

Spring 1935

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Recommended Citation

E. W. Puttkammer, Recent Developments in the Chicago Police Department, 25 *Am. Inst. Crim. L. & Criminology* 902 (1934-1935)

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RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CHICAGO POLICE DEPARTMENT

E. W. PUTTKAMMER*

Both because it is the second largest city in the country and because of the magnitude of its crime problem, the efforts made by Chicago to combat lawlessness and criminality have always attracted a nationwide interest. Whether the attack took the form of social work led by such institutions as Hull House or Chicago Commons, of far-reaching procedural changes, such as the establishment of juvenile courts, or of unofficial but organized citizen watching over official conduct and efficiency, as carried on by the Chicago Crime Commission, or took any other shape, it has been sure to have had a large and sympathetic audience. It is for this reason, also, that the efforts to modernize the Chicago Police Department have commanded much more than local attention. These efforts began in 1929 with the organization of a Citizens' Police Committee and an exhaustive survey, under their supervision, of the department. After two years of careful study a report was issued¹ which made definite and detailed recommendations for improvements, ranging all the way from simple and obvious adjustments to a fundamental reorganization of the structure of the department. Due to the cooperation of the department itself, considerable progress was soon made in securing the adoption of the simpler suggestions. Developments up to this point were described in an earlier article in this journal,² and need not here be repeated. The progress since then has been slower, because concerned with more fundamental matters, but has for that very reason been even more significant. The cooperation received originally from the then commissioner, William F. Russell, was continued by the present holder of that office, James P. Allman, and as a result progress has steadily continued.³ The purpose of this article is to

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¹Published in book form by the University of Chicago Press under the title, *Chicago Police Problems*.

²"Recent Improvements in the Chicago Police Department," by E. W. Puttkammer, in 23 *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 708 (1932).

³A full discussion of the progress of the department should logically include an examination and comparison of the criminal statistics of the present and of various periods in the past, the number of offenders, arrests, convictions, etc. In the last analysis these figures are the main test of the "progress" of a

describe these further advances. In consequence it will deal almost wholly with the favorable side of the picture—what has been accomplished—with only occasional reference, where it seems absolutely necessary, to what remains to be done. This limitation should be remembered, lest too favorable an impression be produced.

Another limitation on the scope of this article is that it deals only with the municipal police force of the city of Chicago. The possibility and the desirability of establishing a metropolitan force covering the entire metropolitan area of Chicago and absorbing into it the many small and frequently unprogressive local units cannot here be examined, although the slight development of some cooperative activities, under the leadership of the Chicago force, will be referred to later. For the same reason little or nothing can be said of the plainly desirable goal of taking into the Chicago city force the other police forces operating inside of the city limits, mainly made up of various park police organizations.⁴ Until changes of a far wider and more fundamental nature are made the loss of power and effectiveness from these divided organizations will be inescapable.

At the very center of the problems to be faced was that of the structural organization of the force and of a unified and effective command over it. While these are closely allied problems they can best be considered in succession. First as to the leadership of the department. This is in the hands of the commissioner of police, an officer who has come up from the ranks, and not, as in many cities, a civilian. In the twenty-two years preceding the beginning of the survey there had been no less than eleven commissioners.⁵ Only one had held office for four years, the average of the others being under two years. It is obvious that no business or industrial organization

police force—whether forward or backward. But an adequate dealing with these statistics would be beyond the scope of this article, which is intended to be limited to the structural development of the department itself. Parenthetically it might be said, however, that almost all offenses show a more or less marked decline in numbers since 1931, the most notable improvement being in automobile larcenies (see Chicago Crime Commission report of July 23, 1934). The only offenses to show signal increases in this period were larcenies under \$50 and traffic injuries. The former are almost certainly a depression phenomenon to a large extent. The latter have been assigned to two main causes, the progressive deterioration of motor equipment on our streets (again due to the depression) and the influx of thousands of World's Fair visitors, unacquainted with local traffic regulations. Neither increase, therefore, is necessarily an indication of decreasing police efficiency.

