

Death raises homicide toll to 18; double that of '76

By TOM SUK

Register Staff Writer

The slaying of a 33-year-old man early Thursday has raised the number of homicides in Des Moines this year to 18 — more than twice the total for all of 1976.

With two exceptions — the deaths of two police officers — all the slayings have stemmed from what police describe as domestic trouble.

In most of the cases, the alleged slayer knew his victim.

For police — to whom the public looks when crime statistics rise — the situation is paradoxical.

First, they say there is almost nothing they can do to prevent such crimes. On the other hand, they say they have been able to clear up almost all of the cases.

The latest victim was Jesse Robert Comly, jr., of 7906 S.W. Tenth St., who was found dead on the third-floor landing of a building at 1148 Eighth St. at about 1:40 a.m. Thursday.

The victim's father, Jesse Robert Comly, sr., 57, who lives in the building, was found wounded in his third-floor apartment, just off the landing.

A man who reportedly had been living in an adjacent apartment has been charged with murder.

At this time last year there had been six homicides in the city, and by the end of 1976, there had been only eight.

"In domestic killings and crimes of passion there just isn't much you can do to control those," police Lt. Ed Harlan said.

Assistant Police Chief Thomas A. Teale, jr., agrees.

"To prevent murders of this type is practically impossible," said Teale. "Many crimes can be prevented with enough (police) men, but domestic murder is not one of them."

They occur when disputes flare into "spontaneous violence," said Teale, and usually involve "persons having problems among relatives, friends or neighbors."

Of the 18 homicides this year, "all have been cleared and closed but one," said Teale. "The perpetrators have been identified in all of them and have been disposed of by arrests or other means." The other means apparently refer to suspects who took their own lives or were slain by police.

Firearms were involved in all but one of the 18 homicides, including the five that were reported this month alone.

In Thursday's case, Dr. R.C. Wooters, Polk County medical examiner, said Jesse Robert Comly, jr., died of a bullet wound to the head.

The elder Comly was listed in critical condition at Mercy Hospital where he was being treated in the intensive care unit. Police said he suffered one bullet wound in the upper left chest area.

Shortly after the shooting, Harold Lindsey Hall, 31, surrendered at the police station. Hall gave his address to authorities as 3594 Twenty-seventh St., but police said a number of occupants of the Eighth Street apartment building said Hall had been staying in an apartment adjacent to the elder Comly for some time.

Hall was charged with murder

later Thursday and Magistrate Vincent Hanrahan set bond at \$100,000. Hall was being held in the City Jail Thursday night.

Police gave this account of the incident:

At about 1:35 a.m., police received a report of a fight in the hallway of the building.

The fight, according to witnesses, began outside, and then moved into the building and continued up the stairwell to the third floor landing. Police said several occupants reported being awakened by the argument.

Residents reported hearing two gunshots and screams, and again called police. Police said they received the report of the shootings while en route to investigate the complaint of the fight.

Police found the body of the younger Comly lying on the third-floor landing. The wounded elder Comly was found inside his apartment, police said.

Police said a witness told them another man had run into an adjacent apartment, and officers repeatedly knocked on the door but got no response.

As police were about to force their way into the apartment, which they learned might also contain a woman and three children, they received a report that a suspect had voluntarily surrendered.

Lieutenant Harlan said a .38-caliber revolver, believed used in the shootings, was found at the scene. Harlan said a handgun was also taken from the elder Comly's apartment but said it apparently played no part in the incident.

Neither of the Comlys was believed to be armed at the time and the only shots fired were the two bullets which struck the father and son, Harlan said.

Judge orders to reinstate fi

By CHARLES HARPSTER

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The Eastern Allamakee Community School District has been ordered by a federal judge to reinstate a first-grade teacher who was fired in 1975.

It is believed to be first time in Iowa that a discharged teacher has been ordered reinstated by the courts, a spokesman for the Iowa State Education Association (ISEA) said Thursday.

The teacher, Rose Zoll, was fired on a 4-to-1 vote of the school board despite the support of many of the 150 to 200 persons who attended her public hearing. She had taught first grade at the Lansing school for 15 years.

First Vacancy

In a ruling filed Wednesday in Cedar Rapids, U.S. District Judge Edward McManus ordered the board to offer Zoll the first vacancy she qualifies for in the school system. He also ruled that school officials must pay her attorney fees, with the amount to be determined later.

Hall found guilty in murder case

Polk County District Judge Anthony Critelli, acting as judge and jury under a provision of the new Iowa criminal code, Monday found Harold Lindsey Hall guilty of first-degree murder.

Hall, 32, of 3504 Twenty-seventh St., was accused in the shooting death of Jesse Robert Comly Jr., 33, of 7906 S. W. Tenth St. The slaying occurred in an apartment building owned and occupied by the victim's father, Jesse Sr., 57, of 1148 Eighth St. last Sept. 29.

Critelli, in a 22-page statement of findings and conclusions accompanying his verdict, rejected Hall's claim that Hall was acting out of fear for his life and possibly in self-defense when he fired the fatal bullet at the younger Comly.

No date was immediately set for Hall's sentencing. Hall is being held in the Polk County jail.