Sirgo Predicted

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'Generation of Violence'

By ALLAN KATZ

Deputy Police Supt. Louis Sirgo, killed yesterday by sniper fire in a stairwell at the Downtown Howard Johnson's, had often expressed the view that leniency by juvenile and criminal district courts here and throughout the nation "have loosed a generation of violent criminals who will claim many victims."

Sirgo, who was 48, became the victim of sniper fire at about 12:30 p.m. yesterday, as he led a squad of policemen up a stairwell toward the roof of the motel where snipers were holding out.

The deputy superintendent, who had left a safe and relatively cushy job as administrator of the Orleans Parish Traffic Court to take the number two position in the police department, was rushing to help an officer reported trapped when he was cut down by a bullet at close range.

LAST APRIL, when The States-Item did a series of articles on problems in the Orleans Parish Juvenile Courts, emphasizing the lack of detention facilities and the fact that many juveniles are arrested 10, 20 or even 30 times without being detained, Sirgo spelled out his views on the criminal and society in an interview.

"The failure of our juvenile and criminal courts, the apathy of society, the unwillingness or inability of schools and parents to discipline young people and the mess that our prison systems are in have combined to create a generation of criminals who fear nothing," Sirgo said eight months ago.

"The police are in a terrible trap," he commented. "We arrest these kids when they are 13 or 14, they are turned loose, we arrest them again and they are soon loose again.

"By the time they have been arrested for the fifth or 10th or 20th time, they have only contempt for society. The idea of punishment has no meaning for them because no one has ever punished them."

SIRGO'S THEORY, which is shared by many policemen, was that the failure to deal with juvenile delinquents and insist they shape up or face a life behind bars leads to their evolution into mature criminals who face justice not much more effective at the criminal court level as they grow older.

"I'll tell you," he said in the April interview, "I've seen 15 and 16-year-old juveniles who are just short of being wild animals. They have no more respect for any constituted authority than does a rabid dog.

"These kids could absolutely kill you

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Wounded policeman Robert Buras
leaves hotel after night of terror

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and think nothing of it," Sirgo said in the interview.

Although his views on the criminal justice system, and what he believed to be its failures, could only be described as tough-minded, he was essentially a low-keyed, affable individual.

Those who dealt with him invariably found him a sound administrator, accessible and reasonable in working out problems. One reporter who frequently dealt with him, recalled him today as a "beautiful person."

ALTHOUGH SIRGO often spoke of the need to hold the specter of punishment over the heads of would-be criminals, he also said he believed in rehabilitation.

Of juveniles, Sirgo said last April, "All of us recognize that the juveniles who get in trouble need help. We'd prefer a system of justice that gives it to them after their first offense rather than waiting until their crimes become so serious that the only effective approach becomes to get them off the street any way it can legally be done."

Tributes to Sirgo and the other police officers who died yesterday began rolling in soon after their deaths were announced.

Mayor Moon Landrieu said of Sirgo's death: "The death of Louis Sirgo in the merciless shooting is a deep personal loss to me. He was more than a deputy chief of police—he was a very close friend. My deepest sympathies go to his wife and children.

"I can assure you, this city lost a gallant police officer. Louis knew no dangers. When he was fatally wounded, he was disregarding snipers in the building.

"IF ANY ONE thing describes Louis Sirgo, it was this wholehearted regard for his fellow policemen—no matter what the risk to his own life. The entire community should mourn the loss of this man. He was conscientious, resourceful and above all—mindful of his duty to the public he served.

"The death of Louis Sirgo is a loss the entire community feels. Please join me in prayer for his memory."

Of the deaths of the other officers, Landrieu said, "I speak for all citizens when I express our most profound sympathies to their families. Like them, we shed tears over such an act of inhumanity.

"I also ask that everyone join me in prayer for the full and speedy recovery of those police officers and firemen injured in the line of duty."

Sirgo rose rapidly through the ranks, retired for more than six years and then returned to become second in command to Supt. Clarence B. Giarrusso.

Here is a history of Sirgo's police service.

Oct. 1, 1946—Appointed a patrolman.

Feb. 1, 1950—Promoted to detective.

Sept. 16, 1950—Promoted to lieutenant.

June 1, 1956—Promoted to captain.

Nov. 30, 1961—Promoted to major.

March 18, 1964—Retired to accept position as chief administrator of New Orleans traffic courts.

Aug. 25, 1970—Appointed deputy superintendent of police.

Jan. 7, 1973—Killed by sniper fire in Downtown Howard Johnson's.