

THE DETECTIVE FORCE: HOW IT WAS CHANGED

New System Adopted by Supt. Wilson

(The detective division of the Chicago police department has been subjected to a thoro shaking up at the hands of Supt. Orlando W. Wilson. What Wilson has done is described in this fifth article in a series.)

BY CLAY GOWRAN

The most controversial move made by Supt. Orlando W. Wilson in his administration of the Chicago police department has been his reorganization of the structure and operations of the detective force.

In a change that began early this year and continued to May, police districts have been stripped of their detectives, about 700 men in all. Police headquarters at 1121 S. State st., from which large numbers of plain clothes men used to work, now has only the skeletonized command posts of the chief of the detectives division and his subcommanders in charge of sections — robbery, burglary, auto theft, and a section for homicide, sex, and aggravated assault; and general assignment.

Six Different Spots

Virtually the total personnel of the division, which has 1,386 policemen and 43 civilian employes, now operates from six detective "area headquarters" strategically spotted thruout the city.

Operating procedures have been revamped as drastically as the division's structure. Detective squads no longer "roam" the city on the chance that they might happen onto trouble. Instead, detectives are on specific assignments.

The old two and three man detective "teams" have been broken up to a large extent, and many detectives work alone. No longer are detectives expected to rush to crime scenes to be in on the preliminary investigation.

Patrol Officers First

Instead, patrol officers [uniformed policemen] are expected to conduct initial investigation of complaints. Their job is to call detectives if they are needed immediately or, if there is no reason for such haste, to submit reports that can be followed up later by detective investigation.

The reorganization has brought anguished outcries from some veterans accustomed to the old ways of the pre-Wilson days—and caustic rebuttals from supporters of the new system.

One big complaint is this: "Removal of detectives from police districts strips the districts of the men who were acquainted with the criminals and trouble spots in such areas and could best deal with crime."

Comment by Chief

John Lennon, deputy chief of detectives, had this to say on the subject: "As a matter of fact, former district detectives were assigned as far as possible, after their transfer to the areas, to work in the sectors with which they were familiar."

Another complaint: "Abolishment of the old 'roaming' squads means that detectives no longer range the city looking for criminals and crime."

A high police official had this reply to such criticism: "Whoever said that is not thinking. Detectives still are ranging the city, even tho they are on specific assignments, and they are expected to be on the lookout for trouble, and to act if they see it."

A Wilson Explanation

A treatise on the reorganization of the detective force, issued by Supt. Wilson's office at the time the change first was proposed, gave a detailed explanation of the reasons for the switch to the new system.

Under the old system, the treatise said, detectives were scattered in some 40 units all over the city, with no effective central control over their operations.

"It is not at all unusual in the case of a relatively serious offense to find six or more de-

tectives on the scene, all taking notes, questioning witnesses, and otherwise performing as if each had sole responsibility for the subject case," the treatise said. "If several detectives are involved in investigation of one case, it is likely that several cases subsequently are given inadequate investigative attention or none at all."

The Past Practice

Here is what the document has to say on the old and now discarded practice of detective squads responding to initial complaints of crime:

"The past practice of utilizing detectives to 'back up' the patrol [uniformed police] operation by responding to as many radio assignments as possible is based on an apparent assumption that patrol personnel are incompetent to handle these matters without detective assistance.

"If this assumption is sound, the proper solution to the problem is to improve the training and supervision of patrol officers. It seems clearly impractical to dissipate the detective force by requiring detectives to function both as patrolmen and investigators."

Put briefly, the main objectives of the new system are: Establishment of efficient control over detective operations, elimination of wasteful duplication of effort, and thoro—if not immediate — investigation of all crimes requiring detective attention in the hope that such careful investigation will lead to their solution.

Another police unit whose operations have been revamped by Wilson is the task force, a special organization made up of more than 450 men and officers.

Before Wilson, task force activities were carried out according to a set pattern. Into a district, picked because it had a high crime rate, the task force would pour masses, sometimes scores of squad cars and motorcycle men. The parade was colorful, but undoubtedly encouraged watching criminals to go some place else to conduct their activities.

A Different Picture

Today, the operation is quiet. From crime analysis maps, decisions are made as to which sections of the city can be benefited most by a "beefing up" of police a l r e a d y assigned to such sections. Into such areas, without fanfare, task force squads are poured, maybe for a night, maybe for a week or month. Shifts of strength, also carried out quietly, are made whenever indicated.

On a recent night, for instance, the trouble-ridden Monroe street, Fillmore, and Lawndale police districts on the west side had 52 regular district cars in operation—19 in the Monroe street district, nine in Lawndale, and 24 in Fillmore.

[TOMORROW: Supt. Wilson himself talks about the changes he has made in the police department.]