

T.O. cop blasts force

'Lack of integrity,' officer says

By ALAN CAIRNS

TORONTO SUN – Friday May 5, 2006

A key cop in a massive probe into alleged corruption in the Toronto Police drug squad is calling for a public inquiry into the way the force investigates itself.

Sgt. Jim Cassells, a 29-year Toronto Police veteran with an unblemished record, asserts that "numerous" allegations of police wrongdoing have been "swept under the carpet," "minimized," only partially probed, or have fallen by the wayside amid interference from some senior officers.

"It's all about the truth ... and the truth is going to be very painful for the Toronto Police," Cassells told the Toronto Sun and the CBC in an exclusive interview.

For the past four years, Cassells has been a key investigator in the RCMP-led probe that led to criminal charges against Staff-Sgt. John Schertzer and five other cops on his drug team.

Cassells refused to reveal specifics of his allegations, saying he does not want to jeopardize ongoing court proceedings.

He is also concerned he would lose the protection that he gets under "whistle-blower" legislation.

"I will give no names, no dates, no places ... but there are complaints about police (conduct) that are not being processed ... assaults ... that are not being investigated fully," he said.

Cassells is going public weeks after an internal charge of misconduct was laid against him for

talking to media "without proper authority" about an "ongoing" internal probe.



Sgt. Jim Cassells says he is speaking out against alleged corruption in the Toronto police force because he wants to uphold core values of honesty and integrity. (Greg Henkenhaf/Sun)

Cassells said he met the reporter in November "for all the right reasons" and that night detailed his concerns to internal affairs head Staff-Sgt. Chris White.

The only action was the Police Services Act charge that was laid against him, Cassells said.

"I know why they didn't get back to me ... they didn't want to hear the answer," he said.

Cassells said his prosecution will put the entire Toronto Police internal affairs process on trial.

"They have a lot bigger problems than one policeman who speaks with the media," he said.

"Ultimately, I believe a public inquiry is probably required ... I honestly believe a third party needs to review how we conduct ourselves in investigations," Cassells said.

More than two years ago Schertzer and five other former Central Field Command (CFC) drug cops -- Steve Correia, Joe Miched, Raymond Pollard, Rick Benoit and Ned Maodus -- were charged with conspiracy to obstruct justice.

Another 34 charges -- obstructing justice, perjury, theft, extortion and assault causing bodily harm -- were also laid against some individuals.

PRELIMINARY HEARING

The charges stem from allegations of a police assault, extortion, thefts of cash and drugs, and falsification of notes, police records, court testimony and search warrant affidavits.

A four-month preliminary hearing before Superior Court of Ontario Justice James Blacklock wrapped up last week and a decision on whether a trial will be held is expected this summer.

If the case does go to trial, it is certain to be challenged under the Charter of Rights because of delays.

The six drug cops return to Old City Hall this morning, when Blacklock will ask their lawyers for positions on a CBC bid to access exhibits filed at the preliminary hearing.

The drug squad probe -- initiated in 2001 by former chief Julian Fantino and led by RCMP Staff-Supt. John Neily -- has been full of controversy.

During the probe, about 200 major drug trafficking prosecutions were stayed and hundreds of alleged criminals set free.

And in a series of sealed affidavits that were filed during the drug squad probe and made public weeks after the January 2004 arrests, Neily alleged that "evidence of criminal activity exists against 17 members" of the CFC drug squads.

At one point, he claimed that evidence supported 122 criminal charges associated with 28 separate cases.

"I am attempting to identify only ... the most serious offences," Neily wrote in one affidavit.

'CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR'

In another affidavit, Neily alleged that 12 cops were involved in "serious criminal behaviour" and one was trafficking drugs.

None of the allegations have been proven in court.

Fantino told media at the time of the arrests that the problems were "isolated."

Cassells said he looks forward to his May 11 appearance before the police tribunal because it is "an opportunity to bring the truth out."

Cassells said he wants to stress he is not a "disgruntled employee," but an average cop who believes the Toronto Police should stick to the "core values" the service trumpets in the media.

"Honesty and integrity ... it is posted in every police station. It is on our website. It is part of every promotional process," he said.

"We preach them as an organization. I believe there has been a serious lack of integrity in the professional standards (unit) I have been exposed to."

At various stages in the probe, lawyers Clayton Ruby, Edward Sapiano and Peter Biro have demanded an inquiry.