

Cops use 'stun gun' to end siege



Joseph Blazek is taken from his ground-floor apartment in Graniteville.

S.I. Advance Photo by Irving Silverstein

By ED BARBINI
Advance Staff Writer

Police ended two tense hours of negotiation yesterday by storming a Graniteville apartment and disarming a bat-wielding tenant.

The tenant, Joseph Blazek, who police said had a history of mental problems, had barricaded himself in his ground-floor apartment at 1290 Richmond Ave. and was slamming the baseball bat against the doors and walls before he was subdued by emergency service police using two different types of "stun guns."

Officials said later that it was the first time that the electric shock devices had been used by police on Staten Island.

Blazek, 35, was not injured in the attack. He was taken from his apartment, kicking and screaming, to St. Vincent's Medical Center for psychiatric evaluation.

"This was an extremely dangerous situation," said Officer Robert Prather of the Island's Emergency Services Squad 5, who was one of the officers who subdued Blazek. "We didn't know exactly what kind of weapons he had, and we were concerned that he might hurt himself or one of us."

The drama began in mid-morning, when a city marshal and a case worker from the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities arrived at the three-room apartment with a court order to evict Blazek. Police said the tenant was being evicted because he had set fire to his kitchen last month and refused to let the Fire Department inside to put out the blaze.

Blazek refused to leave his apartment and he locked himself inside, screaming at his neighbors

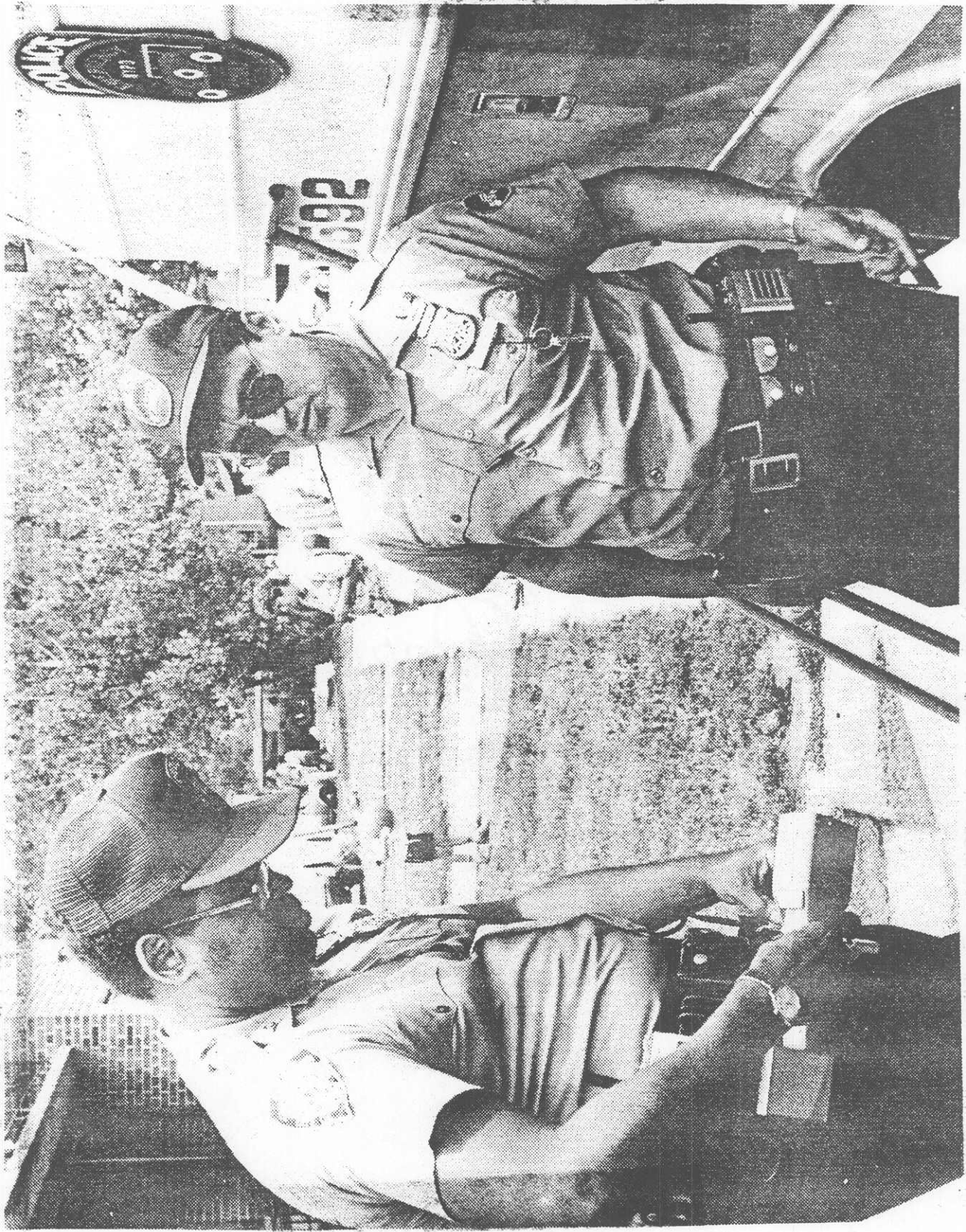
through an open window. Police from the 120th Precinct were called to the scene, as was the Fire Department, in case Blazek set another fire.

