

STOP THE ROBBERIES-ENJOY SAFE STREETS

STRESS Investigation Report

Submitted by

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Because of the evident tension in the community caused by the recent action of police officers assigned to the STRESS unit, it was felt by department heads of the Michigan Civil Rights Commission that staff should undertake an investigation of the STRESS unit for presentation to the Commissioners.

On October 18, 1971, Chief Inspector James Bannon of the Detroit Police Department was interviewed by members of the Compliance Division of the Michigan Civil Rights Commission. The purpose of the interview was to gather information relative to the functioning of the STRESS unit of the Detroit Police Department.

This report represents a compilation of information from newspaper articles, Detroit Police Department records, contacts with citizens, and the Bannon interview.

#### BACKGROUND AND ORIGINS-STRESS

Commissioner John Nichols, after an evaluation of Detroit Street Crime in 1970, concluded that street robberies in Detroit were violent. In 1970, 2300 robberies were committed, of these 1800 were larcenies from persons. Because of these figures police personnel are charged with the responsibility of devising a method to combat the rise in street crime.

The STRESS unit was the "brain child" of Inspectors James Bannon and Gordon Smith in October of 1970. The purpose was to combat street crime through the use of a low visibility police force. A force that could effectively blend in with the neighborhood where crimes were being committed and thus catch criminals in the act.

Inspector Bannon acts as an analyst and resource person and Inspector Smith acts as the administrative head of the unit. One lieutenant and two sergeants are supervised by Inspector Smith.

#### RECRUITMENT AND STAFFING

The STRESS unit was made operative in January, 1970. Policemen working in the Precinct Support Unit were transferred to the STRESS unit. There were no volunteers. Officers who did not wish to work as a part of the STRESS team could refuse re-assignment. No screening was done on the original transfers.

Transfers into the STRESS unit are at the present time being screened and any officer assigned to the unit is a volunteer.

The screening process is described as follows:

1. Transfer request.
2. Endorsement of Commanding Officer.
3. Review of the number of arrests.

4. Number of arrests resulting in convictions.
5. Types of duties performed.
6. Citations.
7. Disciplinary actions and citizens injuries.
8. Physical health.
9. Service ratings.
10. Number of citizen complaints.

The officer in the original unit tended to be experienced officers with approximately 50% having at least 5 years of experience with the force. Recent police academy graduates are now being assigned to STRESS.

There are presently 8 black officers in the STRESS unit. Although the exact number of officers assigned to the unit is confidential and "classified", Inspector Bannon indicated that the 8 black officers comprised 20% of the total unit.

#### TRAINING

Officers in the unit were given a two week training period. The training program consisted of indoctrination as to the mechanics of committing a crime, the elements of being a decoy, the use of surveillance techniques, and elementary law.

#### OPERATING PROCEDURES, REPORTING, AND ASSIGNMENT

STRESS operates on the basis of teams. Each team consists of four men. The personnel is interchangeable. All of the teams are not integrated racially. The assignment of men to a team is the responsibility of the command officers. One team is all black out of choice. The men have not been re-assigned because they are considered highly effective. The officer with the most seniority usually acts as the charge officer of the team. However, there is no set policy establishing who the charge officer will be.

The lieutenant and two sergeants assigned to the unit are often on the street with the patrolmen. Activity logs are not kept by the officers. Instead a system log records the arrest made. There is no mechanism in use which reflects what officers are doing during their entire tour of duty. The officer, after making an arrest, completes a form detailing the incident. This form is then forwarded to the court section of the prosecutors office who decide the charge and recommends a warrant. This procedure differs from other units where police officers submit warrant request forms naming the charge.

STRESS is located in 1300 Beaubien and does not operate out of precincts. Prisoners are taken directly to 1300 and are not booked or held at precincts.

Inspector Bannon stated that although officers are not usually assigned to an area in response to citizen requests, it has been done on two occasions. A woman reported that pensioners were being robbed when they cashed their checks at a certain bank. A check of reports verified the information. STRESS officers were assigned to the area and three suspects were apprehended. In the second incident citizens in the Belmont-John R area requested STRESS officers in their area because of a large number of street robberies which they felt were connected with a methodon center in their area.

