

Orange police chief confirms probe of possible wrongdoing by cops

By KEVIN DILWORTH

An investigation has been launched into possible criminal activity among police officers in Orange, the city's chief has confirmed.

"There has been an ongoing criminal investigation within the city," said Chief Robert Sorge. "I'm actively and aggressively continuing this investigation."

Sorge added that further comment "would be inappropriate at this time."

John J. Fahy, as assistant U.S. attorney for New Jersey in charge of the special prosecutions division, said, "We can't confirm any current investigation."

"If he (Sorge) is saying he's conducting a criminal investigation, we just hope that it's done fully and properly, so we can clear our department of any and all alleged aspersions cast upon it," said Lt. Charles Cobbert, president of the Kinsmen, a black police officers group in Orange.

"We remember that, in 1974, the Essex County Prosecutor's Office had an investigation (of the department)," Cobbert continued. "At the time, it was rumored throughout the department that they (the prosecutor's office) did not get everyone who may or may not have been corrupt at the time."

John Redden, deputy first assistant prosecutor in Essex County, said he had "no comment" on whether his office was involved in an investigation of the Orange department.

Chief Sorge disclosed the investigation in the wake of public inquiries raised at Tuesday's city council meeting. Some residents questioned whether it was true some police officers were involved in drug trafficking.

Rocco Zarillo, a South Center Street resident and the city's former director of information and complaints, noted how he was "affronted" by reports that some police officers are under investigation for drug trafficking, and neither Sorge nor Mayor Paul Monacelli, the city's police director, attended the meeting.

If there were police officers "using or selling narcotics," Zarillo continued, Sorge had an obligation to arrest those people and refer the matter to the municipal court and prosecutor's office.

"We're talking about drugs here," Zarillo told the council. "The matter should be investigated. We've got too many clean cops in this department" who are being forced "to have a stigma attached to them."

On Oct. 22, 1982, two Orange police detectives, Thomas Fazio, 31, and Daniel O'Connor, 26, were arrested in a Newark apartment during State Police drug raids.

A state grand jury indicted them on charges of failing to investigate and arrest six alleged drug dealers.

O'Connor and Fazio, Orange officials later reported, were supposed to be at a stakeout in Orange looking for a suspected rapist at the time of their drug-related arrests in Newark.

Both men resigned from the force and lost their pensions. In May 1985, Fazio and O'Connor were sentenced to three years' probation and fined \$10,000 and \$2,000, respectively.

In a separate probe, the Essex County Prosecutor's Office four years ago investigated the disappearance of \$4,500 worth of jewelry from the Orange Police Department's evidence room.

The prosecutor's office concluded there was "some negligence" on the part of authorities in Orange. But, it added, no one person could "be pinpointed as a suspect" responsible for either misplacing or taking the gems.

Two Orange police officers, Abdul H. Bilal, 30, and Craig Burns, 29, were charged with aggravated robbery, receiving stolen property and carrying concealed weapons while in Cleveland last August on official business. They face trial in Cuyahoga County (Ohio) Common Pleas Court on Feb. 11.

This is not the first time Bilal has been in trouble. He was fired from his post on Nov. 7, 1983, after being accused—by then Police Chief Pasquale (Pat) Messano and an independent hearing officer—of improper conduct, discipline problems, failing to answer and assist other police officers while on his post and self-admitted "personal problems."

Two months later, then-Mayor Joel Shain reinstated Bilal after agreeing to do so at the urging of the Kinsmen. Bilal and Burns are members of the organization.



Photo by Jerry McCrea

James names 2 women to bench

Newark Mayor Sharpe James has nominated two new judges for the Newark Municipal Court.

He noted both were women from minority groups, and added if she is confirmed by the city council, Myrna Milan will become the first woman of Hispanic origin to sit on the Newark bench.

Milan is a former municipal prosecutor for Elizabeth. The other nominee, Alison Brown Jones, has served as assistant corporation counsel for Newark since 1982.

During his State of the City address on Jan. 14, James disclosed he would submit the two nominations. He

said the two would make the city's court "an All-American court."

Upon confirmation of the two appointments, he said, "the Newark court will be the most dedicated and most representative judicial body in the state. Our magistrates will reflect our city's diverse population, black, white, Hispanic and Portuguese."

Milan is a former research assistant to Professor Alfred Slocum, who is currently the New Jersey Public Advocate. She is now in private practice in Elizabeth.

Concerning Jones, the mayor said: "During her tenure with the city of Newark, Ms. Jones has served as chief

of the law department's labor section, counsel to various agencies and departments and has ably represented the city in numerous workers' compensation cases and civil litigation."

The mayor also revealed he will "forward the names of several sitting judges to the city council for reappointment in the next few weeks."

Since taking office in 1986, James has appointed Paul Daniele and Richard Gomes—the first Portuguese-American on the Newark bench—to the judiciary.

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