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LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE ADMINISTRATION (LEAA)
POLICE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE REPORT

SUBJECT: A Study of the Police Records and
Communication System

PROJECT NUMBER: 76-152/085

FOR: DeKalb, Illinois, Police Department
Population (1970) 32,949
Police Strength
(Sworn) 45
(Civilian) 13
Total 58

CONTRACTOR: Public Administration Service
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CT NUMBER: J-LEAA-002-76

August 30, 1976

36846

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SECTION I. INTRODUCTION

The Chief of Police in DeKalb, Illinois, requested technical assistance for the purpose of reviewing and updating the Department's records and communications system in order to eliminate information flow problems. The request was forwarded by the Northwest Illinois Criminal Justice Commission to the Illinois Law Enforcement Commission. The Law Enforcement Assistance Administration approved the request and a total of five days was authorized for the assignment. On-site work was conducted during the period August 24-26, 1976. During this time the consultant examined the existing communications and records system and interviewed the following members of the DeKalb Police Department.

Chief of Police J. Maciejewski
Lieutenant Ronald Mosback
Sergeant Ralph Leiser
Sergeant Charles Kross
Patrolman C. Gerald Powell
Patrolman William Thompson
Patrolman Gordon Plucker
Patrolman Robert McMorrow
Miss Debbie Kaufman
Mrs. Cleo Edwards
Mrs. Joyce Hiland

In addition, the consultant interviewed Sergeant Peter Luhrs of the Rockford, Illinois, Police Department and examined that Department's microfilm records system.

The City of DeKalb, population 32,949, is located in North-Central Illinois, and is the site of Northern Illinois University with a current enrollment of approximately 22,000 students, about half of whom reside in University housing. The University has its own security force. The City of DeKalb occupies 6.5 square miles and its population has remained largely stable for the past decade.

The DeKalb Police Department consists of 45 sworn officers and 13 full-time civilian employees. Civilian employees include six dispatchers, four police cadets, two secretaries, and one animal warden. Sworn personnel include a Chief of Police, 2 lieutenants, 6 sergeants, and 36 patrolmen.^{1/} The Department's organization is shown in Figure 1.

^{1/} The Department also employs a part-time (20 hours per week) secretary to assist in the records section.

The Police Department has 12 automobiles assigned to it and in 1975 logged 455,423 miles driven. ^{2/} Between 1972 and 1975, the Police Department's calls for service increased by approximately 50 percent. In 1975, the Police Department recorded 13,307 miscellaneous service incidents. The City's index crime rate (serious offenses per 100,000 population) remained stable between 1973 and 1975.

A comparison of activity figures for the years 1974 and 1975 is shown in Table 1.

^{2/} Statistical activity data are from the 1975 DeKalb Police Department Annual Report.

