

William L. Altdorfer **(- 29 Aug 1913)**

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Claims He Killed in Self-Defense

William J. Fisher Explains the Stabbing of William J. Altdorfer Was Suddenly Attacked And Fought For His Life

Tragedy in Chevy Chase Home Follows Alleged Attack on Young Woman

Slain by a stab wound inflicted at the hands of a friend of more than twelve years, William L. Altdorfer, former employe of the Department of Commerce and Labor, and later a writer of special articles for Sunday newspapers, is dead at his bungalow in Elm Street, North Chevy Chase, Md. Crazed by liquor, it is declared, Altdorfer had acted improperly toward his own adopted daughter, and when the friend, William J. Fisher, for years a boarder and member of the Altdorfer household, came to the girl's defense Altdorfer turned on him.

Fisher, who is an employe of the isthmian canal commission, was arrested last night and taken to the Montgomery county jail at Rockville, where he was locked up on a charge of murder.

A half-pint whisky flask on the dresser in the dead man's bedroom, containing not more than a few spoonfuls of liquor, mutely tells a part of the reasons for the tragedy.

Altdorfer met his death shortly after 10 o'clock last night. The weapon with which the death wound was inflicted was a pair of shears, the nine-inch blades of which were driven to their full length into his heart. In addition to this wound, four other stab wounds were inflicted on the frenzied man's body by the little one-hundred-and-seven-pound man whom Altdorfer was attempting to choke to death because he had come to the rescue of seventeen-year-old Lillian Reeves, Altdorfer's adopted daughter.

Came Home Intoxicated

According to a statement which Fisher made at the Rockville jail today to State's Attorney Outerbridge Spates and Sheriff Howard of Montgomery county, Altdorfer came home intoxicated last night, being assisted into the house by Lewis Turner a next-door neighbor. Turner helped to remove Altdorfer's outer clothing and tried to get him to go to bed. The intoxicated man refused to retire, however, and it is said, insisted on drinking the contents of a half-pint flask of whisky which Turner had taken from his pocket while undressing him.

When Turner left Altdorfer and returned to his own home next door. Altdorfer, according to Fisher's statement, arose and went into the kitchen where he found little Miss Reeves, and attempted to attack her. Miss Reeves, Fisher says, called for help, and Fisher came downstairs from his room and attempted to get the intoxicated man back into his to own room. Altdorfer became enraged at the interference of the boarder and attacked him.

The pair struggled in the tiny kitchen for several minutes, when Altdorfer appeared to become quiet and Fisher and the girl went into the dining room. Altdorfer followed, and in a few minutes renewed the struggle. It was then that Fisher claims he was about to be overcome by the superior strength of his assailant, and fearing for his life, seized the pair of shears and repeatedly plunged them into Altdorfer's body.

Body Bears Five Wounds

Five wounds in all were inflicted, only one being more than superficial. This wound, extending the full depth of the nine-inch blades of the shears, passed directly through Altdorfer's heart. He fell to the floor and before Dr. Thomas A. Poole of Chevy Chase could reach the house in response to an urgent telephone message, Altdorfer was dead.

Justice of the Peace Clarence Dawson and Constable Wise, summoned by Dr. Poole, found Fisher at the house. The latter made no attempt to escape, and was placed under arrest. He told the justice and the constable how the deed had been done, and why.

At the autopsy held at the Altdorfer home today it was decided that, in view of Fisher's statement, no formal inquest will be necessary.

It was learned that Mrs. Altdorfer left her husband about a week ago, following an attack in which her husband brutally beat her, rendering her unconscious. Neighbors, it is stated, have repeatedly been compelled to come to the aid of Mrs. Altdorfer and Miss Reeves when they were attacked by Altdorfer in the rages that came upon him when under the influence of drink.

Fisher, the man at whose hands Altdorfer met his death, is a member of the Columbia Country Club. He is a much smaller man than Altdorfer, weighing barely 107 pounds. To State's Attorney Spates he said today that this was the only trouble or difficulty of any kind he had ever had in his life, and he is reported to be almost prostrated over the tragedy in which he was forced to be the principal actor last night.

An autopsy today was performed by Dr. Conrad and Dr. Poole of Chevy Chase, with Sheriff Howard, State's Attorney Spates and Delegate A.J Cummings of the Chevy Chase district.