"This was an unpredictable situation," said Sgt. Raymond Diaz of the 120th Precinct. "We weren't sure what this person would do."

After a priest and police from the Hostage Negotiation Team tried and failed to talk Blazek out of the apartment, a decision was made in consultation with Borough Commander Samuel Marino, who was at the scene, to storm the apartment in hopes of overwhelming Blazek.

As police officers stood outside and banged on wooden boards outside Blazek's window to distract him, Emergency Services officers, led by Prather and his

—Island news—



Emergency Services Officers Robert Prather, at left with stun gun, and Jerry Cottone led the team to the suspect's apartment.

S.I. Advance Photos by Irving Silverstein

partner, Jerry Cottone, knocked down the apartment door to confront the man.

Prather shot Blazek with a "Taser," a type of stun gun which shot charged pins connected to thin wires into Blazek's lower back and left thigh. Cottone followed with a shock from a "Nova," a stun instrument on a pole similar to a cattle prod, and another officer shot a fire extinguisher at the man.

"The guy was swinging the bat like he meant business," Cottone said. "But we had to use the stun guns. The apartment was pitch-dark, and this was the best way to avoid seriously hurting anyone, both him and us."

When we stunned him, we had him dancing around for a moment," Prather added. "It hurts for a little while, but it's a safe and humane way of subduing people. We didn't want to kill the guy — just get him out safe."

The shots from the dual stun instruments and a fire extinguisher knocked the baseball bat from Blazek's hands, and he collapsed onto the floor, where he was handcuffed. No other weapons were found in the sparse apartment.

As he was led to an ambulance, the bare-chested Blazek screamed at the police and his neighbors waiting outside the building. "You all better redeem yourself," he shouted. "You better tell God you want to be saved before it's too late."

