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STATEMENT BY

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COMMON COUNCIL  
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BACKGROUND

One of the major elements in the overall increase in crime in Detroit in recent years has been the felony known as robbery, in which the criminal confronts the victim with violence or the threat of violence.

While all major crimes in the City increased 32 percent from 1968 to 1970, robberies increased 67 percent. Of the seven major crime categories (murder, rape, robbery, assault, burglary, larceny and auto theft), robbery alone accounted for 24 percent of the overall increase between 1968 and 1970.

In actual numbers of crimes committed in Detroit, robbery ranks third behind burglary and larceny, and first among crimes in which force or the threat of force is involved.

To deal with this most prevalent of the crimes of violence, a special operation was devised and announced within the Detroit Police Department on January 13, 1971. Its mission was stated succinctly in its acronymic code-name, "S.T.R.E.S.S." -- Meaning "STOP THE ROBBERIES -- ENJOY SAFE STREETS."

The nature of the mission was to operate in plain clothes in such a way as to "merge" with the environment, and to appear to be the type of person that a thug seeking a victim would be likely to confront. Officers would be expected to work in teams. One member of the team on occasion might be expected to pose as a prospective robbery victim.

January 18, 1971, the first arrest was made by one of the earliest volunteers. April 5, STRESS operation results were reported publicly for the first time.

RECRUITING

Initially, officers assigned to the STRESS operation were selected primarily from the Precinct Support Unit, one of three special task forces within the Department's Patrol Division. As its name suggests, the PSU of about 80 men, reinforces the precincts on response and patrol assignments when the workload is exceptionally high, or pays particular attention to certain types of high-incidence crimes.

Men are assigned to the PSU itself on a volunteer basis. As experience with the STRESS operation increased and its use was expanded, men volunteering specifically for STRESS have gradually filled the entire complement of the PSU, so that to all intents and purposes, the Precinct Support Unit and the STRESS Task Force are one and the same.

To launch the program, a description of the new operation and its objectives and risks was circulated throughout the department, and those interested were encouraged to seek a transfer to STRESS. As transfer requests were received, each volunteer's record was carefully studied.