

Police Officer Is 'Murdered for Her Uniform' in the Bronx

By Benjamin Mueller and Al Baker

July 5, 2017

On a corner in the Bronx strained by steady rancor over unsolved crimes, and distrust of the police, Officer Miosotis Familia was a balm.

[Related: 2 police officers shot and killed in McAllen, Texas.]

She had earned a reputation as “a good policewoman” in the short time she was assigned to an R.V.-style police command post at East 183rd Street and Morris Avenue, two miles north of Yankee Stadium, a longtime resident, Roma Martinez, said. She waved hello; she spoke Spanish.

But long before she arrived, a hostility toward law enforcement personnel was building in Alexander Bonds, who had been in and out of prisons and jails for 15 years and was slipping into severe mental illness. Last year he warned in a Facebook video that he would not back down if he encountered police officers on the streets: “I got broken ribs for a reason, son. We gonna shake.”

His girlfriend called 911 on Tuesday night and told the police that Mr. Bonds “was acting in a manic, depressed state — paranoid,” a law enforcement official said. When officers arrived, he had gone.



Miosotis Familia
New York Police Department

About three hours later, with Fourth of July fireworks still going off, Mr. Bonds strode up to Officer Familia’s command post and fired a .38-caliber revolver through a window, killing her with a bullet to the head. She was the first female New York Police Department officer killed in the line of duty since the Sept. 11 attacks, and only the third female officer killed in a combat-type encounter in the department’s history.

The New York City police commissioner, James P. O’Neill, said in a message to officers that she was “assassinated without warning, without provocation, in a direct attack on police officers assigned to safeguard the people of New York City.” And once again the city was plunged into mourning over a targeted police killing that appeared to result in part from a swirl of mental illness and anger at the police, two and a half years after a man with a similar history fatally shot two officers through their patrol car windows.

In the command post around 12:30 a.m., Officer Familia’s partner, Vincent Maher, pleaded for help over the radio: “My partner’s shot! My partner’s shot!” His call drew scores of officers and turned stretches of Independence Day festivities into a crime scene.

Officers chased Mr. Bonds, 34, who wore a black hooded sweatshirt, black pants, black sneakers and black gloves. When they confronted him, he pointed his five-shot Ruger revolver at them and fired, a preliminary investigation indicates. The officers — a sergeant and a patrol officer — shot him dead. A bystander struck during the shootout was in stable condition.

“He clearly had to look at her to get the kind of target acquisition it would take to shoot somebody in the head,” a law enforcement official said. “It does not appear that he fired a whole lot of shots at her. So it looked like a straight-up assassination.”

The attack underlined a challenge bedeviling New York City as crime falls to record lows: how to marshal public health resources and coordinate city agencies to treat the most violent and vulnerable citizens, many of them afflicted as Mr. Bonds was by serious mental illness.



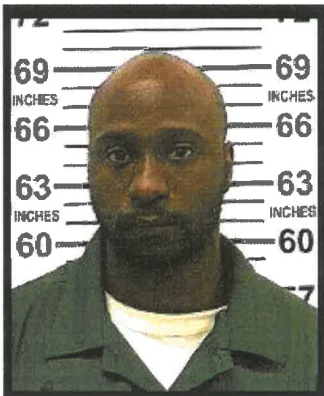
Investigators examined the vehicle in which Officer Miosotis Familia was shot while on duty with her partner in the Bronx Wednesday. David Dee Delgado for The New York Times

“She was a warrior, tell you the truth,” John Cuello, a nephew, said. “She was a fighter, she was tough — and that was the job for her.”

She was assigned to the 46th Precinct in the northwest Bronx before an on-duty leg injury resulted in her being sent to the Bronx courts, a sometimes glum place where her sunny disposition and her desire to be active set her apart. She had made 76 arrests over her career, 23 of them in felonies. She had recently been assigned to the R.V.-style truck stationed on East 183rd Street, which was put there as a deterrent to a rash of gang- and crew-related shootings, among them a daytime triple shooting. The police arrested a man in March in connection with that crime. A law enforcement official said two crews on opposite sides of the Grand Concourse had been warring.

For some residents who said the city too often skimps on police resources in the Bronx, the mobile command post offered a measure of assurance.

Three miles south, outside the apartment where Mr. Bonds lived on the Rev. James A. Polite Avenue in the Morrisania neighborhood, residents said he had often spoken with addicts before they took drug purchases from other men on the block. He had been on parole since May 2013, after being locked up for eight years on a robbery conviction in Syracuse. He had also been convicted of selling drugs near a school and had been arrested on suspicion of punching an officer in Queens in 2001 with brass knuckles.



Alexander Bonds in April 2013.
New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision

Since his release in 2013, though, he appeared to have minimal police contact and had complied with the conditions of his parole. In the video he posted online about the police, many of his complaints stemmed from what he described as dangerous conditions in state prisons and a lack of accountability for guards.

