

**GONE THE RENAISSANCE COP
WILL SPECIALIZED POLICE OFFICERS BE THE
STAFFING MODEL OF THE FUTURE?**

by

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The Command College Futures Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue of relevance to law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future; rather, to project a variety of possible scenarios useful for strategic planning in anticipation of the emerging landscape facing policing organizations.

This journal article was created using the futures forecasting process of Command College and its outcomes. Defining the future differs from analyzing the past, because it has not yet happened. In this article, methodologies have been used to discern useful alternatives to enhance the success of planners and leaders in their response to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing it—creating, constraining and adapting to emerging trends and events in a way that optimizes the opportunities and minimizes the threats of relevance to the profession.

The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College Futures Project and journal article are those of the author, and are not necessarily those of the CA Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

GONE THE RENAISSANCE COP WILL SPECIALIZED POLICE OFFICERS BE THE STAFFING MODEL OF THE FUTURE?

In America, municipal police officers are generally... generalists. But as the world they police in changes rapidly the time is fast approaching to rethink traditional staffing models. Is the average local jurisdiction prepared to deal with high technology crimes, anti terrorism efforts, environmental offenses and multi-lingual societies while at the same time operating in a challenging fiscal environment? The future of policing promises to deliver new and emerging challenges that will require substantial expertise. Being a jack of all law enforcement trades and a master of none will not likely serve the industry well as it progresses into the future.

But the answer may be found in creating a new breed of sworn officer. Those that protect and serve by occupying specialized positions; bringing their own training, education and talent to the table with the nuances of law enforcement learned more by hours in the classroom, than miles on the street. In short, the future may include officers appointed via "direct commission." As such, they will work in their own career track, saving millions of dollars in redundant training costs and delivering a higher level of expertise than is possible with more traditional means of delivering police service.

Driving Forces

There can be no question the fiscal crisis of the early twenty-first century will change the way local governments do business for decades to come. In this new era, government must examine not only ways to trim expenses to meet the crisis of today, but also deep structural changes that will alter what government does and how it gets done. Law enforcement is not exempt from these changes, and must be willing to examine their culture to focus on delivering

results with accountability.¹ The once sacred cow of law enforcement can no longer avoid budget cuts, and even with heavy unionization and contracts, austerity is necessary.²

Police agencies spend tremendous amounts of time and money to train new officers to be experts in their field. But many times, these same officers are motivated to seek promotion or transfer to yet another unit of assignment. This of course means a new set of expenditures to create new experts in the same fields. In the future, it is likely that law enforcement will be called upon to justify a system that has such inherent repetitive expenditures that could be saved or used to increase the proficiency of those who could be trained, and then retained, in positions of expertise.

Beyond fiscal challenges lie other threats that will test the ability of law enforcement to respond using current models of generalization. Advancing technology stands out as a particularly daunting task for police investigators to tackle. With more than 80% of U.S. households having at least one computer³, and about that same amount accessing the Internet from some location⁴, it is likely that at least the same percentage of criminal investigations will involve computer evidence in some manner. And as computing technology continues to grow in complexity, so must the expertise of those chosen to investigate technology related crimes.

American demographics are also expected to undergo major shifts in the decades to come. In his book *The Next Hundred Million*, Joel Kotkin relates that governments in America will oversee a far more diverse population and “will no longer be a ‘white country,’ but rather a staggering amalgam of racial, ethnic and religious groups” from across the world.⁵ With such diversity comes the likelihood of police officers encountering unique languages from myriad countries, especially those officers working near major points of entry. Speaking to how

American governments might respond to such challenges, Kotkin posits that such a complex society will “not fit well into a one-size-fits-all approach.”⁶

It is not difficult to imagine these and other areas will challenge the abilities of generalist police officers. Environmental issues, domestic anti-terrorism efforts, unmanned aerial vehicle patrols and infrastructure attacks all will require a specialized expertise to competently respond, investigate and resolve the complex criminal case of the future. The signals are there; our changing world and demands on law enforcement will cause the industry to consider new staffing models. The struggle between frugality and effectiveness will require a unique balance. The use of police specialists may be just what the doctor ordered.

