

Winter 1934

Police Recruiting and Training

Donald C. Stone

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc>

 Part of the [Criminal Law Commons](#), [Criminology Commons](#), and the [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Donald C. Stone, Police Recruiting and Training, 24 *Am. Inst. Crim. L. & Criminology* 996 (1933-1934)

This Criminology is brought to you for free and open access by Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology by an authorized editor of Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons.

POLICE SCIENCE



CALVIN GODDARD [Ed.]

POLICE RECRUITING AND TRAINING¹

DONALD C. STONE²

During the past few years, we have frequently heard it repeated that police work is a professional calling. At a meeting of the joint committee of the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the American Bar Association, it was recommended that "The heads of police departments should in all cases be men of professional police training and experience; preferably men experienced in the community whose department they are chosen to head." It seems to me that the two parts of this proposal are contradictory, and I am going to use it as a sort of text. We have used this word "professional" so glibly that I am wondering if we ever have faced its implications.

If police work is to be treated as a profession, is it not desirable that we know what a profession is? I find that the characteristics of a profession are generally considered to be the following:

- (1) There must be a body of knowledge held as a common possession and extended by united efforts of those engaged in the calling. The great amount of literature dealing with police organization, personnel, investigation, identification, records, criminal methods, patrol, traffic enforcement, and the thousand and one problems with which the police deal is evidence that this first characteristic is met.
- (2) Certain standards or qualifications based on character, training, and competency are required for admission to the profession. Cer-

¹Presented before the Midwest Conference on Police Problems and Methods, February 1, 1933, Northwestern University.

²Director, consulting and Research Division, Public Administration Service.

tainly every police chief requires competent men of excellent character. Perhaps we haven't obtained them to the needed extent and certainly we haven't recognized that professional training should precede a man's recruitment to the police force.

- (3) Certain standards of conduct are required with respect to relations with others in the profession and with the public based upon courtesy, honor, and ethics. I think we can all agree that high standards of conduct exist between policemen, and as a whole the police observe fairly high standards in dealing with the public with respect to courtesy, honor, and ethics. I say fairly high because we might as well be frank in that we slip all too often.
- (4) A profession must exercise a constructive interest in the selection, training, and apprenticeship of candidates for the profession. As a group we haven't gone very far in providing a sound system of training and apprenticeship for men who wish to make police work their profession.
- (5) And finally, a profession is characterized by an organization of those within it which is based primarily upon common interest and public duty. We have our International Association of Chiefs of Police and other police associations but as yet there is no unified association.

In summary, it would appear that police service as now conducted does not meet all of the tests of a profession. However, I see no obstacle except the lack of interest and effort on the part of the police themselves which can prevent them from attaining these marks of a profession. The question now arises what can we do to elevate police standards so that we may have a real profession.

Recruiting Policemen

We can all agree that men of particular ability, character, and training are badly needed in the police service. "How can we get such men?" We want men with intelligence, with aptitude for police service, men who can work together in a police organization, men who will be able to perform the great variety of duties required by modern police service, men of physical stamina, and above all men of high character. We should consider it ideal if we could obtain men who had been thoroughly trained in all branches of police science.

There is no short cut to obtaining good men. It can't be done under our usual type of civil service examinations. Giving a man an examination in arithmetic or in the location of the city buildings, or in defining a few crimes will hardly determine if he will make good as a policeman. Neither will a police inquiry among the friendly references given by a candidate tell whether he is of sound character.

This subject of recruitment requires far greater study than has been given to it. First of all, we must set forth the characteristics of a good policeman, and then through experimentation find out what types of examinations will produce such men. In the absence of adequate investigation on this subject, I suggest the following procedure which has proved the most satisfactory to date.

Intelligence and Aptitude Tests

Two examinations are suggested for testing the intelligence and aptitude of police candidates. Due to its simplicity, I recommend the use of the Army Alpha intelligence test. The Army Alpha should be merely a qualifying examination. In these days when a large number of candidates can be obtained, a minimum grade of 110 is desirable.

At the same time the Army Alpha test is given, I suggest the partially standardized Test for Patrolmen, as prepared by the Bureau of Public Personnel Administration.³ Although deficient in several respects it represents the best available examination of police aptitude.

