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POLICE SCIENCE

AUGUST VOLLMER*

O. W. Wilson

After planning this sketch about the career of August Vollmer, the editorial board was pleased to have O. W. Wilson accept its invitation to prepare this paper. Dean Wilson's own career in the police field started under August Vollmer on the Berkeley Police Department. He subsequently held appointment as Chief of Police at Wichita, Kansas, and in 1939 joined the faculty of the University of California as Professor of Police Administration. In 1950 upon the creation of the School of Criminology, he was appointed its dean. Dean Wilson is the author of three books: *Police Records* (1942), *Police Administration* (1950), and *Police Planning* (1952).
—EDITOR.

August Vollmer, police administrator and consultant, student, educator, author, and criminologist, will be recorded in American police history as the man who contributed most to police professionalization by promoting the application of scientific principles to police service. A review of his professional accomplishments and his personal contributions of friendship, inspiration, and counsel to individuals, and of guidance and stimulation to important civic causes, reveals the stature and versatility of the man. His ability to succeed in whatever he undertakes has been demonstrated in business, war, politics, and education.

August Vollmer may be considered a truly complete man. By his works of a lifetime he has shown that he possesses the qualities which he listed, many years ago, as desirable for a policeman: The wisdom of Solomon, the courage of David, the strength of Sampson, the patience of Job, the leadership of Moses, the kindness of the Good Samaritan, the faith of Mary, the diplomacy of Lincoln, and the tolerance of Confucius.

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

August Vollmer's German-born parents, John and Philippine Vollmer, were brought as children by their parents to New Orleans. His parents were married in that city; August was born March 7th, 1876, and a brother in 1878. The father died in 1884 leaving a prospering grocery business to be operated by the mother for two years, when ill health forced her to sell the enterprise and take her sons on an extended

*The material for this article was obtained from association with August Vollmer and from "The Story of August Vollmer" by Robert Shaw, published in serial form in the *Post Enquirer*, Oakland, 1938.

tour of Europe. On her return, still seeking health, she went to California, found the country and its climate and people to her liking, and returned to New Orleans to bring her family to San Francisco in 1888.

Shortly before this time, David Hennessy, Chief of Police of New Orleans, had been shot to death by the Mafia after he had succeeded in bringing some of their members to justice. By strange coincidence, the widowed Mrs. Hennessy traveled to San Francisco on the train that carried Mrs. Vollmer and her children. It is interesting to conjecture the extent to which knowledge of the Hennessy tragedy may have influenced the future law-enforcement activities of August, who was then twelve.

Mrs. Vollmer moved her family from San Francisco to a home she bought in North Berkeley in 1890, and where she resided until her death in 1938. Berkeley has remained the home of August Vollmer and, by virtue of his accomplishments and contributions during the intervening sixty years, he has come to be known as its first citizen.

August had gone to the New Orleans Academy; his move to California marked the end of his formal education—although all who know him recognize that he is a highly educated man. His inquiring mind and insatiable curiosity have driven him to devour mountains of books and scientific journals in a surprisingly wide field of interest. He probably attended more university lectures than many undergraduates who have obtained degrees.

August Vollmer has happy memories of his youth in Berkeley. His spare hours were spent with congenial companions hunting rabbits in the Berkeley hills, fishing and duck-shooting on the bay, swimming for a mile or two, and hiking in the hills. His sporting instinct prompted the purchase of an old boat, *The Ruby*, on which he and his companions piled so much sail one blustery day that the mast was wrenched from its moorings, the boat sank forthwith in the middle of the bay, and all hands had to swim ashore. During this same period the music in his heart prompted him to play the guitar and with friends to organize an orchestra for their own enjoyment. Four of this same group now, nearly sixty years later, regularly meet at the home of one or another for dinner and an evening of music.

During his early youth, Vollmer was employed for three years by a business firm in San Francisco, and although his advancement was rapid he was impatient to own an independent business. With a partner he established a fuel and feed store in North Berkeley which quickly expanded into a flourishing enterprise.

