

# Acid threat defused by bomb cops

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The Bomb Squad averted two potential explosions yesterday when officers removed highly unstable picric acid from an abandoned Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC) building in Willowbrook and from the College of Staten Island's Sunnyside campus, police said.

In a delicate hourlong operation at SIDC that began at 6:30 p.m., a Bomb Squad team carried out 14 containers with 25 pounds of the dangerous acid from Building 2, an old laboratory that has been locked for years, police said.

About 40 police and firefighters were called to the scene, according to Deputy Inspector Peter Scalabrino of the 120th Precinct, who was at the scene.

The action at Willowbrook came about following a tip police got only a few hours earlier, while they were removing vials of picric acid from CSI.

Police officers Joseph Carlucci and Andrew Cappa of the Emergency Services Unit 5 went directly from the college to Willowbrook with a Bomb Squad unit shortly after 1:30 p.m.

"We came over here and figured we could get rid of the acid right away, but when we saw how much there was, we had to call in two more Bomb Squad units," Carlucci said.

Firefighters and paramedics were already at the scene, because of the possibility of an explosion.

Picric acid can explode if it has been sitting around for some time, because it crystallizes and can become unstable, according to Bomb Squad officials.

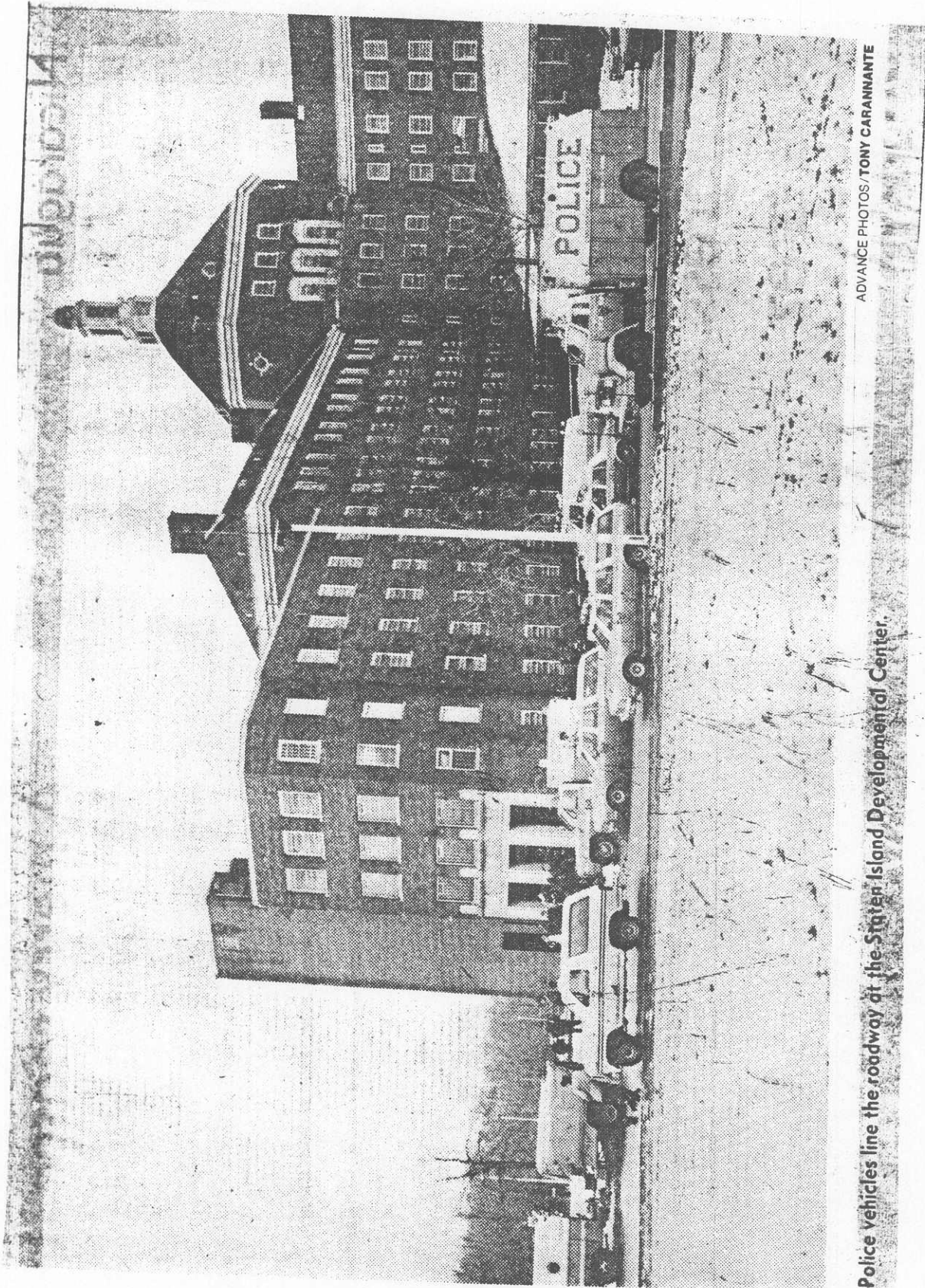
"Some of the acid the team removed was definitely crystallized," said Sgt. Thomas Six of the 122nd Precinct, who ran the temporary headquarters in Building 3 from 3:30 to 7:40 p.m.

