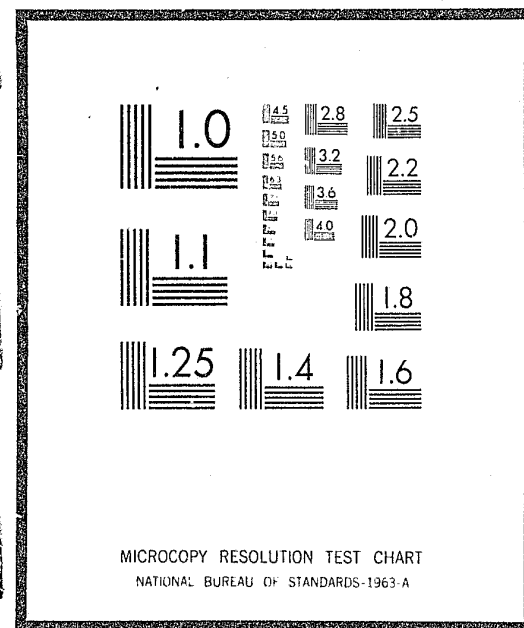# NCJRS

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5/2/77
Date filmed

LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE ADMINISTRATION   (LEAA)

Police Technical Assistance Report

Subject	A Study of the Police Records System
Project Number	76-193/101
For	Wood Dale, Illinois, Police Department
	Population: 12,500 est. (1976)
	Police Strength: 21
	Sworn : 17
	Civilian: 4
	Square Mile Area: 7.7
Consultant	Charles D. Hale
Contract Number	J-LEAA-002-76
Date	December 29, 1976

38905

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INTRODUCTION

The Chief of Police in Wood Dale, Illinois, requested technical assistance for the purpose of reviewing the present police records system and recommending improvements thereto. The request was directed to the regional criminal justice planning council on October 12, 1976, and was approved in late November, 1976. On-site work was conducted during December 22-24, 1976.

The following members of the Wood Dale Police Department were interviewed in order to gain a thorough understanding of the operations and procedures involved in the present records system:

Chief of Police Frank Williams

Sergeant R. Becker

Dispatcher Albert Preisinger

Secretary Beverly Moretti

Clerk Carol Knoll

In addition, the current report forms, activity reports, and report processing procedures were examined in order to determine existing deficiencies and to formulate recommendations for improvement in the records system.

I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The request for technical assistance was initiated by Chief of Police Joseph D. Mandarino who resigned from his position prior to the study being initiated. At the time the on-site work was conducted, Chief of Police Frank Williams, a former sergeant with the Wood Dale Police Department, had served less than one month as Chief of Police. Chief Williams was unsure of exactly what problems Chief Mandarino had wished addressed during the study. In addition, an interview with the police record clerk revealed no particular problems, other than a lack of adequate storage space. It was learned, however, that plans exist to modify the present structure of the building to provide more working area for the records operation and that new file cabinets with expanded capacity are on order. Accordingly, the consultant was left to identify existing records system problems and formulate recommendations for improvement with little in the way of guidelines from agency personnel.

During conversations with agency staff and in the process of reviewing the present records system, several problems emerged and became the central focus of the study. These problems included:

1. The lack of an effective means of recording, retrieving, and analyzing police activity data for the purpose of improving management decision-making concerning manpower needs, resource allocation, and crime control and crime reduction strategies.

2. The need for an improved system of accounting for and disposing of evidence and found property.

3. A lack of adequate records storage space.

In addition, several areas of relatively less importance were identified. These include the need for multiple-copy report forms to eliminate the practice of mechanically reproducing reports in order to provide copies for detectives; the absence of a central arrest file; and some duplication in the master name file resulting in excessive file storage requirements.

Time did not permit the development of detailed system design requirements. Rather, emphasis was placed on developing general recommendations for the improvement of the Department's records-keeping system.

In general, the Department's records system was found to be adequate for the needs of a small police agency. The most critical need at this time is to improve the quality and level of management information so that police planners can make better decisions regarding resource allocation and crime reduction efforts. Improvements in the Department's system of recording and disposing of evidence are also needed, as is a more effective means of storing inactive police records.

II. ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM

This section presents a brief overview of the Department's field reporting, records processing, and filing procedures. A more detailed discussion of the three principal problem areas mentioned previously is then presented.