WAR SERVICE

On the outbreak of the Spanish American War, Vollmer liquidated his business and enlisted "for the duration". He arrived in Manila Bay in July, 1898, in time to participate in the successful battle for the city of Manila in early August. This was his first important battle; it was followed by many skirmishes with Aguinaldo's insurgent forces. He was one of ninety volunteers selected on the basis of courage and physical fitness to man the gunboat Laguna de Bay which had been improvised by nailing sheets of steel to the wooden sides of an old shallow-draft river boat and installing armored three-inch gun turrets on the upper deck. Its mission was to keep the rivers, which were the main arterial highways of the island, open to travel, to convoy troops, to capture river towns held by Aguinaldo's forces, to shell insurgent nests, and to make the operation of the rebels as unpleasant and difficult as possible. For weeks the Laguna de Bay fought an engagement nearly every day, and on busy days several. Men died, to be replaced by other volunteers, and the fight went on. Vollmer survived with no injury except for slightly impaired hearing—his eardrums had been permanently damaged from the constant roar of the three-inch guns in their improvised turrets.

When the river fighting slackened, Vollmer volunteered to undertake a more dangerous mission—to penetrate to the rear of territory held by the Aguinaldo forces in order to reach a tribe, the Macabebes, believed to be friendly, and to learn their equipment needs, strength, and temper. With a friend from the Laguna de Bay, Vollmer manned a catamaran with a native crew believed to be trustworthy. The small raft was loaded with nipa-plant thatching beneath which he and his comrade were hidden. Once in enemy territory, a bullet sang over the heads of the crew, and the craft was ordered to shore where a Captain from Aguinaldo's forces poked in the pile of nipa grass with his rifle but failed to discover the hidden soldiers. Since discovery would have meant certain death, perhaps following lengthy torture, this was the most harrowing moment of Vollmer's war experience, although not the most dangerous one. The boat crew proved trustworthy and courageous; they calmly persuaded the Captain that they were engaged in peaceful trade, and they were permitted to proceed. Vollmer visited the friendly tribe, obtained the needed information, and, a few days after his return to headquarters, he accompanied an expeditionary force through the enemy territory with military supplies to enable the Macabebes to attack Aguinaldo's forces from the rear.

Vollmer left the Philippines on August 17, 1899. His active and adventurous army experience seems to have lessened his interest in a business life behind a desk; he obtained appointment as a letter carrier "to establish contacts that would prove helpful in a future business career", he told himself. It was during his postal service that his friendly interest in people attracted to him a throng of friends; whoever met this earnest, pleasant young man was impressed by his personality, character, and resolution. But he never returned to business; his friends had quite different plans for the recently returned war hero who had demonstrated such courage and ingenuity in the face of the enemy.

TOWN MARSHAL AND POLICE CHIEF

Berkeley, experiencing a rapid growth, had been invaded by a few prostitutes and some Chinese gamblers who were also providing facilities for opium smoking. The leading citizens felt that these conditions should not be tolerated in this small university town; they demanded a cleanup.

At the instigation of his friends, who insisted that only he had the qualifications to deal with the vice situation, Vollmer filed for the position of Marshal over the protest of his family who felt that service as a policeman would bring social disgrace. He was elected on April 10, 1905, and was thus launched on a life-time career of law enforcement, although at the time he intended to serve only one term.

During Vollmer's four-year term of office the city adopted a new Charter and a form of government that provided for a Police Chief to be appointed by the City Council. On August 13, 1909, he was appointed Berkeley's first police chief, a position that he filled with distinction until his retirement on July 1, 1932.

Vollmer succeeded in ridding his city of all forms of commercialized vice in spite of a defeatist attitude on the part of his men and the efforts of the vice overlords of the East Bay to bribe him through a corrupt councilman.

Vollmer has always stoutly maintained that there is no such thing as luck in policework. From the start he demonstrated the truth of his maxim. Before he had served six months as Marshal, his department succeeded in bringing to justice two internationally notorious criminals and their accomplices, and thus focused throughout the nation the attention of the press and the police on this small-town Western police

force. The Berkeley Police remained a center of attention during the entire career of August Vollmer, the result of his unique ideas, unusual methods, and brilliant accomplishments.