Figure 1
ORGANIZATION CHART
DEKALB, ILLINOIS, POLICE DEPARTMENT
August, 1976

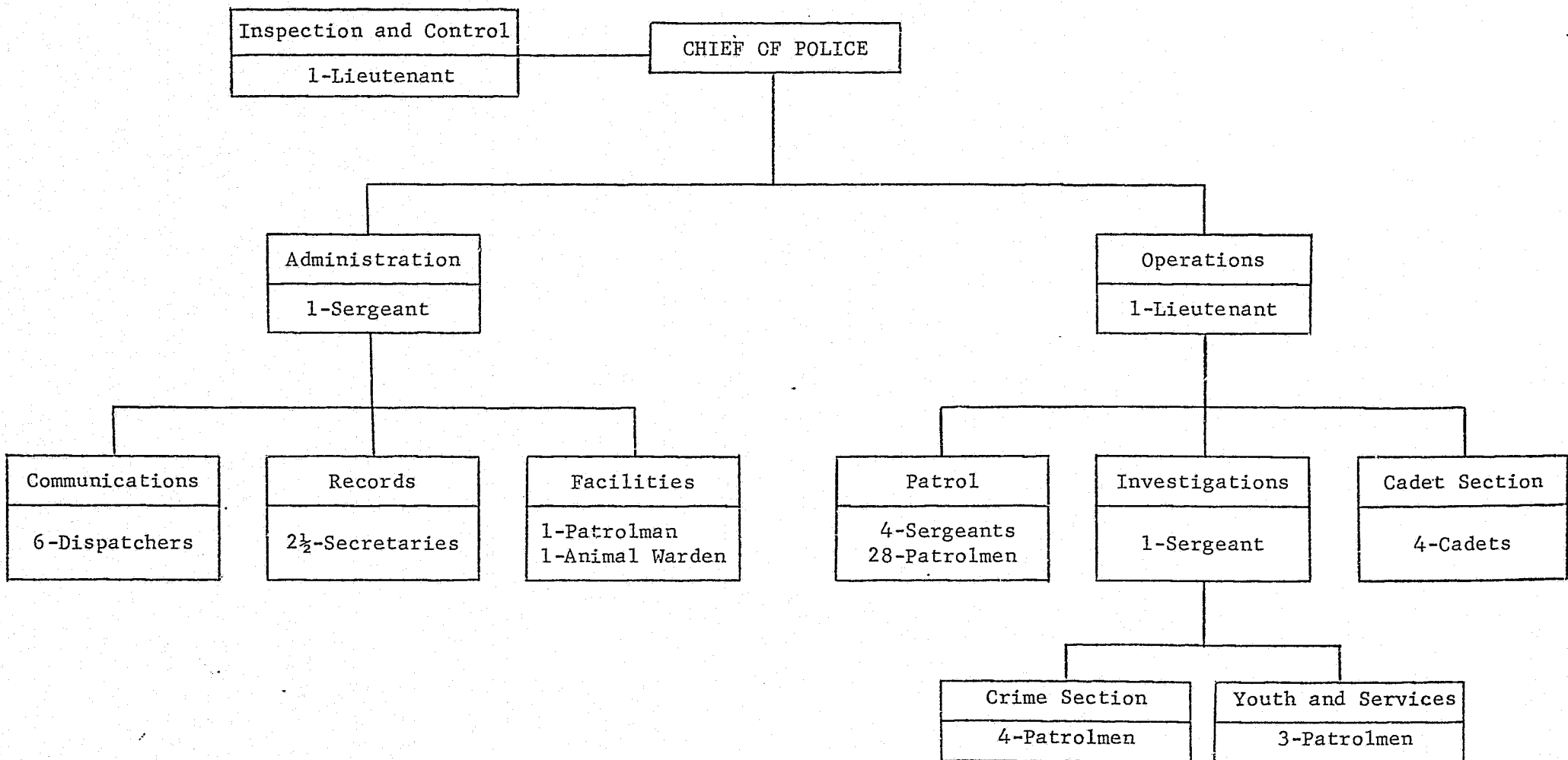


Table 1
 ACTIVITY SUMMARY
 DEKALB, ILLINOIS, POLICE DEPARTMENT
 1974-1975

	1974	1975	Percent Change
Index Offenses ^{a/}	1,190	1,170	- 1.7
(Number Cleared)	(264)	(274)	+ 3.8
(Percent Cleared)	(22.2)	(23.4)	+ 5.4
Non-Index Offenses ^{b/}	2,038	1,979	- 2.9
(Number Cleared)	(1,026)	(985)	- 4.0
(Percent Cleared)	(50.3)	(49.8)	- 1.0
Total Offenses	3,228	3,149	- 2.4
(Number Cleared)	(1,290)	(1,259)	- 2.4
(Percent Cleared)	(40.0)	(40.0)	0
Adult Arrests - Total	959	919	- 4.2
(Index Crimes)	(179)	(181)	- 1.1
(Non-Index Crimes)	(780)	(738)	- 5.4
Juvenile Arrests	162	245	+ 51.2
(Index Crimes)	(63)	(105)	+ 66.7
(Non-Index Crimes)	(99)	(140)	+ 41.4
Traffic Accidents - Total	1,592	1,627	+ 2.2
(Fatal and Personal Injury)	(150)	(140)	- 6.7
(Non-Injury)	(1,442)	(1,487)	+ 3.1
Traffic Arrests - Total	4,338	3,564	- 17.8
(Accident)	646	629	- 2.6
(Non-Accident)	3,692	2,935	- 20.5
Written Warnings	2,146	2,910	+ 35.6
Verbal Warnings	3,455	3,982	+ 15.3

^{a/} Includes homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, and auto theft.

^{b/} Includes all other offenses, such as simple assault, forgery, indecent exposure, etc.

SECTION II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The request for technical assistance initiated by the Chief of Police in DeKalb did not specify any particular problem areas, but rather requested a review of the records and communications system "in order to eliminate information flow problems." Due to the rather vague nature of this request, considerable time was spent in examining the current communications and records systems and procedures and in interviewing Department staff in order to elicit their views on current problems. After much study, it was determined that the problems that do exist are relatively minor in nature and that, on the whole, the communications and records systems are quite sound.