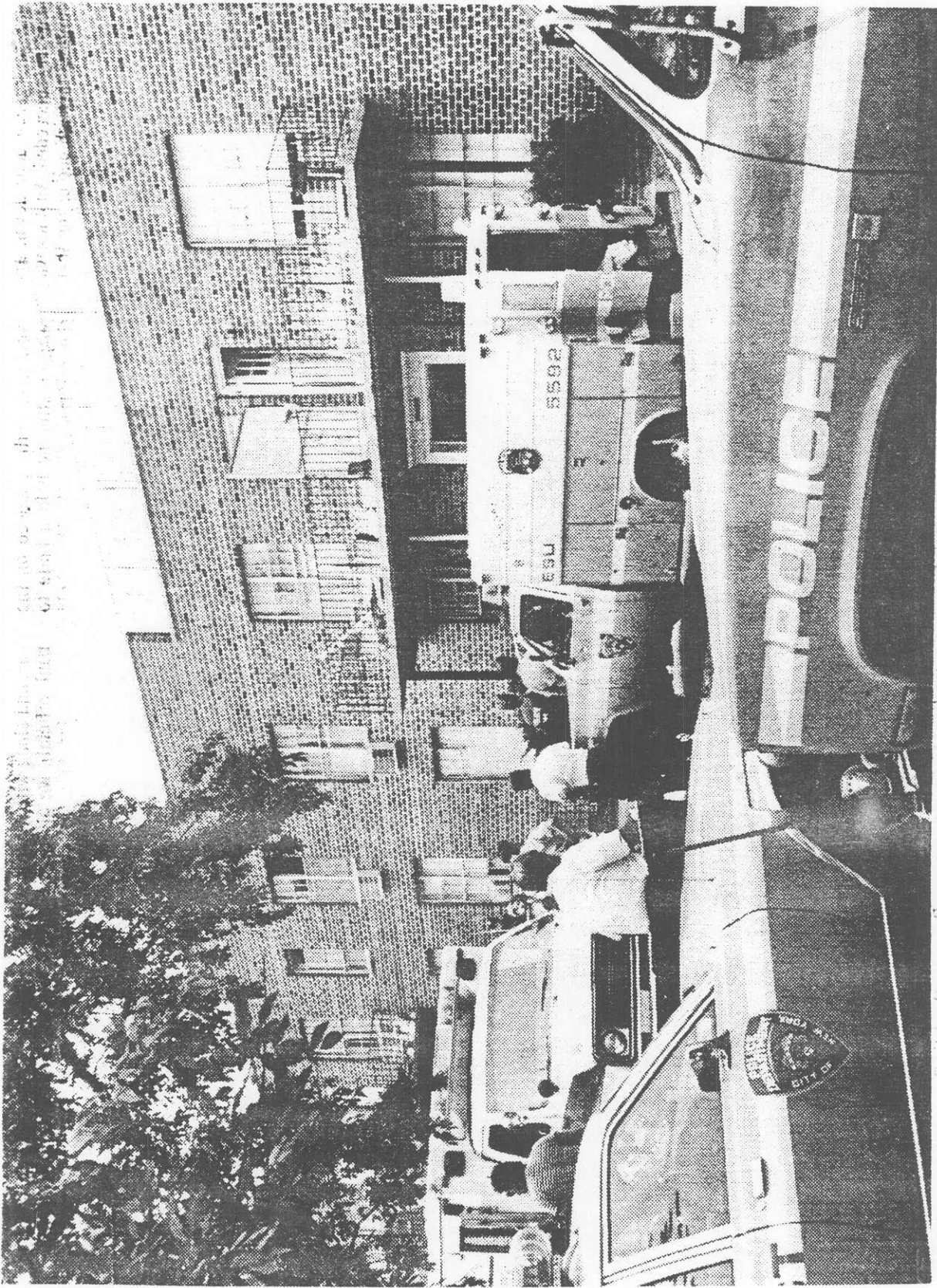
Police said Blazek was a former resident of Staten Island Developmental Center. It could not be determined yesterday when he was released from the institution.

Blazek's rent was paid by the city Department of Social Services.

"I was scared of the guy," said one resident after the ambulance sped away. "He was like an explosion waiting to happen, always yelling at people in the street and making everybody nervous. It's just too bad that it had to come to this."

Other neighborhood residents were also pleased with the peaceful methods police used to subdue Blazek.

"The negotiating was necessary, but it was also pretty important to end this problem quickly," Sgt. Diaz said. "These officers did a professional job, and no one was hurt. You can't do it much better than that."



Emergency Services officers wait anxiously outside a Graniteville apartment building where a tenant barricaded himself.