

METRO NEWS

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It still hurts after 35 years

'French Connection' detective blasts city over mosque cop killing

BY ERNIE NASPRETTO
DAILY NEWS POLICE BUREAU

IT WAS ONE of the darkest days the NYPD has had to endure — the murder of Police Officer Philip Cardillo at the Harlem Mosque in 1972.

Saturday will mark the 35th anniversary of the shooting that reeked of racially charged politics and polarized cops.

"Political expediency won over cops' lives and justice," said retired detective Sonny Grosso.

Now 74 years old, the detective of "French Connection" fame responded to the infamous shooting and penned "Murder at the Harlem Mosque" in 1977, detailing the horrific treatment the Cardillo murder got from then-Mayor John Lindsay and police brass.

Lindsay was campaigning for the Democratic presidential nomination and "sacrificed this cop in hopes of getting black votes," Grosso charged.

At 11:41 a.m., Cardillo and his partner, Vito Navarra, and other cops in the 28th Precinct rushed to assist a "detective" who called for help on the second floor of the mosque at 102 W. 116th St.

The call would turn out to be bogus. But seconds after Cardillo, Navarra and other cops rushed inside violence erupted.

As Cardillo and Navarra rushed up a staircase they were intercepted by a large group of men who started pummeling the cops with fists, feet and blackjacks. Both their service revolvers were taken from them as shots rang out.

Navarra was beaten into semiconsciousness while Cardillo was shot point-blank in the chest.

The murder of a cop was bad enough. But, the political posturing by Lindsay, fueled by Rep. Charles Rangel and Minister Louis Farrakhan, prevented a thorough investigation of the shooting, said Grosso.

Lindsay died in December 2000.

Neither Rangel nor Farrakhan responded to a comment regarding the Cardillo killing.

Basic crime scene procedures were not followed. At least 17 suspects were released without being interrogated — on direct orders from Lindsay and then Police Commissioner Patrick Murphy, said Grosso.

"There was a riot within minutes of the shooting. Police cars were overturned, bricks came flying off of rooftops, TV reporters were assaulted. It was a riot, plain and simple, yet Lindsay refused to even call it that. Bad press would hurt his [presidential] chances and Murphy wanted to be the next FBI director. What a joke," said a still angry Grosso.

Even after Cardillo, a 31-year-old father of three, died six days later, Lindsay and Murphy were nowhere to be seen.

"What bothers me the most was that he was lying on his death bed and neither Lindsay nor Murphy came to visit him. Then after he dies, they are conveniently out of town and don't attend his funeral," said Navarra, 63, who retired as a detective in 1995, and lives "with this every day of my life."

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How the Daily News covered the attack on the cops at the Harlem Mosque in 1972.

Drug sting cracks DeKalb Ave. gang

A VIOLENT Bronx drug gang monopolized the crack and pot trade along E. 213th St. and DeKalb Ave. for eight years by ripping off rival dealers, federal prosecutors say.

Twenty-two members of the "Lions" — a gang that took its name from a Jamaican prison gang — were indicted in Manhattan yesterday on federal drug, robbery and firearms charges following an 18-month investigation by the NYPD and federal agents.

Sixteen were arrested yesterday, including the gang's reputed leader, Bobby Saunders, 52, also known as Bobby Moore Sr., and his two sons Bobby (Pops) Moore Jr., 22, and Tyrone (Puss) Moore, 20. Six more are being sought. Police seized \$25,000 in drugs and cash.

Gang members are suspected in several homicides and home invasion robberies but have not been charged, a law enforcement source said.

On May 21, 2003, defendants Hibah Lee and Mark Gabriel both shot at a rival dealer believed to be carrying a large amount of drugs near 2041 Strang Ave., the indictment says.

Cops say the gang resold the drugs they stole. Since 1999, they distributed more than 5 kilograms of powder cocaine, 50 grams of crack and 1,000 kilograms of marijuana, prosecutors say.

Robert F. Moore and Thomas Zambito

Farewell to lawman in mystery death

BY ABBY LUBY
DAILY NEWS WRITER

MORE THAN 1,000 mourners packed a Mount Vernon chapel yesterday to mourn the loss of one of Westchester's finest.