Specific problems identified were:

1. The need for a standard format dispatch card which would permit more efficient recording of original complaint information by the dispatcher.
2. Space and facility problems which increase the amount of time and effort required to locate files and reports.
3. An elaborate report review procedure which creates delays in processing reports and adds to the confusion which results in trying to locate original reports soon after they have been initiated.
4. Internal controls concerning access to the files by non-records personnel.
5. Excessive demands on records personnel for copies of reports, thus distracting them from their regular duties.
6. Interruptions in the duties of records personnel created by the necessity to answer telephone inquiries, handle walk-in traffic at the record counter, make record checks, etc.

SECTION III. ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM

Complaint Receipt Procedures

The DeKalb Police Department utilizes a very simple and straight-forward approach to recording complaints and police activities. Each time a call for service is received, the dispatcher time/date stamps a blank IBM card and notes the name and address of the complainant, the type of incident (using an incident code number), and the officer assigned. This procedure is also followed on officer-initiated calls as well. The location of the incident, broken down into one of 20 reporting districts, is also shown.

When the officer completes the call, he will indicate to the dispatcher whether a case report has been initiated. If so, the dispatcher assigns a case report number and records this number on the dispatch card.

All dispatch cards are sequentially numbered, starting with 001 at the beginning of each new day (midnight). Completed dispatch cards are then entered on the Desk Report, which is a typewritten summary of all police activities and which is prepared by the dispatcher. An average of 100 incidents are recorded on the Desk Report each 24-hour period.

Two copies of the Desk Report are prepared. One copy goes to the patrol sergeants' office and a second is kept on file in the radio room for a period of 30 days. The original goes to records for name indexing. Each work day the administrative sergeant reviews the Desk Report and checks those entries which should be indexed. A secretary then prepares name cards and places them in the name index.

Each work day one of the secretaries checks the dispatch cards for any that indicate a case report was prepared. She then locates the case report, reads it, and determines the proper offense code classification, which is derived from the classification codes used for the Illinois Uniform Crime Reports (I-UCR). The secretary then enters this number on the dispatch card and returns it to the radio room.

Each month, the dispatch cards are keypunched, either by a cadet or one of the dispatcher, and then are taken to Northern Illinois University where they are run through a computer to generate monthly activity reports. These reports, which are produced for a very reasonable amount of money, are useful to the Department in terms of analyzing activity trends and making resource allocation decisions.

The procedure outlined above is relatively unencumbered and expeditious. Moreover, it serves a useful purpose. Two critical observations can be offered, however. First, it would seem that a fixed-format, preprinted dispatch card would be more efficient than the blank IBM

card being used now. As it is, dispatchers must necessarily commit some information to memory while transferring the information from the dispatch card to the Desk Report. In addition, a fixed-format card would ensure that all necessary information, such as name, address, and telephone number of the complainant, is recorded when the call is received. Moreover, a fixed-format card would permit the recording of additional (backup) officers on a single incident. Under the present system, cards must be prepared for each officer responding to a single call. A fixed-format card could be developed which could still be keypunched for computer analysis.

The second criticism to be made with respect to the processing of the dispatch cards is the requirement that a secretary collect all dispatch cards which indicate case reports have been initiated, match them up with the original case reports (this itself is a time-consuming task due to the difficulty in locating reports as will be discussed later), read the case report, determine the appropriate I-UCR classification, enter the classification code on the card, and return it to the radio room.

It is not clear why patrolmen are deemed incapable of determining the appropriate classification code for a case report. To be sure, it is perhaps preferable to entrust this duty to a single person to ensure consistency of classification, but it would not seem to be an insurmountable problem to train patrolmen in the use of crime classification codes. It is the patrolman, after all, who is most familiar with a case, since it is he who conducts the investigation and prepares the original report. It would follow that he should be capable of determining whether a crime is or is not a burglary, or whether the theft was greater or less than \$50. In short, the Department goes to unnecessary lengths to accomplish something that could be done much more efficiently and just as effectively by requiring patrol officers to determine the appropriate classification code when the report is initiated. Proper training in I-UCR classification methods, supplemented by adequate supervision, should ensure that this process can be completed much more expeditiously, and with a minimum of error.

Records Storage

A lack of adequate storage space for records is not an unusual problem in police departments. The amount and type of information police departments are required to maintain grows each year, and file cabinets and storage areas quickly become over-burdened.

