Spreen bows out quietly after stormy tenure

N 25 years with New York City Police, Johannes F. Spreen dealt with blackouts, a Pope's visit and a 13-day transit strike. He spent 18 months as Detroit police com-missioner in the tense aftermath of the

But hardest stint of his career came

But hardest suit of his career came as sheriff of Oakland County.

"I put in 12 of the toughest years of my life." said Spreen, recalling his time as the "lone Democrat" at the top in a Republican stronghold.

"John Nichols is out of his cotton-picking mind to take this job."

picking mind to take this job."

CONSTANTLY IN the headlines during his tenure as sheriff, Spreen left effice last week in an uncharacteristically quiet way.

When you have been considered the control of the control

aheriff.

Noted for being outspoken, Spreen granted just a couple of farewell interviews — and even those, reluctantly. As he packed boxes, he made it clear there's no love lost between him and the folks who reported his every move award.

the four wao reported me every necessary necessary as sheriff,
"I begged the media to support me," said Spreen, bilaming the press not only for some of his political defeats but also problems in his troubled marriage.
"I don't get fair play because I have the backbone to speak out."

WHILE UPSET with the press, Spreen is even angrier with Republi-cans on the Board of Commissioners. He contends they sabotaged his efforts for collision reasons.

cans on the Board of Commissioners. He contends they sabotaged his efforts for political reasons.

"This was a top-notch department, the best in the state. But three years ago it was destroyed by politicians," said Spreen, referring to layoffs of 27 deputies because of bindget cuts.

After meeting with both parties to discuss his candidacy for sheriff, he decided in 1972 to run as a Democrat. That decision came because the Democratic Party endorsed him (Republicans wouldnit endorse in a primary) and a desire to represent "the people, not be obligated to 30 individuals."

Since then, Spreen has been flighting with the growing Republican majority on the county board of commissioners over staffing for his department, Jail overcrowding, township patrols and even preventive crime programs like ES.C.A.P.E.

Internal sheriff department strug-

ESCAPE.

Internal sherilf department struggles — which he also blames on political
— led to charges that he used county
meat for private purposes and that his
wife Mona had ties with organized
crime figures.

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The charges resulted in his firing then-undersheriff Robert Nyovich, whom Spreen accused of blackmail.

"I built up the finest department in the state of Michigan until I had the misfortune to bring in an undersheriff who was a bit thirsty for power," Spreen said.

"I was never allowed really to do the job," he summed up.

A NATIVE OF Osterbolz-Scharm-

A NATIVE OF Osterhola-Scharmbeck, Germany, Spreen was a "little immigrant kid" who grew up in a German nelghborhood in Queens, New York.

While intending to be a baseball player, he tested to become a New York polleeman because his friend "wanted to be a cop in the worst way." His buddy failed the test, but Spreen came out at the top of the list. When he found out the job paid \$2,000 a year, the young German decided to be a cop and pitch on the New York City Police baseball team.

Spreen worked his way up to full inspector and retired from the New York department after 25 years to teach at John Jay College, He received a bachelor's degree from the school after age 35 and went on toget a master's degree. He is now working on a Pha. Dut on what he calls the better and the calls the



'The things i wanted will be given to (John) Nichols. John is a professional and won't brook any nonsense and may have a run-in if they try to do to him what they did to me.'

— Johannes Spreen ex-sheriff about successor's prospects

it was politics

enough to take the job," reflects Spreen. "It was the toughest job in the country." Spree resigned as commissioner af-ter Detroit Mayor Jerome Cavanagh decided not to run again for re-election.

TODAY, SPREEN regrets somewhat not staying on as commissioner — even though it was a job he says he almost quit four times in 18 months. Always outspoken, he was at odds with Cavanagh over affirmative action hiring policies, a change in the pension system,

and the promotion of someone the may-or didn't like.

"Four times I put my job on the line, but I think that's what a professional law enforcement officer has to do," said Spreen.
Dedicated to "accentuating the posi-

Dedicated to "accentuating the posi-tive," he came up with anappy slogans like "Blue is Beautiful" and "Cops Are Tops" and the idea of scooter patrols to bring police officers closer to residents of the community. While other cops denned riet gear, the 4-(oot, \$-inch 250-pound chief

strolled along 12th Street in a trench coat during a fracas marking the anniversary of the riot. And he held a "love in" to ask he city to give him 100 days in which to turn the city around.

But on the 101st day "the roof fell in" when a fight broke out between black teens and while officers at the Veteran's Memorial building in Detroit. In May 1959 an officer was killed in the New Bethel Church shootings, which led to the arrests of 142 people. "The whole thing was a mess," recalled Spreen. "It tried to save a great city, a city that doesn't deserve the reputation it has. And I think I accomplished some things there, just like I did in Oakland County."

AFTER LEAVING the Detroit force Spreen set up a law enforcement pro-gram at Marygrove College, which he directed for 10 years.

Former Oakland County Prosecutor Thomas Plunkett encouraged him to run for the office of Oakland County sheriff, it depends on Spreen's meed whether he regrets his decision to go for it.

Spreen also lamented daily newspa-per articles about his wife of five years. The Spreens were in a divorce sult but reconciled when he decided to run for county executive.

The ex-sheriff is proud of his efforts in crime prevention. Always dedicated

to programs that head off crime, he touts ES.CA.P.E. (Enroll in the Sheriff's Crime and Accident Prevention Education). The program brings citizens into the department for educational purposes.

He also feels vindicated by jail timprovements, forced by a lawsuit brought by prisoners. One of Spreen's earliest suggestions was to try to get federal money to improve the fail.

WHILE THERE Is speculation that 65-year-old Spreen is among candidates boping to fill Nichold's former job in Farmington Hills, he won't cpairm or depy the rumor.

Spreen says there are offers from security companies and Washington, D.C., but he'd like to stay in this area. One goal is to finish his dectorate in educational sociology at Wayne State University. University.

He once wrote a newspaper column, and he said he might do some more writing. "Maybe I can continue lending my voice so people get an awareness of what happened here," he said.

While he likes Nichols, he admits it's going to be hard to watch the Republi-can commissioners who fought him cozy up to the new Republican sheriff.

"The things I wanted will be given to Nichols," said Spreen. "John is a professional and wor't brook any nonsense and may have a run-in if they try to do to him what they did to me.

"But politicians are not stupid. They won't do it to him."

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