

DETROIT POLICE DEPARTMENT

Administration Division
INTER-OFFICE MEMORANDUM
Citizen Complaint Bureau

Date July 25, 1968

To: **Commissioner Johannes F. Spreen**

Subject: **CONCLUSION TO COBO HALL INCIDENT**

From the available information developed in this investigation, it is clearly evident this entire incident or series of incidents involves a great number of civilians and police officers. It abounds with charges and counter-charges, consistencies and inconsistencies; varied and complex to a degree affecting equitable culpability.

The majority of citizens volunteering information tend to indicate the police over-reacted to a difficult, unfortunate situation, despite the fact that several ranking police officials were present. The greatest criticism and most abrasive grievance seems to be; the sudden appearance and use of horses by the mounted division to disperse an unruly crowd, which to many, appeared to stampede and force the marchers into a cordon of baton wielding foot patrolmen. Hypothetically, had the horses not been on the scene, the most glaring phase of the incident would not have transpired.

Obviously, the entire incident was set in motion by a lack of communication and a misjudgment over a stalled sound car belonging to the marchers. The officers deemed most responsible for such incompatibility have been summoned before the police trial board for proper hearing and adjudication.

Whether the police handling of the overall incident was devoid of emotional error is not completely answered. Emotions were running high on both sides. There is evidence from many sources that police were taunted and harassed by participants during the entire march. There is also evidence that supervision, coordination and communication appeared lacking on both sides in several phases. Obviously this factor weighed heavily in the root causes of the problem.

The many complaints emanating from this incident are from unavailable persons, general in nature and lack necessary elements to clearly pinpoint individual culpability, such as the absence of coordinated supervision. However, as depicted in several photos taken by private photographers during the height of the tumult plus statements of witnesses, there definitely appears evidence of questionable activity by Patrolman John Kursteiner, #2670, of the Tactical Mobile Unit.

Inspector Carl Heffernan
Citizen Complaint Bureau

HJ:ygd

DETROIT POLICE DEPARTMENT

Administration Division
INTER-OFFICE MEMORANDUM

Citizen Complaint Bureau

Date July 15, 1968

To: **Commanding Officer, Citizen Complaint Bureau**

Subject: **CITIZEN COMPLAINT BUREAU INVESTIGATION AND FINAL REPORT OF COBO HALL INCIDENT. INVESTIGATED BY DETECTIVES EARL GRAY AND RICHARD RIDLING, PATROLMEN SALVATORE PALAZZOLO AND REGINALD TURNER. CCB #68-83**

INCIDENT:

The "Cobo Hall" incident with which we are dealing developed Monday evening May 13th, 1968 during the culminating rally of the "Poor Peoples March", at approximately 8:24 P.M. The melee occurred on the east side of Cobo Hall in front of the doorways leading to the lobby adjacent to hall B. The majority of marchers were attending a rally at the rear of the Veteran's Memorial Building. However, several hundred or possibly over a thousand participants were meandering between the river front rally and Cobo Hall "B" where some were being fed and assigned accommodations. Adding to the heavy activity was the Shriner's dinner, which was also being accommodated in hall "C" at Cobo Hall. Many police officers who had escorted the march were on the scene including the mounted division, stationary traffic, motor division, T.M.U. and others. Figuring prominently in the march and rally were Father Groppi and his "Milwaukee Commandos".

At approximately 8:20 P.M. controversy developed between the department and some of the participants over the stalled communication car of the marchers, which was parked in the driveway in front of the doors leading to hall B. Marchers surrounded the car; a few climbed atop. It appeared to some that trouble was imminent. The mounted division advanced to disperse the crowd and protect the officers at the car. Chaos abounded. People were injured, debris and table legs were hurled at the horses and mounts. People attempted to flee into Cobo Hall; many were prevented entry by a cordon of foot patrolmen stationed across the doorways.

