

LAW ENFORCEMENT ROLE

Plainclothes Bicycle Patrol: ⁴¹⁵³⁴ *Silent—Preventive—Effective*

The city of Richardson, Tex., is a predominantly residential community located north of and adjacent to the city of Dallas, Tex. The city's population of an estimated 67,000 includes a predominance of white-collar workers engaged mostly in scientific and engineering occupations. The average mean income—\$16,000 plus—provides many of Richardson's citizenry with a relatively high standard of living. It is a suburban community of fine homes, churches, schools, and shopping centers.

The city's police force is comprised of 71 sworn officers and 25 civilian support personnel. The community it serves has a low incidence of crimes such as robbery, rape, and murder, but is plagued with a seemingly ever-increasing burglary and theft rate. Two factors appear to contribute to this rising rate. First, the income bracket of the average Richardson citizen allows him to possess various items highly sought after by burglars and thieves, such as television sets, stereos, tape decks, coin collections, 10-speed bicycles, and citizens' band (CB) radios. Second, property of this nature is located in or around residential homes which, for the most part, have entry garages and 6-foot wood security/privacy fences in the rear. These



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fences often can assist in providing a secure and private environment in which the thief or burglar can work when no one is at home or attentive.

Initial Approach Unproductive

In an attempt to reduce the burglary and theft rates, the Richardson Police Department initiated directives to patrol personnel to concentrate their patrol activities in residential areas using "high visibility patrol techniques." It soon became evident that this approach was not producing

the desired result. During this time, a criminal investigator was interviewing a burglary suspect who was willing to "clean up all of his business." In the company of the investigator, this burglar was driven around town so he could point out residences he had burglarized. During this process, the burglar made an interesting and enlightening comment. "Drive me up and down the alleys," he stated, "I can't tell nothing from the front of the house. I hit from the rear, it's safer." Based on this tidbit of information, the patrol units were directed to concentrate their patrolling actions in the alleys rather than on the streets. Again, no noticeable effect on the volume of targeted criminal activity was evident.

CB Radio Thefts

During this "trial and error" period, a new wave of thefts further escalated the rising crime rates. Almost

overnight, thefts of CB radios from motor vehicles became a major problem. The city began to average three to four such offenses a night, and at an average cost of about \$200 each, the department's property loss financial tally began to rapidly rise.

Alerting the Public

Since the department appeared to be utilizing its manpower resources, other alternatives had to be pursued. In this regard, the department initiated a program to inform the general public of the problem and seek its assistance. Through use of local media sources, neighborhood meetings, emphasis generated by the Dallas Police Department's series of television spot announcements on community involvement, and mailing of relevant literature to community residents, efforts were made to develop security awareness by the public, encourage reporting of suspicious activities to the police, and promote employment of better security hardware. With the exception of a few isolated instances, it appeared that the public response to our pleas was generally minimal.

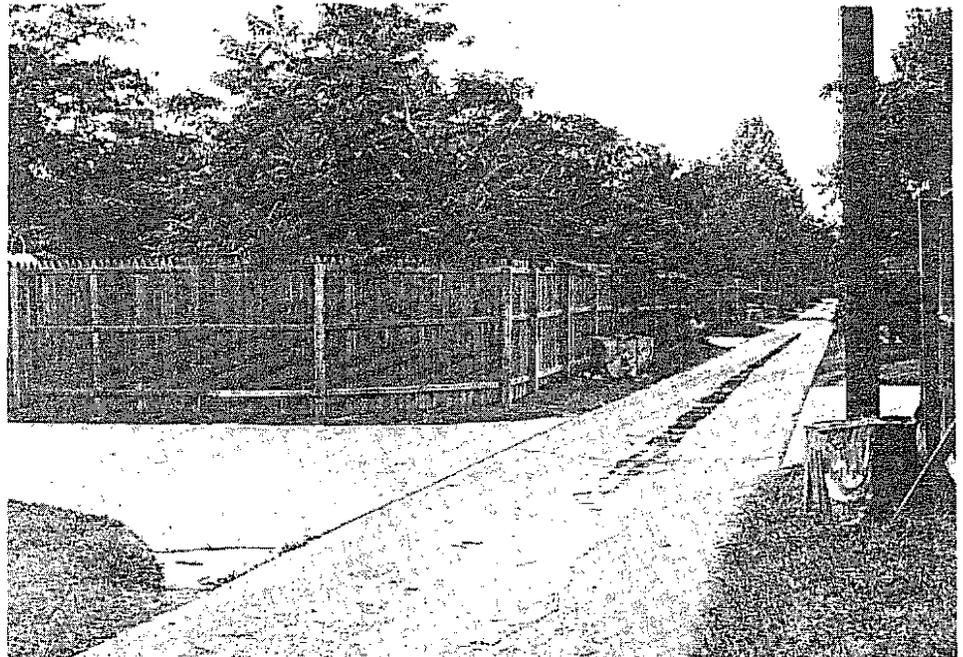
"[T]he department initiated a program to inform the general public of the [crime] problem and seek its assistance."

Since various traditional police actions and concepts had been used in attempts to reduce the burglary and theft rates, it would have been easy to state that the police department was doing everything possible to combat crime in the Richardson area and perhaps leave it at that. Or we could blame the apparent apathetic attitude toward this type of criminal activity by some segments of the population as

a possible scapegoat. Obviously such rationalizations did not provide an acceptable answer to our present problem. A "brainstorming" session was used to assess why our present actions were not meeting our expectations.

We began by analyzing current environmental and intelligence data about the community. Environmen-

trash cans, bicycles, or dead limbs, will be in the alley. Alley lighting is poor to fair in 80 percent of the community. Lighting inside apartment complex areas and in the complex parking lots is also poor to fair in about 80 percent of the units. Street lighting in the community is adequate in most cases.