⁴The number of these forces has been much reduced by recent legislation consolidating a large number of separate park units. The single resultant unit however will continue to maintain its own force of nearly a thousand men.

⁵Prior to 1927 this official was known as chief of police but for the present purpose no significance is involved in the slight change of title.

could carry on under a complete change of management every eighteen or twenty months, and neither could the police department. Actually the situation was even worse. The first five or six months of a new commissioner's time would necessarily be spent in learning the nature of his job, a job entirely different from the headship of a single district which, as a captain, had been his previous experience. A half a year is none too long for such a mere training period. In consequence the actual time during which he had a chance to act for himself as head of the department would scarcely exceed a year or so. Then, confronted with the inevitable failure to "clean up" the city in that time, out he would go, and the whole futile performance would start over again. A longer tenure of office was vital to a real control of the police force. The present head, James P. Allman, took office October 1, 1931, and therefore has already considerably exceeded his life expectancy as commissioner, a fact doubly fortunate for the further reason that he is a singularly able public official. Whether, however, this indicates any permanent improvement in the tenure situation is more than doubtful. Only public opinion such as exists in Milwaukee will assure not only getting the right man into office but keeping him there.

But the structural organization of the force was in 1929 such that even a commissioner who stayed in office as long as his efficiency entitled him to, could not genuinely lead it or bring order out of its chaos. His job was an unworkable one. He had no less than nineteen separate units reporting to him daily for orders. Assuming that his office day was eight hours, at least half of it would go to political and non-police matters, leaving him at the very best four hours to give to his department. In these four hours he would supposedly examine the daily reports of these nineteen units, solve their separate problems, and coordinate their activities. If he did not do it, there was no other harmonizing force. In fact it was impossible for the commissioner to handle nineteen positions at a time and, as a result, to a large degree the department consisted of so many almost independent organizations. If they worked in reasonable harmony, it was a matter of good luck, and nothing else. Nor were even these nineteen units constructed internally on logical lines, each one completely filling a single function. Instead they dovetailed in a most confusing fashion. The single city-wide function of traffic control may be cited as an example of the scattering of authority and responsibility. In part this was under the Traffic Bureau. But it was also shared by the Motorcycle Section and by the Vehicle Section,

two wholly independent units, as well as by the local details commanded by the district captains, with the more or less independent School Boys' Safety Patrol as a fifth factor. That any unified handling of traffic problems could possibly result required optimism indeed. With these facts in view it was plain that one of the greatest needs was a reorganization which would divide the department into a much smaller number of units, a number so small that it would be possible for the commissioner, aided by powerful subordinates, to exercise a real unifying control over them, each unit completely to fill a single field.⁶ It was found possible to group the work in eight separate units, each thus filling a single field, and all of them including the entire activity of the force. This scheme has since been put into effect, and in the words of the department "the effect of these changes has been far-reaching and the extent of their value is still being revealed from day to day. Uniformity of practice, improved discipline, economies of man-power through grouping of activities, increased flexibility of available man-power, and a generally smoother functioning of the police department as a whole, constitute some of the more striking results."⁷

Of these eight units the most important, and by far the largest, is the uniformed force, engaged (directly or indirectly) in patrolling the city. This unit is commanded by a single chief to whom six supervising captains report. Each of these latter commands one of the six divisions into which the city is divided, each division containing six or seven police districts (the final unit of division) commanded by a captain. This building up of supervisory authority, while preserving the local responsibility of the captains, has made possible a much greater flexibility in adjusting the man-power to the needs of different localities, and this has also made possible a real control on the efficiency of local units. The chance of overlapping, or of conflicting policies in the previously almost independent districts is almost eliminated. The other seven headquarter units are the detective bureau (with the three divisions of investigation, identification, and criminal correspondence), the bureau of criminal information and statistics, the bureau of department records and property (in charge of financial and all other non-criminal records and

⁶During the progress of the survey the situation was made acutely worse when acting commissioner Alcock still further disorganized the force by providing that forty-nine separate units should report directly and solely to him, with twenty-three others forming a well named "miscellaneous division" under the first deputy commissioner.