The Present System

Information Receipt

The police dispatcher is the point of origin of all police information. Requests for police service are received by the police dispatcher either by telephone or from persons entering the police lobby. It is the duty of the dispatcher to analyze service requests, determine response requirements, assign responding units, ensure coordination of field activities, and provide necessary information to field units.

Upon receiving a request for police service, the dispatcher prepares a complaint slip on which is recorded the type of incident; the location of the incident; the name, address, and telephone number of the complainant (if known); the officer(s) assigned; the date and time the call is received and dispathced; and the time the police unit arrives and completes the assignment.

Complaint cards are not prepared on officer-initiated incidents unless a formal case report is later completed on the incident. Officers are required, however, to enter all field activities on daily activity logs. Other than those incidents for which complaint numbers are assigned, though, there is no effective way to verify the accuracy of the information recorded on the activity logs. In addition, there is no reliable way to ensure that all officer-initiated activities are recorded on the activity log. As a result, there is every likelihood that a considerable amount of officer activity information is either not recorded or is recorded inaccurately.

Complaint slips are serially numbered with a four-digit number prefixed by the last digit of the current year (i.e., 6-5042). This complaint number is assigned to all subsequent case reports originating from the complaint and is the key to the Department's filing system.

Complaint slips consist of an original (white) and one (yellow) copy. Upon completion of the assignment by the field officer, the copies are separated. The originals are collected by the dispatcher and forwarded to the record clerk. The yellow copies are held by the dispatcher until the police report is completed and turned in by the patrol officer. The yellow copy is then attached to the police report.

Incident Tally

Another duty of the dispatcher is to record all complaints on tally sheets which reflect a current summary of all complaints by type of incident, hour of occurrence, day of week, post (beat), and so forth. These incident tally sheets are then used to prepare monthly and annual activity reports which are distributed to the Chief of Police, the City Manager, and the City Council. As indicated above, however, the incident tally sheets reflect only those incidents for which a complaint number has been assigned, and do not include miscellaneous officer-initiated incidents.

Report Processing

Police officers prepare a single-copy police report in the field. Two types of reports are used most frequently. The first is a General Case Report which is used to record all criminal incidents. A second report, the Police Action Report, is used to indicate the action taken on service and related non-criminal incidents. This report is basically an abbreviated check-off type of report which requires little, if any, narrative by the officer.

A third type of report, used less frequently than the two just described, is the "Miscellaneous Incident Exception Report", which is used to record information on quasi-criminal incidents, such as disorderly conduct, which do not require a general case report, but which require some record beyond that provided by the "Police Action Report".

Several other special reports are used also, such as stolen bicycle reports, tow reports, and so forth.

Once the patrol officer completes the police report, it is reviewed by the shift supervisor for accuracy and completeness and is then turned in to the dispatcher, who attaches the yellow copy of the complaint slip. All completed reports are then reviewed by the administrative sergeant who again checks them for accuracy and completeness. This done, the administrative sergeant sorts out those reports which require follow-up from those which do not.

If a report requires follow-up, an assignment slip is attached to it. The assignment slip indicates to whom the case is assigned, the date assigned, the date a follow-up report is required, and any additional remarks. The assignment slip is prepared in duplicate, the original being attached to the report, and the copy retained by the administrative sergeant in a tickler file. This allows the administrative sergeant to check periodically to ensure that follow-up reports are completed as assigned. Generally, all criminal incident reports are assigned for follow-up.

Reports are then forwarded to the record clerk who then makes copies of those reports which have been assigned for follow-up. The copy of the report, along with the assignment slip, is then forwarded to the detective bureau for follow-up. When a follow-up is completed, a supplemental report is prepared and is forwarded to the administrative sergeant for review and is subsequently forwarded to the record clerk for disposition.

All completed reports are filed by complaint number. Before reports are filed, incident cards and name cards are typed for all reports. Incident cards are filed by incident type and name cards are filed in alphabetical order. In addition, the record clerk extracts information from completed reports for inclusion in the monthly Illinois Uniform Crime Report (I-UCR).

The original copy of the complaint slip is filed by complaint number. The yellow copy of the complaint slip is discarded when the completed report is received by the record clerk. Supplemental reports are filed with the original report.

