

R.D. SANDERS, PIONEER BLACK OFFICER IN HOLLYWOOD

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R.D. Sanders, the first black police officer in Hollywood, never had to draw his gun in 23 years with the Police Department.

Mr. Sanders died on Saturday of natural causes, while sitting in his favorite chair. He was 74.

He was the second of 13 children born in Moultrie, Ga. Like one of his brothers, O.T. Sanders, Mr. Sanders' first name was just the initials, R.D., said his son, Ezara Sanders. Later in life, he picked up the nicknames "Jay" and "Jake," but no one knows why.

Mr. Sanders moved to West Palm Beach in 1949. Shortly thereafter, he moved to Hollywood and worked in the construction business, his son said.

In 1951, he became a Hollywood police officer, patrolling Liberia, his neighborhood.

Mr. Sanders had a foreboding physical presence - 6 feet 2 inches tall and 270 pounds. He could walk up to a murder suspect, not handcuff him, say, "Get in the car," and be obeyed, Ezara Sanders said.

"For all of his size, he was a great communicator. He had a settling effect on people," said Cooper City Police Chief Steve Davis, Mr. Sanders' former partner.

Mr. Sanders preferred to use physical strength, not a gun, to subdue criminals.

"He used to tell me he never wanted anybody's death on his conscience," Ezara Sanders said.

One of the most remarkable encounters in Mr. Sanders' career was the time when he backed up Davis as a man pointed a shotgun at Davis.

"Jake stepped in front of me, talked to him a couple of minutes and took the gun away," Davis said. "He shielded me."

Mr. Sanders retired in September 1974. His hobbies were fishing and hunting.

Besides his son, Mr. Sanders is survived by his wife, Gussie Sanders; three brothers: Lieodis Sanders of West Palm Beach, Nathan Sanders of Tampa and O.T. Sanders of West Palm Beach; and three sisters: Bessie Goldwire of West Palm Beach, Fannie Lou Worthy of Moultrie, Ga., and Nellie Sanders; and a grandson, Vincent Xavier Sanders.

Visitation will be from 6-9 p.m. Friday at New Jerusalem First Baptist Church, 2254 Douglas St., Hollywood. The funeral will be at 11 a.m. on Saturday at the church.