Colombo Shot, Gunman Slain
At Columbus Circle Rally Site

Killing of Assailant
Not Done by Police,
Inspector Says

By WILLIAM E. FARRELL

Before thousands of stunned spectators and amid heavy police security, Joseph A. Colombo Sr., the 48-year-old reputed chief of a Brooklyn Mafia family, was shot in the head and critically wounded at Columbus Circle yesterday less than an hour before a massive Italian-American civil rights rally began.

Colombo's assailant, a 25-year-old black man named Jerome A. Johnson, of 88 Throop Avenue, New Brunswick, N.J., was shot to death at the scene, but it was still not clear last night who had shot him—the police, associates of Colombo or unknown third parties.

After five hours of brain surgery at Roosevelt Hospital, Colombo was reported in a coma last night, and his chances of survival were estimated by surgeons to be "less than 50-50." Two bullets were removed, one from the midbrain and the other from the back of the neck.

Calls Attack Planned

Chief of Detectives Albert A. Seedman said at a news conference last evening that the attack on Colombo was planned and that Johnson was not killed by a policeman, but he offered few details. Several reputed underworld leaders were picked up for questioning, including the Gallo brothers of Brooklyn, who have long been reported feuding with Colombo.

The major questions facing police, Chief Seedman said, were: Who killed Johnson? What was the purpose of the shooting of Colombo? Who else was involved?

The sudden spurt of gunfire took place shortly after 11:45 A.M., within 100 feet of the gaily festooned statue of Christopher Columbus, which was bedecked, as was the surrounding area, with plastic tatters of red, white and green—the colors of the Italian flag.

Pandemonium engulfed the area, sending hysterical spectators, many of them women clutching small children, spilling uptown toward 61st Street. So sudden was the violent

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outbreak in the area near the
statue of Columbus and close
to a large stage set up for the
second annual Unity Day cel-
bration of the Italian-American
Civil Rights League, that the
— both uniformed and
 plainclothes men who were
in the area—were initially as
stunned as the spectators.

Within seconds, however, a
plainclothes policeman, halted
by ral~y captains of the civil
rights league, which Colombo
founded last year, were corre-
ning off the scene of the vio-
cence.

There were shouts of "A
colored guy did it!" and cries of
"They got Columbus!" as a
band struck up some music in
an attempt to soothe the throng.

Within seconds, Colombo,
who was reported to have re-
ceived shots in the left jaw and
torso, was taken to Roose-
velt Hospital, a stream of blood
 gushing from his neck and
mouth.

Within minutes, Colombo,
who was removed to Roosevelt
Hospital, said that Colombo
was shot in the leg and that
he looked dead to me."

At this point, Mr. Cecora was
interrupted by detectives and
was taken in for questioning.

At his news conference, Chief
Seedsman said that several rank-
ing police officers had been
seen near Colombo just prior to
the shooting and that Colombo
had been checking on the venders
authorized to sell refreshments
at the unity rally.

One of the policemen near
Colombo was Deputy Chief In-
spector Thomas Reid, who said
his 'call was "Hold the three,"
and along with other police-
men who had been with the
hundreds assembling for the
 noon rally.

One captain, muttering in
distress at the comments the
detectives were eliciting,
was overheard to say: "Damn it.
 Didn't any one of those guys
see or hear anything but a
bunch of damn firecrackers go-
ing off?"

Just east of the shooting
scene, looking down on it, was a
camera platform used by a
freelance television crew re-
tained by the civil rights league
to film the proceedings.

Witness Gives Account

A man who identified him-
self as James Delmonico, a 33-
year-old freelance, said he
witnessed the shooting.

"I watched Colombo walk-
ing," Mr. Delmonico said, "I
saw a black man jump out
behind the back of his [Co-
ombo's] head. He fired three
times with an automatic pistol.
Colombo fell.

"There were two more shots," I
think. They crossed around
that guy with the gun. Colombo
had blood all over his head.
The black man dropped the
 gun and got hit three or four
times."

Near Colombo on the scene
were members of his family,
including his son Anthony, a
vice president of the Italian-
American Civil Rights League.

