

City of Detroit

DEPARTMENT OF POLICE ✓

DETROIT, MICHIGAN 48231

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RAY GIRARDIN
Commissioner

October 20, 1967

Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh
1126 City-County Building
Detroit, Michigan 48226

Dear Mayor Cavanagh:

In response to the questions raised concerning the actions of the Detroit Police Department during the civil disturbances of last July, I am submitting the following information.

Criticism of police actions on the night and morning of July 23 begin with the origin of the raid itself. There appears to be a conviction in the minds of many people that the raid on the "Blind Pig" at 9125 Twelfth Street was out of the ordinary and should not have been staged at that particular time. Neither point is well taken. In the first place, the critical determinant in the timing of a raid is the ability of an officer to gain entrance to an after-hours drinking establishment and to witness an illegal act. Routine procedure in these cases is to wait ten minutes and, if the officer gaining entrance has not come out before then, to raid the establishment on the assumption that he has been able to gather the necessary evidence.

This was the procedure followed on July 23. At 3:45 a.m. an officer was able to gain entrance to the blind pig in question after a previously unsuccessful attempt at approximately 10:00 p.m., July 22. Ten minutes later the Tenth Precinct clean-up squad was notified. The first patrol wagon was loaded at 4:05 a.m. At that time, there were only 192 patrolmen on duty on the streets. Only 44 of these were in the potential riot area. (See Appendix for Chronology and Personnel Strengths)

Within the 24-hour period preceding this raid, there had been five other raids throughout the city. Three of these were of other blind pigs; the other two were of gambling establishments. Nine attempts had been made to raid the after-hours establishment at 9125 Twelfth in the 16 months before July 22. On February 11, 1966 at 3:00 a.m. the Tenth Precinct clean-up squad arrested ten persons. On June 3, 1967, this time at 2:30 a.m., the Vice Bureau raided the same address and arrested 28 persons. Just seven weeks later the July 23 raid was conducted.

It should be apparent from this brief summary that this raid was indeed routine and was only one of many conducted between July 22 - 23. It should also be obvious that the raid at 9125 Twelfth was not out of the ordinary and that the timing was dictated by being able to get a man inside of an after-hours drinking establishment well-known to the police from previous experience.

The only thing out of the ordinary in this raid were the numbers of people found inside the blind pig. Rather than the ten people in February 1966 or the 28 arrested just the previous month, there were 85 persons, including three arrested for operating the establishment. More squad cars had to be ordered and loaded, a process which took some 55 minutes. During this time, the crowd which had numbered ten to twenty when the first patrol wagon pulled up increased to about 200. Officers on the scene described the crowd as jovial -- kidding with those who had been arrested. As the police left, however, an empty bottle was thrown through the rear window of a scout car.

A patrolman left on the scene in plainclothes and a lieutenant and sergeant who arrived at 5:10 a. m. observed people throwing objects and breaking windows. There was no looting at this time. Nevertheless, in quick succession, the West Side District Inspector and the Commanding Officer of the 10th Precinct were notified of the crowd and its activities at 5:15 a. m. Commissioner Girardin was notified at 5:20 and he immediately called Mayor Cavanagh. The weekly duty officer and the Deputy Superintendent were also notified. All of this took place within a half hour after the first missile had been thrown.

At 5:30 eight scout cars with 17 men from other precincts were ordered into the 10th Precinct. At 6:00 when Commissioner Girardin arrived at Police Headquarters, the total strength of lieutenants, sergeants and patrolmen was 369 with 43 of these men committed to the potential riot area. After a review of the situation, a mobilization of the force was ordered in three successive steps from 6:15 to 6:42 a. m.

The mobilization procedures of the Police Department are outlined in Appendix 2. Briefly, they are designed to summon the greatest number of men in the shortest amount of time. No one man has more than eight officers to contact. Each man has the authority to ask an operator to cut in if a line is busy, and, in the event a man cannot be reached, the alerting officer is directed to go to the next man so that no time is lost. Officers not contacted are reported to an officer at the mobilization point. Members of the Commando and Mobile Tactical Units are summoned in the same manner.

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that mobilization is inherently a time-consuming operation, no matter how efficient. After a man is notified, he must dress and travel to his reporting point. Once he has checked in and has been equipped, he must be turned around and transported to a command post or

an assembly point. There he must be briefed on the situation that exists, the location of the riot area, his duties, and other details required to make him effective once he is deployed. He must then be actually committed to the area of involvement. The time lapse in this entire procedure ranges from 1-1/2 to 2 hours.

At this point, it might be well to point out that 43 members of the Tactical Mobile Unit had finished their normal tour of duty at 3 a. m. and could not have been summoned back immediately. The balance of the 80-man unit had been alerted. By 8 a. m. over half were in the process of being mobilized. The units trained as Commandos are the Motor Traffic Bureau, the Stationary Traffic Bureau, and the Mounted Bureau. None of these bureaus were on regular duty on Sunday. All, therefore, had to be called and, by noon 53 had reported for duty. There were 17 Commandos on duty at 7 a. m. These men had been moved from the Kiefer Command Post to a staging area at Ford Hospital. Hence, they were immediately available to conduct the sweep of the 12th Street at 7:50 a. m. That this sweep was unsuccessful is due to the swelling of the crowd by that time to an estimated 3,000 people, many of whom were women and children, who flowed onto the side streets as the police advanced and then back onto 12th behind the officers. Thus, it was not a question of using one type of unit rather than another but rather a tactical maneuver with the forces available, which might have succeeded, to disperse the crowd and to stem the looting which had begun.