Police Files

A number of files are maintained by the Police Department. They include:

Case Files. The original copies of all completed incident reports, filed by complaint number on a year-by-year basis. Case files prior to 1974 are kept in storage, although records prior to 1970 are apparently quite incomplete.

Name File. A 4" x 5" card is prepared on all persons mentioned in case reports. These cards reflect the name and address of the person, the nature and date of the incident, and the complaint number of the incident. Although these cards could be used to record more than a single entry, a new card is usually prepared on each person named in a report. As a result, several cards may exist for the same individual.

Incident File. A 4" x 5" card is prepared on each case report and is filed by incident type. The Department uses its own incident classification system rather than the classification system recommended by either the state or federal uniform crime reporting system.

Complaint File. The original copies of all complaint slips are filed in chronological sequence by complaint number.

Fingerprint File. A copy of all fingerprints taken from persons arrested is maintained in a file jacket and is filed in alphabetical order by the last name of the person arrested. No classification or arrest numbers are assigned to persons arrested. Rather, the complaint number of the case report connected with the arrest is typed on the fingerprint jacket. A new jacket is prepared on each arrest; therefore, some persons may have more than one arrest jacket on file. In addition, there is no copy of the case report in the fingerprint file. It is therefore necessary to refer back to the appropriate case report to learn the circumstance of an arrest.

Other Files. The Department maintains a variety of other files and logs, most of which are required for routine administrative purposes.

Record System Improvements

No critical problems were discovered in the existing records system. In general, all necessary records are maintained in a logical manner and are easily retrievable. Duplication and decentralization is minimal and there is little wasted effort in the records-keeping process. Nevertheless, some deficiencies do exist and should be corrected.

Incident Reporting

The most immediate need at the present time is to develop a comprehensive incident reporting system that more accurately portrays the time, nature, and scope of police activity. This can be accomplished by changing the manner in which incident data are now recorded and by implementing an improved Incident Record to replace the complaint slip now being used.

A variety of Incident Record types can be developed and implemented. Figure 1 is an example of one type of Incident Record. The form used is less important than the manner in which it is used, however. The basic change recommended with respect to the present system is that an Incident Record would be prepared on all police incidents, including those initiated by officers in the field.

The purpose of the Incident Record is to provide a comprehensive summary of all police activities. This allows police management personnel to make more appropriate decisions regarding how resources may be utilized. While the existing reporting system provides a partial answer in this respect, much information goes unrecorded, or is recorded in a manner that is highly unreliable.

An Incident Record should be prepared on all incidents, including those initiated by the dispatcher as well as those initiated by officers in the field. The report is prepared by the dispatcher at the time the incident is initiated. If an incident results in a police report, the report number (complaint number) is shown on the form. In the event a citation is issued, the citation number is also recorded on the form. If no subsequent report is issued, the disposition of the incident is recorded under the "Remarks" section.

The use of the Incident Record would permit the elimination of the "Police Action Report" now prepared by the patrol officer, since this information would now be placed on the Incident Record. In addition, it would no longer be necessary for officers to maintain daily activity summaries, since all incident data would be recorded by the dispatcher. This would further eliminate the need for supervisors to prepare monthly activity reports from daily activity summaries.

A flow chart showing the manner in which the information is received, recorded, and processed is shown in Figure 2.

It is recommended that the Incident Record be prepared in duplicate so that the copy may be filed by incident type, thus eliminating the need to type incident cards.

Figure 1

INCIDENT RECORD

1. Name (Last, First, Middle Initial)		2. Address			3. Telephone	
4. Location		5. Description		6. How Received: ☐ On-View ☐ Telephone		
8. District	9. Complaint No.		10. Incident Code	☐ Counter ☐ Radio ☐ Other		
11. Officer Number	12. Date/Time Received	13. Date/Time Dispatched	14. Date/Time Arrived	15. Date/Time Completed	16. Total Time	
17. Remarks						
18. Dispatcher		19. Approved		20. Records		

