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Police brass converge on make-believe scene

Mock riot preparation for real thing

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Hundreds of New York City Police Department (NYPD) officers from the five boroughs converged in Willowbrook last night to calm an angry crowd of 75 people who were protesting the shooting of a Staten Island resident by police.

They came in police cars, vans, task force trucks, motorcycles, by horse and helicopter to the grounds of the former Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook.

Though the scene had all the makings of a real riot, the police officers and police brass were participating in the department's mock mobilization exercise, which is held throughout the city each month in alternating boroughs.

Dozens of residents of Willowbrook and surrounding communities inundated the Advance with calls questioning the police presence. Many were relieved to find out it was only a mock crime situation.

This month, the police decided to re-enact a scene in which a police officer shoots a member of the community, an incident that immediately draws people out of their homes or businesses to protest.

Details of the shooting were not important. What was important was the purpose of the mock mobilization: to have police officers practice and prepare for a similar, real-life situation, according to David Scott, chief of department for the NYPD.

"This gives them experience with practice runs and working as a team through drills," said Scott, who added that the group of police officers who portrayed the rioting crowd added "realism" to the exercise.

Scott said last night's situation was similar to a shooting in Washington Heights last year, but said each real situation the police encounter is different.

"This is New York City, the possibilities are limitless. This just gives them a sense of real-

ism," said Scott, who added that mock mobilizations are held at different locations and times of the day each month to prepare officers for every possibility.

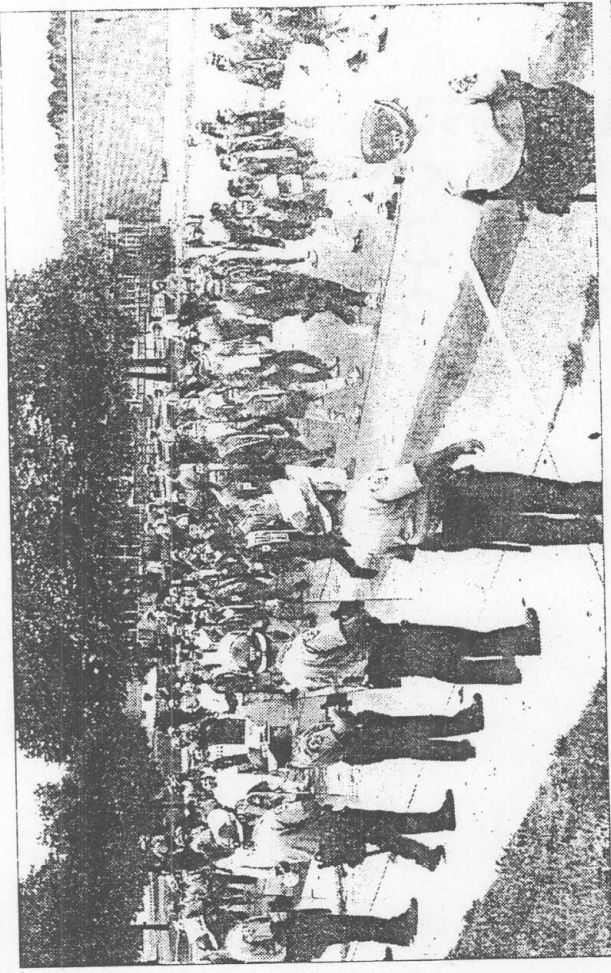
The chief also summed up the department's purpose in one familiar sentence. "Practice makes perfect."

Last night, officers from the city's seven task forces participated — Manhattan's north and south task forces, Brooklyn's north and south task forces, and the task forces from Staten Island, Queens and the Bronx.

Some of the officers posed as angry community residents who protested the shooting of a fellow community resident by staging a peaceful march turned riotous.

Arrests were made of members of the unruly crowd who participated in rock and grenade throwing and other physical violent behavior. During the protest, the crowd repeatedly called for justice, chanting "No Justice, No Peace."

In addition, they called for



ADVANCE PHOTO: TONY CARAMANTE

Police officers in riot gear and on horseback keep a watchful eye on make-believe protesters at a drill in Willowbrook.

Mayor David N. Dinkins to come to the scene and "let him pay the \$6 toll," the protesters yelled. A temporary police headquarters was also set up where police sergeants and lieutenants led a command station and plotted the course of the crowd and the crime scene. Police were dressed in full uniform and in addition carried protective plastic shields and wore helmets with protective face shields in preparation for riots. Staten Island Borough Commander Chief Tosano Simonetti was also on hand for the demonstration. "If you act out and become unlawful then that's when we contain, seal off and arrest," said Simonetti, explaining the procedure that would be taken in a real-life situation.