Enter the Specialist

So just what is a police specialist? Specialized officers would bring their own education and training into their job, specialize in an area of need, attend abbreviated law enforcement training, work and advance in their own career path and enjoy the same rights, responsibilities and benefits as a traditional peace officer. These officers would be recruited for the value of their expert knowledge rather than their physical abilities or other attributes commonly sought in their predecessors.

Imagine the need for a technology investigator with a high level of expertise to forensically examine computers or track criminals in the Internet cloud. Rather than taking a street police officer and spending untold dollars to train them (in the hope they have the aptitude to reach an expert level), a police department could hire a computer science graduate and provide some limited one-time training in police procedures. The same would hold true for a linguist or high level interpreter of an unusual language in demand in a given geographic region. Airborne officers are pilots who started as street police officers, complete expensive flight training, and

then often move on to other police assignments. Current pilots with their own certifications could easily fill those positions and stop the hemorrhaging of public funds spent on repetitious pilot training.

Employees like these would save government dollars by bringing their expertise to the table. In addition, these specialists may very well have higher levels of productivity and precision as they stay focused on their area of expertise without the fear of transfer or use of the position to further another ambition. Specialists would replace generalist police officers in those fields calling for specific skills, allowing a police agency to reduce the number of traditional officers it employs. As the use of specialists matures, they would even have their own career track, including supervisors and managers within the same specialty.

Like all sworn law enforcement employees, these specialists would be subjected to pre-employment screening, background investigations and citizenship requirements. Perhaps the biggest departure from tradition would be in basic officer training. While the majority of the traditional academic courses would likely be necessary and valuable to prepare specialized officers, the numerous hours normally dedicated to physical fitness, defensive tactics and firearms could be substantially limited to accommodate the academic nature of this new class of officer. Other field related training courses could also be reviewed and reduced or eliminated. While such courses are valuable for field-based officers, the program for a specialist would be more academic, and most likely resemble a graduate collegiate curriculum in practice. This is not to say the concept of retaining career specialists in positions formerly held by generalists is not without its challenges. The traditions of the profession may be the highest hurdle to scale to implement this concept.

Trends Challenging Tradition

While there may be great diversity among operational procedures in municipal police departments across the nation, there is a fairly common standard in what it means to be a police officer.⁷ Along with those standards comes a tradition of earning the right to wear the badge in a police academy and proving their worthiness on the street. Those that meet the mark spend years becoming good street police officers, some with hopes they may be selected for a specialized assignment to broaden their expertise.

While law enforcement agencies incur huge costs training specialists, the fact they are classically trained police officers who may return to the streets at any time remains. In fact, they do on a regular basis; either through promotion, rotation or some other form of transfer. And thus the cycle begins anew, with money and time being spent for the same training to create the same expertise in another officer. Under the current definition of what it takes to become a police officer, this cycle will likely continue. In a world of accelerating technology and global challenges, though, the question facing law enforcement is how they will provide expertise and services to meet the expectations of the public, both operationally and fiscally, in years to come.

At a community service event in early 2009, a conversation with community member Edward Lafian led to an interesting question. Lafian, who runs a successful business in the Glendale, CA community, expressed a desire to become a reserve police officer. But it was not the lure of lights, sirens and uniforms that led to his decision. Rather, it was a desire to serve his community in the best way he knew how, providing unique linguistic services to a large immigrant population during their interaction with the police.⁸ He pondered why he was required to attend a full police academy and become a regular street police officer before he could even be afforded the opportunity to use the talents he brought to the table. Lafian's

business sense told him that law enforcement could benefit by allowing specialists to bring their own developed talents to a police agency.⁹ He touched on a growing trend in many industries - a trend that has yet to touch law enforcement in a major way. That trend involves a reduction in generalists and an increase in specialists to keep up with changing needs and demands.

Futurists Owen Davies and Marvin Cetron noted in 2008 there is a need for employers to rethink their policies and practices to continue their ability to compete in a global market.¹⁰ Part of that change involves the need for more specialization in industries and professions.¹¹ In private industry, specializing may be a necessity for survival. In government, and particularly in law enforcement, it may be a means of survival of a different sort - political and fiscal survival through a responsible and innovative use of resources.

