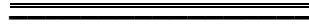


**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**



Reserve Police Units



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ABSTRACT

Local police forces are experiencing a crisis concerning available work force to ensure proper police services are provided. Without the proper staffing levels, citizens are left with longer response times, which could ultimately result in the loss of life or property. Law enforcement agencies should implement a reserve police officer program to ensure the safety of their communities. Having a reserve officer program will allow for greater multi-agency response to disasters. The program will also provide an avenue for law enforcement agencies to gain and retain knowledge that reserve officers could provide after retiring from full time law enforcement employment.

Community involvement is essential for any successful law enforcement agency. A reserve officer program will provide the community the ability to become directly involved in the policing effort. With the involvement of reserve officers, a law enforcement agency can take advantage of cost savings that overtime can incur. With budgetary issues, the demand for increased police availability and department memory, a reserve officer program makes sense.

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INTRODUCTION

America was founded on the dedication of men and women going beyond normalcy to better themselves and provide a future for the generations to come. The only way this was successfully accomplished was due to the American volunteers protecting property and lives of their loved ones. Of course some of the volunteers were set to gain something in return (be it freedom, land, independence), but the same can be said for all volunteers even if it is just a sense of pride in helping others. Law enforcement has the ability to capitalize on the willingness of its very own citizens to volunteer their time and ability to accomplish their agencies' missions. Volunteering is a time honored tradition that has been part of the very development of this country for a (Wallace & Peter, 1994). The history of the early American police reserves can be traced back prior to the arrival of the Anglo Americans.

When Native Americans were the primary occupant of the North American continent, elders of the Sioux Indians implemented a process in which a group of volunteer male warriors would take the responsibility to enforce tribe rules and provide protection to the group (Ross, 2011). These warriors were known as Akicitas, which roughly translates to one that looks after them or looks out over them (Ross, 2011). These Akicitas are considered an early form of the voluntary police reserve force. They operate under the full authority of their Chief much like the police reservist of today and were responsible to provide protection and enforce the rules for their tribe. They accompanied the members of their tribes on hunting parties to ensure they were acting within the rules and not straying outside what was expected. They were to act swiftly and administer swift justice when members committed infractions that could bring

unwanted attention to their tribe from outside forces such as theft (Greenberg, 2015).

The Akicitas lived away from the hunting parties to decrease fraternization as well as to provide a ring of protection to those living within. This warrior society had the responsibility to maintain law and order within their culture (Greenberg, 2015).

The volunteer police reserve function moved on to the watch and ward committees during the colonial times (Greenberg, 2015). This was the period of time where local citizens organized a watch system of where they participated, or the well-to-do paid someone else to stand their watch for them. From there forward, several other forms of reserve police forces organized in the forms of vigilantes, posses, militias, and the American Protective League (Wolff, Albrecht, & Dobrin, 2015). During World War II, the establishment of several forms of volunteer civil defense organizations saw the implementation of police reserve forces in several American cities. These police reserves helped to provide the much needed personnel to supplement security at sensitive port locations, patrol functions, as well as other essential duties police officers overseas usually accomplished while home (Greenberg, 2015).

Just as in World War II, the United States finds itself once again in a state of war on several fronts with no end in sight. This means that many of the officers currently employed at agencies are also serving in reserve military units. These officers will eventually find themselves deployed for uncertain amounts of time. This can effect an agency on several levels. An agency is required morally and by law to retain that position for that officer while they are deployed. Besides the actual military deployment, the officers are required to fulfill their monthly and annual training cycles as well and any work-ups prior to the deployment (Sharp, 2003). Many agencies are not large enough to

absorb that loss for an extended amount of time without reallocating funds for either overtime or hiring additional personnel. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush urged all citizens to serve their community in one way or another which included participation in a volunteer police reserve force. Since that time, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) with funding through the Bureau of Justice Assistance in the U.S. Department of Justice, The Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS) Programs were established in May of 2002 (Godshall, 2009). Its first step was to find out how many law enforcement volunteer programs existed and what type of resources would be needed for them to become effective to the respective communities (Godshall, 2009). This ended unorganized police volunteer programs and created new standardized operating procedures for the first time.

There are vast amount of opportunities a police reserve unit could help a law enforcement agency accomplish. The ability to retain institutional knowledge from retiring officers to providing police training to business leaders who also have their own professional experiences will help develop and strengthen community relations with the department. With the current military operations going on throughout the war and the ever increasing multiagency response to natural disasters, law enforcement agencies should implement a reserve police officer program.

POSITION

The incredible value that a reserve police unit could add to a law enforcement agency is enormous. The first reason law enforcement agencies should implement a reserve program is to retain the knowledgeable resources either directly or indirectly

invested in reserve officers. Typically there are three types of people who volunteer to serve as reserve police officers (Wolff et al., 2015).