The officers are assigned to neighborhoods according to the pattern flow of crimes. Teams have been assigned in every precinct in the city with the exception of #4 (Fort and Green) and #16 (bounded by W. 8 Mile, Southfield, Warren, and Telegraph).

A map is used to pin-point area in which street crimes are being reported. When a pattern emerges STRESS officers are assigned to the area. The map indicates the hours during which crimes are taking place and this determines the working hours of the assigned officers. The maps are kept on a monthly basis and at the time they were observed showed a decrease in the number of reported crimes.

#### METHOD OF OPERATION

It would appear that the method used by STRESS officers to expect arrests involve two techniques, surveillance and decoy.

#### SURVEILLANCE

STRESS officers act and dress in a manner that allows them to blend in to a neighborhood. They often ride in taxi-cabs, drive trucks, work counters in small businesses. They are often able to interdict a crime by being in the scene.

Inspector Bannon stated that in one area on the city, women were being accosted in the early morning hours on their way to work. STRESS officers, sent into the area, watched and followed several women and made an arrest during the commission of a crime.

Inspector Bannon was not specific as to the exact components of the surveillance technique but indicated it accounted for 80% of the activity of the STRESS unit.

#### DECOY

Inspector Bannon stated that the decoy technique accounted for 20% of the total STRESS operation. The decoy technique differs from surveillance in that one officer sets himself up as a potential victim of a crime. The officer who acts as a decoy is usually a volunteer. The other three officers on the team act as cover men for the decoy. The team decides when to use the decoy method once they are on the street. The decoy officer is in the position of not knowing where his cover officers are. However, the cover officers are never supposed to lose sight of the decoy. There is, at the present time, no means of communication between the decoy and the cover officer.

According to Inspector Bannon the decoy is the key man because the covering officers respond to his actions. If the cover officers hear the decoy yell "Halt! Police!" and start to fire, they will more than likely respond with gunfire.

The decoy technique has accounted for 59 out of 1,747 arrests effected by STRESS officers. It has accounted for 9 out of 10 fatalities charged to STRESS officers.

#### WEAPONS

All STRESS officers are issued .38 calibre weapons. Some officers do carry privately owned weapons approved by the department. Shotguns are carried in their cars. The STRESS officers have been approved to carry .38 automatics, because they can be easily concealed, however, 8 additional hours of training must be taken by the officers. No training has been given and no officer is carrying the automatic weapon at this time.

No statistics have been compiled as to the actual number of shots fired by the unit. It is known that the 8 black officers have fired a total of 34 shots. In two incidents involving 7 white officers a total of 35 shots were fired.

To date a total of 37 citizens have died as a result of police action. Ten of those victims are attributed to STRESS. Of the total number of victims 28 have been black, 8 have been white, and 1 Mexican-American. Nine of the 10 STRESS fatalities have been black. 38 suspects have sustained injuries due to STRESS activity. The fatalities have been caused by 34 white officers and 7 black. All of the STRESS fatalities were the result of the action of white officers. One black STRESS officer has been killed and 56 officers in the department have been wounded.

#### FIREARMS POLICY

Inspector Bannon stated that street muggings were considered among those crimes serious enough to allow an officer to use fatal force on a fleeing suspect. Officers are trained to aim for the largest part of the body. A copy of the Detroit Police Department firearm policy is attached to this report. The Detroit Police Department has an official policy banning the use of warning shots. This policy resulted from the feeling that it would encourage an infrequent and more frequent use of firearms and escalate the number of wounded and fatality suspects.

#### ARRESTS AND CONVICTION

STRESS has to date accounted for 1,747 arrests. Between January and September, 1970 the precinct support unit has accounted for 1,747 arrest. 540 felony warrants have been issued. 141 juveniles have been detained and processed through Juvenile Court. There has to date been six felony convictions and two dismissals.