Certainly, law enforcement, facing pressure to continue to fight crime while reducing spending, has already engaged in a number of strategies to find solutions for fiscal woes and to enhance specialized expertise in their ranks. Amongst those efforts are a few noteworthy examples:

- The City of Oakland is experimenting with hiring armed security guards at city expense to help cover high-crime patrol areas. And while this unique approach by the city is likely to save dollars, the Oakland Police question the qualifications of the guards. Citing a lack of training and background checks, Oakland police officers seem less than open to the idea.¹²
- In Orange County, CA a task force of officers and federal agents has come together in the area's first-ever digital forensics lab. According to the July 22, 2009 *Orange County Register* article entitled "FBI lab to open in O.C. to nab cyber criminals" California is the state with the largest number of cyber-crime victims. Police Chief John Welter of

Anaheim was quoted as saying "...we do not have the most cutting-edge technology or the training for our examiners to successfully extract evidence."¹³

- In Arizona, the Mesa Police Department is hiring civilians to do investigative work.¹⁴ Significant budget cuts in the city have spawned new ideas which include a non-sworn investigative team to handle non-violent criminal investigations. They receive about half the number of hours of training a regular officer does focused on their investigative responsibilities versus other street policing skills. The program is said to be reducing costs while improving the quality of police services by allowing traditional officers to remain on the street and not have to rush through a preliminary investigation to get to the next call.¹⁵

Stories such as these are indicators that the law enforcement industry is trending toward a new staffing paradigm, although the shape it may finally take is still in flux. In Oakland we see that resistance to civilianization seems to linger, and the Orange County plan does not address what happens when their agents and officers promote or transfer. Sworn specialists would address both of these issues.

Apples and Apples

While the idea of using a new classification of police officer may seem foreign and uncomfortable to many law enforcement traditionalists, the concept is not without foundation. Many in the industry will cite the uniqueness of the policing environment, their arcane protocols and norms, and the work necessary to save lives, including their own. It is this uniqueness that makes it difficult to compare the field to private industry models in a meaningful way. The United States military, however, offers a close comparison in the structure and sense of tradition found in law enforcement.

The military has recognized that, in some cases, the specialized skills possessed by some are of great value and worthy of appointment to the officer ranks for the betterment of the service and the country. The authority for such appointments is found in the United States Code which gives the President and the Secretary of Defense the authority to appoint a commissioned officer who, among other qualifications, has special qualifications designated by the Secretary of the military department in need.¹⁶

The original intent may have been to allow medical personnel (doctors and dentists) to serve, as the Code specifically exempts these personnel from the age restrictions imposed on other military officers.¹⁷ It is clear that a military force has a serious need for persons with these skills and qualifications. Rather than trying to find soldiers that can possibly be made into doctors, the military finds doctors that have a desire to serve in a capacity other than the traditional fighting man or woman.

In most military programs, this type of appointment is referred to as a direct commission, and the employee becomes a Direct Commission Officer (DCO). As the needs of the military have changed, so has the list of specialties that might qualify someone for a direct commission. Currently, DCO positions include such fields as law, science, medicine, dentistry, nursing, intelligence, supply-logistics, engineering, public affairs, chaplain corps, cryptology and others.¹⁸ These programs serve to “ensure that the Services have access to a number of different pools of personnel with diverse skills,”¹⁹ and the Navy’s description of their program states “The Direct Commissioning Program serves the expanded needs of the Navy in certain officer skill areas...”²⁰ Military officers in the DCO program do not attend traditional military training. Personnel in this program attend a course on basic officer leadership depending on the branch of service they enter into. The Navy’s program is called the Direct Commission Officer

Indoctrination Course. This program provides the training necessary to prepare them for their role as a commissioned officer.²¹

It is not a tremendous leap to picture a program such as this in the future of law enforcement. Like the Navy, the changing need for specialization is ever present. There are most certainly those who want to serve, like Ed Lafian, but in a specialty they are already trained and prepared to work in. Law enforcement agencies can most certainly develop training to prepare specialized officers in the fundamental aspects of law enforcement.

Of course, there is a legitimate concern when it comes to mixing traditionally trained soldiers or police officers with DCO's or specialists. One group is trained for battle in the field while the other has technical abilities. This reality is not lost on the military. A DCO will always be limited by their field of specialty. While they are fully commissioned military officers with the same rights and responsibilities, specialists promote within their own fields and are often limited in the highest rank they can obtain. They are not line officers, and do not lead or command combat units. Using specialized officers in policing would likely require similar limitations.