⁷Chicago Police Department, Annual Report, 1932, page 8.

of all departmental property), the traffic bureau, the personnel bureau (including the medical and training divisions and the trial boards), the crime prevention division (including juvenile officers and moving picture censors), and the morals division (a city-wide unit for obvious reasons). These few units can in fact receive a real supervision from the commissioner, and at the same time a breakdown anywhere along the line can at once be assigned to the unit which is at fault.

The roomy Police Headquarters Building, only five years old, has given the physical opportunity to bring together related activities which formerly were housed in separate, inadequate and widely scattered buildings. It is unfortunate that the commissioner, who now has such an unprecedented chance genuinely to lead the department, must continue to have his office a mile away in the City Hall. As one authority puts it, "from the political viewpoint this arrangement doubtless appears important, but from the police standpoint it is an absurdity. The commissioner never really occupies the driver's seat. He is forced to operate the police machine by remote control."⁸

So much for the structural organization of the force. This, however, was only the skeleton on which alone effective police work could be built up. The effectiveness with which that work itself was done was, at the very least, equally important. And the starting point of efficient police work must be complete and well kept police records. A police force is as efficient as its records. This is so not only for the obvious reason that solely with effective identification records and other similar records is it possible to identify and discover criminals, but also, perhaps less obviously, because complete records are in a very real sense the most powerful disciplinary instrument that the higher officers in a department have over their subordinates. Only by means of complete and well maintained records can the higher command determine whether the lower ranks are doing their work well and where pressure should be applied to produce better results. The 1929 survey of the department showed a staggering inadequacy in this matter. Of the total number of burglaries and robberies alleged by citizens to have taken place only 44%, or less than half, ever reached the files at headquarters. Fifty-six per cent remained in a condition where they could be "covered up" by local silence. As the result of changes centering about the establishing of a central complaint room (described in the next paragraph), a similar survey

⁸Bruce Smith. *Chicago Police Problems, an Approach to Their Solution*, page 44.

two years later showed that 97% of the burglaries and robberies were then properly recorded.⁹ Thus, to quote the department's own words, the change in methods has meant that "for the first time in the history of the Chicago Police Department an accurate picture of criminal offenses committed over the entire city is available."¹⁰

As was just said, this improvement was largely due to the establishing of a central complaint room at police headquarters, to which all telephone calls for police aid, regardless of their point of origin, are transmitted. This fact alone would insure central knowledge of the overwhelming majority of complaints, as only a small minority are personally reported by citizens at district stations or are first discovered by the police themselves. But even as to these latter the central complaint room has made covering up much more difficult. This is so because one of the routine steps taken with all complaints coming in is the assigning of a serial number to each. As such numbers can only be assigned by this room the discovery of an unnumbered complaint on a station's records at once points to it as an unreported complaint, where previously its character as such would only have been disclosed by the almost impossible task of checking back at headquarters on the mere guess that it might not be found there.

The central complaint room has also filled another useful function as a dispatching room for squad cars by radio broadcasting. Briefly to describe the mechanics of getting police action as quickly as possible, a complaint is received in the first instance by a police "operator,"¹¹ (the present equipment would permit eighteen such operators to function at the same time), who takes down the important facts being reported. If, however, the operator discovers that the complaint calls for immediate action by a police car he will throw a switch which permits the radio broadcaster also to listen to the complaint as it comes in. The latter needs to hear only the nature of the trouble and its place, and can then at once proceed to broadcast it. Thus it is entirely possible that an excited citizen is still stammering details to a patient operator while a squad car is already on its way

⁹It is obvious, of course, that such an increase in the number of crimes reported will appear superficially as an increase in the number of crimes being committed, even where, as indicated in note 3 *supra*, there has been actually a decline in numbers. Many nationally advertised "crime waves" are probably based on nothing more substantial than increased police zeal and activity with a resulting disclosure (and perhaps even improvement) of conditions previously allowed to pass unnoticed.

¹⁰Chicago Police Department, Annual Report, 1931, page 6.