Even before this, however, at 7:00 a. m., the State Police, the Wayne County Sheriff, the Michigan National Guard, the F. B. I., the Wayne County Prosecutor and the Department of Public Works were alerted to the situation that existed.

By 8 a. m., a little more than an hour and 15 minutes after the mobilization orders, the strength of the police force had increased to 1,004 men on duty. Over one-third, or 364, of these men were committed to the riot area. Of the total, however, most were still in the process of being mobilized. The riot was still localized along 12th Street at this time and was not spreading to other areas of the city. With the forces available it still appeared possible to contain and to localize the problem. In addition there were other areas of the city as well as vital areas throughout the city which had to be protected.

The crowd itself, while still growing, appeared to be controllable with the forces being assembled at that time. This is perhaps best illustrated by the fire which broke out at 12th and Clairmount at 8:25 a. m. The first fire of the day in the trouble area appeared to be an isolated incident. More importantly, however, was the fact that the firemen who responded to the call fought the blaze for an hour and a half without incident, only a block from the blind pig that had been raided. Meanwhile the police were attempting to seal off, or cordon, the 12th Street - Clairmount area.

The attitude of the people on the streets began to change after community leaders had been unsuccessful in their appeal to the crowd to disperse between 9:33 a. m. and 10:00 a. m. By 10:30, looting was increased and police were under sporadic attack by rocks and bottles. Still, the problem was localized in a six-block area and police strength was still growing. There were more than 1,122 policemen on duty at 10 a. m. (540 in the area of which 108 were being used to cordon the area); six men were arrested at 10:30 for looting.

The increased hostility of the crowd was the first significant change in the character of the riot. However, the decisive turning point did not occur until 1:00 p. m. when firemen responding to alarms at four different locations along 12th Street were pelted with rocks and bottles. By 1:31 when the first request for a second alarm was turned in from one of these locations, this change in character was clear. It was during this time period that policemen who might otherwise have been used to tighten the cordon around the area had to be pressed into service to protect firemen.

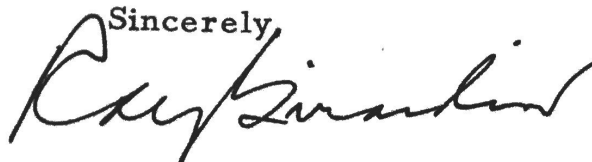
These facts were clear and dramatic evidence that the situation could get out of hand if the riot spread to other streets. Based on this analysis, at 2:00 p. m., Mayor Cavanagh requested that Michigan State Police be sent to Detroit. By 3:00 p. m., 360 State Police had arrived at the West Eight Mile Armory. The alerting of State Police officials more than seven hours before undoubtedly was a key factor in this quick response. Twenty-three minutes after the state troopers arrived the riot did in fact spread with looting and rioting along Linwood and further along 12th. At this time attempts to seal off 12th Street were ended.

Prior to this, however, police forces had built up substantially, the riot was still contained in a small area, and the need for police protection of firemen fighting multiple, separated, major fires had not taken place. Against this background, there were few indications of a need to request state assistance prior to 1:00 - 2:00 p. m. However, the alerting of the State Police at 7 a. m. and the National Guard at 7:10 a. m. proved to have been extremely prudent moves which enabled these forces to respond when actually called upon.

Two other points which have been raised concerning police actions during these hours concern tactical decisions of the officers in command and on the street. The first is the question of why the policemen did not use their weapons or more force during the early hours. In the first place, there were no orders for the men not to shoot as the teletypes in Appendix 3 make clear. In the second place, the crowds along 12th Street consisted of large numbers of women and children. Finally, such decisions must be delegated to the officer on the street who is in the best position to judge the situation. All police are periodically briefed on the use of their weapons and when such use is justified. The men are also aware of department policy as outlined in the Detroit Police Manual (Appendix 4). No ex-post-facto judgments can be substituted for those of the men who were actually engaged in trying to control and to end the disturbance with minimum loss of life and property. In 180 incidents of rioting in other cities, in no case, have the police gone into the area and begun shooting immediately.

Finally, there is the question of the use or non-use of tear gas in the early hours of the riot. Such criticism neglects to take into consideration the character of the 10th Precinct, the operational factors in using tear gas, or the weather conditions at the time. The 10th Precinct is one of the most densely populated in the city. There are some 148,000 people housed in its 6.6 square miles. This is a density of more than 22,400 per square mile. Along 12th Street this figure may even be higher because of the multiple dwellings just off it. Tear gas, technically, is a light gas with low persistency. In order to cover the area involved, massive doses of the gas would have been required. The gas in such concentrations would have seeped into homes forcing even larger numbers of people onto the streets. Such action in the hours before 10 a. m. would unquestionably have changed the character of the disturbance before the police forces had been fully mobilized and deployed. With these larger numbers of people on the streets, the police force most probably would have been faced with an uncontrollable situation. Finally, the winds in the area had been building up and, by 1 p. m. when the multiple fires began, had velocities of 9.2 miles per hour. By 4 p. m. the wind was blowing at 11.5 mph and did not slacken until 10 p. m. Even then the velocity was still 9.2 miles an hour. These conditions are marginal for the effective use of tear gas. Even massive concentrations of the light gas would be dispersed by these winds.

The judgments throughout were those of prudent men whose prime obligation is to enforce the law with minimum jeopardy to lives and property. In hindsight, there are lessons to be learned and deficiencies to be corrected. These lessons cannot be applied effectively, however, in a divisive, demoralizing atmosphere created by an incomplete understanding of the facts and of the environment which existed at the time.

Sincerely,

Commissioner

RG:sjb