The first of the two international criminals who made the mistake of coming to Berkeley was "Kid" McMunn, alias Matthew Kennedy. He was a bank burglar, post office robber, safecracker, confidence man, and murderer wanted by the police of a hundred cities in this country, Canada, Mexico, and Australia. He arrived in Berkeley with three accomplices intent on burglarizing a small bank that was known to have on hand, in addition to its ordinary resources, \$50,000 in currency to meet an oil company payroll. McMunn and accomplices were observed near the bank after midnight on September 28, 1905, by a Berkeley officer. McMunn ordered the officer, who had his hands in his overcoat pockets, to reach for the sky; as the officer did so he seized McMunn's gun and at the same moment fired his own, severing McMunn's spine, piercing his windpipe, and killing him immediately. The accomplices fled after concluding that they had shot the officer who had fortunately tripped and fallen just as a bandit's gun blazed at him.

Vollmer concealed a plain-clothesman at the morgue to observe persons who might view McMunn's remains. A woman, deeply moved by the sight of the "Kid", was followed to a house on the Barbary Coast in San Francisco where she was identified as "Little Egypt", a prostitute. Through her Vollmer obtained information that eventually led to the capture of the other three men.

Within two weeks of the McMunn killing, Vollmer found himself working on the case of Milton Franklin Andrews, alias "Long Shot" Harry Brush, another internationally notorious criminal who had murdered two mistresses, each time to free himself for a new attachment. The first one was killed in New Britain, Connecticut, with the assistance of Bessie Bouton, his new paramour. Andrews and Bessie then murdered a business man after robbing him of \$30,000 and left for Denver. Bessie was killed on Mount Cutler, Colorado, in 1904, to make way for Nulda Petrie Olivia who assisted Andrews in this murder. These two then fled to Australia where they met an English-born jockey, Ellis, who cleaned up on a crooked deal at their instigation. Ellis carried the proceeds of several thousand dollars in currency on his person. The three returned to this country; Brush and his girl rented a cottage in Berkeley and invited Ellis for dinner. They had made elaborate preparations for his murder; oil cloth spread on the floor, dissecting instruments, two new cheap suit-

cases gave a general outline of their plan. Ellis was struck repeatedly on the head with a hammer, but his three-quarter inch thick skull saved his life and enabled him to fight his way out of the house to the street, where he was discovered in a semi-conscious state and taken to a hospital.

Through a circular from Colorado Springs, Colorado, Ellis identified "Long Shot" Harry Brush as the Andrews wanted there for murder. The same source revealed that Andrews was the habitual user of a health food in the form of a certain brand of malted milk tablets. Bay area newspapers received a number of letters postmarked in San Francisco, indubitably in Andrew's handwriting, all denying that he had attempted to murder Ellis.

Vollmer requested all retail food stores to report if anyone asked for Andrew's brand of health food. A plainclothesman was posted in a store that reported such a sale to a woman customer. When she next returned, she was followed to her apartment, reinforcements were summoned, and the landlord was taken into police confidence. He and two officers knocked at the door of the woman's apartment with the explanation that an inspection was to be made of the gas heater. After considerable argument and delay they were admitted, but no one except the woman was found in the apartment. The police retired to confer on their observation that a couch was in front of a door identified by the landlord as one opening into a closet. Their suspicions confirmed, they returned and knocked but were denied re-admittance. They then announced that they were police officers and threatened to break down the door. A shot was fired, but not through the door panel. Shortly afterward a second shot was fired. The officers broke through the door to discover Andrews and his girl friend stretched out on the floor; both were dead.

These two cases were solved by the typical Vollmer approach based on a deep understanding of human reactions. This understanding is further illustrated by instructions to his officers to search a section of the city which had experienced a number of incendiary fires for an adolescent boy from a distant home who was visiting relatives in Berkeley—and who might be feeble-minded. Vollmer had read *Criminal Psychology* in which Hans Gross had remarked that homesick people sometimes set fires. The search uncovered a youth who was visiting relatives; he was homesick and feeble-minded. Investigation further revealed that he had set the fires.