¹¹At present most of these operators are women. They appear not to have been so satisfactory as men, and as vacancies occur it is now planned to fill the places with light duty police officers.

to the scene. In addition to the personnel just described the system also requires certain operators whose duty it is to keep track of what squad cars are on the street and available at any given time. These they indicate to the broadcasters by a system of lights so that a glance will show the latter what number car may be called on. The value of this system is heightened by the fact that over fifty neighboring suburban forces are participating in the Chicago broadcasting system. The efficiency with which the personnel is doing its important work is shown by the fact that in 1933 (the latest period for which figures are available) with no increase in personnel the room handled 16% more calls than in 1932, and that of the calls received over 230,000 required broadcasting.¹²

In other respects also the record system has been greatly improved in the last few years. As of July 1, 1931, the system of classifying offenses was revised so as to bring it into harmony with that of the Division of Identification of the United States Department of Justice and as a consequence it is possible for the first time really to compare local criminal statistics with those from other cities. At the same time a routine exchange of finger prints with that national organization was begun and is now in effect. A less spectacular but important innovation of recent times is the maintenance of spot maps showing the geographical distribution of offenses by kinds and the protection (both as to quantity and type) needed by the various areas.

Another problem of major importance was as to the man-power of the department, both in regard to the necessary size of the force and as concerned the use made of those then on it. First as to the problem of size. The survey emphatically declared that there was urgent need for a much larger force (although there was a decided difference as to the extent of the necessary increase). This was apparent both from an examination of the work to be done as compared to the available man-power to do it, and from comparison with other American cities on a per capita basis. But increased personnel meant increased costs and it hardly needs to be said that no progress in this direction has been, or probably shortly will be, made. On the contrary, the size of the Chicago Police Department has gone down. On January 1, 1930, it numbered 6396, all told, and on

¹²Figures obtained from Chicago Police Department, Annual Report, 1933, page 8. In the Annual Report of 1930, page 58, it was stated that the average length of a squad car's run to the scene of trouble was 1.2 miles, and the average time for a run was 3.1 minutes. It is expected that the Annual Report of 1934 will show a considerable reduction in the average time for a run, but exact figures are not yet available.

July 1, 1934, 6071. In no respect has the increase in efficiency of the Department been better shown than in the efforts to counter-balance this drop by a more economical use of man-power to the end of keeping as many men, or possibly even more men than before, on the street doing patrol duty. Thus the detective bureau, an unwieldy unit of over 800 men in 1929, which was almost becoming a force within the force and was duplicating for itself many tasks already done by the department, without coordination of effort with other parts of the department, was reduced (December 31, 1931) to under 500, without, it is believed, any reduction in working capacity. A rearrangement of the patrol wagon service and a reduction in the number of lock-ups by discontinuing them in certain stations resulted in the direct release for other police duties of 216 men. Lesser economies of various sorts have probably put the total saving in man-power from all sources at somewhere near 600, without any additional cost to the city. Besides this there has been a further saving through the cutting down of special details, a drain of almost unlimited extent and one which presents a ceaseless problem for police administrators. These special details, many of them of a legitimate nature, many less legitimate, but in any event all of them calls on the department to furnish temporarily or more or less permanently men to do special jobs, averaged about 200 men a day in 1929. At present they are materially lower,¹³ but still are a serious problem.¹⁴ As the line between a proper special detail and an improper one is bound to be difficult to draw, and as the desire of humanity to get something for nothing will probably continue, the pressure on a police head will be constant, and no organization scheme or other mechanical aid can be counted on to give any great aid.

By the methods described it was possible, therefore, to meet, to a large extent, the decrease in man-power. It is evident, however,

¹³The Annual Report of 1933 states that there were 92 men on special duty at the close of the year, and that further reductions "are contemplated for the near future." In view of the fact that the detail to the State's Attorney's office (see note 14 *infra*) was then 46 and is now about 70 these hopes will hardly be realized.

