

Off-duty NYPD cop fatally shot by fellow officer

By JENNIFER PELTZ – 3 days ago

NEW YORK (AP) — A plainclothes policeman who drew his gun while chasing someone he had found rummaging through his car was shot and killed by a fellow officer who was driving by and saw the pursuit, the police commissioner said.

Commissioner Raymond Kelly said 25-year-old Omar J. Edwards died after being shot late Thursday within blocks of the Harlem housing police station where he worked. The medical examiner said Friday that the fatal shot entered his back.

The shooter was white and Edwards was black, a fact that could raise questions about police use of deadly force in a minority community. And in recent years there have been several cases of off-duty policemen in the New York City area being shot and killed by other officers.

Edwards had just finished his shift around 10:30 p.m. when he headed to his car and saw that the driver's-side window had been smashed and a man was going through the vehicle, Kelly said.

Edwards struggled with the man, who got away from him by slipping out of his sweater, Kelly said. Edwards chased the man up two streets with his gun drawn, he said.

A sergeant and two plainclothes officers in an unmarked police car saw the pursuit and made a U-turn to follow the men, Kelly said. The officers were from the neighboring 25th Precinct anti-crime unit. One of the officers jumped out of the car and fired six times, he said.

It was unclear whether the officers identified themselves. The name of the officer who fired the shots has not been released, but Kelly said he had worked at the NYPD for four years.

Though the official cause of death was a gunshot wound to the chest, the bullet that caused the fatal injury entered the left side of Edward's back before hitting his heart and left lung, said medical examiner spokeswoman Ellen Borakove. It lodged in the front of his chest, and was recovered.

An autopsy also found that another bullet tunneled through the victim's left arm. He also was hit in the left hip by a third bullet.

Kelly said Edwards did not fire his weapon. He died at the Harlem Hospital Center about an hour after the shooting.

Witnesses said they heard several gun shots. Carmen Romero, on her way to work Friday morning, has lived in a nearby housing project for 26 years and said the shots sounded as if they were next to her window.

She said she and others in the area have been debating what role the race of the victim might have played in the shooting.

"I think they just saw a guy with a gun. How's that cop (who shot him) supposed to know" he was a police officer, she said. On the other hand, she said, it could have been because the cop was black.

"I'm not saying it was," she said. "All the white cop saw was a black man with a gun. Pow, pow, pow."

The Rev. Al Sharpton said he got calls shortly after the shooting "from black officers who were at the precinct and were alarmed by the shooting of Omar Edwards."

The civil rights activist said he is concerned about "a growing pattern of black officers being killed with the assumption that they are the criminals."

Sharpton called for a federal investigation in the shooting.

"Can police investigate themselves fairly and impartially? It would seem very difficult at best and unlikely in fact," he said.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg said on his radio show Friday that investigators were reviewing security tapes and interviewing witnesses. Investigators were also questioning the man Edwards had been chasing.

"The only thing that can come out of this is to improve procedures so perhaps it doesn't happen again," Bloomberg said.

Kelly said Edwards had been on the force for two years and worked in the housing bureau. He was recently married and had two young children. His father-in-law has been a police officer for 19 years.

The shooting recalled other cases of off-duty policemen being shot and killed by fellow officers.

In 2008, a black, off-duty Mount Vernon police officer was killed by a Westchester County policeman while holding a gun on an assault

suspect in suburban White Plains.

In 2006, a New York City police officer, Eric Hernandez, was shot and killed by an on-duty patrolman who was responding to an attack at a White Castle in the Bronx.

Associated Press Writers Marcus Franklin and Sara Kugler contributed to this report.

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