This problem does not seem to be acute in the DeKalb Police Department, even though some staff members expressed concern over expanding storage requirements. At the present time, all case records since 1971, along with all arrest jackets, a central name file, and several other miscellaneous files, are kept in several lateral three-drawer file cabinets, each measuring approximately 39" x 19" x 45". Each drawer will accommodate case reports

for a period of six months. Thus, each file cabinet will accommodate case reports for a period of one and one-half year. Arrest jackets are maintained in four, lateral three-drawer file cabinets. Another lateral three-drawer file cabinet is used for a type of crime card file, an accident location card file, and miscellaneous files. Part of another lateral three-drawer file cabinet is used to store the master name file. Old case reports since 1958 are stored in the basement of the police station and are only frequently referred to.

The Police Department has considered adopting a microfilm system to reduce the space required for storage of police records, but have been advised that federal funding of such a system is doubtful. The City has entertained the notion of purchasing a microfilm system for all city departments, but has taken no positive steps in this direction. Several questions, then, need to be answered:

1. Would a microfilm system reduce the storage requirements for police records?
2. Could such a system be adopted within reasonable cost limits, and would it be cost-effective?
3. Could such a system be used for other municipal departments?

Space-age technology has revolutionized the records storage and retrieval systems available to police agencies today. These systems vary widely in cost and complexity and can be tailored to fit the specific needs, and financial limitations, of most police agencies. Undoubtedly, some such system would be of value to the DeKalb Police Department. The task is to determine what type of system would best fit the Department's needs and still be cost-effective.

Two basic options are possible, each with several variations. One option, the most costly, would be to microfilm all case reports and miscellaneous reports as they are received, and to index them by date, time, location, name, etc., using a computerized memory bank to permit instant access and retrieval. This type of system is currently in use in the Rockford, Illinois, Police Department. In Rockford, however, the volume of cases is sufficient to justify the initial cost of this type of system. The volume of cases in DeKalb, however, is substantially less than that in Rockford, and it is doubtful whether the cost of this type of system could be justified in terms of the expected results.

The second option, which would be much more practical for the DeKalb Police Department, would be to microfilm all case reports and other miscellaneous documents over five years old. This would reduce the storage requirements of these records to a fraction of what they are now. Moreover, since access to these records is required only infrequently,

there would be no need to have a sophisticated index and retrieval system.

The primary advantage of the second option is that the expense would be minimal. The Department could purchase or lease the required equipment to photograph and process the reports, and the only permanent piece of equipment it would need would be a viewer/printer, which can be manually operated whenever a copy of a report is required. It should be noted that state statute may require permanent retention of some records, such original arrest files, but general case reports could probably be disposed of immediately after being microfilmed.

Of the two options, the second would obviously be the most practical from the point of view of the Police Department. If, however, the City were to decide to purchase a single system for all municipal functions, the first option would offer some definite possibilities and would probably be cost-effective in the long run. The second option, of course, could be used for applications other than the Police Department, but on a more limited basis.

There would not seem to be, at this time, any particular advantage to be gained by trying to microfilm current police operating files, such as the master name index, type of offense, or accident location files.

Report Processing

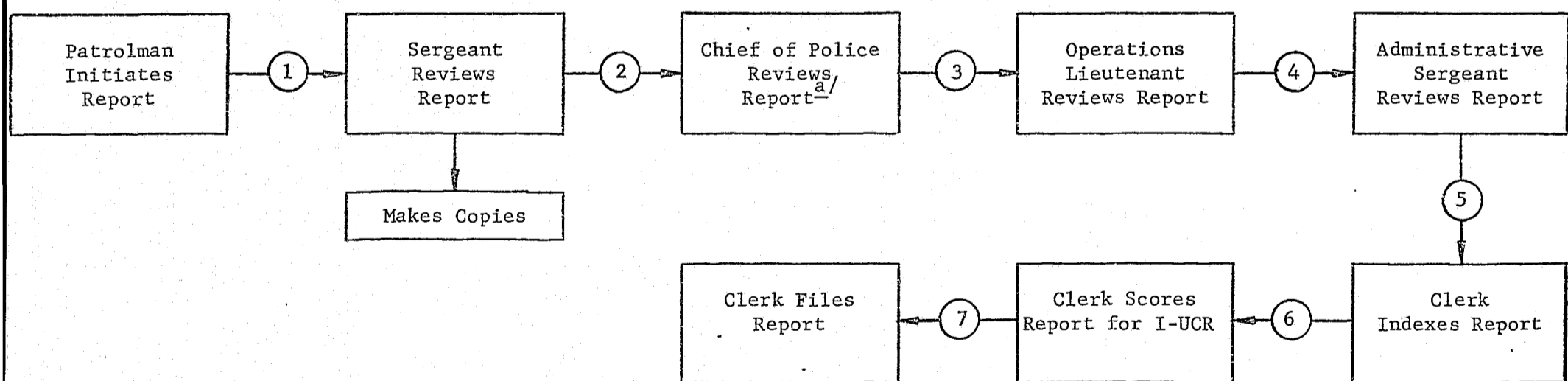
The manner in which case reports are processed in the DeKalb Police Department, from the time they are written to the time they are placed in the master file, is a somewhat complex one. While each step of the process has a legitimate purpose, the very complexity of the system creates serious time lags in the processing sequence. As a result, a delay of up to 72 hours may be encountered before a report is finally processed and placed in the master files. This creates needless confusion and disruption when trying to locate reports. The problem, then, is to provide some level of quality control that is now possible, but to speed up the processing cycle and reduce delays. The present system works as follows (see Figure 2).

