



Eric Zorn

Overlooked tale of police video gets 2nd chance

By now, Sayyid Qadri ought to be a household name—the next Rodney King and Chicago's very own.

And by noon Tuesday, it might be. This month, Qadri's attorneys released copies of surveillance video from the Evanston Police Department showing an officer with blood on his hands after Qadri emerged with the officer from a bathroom stall sporting a fresh, gory head wound.

The video shows Evanston Officer Gus Horemis leading Qadri, 21, into the station around 11:30 p.m. on March 10 after arresting him for allegedly making an illegal right turn on red and not having a valid driver's license. Horemis takes Qadri briefly into an anteroom, then, accompanied by two other officers, leads him away. Qadri's hands are cuffed behind his back at all times.

Written police reports allege that Qadri was profane and abusive. Qadri says he was simply asking to be given his tickets and released. The video has no soundtrack to sort out this discrepancy, but in Qadri's favor, significant portions of the written reports conflict with the recorded images.

For example, Horemis wrote: "I then saw [Qadri] move toward the toilet area. And as I and [Evanston Police Officer Michael] Yorty moved in to secure him, he kicked at the toilet . . . pushing with [such] force backwards as to again strike Yorty causing Yorty to fall back against the wall."

What the video shows is Qadri being hustled into the bathroom by three officers and being shoved sideways into a toilet stall—the one area in the station where cameras are not trained. Horemis follows him in. Twenty-two seconds later, a second officer enters the stall.

After 10 seconds, that officer emerges casually and appears to direct the third officer to make sure no one is in the other stall.

Video shows an officer with blood on his hands.

After 1 minute and 14

seconds, Horemis shoves Qadri out of the stall and into a wall. Qadri slumps onto a bench, still cuffed behind his back, his shirt spattered with blood from a fresh cut on his forehead that emergency room doctors later closed with six stitches.

"I was able to finally bring [Qadri] to the bench and sit him down, but he kicked at me and caused me a small cut to my left shin," Horemis wrote.

The video shows no kicking, only Qadri trying several times to stand and officers slamming him back down into the wall, usually with a hand at or around his neck. Body language all around suggests that Qadri and Horemis are having words.

"By that point I was snapping [at them]," Qadri said Monday in a telephone interview from his West Rogers Park home. "What the [expletive] is your guys' problem? You're going to hear from my lawyer."

And hear they did, in a 10-count federal lawsuit filed Sept. 2 by the Chicago firm of Loevy & Loevy. The allegations and the video received a one-day burst of media attention. The office of Cook County State's Atty. Richard Devine said an investigation of the incident was ongoing, and Evanston Police Chief Frank Kaminski said two of the officers have been on unpaid administrative leave since March.

Then nothing. No national news coverage. No demonstrations. No further media efforts to contact Qadri. No statements of outrage from state or local political leaders condemning the apparent brutality and cowardice of these Evanston officers. No editorials or columns lecturing Devine and Kaminski that their delay in the face of such evidence reeks of tacit approval.

Was it the interposition of the long Labor Day weekend? The shadow of the Republican National Convention and the 9/11 anniversary? Qadri's unsympathetic history of nearly two dozen arrests on drug and gang-loitering charges, or his foreign-sounding name? The relatively minor nature of his wounds? The failure of the cameras to capture the moment his head slammed into the wall? Brutality fatigue that began setting in when video of the 1991 beating of motorist Rodney King by the Los Angeles police was broadcast endlessly?

Whatever the reasons, the story will get a second chance at life Tuesday when Devine and Kaminski are scheduled to hold a joint news conference at 11 a.m., at which smart money says they will announce criminal charges against officers seen in the video.

The nation may yet come to know the name of Sayyid Qadri.