The first set of volunteers includes people who have never held full-time law enforcement positions. These people approach the position as a sense of duty and a way to give back to the community. The second group of reserve volunteers are officers who choose to participate because they see it as a way to get their foot in the door and gain valuable experience so they can apply with confidence for a full-time position (Wolff et al., 2015). The final group of volunteers are the officers who have recently retired and are looking for ways to continue serving. This group of officers are extremely valuable considering they have usually held high-ranking positions, have decades of experience, and have extensive organizational memory that cannot be regained once lost (Weinblatt, 1999). Some agencies are so entranced with the idea of keeping institutional knowledge alive that they only allow former full-time officers the ability to join their reserve police units.

Having the ability to maintain this type of knowledge and experience would be invaluable during times of crisis and natural disaster when law enforcement is placed at its limits. When a tornado or hurricane destroys a city or town, the call goes out for any and all help available. Having already trained and certified teams of reserve police officers ready to respond and partner up with full-time officers of the affected area would be instrumental in saving lives and property (Weiss & Davis, 2005).

This same reason establishes a group of officers to evaluate and recruit for full time positions within. There are agencies that have made it a requirement for applicants to have first serve as a voluntary reserve officers prior to being considered

for full time employment (Wolff et al., 2015). This gives the agency time to evaluate officers' determination as well to see if they are a good fit for the department.

Another reason to establish a reserve officer unit is the amount of community policing efforts that can be accomplished with its implementation. There is no doubt that having a police reserve unit can create a positive partnership between members of the community and the police department (Wolff et al., 2015). Many of the reserve officers the public will come into contact with are also their co-workers at the post office, factory, or church. This creates an important link between the police and the community at large. The community already considers them their partners at work or church and, as a result, knows and trusts them (Weinblatt, 1999).

There is an ever increasing number of departments directly assigning their reserve police units to the agencies community policing programs (Sharp, 1999). These reserves not only perform the normal patrol functions of police officers they assist in duties such as parades, festivals and other community functions that do not require a presense of a full time officer. The simple act of recruiting for the reserve police unit can be portrayed as a community policing activity by its recruiting efforts. Attending fraternal organizations, citizen academies, and running ads through the local media shows how agencies are actively involved in wanting community involvement in their efforts to improve the quality of life in their city (Sharp, 1999). Police reserve units can provide reservists exactly what they want by giving them the opportunity for a rewarding experience through providing their family and neighbors their personal service through policing (Sharp, 1999).

Additionally police chiefs across the country are constantly confronted with the increased demands of doing more with less. Department budget challenges calls for unique ideas to ensure that police services continue uninterrupted (Williams, Crowe, & Lowe, 2012). Agencies have studied several functions that can be filled by reserve police officers, thus freeing up their full-time counterparts such as special event details, court room security, and disaster relief details. These functions being filled by reserve officers will reduce cost by eliminating a great deal of overtime pay to officers that have already fulfilled their normal duty hours (Williams et al., 2012). Departments that utilize reserve officers can require them to already possess peace officer licenses thus eliminating that expenditure. The costs of outfitting reserve officers is much less than their counterparts since the reserve officer will not require the yearly expenditures for numerous uniforms and other items that routinely wearout that full time officers require. Each time a reserve officer is utilized in place of a full time officer it is cost effective to the cities tax payers. It should be noted that having a reserve police unit is not free but federal and state grants can help off set the cost. Having a ready reserve of police officers in place when staffing shortages or a natural disaster occurs will ultimately pay off more than any financial cost upfront (Williams et al., 2012).

COUNTER ARGUMENTS

Opponents to the police reserve unit immediately point toward liability issues that accompany such a program ("Police reserve...", 2015). Everyone points to the accidental shooting in Tulsa, Oklahoma in April 2015 where a reserve officer mistakenly discharged his pistol into a struggling suspect believing it to be a Taser (Ellis, Let, & Sidner, 2016). Robert Bates was a 73 year old insurance executive who served on a

high-risk warrant service team as a reservist. Mr. Bates held a peace officer license and one year of full-time peace officer experience in the 1960s. Despite the obvious lack of experience required to be assigned to such a high risk duty, the reserve officer got the assignment. Several other regulations were overlooked regarding Bates' participation in the program much linked to his close relationship with the Sheriff (Ellis et al., 2016). While this incident is clearly disturbing it can clearly be corrected by establishing and enforcing clear policies regarding training and identifying areas for reserve officer utilization. All skills including the skills of a police officer are perishable and require training and practice to become proficient (Weiss & Davis, 2013). Considering that department budgets are already being cut and usually training is the first to take the hit it is natural to cut back on reserve training first.

