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## REPORTING ON OFFENSES IN POLICE DEPARTMENTS

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Glen Christman

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Glen Christman has served as Secretary, Highland Park (Michigan) Police Department, for the last two years during which time he assisted in the reorganization of the records system of the Department. The "bookkeeping" system which was evolved is described at length in his present article, and because of its simplicity of operation and thoroughness of coverage should be of interest to all police administrators who desire to modernize and improve their department's records and reports. Mr. Christman's experience in the police field has been varied and includes work as a police reporter on a metropolitan Detroit newspaper and five years' duty with the U. S. Naval Intelligence Service. He recently resigned his position as department secretary to accept private employment.—EDITOR.

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Police departments today have become specialized in many ways, employing skills related to problems of communications, traffic, investigations, and the like. Progress in these phases of the broader activity has been widely, ably publicized and even dramatized.

Unfortunately, however, the same departments in many instances have remained only partly specialized in an administrative phase, so important for achievement of law-enforcement's ultimate goal: The two-fold objective of apprehension of the law-breaker and the best possible prevention of crime. The undeveloped phase is that of "bookkeeping."

### POLICEMAN AS BOOKKEEPER

The policeman should be an expert bookkeeper. A bookkeeper, if you will, not merely within the conventional sense of the word—of dollars or apples or nails—but of the vagaries and wiles, the indiscretions and violences of the people who in part make up his community. The policeman must realize the verity that "Past is Prologue"—the words are borrowed from the United States Government Archives Building, Washington. He must realize the importance of examining studiously the past for some hint of the future. The medium for such examination is inherent solely in the offense reports and records he keeps.

### POLICEMAN-SOLDIER ANALOGY

The structure, policies, and procedures of most of our American police departments are semi- or quasi-military in their nature. This, of course, is the usual and obvious analogy. Nevertheless, our officers do wear uniforms, are armed, stand assembly and retreat, are pensioned, and in other things are comparable to the soldiers. Regrettably, this similarity is not

always made to extend far enough. In many departments there is little actual centralization of direction or coordination of effort. The policemen do not actually make up a *combat team* in the full meaning of the term, to the misfortune of the public they serve. Reports and records are often incomplete and inaccurate. Or when they are complete and accurate enough, they are not extended to serve all the purposes which they might.

"Waging war on crime" is a phrase doubtless trite by this time. Perhaps the connotation is melodramatic. Nevertheless, the policeman surely *should* be doing battle with every means available, and far beyond the degree of merely arresting crime by chance encounter. Policemen by their mere presence have not been able to scare the "enemy" away.

If the policeman-soldier analogy seems farfetched, it can only be because there is no battle-scarred terrain, no tumultuous sounds, no other overt evidences of war's hideousness. But the policeman's war is hideous enough if police and public alike contemplate the "casualties" that go to make up the departments' pages of unsolved crime and unrecovered property. The "enemy" indeed, is cloaked in a thousand garbs, is capable of a war-of-nerves not dreamed by dictators, and is armed to commit a thousand outrages. His rapes, burglaries, assaults, robberies, larcenies, not daily, but by the minute, make large dents in the bucklers of society.

Being aware of these things, they become themselves the reasons why the ranks-and-files of our departments stand in constant need of "selective procurement," of "briefing," of "indoctrination," of "orientation," of "leadership," of "liaison"—truly of all the practices and devices accorded a really professional army. To the exact degree that the policeman thinks of and employs these devices only is he professional. He will never be professional by virtue of the fact he is paid to work eight hours each day.

#### PURPOSES OF OFFENSE REPORTS AND RECORDS

Any comprehensive analysis of offense reporting and recording in departments generally today might well have much the same results as the notable examination of the elephant by the seven blind men. Being blind, they were therefore excusable. After touching the elephant, they offered seven dissimilar answers; none even approaching the true identification.

Too few police administrators realize the variety of purposes to which their offense reports may be put. Too frequently the attitude with relation to the offense reports is that a report is

sufficient if it will enable the administrator to reply to inquiry simply, "Yes, that offense *did* happen," or "Yes, that man *was* arrested."

This attitude certainly is not justified by the mere fact that the offenses are myriad and literally "swamp" all departments. Nor is the attitude any more justified by the equally sad fact that police department personnel is no less than "skeleton" in strength when weighed against the task at hand. On the contrary, these two facts—extensive work and limited personnel—at once supply in themselves the main reason for thorough systems of reports and records. Such abstract things as plans, evaluations, coordination, etc. will be long in coming in the absence of system; for indeed "out of order issues force." It is not to be expected that perfect satisfaction for all complainants to police departments will ever be accomplished. It is assuredly to be expected that improvement and extension of systems will increase the measure of satisfaction.

