

Broadway Cop

By Bob Considine and Jerry D. Lewis



Few Times Square tourists recognize Johnny Broderick, but New York mobsters cringe at the mention of his name. Meet Broadway's one-man riot squad in his own bailiwick—where the lights are brightest

WHEN the average American thinks of Broadway he's inclined to think of the fishes on the Wrigley sign, the thunder and lightning of Times Square, the marquee of the Paramount and the second-floor dance halls that boast of 100—Beautiful Hostesses—100. Or the name of Broadway will stir up in his mind the vision of a great lady of the theater, or a hilarious musical-comedy comedian. Or a furtive necktie pitch man.

But when Broadway itself thinks of Broadway, it thinks of a cop named Johnny Broderick. Broderick will give you a long, sincere argument to the effect that he is no different from any other man on the country's biggest, busiest and most efficient police force. But Broadway knows he's different. Because for nearly twenty years he has endeared himself to the pale-faced residents of that garish boulevard by befriending the virtuous and by bouncing left hooks off the jaws of mugs.

Rough-and-ready Johnny, with a kayo punch in each fist and a rather humble smile on his merry Boston-bull face, is unrecognizable to the millions of visitors to Broadway. He'd like to stay that way—all good detectives would. But because of the exploits he so heartily deprecates, and despite his honest yen for privacy, he has become nationally known. Broadway columnists like to use his name. A comic strip named Mickey Finn has him in there as a character. Two movies, the last being *Bullets or Ballots*, used his counterpart.

As more than one gorilla can testify, Broderick's appearance is deceiving. He's no hard-hat dick with a cigar stuck in his kisser. Intimates call him Duke. He weighs in the 160's, is somewhat under six feet tall and turns in desperate heroics despite the fact that he's 42, is a solid family man and his manner is civil and circumspect.

In the concrete creek of Broadway and in its neon-lighted tributaries, Broderick has made his rep as friend, counselor, two-fisted scourge, and goodwill man for the police department. And there he'd like to stay put, protecting little guys from big ones, chasing bums away from taxi-dance girls who don't want a bum, helping guys and gals down on their luck, and chasing hoodlums and racket guys away from Lindy's, Leone's, the Automat, Dinty Moore's, McGinnis', the Astor, Shor's and Jack Dempsey's. Dempsey once hired Broderick as a bodyguard.

Broderick's bodyguarding didn't begin or end with Dempsey. He convoyed Sam Gompers, Queen Marie, King Al-

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Broadway Cop

bert, President Roosevelt (the President especially requested him for the 1936 World Series) and the Chicago World's Fair. Chicago police borrowed him and his do-or-die side-kick, Detective John Cordes, to spot criminals attracted by the bright lights and easy coin of A Century of Progress.

Broderick's memory dwarfs description. He was walking past Lindy's, after last June's Louis-Conn fight and suddenly stopped dead in his tracks. He walked quickly over to the man on whom he had riveted his attention, and started him roughly on his way to Penn Station with an order to get out of New York. The man was a dope peddler. Johnny remembered seeing him caught at the second Dempsey-Tunney fight, and hadn't seen him since!

Up from the Gashouse

Johnny came from that section of New York wherein the Dead End Kids fear to tread. He was reared in the gashouse district in the East Twenties, and survived to have the dubious honor of disarming and pinching more than one boyhood chum turned mobster. Johnny had no more chance than the mugs who were bred in the same tough district. He had to quit parochial school when he was twelve to help support his family. His first real job was driving a truck. He used that as a springboard to become a minor official in the Teamsters Union. That's how he met Gompers, who was much impressed by the forceful, gusty young man.

But the job of bodyguarding the late labor leader palled on Broderick. He joined the Navy and (though the long list of hoodlums he has since flattened will find this impossible to believe) suffered a one-round knockout in the only formal fistic engagement of his life.

After the war Broderick became a New York fireman, then shifted to the police force in 1923. Things began happening to him immediately and will continue to happen to him. A few hours after he had been sworn in, back in 1923, he broke into a burning tenement on his beat and rescued two kids. And late in 1941, while this piece was being written, Johnny leaned far out of a speeding police car and shot a rear tire off a rocketing gangsters' car and thus trapped five of them.