As a result; several persons claimed injury and many witnesses including two men from the U.S. Department of Justice allege police mishandling, especially regarding the use of horses. Several private photographers were on the scene taking pictures and subsequently an Ad-Hoc group presented the Mayor's Office with a list of grievances and demands.

DETROIT POLICE DEPARTMENT

Administrative Division
INTER-OFFICE MEMORANDUM
Citizen Complaint Bureau

Date July 11, 1968

To: **Commanding Officer, Citizen Complaint Bureau**

Subject: **CITIZEN COMPLAINT BUREAU INVESTIGATION AND FINAL REPORT OF COBO HALL INCIDENT, INVESTIGATED BY DETECTIVES EARL GRAY AND RICHARD RIDLING; PATROLMEN SALVATORE PALAZZOLO AND REGINALD TURNER, CCB #68-83.**

SUMMATION:

Chronologically the following events transpired; at 8:24 P.M., Lieutenant Teddy Sikora called over the prep radio and talked with District Inspector Bertoni regarding a disruption being caused by a sound vehicle in relation to the Shriner Convention being held at the same time as the Poor Peoples Rally at Cobo Hall. He was informed by District Inspector Bertoni that he should have the driver move the vehicle and if he did not, then he (Sikora) was to have it towed away. A tow truck was called for by Lieutenant Sikora, not for the vehicle with whom he had spoken with District Inspector Bertoni, but for a disabled vehicle which was attached to the Poor Peoples March that was blocking the doors to Cobo Hall.

Prior to the arrival of the tow truck, Sergeants Fred Wright, #S-128, and John Logan, #S-249 appeared on the scene with Patrolmen William Flannery, William Ross of the Stationary Traffic Bureau and a third unidentified patrolman to assist in the removal of illegally parked vehicles. Lieutenant Sikora at this time was engaged in conversation with the occupants of the Poor Peoples sound truck. As Sergeant Wright motioned for the tow truck to come forward, a Negro male, identified from Citizen Complaint Bureau investigation as Abraham Rice, a/k/a Barricuda, signaled for persons connected with the march to surround the vehicle to prevent its removal. The crowd proceeded to climb atop the stalled vehicle and generally surrounded it while engaging in songs and handclapping. An agreement had been reached between the driver of the vehicle, Mr. Howard Royer, and Lieutenant Sikora that the tow truck would merely move the vehicle to a location which would not interfere with traffic until a battery which had been sent for arrived.

It should be noted at this point that Mr. Royer, Mr. Philip Gordon, Mr. Fred Brown, Mr. Harold Dorsette and Mr. Joseph Kane, all of whom stated they were present at the onset of the disagreement over the removal of the car, contend that the vehicle was having battery trouble. Attesting to the validity of their presence during this time, photographs depicting the presence of Messrs. Royer, Gordon and Dorsette around the vehicle are incorporated within the material of this investigation.

Messrs. Kane, Gordon, Brown and Thomas Turner agree that an amicable agreement between Lieutenant Sikora and the occupants of the stalled vehicle had been reached and had it not been for the demeanor of the sergeant (identified from photographs by Messrs. Kane and Brown as Sergeant Fred Wright; Mr. Turner also tentatively identified Sergeant Wright along with Sergeant Charles Byrden) the sequences of events which followed would not have occurred.

NOTE: Mr. Turner made his identifications of Lieutenant Sikora, Sergeants Wright and Byrden on July 8, 1968, to Detectives Earl Gray and Richard Ridling.

In an interview with a Mrs. Josephine Smith of 15010 Washburn, who although not present at the vehicle, stated; after the incident while on a bus conveying a group of the poor peoples contingent to Washington, D. C., she overheard a Negro male state that the battery was not dead but was merely a form of subterfuge to create an incident due to the lack of publicity the march was receiving. Material received from the Toledo Police Department reveals that on several occasions the marchers stalled traffic at several intersections with prayer meetings while the march was in that city.