Figure 2

INFORMATION FLOW SYSTEM

INCIDENT REQUIRING POLICE ACTION

Observed By Police Officer

Reported By Citizen

Reported By Other Agency

Dispatcher Initiates Incident Record

Patrol Officer Takes Action

Report Required

Yes

No

Incident Record Completed By Dispatcher

A
page 2

B
page 2
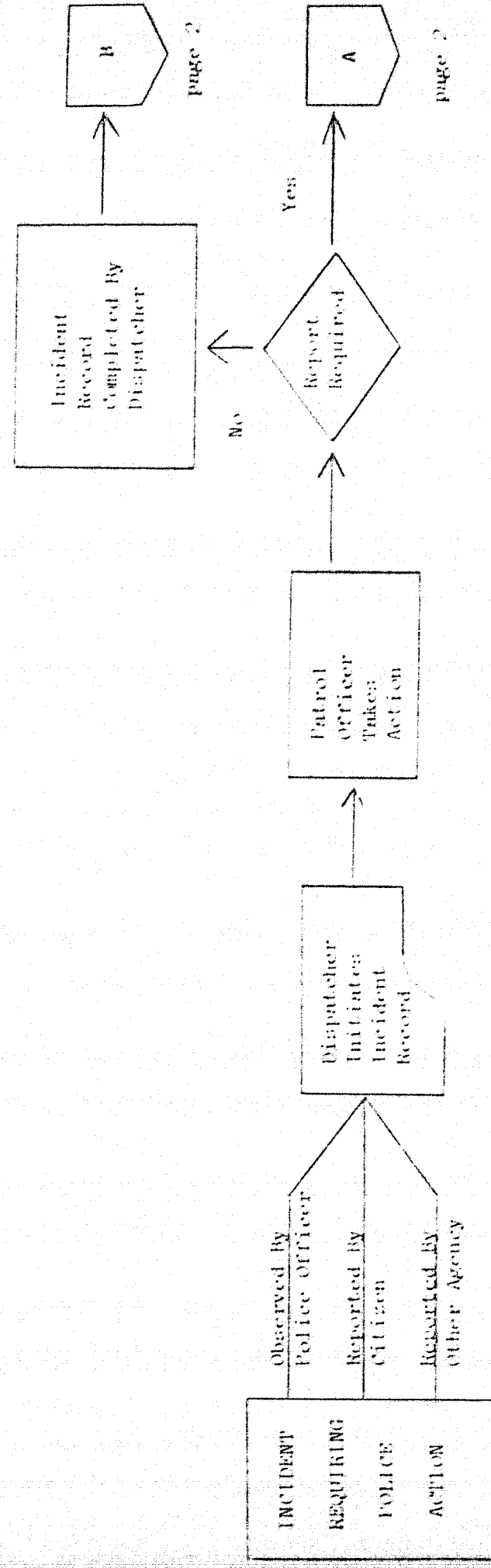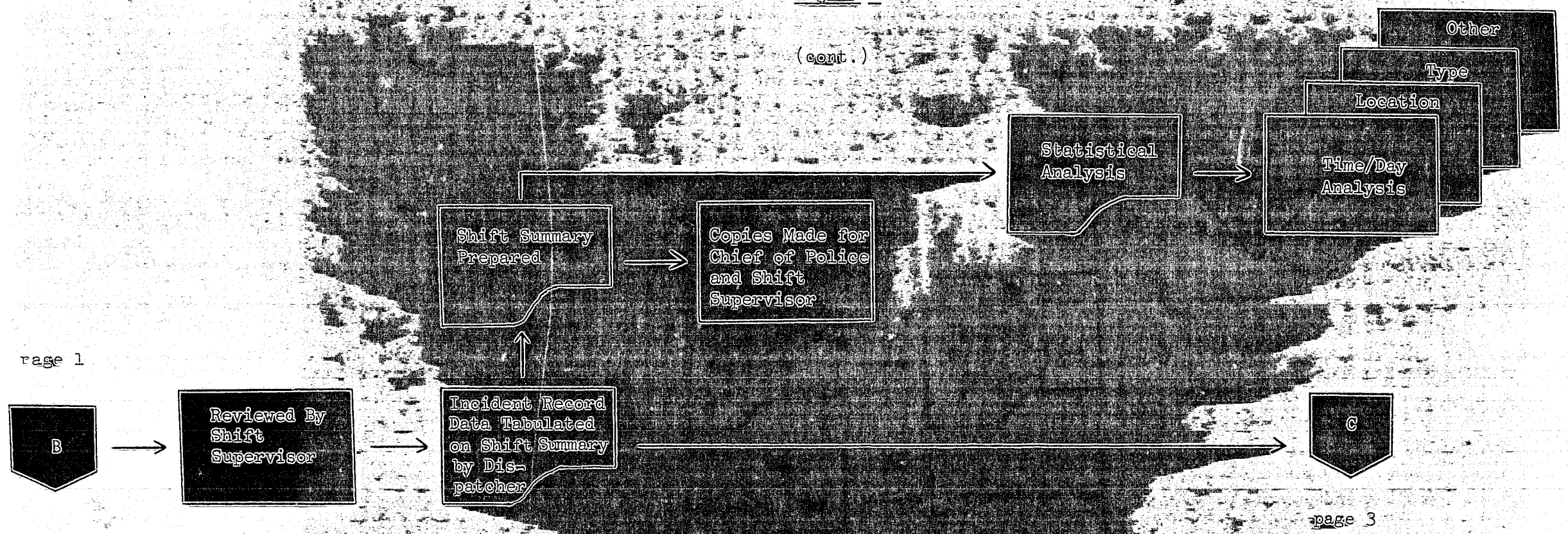
Figure 2

