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RURAL POLICE PATROL IN ENGLAND AND WALES

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Beat patrol in the more heavily populated urban areas, discussed in the preceding article,¹ is but one aspect of the patrol picture in England and Wales. The other is the method of patrol afforded the rural, or detached beats. Although many of the same types of problems are encountered on the detached beat, rural beat patrol presents a different prospective than found in urban procedure. The objects in view are similar, but the area and organization present basic differences. A rural beat is generally thought of in terms of wide expanses of countrysides, but this is often not the whole case. It probably would be more graphically illustrated as a collection of villages or scattered hamlets covered by one constable. The typical area might contain eight or so such villages or hamlets each with a population of about 200 persons. The residence of the beat constable would best be located in the most important village of the eight. The house would be fitted with an exchange telephone system and probably would not have any private line system. The area is generally primarily agricultural but also contains other industry of a less dominating nature.

A constable seeking duty in a rural beat area generally does so by application to his Chief Constable. Usually, possession of an automobile or motorcycle and willingness to use it on police business is a prime requisite. This auto requisite, of course, only pertains if the Chief Constable deems it necessary that a car be used. Where an officer uses his own auto or pedal cycle for police duty, the Police Authority grant him some type of remuneration. Generally, no radio system is used on a privately owned car or cycle, communications being maintained by telephone "rings" to the section station.

Years ago the hours when duty was to be performed were specifically laid down, but this is no longer the case. Today the constable arranges his own times in conjunction with his sergeant. This procedure is obviously more satisfactory as the beat man is "on the spot" and is aware of the problems and activities of the locality and thus plans his operations accordingly. Due to this, it is readily noted, then, that personal initiative is the essence of a good detached beat constable.

Responsibility for police coverage to the detached beat is entirely that of the assigned constable. He is the only man assigned to that specific area and has jurisdiction for all 24 hours. He is available for call at any hour of day or night. However, regardless of the 24 hour responsibility, he must perform at least eight hours of duty

¹ See the writer's "Urban Police Patrol in England and in Wales," this Journal, Volume 45, No. 3, pp. 349-358 (September-October, 1954).

unless otherwise instructed or excused by his superior officer. The beat constable is expected to insure, at some time, that all 24 hours are covered by active patrol. This is done by staggering and juggling the eight hour patrol periods to encompass varying times of the day and night. Sometimes the tour can be arranged as a straight eight hours or can be worked as two periods of four hours each. Often the tour is split into three sections of two or three hours each, totaling at least eight hours. A variety of combinations might be used.

Rural constables are often times called upon to meet demands not encountered by their urban counterparts. One major type of demand that exemplifies this point is the large number of rural agricultural and livestock matters that the country constable must meet. The officer should possess a sufficient degree of knowledge as is necessary to aid animal and crop owners with any incidents or diseases which might arise. In this respect it is imperative that he maintain active cooperation with the various governmental, agricultural, and veterinary inspectors. Should a serious outbreak of any certain disease occur, it may mean long arduous hours on duty for the rural constable, as he must assist to confine the outbreak and to make inquiries as to any possible contacts with it.

Prior to the officer's leaving home to go on duty, he will book on duty and telephone the sergeant at the section station when any particular duty or assignment would be passed on. Any crime publications or similar material received would be perused prior to leaving the house. A call to the neighboring rural constables to compare current cases might be made. This is a very important feature, and many cases have been closed in this manner of maintaining liaison with the adjoining beat constables. Often adjoining constables will call at one another's homes during off duty hours, and as well as much police information being passed about, it provides a pleasant social outlet as well.

On leaving the house, the officer can either patrol his "home" village on foot or proceed to one of the other villages or farms by car or cycle. Regardless of where he went, he would seek to obtain all the current news of the moment. It is a feature of rural England that everyone knows what everyone else is doing, and a rural constable, to be in a position to do a good job, should take full advantage of this in his inquiries. Contacts are made with people in all walks of life to get information regarding each type. This contact work is vital to the success of the constable, and it must be maintained, not only while he is on duty, but while off duty also.

This type of patrol and observation would be carried from village to village to get a good picture of what is going on. At the appointed hour, the "conference point" would be made, and the meeting with the sergeant held. Also at intervals, a call home to the officer's wife or to a given place where messages might be kept, is made. Any case assignments or other information would be picked up. Wherever possible, rural constables often leave information with their wives, as to where they are headed so that if any urgent inquiry arises, they can be contacted with a minimum of delay.

Any night patrol undertaken would center around trying doors and generally concentrating on matters centering around crime. In country areas this duty is an exceptionally lonely period as far as the constable is concerned, to a greater degree than the urban officer. The country officer has great stretches of open country to cover in

order to examine property. Poachers and other game thieves still cause a considerable amount of anxiety to the country inhabitants and the rural officer. He can spend many arduous hours on duty, especially around Christmas time when poultry thieving is prevalent.

In England and Wales, it seems to be the case that the criminal uses his own auto when transportation is needed instead of going out and stealing a convenient automobile. As a result, many forces circulate lists of known criminals, and the current description of their autos. This list should always be in the possession of the rural officer as he is in an excellent position to see an unfamiliar face and car and check any suspicious ones against his list. Lists should also be kept current.

Assistance is quickly obtained from Section Headquarters even though the rural constable is detached from his section. Should any serious incident occur, a telephone message will bring all assistance he might require. Specialized branches are in existence, and he can call on any branch in order that the occurrence be successfully concluded.

Also available in most country areas is a form of volunteer police, the Special Constabulary, an organization of men enrolled by the local police and able to render miscellaneous assistance. While these men do not have any specialized knowledge, they are a very useful body and render untold assistance, particularly at public functions, processions, country gatherings, and the like.

It is a truism that the rural policeman "rules supreme" over his area. He does so not by ruthlessness but by clever and judicious use of his intelligence, initiative, and powers. He should be one of the most respected persons in the area, and this should be borne out by the fact that his advice and counsel are sought every day from persons in all walks of life. He, and his wife if he is married, must be socially adept and able and capable of mixing in the social events particular to a rural area. Thus, it is seen that there are major differences and demands between the rural and urban officers even though basically their jobs culminate in a similar end.