Lieutenant Sikora called over the prep radio for the mounted bureau after the movement of the crowd onto the stalled vehicle. Patrolman Gilbert Hill, using code call number 2782, also called over the prep radio stating that a major disturbance was in progress in front of Cobo Hall. As a direct result of these calls, Lieutenant William Gerlach responded with his mounted detail and began dispersing the crowd.

The next issue which confronted this investigation was the number of sweeps engaged in by the mounted during this dispersal. Most witnesses agreed that two and possibly more sweeps were made by the mounted and that most of the sweeps occurred on the sidewalk. Lieutenant Gerlach refuted this contention by stating that there was only one organized sweep after which the formation was broken and each officer acted individually.

The reason given by Lieutenant Gerlach for his ordering his men into the crowd was the fact that he observed an officer later identified as Sergeant Wright to be in a precarious position within the disorderly crowd and was fearful for his safety. Patrolman William Flannery in his Citizen Complaint Bureau interview stated that prior to the mounted details act of dispersement tactics, he and Sergeant Wright walked away from the car followed by a hostile group. Sergeant Ralph Osinski stated in his Citizen Complaint Bureau Interview that he had walked Sergeant Wright to the police car when the initial sweep by the mounted originated. Sergeant John Logan stated in his precinct resume that shortly after the mounted began their crowd control, he observed Sergeants Wright and Osinski standing by a car. Mr. Fred Brown stated that he was with Sergeant Wright about 15 feet from the stalled vehicle when the mounted started their sweep. He stated that the horses started toward the sergeant, but never stopped where he (Sergeant Wright) was. On the basis of the information garnered in relation to this particular phase, the deciding question which must be answered is, Was Sergeant Wright in danger as Lieutenant Gerlach supposed?

This investigation discloses that in Lieutenant Gerlach's mind he believed Sergeant Wright to be in danger although the witnesses' statements tend to indicate that Sergeant Wright had removed himself from the crowd.

In answer to whether an order for dispersement was given by Lieutenant Gerlach prior to the initial sweep, this investigation indicates the following:

Lieutenant Gerlach stated that he initially ordered the crowds dispersement verbally and then physically by the use of his baton, when the noise of the crowd drowned out the verbal command. The following persons refute the assertion that a verbal command was given: Marjorie Ives, Longworth Quinn, Jr., Edward Roberson, Philip Gordon, Joseph Kane, Catherine Wells, Rita Brown, Sandra Bonjac, Virginia Jones, Jean Smith, Helen O'Brien, Jan Olson, James A. Smith, Reverend George Coleman, Father Groppi, Reverend David Jordon, Reverend James Markunas, Thomas Turner and Eva Walsh.

The following witnesses attest to some form of order given in regards to the crowd:

JAMES PIENBERG heard a whistle blown after which the horses were observed to walk into the crowd.

REVEREND CHARLES SACQUET heard verbal orders for dispersement given by individual mounted officers as they rode into the crowd.

HAROLD DORSETTE heard some unknown officer remark, "Let's ride them down".

GEORGE MATISH heard an undistinguished utterance by the mounted lieutenant which appeared to be directed only to those officers under his command.

PATROLMAN WILLIAM FLANNERY heard an order for dispersement but was unable to ascertain from whom it came.

As a result of the mounted detail's sweeps, approximately 26 persons were allegedly injured either directly through this action or those of the foot patrolmen who were instrumental in preventing entry into the hall proper by those persons attempting to escape the mounted sweeps.

This investigation is able to verify only four recorded reports of injuries to citizens as a result of this incident. Photographs showing Dr. Claude Young treating persons at Cobo Hall is further evidence that injuries were incurred but this investigation is unable to specifically pinpoint the manner in which they were sustained.