(cont.)

Figure 2

(cont.)

11

Figure 2

(cont.)

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        ┌─────────┐              ┌─────────┐
        │ Monthly │              │ Master  │
        │ I-UCR   │              │ Name    │
        │ Report  │              │ File    │
        └─────────┘              └─────────┘
             ↑                        ↑
   ┌───┐  ┌─────────┐     ┌─────────┐        ╲       ╱
   │   │  │ I-UCR   │     │ Name    │         ╲ Case╱
   │ E │→ │ Data    │  →  │ Card    │  →       ╲   ╱
   │   │  │ Extracted│     │ Typed   │          ╲File
   └─┬─┘  └─────────┘     └─────────┘            ╲╱
     ╲___╱
```
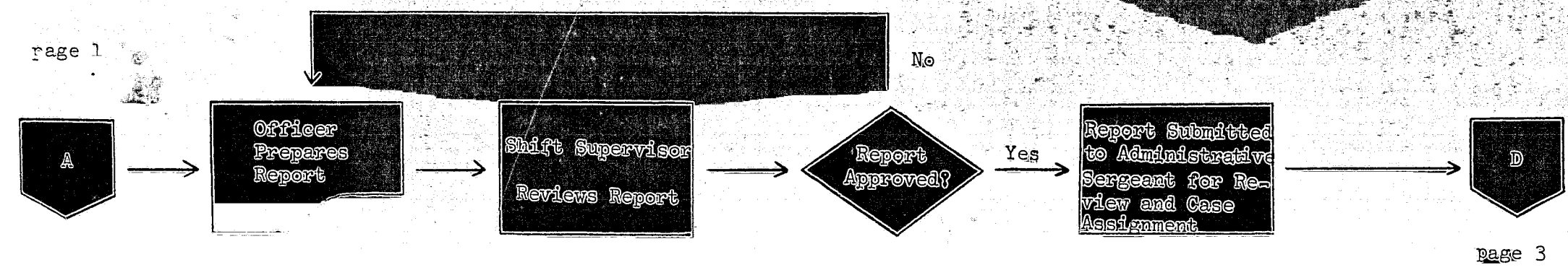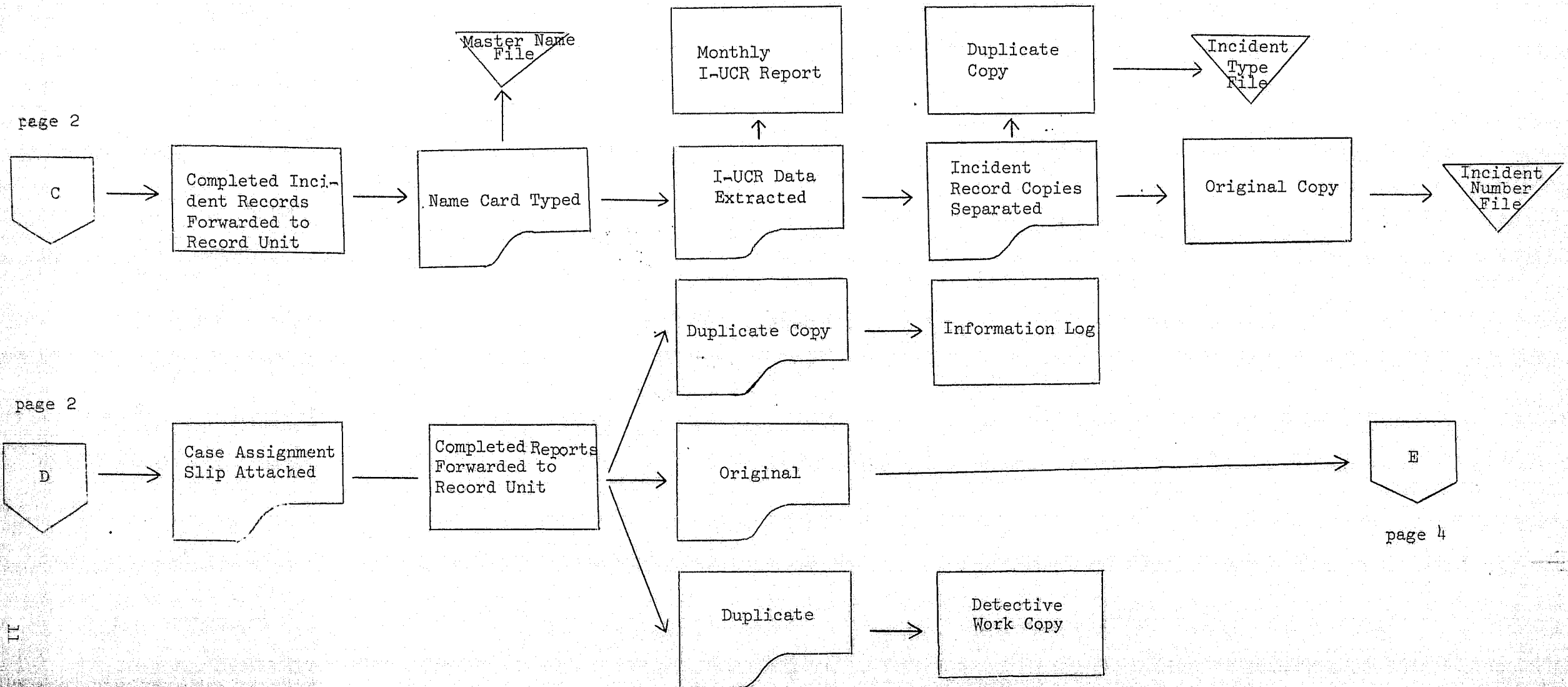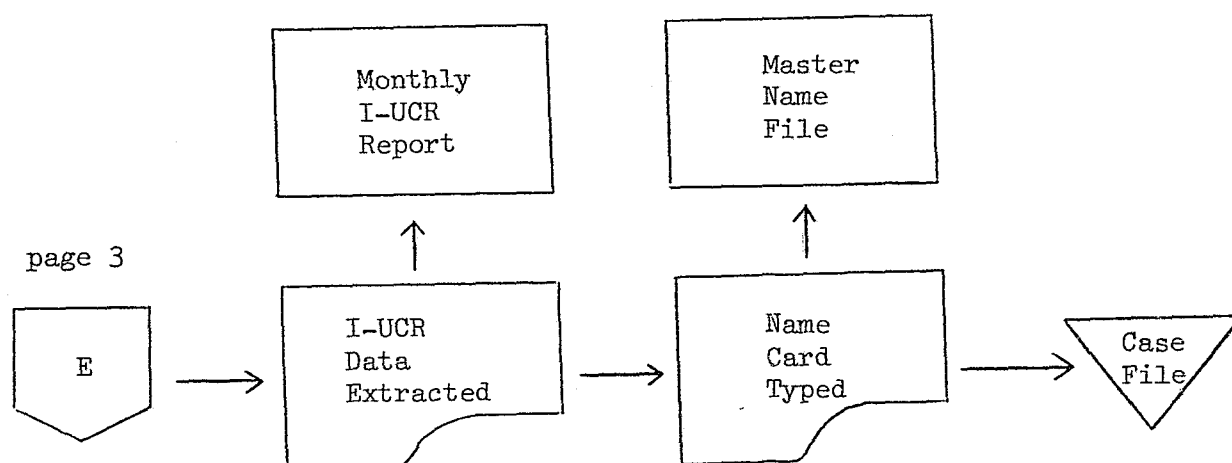
Once incident reports have been completed, they can be entered on a shift summary report, which can be used to prepare statistical activity summary on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. An example of a shift summary report is shown in Figure 3. This report could be prepared by the dispatcher in lieu of the radio log that is now maintained.
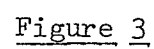
As an alternative, information from the Incident Record could be key-punched, batched, and processed on a computer at lit·le cost. The information categories shown in Figure 3 should be included in any automated data analysis system. Weekly and monthly activity reports could be generated to produce a comprehensive analysis of police activity. A variety of simple computer programs could be purchased at relatively little expense to provide the Department with several periodic activity reports. The Mount Prospect, Illinois, Police Department is in the process of developing an automated report system which could probably be adopted or modified to meet the requirements of the Wood Dale Police Department.

It is also recommended that the Department develop a system of geographic reporting.districts for the purpose of recording crime and police activity. Reporting districts ranging from 1/10 to 1/4 square mile in area are recommended for this purpose. This will provide for a more discrete analysis of crime, traffic, and police activity than is now possible, and will permit more effective deployment of resources.

In addition, it is suggested that the Department consider adopting a series of location codes which can also be used for the purpose of crime and activity analysis. The following location codes are not recommended, but are merely provided for illustration purposes:

0100	street, alley
0110	street, alley, public
0120	street, alley, private
0200	parking lot
0210	parking lot, residential
0220	parking lot, commercial
0300	private residence
0310	private residence, single family
0320	private residence, multiple family
0400	commercial building
0410	commercial building, multiple office
0420	commercial building, single office
0500	industrial building
0600	public facility
0610	recreation area, park
0620	library
0630	school
0640	government building

