

Good cops stung by 'internal' injuries

As the Mollen Commission prepared its interim report earlier this month, I had a long lunch with a dozen New York cops and ex-cops at a restaurant on the outskirts of the city. Together these men have 300 years of experience in internal affairs, police academy teaching, precinct commands — you name it. Those who've retired run private security forces, counsel troubled kids, teach college-level police science. All of them, in or out of the NYPD, frequently cogitate about where the department has gone wrong.

As we finished our veal marsala and chicken cacciatore, the convivial holiday mood turned grim. A broad-beamed, bearded ex-cop, and others, spoke gravely and with riveting sincerity about a job that's "not on the level," driven by favoritism, careerism, ethical sloth and "the great race to get off patrol."

They spoke warmly of their ideals and good policing. But they laced into police training, which, along with "layers and layers" of bureaucracy, is "the department's cover-your-ass answer to everything."

"Oh," they say, "We have a training program for that," one diner said, mimicking how the brass stifle new ideas. Another reported that Nassau County's current police recruits include four NYPD sergeants. The men shook their heads.

They spoke with bitter irony about the Mollen Commission. "It was driven by Michael Dowd's capture and the election," so it missed the real story, they feel. Corruption isn't as bad as it was when Frank Serpico exposed it before the Knapp Commission. The new plague is the smothering of hard work and initiative by perverse incentives that turn policing into "throwing your bureaucratic weight around based on who you know." The penalty for exposing that is as harsh as the ostracism and harassment that haunted Serpico for five long years.

A former police middle manager told of a cop he knows who moved from what's now called the Internal Affairs Bureau to a command where his new colleagues were goofing off. No heavy corruption, just botching cases and cheating the public with laziness and minor abuses. The cop — call him Tom, the straight-shooting son of a retired senior officer — telephoned IAB anonymously. Having worked



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there himself, he knew his report could leak back to his command. IAB launched a big probe — not of the wrongdoers, but of the caller, trying to learn Tom's identity. So he came forward. "You're looking for me," he said, explaining his early anonymity by citing cases in which IAB had leaked informants' identities. An IAB inspector expressed sympathy, but then someone at the division

told someone at Tom's command.

Tom found dead rats on his car. His property was damaged. A club he'd booked for his child's christening canceled on him — under pressure, he suspects, from colleagues who were members. After 18 months of hell, IAB brought Tom up on charges of reporting anonymously and filing false charges.

But the allegations weren't false, the former police middle manager told the lunch group. The NYPD's explanations themselves were false — cooked, perverted. Tom's slick union lawyer said, "I admire your coming forward, but it's a kangaroo court in there. I can get you 20 days without pay and process your papers for a disability retirement." Dejected, Tom agreed, but only after a promise from Police Commissioner Ray Kelly's office that Kelly would see him when it was over.

A new group

Instead, Kelly, presumably on bad advice, upped Tom's punishment to 30 days without pay and a year's probation. He's now in another precinct, shuffling papers — a young, active cop beaten down.

A few days ago, a high-ranking ex-cop confirmed that the division did leak Tom's name to those it should have been investigating. *And all this while the Mollen Commission was putting on its show.*

Around the table, the men decided to begin an organization to give law enforcement policymakers help. It will identify and condemn the "ineffective, corrupt, unfair, politically unbalanced policing" that has sickened these men during their careers. It will shelter and support cops like Tom who try to expose it.

"The real blue wall of silence," said an IAB veteran, "is all the cops who want to speak up but are afraid." Will Rudy Giuliani and Kelly's successor, John Bratton, be ready to listen to them and work with this new organization when it surfaces in 1994?