To recount all criminal cases cleared by Vollmer's clear insight

would make this article a detective story. Vollmer would have been a top-flight crime investigator, but circumstances cast him in the role of police administrator.

POLICE ADMINISTRATOR

From the beginning Vollmer's police career was marked, first, by a stubborn insistence that any task could be accomplished and any problem solved if he thought about it and worked at it long and hard enough, and second, by an ingenuity and resourcefulness that enabled him to develop unique methods to accomplish his purpose. His clear vision and critical mind enabled him to probe quickly to the core of any problem. His fresh approach and unswerving determination brought solutions that all too frequently were met by derision from his colleagues, the press, and the public. In consequence, hundreds of experienced police officials scorned, at first, the ideas developed by this young man from a small Western town. But the police profession today recognizes that Vollmer was right in his proposals; his procedures have been adopted by progressive police departments throughout this country as well as abroad.

One of Vollmer's first official acts following his election in 1905 was to mount his officers on bicycles. This of course drew laughs from the press, the public, and other police officials. He was, however, merely applying the military maxim of "getting there fustest with the mostest men." He also discovered that, in addition to riding their bicycles, his officers were continuing to walk as many miles as before. In 1910 he mounted his force on motorcycles, and in 1914, at a time when half his men were in the hospital as the result of injuries received in motorcycle accidents, he placed them all in automobiles. With the exception of once, while he was on a year-long leave of absence and the acting Chief of Police purchased a motorcycle which was sold immediately on Vollmer's return, the department has ever since operated exclusively in automobiles manned by one officer.

Placing policemen in automobiles was ridiculed by everyone in 1914; today police departments throughout the country average more than 60 percent of their patrol forces in automobiles.

Late in 1905 Vollmer requested an appropriation from the City Council for the installation of a system of flashing lights throughout the city to be used in conjunction with telephones conveniently installed in boxes on telephone poles so that his headquarters might summon officers on patrol for dispatch on police calls. The Council was reluc-

tant to grant such a large appropriation but instead put the issue before the voters on a \$25,000 bond issue which carried. In 1906 Vollmer had a communication system in operation that enabled the speedy dispatch of bicycle-mounted officers to the scene of action.

The recall system demonstrated its value from the start. In the first year of its operation the Oakland Police notified the Berkeley Department of an armed robbery; the Berkeley sergeant turned on the signal lights and an officer standing near a call box reported so promptly that he received over the police telephone the description of the bandit as it was being recorded from Oakland. The officer told the sergeant that he thought the wanted man was across the street and that the line should be kept open. The officer arrested the suspect who was armed and had several hundred dollars on his person; he was the bandit. The officer reported that he had the man in custody. This information was relayed to the Oakland Police who had not yet completed their conversation. They refused to believe that their man was in custody until they called at the Berkeley police station to see him with their own eyes.

In 1919, during the period of crystal radios and headsets, Vollmer experimented with a radio receiver installed in a patrol car. This was many years before police radios were placed in actual operation. Today police radio is commonplace.

Vollmer immediately recognized the need for complete and accurate police records filed and indexed in a manner to assure quick and easy reference in day-to-day operations and also tabulated so as to serve as an aid in police planning and as a measure of accomplishments and of the need for police service. He at once set about the development of a method of record keeping which has been widely copied by other police departments.

On learning of the British procedure for identifying criminals by their method of operation, he adopted a modified *Modus Operandi* system for Berkeley and promoted the installation of similar systems in many other departments.

In 1907, as President of the California Police Chiefs Association, he urged the state legislature to create a state bureau of criminal identification. Ten years of persistent promotion was needed to accomplish this purpose. The California State Bureau, created in 1917, has served many other states as a model in the creation of similar clearing houses of information relating to crimes and criminals.

Vollmer was active in the promotion of similar facilities at the

national level. His efforts eventually bore fruit; a national fingerprint collection and a uniform system for the classification and collection of crime data were developed by the International Association of Chiefs of Police some years after he served as its president, to which office he was elected in 1921.

