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STATEMENT BY NEW YORK CITY POLICE COMMISSIONER HOWARD
R. LEARY BEFORE HEARINGS OF THE SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE
ON INVESTIGATIONS INTO BOMBINGS AND TERRORISM IN THE
UNITED STATES - July 16, 1970.

Mr. Chairman, Senator Javits, members of the Senate Subcommittee on Investigations. With your permission I would like to digress for a moment to first thank you for the opportunity to present my views and those of the New York City Police Department in regard to the bombing problem as it effects us, and second to introduce to you the representatives of the department who are here with me today.

They are: Deputy Commissioner Luis M. Neco who is in charge of Legal Matters; the department's Chief Inspector, George P. McManus; the Chief of Detectives, Frederick M. Lussen; and, Lieutenant Kenneth W. O'Neill, Commanding Officer of the department's Bomb Squad.

Approximately one month ago, the critical nature of the bombing problem in New York City was brought to full realization for the city's some seven million residents, particularly its Police Department.

Police Headquarters, at 240 Centre Street, the nerve center for the entire department and its 32,000 policemen, was bombed.

In capsule I would like to relate to you the chain of events which led to this dastardly and demoralizing deed, the historical significance of which is yet to be fully realized.

At 6:43 P.M., on June 9th, 1970, the Police Headquarters Communications Center received the following telephone message from a male, presently unknown:

"LISTEN CLOSELY ... THIS IS WEATHERMAN ... THERE IS A BOMB AT 240 CENTRE STREET ... YOU HAVE JUST ENOUGH TIME TO GET OUT IF YOU LEAVE NOW ... MAKE SURE EVERYBODY GETS OUT ... DO NOT TRY TO FIND IT ... THIS IS FOR REAL ... WE'RE DEAD SERIOUS"

Two minutes later, at approximately 6:45 P.M., a second call was received in the Chief Inspector's Office, again by a male, presently unknown; the message:

"A BOMB WAS PLACED IN POLICE HEADQUARTERS AND SCHEDULED TO GO OFF ... THIS IS A WARNING SO THAT THE BUILDING CAN BE EVACUATED SO THAT NO ONE WILL BE HURT..."

A floor by floor and room by room search of Police Headquarters was immediately initiated.

At 6:57 P.M., fourteen minutes after the first call was received, the bomb exploded in the second floor men's room.

The explosion demolished the men's room, knocked out two adjoining walls and resulted in the injury of three police officers and a female civilian elevator operator.

Its blast hurled debris into the street behind Police Headquarters inflicting injury upon two men and two women, none of whom were employed by the department.

Despite the severity of the blast, no one was killed and those who were injured, though serious were not critical.

I do not want the fact that no one was killed to mislead anyone as to the seriousness of the situation. Next door to the room where the bomb had been secreted is the office of the Deputy Commissioner in Charge of Administration. It was the wall to his office that was blown out, and only the fact that he was not present in the room at the time of the impact saved this man.

Divorced from its unique social consequences, the bombing at Police Headquarters is but one of a growing list of explosions and near explosions which have plagued the City of New York in the past 18 months.

Since January of 1969 there have been 368 bombing incidents of the explosive and incendiary type. The objects of such explosions, or attempted explosions have been municipal and federal buildings, such as the Criminal Court Building in Manhattan, where explosions occurred on November 12, 1969; banks and religious houses of worship, such as the Mosholu Jewish Center where an explosion occurred on March 25, 1970; and commercial buildings.

This tragic list included two residential buildings wherein on two separate, though possibly related incidents, these structures were being utilized as bomb factories for the manufacture of explosive devices.

One was the Greenwich Village Townhouse in which three persons were killed when an explosion destroyed the bomb factory housed therein.

A few days later, a second explosion, this one in an apartment that was also being used as a bomb factory, resulted in the death of one person and the maiming of another.

Another incident saw two local, community-type theatres, both in the Borough of the Bronx, racked by explosive devices on the same night. While there were injuries to innocent patrons, fortunately no one was killed.

A family, visiting our shores from Ecuador was shopping in a prominent New York City department store. An incendiary device with timer, enclosed in a seemingly harmless cigarette package, had been placed in a garment in that store. At the very moment the device was set to detonate, one of the visitors was trying on that same garment. Flames consumed the jacket and although the visitor was slightly injured, he no doubt will carry with him for the rest of his life the mental scar created by the totally unnecessary act of a depraved and misguided person.