Altdorfer Syndicate Writer

Altdorfer was for several years a writer of syndicate articles for a number of newspapers, and recently started to prepare a magazine article on the tournaments of Maryland, in which he was being assisted by Mr. Cummings. He was addicted to periodical overindulgence in intoxicants, it is declared, and when under the influence of drink, it is stated, he was practically insane, and a menace to those about him. In his sober senses he was somewhat aggressive, but, so far as his friends knew, was not the kind of man to attempt the kind of crime which resulted in his death last night.

It was stated today that the board of guardians would take charge of Miss Reeves during her minority, but it was declared by Mrs. Altdorfer and the girl herself that nothing of that kind was necessary.

Besides his wife, Altdorfer is survived by two sisters, one living in Washington and the other in Leesburg, Va.

Fisher Makes Statement

In his cell at the Rockville jail this morning Mr. Fisher made the following statement to a reporter of The Star:

"Mr. Altdorfer came home intoxicated last night and was assisted into the house by Lewis Turner, who lives next door. Mr. Turner tried to get him to bed, and removed his outer clothes, but Altdorfer would not go to bed nor allow his nightshirt to be put on him.

"I was upstairs changing my clothes, which were damp from the rain in which I had been caught, when a noise downstairs attracted my attention. I ran down and found Altdorfer in the kitchen with Miss Reeves, his adopted daughter, and the young girl told me he had been behaving improperly toward her.

"When I protested and tried to save the girl Altdorfer appeared to become enraged, rushing at the girl as if to attack her. I stepped between them, and Altdorfer grappled with me. We tussled about the room for a few minutes, but finally quieted him, and I went into the dining room, Miss Reeves following. Altdorfer also followed, and sat on a chair on the opposite side of the room, muttering to himself and threatening to shoot me.

Attacked Without Warning

"Without an instant's warning he sprang from the chair and hurled himself at me. He had hold of my throat and was choking me, and his superior weight was bearing me to the floor. I felt my strength failing, and seized a pair of shears that I saw lying on a table nearby, and with these I made several lunges at Altdorfer's body. He lightened his grip on my throat, and I lunged the shears' blades into his body as hard as I could. Then he fell to the floor, releasing his grasp on my throat, and I saw he was desperately wounded. I did not know I had killed him, however, until the doctor arrived some time later."

Fisher declared he killed Altdorfer in defense of his own life, and after having exhausted every peaceable means of quieting the drink-crazed man.

Assisted Altdorfer Into The House

Lewis Turner, the neighbor who helped Altdorfer into the house and tried to get him to go to bed, told a Star reporter today of his connection with the case. Mr. Turner said he found Altdorfer at the foot of the steps leading up to his yard and helped him up and into the house. There, he says, he took Altdorfer's outer clothing off and forced him down on his bed. He took a half-pint flask of whisky from the man's pocket and placed it on a dresser.

Altdorfer refused to remain on the bed, Turner stated, and rolled off on to the floor, creeping across the room to the dresser and trying to get the whisky flask. Turner started to restrain him, but Miss Reeves, knowing the craving of her adopted father for liquor, urged that he be given the flask, and the drink-crazed man almost drained it at a draught.

Turner says he went to his own home, but a few minutes later was attracted by noises in the Altdorfer home and went over. He did not go in however, as he heard the altercation and knew that owing to Altdorfer's condition, he could do no good. He returned home but had not been back in his own house more than five minutes, he said, when Miss Reeves came running in, exclaiming that "Mr. Fisher had killed Mr. Altdorfer" Fisher himself, Mr. Turner stated, followed almost in her footsteps. He was dressed only in undershirt and trousers and was in his stocking feet.

Declares He Acted In Self-Defense

As he came up on the porch, according to Turner, he said:

"Come over; I'm afraid I've killed Altdorfer. But if I have it was in self-defense."

On re-entering the Altdorfer home Mr. Turner found Altdorfer on the floor in the reception hall a widening pool of blood flowing from the wound in his breast and spreading over the rug. Mr. Turner first called Dr. Devereux of Chevy Chase, but being unable to get him called Dr. Poole. When the doctor arrived Altdorfer was dead.

William J. Fisher, the man who killed Altdorfer, had known the family for the past twelve years. He first became acquainted with them in the Philippines. Fisher enlisted in the United States Volunteers during the Spanish-American war and served in the islands. At the expiration of his enlistment he entered the bureau of education in the Philippines, and later became disbursing officer of the bureau. It was while so employed that he became acquainted with the Altdorfers.

On his return to the states he was transferred to the customs service and later to the isthmian canal commission where he is still employed.

Friends of Fisher went to Rockville today to learn if arrangements can be made to secure his release on bond, and to learn his wishes with respect to the employment of attorneys to represent him.