

# Portable Police Radios: Instant Communication

BY FRANK ZAHOUR

Chicago police are doing away with car-mounted radios and turning to new, lightweight, personal radios that will give each policeman instant contact with police headquarters.

Key to the new police procedures is a 21-ounce, 2½-inch by 6½-inch personal radio that every policeman will carry by the end of 1972.

Presently, about half of the 8,000 men in the patrol section are equipped with the radios, said James J. Riordan, chief of patrol.

## Lifelines Cut

The new radios will give police greater mobility and police greater freedom on foot; no longer will they be tied to their electronic lifelines of the car radio.

Police Supt. James B. Conlisk Jr. said the new radios give police "greater mobility and permit them to provide more effective service. Now a patrolman can have the advantages of a patrol car and also on-foot mobility. At the same time he can be in radio communication with other police personnel."

New cars arriving for duty in the 18th Police District are no longer equipped with car-mounted radios, said John R. O'Shea, district commander.

"We now have the flexibility

to go both ways," said O'Shea. "The radios mean new opportunities for surveillance and greater flexibility."

## Begun in 1970

The department began receiving the radios in May, 1970. After overcoming technical problems, such as signal strength and interference, the radios have become useful crime fighting tools in the 1st and 18th Police Districts.

Police carefully phase them into operation in each district, and discontinuance of the car-mounted radio comes only after officials become convinced of the effectiveness of the personal radios in any given area.

Radio receivers were first installed in police cars in spring, 1929, when the department conducted an experiment with WGN radio.

## Bulletins Cut In

Regularly scheduled WGN programming was interrupted with bulletins ordering police to rush to scenes of crime. Police heard the calls and so did the public; "Chicago's finest" often arrived at the scene to find the street clogged with curiosity seekers.

The new personal communicator represents the latest development in the use of radios, and former Police Supt. O. W. Wilson sees the Chicago experiments as leading a nationwide trend.

Wilson, 71, now living in retirement in California, has called the personal radio "a very important development. It will enable the policeman to get away from his car, and it certainly is desirable that he should make contact with the citizens of the community he serves."

An experiment with personal radios was conducted by the department in the 1960s when Wilson was superintendent, but high cost and technical problems ended the test.

"One of my last acts as superintendent," said Wilson, "was to communicate to electronics manufacturers the need and the desirability of such a small, personal radio."