

PATRICK V. MURPHY, POLICE LEADER WHO REFORMED NEW YORK FORCE, DIES AT 91

*By AL BAKER
DEC. 17, 2011*

Patrick V. Murphy, the son of a New York City policeman who rose to lead the Police Department in the early 1970s, steering it through one of its rockiest periods as he instituted reforms to root out corruption in the ranks, died Friday at a North Carolina hospital. He was 91 and lived in Wilmington, N.C.

The cause was complications of a heart attack he had on Wednesday night, said his son Gerard R. Murphy, who works for a police research organization his father founded.

Mr. Murphy, a former member of the New York force, was tapped to lead the department by Mayor John V. Lindsay in 1970 after the so-called Knapp Commission, an independent body appointed by Mr. Lindsay and headed by the lawyer Whitman Knapp, had begun investigating explosive allegations by Frank Serpico, David Durk and other whistleblowers of pervasive corruption in the department. Mr. Murphy replaced Howard R. Leary, who had resigned under a cloud.

The commission's report described an out-of-control police force in which officers accepted bribes and shared the spoils with supervisors, financed heroin transactions, sold information, revealed the names of informants to mobsters and even found hitmen to kill witnesses in drug dealers' trials.

Mr. Murphy began planting spies, called "field associates," in the Police Department to uncover corruption, and he established stricter performance standards.
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"A hundred years of police payoffs — a system called the pad — was ended by Murphy," Thomas A. Repetto, a police historian and author, said in an interview on Friday. "And he introduced command accountability."

Mr. Murphy also established a good-will program called "Cop of the Block," in which officers were encouraged to get to know the people on their beats to gain their trust. The program was a model for other departments developing what became known as "community policing" tactics.

By the time Mr. Murphy stepped down as commissioner in 1973, he had become a nationally recognized police figure with a track record that extended to Washington and Detroit, where he held leadership positions after leaving the New York force in 1965 as a deputy chief. He also worked for the United States Justice Department.

In Washington, where he was public safety director, he gained wide attention for his "fleeing felon rule," ordering officers not to shoot at looters in 1968 in the riots after the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Before then, police officers would shoot at fleeing felons on foot or in cars or fire warning shots.

Mr. Murphy wrote about his police work and philosophy in the 1977 book “Commissioner: A View From the Top of American Law Enforcement.”

“Pat Murphy was the visionary embodiment of police reform,” the current commissioner, Raymond W. Kelly, said in a statement released Friday. “In the face of fierce opposition from entrenched elements of police leadership nationally, he revolutionized policy to restrain the use of deadly force.”

Many say Mr. Murphy’s emphasis on better education and training helped transform American police work from a journeyman trade into a profession.

“He is perhaps the most influential police leader over the past half-century,” said Jeremy Travis, president of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice and a former director of the National Institute of Justice.

Photo

The tumult Mr. Murphy faced was not only in the police ranks. Crime rates were high, and officers felt under siege on the streets. In 1971, Officers Joseph A. Piagentini and Waverly M. Jones were murdered by members of the Black Liberation Army. The next year, another officer, Phillip Cardillo, was fatally shot inside a Harlem mosque.

“He was commissioner during an extraordinarily turbulent time in New York, and America,” William J. Bratton, who was New York City’s police commissioner from 1994 to 1996 and who led departments in Boston and Los Angeles, said in an interview. “In a profession that has very few giants, it is safe to say he was a giant of policing.”

Patrick Vincent Murphy was born in Brooklyn on May 15, 1920, one of eight children — four boys and four girls — of Patrick Murphy and the former Ellen Jones, who was known as Nellie. They had met in their native County Cork in Ireland and immigrated to the United States.

Patrick, who excelled in math, earned a bachelor’s degree from St. John’s University and a master’s in public administration from the City College of New York. He also graduated from the F.B.I. National Academy.

As a boy he saw law enforcement as a path for self-advancement, using his father and two older brothers, Andrew and John, as models. All were New York City police officers.

Mr. Murphy got his start in policing in 1945, when he joined the New York force after flying Navy bombers in World War II. He was assigned to foot patrol in the Red Hook section of Brooklyn. There, his son Gerard said, he came to see police officers as moral guideposts in persuading neighborhoods ultimately to police themselves.

A former emergency services officer, he was adept at rescue-and-recovery work. “We always used to tease him because at home he was always up on a tall ladder, or with a rope around him, on a roof, fixing a shingle,” Gerard Murphy said.

After stepping down as New York’s commissioner, Mr. Murphy became president of the Police Foundation, formed three years earlier, to push for improvements in policing across the country.

He lectured in the United States and abroad and watched as commanders who once worked for him took high-ranking posts in cities like Kansas City, Seattle, Minneapolis and Baltimore.

In 1978 Mr. Murphy helped found the Police Executive Research Forum. (Gerard Murphy is a researcher there.)

“It was his vision to create an organization to research issues facing the police,” said Chuck Wexler, the organization’s executive director. Race, class, poverty and immigration were among those issues.

“He was an unconventional thinker in a conventional field, and he put a high premium on education,” Mr. Wexler said.

Mr. Murphy and his wife, the former Martha E. Cameron, moved to Wilmington about four years ago. She survives him. In addition to Gerard, Mr. Murphy is survived by four sons, Patrick Jr., Kevin, Paul and Mark; three daughters, Sallie Kelley, Eileen Karam and Anne Zabriskie; two sisters, Mary Murphy and Sheila Barry; 21 grandchildren; and 17 great-grandchildren.

Gerard Murphy said his father loved to tell stories about his days walking the beat in Brooklyn. One centered on a particular tactic he used while searching for clues about crimes in the buildings and back streets of an Italian-American neighborhood he patrolled. Knowing that housewives were likely to have seen suspicious activity, he went knocking door to door. To put the women at ease, he would start the interview by asking for their special recipes.

“My mom said she had a hundred recipes for Italian spaghetti sauce,” Gerard Murphy said.

Source:

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