¹⁴Thus a constant subject of contention has been the practice of detailing men permanently to the Cook County State's Attorney's office (the number in recent months being about 70, with a captain at their head). By those supporting this large diversion of man power it is argued that the men are in any event engaged in police work, in collecting evidence for prosecutions, following clues, etc. Those opposed argue that there may be and often is a duplication of responsibility and effort, or even active clash of activity, with regular police units working on the same case, and that in any event it is improper for the Chicago police force to have to bear the expense of work done for a county official merely because the city is the preponderating element in that county.

that such savings have a definite limit, and the present Commissioner has pointed this out in his annual report for 1932:¹⁵

"The constant shrinkage in the authorized strength of the police force cannot be offset much longer by the kind of devices and inventions already employed to release personnel for active police duty. There is immediate need for additional personnel (1) to fill out the ranks of the motorcycle division, which has been depleted to a point where many of its machines are out of service for lack of men to ride them; (2) to cover numerous and dangerous street crossings. . . . and (3) to make important additions throughout the city to the foot patrol force, which represents the backbone of the protective, preventive and repressive work of the police department."

Related to the problem of enlarged personnel is that of securing the best possible personnel when adding recruits. Some improvements, viz., reducing the age range of recruits, and very slightly stiffening the examinations, have already been described.¹⁶ But on the whole little real progress has been made or seems to be in sight. The civil service rules still effectively limit appointment to residents of Chicago. Thus they still insist on confining the selection to men with the maximum amount of local connections and loyalties, to the utter exclusion of men who, coming in as strangers, would owe sole and entire loyalty to their police duties, a strange inversion of the English rule which excludes local men from police work in their home city. The parrot-like demand to "make our force like Scotland Yard" goes on, quite in harmony, it seems, with an utter refusal to adopt a single one of the elements that make the English police what they are! While it is obviously too much to expect that such a change as this would be made in a time of depression, with many local unemployed seeking jobs, it is unfortunately almost as unlikely that it will ever be made even if the depression factor is removed.

Another needless hindrance to securing a higher grade of recruits, which has been at least partially overcome, lay in the practice of only occasionally and at long intervals taking in recruits, instead of having a fairly continuous recruitment in small batches. The result of this policy, as it worked out in practice, was to have a long lag between the time when a man was certified by the civil service commission and the time when he was called to join the force. In that long waiting period it is obvious that the likeliest to drop out and secure other jobs would be the better men on the list, while the inefficient, marginal man, who had barely gained a place on the list, could be counted on to be there ready and waiting, when the call

¹⁵Page 9.

¹⁶23 Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology at 711.

came two or three years later. At present, instead of calling in groups of 400 or so, a quarter of that number are called at a time, with a considerable consequent improvement.

The stiffening of the entrance examinations (both physical and mental) in other respects, as recommended by the survey, has not been accomplished. Principally this had to do with more adequate mental examinations, the institution of aptitude tests, and the elimination of extra grade points for athletic attainments (which are highly temporary and may have no connection with general physical fitness) and for a vague something referred to as "practical experience." This latter, it is apparently held, is shown by "the degree to which each applicant has been accustomed to dealing with the public." It is plain, however, that contact with the public may be such as to do nothing toward increasing potential police efficiency, for example the usher in a moving picture theater.

These criticisms of recruitment, however, rest on the shoulders of the civil service commission, rather than of the police department. The matter of training these recruits in their duties, when they have been taken into the force, is, on the other hand, a police matter. And here definite progress has been made. The period spent by police recruits in the training school has been lengthened from four weeks to ten, the classes are smaller, and teaching methods, as well as the content of the courses given, have been improved. There is, however, much room for further improvement. In the words of a prominent authority, the school

"accepts all recruits which come to it as being qualified, and regardless of their individual capacities it turns them all out, right on time, for active police duty. This policy surrenders a real opportunity for using the training period for the further selection of personnel, and for rejecting unsuitable recruits who have merely succeeded in satisfying the modest requirements of the civil service commission."¹⁷

As to the disciplinary and promotional handling of the men after their admission to the force there have been a few slight improvements. Thus there has been an increase in the cooperation of the civil service commission in eliminating unfit personnel and in not granting reinstatements. But there has been no needed extension of the commissioner's authority to dismiss probationary officers. Rather the contrary: the time of schooling having been lengthened by six weeks, the actual time that an officer is on the streets, demonstrating his fitness or unfitness for the work, has been cut down by