On July 4, Mr. Bonds returned from work at a fast-food restaurant around 7:30 p.m. and began drinking with friends on the corner, a neighbor said.

His behavior alarmed his girlfriend, who, around 9 p.m., called the police several times as she followed him down a street farther south in the Bronx and reported that he was paranoid and manic, a law enforcement official said. Asked by the operator if he was armed or violent, the girlfriend said no, the official said.

Officers and an ambulance crew reached the street where the woman was calling from, but Mr. Bonds had left. The officers classified the call as for an emotionally disturbed person and left.



A woman is consoled at the 46th Precinct station in the Bronx after the shooting of Officer Miosotis Familia, a 12-year veteran of the police force. Bryan Anselm for The New York Times

Soon after midnight, Mr. Bonds was dressed in an all-black outfit that officials believe he was using to escape undetected and carrying a revolver that had been reported stolen several years ago in West Virginia. He passed a deli, turned toward the mobile command post, cinched his hood tighter over his face and then fired one shot through a passenger-side window, said J. Peter Donald, a police spokesman.

There was no indication that Mr. Bonds said anything before he fired, and detectives said they did not believe he knew Officer Familia. She was in uniform at the front of a fully lighted truck, a situation in which officers tend to feel at ease, police officials said. Officer Familia was taken to St. Barnabas Hospital, where she was pronounced dead about three hours after the shooting.

“Make no mistake: Officer Familia was murdered for her uniform and for the responsibility she embraced,” Mr. O’Neill wrote in the message to the department. “And for the N.Y.P.D., regularly achieving lower and lower crime figures means absolutely nothing when one of our own is brutally shot and killed.”

The attack revived memories of killings of police officers such as those in Iowa last year and in Brooklyn in 2014, when two officers — Wenjian Liu and Rafael L. Ramos — sitting in a patrol car in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn were fatally shot by a man who had traveled to the city from Baltimore vowing to kill officers. The man, Ismaiyil Brinsley, who had a history of mental illness, then killed himself with the same gun.

It also renewed worries in the Police Department about the risk of officers being targeted in their cars. The department has recently installed bulletproof protection on the doors of more than 2,000 patrol cars; in January the city allocated funding for bulletproof window panels on 3,800 cars and last month received its first delivery of 500 pairs of windows.

In 2015, the administration of Mayor Bill de Blasio began tracking a small number of people with a history of violence and mental illness, but the program was slow to take shape. The city declined to say whether Mr. Bonds had been on its radar but said that 364 people were now in the program, up from 78 in its early stages.

Police Mourn Slain Officer, as Do the Bronx Residents She Served

By Benjamin Mueller

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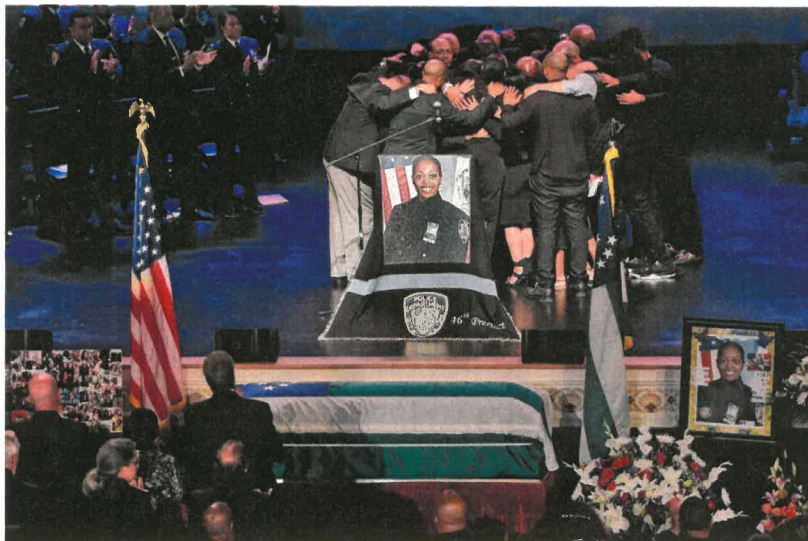
A pair of police sharpshooters stood atop a day care center in the Bronx on Tuesday morning and peered over the terra cotta and marble facade of a converted movie theater next door. The facade's mechanical clock was stuck at a couple of minutes after 2. On the ledge, a pigeon cleaned its feathers.

Below, the Grand Concourse, normally pulsing with activity, was deserted and silent, except for the rattle of shop grates being pulled open and police trucks idling. It was saving itself for a police officer's funeral.

Soon the concourse filled for 10 blocks with officers in their finest dress blues — Class A's.

They had turned out for the funeral of Officer Miosotis Familia, killed for doing little more than what her colleagues did on Tuesday morning: put on a New York Police Department uniform. Not an hour into her overnight shift on July 5, she was filling out paperwork in the front seat of a police truck when a man fired once through the passenger-side window. She was shot in the head and killed.

