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DEPLOYMENT OF POLICE PERSONNEL DURING EMERGENCY DISASTER

B. R. Caldwell

(The author of the article, Deputy Chief B. R. Caldwell, Director of the Traffic Bureau, Los Angeles Police Department, entered that organization in September of 1925 and was promoted through the ranks of Sergeant, Lieutenant, Captain and Inspector to his present position in November, 1940. He is a graduate of the Northwestern University Traffic Institute and since the outbreak of the war has directed much of his time to the problems of war traffic control. As he has pointed out in his article, its purpose is to set forth how and in what manner the Los Angeles Police Department developed a plan for the deployment of traffic personnel in the event of emergency or disaster.—
EDITOR.)

It is axiomatic that a police department is charged *at all times* with the duty of preserving life and property. Such a responsibility not only requires the proper and effective handling of routine problems, but, in particular, it requires the planning and adoption of forceful techniques of enforcement in the event that disaster or emergency arises. This is true in times of peace. It is vital in times of war. Fire, storm and flood, industrial hazards, subversive activities . . . these count among the many catastrophies and disasters which may overtake a city. In anticipation of them, it is the alert police department which has already formulated plans in advance whereby all its available resources can be instantly utilized for the general welfare of its people.

When disaster arises, one of the most difficult and yet important tasks of the police is to keep the channels of transportation and communication open. If these are clogged, the entire program for combating the disaster is imperiled. It is the purpose of this article to set forth in broad details how one of our largest police departments—that of Los Angeles, California—has developed a plan of deployment of traffic personnel during disaster emergency. Since emergency traffic control during peacetime disasters (such as floods or earthquakes) and that necessitated during wartime differ principally in the size of the area affected, it is deemed expedient at this time to consider the problem in its larger wartime phases. A major disaster is defined by the Los Angeles Police Department, for practical purposes, as any calamity or interruption of normal routine which requires that its personnel remain on duty for periods of twelve hours on each watch or tour of duty.

It must be realized that any plans created to meet disaster conditions will necessarily be general in their nature. It is desirable to plan for all contingencies; however, specific plans will have to be prepared to meet problems as they arise.

Traffic control problems arising from major emergency disasters present difficulties which may require the employment of personnel not primarily engaged in traffic work. This is almost certain to be the case during war emergencies, when the potential

magnitude of the disaster area is greater. For this reason it is desirable to prepare a manual of training for both regular and auxiliary members of the force, so that all may be familiar with the principles and procedures adopted. Exercises and drills should be encouraged, under simulated conditions, where it is practical.

Regular officers assigned to extraordinary traffic control should include those most experienced in traffic control work. They should be assigned to duties demanding responsibility and judgment. Auxiliary policemen may be detailed to duties requiring less specialized knowledge and involving less responsibility. Economy in the use of regular police officers may be effected by assigning one or more auxiliaries with a regular officer when conditions require the coordinated efforts of two or three men. Important qualifications necessary in those selected for special traffic work include good physical condition, respect-commanding appearance, sound judgment and quick reaction.

Plans have been made in Los Angeles to cope with civil revolt or similar disturbances which may arise in the future. These plans, which call for close cooperation between the civil police and other official, organized groups, are necessarily confidential. However, officers are being trained in the special tactics which will be utilized in carrying out the proposed operations.

There has been established in the Los Angeles Police Department a War Traffic Control Bureau, charged with the responsibility of controlling street traffic within the city during any disturbance of ordinary community routine. The post of Chief Officer of the Bureau is occupied by the Director of Traffic Operations of the Los Angeles Police Department. The positions of Assistant Directors are filled by the Commander of the Accident Prevention Division and the Commander of the Traffic Enforcement Division. The War Traffic Control Bureau consists of several units, including Planning, Mobile, Engineering and the thirteen divisional Traffic Control Units.

The Planning Unit consists of the equipment and personnel of the Analytical branch of the Accident Prevention Division, ordinarily charged with the analysis and processing of accident reports. Its Supervisor has the responsibility of developing detailed plans devised by the Director of War Traffic Control, the maintenance of current maps depicting the various routes established for general evacuation and for convoy movements. The Planning Unit offices serve as a central control for the processing of information relayed to it by traffic observers stationed in each police division.