¹⁷Bruce Smith, *Chicago Police Problems, an Approach to Their Solution*, page 25.

that same amount. In promotions extra credit is still given for extended service in the present rank, thus increasing a man's chances of promotion each year and correspondingly holding back younger men with greater potentialities. No effort has been made to follow the lead of some other American cities and establish higher training schools for newly appointed sergeants, lieutenants and captains. Apparently it is still felt that the mere fact of promotion demonstrates that a man somehow already has the information and skill needed to handle a very different job from what he has had before. Finally, there has been some progress in eliminating superannuated personnel, the average police age having been brought down somewhat, although it is perhaps still higher than in most American cities.

There has been some change in the type of motorized patrol, as well as in the control over cars on the street. The latter was formerly largely in the detective bureau, this being one of the reasons for the swollen size of that bureau, as previously mentioned. In 1931 most of these cars were assigned to district command, the detective bureau now having only ten cars of four men each. The districts now have twenty cars of three men in citizen's dress, and about one hundred cars of two men. These are distributed according to need, some districts having as many as six cars. Motorcycle police, being in a headquarters unit, now operate on straight-away beats, along named streets, instead of conforming to district lines, which had no relation to the type of work which they were called on to perform.

There has been a complete revision of the department rules and regulations. Those previously in use were ten years old and the existing rule book was completely out of date and inadequate. The present book not only brings the rules to date, but, being looseleaf, can be kept up to date. The accurate and reliable knowledge, which this gives to an officer, as to the nature and extent of his authority and duty adds greatly to his efficiency in carrying on his work.

Finally mention should be made of the surprising success of the department in reducing expenditures. From 1930 to 1932 these were reduced almost \$4,000,000, or about 23%. In 1933 there was a rise of about \$600,000 but this was due to a resumption of recruiting, expenditures for items other than salaries actually showing a still further decrease. For the last two years the department's estimates of its own needs have been below those of the city comptroller—perhaps an unprecedented state of affairs. This achievement has been possible only because the structural reorganization already described brought with it as a valuable by-product the chance for real, intel-

ligent budget making by the heads of the various units, a practice impossible when no unit could tell how much of a given task would fall to it to perform. These separate estimates are combined and minutely gone over in the commissioner's office for further suggestions of economy. A few specific illustrations of economies effected may be in point. The consolidation of call boxes,¹⁸ besides making patrol work more effective¹⁹ cost \$85,000, and resulted in the release for other duties of men whose annual salary cost was \$150,000. Through a more favorable contract for the purchase of gasoline and through more rigid regulation of free street car tickets another \$100,000 were saved. The department now does its own printing, and this fact, together with a standardized system for ordering printed supplies whereby emergency rush orders are reduced to a minimum, has cut printing costs 33%. Further examples might be given. Allied to this program of saving has been a much more business-like administration of the several million dollars worth of tangible property belonging to the department. The control over supplies is now unified, and the civilian, rather than police, work of administering their care and disposition is under a single head. A matter concerning property, where for financial reasons it has not been possible to make needed progress, is the replacing of superannuated district station houses. A few of the stations are modern and adequate. A few others, mainly the less important ones, are merely rented quarters in a larger building otherwise made up of stores. Most are huge structures dating back to pre-telephone days when it was necessary to have dormitory space large enough to house the entire district staff in times of emergency. Some of this group are perilously near the point of being condemned as unsafe, and several are seriously inadequate in one important respect or other. Probably no early improvement can be hoped for, and it stands as a further credit to the police force that their morale has suffered so little from having to do much of their work in surroundings most discouraging to efficiency and modernization.

Definitely the Chicago Police Department has shown most encouraging progress in the last few years. Every day that passes these gains are being consolidated and made more nearly permanent. There is still much to be done, and unfortunately in no department of the municipal government is it more possible that improvements once made may later be lost again. If these qualifications are kept in mind, Chicago has much reason for satisfaction and optimism.

¹⁸This was described in 23 *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* at 710.

¹⁹Chicago Police Department, Annual Report, 1932, page 7.