After a report is written in the field, it is turned over to the patrol supervisors for review and approval. The supervisor then makes copies of the report and places the original in a tray in the records room.^{3/} At 8:30 a.m., each work day, these reports are reviewed by the Chief of Police, who reads them largely for informational purposes. Once the Chief of Police has finished reading the reports, they are then reviewed by the Operations Lieutenant.^{4/}

^{3/} We are concerned here with only the original report, not with the copies which are distributed in various ways depending upon the type of report.

^{4/} Due to the changing schedule of the Operations Lieutenant, he may or may not review the reports at this stage.

Figure 2
CASE REPORT PROCESSING FLOW CHART
DEKALB, ILLINOIS, POLICE DEPARTMENT



Delay Factors:

1. Between .5 and 2.0 hours = cumulative delay of between .5 and 2.0 hours
2. Between 2.0 and 24.0 hours = cumulative delay of between 2.5 and 26.0 hours
3. Between .5 and 1.0 hours = cumulative delay of between 3.0 and 27.0 hours
4. Between .5 and 1.0 hours = cumulative delay of between 3.5 and 28.0 hours
5. Between .5 and 1.0 hours = cumulative delay of between 4.0 and 29.0 hours
6. Between 3.0 and 4.0 hours = cumulative delay of between 7.0 and 33.0 hours
7. Between 1.0 and 2.0 hours = cumulative delay of between 8.0 and 35.0 hours

^{a/} Since this step occurs only once each day, at 8:30 A.M., any reports taken after this time must wait until the next working day to be processed further.

The reports are then forwarded to the administrative sergeant, who reads the reports, checks the names to be indexed, and determines which offenses will be entered into the type of crime file. The type of crime file consists of a 3x5 index card file, arranged by type of crime, such as "thefts over \$50," "auto theft," etc. Since not all case reports are indexed, someone in a command position must determine which ones to index.

After the administrative sergeant reviews the reports, they are placed in a tray in the records room. A secretary will then take the reports and prepare name index cards for those names checked on the report, after first checking the master name file to determine if a name card is already on file. If so, the card will be pulled and the new information typed on it. If no card is on file, a new one will be prepared.

After the reports have been indexed, a type of crime card will be made on those checked by the administrative sergeant. At the same time, the secretary will score the report on the Illinois Uniform Crime Report monthly tally sheet. After this has been completed, the report is placed in a tray for filing.

Records personnel maintain a master list of all case report numbers. When a report has been completely processed, the case report number is checked. This enables the secretaries to know which reports, if any, are presently outstanding.

Two basic problems arise from the present method of processing reports. First, there is an exceptionally long delay created by the fact that all original reports must be reviewed by the Chief of Police. Since this occurs only once each work day, reports become backlogged, and do not continue immediately through this processing cycle, as shown in the delay factor figures in Figure 2.

The second problem relates directly to the first. For some reason, not clearly understood by the consultant, police officers seem to frequently require access to case reports. If the reports have not yet been filed, several different locations must be checked before the report may be found. If records personnel are on duty, they must interrupt what they are doing to help an officer find a report. If no records personnel are on duty (the two secretaries work from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday), officers may remove reports from the files or from the desks and then either forget to return them or return them to the wrong place. As a result, more delays and confusion occur.