The whole fabric of the police officer's work, the very existence of his department, is woven around the reports he makes on the offenses made known to his department by either he himself or the public. The officer makes an arrest and his report automatically embodies the offense. Or he listens to a citizen recount the occurrence of an offense. If full details, and sifting of details, which touch upon the elements of an offense—time, location, *modus operandi*, age, sex, names, addresses, witnesses, descriptions, etc.—are lacking, the consequent investigation and prosecution is limited, prolonged, or handicapped from the very outset. Moreover, intelligent appraisals, comparisons, and plans are hampered seriously within the department when such details are lacking. Therefore, it becomes important that the department to a man has workable understanding of reports and records.

Purposes of the offense reports and records are essentially the same in a department serving 1,000 population as they would be in another serving a population of 100,000. Those purposes can be clearly defined. Once defined, they should *all* be used to attain the utmost degree of success for the department. These purposes of offense reports and records are:

1. To deal with the public,
2. To transact business with other enforcement agencies,
3. To maintain standards in the department,
4. To maintain morale in the department,
5. To compile statistics,
6. To interpret trends and concentrations,
7. To make plans for the future operations,

8. To prepare public and press-relations material,
9. To account for, descriptively and by values, losses and gains made against and for the public, and
10. To report to municipal officers.

#### REVISED FORMS AND PROCEDURES IN HIGHLAND PARK, MICHIGAN

In the summer of 1947 the Foreword of a newly instituted Manual of Procedures in the Highland Park, Michigan, Police Department presented the following essentials of operation:

- A. Use of proven methods,
- B. Standardizing and unifying,
- C. Centralization of supervision,
- D. Provision for adequate and continuous training, and
- E. Maintenance of high morale.

As a part of the program suggested by these essentials, a study was made of procedures and forms related to matters of complaint, arrest, and investigation in the Highland Park department. The department is in a metropolitan suburb of approximately 2.8 square miles and 65,000 population. It is unlike most other towns of comparable size, perhaps, only by reason of a peculiar geographical position, that is, the municipality is located centrally and entirely within the larger City of Detroit.

The study of the offense reports and methods resulted in a consolidated 8½x11 inch, two-sided report form, entitled, "Offense, Arrest, and (Preliminary) Investigation Report," with larger spaces allowed for information on each of these items; and with smaller spaces allowed for reports on follow-up actions such as "Court Action," "Identification," "Case Status," and "Review." The form makes possible orderly inclusion of all action subsequent to the original offense and/or arrest action, these additions being either written into the form or added by a smaller, standard supplementary report form. The form is in quadruplicate, with colored copies for "Master," "Division," "Referral," and "Court."

Consolidation of the several reports embodied in this one form made possible a complete breakdown of crime elements in a visible, accumulative, and comparative manner in a series of six looseleaf books. These are described briefly in the ensuing sections.

#### OFFENSE RECORD

First of the record books is the one entitled, "Offense." Make-up of this book is based upon the Uniform Classification of Of-

fenses, Parts I, II, and III, as adopted a few years ago by the National Police Chiefs' Association.

Each classified offense or group of offenses, as numbered by the Uniform System, is given a section of pages, the pages being index-tab labelled and alphabetically arranged in the book to make for ready manipulation and posting. Each morning the preceding 24-hour accumulation of offenses, as reported in the Offense, Arrest and Investigation forms, are recorded in the proper places in the books. Information given on each offense is set forth under the captions, as follows:

<u>System Letter</u>	<u>Report Number</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Modus Operandi</u>	<u>Consecutive Number</u>
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Since the entries in the Offense Record are blocked off by month, and since "reclassification" postmarks are recorded, a quick tally is possible at all times simply by glancing at the column total or monthly total. Any omissions on the part of reporting officers are readily noticeable by the gaps in the lines. A study of modus operandi employed in separate offenses of the same classification is possible at all times, whether the offense is burglary, confidence game, or drunkenness. Similarities of time, modus operandi, or other factors may be seen without any or with only a minimum of "shuffling".

Finally, since the record is accumulative, all pertinent information (as to quality of reports, methods in offenses, increase-decrease, percentages, averages, etc.) is resultant on a day-to-day basis, a monthly basis, or a this-year basis, and may be speedily assembled and disseminated to all operating divisions and personnel.