Impressed by the need for intelligence and emotional stability in police service, at the end of the First World War Vollmer introduced a validated general intelligence test to eliminate intellectually inferior candidates, and he appointed a police psychiatrist on a part-time basis to weed out the emotionally unsuited. Both procedures have been continued in the Berkeley Department and have demonstrated their value. Police candidates in many cities are now subjected to general intelligence tests as a part of the selection procedure and increasing numbers of cities are requiring the psychiatric examination of candidates before their appointment.

At the end of the First World War, Vollmer initiated the appointment as policemen of students at the University of California. Berkeley officers were immediately nominated "College Cops" by the press. In most American police departments today, a college degree is no longer considered a handicap. In Los Angeles County nearly a thousand law enforcement officers are currently studying for the Bachelor's and higher degrees.

Among the "College Cops" were men destined to become the heads of a number of law enforcement agencies, several college and university professors, the Chairman of the California Adult Authority, a psychiatrist, a notable physician, and a Major General in the Army.

Impressed also by the police lack of technical knowledge to draw sound conclusions from the examination of physical evidence, Vollmer relied on the scientific knowledge of his friends at the university to assist in crime investigations. He obtained the part-time employment of Dr. Albert Schneider as the department criminalist.

Police officers throughout the country were at that time reluctant to believe that scientists had a role to play in crime investigation. The solution of one case by Dr. Schneider shortly before the First World War served to convince all who knew the facts that science could provide great assistance in such investigations. Black-hand extortioners planted a bomb beside the house of their victim after he had reported their threats to the police; fortunately the bomb, made of several sticks of dynamite wrapped in a burlap sack and tied with a stout cord, failed to explode. From an examination of the bomb Dr. Schneider

stated that the bag and string had come from a farm on which were to be found one or more sorrel horses, Jersey cows, black and white rabbits, Rhode Island Red chickens, pine trees, and a swift stream of water. He was able to trace the dynamite to the merchant who sold it, which narrowed the search for the farm to one county. A farm having all of the described characteristics was located. The owner reported that the dynamite had been stolen from him by two Italians. The culprits were located and prosecuted for their crime.

At that time crime laboratories were non-existent in this country. Today they are commonplace.

Vollmer was intrigued by the efforts of a number of workers to detect deception through changes in blood pressure, pulse rate, and breathing. One of his university-student patrolmen, with his cooperation, devised a machine to record such changes on a moving strip of paper. This was the first practical lie-detector, improved forms of which have enabled the Berkeley Department to break many criminal cases, other police forces frequently bringing their suspects to Berkeley for interrogation on this machine. The patrolman was John A. Larson, now a psychiatrist who has been in charge of a number of hospitals for mentally ill patients.

The Army, the Federal government, and many police departments now make daily routine tests of deception.

POLICE CONSULTANT

Vollmer has assisted personally in the reorganization or modernization of the operating methods of scores of police departments, and through correspondence he has assisted hundreds of others. He was called to San Diego to reorganize the police department in 1917. In 1923 he went to Los Angeles as Chief of Police while on a year's leave of absence from Berkeley. In Los Angeles he instituted personnel practices and operating procedures that have been continued to the present. In consequence of his influence, Los Angeles has today the best large police department in the country. He also made reorganization surveys of the police forces in Cuba, Detroit, Chicago, Kansas City, St. Paul, Minneapolis, Portland, Dallas, Syracuse, and a number of other cities. He served as police consultant to the Wickersham Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement.

Vollmer's law enforcement career did not divert his attention from the basic causes of criminality. He adopted the practice of making a case study of each criminal who came to his personal attention.

His sympathetic friendliness and personal interest in the problems of each won him the confidence of the most hardened; he was thus able to learn detailed secrets relating to the lives of criminals. Much thought, time, and effort were devoted to research in which he worked with his police psychiatrist and the Superintendent of Schools; he also stimulated research by other individuals and agencies.

Children invariably have received sympathetic attention from Vollmer. He organized a junior police before the First World War and later the School Boy Patrol. Under his leadership, Berkeley organized the first Community Coordinating Council for the Prevention of Delinquency in 1919. Similar community councils are found in cities throughout the country today.

He concerned himself with the treatment accorded convicted criminals; he took an active part in promoting the creation of the Youth and Adult Authorities in California. In 1923 he constructed a minimum security prison in Los Angeles, a superior practice that has spread throughout the country.

