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**The Bill Blackwood  
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A Feasibility Study of the Police Reserve Unit

**A Policy Research Project  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Professional Designation  
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RESERVE

## **ABSTRACT**

This project explores the usefulness of a volunteer reserve unit in the modern police agency. With resources shrinking and demands growing, administrators must find new and alternative ways to deal with those problems. Sometimes revisiting an old concept can solve a new problem.

The purpose of this project is to examine the available material and make a determination as to whether a volunteer reserve unit is a viable and affordable option for the Borger Police Department.

A Volunteer Police Reserve Unit is comprised of several private citizens, who have gone through a rigorous training program and have met all state and department requirements to hold a state peace officer license and are certified to execute all duties of a full time peace officer. The only difference is that these volunteers perform their duties without compensation.

Reserve officers can be deployed as a unit or individually by the departments command staff to supplement, extend and strengthen any manpower shortages that may exist during regular patrols or during times of civil unrest, riots, large gatherings, sporting or cultural events etc.

It is concluded that a Volunteer Reserve Unit is an affordable and viable option to alleviate manpower shortages in the Borger Police Department. Upon completing this research it should be noted that an additional benefit to the Borger Police Department in the form of positive public relations could be gained by implementing a volunteer reserve unit. By allowing the citizens of the community to become involved in the problems and, ultimately, the solutions, everyone wins.

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## INTRODUCTION

In today's police agency budget cuts, manpower shortages and privatization are common and on the rise. New avenues of funding and ways of dealing with these issues are necessary. New avenues are not necessarily new ideas. Old ideas and concepts revisited might hold some of these answers.

The purpose of this research project is to explore an old concept; that of a Volunteer Police Reserve Unit. This research paper will determine the usefulness of such a unit within the Borger Police Department.

The problem of a limited and shrinking budget due to budget cuts has caused the Borger Police Department to be faced with manpower shortages. This paper examines several issues in an attempt to provide the Command staff adequate information to make the determination of whether a reserve unit will be a viable option.

The intended audience for this project is the Command staff of the Borger Police Department, City Manager and City Council.

Sources of information and methods used in this project are police journals and periodicals, other department operating procedures and policies on established reserve units, State law, legal opinions, books and web sites.

This paper will examine such issues as start up costs, liability, recruitment, cost analysis and intended duties etc. The intended outcome of this project will be to make a recommendation for the adoption of a volunteer reserve unit for the Borger Police Department. Such a unit is a viable and affordable option for the Borger Police Department.

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

Kruger (1982) comments that, in colonial times, volunteer reserve forces were utilized in the form of posses. These unpaid volunteer citizens armed themselves and assisted the local Sheriffs and Constables in manhunts, emergencies, and in bringing criminals to justice. This reliance on volunteer citizens assisting the local police force was the norm until the 1920s. The period from the 1920s until World War II saw a decline of volunteer citizens as police. This is when "what could be termed the modern period of policing began" (Kruger 1982 p.40). During this period, the U.S relied more on full- time uniformed police and less on volunteers. They wanted a professional police force patrolling their cities and towns, not unpaid private citizens.

During World War II, with a majority of the men fighting, there was a shortage of police and the creation of Civil Defense Auxiliaries (air raid wardens) was necessary. These volunteers were essential to the National security of the nation. The Civil defense systems stayed in place well into the Cold War Era, (Dow 1978).

These Auxiliaries were used for some law enforcement duties, but were poorly trained and equipped to perform those duties. Often they were elderly or middle aged men with little or no training in law enforcement. Armed with nothing but a flashlight they could only perform limited law enforcement duties such as traffic or parking duties (Kruger 1982).

During the 1960s, volunteer reserves started to perform more of a police function along with their Cold War Civil Defense role; however, they still maintained the Civil Defense "Label".

The image of the Civil Defense during this period was again elderly and middle aged men often times politically appointed, dressed in unpressed ill-fitted uniforms.

(Kruger1982)

Kruger (1982) writes that the Civil Defense were unable to perform even limited law enforcement duties. Many times while directing traffic in intersections and parking cars they caused more problems than if they had not been there. This image was not very well received by these volunteers. Many units around the country had capable and well-trained people who made a genuine contribution to law enforcement and took their roles seriously. They recognized a need to bring about change within their units and lose the stereo type image.

In 1978 Ronald Dow, Criminal Justice Professor (p.4) wrote: " Since the Korean Conflict there has been a gradual national transition from the Civil Defense Auxiliary Unit". This was the point that turned the volunteer police service toward a specific law enforcement function (Whiteside 1995).

The 1980s saw a drastic increase in violent crime, Federal budget cuts, and a public demand for lower taxes and increased productivity (Whiteside 1995).

This increased the burden on many police departments throughout the country and caused them to find alternative ways to deal with those problems. Numerous smaller departments and some larger departments, saw a need for a well trained properly equipped reserve force to help offset their already over- burdened full time forces.

(Taylor 1982).

Many Departments throughout the 1980s that had reserve forces re-organized and began a formal training process for the reserves. During this time, State certifying agencies such as The Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Standards and Education and The California Police Officer Standards and Training, aided by adopting set standards, training requirements, and certification of police reserves (Whiteside 1995).