The gunman, Alexander Bonds, had been the subject of three 911 calls earlier that night by his girlfriend, who reported that he was acting manic and paranoid. He had a history of hospitalizations for mental illness and had expressed anger at law enforcement officers in a video last year. The police killed him later that night.



The family of Detective Miosotis Familia during her funeral at the World Changers Church in the Bronx on Tuesday. Pool photo by Richard Drew

The mourners hailed from dozens of city precincts and specialty units, the gold letters on their lapels spelling out their assignments. Joining them were representatives from at least 85 other police agencies: Aurora, Colo., and Orlando, Fla., officers arrived first, and then others from Ottawa and the Emirate of Dubai. They lined up 25-deep in front of Loew's Paradise Theater, a 1929 baroque-style movie house that was decommissioned and taken over by World Changers Church.

Inside the church, 4,000 mourners filled the seats and spilled into the outer aisles.

Before the church moved in, officers from the 46th Precinct, where Officer Familia patrolled, used to dip in for the air-conditioning on hot summer days. But the area around the old movie house, within a few blocks of where Officer Familia was killed, had been dear to her as well.

She often stopped at Mom's Bakery, steps from the church, to buy one-pound tres leches cakes to celebrate police colleagues' birthdays. They were \$40 each, no discount. Pamela Paredes, 28, who has worked there for six years, said Officer Familia greeted her with a smile when she placed her order in the morning, and then again when she picked it up in the early afternoon.

On Tuesday morning, Ms. Paredes peeked through a window full of display cakes at the officers gathering outside.

Among them were mourners who had been through earlier chapters in the city's history of targeted police killings. The father of Wenjian Liu, ambushed along with Rafael Ramos in Brooklyn in 2014, had a shining well of tears in each eye as he walked across the concourse



A sea of police officers lined the streets of the Bronx outside the church where the funeral was held. Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

Each such ambush occasions a fresh reckoning with the state of policing in New York City, and Officer Familia's killing was no different. Police Commissioner James P. O'Neill delivered an impassioned speech on Tuesday, tinged at times with outrage and directed as much at the public as at his officers, about the nation's feelings toward the police. Again and again, his voice creaked with emotion.

"Hate has consequences," he told the crowd. "When we demonize a whole group of people — whether that group is defined by race, by religion or by occupation — this is the result."

He spoke of police officers' shouldering the burden of a rash of society's failings: drug addiction, underfunded schools, inadequate mental health treatment. He voiced pride in what has changed since Officers Liu and Ramos were killed in 2014, amid protests over the killings of unarmed black men, while exhorting the public to trust the police.

"We are on firmer ground now, with police and communities working more effectively together," he said. "But in mid-2017, there unquestionably is a creeping apathy among the public about the work and role of its dedicated police officers."

Commissioner O'Neill, like almost everyone who knew Officer Familia from the street or the station house, spoke of her smile. One of 10 children raised in Washington Heights, she became known for mediating disputes at home and on the street. She was promoted posthumously to first-grade detective.



Patrick Lynch, president of the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association, criticized Mr. de Blasio before the service for going to Germany as police officers prepared for the funeral. The mayor's office called it "a bogus controversy ginned up by the media and those looking to politicize Detective Familia's death."

Officer Familia's sister, Mercedes Proefrock, took the stage in the church and called her family up. They huddled in a three-deep embrace.

Officer Familia's son, Peter, spoke of how his mother "made sure we had every single thing we wanted," despite her dangerous job.



World Changers Church, on Grand Concourse in the Bronx. Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

Then Genesis draped her arms around Peter and Delilah. "Mom, I miss your smile," she said. She said her mother had found her calling in policing but managed also to act the part of guidance counselor, philosopher and philanthropist. "Thank you, thank you for everything," she said.

As she spoke, a city corrections officer outside used her white gloves to wipe away tears.

The funeral was unusual in that it was held in the heart of the district Officer Familia patrolled, on a block with a pawnshop and a 99-cent store that has resisted the tides of change. It has been more than a decade since the funeral for an officer murdered in the line of duty was held in the Bronx.

It drew people who had encountered Officer Familia on their worst days.

Among them was Deakys Abreu, 45, who had bought a white skirt and a white necklace for the funeral. Ms. Abreu said Officer Familia had handled a domestic violence case for her in 2005. "She was my strength, she was my heroine," Ms. Abreu said in Spanish, as she and her daughter stopped on their way home at the memorial marking the spot where she was killed.

Cleopatra Teaque, 47, had come, too. She became friendly with Officer Familia in 2011 and came to count on her for advice and encouragement. When Ms. Teaque had a problem with her boyfriend two years ago, she called Officer Familia, who helped her secure a spot in a residence where she stayed for two years.

After Officer Familia was shot, Ms. Teaque rushed to the station house, where she said officers told her, "Your girl is gone."