Without hesitation I can visualize the thousands of New York City residents, as well as visitors who each time, for the following weeks, until the impact of this dastardly deed wore off, thoroughly checked every garment they tried on for similiar hidden devices.

I can visualize too the thousands who peered into closets in rest rooms throughout public buildings, within the days following the explosions at Police Headquarters and other buildings. All carrying within them the fear and emotional upset brought about by these incidents.

While these devices which functioned as their incompassionate designers intended and did spread fear through the hearts of men, women and children, there were other devices which fortunately did not detonate, but which never-the-less helped spread fear. In over 50 instances, these devices were located and members of the New York City Police Department's Bomb Squad, who deserve our constant prayers and thanks, did successfully, at total disregard to their own lives, dismantle and render these devices harmless.

The bombing problem has only in recent months been highlighted and singled out as the real menace it is. However, it is not a new problem. In the five year period from 1960 through and including 1964, the New York City Police Department has recorded the detonation of 113 devices of terror, 85 of which were explosive devices and 28 of which were incendiary devices.

During the period from 1965 to and including May 1970, the department has recorded the detonation of 438 devices, of which 331 were explosive devices and 107 were incendiary devices.

These devices break down into two categories. The first is known as High Order, such as dynamite, and the second is Low Order, such as pipe bombs. The prime distinction is the type of explosive used. As to incendiary devices, there are normally two types which the department has come in contact with, Molotov Cocktails and other chemicals.

Let me give you a recent example of the incendiary device problem. Only a few weeks ago, an alert policeman at one of our precincts discovered eleven glass bottles, containing gasoline, with crude fuses made of firecracker wicks, planted underneath five police vehicles parked alongside the station house. It was the intent of the perpetrator to ignite the wicks, attaching a lighted cigarette to them. Fortunately the cigarettes had extinguished before the smoldering tobacco reached the wicks. Had they not, the five police cars, and the station house, might have gone up in flames and explosion. The extent of injury and death had this happened is difficult to forecast.

The big question we must ask ourselves in the face of this rash of needless injury, destruction and also death, is why? I mention death for the first time because it has occurred and I live in hope that it will not occur again. The death I refer to is those of Detectives Joseph Lynch and Ferdinand Socha, both killed on July 4, 1940 while deactivating a bomb that had been planted at the British Pavilion at the New York World's Fair.

The why is much easier to explain, than is the death. We know, and we can say that the present crop of explosive devices, in the main, represent distorted petitions for redress of grievance. But, what do we say to the widow, the parents, the children of these wantonly slain policemen?

The explosion of firecrackers and noise making devices, under safe and sane, as well as controlled conditions, has been symbolic of this nation's struggle for freedom. Yet today there are those who sadly use this same symbol, wrapped-up in death, injury and destruction, as their means for creative expression. It is a problem which society must face and overcome.

While these bombings have caused death, injury and destruction, which I in no way minimize, they have also brought about other problems. For example, at a tremendous cost in manpower and inconvenience, we have been compelled to increase our security at Police Headquarters, as well as at every precinct house throughout the city. Where once we were willing hosts and the portals of our buildings welcomed the public, we must today, of necessity bring down a curtain of surveillance and caution, not alone for the protection of the policemen and civilian workers on our staffs, but also for the safety of the public, the citizen, who of necessity must visit with us.

While this security has affected the ready accessibility of our precinct houses to the community, we will never-the-less continue and expand our efforts towards a more meaningful police-community relationship.

The Police Department of New York City is not alone in this pressing problem for increased security. I could name hundreds of business concerns which at a tremendous, unanticipated expenditure have been forced to increase their own security measures. Thousand upon thousands of workers, in all areas of the City can now be seen wearing identification cards which are their sole key to admission to their place of employment, to the earning of their livelihood.

All of us have worked hard at improving our security with the prime purpose of protecting the public from these dispensers of death, injury and destruction. And I want to make one thing solidly clear, we are not doing this out of fear or with any sense of panic. We know the problem and we are leaving no stone unturned in our efforts to prevent its recurrence. However, it is a problem which goes far beyond the scope of police work. It is a problem which demands the full effort of every citizen. It is a problem which demands the full and complete support of this nation's leaders and legislators, such as the leadership which is so evidently being shown today by this Senate Subcommittee.

We in police work know the problem. It is you in the Senate who can get at its roots and develop lasting solutions.

I thank you and offer to you the full services of myself and my staff and humbly petition you in the name of the people of this great country whom we have vowed to protect and defend, that you take full advantage of this offer.

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