He has consistently maintained that criminality cannot be eliminated by legislative action; instead, that a sentiment favoring law observance must be nurtured in each person.

EDUCATOR

From the start of his police career Vollmer was aware of the need for police training and has promoted the establishment of in-service training facilities in police departments and throughout the state by some form of regional training program. He has also steadily maintained that if the police are to attain professional standing, provision must be made for pre-employment training comparable in quality to that provided for lawyers, doctors, and the other professions.

He established a police school in the Berkeley Department; instruction was principally provided by his friends on the University faculty. A three year program was designed; each officer was required to complete the work.

At the same time he interested his university friends in a plan to offer police and other criminology courses at the summer sessions. This plan was inaugurated in 1916 and such courses were given every year (except 1927) until 1932 when the University offered similar courses during the regular school year. Police officials from all parts of the West Coast attended the summer session courses.

Vollmer was appointed Professor of Police Administration at the

University of Chicago in 1929, a position he held until 1931 when the University of California offered him a similar appointment which he accepted. He continued in this capacity until he resigned in 1938.

Vollmer has strongly influenced nearly a dozen West Coast universities and colleges to institute police and other criminology courses. The program started at the University of California in 1916 has now developed into a School of Criminology that offers a Master of Criminology degree in addition to the Bachelor's degree.

At the time Vollmer was building the Berkeley Police School, relatively few police officials recognized a need for police training. Today it would be difficult to find a police official who does not recognize this need; practically all are doing their utmost to provide improved training facilities for their men; many are urging their institutions of higher learning to offer courses in criminology. Much of the credit for this transition belongs to Vollmer.

AUTHOR AND CITIZEN

Vollmer has had published numerous articles in technical and scientific journals as well as four books: *Police and Modern Society*; *The Criminal*; *Crime, Crooks, and Cops*; and with A. E. Parker, *Crime and State Police*. He has stimulated others to write dozens of books in the broad field of criminology. Since 1918, he has served on the editorial board of the *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*.

Vollmer's service as a citizen has been acknowledged by three awards. In 1929 he received the Harmon Foundation Medal for the most notable contribution to Social Science in the past year. In 1931 he received the Benjamin Ide Wheeler "Distinguished Citizen of Berkeley" Award. And in 1934 he received the Academy of Science "Public Welfare Medal" awarded in recognition of the application of scientific principles to police administration.

FAMILY LIFE

Vollmer was married to Lydia Sturdevant in 1911 and divorced in 1920. On July 23, 1924, he was married to Millicent "Pat" Fell, whom he had known since boyhood days. Shortly after his marriage he purchased the home in the Berkeley Hills where he now resides. Pat was his constant companion until her death in 1945.

While walking through the Stockton Street tunnel in San Francisco one evening with Pat shortly before he went to Los Angeles, Vollmer observed two young hoodlums rob a pedestrian at gun-point. As he

had done countless times in Berkeley with no thought of the hazard involved, he ran them down, disarmed them, and turned them over to the San Francisco police. But this time his heart was damaged by the exertion, a condition that was aggravated by his pace during his year in Los Angeles. After their marriage, Pat watched over him and nursed him back to fair health, although his weakened heart still reminds him of the limitations to his endurance.

In 1932 the Vollmers spent a year in a leisurely tour around the world. He visited police officials and criminologists in most of the important European and some of the Asian countries.

RETIREMENT

Since 1938 Vollmer has reveled in what he calls retirement. Retirement means only that he is not on a payroll or earning a fee; he is as active as ever. He figuratively punches a time clock and devotes a full day to reading and writing when he is not working in his garden or conferring over someone's problems.

His constant stream of visitors seek advice on personal as well as official matters. Law enforcement and correction officers from all over the state knock at his door with their problems. Scarcely a week elapses without an important foreign visitor arriving to pay his respects and obtain counsel.

Vollmer has the power to stimulate and inspire; all who leave his study go with a new confidence in their ability to deal effectively with the problems before them.

And Vollmer, sage that he is, says that his retirement is proving to be the happiest period of his life.