

UCSC POLICE CHIEF

A LIFETIME OF SERVICE



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Mickey Aluffi is retiring after a long law enforcement career as UC Santa Cruz police chief and at the Watsonville Police Department before that.

After 41 years in law enforcement, Aluffi retires

Santa Cruz native worked for Sheriff's Office, Watsonville PD, UCSC Police

By TOVIN LAPAN

tlapan@santacruzsentinel.com

SANTA CRUZ — Arline Aluffi, in typical motherly fashion, was deeply worried.

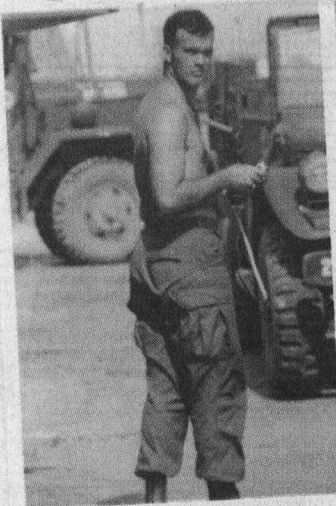
It was the late 1960s and her eldest son, Bill, was set to join the Santa Cruz Police Department. Arline wrote a letter to Michael, Bill's younger brother by 15 months, who was fighting in Vietnam. Mickey, as everyone called him, had been shot and wounded after just three days in combat. He had

already been to a hospital and returned to the war. Arline figured that if anyone could convince Bill to find a different line of work, it was Mickey.

Instead, much to his mother's dismay, he declined to influence his brother, and then promptly joined the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office upon his return.

So, with Arline springing into a rigid right angle whenever a siren awoke her in the middle of the night, Mickey Aluffi's 41-year career in law enforcement began.

Aluffi retired Friday as the UC Santa Cruz police chief, a position he held for the last eight years of his 11-year stint with the campus police force. It was his third stop in a



Mickey Aluffi in 1966 at an Army base in Cu Chi, Vietnam.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

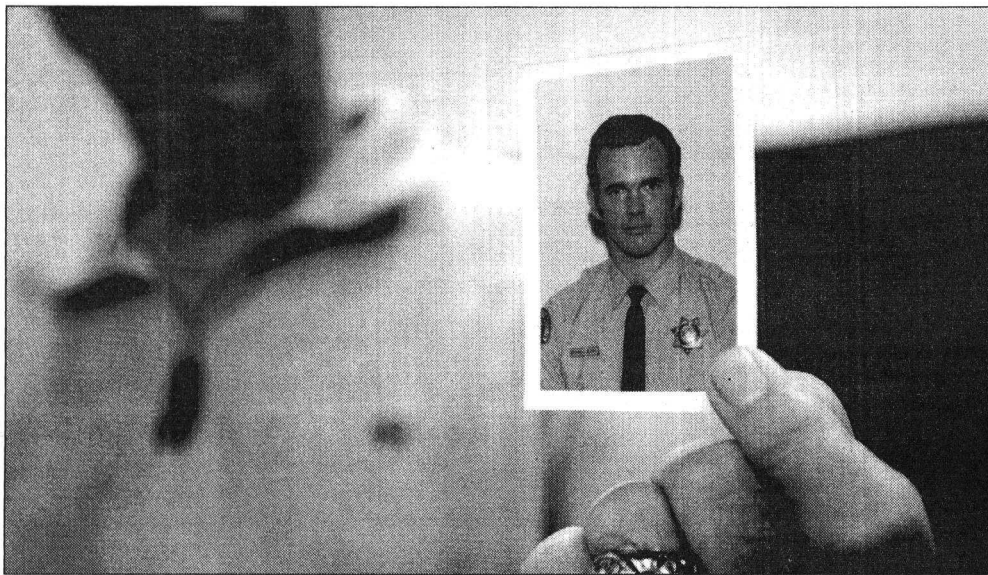
SEE ALUFFI ON A2

ALUFFI

Continued from A1

long law enforcement career that included working on trailblazing narcotics and gang-prevention teams and an infamous serial murder case.

"We were lucky to have him that long," said Tom Vani, UCSC vice chancellor of business and administrative services. "The experience does help quite a bit. It's a situation where you deal with a narrow demographic, mostly 18 to 22 year olds, it takes people with patience, experience and tolerance to understand the environment. Mickey has done a wonderful job."



TOVIN LAPAN/SENTINEL

Mickey Aluffi in a portrait taken in 1970, a year after he joined the Santa Cruz Sheriff's Office.