The Mobile Unit is commanded by the heads of the Accident Prevention and Traffic Enforcement Divisions. In the event of a major disaster occurrence, decentralization of manpower becomes extremely important. To this end, motorcycle officers of the

Enforcement Division are instructed to report automatically to one of five predetermined posts. In determining the number of motorcycle officers to report to each district, cognizance was taken of the number of emergency route posts in each district, as well as of the anticipated requests for escort services to convoy troops originating in or near each district. This system of reporting is effective at all times of the day or night, without regard to whether the officers concerned occupy an on- or off-duty status. So that all motorcycle patrol beats will coincide as closely as possible with the location where an officer is to report, superior officers are instructed to take this fact into consideration when preparing their monthly beat assignments.

During an emergency, telephonic communication is maintained at all times between the post commanders of the five districts and the watch commander of the Traffic Enforcement Division. A live record of the number of men available for assignment in each district is kept by the Division watch commander, in addition to a record of the actual assignments. Post Commanders detail motorcycle officers to foot traffic duty at major intersections within their districts until traffic returns to normal flow.

The army is aware that movements of military personnel and equipment can be expedited by the assistance of Civil motorcycle police. All requests for escort or guide services to military convoys are referred to the office of Provost Marshal, for consideration of their merit. If the request meets with his approval, full details are forwarded by him to the Traffic Enforcement Division, whereupon the necessary motorcycle officers are detailed to the convoy by the Commander. In the event that weather conditions prohibit the use of motorcycles, necessary substitute assignments are provided from the personnel and equipment of the Accident Prevention Division.

The Mobile Unit includes the services of the accident investigation crews assigned to various patrol areas throughout Los Angeles. Upon receipt of a major disaster alert, the two crews assigned closest to the home division are instructed to return to it for the purpose of standing by. All other units remain at predetermined posts, (24-hour business locations) and keep in communication with the watch commander, reporting by telephone for possible assignments each fifteen minutes. Plans embracing the deployment of such personnel contemplate the assignment of traffic accident investigation cars to patrol emergency routes, and provide for a reserve of men and equipment at strategic locations in order that they may be dispatched immediately to any point where a need for their services may arise.

Shortly after the entry of this country into the war, and the establishment of the west coast as a possible theater of operations, it was agreed that the facilities of the Planning Unit might be

utilized for the purpose of devising civilian evacuation routes. It was found necessary to separate the inter- or intra-community dispersal problem from the problem of mass evacuation. It is feasible to develop and predetermine certain fixed routes to be used in the event that a mass evacuation of a disaster area becomes necessary. To this end, certain routes were selected and marked upon maps in the Planning Unit. In selecting these routes, full consideration was given to military highways in order that no conflict occur between evacuation and military traffic. However, in the intra- or inter-community dispersal problem, the establishment of fixed official routes is out of the question because of our inability to predetermine the area to be affected.

In that a disaster may occur anywhere within the county and may necessitate the evacuation of the persons affected by it, we must think in terms of devising the route to be used after the evacuation area and the reception area have been determined. In Los Angeles, such plans are formulated in this manner. The chief dispersal officer for Los Angeles County informs the Planning Unit that an evacuation movement will occur, giving the details as to the place of origin, the destination, the number of persons and vehicles involved, and so forth. After selecting a route, the planning officer informs the law enforcement agency of each locality affected and obtains their approval to traverse that portion of the route within their control. This contact is desirable in order to be certain that the highway selected is traversible, and that the convoy will not interfere with other traffic movement. When a tentative route has been chosen, the planning officer develops a timetable for the movement of the convoy and arranges for proper policing of the convoy through other jurisdictions. The method of detailing motorcycle officers for escort duty is the same as for troop movements; clearance from the Provost Marshal's office being required before the convoy is permitted to move.

The Street Traffic Engineer as Director of the Engineering Unit has the responsibility of the maintenance of traffic control devices and markers used in disaster areas and along emergency routes. He also acts as procurement officer for all barricades and mobile or stationary signs which may be required to effect proper traffic control as an aid to the assigned officers. The Engineering Director may also be called upon to place physical barricades which may be needed to block off certain portions of streets and highways rendered dangerous by disaster conditions.