Shrubbery, high fences, and back-alley accesses provide an environment susceptible to exploitation by would-be vandals and thieves.

tally speaking, the city of Richardson is 75 percent residential by design. Apartment complexes and townhomes comprise 10 percent of this figure, while one- and two-story single-family homes comprise the remaining 65 percent of residential dwellings. The apartment complexes are constructed in the standard row or courtyard design, with parking provided in row form and in some cases with overhead shelters but open sides. Ninety percent of the single-family dwellings have rear-entry garages, and 75 percent of those homes are protected in the rear by 6-foot security/privacy fences. Ninety-five percent of the residential alleys are paved; however, the odds are quite high that obstacles, such as

The following information was developed through patrol observations, studying offense report and statistical data, and/or through interview of offenders:

- (1) A good possibility existed that some newspaper delivery boys were quite active in perpetrating acts of vandalism and theft during the early morning hours. Their "loot" was easily concealed in their paper bags, and their movement during this period was not considered unusual by citizens or police elements.
- (2) It appeared that 35 to 50 juveniles were roaming the streets of the community between 2 a.m.



Obstructions in alleys, such as this parked auto, while hindering auto patrols pose no similar hindrance to bicycle patrols.

and 5 a.m. each day. The majority of these youths had apparently "snuck out" during the night while their parents slept.

(3) Arrestees reported they could easily see, and more importantly, hear a police unit several blocks away at night.

(4) The majority of the CB radio thefts and acts of vandalism were occurring in the early morning hours.

Establishing the Bicycle Patrol

Considering the environmental and intelligence data, it appeared desirable to develop a method that would facilitate patrolling a given area in an inconspicuous and quiet manner that would also have a deterrent effect. Since the criminal element was reacting to the environment by using the rear-entry garages, high fences, poor lighting, and alley obstacles to their advantage, two counteractions were

conceivable. First, the environment could be changed in order to provide less opportunity. This was not feasible, since we could not unilaterally rebuild the community. The second possible action was to adjust our tactics to fit the environment and use it to our own advantage. This latter consideration provided the impetus for establishment of the bicycle patrol.

We were aware of the youthful criminal's frequent use of the bicycle and its widespread use for transportation, sport, and fun by the general community. If the bicycle supplied the criminal element a mode of transportation that was efficient, quiet, and inconspicuous, logically the same benefits could be derived by the police department. As initially organized, the bicycle patrol consisted of five teams with two officers per team. The officers wore regular street clothes suitable for bicycle riding. Their weapons were concealed under their clothing, and one team member carried a portable police radio. Bicycles used were personally owned by officers or were

recovered bicycles that were unclaimed.

It was determined that a single team could effectively patrol a 5- to 6-square-block area during a 6-hour tour of duty. The 6-hour tours were performed by the officers as overtime on their normal days off. After initial experimentation in utilizing officers during various time frames, eventually the shifts were concentrated in early morning-hour periods.

The selection of the patrol area and time frame was based on analysis of statistical offense data. The teams were transported to their selected area by the team supervisor in an unmarked departmental van, and the team supervisor remained mobile in the van so that he or another mobile police unit could respond if assistance was required by a team.

During the first two nights of operation, the teams were able to develop intelligence data that led to the clearance of several theft, burglary, and criminal mischief cases. One team actually rode up and apprehended two

juveniles in the process of stealing a CB radio. The teams questioned and released to proceed, or to their parents, 40 juveniles who were discovered in questionable circumstances after 1 a.m.

It became evident that the bicycle teams had a great impact in the areas they were able to effectively patrol. Despite the effectiveness, we could not allow the operation to continue as a continuous program due to cost considerations. A team of officers performing on overtime and patrolling only a small area of the community is quite costly.

Prevention Through Publicity

It was now time to implement the second phase of our program. With outstanding help and cooperation from local mass media sources, we went public with our program. A local television station ran a minidocumentary on the program. All major newspapers in the area provided coverage about it on either their front page or the first page of their metro sections. Radio stations in the area rendered information reports on the teams in their major newscasts. This mass

media coverage of the bicycle patrol was the key element in prevention aspects of the program. Almost overnight, thefts of CB radios dropped from an average of four a night to about one every four nights. Occurrences of nighttime vandalism dropped quickly also. Why? The mass media coverage of the program was designed to effect a psychological deterrent on the criminal. With the large number of bicycle riders frequently on the

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streets, it was quite difficult to distinguish the bicycle-mounted plainclothes police officers from the citizens. A potential offender did not know at any given time or place if the bicycle rider, pedestrian, or hidden shadow was just an ordinary citizen or a police officer. It was not worth the chance to find out. The environment for committing the crime had been altered to the detriment of the criminally inclined.

The department is continuing the use of the bicycle team as a reactionary unit. If a specific area becomes a trouble spot, the team can be promptly reactivated. It will first react without notice in an attempt to apprehend offenders or gain intelligence data on criminal activity. The patrol may then be publicized as working in the area, thereby producing a further deterrent effect for other criminal elements still considering illegal operations.

Conclusion

The “bicycle patrol” is an example of one method of reacting to a particular type of rising crime rate in an effective manner. With the recent influx of educated, creative, and intelligent young minds into the police profession, and through the effective use of their skills, police agencies are better able to devise innovative countermeasures against crime. Our bicycle patrol experiment represents one successfully innovative approach. We hope that through similar analysis and controlled experimentation, we may achieve additional success with other crime-related problems in our community. ®

This posed scene depicts two plainclothes bicycle patrol police officers (wearing T-shirts) questioning two youths in alley behind residences.