In the 1990s in numerous states and police departments, reserve officers and reserve units are held to the same exacting standards of recruitment, training, education, and conduct as those of full- time regular officers. They are in effect "regular" officers who are unpaid and are by state mandate required to be state certified. These reserves are making a real contribution to modern law enforcement. This new system allows the citizen to voluntarily participate in their own security rather than a have a total reliance on regular police force (Taylor 1982).

Today, as in Colonial times, local law enforcement agencies are again relaying on private citizens to assist them. "Many private citizens have a real interest in law enforcement, and many have special skills and talents that are useful to many police organizations. However for one reason or another these private citizens will not or can not engage in law enforcement on a full time basis". (Kruger 1982 p.41)

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE OR PRACTICE:

Taylor (1982) in an article on volunteerism reports that the Colorado Springs, Colorado Police Dept. used both civilian volunteers and police reserves in that city to alleviate the climbing crime rate and decreasing budget dollars. Through proper recruitment, training, and placement within any of that department's bureaus the volunteers have saved the city thousands of dollars in a relatively short time. This report also notes that the trust built from the citizen police team in terms of community relations cannot be measured by any budgetary process.

Kruger (1982) reports that the Salem Illinois Police Department saw a need to have a volunteer reserve force in their city of 8000 to assist in natural disasters, emergencies, and several annual festivals, which place an enormous load on the Police Department. Recruitment standards are the same as for regular officers. The Department conducts training "in house". The cost of the unit start up was minimal- less than \$1000.00 per man. The reserve units "fund raising" efforts will eliminate this cost in the future. The Salem Police Reserve Unit has proved it's worth according to Chief Kruger.

A 1994 report by Wallace and Peters on Police Reserves Rights and Liabilities examines the legal issues associated with reserves. Several issues must be addressed and dealt with in order to have an effective reserve program. Labor unions must be consulted as to the extent of reserves being used instead of "overtime" officers. Failure to train as cited in (Russo v. City of Cincinnati 1992) states the agency must provide training that is adequate in content and quality. Worker's compensation issues must also be addressed.



The California Commission on Police Officer Standards and Training (POST) conducted a 1995 "Reserve Officer Utilization Survey" in which they surveyed 314 small agencies and received 209 replies. Of those 209, 196 agencies had a reserve program, which accounted for 2,242 reserve police officers in the state. The agencies that disbanded their reserve programs cited reasons as "Lack of candidate interest," "More of a burden than a benefit," and "Training requirements exceed resources." The survey also found that 42.5% of the small agency reserve units had a rank structure, compared with 83.3% in large agencies. The survey revealed that 173 out of the 196 reserve units belonged to a labor association.

Whiteside (1995) reports in a study conducted in cooperation with the California (P.O.S.T) that there is a significant decline in the number of reserve officers in the state. From 1983 until 1993 there was a reduction of 1,315 reserve officers, which equates to an 11.6% reduction over a 10-year period.

In a comparison study with the 1992 California crime statistics, Whiteside (1995) discovered a pattern of higher crime rates in cities that reduced their number of reserve officers as compared with those cities that increased their reserve officers. "There is an apparent link between agencies with stable or growing reserve programs and lower criminal activity"(Whiteside 1995 p.6). If, "the literature search supports the inference that reserve programs have a positive impact on small communities." (Whiteside 1995 p.6). In the same study, 10 agencies were polled by phone. Eighty percent said their reserves had a positive effect on their communities and seventy percent would like to increase the size of their reserve force.

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The Bexar County Sheriffs Office, San Antonio, TX. has one of the oldest volunteer law enforcement groups in the nation. Their support division currently has more than 200 volunteer deputies. They are required to meet all entrance requirements of a regular deputy and have a Texas Peace Officer License and work a minimum of 16 hours a month, however the current average is 32 hours a month. These Deputies save the taxpayers of Bexar County well over a half a million dollars a year (Thrash 1998).

The Gilbert Police Department, Gilbert, AZ. has 16 full time officers and 3 reserve officers. State law mandates that Arizona reserves complete a reserve-training academy of 400 hours. Upon completion, the Gilbert reserves must also complete a standard field training officer (F.T.O) program. Using their reserves the town of Gilbert saved \$22,980 in an 8-month period (Aragon 1993).

The Belding Police Department, Belding, MI. has 9 full- time officers and 10 reserve officers. Michigan law doesn't require any special or mandatory training for reserves. However, the Belding Police Department trains all of the reserves using full time officers as trainers. Over 6000 hours of service were contributed by the Belding reserves in 1986 to 1987 (Aragon 1993).

## **RELEVANT ISSUES:**

A department must develop a comprehensive policy and procedures manual for volunteer reserve officers and reserve units. This policy should address all key issues in detail to be effective. The procedure manual should set forth without question those things dealing with the operations of the reserves and reserve unit. Several key issues will be discussed in this section

Because not everyone is able to perform in a law enforcement environment, recruitment of candidates should be the number one priority. Those candidates must be able to handle high stress and be mentally and emotionally stable and be physically able to handle the job. Background checks are necessary, in which the candidate's history, stability, and criminal record, if any, are examined in detail.