"The Bomb Squad was soaking



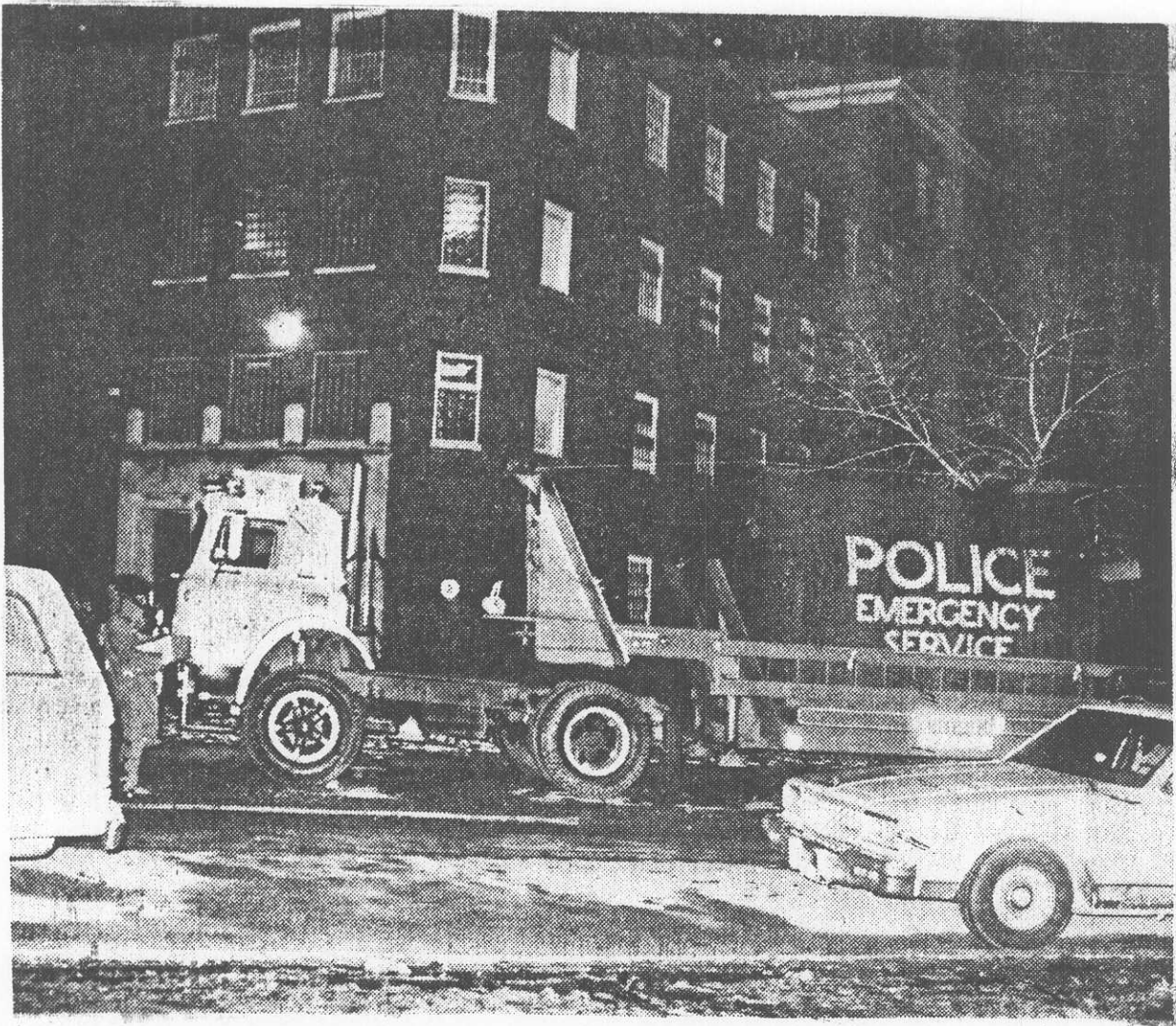
ADVANCE PHOTO/TONY CARANNANTE

Firefighters dressed in protective gear get instructions from Deputy Fire Chief Warren Haring at the Staten Island Developmental Center.



Police vehicles line the roadway at the State's Island Developmental Center.

ADVANCE PHOTOS/TONY CARANNANTE



Bomb squad officers take a breather after removing potentially dangerous chemicals from a building.

# Acid

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wet (from sweat) when they were done," he said.

The team also removed four gallons of partially crystalized anhydrous acid, which is also explosive in that state. Six said.

The chemicals, like those taken from CSI, were whisked off to be detonated at the Police Department's firing range at Rodman's Neck in the Bronx.

Scot Booth, evening administrator at SIDC, said, "Nobody really knew the picric acid was there or how dangerous it could be."

He was not aware that anhydrous acid had been removed, he said.

"Many years back the building had been used as a medical treatment building and morgue, besides a laboratory," Booth said the picric acid was used to adhere specimens to slides for microscope viewing.

He said the acid could have been sitting in the six-story brick structure "anywhere from two to 15 years.

"A year or so ago we started the bidding procedure to get a contractor in here to clear all the chemicals out, but we haven't found anybody to come," Booth said, although he was not sure why.

Although no evacuation was necessary, he said, "the first thing Monday, we'll have to get someone in to clean out the rest of the chemicals, because of (yesterday's) emergency."

Ted Nabavi, a chemist from the city Department of Environmental Protection, was at the scene to help identify the chemicals, police said, but he could not be reached for comment.

Earlier in the day, CSI called the police to the scene in response to a city Police Department directive issued last month to all colleges, junior high and high schools

in the city. The report classified the chemical as highly explosive and strongly recommended its removal.