The type of location code, incident code (currently in use), and reporting district code can be combined to provide a highly sophisticated and extremely useful method of crime analysis. Of course, the more sophisticated the system becomes, the greater the need for automated data processing capability. As indicated earlier, however, this capability can be obtained at a relatively low cost and does not require that the City purchase its own data processing equipment.

Figure 3

SHIFT SUMMARY REPORT

Day: _____ Date: _____ Shift: From _____ A.M. to _____ A.M.
                                                  P.M.   P.M.

INCIDENT CODE	REPORTING DISTRICT	OFFICER(S) ASSIGNED PRIMARY/SECONDARY		TIME RECEIVED	TIME DISP.	TIME ARRIVED	TIME COMPLETED	RESPONSE TIME	ELAPSED TIME	DISPOSITION

Records Storage

The second problem identified in the study is the lack of adequate records storage space. This problem has two principal ingredients. First, the room in which records are maintained is quite small and existing files are reaching maximum storage limitations. Second, the Department has no means of reducing storage space requirements for retired and inactive files. Limited storage space provides only for current files to be kept in the record room. Retired and inactive files are kept in a storeroom and are not easily accessible. In addition, although the Department has obtained assistance in developing a records retention and disposition plan, most records are retained longer than legally or practically necessary.

The storage space problem will shortly be somewhat relieved by the expansion of the record room and the acquisition of new file cabinets with more storage capacity. It is not known, however, what impact these improvements will have on immediate records storage problems.

A long-range solution would be the acquisition of a microfilm processing system for the Police Department. This system could also be used for other City functions as well. The City should seriously consider purchasing a medium-level microfilm system that would permit periodic microfilming of old reports which are not needed on a regular basis. Several models are available for this purpose and can be obtained at a nominal cost. For police purposes, all complaint files over 12 months old could be placed on microfilm and the originals destroyed, thus considerably lessening storage space requirements. Similar advantages would accrue to other City departments.

Report Distribution

Under the present system, all reports referred to detectives for follow-up (which includes, for the most part, all criminal offenses) must be mechanically reproduced. It is suggested that the Department consider adopting multiple-copy report form for those reports which usually require multiple distribution. This would provide a higher level of report processing efficiency with little increase in costs.

Evidence and Found Property

The system of storing, retrieving, and disposing of evidence and found property suffers from two weaknesses. The first is a procedural weakness, and the second pertains to the lack of a uniform system of accounting for evidence.