Training standards must state exactly what training is required prior to joining the department and what advanced training is required once a candidate becomes a reserve. Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Standards and Education requires a Basic Peace Officers License to become a reserve officer. That consists of 720 hours of classroom and hands- on training prior to ever wearing a uniform. Once a person becomes a reserve advance training is required and certain topics are mandated by the state while departments require others. This advanced training should be held within the Department and taught by Department instructors on a set schedule. Training is probably the key item in terms of liability to the officer, the department, and the city. It is vital that a detailed training manual be developed.

In order to portray a professional image and provide for the personal safety of the officer equipment and uniform standards must be set. These standards should explain how the uniform is worn, where and when it is to be worn, what personal equipment is required and who will supply that equipment- the reserve or the department. Requirements and specifications on uniforms, personal body armor, hand guns, leather gear, and accessories must also be set forth.

The duties or service the reserve officer is going to perform must be spelled out. State law sets the authority and scope of responsibility and department policy must prescribe what they can do and what they cannot do. It must spell out what jobs and duties they can perform and if they will be allowed to perform any special assignments or additional duties. It must also set the number of hours required each month; the basic accepted number is 16 hours a month. Duty standards must take into account what action will be taken if those hours are not met by each reserve.

Other issues such as who will take care of administrative duties, record keeping, supervision, and scheduling of the reserve officer must be addressed in a comprehensive policy. Will the unit have a rank structure within and how do they achieve rank? Under whose authority do the reserve fall? Who will do the scheduling and how will it be done? These are all questions that must be answered in order to have an effective program.

A program to educate the citizens about the reserve program, its benefits to the community and requirements to participate should be enacted. The citizens are the ones who will receive the benefits and they must participate in it for it to be a success.

Of all the issues at hand the one of most concern to the Chief of Police and City officials is that of funding. The question of where the funds will come from and how much will it cost should not be the bottom line. Command staff and elected officials should look at the cost/benefit analysis.

Yes, there are certain costs associated with a reserve program. Salaries for full time personnel to administer, train, and supervise. Cash expenditures for bonds, insurance, uniforms, and equipment. However, many departments have looked at and found innovative ways to help funding. Things such as State and Federal grants, and money from the private sector in the form of donations, sponsorships, adopt a cop etc. Many times the reserves themselves can be asked to foot some of the bill by paying for some or all of their training and equipment. Reserve units can hold fund raising events. All of these can help offset, and in some cases eliminate, start up and operating costs.

If still after examining and obtaining alternate ways of funding the bottom line is in fact how much money will the City or Department have to spend, then elected officials and the chief must look at dollars spent vs. benefits received. Currently the annual cost for 1 full time officer is \$52,000. Twelve reserve officers can be fully funded and placed on the street for that amount with an increase of 1240 man-hours annually. This will improve moral and reduce the liability to the city .By increasing the number of personnel on the street you decrease the workload on the full-time officers. This will improve moral, productivity, and providing additional back up officers for their safety. Thus reducing officer safety issues to the city.

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With a comprehensive training program, the reserves as well as receive the full-time officers will benefit, providing the city with a highly trained police force further decreases liability, increases community relations, and increases officer safety.

What price tag can you place on the reduced liability to the city? Is a thousand dollars spent in training and reserve manning up front, worth not having several personnel and several thousand dollars tied up in court defending a lawsuit later. Can you place a dollar value on positive community relations, citizens and police working together for the community and support for your Police Department and City Council?

## **CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The purpose of this research project is to explore an old concept; that of a Volunteer police reserves unit. There is a question as to whether such a Unit a viable and affordable option for the Borger Police Department in dealing with the problem of a limited and shrinking budget. A smaller budget has caused the Borger Police Department to be faced with manpower shortages.

After examining all of the issues, it is concluded that a volunteer reserve unit would be an asset to the Borger Police Department and would effectively deal with the manpower shortage while also providing an added benefit of positive community relations with the Police Department. By providing proper recruitment and training private citizens can make a useful contribution in the community in dealing with those problems that faces the community.

It is further concluded that a comprehensive policy must be written to address the key issues of training, recruitment, uniforms and equipment, duties and responsibilities. Locating alternative funding through grants, the private sector, and the reserve officers themselves would offset the cost and increase the benefits to the Department and the community.

It is recommended that the Borger Police Department adopt a Volunteer Reserve Police program. Such a program would increase needed manpower during peak hours and during times of emergency without the City of Borger having to hire additional officers. For the annual cost of one full time officer, 12 reserve officers can be fully funded, and placed on the street with an increase of 1240 man-hours annually.

Liability to the City will be greatly reduced through extensive training of the reserves. This will have a ripple effect in further reducing the liability in the full- time officers as they will also receive additional training at no additional cost. Start- up and operational cost would be nominal through the receipt of alternative funds.

With the budget shrinking the bottom line for the City is getting "the biggest bang for the buck". With a reserve program, returns on every dollar spent would be four fold, both in services provided by the Police Department and in the impact on the citizens. No other program the City could start would give those returns.



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