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THE QUALIFIED POLICEMAN—THE BACKBONE OF SOCIETY

JOHN J. MIRICH

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—EDITOR.

Some people, especially law enforcement officers, maintain that police experience is far more important than any academic training in the same area. Experience is extremely important in any field, but how many of our citizens have had their individual rights tread upon by policemen who do not understand these rights themselves, even after many years of police experience? Experience alone cannot teach the officer all the city, county, state, and federal laws he is required to enforce. Experience cannot teach him entirely those fundamentals of human behavior with which he must be very familiar when handling the public.

Many of these same theorists advocate stronger laws with more "teeth" to deter law violators. They maintain that many of our local, state, and federal laws are so worded that they are a detriment to good enforcement. This may be true. But it is also quite evident that the average city, county, and state police officer in the nation is not qualified to handle the added authority he would receive from stricter laws. We would endanger our whole social order if we tighten the laws before we demand higher police qualifications.

We are experiencing a frightening rise of crime and delinquency nationally, especially in the teenage group. Various cities believe that the remedy lies in a greater police force. If we continue to employ officers who are not qualified, and it goes on every day, we can triple our law enforcement departments without decreasing crime appreciably. Is this wise economy? Would not this money be spent more wisely on higher wages to better trained personnel who could do a better job?

Why do organized gangsters fear Treasury, Internal Revenue, and F.B.I. agents? One of the basic reasons seems to be that these highly trained professional officers have developed the reputation of always getting their man. The mobs and professional hoodlums are more inclined to violate

local and state laws rather than federal laws because they have greater respect for the apprehension and conviction abilities of federal officers. Witness the gang slayings weekly in our large cities. Our citizens wonder "if crime does not pay" when they see the large number of unsolved underworld murders. Of sixty gangland slayings in Los Angeles and vicinity in the last several years, only *one* has been solved.¹ Why? Why is the professional criminal so immune to arrest? Could it be true that he is better trained in crime than is the average policeman in crime detection? It is granted that hoodlums can obtain some of the best defense attorneys available and use all possible loop-holes in the laws to escape punishment, but a very small percentage of them are forced to do so. Most of them are never apprehended.

Political influence in police recruitment in some sections of the nation is as prominent today as it was in the earlier era of this nation and its theory of "to the victor belongs the spoils." It is tragic that politicians can place their untrained friends, family members, and constituents into police positions. They will continue to do so until law enforcement sets forth academic and other requirements that will eliminate these unqualified applicants.

THE QUALIFIED POLICEMAN

This writer has previously presented his proposal for certification of local law enforcement and his suggestion for the minimum academic requirements necessary in various police positions in this Journal.²

Whenever certification is discussed, this question arises: *from where shall we derive the funds to pay*

¹ Quoted from a broadcast of radio station KMTV-CBS, Los Angeles, California, December 2, 1958.

² JOHN J. MIRICH, Certification of Local Law Enforcement—A Must, this Journal, Vol. 49, No. 1, pages 92-95, May-June 1958.

adequate salaries which will be attractive to desirable applicants for police positions? This has been one of the most perplexing problems facing social scientists who are concerned with the elevation of police standards.

This writer's answer would be: *we cannot afford not to find ways and means of obtaining funds* because: (1) Policemen are delegated the responsibility of protecting the rights and privileges of citizens in a democracy; (2) They must deter professional criminals who, in many cases, are better trained in crime than the average policeman is trained in crime detection; (3) They must deter the potential violator of the law; (4) They are the same guardians of the community, as the soldier is of the nation.

It should not be taken for granted that academic training alone is the only criterion of a good policeman. It is but one of several important attributes of a person well qualified to enforce the law. Some of the more important characteristics of a qualified policeman would be:

1. Academic training
2. Moral character
3. Mental and emotional make-up
4. Physical condition

Academic Training. This qualification has been discussed in an earlier article.³

Moral Character. The well accepted policeman of any community must have a reputation, past and present, that is above reproach. The old assumption still held by many, that it takes a crook to catch a crook is a fallacy. The person who aspires to be a law officer is defeating his purpose if he is not one of those to whom community can point with pride. The morals of his family, friends, and associates are considered to be a direct reflection of his own. Can an officer with political or social debts be trusted as a guardian of our individual rights?

When an individual chooses to become an officer of the law he automatically relinquishes many social privileges enjoyed by other citizens. He cannot frequent many businesses (bars, poker parlors, etc.) which may interpret his presence in their establishment as indicative that they enjoy special privileges. His domestic problems cannot be aired throughout the community, and his family is equally responsible not to repeat community intimacies which the officer usually discovers in the course of his work.

³ Ibid.

We should not allow individuals to enforce the law who cannot be worthy of the trust that we have placed in the policeman's badge.

Emotional and Mental Make-up. These are probably the most important and least understood attributes of a good law officer. We are in dire need of constructive valid tests of emotional stability for police officers. Persons engaged in test-making will find that the area of law enforcement needs instruments (other than the personal interview) that will assist in determining for which of the following general reasons the applicant seeks police work:

- a. *A personality crutch:* Due to his inability to compete socially, academically, or physically with the social order, he desires the power and prestige of law enforcement.
- b. *Steadiness of the employment:* He knows that regardless of the season of the year, or economic condition of the nation, he will be employed. His interest in police work is secondary.
- c. *Interested applicant:* He has a deep respect for law and order and an intense interest in human behavior.

How can we tell, at the present, for which of the above general reasons the applicant is interested in law enforcement? We do not have an acceptable criterion as to whom is the successful well adjusted police officer with which to correlate any paper and pencil test of emotional maturity. Until such time as valid tests of emotional stability are constructed, we must rely upon the personal interview alone in determining the emotional character of the applicant.

The officer must have the ability to react intelligently regardless of the situation in which he finds himself. He should have the ability to grow mentally and emotionally. Above all, he should not be a policeman for self enhancement.

Physical Condition. Huge physical size is one of the most over-emphasized attributes of a qualified policeman. Too many communities choose policemen only for their physical size or strength. Contrary to popular opinion, ex-boxers and -wrestlers are not the best officers if they are chosen on the basis of physical prowess alone. We have ample evidence that is indicative of the fact that a very small percentage of the average police officer's time is spent subduing criminals.

Since the conception of this nation, the typical

policeman has been presented as a large, overly fat individual, generally named Mahoney. He may have known very little about the laws he enforced, but his physical size was quite impressive. We must do away with the fallacy that the policeman be a physical Samson to be effective. Crime and delinquency will continue to outdistance law enforcement if we insist on choosing officers on the basis of physical strength instead of the various other attributes of a qualified law enforcement officer.

The officer should have sound physical health. A minimum height and weight requirement may be desirable in some areas, but to require academic

standards of lawyers and only physical ability from law officers is very inconsistent.

Local law enforcement can raise the *academic* requirements to four, five, or six years in the future, but the *moral, mental, emotional, and physical standards* should be so high that we need never request they be raised. The qualified policeman will (1) reduce crime and delinquency, (2) deter potential law violators, and (3) demand, and receive respect as a professional person.

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