TRIAL BY FIRE

After joining the Sheriff's Office in 1969, Aluffi became a homicide detective in 1972, just as the country's attention was about to fix on Santa Cruz, where three different serial killers, John Linley Frazer, Edmund Kemper and Herbert Mullin, would send the county into a panic.

As a new detective, Aluffi had to manage the paperwork from registered firearm sales. One day, a record of sale landed on his desk for a .44 caliber magnum pistol bought by Kemper, who had a sealed juvenile record. Suspicious, Aluffi went to Kemper's house with his partner Don Smythe to confiscate the gun until they could find out more about Kemper's past.

"There was something about Kemper that made me uneasy when we visited his house," Aluffi said about the 6-foot-9-inch behemoth of a man who would later be convicted of eight murders. "When he went to the trunk of his car to get the gun, Don and I instinctively put our hands on our guns and went to either side of the car. He later told me that if we hadn't been watching him so closely, he planned to kill us."

Aluffi and Smythe's visit to his house made Kemper nervous that the cops were closing in on him, and he killed and beheaded his mother and her best friend before fleeing. He made it to Pueblo, Colo., before he decided to call Santa Cruz to confess. Aluffi, along with other law enforcement, was sent to Colorado to accompany the serial killer on the long ride back.

"After that I was more confident as an officer, absolutely,"

Aluffi said. "I felt like there wasn't anything I couldn't handle at that point."

PIONEERING POLICE WORK

Aluffi later transferred into the county's first narcotics unit, where, along with partner Wally Walker, they grew thick mustaches and scraggly hair so they could work undercover on drug busts.

"It's a little-known fact, but Mickey has an almost photographic memory," Walker said. "We would drive through neighborhoods looking for the license plates of known suspects, and he never used paper and pencil. He just remembered everything. It is an amazing ability."

Aluffi was hired as a lieutenant in the Watsonville Police Department in 1982, where he worked extensively on gang prevention while also helping manage big events like the cannery strike from 1985 to 1986, and the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake.

Aluffi, who still lives in Watsonville, aided the city in winning a gang-suppression grant, which led to the BASTA (Broad-Based Apprehension, Suppression, Treatment Alternatives) program for combating gangs that was innovative in allowing different agencies to share information confidentially. In 1984, he graduated from the FBI Academy, where he studied law enforcement management among other things, and broadened his contacts in the field.

"He was very cool," said Terry Medina, who worked with Aluffi in both the Sheriff's Office and the Watsonville Police Department. "We'd both seen a lot, and when I

became chief I knew I could count on him. ... There was a feeling of confidence with Mickey. Whether it was the earthquake or a strike, you knew he would communicate with everyone very well."

In 1994, Aluffi ran unsuccessfully for county sheriff, his only attempt at an elected position: "That race made me realize I had no desire to be a politician. I really wanted to be sheriff, and I thought I was a better choice. But I never wanted to run again."

COMING FULL CIRCLE

Aluffi was born at Santa Cruz Hospital, now Dominican, on Feb. 19, 1942. He grew up on the Westside, and attended Santa Cruz High School, where he played guard and defensive back on the 1959 championship football team. His father, Louis, owned the Edgewater bar in Capitola.

"Mickey worked in that bar, and my dad also owned bars when I was younger. So, we both spent a lot of time in bars," Medina said. "When you are raised like that, raised around so many different people drinking in a bar, it gives you an unofficial education on the psychology of people. It really helped Mickey a lot in understanding people and being able to interview suspects effectively."

Joining the UCSC police force, and returning to the Westside where he grew up, was a sort of homecoming for Aluffi.

"When I was younger, there was a man who leased land on Cowell Ranch, and I worked for him running cattle," he said of the property

MICHAEL ALLAN ALUFFI

BORN: Feb. 19, 1942, in Santa Cruz

NICKNAME: Mickey. His mother stuck him with it before he was old enough to protest, Aluffi said.

CAREER: Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office, 1969-1982; Watsonville Police Department, 1982-1999; UC Santa Cruz Police, 1999-2010

CHILDREN: Daughters Lesley and Stephanie, and sons Michael and Dominic

that would later become the UCSC campus.

After three years on the UCSC police staff, Aluffi was recommended for chief by the outgoing Jan Tepper and selected for the position. He helped design and oversee the construction of the campus' new police headquarters near the UCSC carriage house, and adjusted strategies for handling student protests with an eye toward avoiding unnecessary confrontations.

"Mickey is just really a nice person, which is hard to find in law enforcement," Walker said. "Mickey was always cool and calm, which probably really helped at the university."

For the record, neither Mickey nor Bill Aluffi — who served 25 years with the Santa Cruz Police before retiring — was ever seriously wounded in the line of duty, and Arline learned to live with their chosen professions.