There are options to supplement the training for reserve police units. The Volunteer Law Enforcement Officer Alliance (VLEOA) (2018) mission statement includes "To assist in the formation, expansion and training of state, county and city volunteer law enforcement units and to promote awareness of the role of the volunteer officer" (para. 1). The mission statement goes on to say they "will strive to be the leader in the training, support and service to the reserve and auxiliary law enforcement officer by providing a network for the exchange of ideas and information" (The Volunteer Law Enforcement Officer Alliance, 2018, para. 1). This organization holds regional training around the country as well as an annual training conference. These training events are planned and posted well in advance so the reserve officers can adjust their primary work schedules to be able to attend the training opportunity. The issue of training is of the greatest importance when utilizing a reserve police unit. The safety of the reserve

officers, the full-time officers they support, and the communities they serve depend and deserve this training. Any reserve officers given full law enforcement authority should be mandated to receive the same training as the full-time officers in their jurisdictions. Ensuring the reserve officers are screened prior to hiring and maintain the same amount of training as other officers in the Department should reduce liability concerns (Wolff et al., 2015).

Many in the media only focus on the failures of the police reserve units and their liability concerns. Many forget the incident in September of 2014 in which Oklahoma County Reserve Deputy Mark Vaughn shot and stopped the murderous rampage of Alton Nolen who had just beheaded his former boss ("Police reserve...", 2015). Reserve Deputy Mark Vaughn happened to be in the right place at the right time because of his full-time employment as the chief operating officer at the business where the attack occurred. This instance proves that having armed trained reserve officers employed at local industries can far outweigh any liabilities, especially liabilities that can be addressed with policy and training.

Opponents also voice concerns regarding acceptance of the reserve officers from not only the community but their full-time counterparts. Some officers have praised reserve officers' dedication to serve, while others suggest they are just dressing up and playing cop ("Police reserve...", 2015). Some explain this due to the way police officers are socialized into the position. Being a police officer has its own culture and officers are expected to learn by going through a very specific process (Phillips & Terrell-Orr, 2013). This process is meant to accomplish multiple things not only teaching the culture but also prove that they belong. Some suggest that the police

culture itself is a very secretive group and that police officers have a natural suspicion of outsiders (Phillips & Terrell-Orr, 2013). Since these reserve officers are not experiencing the same type of work day after day and do not have a constant relationship they believe that the reservist would be labeled as others. The term others can be closely associated with “us vs them” when described in this instance. It suggests that full-time officers would be unwilling to accept reservists as part of the group (Phillips & Terrell-Orr, 2013). Reports suggest otherwise.

While it is true that the police reserves do not experience frequency of work as their full-time counterparts, the consensus suggests that officers appreciate the volunteers and the fact that they are willing to try and help them do their jobs (Phillips & Terrell-Orr, 2013). Frequent exposure to police reservist can encourage familiarity and eventually a complete acceptance by everyone involved. This cannot be a program that is forced but instead a program that exists and everyone gets used to. Reserve police officers can then become a conventional part of the profession of policing (Phillips & Terrell-Orr, 2013).

RECOMMENDATION

According to an article written by Dobrin (2017), there are currently 1334 individuals appointed as reserve police officers in the State. All of these are listed as strictly volunteers and receiving no pay. TCOLE requires that all certified peace officers be it full-time or reserve complete the same basic police academy prior to receiving their basic police officer license (Dobrin, 2017). The police reserve program presents an opportunity for agencies across the state to build better relationships with its respective communities. Having a ready reserve of certified officers willing and able to assist law

enforcement with their mission helps everyone involved. It attracts community leaders who already have extensive relationships within the area and provides a link to reach some that may be intimidated by the police.

It allows the agencies to retain officers that may be retiring or leaving for other opportunity to keep the organization memory that is so often lost upon their departure. It also gives reservists the opportunity to serve their community in a police role simply out of the American tradition of volunteerism. Many of these reservist can help agencies experiencing manpower shortages due to the on-going war on terrorism. They also provide a group of law enforcement trained individuals that can be drawn from to support other agencies during times of disasters like hurricanes and tornados. These men and women do this without complaint or monetary reward. They do it to fulfill a sense of duty to the friends, family, and neighbors. Agencies using police reserve officers report experiencing cost savings as a result (Williams et al., 2012). However, this should not be the sole reason for establishing such a program.

Concerns regarding liability such programs present can be overcome with robust and enforced policy and training cycles. The question regarding the reservists' acceptance by the community and their full-time counterparts can be overcome by encouraging the people involved to be forward thinking. This program ultimately places several more trained and certified police officers in the community that could one day save their life. With the current state of officer shortages and concern regarding active shooters, law enforcement agencies should look outside the box and implement a reserve officer program in their jurisdiction.

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