The Divisional Traffic Control Units complete the decentralization plans in effect during a major catastrophe. Control officers in the thirteen divisional police stations are charged with the execution of that portion of the War Traffic Control Plan which affects the area under their command. It is their duty to select, train and

assign both regular and auxiliary officers required to execute adequate traffic control.

In the case of flood, major conflagration, earthquake or other calamity which is confined to the area of one police division, field command is assumed by the Division Commander. He may conduct operations as his discretion dictates, after establishing liaison with the Police Department's Director of Field Operations. The Field Commander is responsible for the organization of his personnel into foot or motorized patrols as required by the situation. Other services may be required, necessitating the organization of assigned personnel into watches with regard to police patrols, sentry duty, traffic control within the disaster zone, searching parties, location of additional hazards and emergency action to prevent the spread of the consequences of the disaster. It may often become necessary to assign officers from adjacent divisions to the outer boundaries of the disaster zone to expedite traffic flow along those streets which have the capacity to care for the volume of traffic normally found within that area plus the traffic which is incidental to the emergency.

It has been stated that the purpose of the War Traffic Control Plan is to provide specific routes for the exclusive use of emergency vehicles during disturbances. Since it is imperative that such routes be instantly manned and adequately policed during emergencies, it has been found necessary to assign military policemen to man the fixed posts. Wherever possible, auxiliaries have been assigned to the posts nearest their homes, so that they may walk to their assignments in a short space of time. Because it may become necessary to man the fixed posts at any time during the day or night, auxiliary policemen have been selected on the basis of three eight hour watches for each post. The suggestion is offered that these shifts be established as follows:

Day Watch—8 A. M. to 4 P. M.

Night Watch—4 P. M. to 12 Midnight

Morning Watch—12 Midnight to 8 A. M.

It must be understood that auxiliary policemen selected shall be available during the hours assigned to them and shall respond instantly upon notification. As the selection of auxiliaries for this purpose constitutes specialization within the auxiliary police force, those persons should be selected who possess the aptitudes normally required in a traffic officer.

The system of designating posts was designed for simplicity, and yet there are no duplications of route post numbers within the County of Los Angeles. The position to be assumed by a particular policeman at a particular post is designated by the letters "N", "S", "E" or "W", indicating the north, south, east or west side of the post. For example: If the intersection of First

Street and Main Street were designated as Post 150, an officer receiving the assignment to Post 150-W would work on the west side of the intersection of First and Main Streets. Post numbers are assigned only to points on the route itself. In some cases it may be desirable to protect the intersections and block on either side of the route. This type of assignment is indicated by merely repeating the directional letter, such as "150-WW". This will indicate that the position to be assumed would be the first intersection one block west of the west side of Post 150. Through this system their position is linked to the post to which it is related.

There are three distinct methods of stationing personnel in relation to fixed posts in order to insure protection of emergency routes.

1. The ideal method calls for the stationing of policemen one block on either side of the emergency route at every point where streets intersect the emergency route. Under this method it is also necessary that policemen be assigned at each intersection and at other vital points on the route itself. This system insures street clearance on either side of the route, thus permitting the use of such streets for emergency detours, and provides for the ingress and egress of fire apparatus and other emergency equipment.

2. In the event sufficient personnel is not available to effect method number 1, pedestal detour signs should be made available. When the necessity arises, the officer assigned to a position at an emergency route intersection should place the detour sign at the first intersection immediately to the rear of his position. The sign should be placed in the center of the roadway on the side of the intersection nearest the emergency route. After placing the sign the officer may take his position on the emergency route itself.

3. Method number three contemplates the placing of policemen on the emergency route only. This is the least desirable because of the danger occasioned by the accumulation of vehicles on streets intersecting the route, and adds considerably to the task of the officer assigned. This method should be used only when sufficient personnel and signs are not available.

In selecting the fixed posts along an emergency route, consideration should be given to the relative importance of each particular post. When plans are made to embrace several jurisdictions, it is desirable to set forth the relative importance of each post in each jurisdiction by separate numerical designation. Then the commander in each area can determine where to place his available personnel in the event he cannot assign an officer to man every post. The plan for each jurisdiction should designate those posts where a regular police officer should be assigned, and selection should be made on the basis of those points where the greatest conflict is anticipated, or where the street layout is of a complex nature.