Chickasaw Gardens in "Biography," with the then Miss Beatrice Adalaide Scheibler was the star, in the Fall of 1935. In the Spring of 1937. Mr. Gerber played the role of a reporter in the production of "Front Page," which was given to the Little Theatre by Ellis Auditorium under sponsorship of the Newspaper Guild of Memphis. Mrs. Gerber was then elected president of the Little Theatre, serving for two terms, 1937-38 and 1938-39.

Information from the Commercial Appeal, Sunday, February 29, 1948.

Col. Birdsong Says

From The Commercial Appeal
Jackson, Miss., Bureau

JACKSON, Miss., Jan. 21. — A suspect in the 1948 Gerber slaying, being held in Memphis, is "just one of more than 100 we have questioned" since the brutal slaying, Col. T. B. Birdsong, head of the State Highway Patrol, said Saturday.

"We are naturally following all leads, and this is one of them," he said.

Colonel Birdsong said another person is being held in Jackson for investigation in the case, "But we haven't implicated anyone as yet."

"It's true that Ed Blue of the patrol has been in Memphis questioning the man there, but it is the same procedure we follow when we get a tip we hope someday will be the real McCoy," Colonel Birdsong said.

The man being held in Memphis is a Mississippian. His wife is asserted to have given a tip with reference to the slaying of Charles Gerber, Memphis business man near Hernando on his return by car from New Orleans. His Negro employe, Mark Stevenson, was also slain.

Colonel Birdsong said the Memphis tip "started off pretty hot but as yet nothing has been developed to lead us to believing we have the man who murdered Mr. Gerber."

"However, there are some points in the case we are still checking," he added.