#### PATROLMAN RICHARD WROBEC

Inspector Bannon indicated he does not know whether Richard Wrobec will be transferred from the unit. That decision will be made by Commissioner Nichols and will be based on the report of C. Casey(B).

#### IDENTIFICATION OF STRESS OFFICERS

Names of officers assigned to the STRESS unit were not divulged, however, staff has identified 13 officers. Citizen injury contacts were checked. All officers had at least two contacts; four officers had three; five officers between 5 and 8; and one officer had 22.

Two officers are of special interest: Raymond Peterson and Michael Ziolkowski. Officer Raymond Peterson has been involved in six separate "decoy" situations in which a total of seven persons have been shot, six fatally. He himself shot one alleged robber to death and critically wounded another. His various partners have killed five. However, in at least three of those cases the decoy officer also fired his weapon. In one incident he and his partners fired a total of 170 shots to kill two fleeing men. One week earlier he and three different partners fired 18 shots at an escaping youth after killing his alleged accomplice.

Prior to his assignment to STRESS officer Peterson had 21 citizen injury contacts. Two were sustained, one was partially sustained, four were not sustained. He had one citizen injury contact subsequent to his STRESS assignment. Officer Michael Ziolkowski was transferred to STRESS while under trial board charges arising out of alleged mistreatment of a black prisoner-MCRC #11438-LE.

#### PLANNED CHANGES IN STRESS

Inspector Bannon indicated that changes in staffing of the unit are being contemplated for departmental reasons. He further stated that the department would be amenable to any recommendations made by the Commission especially in relation to the selection process.

#### COMMUNITY RESPONSE

Mr. George Taylor conducted a survey of black citizens on the east side of Detroit relative to their feelings concerning STRESS. Of the 177 persons interviewed 118 requested the unit be improved, 21 retained as is, and 38 wished the unit terminated.

The majority of persons who indicated improved, expressed the desire to have a majority of black officers on the teams.

The information sheets completed by citizens are on file.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The STRESS unit has been the source of much tension and controversy. The decoy technique has come under criticism from the Urban League, New Detroit, Commission on Community Relations, and various citizens groups.

The decoy method which has accounted for 3% of the total number of arrests has also accounted for 90% of the fatalities.

Inspector Bannon indicated that 20% of the total operation of STRESS involved the use of decoy. Therefore, the effectiveness of the decoy technique as a deterrent to crime is highly questionable. This coupled with the tension caused in the black community leaves grave doubts as to whether the decoy method should be continued.

Inspector Bannon indicated that robberies were down, in precincts where STRESS had been displayed, by 1000 compared to last year. There is, however, no indication that this decrease is correlated to the use of the decoy method. Although this investigation and report is less than exhaustive, enough information was gathered to necessitate the following recommendations.

1. The Detroit Police Department will implement those screening procedures as indicated by Inspector Bannon.
2. Officers with a disproportionate number of citizen complaints and/or citizen injury contacts will be disqualified from STRESS duty.
3. The majority of the officers assigned to STRESS will be black and all teams will be racially integrated.
4. Officers volunteering for the STRESS unit will be screened through the Michigan Civil Rights Commission in regards to complaint activity.
5. The Police Community Relations Specialists of the Michigan Civil Rights Commission will participate in the training program for STRESS officers.
6. Records will be kept indicating the number of shots fired by individual STRESS officers.
7. STRESS officers will be required to keep activity logs during their tour of duty.
8. An officer on each team will be officially designated as the command officer of the team. He will be held accountable for the actions of his men. The designation of command officer will be based on merit and ability.
9. The Detroit Police Department will petition the Common Council for funds to enable the purchase of communication devices for STRESS officers.

Staff makes the following recommendations to the Commission.

1. The Police Community Relations Specialists review the progress of the Detroit Police Department in terms of their implementation of any recommendations accepted.
2. Any recommendations adopted by the Commission be reviewed with the Detroit Police Department.
3. Staff be made available to discuss recommendations with police personnel should they wish to do so.

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