A few things happened in between these adventures. Take 1926 for instance: That year he battled a squad of armed Communists all over the street during the fur strike, and was later exonerated of their charges that he accepted bribes from fur companies—and exonerated by a judge who never went out of his way to do a cop a favor.

Then one bleak November day, in the same fateful 1926, three gunmen imprisoned in The Tombs suddenly whipped out guns, mysteriously obtained, killed their keeper and warden and raced into the walled yard of the grim old prison. The prison guards began blazing away at them, but the three men—Hymie Amberg, Robert Berg and Red McKenna—ducked behind a big pile of coal. Their improvised fort completely stymied the police.

All In the Day's Work

Broderick arrived. He always does. He watched the cops shooting at the coal pile for a while. Then he asked them to stop. Next he picked the lid off a near-by trash can, held it up as a shield, pulled out his automatic—a persuader he prefers not to use—and strode into the open prison yard. With bullets spanging off or through the shield, or scuffing around his legs, Johnny advanced on the coal pile, always edging a little to the side. The murderers began edging too, to keep the bulk of the pile between them and their stalker.

Broadway Cop³

Twenty feet from the pile Johnny charged with a yell, his gun spitting fire. The terrified gunmen made one blazing stand, through which Johnny somehow lived, then fled from behind the coal pile—and were riddled by the fire of the waiting police.

When it was all over, Johnny went to the nearest place where he could get a drink. "Give me a coke, please," he asked politely.

Johnny haunted the hoodlums who made Broadway their haunt during prohibition. The host of human rodents on whom the New York police declared war fought back with considerable enthusiasm, especially from their entrenched Broadway positions.

"I'm taking that — Broderick for a ride tonight," the late and heartily unlamented Legs Diamond announced one night in a speak-easy. "C'mon, let's find him." Diamond began the search, and as it continued the size of his grim entourage increased. There were a lot of guys who wanted to bear witness.

Broderick was tipped off that he was being hunted, so he began hunting Diamond. He met Diamond and his satellites at the corner of 46th and Broadway. The milling crowds were unaware of the tense little scene, even when Diamond's mob stopped, with hair bristling, while Broderick sauntered silently into their midst. Broderick stood in front of Diamond and stared at him piercingly for a moment—at the end of which Diamond's principal bodyguard turned heel and fled. Some of the others disappeared.

"Understand you're looking for me," Broderick said. He can talk without moving his lips, and his voice has a low and terrifying sound.

Legs swallowed. "Aw, hell, Johnny—can't you take a joke?"

Johnny's left hook caught Legs exactly right. "Not from you I can't, y'bum," Johnny said. But Legs didn't hear him. Legs didn't hear anything for twenty minutes.

Then there was Johnny's engagement with another product of prohibition—the afternoon in 1931 when 300 policemen cornered Francis "Two Gun" Crowley in his ground-floor apartment hideaway a block off upper Broadway. A lively war was in progress when Johnny arrived. Crowley's citadel was being shelled and tear-gas-bombed, but he was holding out with great fervor.

Broderick knew Crowley well, and asked for permission to try to reason with the trapped rat. When the permission was granted, Broderick walked out from behind a barricade in full view of the dead-eyed sniper. He walked across the open street to the apartment house, banged on Crowley's door and yelled:

"Hey, they got you, Crowley. Why don't you give up?"

Crowley was close to the door. "You know me good enough, Johnny. You know the only way I'll come out of here is shootin'."

"Aw, you're nutty," Johnny observed, impatiently. "Tell you what I'll do: I'll go around the corner for two hours. If you ain't out by then I'll come in and get you." And with his back to Crowley, Broderick strolled off.

Two hours later Broderick returned, and once more the firing and bombing stopped. Broderick went back to Crowley's door, supported now by a few other detectives, and hit it with a splintering football block. The door broke, admitting Broderick more suddenly than he expected. Crowley faced him, his gun aimed at Broderick's belly. Then Crowley began backing out of the room, ready to take his stand in another section of the apartment.

"Drop that gun, y'runt, and keep your hands in the air," Broderick ordered. Crowley hesitated . . . just long enough for Broderick to clip him.