Minutes after the shooting,
Colombo's sister, who was
 sobbing on the grandstand,
was spotted by Mrs. Anthony
Colombo. Another woman said:
"Your mother's going to come
out and see you like this, you'll


on to his band—I don't know
who shot the black man.

The confusion at the scene
was reflected at the 14th
Precinct station house, where
detectives were interviewing
unarmed policemen who had
been among the hundreds for-
alizing for the noon rally.

A high-ranking officer at the
scene of the shooting when
Colombo fell at the policeman's feet and
was retrieved by him.

A high-ranking officer at the
scene shook his head and said:
"Nobody knows what hap-
pened. We know there are
more guns here than what we
have.

One of those who tried to
bring normalcy to the scene
was Richard Azez, a rally
captain, who said he had tried
to shield Colombo's body after
he fell.

"It was an hour before my
legs stopped shaking," Mr.
Azez said as he marched to
post to keep unauthorized per-
sons from flooding the area of
the stage.

Officials of the civil rights
league repeatedly implored the
crowd to remain orderly and
exhorted them in the name of
Italian unity.

Within 45 minutes after the
shooting, the Unity Day Med-
dium began on schedule, at
noon, and soon persons were
leaning against the barricades
that cordoned off the site of the
shooting.

Dr. Hanson, the attending

school bus and driven off.

Several young women who
worked at the civil rights
league office at 633 Madison
Avenue reported that several
threatening calls had been re-
sponded after the shooting and
that "a man called and said he
would go to machine gun the
whole Colombo family.

Office Ordered Closed

Later in the afternoon, Barry
Siegel, the league's attorney,
ordered the office closed.

There were no signs during
the afternoon of activities at the
Colombo house at 1516
Street, between 11th and 12th
Avenues, in the Bensonhurst
section of Brooklyn.

The house is made of brick
with a garage and porch facing
the street. It has a wrought-
iron fence and gate providing
access to a side alley that leads
to the living quarters.

At his news conference,
Inspector Seedsman said that Mr.
Johnson had shown some kind
of a pass to Unity Day officials
and they had issued him their
own working press badges em-
beddled with the Italian tricolo-

But the police, he said, had not
showed the original card. Mr.
Johnson had used to show Unity
Day officials.

Inspector Seedsman said that
Joseph Gallo had been ques-
tioned for about an hour and
half and released.

"He's through for the day," In-
spector Seedsman said when
asked if Gallo's release was
permanent.

The police official said that
the two Gallos and Carlo Gam-
bo had been sought for ques-
tioning because of "stories
of friction between the Gam-
bo guys and the guys headed
by Colombo," he promised to
prove other details.

Inspector Seedsman said that
four guns had been impounded

and were being studied. A
police spokesman said that one
of the weapons came into the
possession of a patrolman at the
scene of the shooting when it
was lobbed through the stage
fell at the policeman's feet and
was retrieved by him.

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JOINING HANDS IN UNITY, participants in the rally at Columbus Circle say a prayer for Joseph A. Colombo.

VICTIM OF SHOOTING IS REMOVED: Colombo being put into an ambulance for the trip to Roosevelt Hospital.
ALLEGED ASSAILANT SHOT: Joseph A. Colombo Sr.'s apparent attacker, identified by police as Jerome A. Johnson of New Brunswick, N.J., was shot fatally at scene. The bag beside him, found to contain lapel pins of the Unity Day rally and a pistol, was picked up by a man who said he was looking for Mr. Colombo's bag. Police questioned him.

neurosurgeon, described Colombo's operation at a news conference. The major wound was caused by a bullet that entered the left back of the head to a depth of three to four inches and lodged near the midline of the cerebellum's hemispheres. Major vascular surfaces were damaged.

The second slug was removed from the back of the neck. A third slug, near the lateral side of the left jaw, was not considered critical and was left in Colombo by surgeons.

"The problem is how much intrinsic damage was done" during the period of heavy bleeding and clotting before the operation, Dr. Hanson said.

Outside the hospital, near the corner of Ninth Avenue and 58th Street, a group of 25 men, four women and two children marched in a slow oval, reciting prayers, the Hail Mary and The Lord's Prayer.