

## 'Flooding Zones' Pays Off

# Homicides Down Sharply, Though Expert Has Doubts

By MARK TOOR

Homicides in 2012 were down 19 percent through Dec. 28 over the same period in 2011, although a policing expert said statistics for other crimes and the department's past misstatements left him skeptical about the sharp decline.

The latest available figures showed 414 homicides, compared with 511 for the same period in 2011, said NYPD spokesman Paul J. Browne. Compstat figures available through Dec. 9 show that of the seven major-crime categories, homicide and grand larceny auto were the only ones to decrease. Grand larceny was up 9 percent, and rape, robbery, felony assault and burglary were up by smaller percentages.

### **Kelly Credits Cops' Work**

"No other major city in the country has so low a murder rate," Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly said in a statement last week. "The murder rate is significantly higher in just about any other city you can think of. Public safety defines the quality of life in New York City. It's the foundation. But it just doesn't happen. NYPD police officers are proactive. They work hard each day to try to stop crime before it happens, and to quickly apprehend those who commit it before they can strike again.

"Twelve NYPD officers were shot this year in the line of duty, and one, Peter Figoski, was shot and killed a year ago this month. All of them in some way helped to drive down shootings and murders, through initiatives like Operations Impact and Crew Cut, as well through patrol's daily, often dangerous business of confronting suspects on the street." The last phrase is an apparent reference to the department's controversial stop-and-frisk program.

Operation Impact floods high-crime zones with officers, many of them rookies recently out of the Police Academy. Operation Crew Cut is an anti-gang initiative that doubled the number of officers in the gang unit and added the duty of monitoring Facebook and other social media for indicators of illegal activity.

No precinct in the city had exceeded 20 homicides, including Manhattan's 34th, which had 103 murders in 1990, Brooklyn's 75th, which had 109 that year, and the 48th in The Bronx, which had 137.

"It's a notable achievement," said Eli Silverman, a Professor Emeritus at John Jay College who is a consultant for police departments around the world. But, he said, the department's case is "riddled with contradictions."

"A cloud will always hang over any NYPD numbers, due to all the other misrepresentations, until they're reviewed by independent experts," he said. Noting that the department has not completed an independent audit of its numbers, he added, "It's a self-imposed cloud."

### **Heat Produces Fudge**

Questions have been raised by policing experts—including Mr. Silverman in a book he wrote with retired NYPD Capt. John Eterno, "The Crime Numbers Game: Management by Manipulation"—about the accuracy of the department's crime statistics. Critics say that pressure from top commanders in Compstat sessions seeking ever-decreasing numbers of major crimes has encouraged bosses at the precinct level to downgrade some crimes from felonies to misdemeanors and refuse to take reports of others.

Det. Harold Hernandez reported in 2010 that six sexual assaults in Washington Heights were improperly downgraded to criminal trespassing, a misdemeanor, so no pattern was ever detected and no officers were assigned to apprehend the assailant. Police did not figure out what was going on until a neighbor spotted the suspect pushing a woman into her apartment. After he was arrested, he confessed to the other attacks.

Police Officer Adrian Schoolcraft, who taped supervisors in Brooklyn's 81st Precinct ordering officers to make illegal arrests and threatening those who didn't meet summons quotas, also reported that crimes were downgraded or complainants ignored. An NYPD

investigation that was not publicly released but whose details were reported by the Village Voice confirmed his findings.

Mr. Kelly in January 2011 appointed a panel of three former Federal prosecutors to examine the department's crime-reporting methods. They were expected to report in six to nine months, but have not done so to date. One of the three members, Robert Morvillo, a prominent white-collar-crime attorney who worked as a Federal prosecutor assigned to the Manhattan District Attorney's Office, died in December 2011. "What's the reason for their AWOL?" Mr. Silverman asked.

### **Cites Anti-Muslim Video**

In addition to the questions about crime statistics, he said, the department has made other suspect claims. He pointed to the confusion in early 2012 over a video criticized as anti-Muslim that included statements from Mr. Kelly. The department first said his contributions came from news clips and then corrected itself to admit Mr. Kelly had sat for an interview, but regretted doing so. On counterterrorism, Mr. Silverman said, the NYPD claims to have thwarted 16 terrorist plots, although the FBI declined to participate in some of the cases and questions were raised about whether some of the plotters had the capability to cause harm.

One factor in the decline in homicides, he said, is that the number of shooting victims is down nearly 10 percent, from 1,725 to 1,557, and the number of shooting incidents declined 8 percent, from 1,426 to 1,312.

Advances in trauma medicine are also a factor, he said. Hospitals and the Emergency Medical Service are saving people who years ago would have died. Some of those people are showing up in the felony-assault category, which went up 3.4 percent, he said. "That seems to suggest [the homicide decline] is less due to police but more due to emergency-room work," he said.

### **Doubts About Stop-and-Frisk**

He noted that no correlation has been proven between the stop-and-frisk policy and street violence. Stop-and-frisks declined in the second and third quarters of 2012 after a steady drumbeat of criticism about the way NYPD officers were performing them. But Mr.

Silverman said that in past years homicides had not been affected by increases in the use of the tactic.

Of the increase in other types of crimes, he said, "The shift for most of the bad guys, especially when you're in a period of economic stagnation, is property crime. We're seeing that all over the country, and New York is part of the wave."

He said that the decline in homicides is part of a national trend, although it has been more pronounced in New York than in other major cities. They dropped about 50 percent across the country between 1991 and 2011, according to U.S. Justice Department estimates reported by the Scripps-Howard News Service. In New York City, the figure was 67% for the same period.