Two changes in the present method of processing reports seem necessary. First, the major delay in the processing cycle could be eliminated by delivering all completed reports directly from the patrol supervisor to the administrative sergeant. The administrative sergeant's schedule is such

that he could review the report immediately as they come in and forward them directly to the records room. The copy of the case report that now goes to the radio room could first be routed to the Chief of Police, then to the operations lieutenant, and then to the radio room. This procedure could reduce the delay by more than one-half in the case of some reports.

The second change should be obvious. That is, to eliminate the practice of unauthorized personnel (i.e., non-records personnel) removing reports from the files or for trying to obtain access to reports while they are being processed. Since a copy of all case reports is on file in the patrol supervisor's office, there should be no need for officers to see the original report after it has been turned in. Policy directives clearly outlining the need for security of files and reports, and explaining how information may be obtained from central records, should help to minimize the control problem.

A related problem is that officers going to court often need to obtain copies of reports and citations to take to court with them. As a result, records personnel may be required to put aside their work, locate the appropriate report, make copies, give them to the officer, and then refile the report. If a secretary is busy, or if none is available, an officer may elect to get the report and copy it himself, thus enlarging the possibilities of reports becoming lost or misfiled.

A possible solution to this would be to make the lieutenant who serves as court liaison officer responsible for:

1. Determining in advance which officer requires reports for court.^{5/}
2. Obtaining the necessary reports, copying them, and returning the originals to the file.

This would serve to clearly fix responsibility for obtaining court reports on one person and would relieve the secretaries of a considerable burden. Since the lieutenant is responsible for coordinating court schedules and all other court-related matters, it seems logical to give him this additional responsibility.

^{5/} This could be determined by reviewing the docket sheets prepared by the court which list cases scheduled for trial the next day.

SECTION IV. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

On the whole, the present records system of the DeKalb Police Department is operationally sound. While some problems do exist, they are relatively minor in nature and on balance do not detract from the overall effectiveness of the records system. Nevertheless, they are problems that need to be addressed.

Of the problems noted, the most pressing is the delay in processing reports. As pointed out earlier, the delay could be reduced substantially simply by routing to the Chief of Police and the operation lieutenant copies of case reports, rather than the original reports.

Storage space for current reports is not yet a critical problem, but could become one in the near future. By microfilming all case reports over three years old, storage requirements would be substantially reduced and access to these reports could still be maintained.

A modified dispatch card, using a fixed format, would also improve the efficiency of the dispatch operation and would entail very little cost and no real change in operating procedures.

Definite policy guidelines relating to the access of permanent files and records is also warranted, along with changes in the procedures by which copies of reports are obtained. In particular, considerable confusion could be avoided if the court liaison officer were assigned the responsibility of determining which reports are required for court and obtaining the necessary copies himself, rather than requiring records personnel to perform this function.

SECTION V. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are offered to improve the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the police records system.

1. The Department should develop a standard, fixed-format dispatch card to record all original police incident information. This card should be designed to serve as the basic record for all calls received from the public as well as for officer-initiated incidents. Space should also be provided for recording back-up assistance by additional officers. An example of such a form is shown in Figure 3.
2. The Department should take steps to determine the feasibility, in terms of costs and applications, of micro-filming its older records. For the time being, there would seem to be no need to implement a computerized, instant access system unless it were to be used by other City departments. The present volume of case reports in the Police Department does not justify such an elaborate system.
3. Changes in the routing of case reports should be implemented as soon as possible. No less than eight working hours should be required to completely process a case report. Any delay beyond this should be considered excessive and remedial action should be taken.
4. More rigorous controls, backed up by written policy directives, should be placed on the security of police records. The number of persons requiring access to the files should be kept to an absolute minimum. Whenever possible, copies of reports, rather than the original report, should be used to avoid the possibility of reports becoming lost or misplaced.
5. The court liaison officer should be given the responsibility of determining what reports are needed for court and obtaining copies of them for the officers.

Figure 3
SAMPLE DISPATCH CARD

1. Name (Last, First, Middle Initial)		2. Address			3. Telephone	
4. Location		5. Description		6. How Received: <input type="checkbox"/> On-View <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone <input type="checkbox"/> Counter <input type="checkbox"/> Radio <input type="checkbox"/> Other		
8. District	9. Case Number	10. Incident Code				
11. Officer Number	12. Date/Time Received	13. Date/Time Dispatched	14. Date/Time Arrived	15. Date/Time Completed	16. Total Time	
17. Details						
18. Dispatcher		19. Approved		20. Records		

END

7. 10/10/1941