

J.B. Conlisk, superintendent of police during stormy '60s

By Kenan Heise

PRIVATE SERVICES were held Monday for former Chicago Police Supt. James B. Conlisk, who headed the Police Department during the turbulent West Side riots and the Democratic National Convention in the late 1960s.

Mr. Conlisk died Saturday in Loyola University Medical Center, near Maywood, three days before his 66th birthday.

Until last Thursday, Mr. Conlisk had worked as assistant to another former Chicago police superintendent, James B. Rochford, who is in charge of investigations for Bally Manufacturing Co., a Chicago maker of electronic games. Rochford succeeded Mr. Conlisk as Chicago police superintendent in 1973.

"He was an extraordinary man, a fine person and a very good friend," Rochford said. He also described Mr. Conlisk as "a very private person."

Mr. Conlisk, who had two brothers on the Police Department, served three years in the Air Force before joining the department in 1946. He worked out of the Gresham station, spent four years at the detective bureau and eight years in traffic before being made captain.

HIS FATHER spent 46 years on the police force and was assigned for more than 30 years to work in the police commissioner's office where he had the reputation of "calling the shots."

But Mr. Conlisk, who often was the youngest man with his rank in the department, was earning his own promotions. He became a captain in 1959 after having been No. 1 on the eligibility list of 159 candidates.

Police Supt. Orlando Wilson first appointed Mr. Conlisk chief of traffic and then deputy superintendent. He remained in that position until

1967, when he replaced Wilson, who had publicly recommended him as his replacement.

The West Side riots that followed the death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the demonstrations surrounding the 1968 Democratic National Convention brought Mr. Conlisk's name, along with that of Mayor Richard J. Daley, to international attention. Protest confrontations in Lincoln Park and Grant Park during the convention were met by physical force on the part of the police.

OVER THE PROTESTS of both the city and the Police Department, the Presidential Commission on Violence, chaired by the later Illinois governor, Daniel Walker, later called it "a police riot."

Mr. Conlisk was superintendent when Daley issued his startling and controversial order to police to "shoot to kill" suspected arsonists and to "shoot to maim" suspected looters in the rioting that followed King's assassination.

In 1972, citizens groups complained about the superintendent's aggressive patrol policies meant to deter crime. The department was also stung by a Tribune expose of police brutality. Mr. Conlisk's soft-spoken voice was often drowned out by catcalls and bullhorns as he appeared in 21 police districts in an attempt to defend his policies and keep his job.

Mr. Conlisk maintained that men in command are responsible for the behavior, criminal or otherwise, of the men under them. He resigned Oct. 10, 1973, a few days after 19 policemen were indicted as a result of a tavern shakedown racket.

U.S. ATTY. Dan Webb, who headed the investigation, said: "I've always felt Conlisk personally was above reproach but lacked independence. I've always been afraid Conlisk would become a



James B. Conlisk

sacrificial lamb as a result of these proceedings."

In 1975, Mr. Conlisk was the center of a grand jury investigation of police spying on private citizens and peaceable groups in the city. The result was that police intelligence files, as a result of a separate suit, were made available to the individuals and organizations spied upon.

Mr. Conlisk remained with the Police Department, serving first as chief of traffic and later at O'Hare International Airport. He resigned May 30, 1980, to work for Bally, joining Rochford, who had resigned from the Police Department in 1977 to become Bally's vice president of corporate affairs and government relations.

Survivors include his wife, Colette; two sons, Police Lt. James B. III and John; and a grandson.