



HEROES OF KERIK'S POLICE POSSE

BY AL GUART
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Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik is backed by a handpicked "posse" of gritty, seasoned cops when he scours the city streets for criminals.

Once or twice a week, the so-called "beat-cop commissioner" cruises the city at night with a security detail composed of cops who have been in shootouts, dangled from rooftops, been hit by bullets, raced into burning buildings and seen their partners die.

"These are people who have put their lives on the line," Kerik told The Post last week.

"Every one of them is a good street cop. They have a tremendous amount of experience and know the dangers of the job."

The 11-member unit is made up of nine detectives who work 17-hour shifts and are assigned to three teams. Each team protects Kerik in rotating 48-hour shifts and answers to two supervisors.

Kerik is chauffeured in an unmarked black Chrysler sedan by veteran Highway Patrol cops trained in hot-pursuit driving techniques. They, too, are part of the unit.

Since he took charge of the city's 41,000-member police force last Aug. 19, the commish has made four arrests.

Members of the security detail backed Kerik when he busted two ex-convicts - one a paroled killer wanted for a carjacking in Virginia - for allegedly driving a stolen van in Harlem last Sunday.

They were also on hand when he arrested a couple - armed with a box-cutter and a knife - engaged in a dispute on a lower Manhattan street corner last Dec. 13.

The next day, members of Kerik's posse covered his back when he nabbed a drunken driver who had stopped to urinate on the Major Deegan Expressway.

Some suspects are shocked to be arrested by the city's top cop.

Detective Gary Combs, an 16-year veteran whose partner was killed in a buy-and-bust operation on the Lower East Side in March 1993, backed Kerik when he busted up the domestic dispute on the way back to Police Headquarters.

"The female had a cutter and was swinging it at her common-law husband, who had a knife on him," Combs said. "The guy looked amazed and said, I know who you are. You're the police commissioner."

Kerik isn't only looking for crimes in areas where residents have asked for a stronger police presence - he's also inspecting his officers and local precincts.

"I go out to see the conditions on the streets," Kerik said. "That's my job. It's difficult to know what's going on if you're not out there."

Kerik has also boarded the A, E and No. 1 trains, watching for crime, as members of his detail drive along the subway route in case he surfaces with a suspect.

"No arrests in the subway yet," said Sgt. Timothy McPartlin, a 16-year veteran whose previous job before being tapped by Kerik was on the Intelligence Unit. "But we have to be nearby."

Members of the detail seem to enjoy their boss' old-fashioned police work.

"I like it," said Detective Craig Taylor, a 14-year veteran who was in a Brooklyn shootout with machine-gun-toting thugs in 1994 and is now one of Kerik's three drivers.

"We're out there seeing whether these problems are being addressed. It so happens, we run into some bad guys when we're out there."

Detective Robert Picciano, 35, a 13-year veteran who was shot in the leg in 1989 in Times Square, said Kerik ordered him to be prepared to make street arrests.

"When we came on the detail, [Kerik] told us we had to carry our handcuffs," Picciano said. "He said that if anything happened, we had to be prepared to jump."

"On some details, you can keep your cuffs in a briefcase. But not on this one."

The 11 cops in Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik's detail are:

1. Hector J. Santiago, 40, a 19-year veteran who received the NYPD's Combat Cross after he was shot in the right arm by a drug dealer in running gun battle in upper Manhattan on Nov. 13, 1991. Cops nabbed the suspect as he tried to reload his 9mm handgun, and recovered a revolver and 5 kilograms of cocaine. In 1986, shot a suspect who had put a .38-caliber revolver to his chest while executing a search warrant.

2. Detective Fermin 'Sonny' Archer, 38, a 15-year veteran who earned the Combat Cross for gunning down an armed suspect in 1991 after his partner was shot on a Brooklyn street. In 1991, Archer spurred controversy for pumping three shots into a 100-pound Labrador retriever as the dog leaped at his 4-year-old son in the East Village. The ASPCA and transit officials ruled the shooting, which killed the dog, justified.

3. Gary Combs, 36, a 16-year veteran, was awarded the Combat Cross after his partner was killed on March 3, 1993, in a buy-and-bust operation on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Combs carried his partner out to the street in the middle of the shooting and returned to help capture three suspects.

4. Robert Picciano, 35, a 12-year veteran, has received eight medals in his 13-year career, including a Combat Cross and Medal for Valor. Picciano's left leg was shattered by a bullet in a predawn shootout on Nov. 25, 1989, in Times Square. While on foot patrol, Picciano saw a teen posing for a photograph holding a 9mm automatic pistol between his legs. The teen opened fire, but was wounded when Picciano fired, and was quickly captured. On May 17, 1995, Picciano helped capture a crazed Queens man who was armed with a shotgun and holding residents of a building hostage. After a 90-minute standoff, the gunman was shot, and Picciano rushed the wounded but still heavily armed suspect to take the gun away.

5. Craig Taylor, 37, a 14-year veteran, was caught in a fusillade of bullets while backing up two undercover cops on April 25, 1994, when two men fired with 9m. machine guns after a buy-and-bust in Brooklyn's 75th Precinct. One was killed, the other arrested.

6. Det. Michael Jermyn, 37, received 19 medals in his 16 years as a cop, including one for a 1988 undercover drug bust in Washington Heights in which his partner was slain. He also infiltrated the Ghost Shadows and Flying Dragons gangs in Chinatown.

7. Det. Michael Sanchez, 40, is a 16-year veteran who received nine medals, including one for running into a burning Brooklyn building in 1993 and rescuing 13 people.

8. Lt. Sean Crowley, 35, a 14-year veteran and commander of the security detail, made arrests in the so-called wolf-pack robberies and jumped - secured by ropes - from an eight-story roof to grab a suicidal mother of five in the autumn of 1993. He was also shot at during the West Indian Day Parade in 1988 and was part of a team that killed a heavily armed man near Ocean Parkway last August.

9. Sgt. Timothy McPartlin, 37, a 16-year veteran, in 1992 busted an armed thief who was ripping off McDonald's restaurants to repay a drug debt but held his fire in 1988 when a kid pointed a realistic gun at him in a Manhattan school.

10. Lynne Meriwether, 39, 14-year veteran, worked on official corruption cases and as an undercover narcotics cop in Harlem and Washington Heights. In 1988, she arrested a woman who repeatedly stabbed her husband in the head in Brooklyn's 71st Precinct.

11. Vincent Gericitano, 39, a 19-year-veteran, is a Highway Patrol and former Housing cop who worked in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. In the 1980s, he carried a Brooklyn woman nine blocks during a snowstorm to Woodhull Hospital after her appendix burst.

Also pictured are three members of Kerik's personal staff.

12. Det. John Giammarino.

13. Det. John Cumbo.

14.Det. Edward Aswad