#### LOCATION RECORD

The second record is concerned with the locations of offenses occurring in the city. Here the crimes are recorded, together with correlated elements, as to exact locations in the city. Each street is given a doubled-column, looseleaf page in the book and arranged therein alphabetically. The information is set forth under headings:

<u>Report No.</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Street No. and Location</u>	<u>Offense (abbrev.)</u>
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A large pin map of the city is used in conjunction with the Location Record on which are posted offenses (felony and misdemeanor) against the property. A smaller map is used to post felony offenses affecting the person, with white pins to distinguish sex crimes from others of violence.

Information as contained in the Location Record makes possible recapitulation at a glance of offense concentrations, by time and date, on any street, group of streets, or in any single area. Any person or official may be shown the extent and nature of offenses occurring throughout the city. Similarly, specific "frequency areas" or "frequency runs" may be noted to patrol officers with instructions that "special attention" be given. For instance, in the Highland Park Department, January 1948, it was disclosed by such count that a total of 65 of the overall total of 200 offenses, or approximately 32% of offenses, occurred in the city's main thoroughfare.

### STOLEN PROPERTY RECORD

A property record is kept, likewise in looseleaf and alphabetical fashion, on all property stolen or lost in the city as reported in the offense reports. As with other offense elements, the breakdown posting is done daily, and each item of property is entered by its object name in the record, together with a description and estimated value furnished by the complainant, under the page headings:

<u>Report No.</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Offense (Abbrev.)</u>	<u>Specific Item</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Estimated Value</u>
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Here, as in the other records, the gaps appearing in the lines reveal negligence or oversight on the part of reporting officers. Inasmuch as entries are made alphabetically by object name, quick and complete tallies and comparisons are available at any time or for any period. Apart from statistical tallies required for monthly and annual statistical reports to State and Government agencies, the record makes possible visible comparison of property recovered with that reported stolen; as well as comparisons for identifying property with owners and with offenses.

In order of numerical count on offenses, items stolen or lost by complainants are money, clothing, jewelry, radios, pocket-books, automobiles, and other items of larger value-importance or necessity-importance. However, there is a quick accumulation also of many unusual items, such as a snowplow blade, steel scrap, steam boiler, midget auto, baby buggy, and tapestries.

### ARREST, COMPLAINT, AND RECOVERED PROPERTY RECORDS

The remaining three records, as named by the above caption, serve largely as cross-references. However, in these as in the

case of the first three, certain pertinent information of a statistical nature is available on a "to-date" basis. Arrest information includes the name (entered alphabetically), report number, date, age, sex and color, and offense, the last four items being abbreviated in the columns. Complaint record contains report number and date, name and address of complainant, and offense complained of, the last item being abbreviated in the column.

#### POSTING TIME REQUIRED FOR RECORDS

The extended description to tell of the "bookkeeping" system at Highland Park, Michigan may suggest that a good deal of effort and time is required to perform this "bookkeeping". That is not the case however. Actually, the system is a time-saving device. For example, the average bulk of offenses thus far has been approximately 200 cases per month, or 6.6 cases per day with a higher peak occurring over the week-ends. The posting time on the breakdown of these offenses averages less than one hour per day in a six-day week.

Nor was the setting-up of the records either difficult or expensive. Six looseleaf binders, sufficient filler paper, and visible index tabs were the only materials required. The work of index-arranging, ruling, and titling the pages was accomplished in a day.

#### LOCATION OF RECORDS AND FREQUENCY CHART

The records described in these pages are maintained in the Office of the Chief and are immediately available to him at all times. In conjunction with the records there is also maintained a frequency chart on all offenses. The offenses are charted daily in one-hour columns over the 24-hour day, and show "peak" and "slump" periods throughout the day, as well as post- and ante-meridian volumes, and volumes by platoon.

#### MONTHLY SUMMARY REPORT FROM RECORDS

In efforts to serve the purposes defined in a preceding paragraph, particularly those purposes under numbers 3, 4, 5, 7, 8 and 11, a report entitled "O. A. & I. Summary Report," as based upon the breakdown records, is issued each month from the Chief's office to all personnel. This report gives a brief estimate of the crime situation in the city, treats of the Departmental manner of reporting on crime, and publishes recapitulations in the form of tallies, percentages, and averages on the offenses by month and per annum.