Stuart Cohen, a 38-year-old senior criminal investigator for the Westchester County district attorney's office, died Sunday after a mysterious illness that union officials say he contracted in the line of duty.

Still, none of the uniformed members of the NYPD, Westchester County or MTA police who left Cohen's Riverside Chapel funeral alongside volunteer firefighters, family and friends discussed the question that hung in the air.

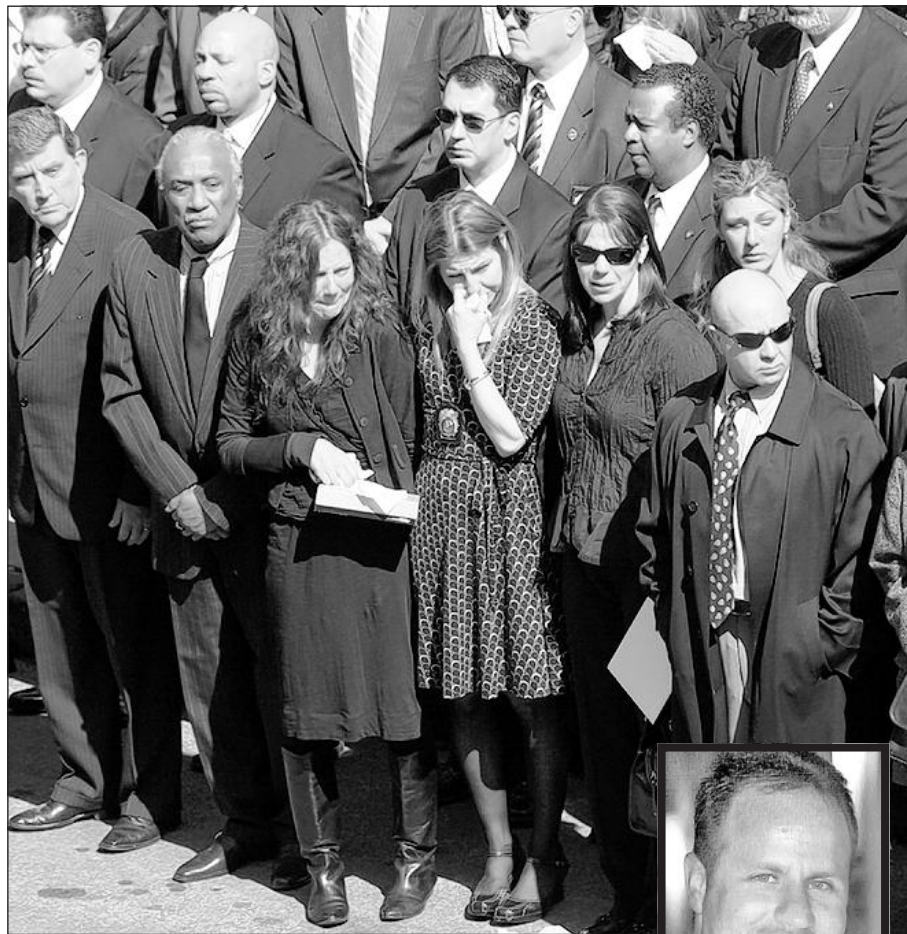
"Stu Cohen came to us over a decade ago with an intense sense of honesty, integrity and determination," said District Attorney Janet DiFiore. In a 1996 narcotics sting, Cohen helped bust the case with a reliable informant.

"I got a memo about Stu saying: 'Police Officer Cohen could not do enough to facilitate the prosecution of this case. He called from work, home, on his day off and from his vacation in Florida.'"

A volunteer firefighter and karate teacher on the side, Cohen became mysteriously ill in December after a series of raids on a Hartsdale house where dealers had been repackaging heroin.

Friends and fellow firefighters said Cohen slipped in and out of a coma over four months, first seeming to recover, then lapsing back into unconsciousness. Visiting Cohen in the hospital always meant wearing protective gowns and masks.

Hastings-on-Hudson Fire Chief Jim Saffarty said until that illness, Cohen was always in great health. "He worked out with barbells and he was a black belt in karate, which he taught to kids."



Stuart Cohen's widow, Gina, wears his badge as she grieves at funeral of investigator (inset) yesterday at Riverside Chapel in Mount Vernon. Photo by Mariela Lombard