Michael Petrides, the college's dean of administration, said that the acid — contained in four 1-pound jars — was removed by the Police Department's Bomb Squad shortly after 1:30 p.m. from a third-floor chemistry lab in Building B at 715 Ocean Terr.

Approximately 400 students were evacuated from the brick building between 12:30 p.m. to 1:55 p.m. as a safety precaution. No injuries were reported.

According to a memo issued by schools vice chancellor Ira Bloom, picric acid is highly explosive when in a solid or crystalized state.

Petrides said the chemical, which is commonly used to etch metals in industry, had been found in a semi-solid state and had apparently been stored in the chemistry lab for a number of years. He said college officials called 911 after finding the acid at 10 a.m. yesterday during an inventory taken of chemicals and supplies in the laboratory's stockroom.

Sgt. Michael Bosak of the Bomb Squad unit in Manhattan confirmed that the Police Department had sent out a memo in mid-November to all city junior high and secondary schools, as well as colleges, hospitals, pharmacies and laboratories — any institution that either stores or may utilize picric acid.

He estimated that in the past month, 50 places in the city had been found to have had the chemical on their premises.

There have been two prior incidences on Staten Island of the acid's presence which prompted its removal by the Bomb Squad, according to Bosak.

On Nov. 15, police received a call to remove a half-quart of the

liquid from the pharmacy at K mart in the Hylan Plaza Shopping Center in New Dorp. Three days later, three pounds of the substance was discovered in a laboratory at Sea View Hospital and Home.

While at the CSI campus, police were informed by a woman who used to work at the developmental center, and was visiting the school, that several vials of the acid may still be remaining in an abandoned building at the SIDC.

Lt. Anthony Juliano, a Borough Command spokesman, said the city's Department of Environmental Protection was called to the scene to take air samples before police from the Bomb Squad entered the building.