A list denoting persons injured in the Cobo Hall melee was obtained from the Southern Christian Leadership Council Director, Mr. Paul Bekulech. Along with the list, Mr. Bekulech imparted the name of a Miss Jean Martin, who was with the Poor Peoples contingent in

Resurrection City. The resultant phone call to Miss Martin has been of no consequence although a message was left for her to return the call collect. Due to the lack of information relative to these injuries and the inability of the investigators to communicate with the four known injured parties, the investigation can only ascertain that injuries were incurred without being able to pinpoint their origin. In conjunction with this matter, letters were sent to the known injured persons requesting information, but as of this time only one reply has been received.

During the time of the mounted details sweeps, it has been alleged that its members indiscriminately used their nightsticks. While it is quite evident that these officers did have batons in their hands as evident by photographs, this investigation is unable to establish that the batons were used to inflict the wounds reported by members of the march. Several witnesses have stated that they were struck or observed persons to be struck by members of this mounted detail, but none have been able to identify any specific officer responsible for the alleged acts. Also numerous witnesses have stated that during the course of the mounted details sweeps, they observed objects and missiles to be thrown at them by the crowd during this period of dispersement, but again this investigation is not able to pinpoint those persons responsible.

As the crowd was driven back into the interior of the hall, there is evidence to indicate they were prevented entry into the hall proper by foot patrolmen who were stationed inside the hall and in the doorways (See photographs). Numerous witnesses have alluded to the fact that these officers used various means to accomplish this through the use of nightsticks and fists. Although these witnesses are able to relate matters concerning this specific incident, here again the inability of these witnesses to identify any officer with any specific culpable act negates the possibility of placing responsibility upon any individual officer with the exception of one which will be expounded upon later. One salient factor which has been disclosed is; there appeared to be a total lack of communication between the foot officers and the mounted detail, even though prep radios were available. Furthermore, there are witnesses' statements to the effect that as these acts were occurring, the mounted details actions were clearly discernible to those officers who were engaged in their preventative actions.

As previously mentioned in the above paragraph, several isolated instances of alleged police improprieties have been revealed by facts developed in this investigation. A witness, Edward Roberson, who took a photograph of one particular incident in front of Cobo Hall during the time citizens of the Poor Peoples March were prevented from entering; stated that an officer, who was helmeted, came out of the hall and began to strike any and all persons within his reach. Patrolman John Kursteiner, when shown this photograph, identified himself as the officer wearing a helmet during a physical altercation with an unidentified Negro male, but denied any other use of force. Two other witnesses, Philip Mason and Sam Dennis, both of whom at the time were attached to the March as agents with the Community Relations Service, U. S. Department of Justice, stated that while Agent Mason was holding a Tommy Willis, Patrolman Kursteiner used his billy club to strike this person in the side with great force.

Agent Mason also incorporated in his statement that when he questioned Lieutenant Gerlach's use of the horses, Lieutenant Gerlach caused his mount to deliberately step on his foot.

Agent Dennis in his statement also referred to an instance when he observed an officer, Badge #2229, extracting his carbine from the trunk of the scout car, an act which he considered inflammatory. In conjunction with this act, Mr. Longworth Quinn, Jr., also stated that as he observed officers to extract carbines from the trunks of their scout car, he attempted to introduce himself as a member of the Commission on Community Relations and request that they return their weapons. One of the officers remarked, "they don't take orders from no niggers". Mr. Quinn further stated that this remark was overheard by an agent from the Justice Department who obtained the officer's badge number. Mr. Quinn stated that he took a photograph of this particular officer while he was engaged in conversation with Agent Dennis. This photograph was made available for investigation and reveals a Negro male whom Mr. Quinn identified as Agent Dennis, but due to the arm position of Dennis, the facial features of the officer are indiscernible. The officer to whom Badge #2229 is issued, John Kress, was interviewed in the office of the Citizen Complaint Bureau, where it was ascertained that he was in the locale, did place his carbine in the trunk, but did not remove it as alleged, did converse with a Negro male about the weapon, but did not speak derogatorily to him. While this investigation clearly identifies Patrolman Kress as the officer alleged to have made the remark to Dennis, Agent Dennis failed to make mention of it in his statement. Therefore, this investigation can point only to Mr. Quinn's statement to establish the validity of the remark without further corroboration.