Presently, when evidence (or found property) is seized, the officer receiving the property places a tag on it and leaves the article in the record room. If the record clerk is on duty, she places the article in a locker, for which only she and the Chief of Police have keys. When the record clerk or the Chief of Police are not on duty, the article is placed in the record room which is locked. The dispatcher has a key to the record room, however, and access is therefore not carefully controlled.

A record of the evidence is prepared and placed with the case report at the time the evidence is taken into custody. These is no systematic method by which items of evidence or found property can be disposed of, however. Instead, it is necessary for someone to periodically check through the items in the evidence locker, review the appropriate case reports, and determine if the evidence can be disposed of.

Several recommendations are offered to improve the integrity of the evidence control system. First, a series of temporary storage lockers, such as those found in airport or bus terminals, should be installed in the proximity of the record room. Upon seizing an article of evidence or found property, the officer would tag the item and place it in the temporary locker. The key would then be removed and placed in a locked box to which only the Chief of Police and the property clerk (the record clerk) have keys. Upon coming on duty each day, the property clerk would open the locked box, remove any keys therein, open the appropriate locker(s) and place the articles in the permanent evidence storage locker.

Second, an expanded area for permanent storage of evidence and found property is required. A large closet-sized room, approximately 10' x 10' would be suitable for this purpose. The room should be constructed with shelves and/or bins along two walls, each bin measuring approximately 2' x 2'. Each bin should be marked with a series of letter and number designations, such as A-1, B-2, etc.

Third, two copies of the evidence or found property report should be prepared. The original should be filed with the case report. The second copy should be placed in the temporary locker with the evidence or found property. When the property clerk places the evidence in the permanent storage locker, the bin number should be marked on the evidence record duplicate copy. This copy should then be placed in a "current" evidence file, until final disposition of the case.

When evidence is required for court or other purposes, an evidence receipt form should be prepared in duplicate by the officer requesting the evidence. One copy should be kept with the evidence and the duplicate attached to the duplicate evidence record on file. If the evidence is later returned for storage, the evidence receipt should be removed and discarded.

