

Police brutality exposed

Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file); Nov 4, 1973; ProQuest Historical Newspapers Chicago Tribune (1849 - 1985)

pg. 1

Police brutality exposed

JOSHIE JOHNSON was sitting on the fender of his car and squinting thru the autumn dusk at a parking ticket when a fist in a black leather glove smashed his nose.

Two policemen with drawn guns watched Patrolman Antonio Francis pound Johnson's face with his black gloved fist until Johnson fell unconscious in a Chicago alley.

When Johnson regained consciousness, he had a fractured jaw, a broken nose, two black eyes, and cuts on his face.

Instead of just a parking ticket, Johnson now faced charges of assaulting a policeman, resisting arrest, and disorderly conduct. The date was Oct. 20, 1971.

Johnson, 32, never arrested before in his life, would spend two years clearing his name in court and proving to the Chicago Police Department that he was a victim of a policeman's brutal, calculated attack.

HE WOULD LOSE several days from

There are 13,000 policemen in Chicago. The vast majority are dedicated, honorable, and courageous. But some have abused their powers and the rights of citizens they are sworn to protect. During a five-month investigation, Tribune reporters talked to hundreds of alleged victims and witnesses of police brutality, interviewed policemen, searched thru documents, and arranged dozens of polygraph tests. This is the first article in a series compiled by George Bliss, chief investigator, and reporters Pamela Zek-

his auto plant assembly job while his injuries healed. He would lose more days making futile court appearances. Finally, he would get the charges dropped by signing away his right to sue Patrolman Francis in a curious and illegal courtroom bartering system.

He would lose still more days proving his brutality case to the Police Depart-



POLICE BRUTALITY

ment, William Mullen, and Emmett George.

ment while giving statements, producing witnesses, and taking polygraph tests.

In the end he succeeded, but he lost nearly 40 days from his job, and his victory was a bitter one.

After months of investigation, the Police Department supported his complaint. It punished Patrolman Francis

by suspending him for only two days. Still, Joshie Johnson was one of the lucky ones.

FOR FIVE MONTHS, a team of Tribune reporters tracked down and questioned at length hundreds of alleged victims of police brutality. Reporters interviewed hundreds of more persons who claimed to be witnesses of such police action, and they examined thousands of documents pertaining to brutality charges.

Some of the people were lying, trying to mask their own wrongdoing by making false charges against police. Others refused to cooperate with the newspaper investigation out of fear of police reprisals.

But what emerged was a pattern of brutality by some policemen that could not be ignored.

In many cases, the alleged victims of unwarranted police beatings were asked to take extensive polygraph [lie detector] tests at The Tribune's expense.

Some of those people failed, but the stories of the overwhelming majority

stood up under the testing by what is considered—even by the Chicago Police Department—the best polygraph firm in the nation, John E. Reid & Associates.

JOSHIE JOHNSON was lucky. The Tribune found people who were telling the truth, but still lost lengthy and expensive legal battles and were convicted of false felony charges that had been placed against them to hide a policeman's misconduct.

The Tribune found even more people who, altho they successfully fought bogus charges, could not get the Police Department to discipline the policemen who had brutalized them.

The Tribune investigation was prompted by a glaring set of contradictions.

In 1972, the Police Department's Internal Affairs Division, responsible for handling brutality complaints, received 327 such complaints but sustained only 29 cases against policemen.

At the same time, this newspaper and scores of community organizations and civic leaders were receiving thou-

sands of similar complaints that the department never seemed to act upon.

The IAD has sustained 8 per cent of the brutality complaints filed so far this year but has sustained 26 per cent of complaints of all types of police misconduct. IAD director Alfred Conrad cited noncooperation of alleged victims as a major difficulty in sustaining brutality complaints.

LAST JUNE, The Tribune assigned four reporters to the problem.

Their findings seem to substantiate a growing public distrust of the department's willingness to isolate and weed out those of its 13,000-man force who threaten rather than protect the community.

The findings showed:

- The department has consistently ignored scathing criticism of half-hearted brutality investigations from such diverse groups as bar associations, federal study groups, and respected police organizations.

- The department has discarded, for

Continued on page 10, col. 1

Police brutality—cries of its victims go unheeded

Continued from page one

apparent political reasons, the most widely praised psychological testing program in the nation for policemen, leaving it years behind departments that copied the Chicago system.

- IAD investigators often ignore the most fundamental rules and tools of police investigation, such as seeking out key witnesses and using the polygraph.

- Discipline against guilty policemen sometimes amounts to suspensions shorter than those levied against policemen who take an unauthorized lunch break.

- Human Relations Commission officials, ordered by Mayor Daley last year to monitor the effectiveness of the IAD, admitted they cannot force the IAD to reopen improperly investigated complaints.

IT BECAME clear to reporters that police brutality can happen to anyone, that it is not reserved for blacks, the poor, or the so-called radicals.

As this first report alone shows, it happened to an Irish immigrant who said two policemen tried unsuccessfully to shake him down, to a 14-year-old boy whose dream of playing football was shattered when he lost an eye, and to a housewife at home.

In Joshie Johnson's case, it was a black policeman attacking a black citizen.

Patrolman Francis was waiting by Johnson's car in an alley behind the



Joshie Johnson last month [left] and on Oct. 23, 1971.

600 block of West 69th Street when Johnson and two companions returned from a grocery store.

The policeman, Johnson said, shouted profanities at him for parking illegally.

"I WAS A LITTLE surprised by the way he was talking," Johnson said, "so I told him if I was wrong, he should give me a ticket."

"I can do more than that," Johnson said Francis replied. "I can call for help."

Francis put a call out on his radio for another squad car, and Johnson said two more uniformed policemen arrived and drew their guns after Francis told them Johnson was "trying to get smart."

Johnson sat on his fender to wait for the ticket. Francis pulled on his gloves, gave Johnson the ticket, then beat him unconscious.

Patrolman Francis is an ex-boxer who has bragged to other beating victims about his fistic prowess. His story differs from Johnson's.

He said Johnson was abusive and profane in refusing to accept the ticket. Francis said he radioed for help and when two policemen arrived, Johnson lunged at him and punched him.

Johnson's witnesses supported his version of the story, while the two policemen failed to support Francis' version. Both men took the polygraph test, and Johnson passed while Francis failed.