Other factors which have been disclosed relative to this complaint and which are of paramount importance in arriving at a determination are as follows:

First and foremost is the question of whether the mounted detail galloped or walked into the crowd during the period of dispersment. While this can never be resolved entirely, photographs tend to show that the horses were not galloping which is verified by some witnesses and refuted by others.

Messrs. Kane, Gordon, and Patrolman Marvin Kreitsch, who was assigned to the police tow wagon on the day in question, all mentioned the presence of a police inspector being present during the discussion over the stalled vehicle. None of whom, when shown photographs, were able to identify this inspector, although all inspectors known to have been on duty at the time were incorporated in the photographs shown.

Why persons were prevented from entering the hall when the mounted were attempting to get them into the hall has never been satisfactorily explained. Sergeant Ralph Osinski stated that he was given the order to form his squad into formation by Inspector Chester Sylvester. This was done in order to "avert further trouble, feeling that the presence of a well organized unit would tend to quell the disturbance".

This investigation has brought forth a preponderance of evidence by witnesses to the effect that there was no direct act of physical assault toward the police officers at the onset of the confrontation and that only after the initial sweep by the mounted detail was there any form of aggression shown in the form of missiles being thrown at the horsemen.

This investigation has revealed only one witness who in substance corroborates the statement of Sergeant Fred Wright that he was spat upon. Patrolman Bernard LaForest, #1687, stated that while standing by his patrol car in front of Cobo Hall, he was about 50 feet away from Sergeant Wright, when he observed him (Wright) begin to wipe his eyes with his shirt sleeve or arm. He had no further knowledge as to who was responsible for this act or what happened to Sergeant Wright after this occurrence. According to Patrolman LaForest, this act took place during the first sweep and he could not remember seeing any other officers in close proximity to Sergeant Wright during this time. Contrary to this assertion by Patrolman LaForest, Patrolman William Flannery, who arrived with Sergeant Wright and was in close proximity at all times, stated that he observed no physical assault of any type perpetrated upon the person of Sergeant Wright.

One further accusation has been directed against members of this department by Mr. Edward Roberson, from whom nine (9) photographs were purchased as an aid to the investigation. Mr. Roberson alleged the Patrolman Lawrence Dokendorf, #2037, whom he identified from a photograph, and two other department photographers were present during the time he was photographing the incident in front of Cobo Hall.

He claimed that these officers took pictures of the incident as he was close enough to hear their cameras operating. He further identified the camera as being a 16 millimeter Bolex. Sergeant Arthur DeConinck, #S0175, Patrolman Dokendorf and Patrolman Eugene Nierzwick, #1922, who were assigned to photograph the march, disclaim being present during the actual confrontation.

On June 19, 1968, Detective Paul Nast and Patrolman Gilbert Truax monitored department tapes relative to the number of calls made concerning disruption of Shriner Convention by persons connected with Poor Peoples March. No calls pertaining to this matter were recorded.

As a result of this confrontation between citizens of the Poor Peoples March and the Police Department, Lieutenant Teddy Sikora was suspended on June 1, 1968, for neglect of duty under the provisions of Chapter 3, Section 34, paragraph 10 of the Detroit Police Manual. After trial dates of June 13, 14, 17, 19, 20 and 21, it was decided by the trial board that he be returned to duty without penalty on July 5, 1968.

Sergeant Fred Wright was suspended on May 31, 1968, under Chapter 3, Section 34, paragraph 8, because of his actions relative to the aforementioned incident. As of this date, the trial board final decision is pending.

Detective Earl Gray
Earl Gray

Detective Richard Ridling
Richard Ridling

Patrolman Reginald Turner
Reginald Turner

Patrolman Salvatore Palazzolo
Salvatore Palazzolo