It should be the responsibility of officers placing articles in evidence to see that proper disposition is made when the item is no longer required. An evidence disposition form should be prepared in duplicate, the original copy going in the case file and the duplicate copy to the property clerk. Upon receiving an evidence disposition form, the property clerk can remove the evidence from storage and make disposition as required by policy or law. The duplicate copy of the evidence record can then be removed from the "active" evidence file and placed in the "closed" evidence file.

The property clerk should periodically review the "active" evidence file to determine whether any items of evidence or found property are being retained longer than normally required. Any questions regarding retention or disposition should be referred to the officer placing the found property or evidence in storage.

The Chief of Police or his designated representative (someone other than the property clerk) should conduct periodic audits to ensure that all items of evidence and found property listed in the "active" file are accounted for.

The same basic provisions apply equally to found property and evidence, although the procedure for handling found property differs in that some means for attempting to return the found property to its lawful owner is required. In addition, a found property file, consisting of a 3" x 5" card file on which items of found property are recorded, should be established. In addition, a tickler file should be created in order that any articles of found property kept beyond a six-month period are disposed of if the legal owner cannot be located.

Arrest File

A central arrest file, arranged either by arrest or identification number, or alphabetically by name, should be developed so that all arrests pertaining to a single individual are kept in one file. The arrest folder should include a copy of the offense report connected to the arrest so that it will not be necessary to search through several different files to obtain information on each separate arrest.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are offered to improve the capabilities and efficiency of the records system:

1. Implement an Incident Record system as described in Chapter II and as illustrated in Figures 1 and 2.

2. Prepare periodic activity summaries, either manually or automated, as described in Chapter II and illustrated in Figure 3.

3. Develop geographic reporting districts and location codes.

4. Explore the feasibility and costs of purchasing a medium-level microfilm system for all City functions.

5. Implement improved procedures for recording the receipt and disposition of found property and evidence.

6. Implement a central arrest file which would include a copy of all information pertinent to an arrest. The arrest file would be identified with an arrest number or identification number which would be used for all subsequent arrests for that individual.

7. Periodically check master name file for duplicate cards and combine entries on a single card.

8. Convert existing incident file to file classification based upon I-UCR classification codes.

END