Broadway Cop

As bouncer emeritus of Madison Square Garden, during the Roaring Twenties and Thirsty Thirties, when fights used to attract the almighty and the scum of the underworld, Johnny engaged in countless bare-knuckle duels with well-heeled mugs. One night stands out particularly. That was the night Broderick brushed aside two bodyguards of the late Vannie Higgins and clouted that perfumed public enemy on the jaw so hard that Higgins arched upward and backward through a telephone booth in the Garden lobby. It was certainly the best punch thrown that night at the Garden.

At the same Garden Johnny protected more than one fighter from armed rascals who were trying to move in on the pug's purse, and came to the rescue of more than one beleaguered sports writer.

Broderick is really a hard man to tag. He actually had a fight with fifteen young toughs one night. One of them called him on the phone and said, "You think you're tough, Broderick? Well, I can lick you." Johnny regarded this as an affront to the police force. He got the address, rushed to Brooklyn, walked into the house and promptly went down under the impact of fifteen waiting hoodlums. Johnny's buddy, Cordes, arrived eventually with a platoon of cops, for Broderick had left a note telling him where he was going. Broderick was nearly unconscious when Cordes arrived, but was still swinging.

His best fight came when he was assigned to find and disperse a gang of plug-uglies who were annoying women en route to an uptown Catholic church.

The devout Broderick rushed to this assignment with great relish. When he came into the pool hall that was their hangout, one of the plugs recognized him, picked up the cue ball and pegged it at Johnny's skull. Johnny barely ducked the bean ball, snatched a cue out of a near-by rack just in time to bunt off another bean ball, and thus bunted or leaned out of the way of the rest of the ivory ammunition that was flung his way. Then he dropped his cue, spit on his hands and cleaned out the nest.

Johnny's fists have held together very well, considering the punishment they've taken. They haven't always been used on jaws, either. Not long ago, while en route to the Polo Grounds, Johnny saw some short-winded citizens giving half-hearted chase to a Negro thief. Johnny joined the chase to the thief's house, unhesitatingly put his fist through the plate glass of the locked front door, opened it, caught the Negro at the top of the stairs and knocked him out with a punch before he could pull his gun. His fists have been taking it like that for a long time. His knuckles and fingers have been broken so many times that X-ray plates of his hands are on file at Bellevue to illustrate how properly set bones will heal.

The paradox of the man is that, withal, he is gentle, shy, sentimental and a good friend to hundreds who can never do anything for him in return. The man who won the Leroy M. Baldwin Medal for disarming a one-man arsenal who was holding up a crowded Childs' Restaurant at Columbus Circle, and who once hit a tough guy so hard that the gorilla's glass eye popped out fiercely and socked Broderick, likes nothing better than an evening at home with his family or a chat with a sports writer.

Cop Saves Crook

Several years ago Broderick was present in court and heard the testimony that sent a young second-story man to Sing Sing. It was a cut-and-dried case, nevertheless Broderick began to worry. He didn't like it. He decided that the boy was innocent of this particular felony. So Johnny began a private in-

Broadway Cop

vestigation. He worked overtime, day and night, finally nailed the real guilty party and saw to it that he was substituted in Sing Sing for the dazed young second-story man.

Johnny has a horror of talking about his profession, and won't recount any of his adventures, except in formal reports to his superiors. A few years ago when several hundred admirers tendered him a testimonial dinner, Johnny rose to his feet when called on to speak, looked out over an audience that tensely expected to hear something about his life and tough times, and said, "Aw, nuts. I'd rather sing." So he sang Sweet Rosie O'Grady. Without a drink, too, for the man who has worked for years knee-deep in night clubs and saloons, has never had a drink of whisky in his life.

Broderick relaxes at gangster movies. He likes to sit in the dark theaters and chuckle at the tough actors. But now and then he isn't pleased. Not long ago he was off duty and resting in his modest suburban home—where he lives with his good-looking wife and their two 'teen-age daughters—when his phone rang. It was his friend Toots Shor, owner of a popular pub.

"Hey, Duke, can you come over to the joint?" Shor asked. "Edward G. Robinson's here and wants to meet you. You know . . . he played the part of you in Bullets or Ballots."

"Tell him I don't want to meet him," Johnny barked. "Tell him I oughta flatten him."

Shor was struck dumb for one of the few times on record. "What's eating you? Robinson's a fine guy."

"Yeah?" growled New York's toughest cop. "Suppose I had let my kids go to see that picture—and they had seen him, playing the part of me, actually taking a drink and smoking a cigar?"

