



HE WAS BORN TO PROTECT AND SERVE

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By Murray Weiss Criminal Justice Editor

Detective Hector Santiago stood proudly in the rear of City Hall's Public Hearing Room watching as a former narcotics cop who saved his life became the city's 40th police commissioner.

"If it weren't for Bernie Kerik, I would not be here talking to you now," Santiago told The Post, recalling the night when he was shot, lying on the street and seeing Kerik race over just in time to fire his revolver at a gunman "coming to finish me off."

On Nov. 13, 1991, Santiago, Kerik and a handful of narcotics cops tried to capture Carlos Carrion, a major drug dealer from Massachusetts who had scored six kilos of cocaine.

"We did not know it, but he would rather die than be arrested - and he opened fire into my car," Santiago said.

The first slug ripped into Santiago's arm as he raised it to protect his head. Other bullets whizzed past him into the head rest.

"I rolled out of the car onto the sidewalk, and I could see Carrion's feet under the car coming around to finish me off," Santiago said.

"Bernie came up firing. So did Terry Burns, Donnie Trenkel and my partner Wanda Rosado," the 18-year veteran continued. "Carrion realized there were other officers and started running."

Kerik led the pursuit, ducking bullets all the way as Carrion repeatedly turned and sprayed bullets over his shoulder from his 19-shot machine pistol.

"Bernie was just 10 feet behind Carrion who was turning and firing over his shoulder and he was just shooting and shooting," Santiago said. "Bernie was ducking bullets, literally."

Kerik and the officers returned fire. Finally, Carrion was hit and fell to the street. He was arrested and today is serving more than 100 years in prison.