Physical Examination

Only to those candidates who have received qualifying grades in the Army Alpha and the aptitude tests should a physical examination be given. By giving the written tests first, the expense of physical examinations for those unqualified is avoided. The primary questions in physical examinations are: Is he fit; is he likely to stand up under the rigors of police duty? General health is more important than mere strength or size. Policing today is far more dependent upon intelligence, understanding of people, and of adjusting social relationships than upon sheer strength. The physical examination should also be a qualifying examination, and all who are not definitely fit should be eliminated from further consideration.

Character Investigation

The remaining candidates should now be subjected to character investigations. This stage is highly important today when temptation and corrupt influences are brought to bear upon policemen at every point. The investigators should endeavor to interview those who may know some short-coming of the individual and not just those referred

³At 923 East 60th Street, Chicago.

to by the candidate. The objective is to find out whether the man has ever proved to be dishonest, engaged in criminal activities, or is otherwise morally unfit, and not to find out that he is a fine fellow. The references given by the candidate obviously are always friends who obviously give him a clean bill of health.

Fingerprints of all applicants should be taken and submitted to the state bureau of criminal identification and to the United States Department of Justice at Washington to see whether the applicant has a criminal record.

The Personal Interview

After a certified list of qualified candidates has been prepared, they should be interviewed in the order of their certification before appointment. The chief of police and the other officers conducting this interview should have power to eliminate a man if his personal characteristics are unsatisfactory. Some cities are submitting applicants at this stage to a psychiatric examination to determine if they are temperamentally and emotionally fitted for police work. This is highly desirable and will save the city many times its expense.

Probationary Period

Although the above recruiting process should provide high-grade men, the ultimate test comes when the individual is put on actual police service. Both in his training school period and during his probationary period his work should be subjected to rigid review. If he performs unsatisfactorily during the training school period, he should be removed immediately. During the probationary period service ratings should be taken at least monthly to determine whether he is giving satisfactory service. If unsatisfactory, he should be discharged at once. It is a simple matter to remove a probationer, but once on the force in full standing, removals are not only difficult but they affect greatly the whole problem of discipline and morale of the department. No permanent appointment should be made at the end of the probationary period except on the specific recommendations of the chief of police in writing.

Good Personnel the Foundation of a Good Police Force

You may say that this procedure is all too complicated and that you can tell good recruits by interviewing them. In the first place, no human being has as yet been able to measure a man's intelligence,

common sense, honesty, or aptitude for police work by looking at him in the eye. In the second place, a carefully selected police personnel is the foundation upon which successful police administration is built. When a department fails to function properly or does not receive public confidence and support, the cause is found very frequently in its inadequate recruiting system and the low entrance standards that result. There is no public service which requires better human material than police work. Not only is a policeman called upon to perform a boundless variety of services, many of which require great skill, but he operates for the most part on his own initiative, and unsupervised.

Obviously, therefore, this recruiting process cannot be handled in a casual half-hearted manner nor can the whole business be left to an outside agency such as a civil service commission. Police officials must take a direct and continuing initiative either in doing the work themselves or in collaborating with the civil service commission if there is one.

In addition to securing high grade men, the rigid adherence to such a recruiting process will eliminate appointments due to political pressure. No obstacle is a greater deterrent to establishing a professional police service than political appointments and the resulting creation of a caste of "untouchables." If a definite, orderly, certain recruiting system is in effect, and I should add a system of promotion as well, the chief may say: "ward heeler, he must be a good man, and if he is he will stand high in the examinations." It will not take long to build up sufficient precedent for a sound recruiting system that no politician can break it down, that is if the chief doesn't want it set aside.

Police Training

A short time ago when the new recruits were appointed to the Chicago police department, several commanding officers objected to these men being given the regular three months' training course. They stated that the men were needed on the streets and that it was a waste of effort to spend all of this time on training. Let us face squarely the implications of this attitude. From it we may draw the conclusion that police training is desirable but not necessary. This being the case, we might as well admit here and now that anybody is qualified to do police work. Permanency of office is not essential. As in digging ditches, it is just a job. In other words, this business of policing is not a profession, nor can it ever be one. No

student of policing will admit that. But it is the logical conclusion to draw from such statements.

Why Training Is Needed

A few months ago when reorganizing a small police department in the south I addressed a large group of influential citizens upon the work of their police department. I submitted a list of the fields of knowledge and the abilities that a capable police officer should be trained in. There were twenty-seven different subjects or fields of action ranging from handling criminals at close combat on the one hand to a study of juvenile problems and treatment on the other; or from knowledge of the uses of chemistry in crime detection to an understanding of the causes of crime and human behavior. The citizens saw for the first time that police work was a highly complicated service. A police department can educate the citizen in the same way.

So broad are the problems with which the police must deal that to learn police work entirely through experience would require a lifetime and more. Obviously, there are a great many things that can be learned only by experience, but there is a host of things a man can learn through instruction which will make his experience much more valuable and successful. Why should a man learn the criminal law of the State of Illinois through trial and error, if he can learn it through instruction? Why should a patrolman burn his fingers by mishandling the problems encountered in his everyday life if he can learn through training schools from the experience of others what to look for on his beat and how to handle it? Police training is the benefiting from the experience of others.

I need not belabor this point further, except to point out the conclusion which I should like to draw. If police officers are to be given permanent tenure of office on the basis that police work is a profession, then let's make it a profession here in Metropolitan Chicago. The subjects discussed at this conference illustrate vividly the great variety of problems which directly affect police service. Yet may I ask, how can a man in a period of one hour learn the application of sociological principles to crime prevention, which will be discussed at 1:30 this afternoon? How can he learn all about evidence in a period of one hour on Saturday morning? Obviously he cannot, and obviously we must revolutionize our whole concept of police recruitment, training, and practice, if we are going to make police administration the profession we have all talked about. The

only alternative is that we accept it as just another job that anybody can handle with no standards of conduct or procedure and certainly without requiring permanent tenure of office.

The Committee representing the Police Chiefs' Association and the American Bar Association, in addition to stating that policemen should be men of professional police training and experience and be given permanent tenure of office, stated also that police chiefs should be appointed from the communities whose departments they are chosen to head. We in the police field have wanted to keep the cake and eat it at the same time. We want our police chiefs selected on the basis of their professional ability and to be given office for life, and yet in the same breath, we say that the police chief or policeman should be selected from the local community. How can we expect the public to look upon police administration as a profession and rise up in protest when a chief is turned out for political reasons when the police fail to conduct their work as though it were a profession.

European Practice

I recently returned from a four months' investigation of European police departments which are frequently referred to by American police observers as representing the type of professionalization which we should emulate. European practices differ largely from ours in these two questions of recruitment and training, and this explains to my mind the reason for their high professional standing.

First of all, men are selected only after rigorous examination and investigation, and appointment to the force is on the basis only of demonstrated capacity, intelligence, ability, and aptitude for police work. And what may prove somewhat of a shock to us here, the departments, particularly in England, make every effort to obtain candidates who come from outside of the city rather than from within it. It is recognized that a specialized or smattering knowledge of certain aspects of the local community usually works against the ability of the police to train their recruits broadly in local police problems and procedure. Police chiefs are promoted from city to city, each city thereby gaining a man with broad experience. A definite police career is made possible also.

Nor are the police recruits in Europe put into uniform, given a club, told to be careful and sent out to enforce the law. Rather, they are trained rigorously and at great length, in many cases for

upwards of a period of six months to a year, before they are sent out on the delicate task of adjusting human affairs. Moreover, the period of training does not end there. It continues throughout their life in a rigorous manner not even approached in any jurisdiction in this country that I know of.

In Germany, recruitment as a patrolman is not the only means for getting upon the force. Police work is recognized as a professional undertaking, and recruitment is made upon three levels. Men are selected for the uniform force as the lowest grade in the service. Another entrance into police service is obtained directly through examinations for investigation and other specialized police activities where the requirements of previous education, training, intelligence, etc., are far higher. And finally, all administrative officers are recruited at large for the third general branch of the service. These administrative officers, consisting of commissioners of police, deputy commissioners, departmental staff, and others, are almost all university graduates in jurisprudence or criminology, and police administration as such is recognized as a special and life-long career. Men may move from one of these three levels to another, but it is rather difficult, because of the high qualifications required at the entrance to each level.

It may be many years before we approach European practice in this regard, but as I have watched the improvements in police administration over the past few years, I feel confident that our standards will not compare unfavorably with theirs within a period which will prove surprisingly short to all of us.

May I give one illustration. The junior college at San Jose, California, has established a police training course covering two years for young men who desire to be trained in the police profession. Before admission is granted, the student must be certified by a chief of police and will be placed on his force if the student's work is satisfactorily completed. The instructors are mainly experienced police officers. In this one example, I see the germ of a scheme which may really give rise to police work as a true profession.

I have hardly mentioned how police training should be conducted as this would require more time than is at my disposal. I leave this question to the discussion which follows or to another Midwest Police Conference. If there is a real desire for training, the questions of method and subjects can be easily worked out. Where there is a will, there is a way.