Still Sworn to Serve

As the idea of creating specialized officers was informally discussed with law enforcement officials, one common question was whether or not such positions needed to be sworn officers. We can only speculate regarding the allure of commissioned ranks to those who are drawn to serve in the military in DCO positions. If they were simply civilian technicians, the draw would likely be less, as there seems to be a higher purpose in what they are doing as well as the same prestige, rights and benefits.

Law enforcement brings with it a certain mystique as well. Those that have a desire to serve in the battle against crime may share the same mindset. Potential specialists also bring with them marketable skills. We must wonder if they would settle for the position being a subservient role. The *Associated Press* published an article discussing how a shortage of cyber experts is hindering the government, and warns the government that they will need to improve quickly. Max Stier, President of the Partnership for Public Service, was quoted as saying “You can’t win the cyber war if you don’t win the war for talent.”²² In his article *Hold That Hire, Will Wilson* also warns that as the economy recovers governments will face a challenge to retain their employees, citing salary as one primary factor.²³

Beyond the financial side of the equation, there are certain legal and safety advantages to these positions having full police powers. Specialized officers should be expected to be fully engaged in the pursuit of criminals in whatever their specialty allows, including responding to search warrants and providing court testimony. This places those officers at the same level of risk of retaliation as any other peace officer, and the legal ability to be armed could be essential. Also, states like California have laws that allow sworn officers to do and possess some things that the ordinary civilian cannot do. For example, law enforcement can possess child pornography for purposes of investigation²⁴ which would be required for digital forensic investigators. California law also permits one party telephone recordings when they are authorized by law enforcement.²⁵

In California, law enforcement is a highly regulated industry. Eligibility and suitability for employment, authority, responsibilities and training requirements are set both by law and policies of the California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).²⁶ Current California law and POST requirements do not allow for the “direct commission”

specialized police officer of the future. California and states with similar laws and regulations should pursue legislation to create such positions. Training requirements to support it should also be created by POST and their companion agencies across America. Conceivably, the industry could begin with a beta test by finding a select few incoming officers who meet existing legal requirements, possess requisite skills and are willing to be transitioned to a new career track. This would allow for some evaluation of its effectiveness during what will likely be a protracted endeavor to change tradition and legislation.

Conclusion

While no one can predict the future of law enforcement in California, the emerging trends indicate that budgetary issues, accelerating technologies, complexity of investigations, terrorism, and increasing diversity will place unprecedented demands on the industry. A staffing plan including specialized officers would enhance the ability of law enforcement to deal with a world of crime that is constantly increasing in complexity.

The use of specialists will not replace traditional policing, but enhance it. There will always be a need for street enforcement and tactical operations, and those functions should be left to more traditional officers who will essentially become de facto specialists in that arena. The time to challenge tradition and specialize our police agencies is rapidly approaching. It works for our fighting forces abroad, and it will work for our fighting forces at home.

ENDNOTES

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- ¹ Zach Patton, "Next-Generation Government," *Governing*, December 2009, 50.
- ² Alan Greenblatt, "Squeezing the cops," *Governing*, June 2009, 14.
- ³ Leichtman Research Group, "Over Half of U.S. Households Subscribe to Broadband Internet," 7 June 2007, www.leichtmanresearch.com/press/060707release.html.
- ⁴ U.S. Census, "Current Population Survey," October 2009.
- ⁵ Joel Kotkin, "Demographics and Destiny," *Governing*, May 2010, 38.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.
- ⁷ Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, "Police and Detectives," *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-11 Edition*, <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos160.htm>.
- ⁸ Edward Lafian, in discussion with the author, April 18, 2009.
- ⁹ Edward Lafian, in discussion with the author, April 18, 2009.
- ¹⁰ Marvin Cetron and Owen Davies, "Trends in labor force and work," *The Futurist*, May 2008, 41.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 41.
- ¹² Bobby White, "Cash-strapped cities try private guards over police," *The Wall Street Journal*, 21 April 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124027127337237011.html>.
- ¹³ Denisse Salazar, "FBI lab to open in O.C. to nab cyber criminals," *The Orange County Register*, 22 July 2009, <http://www.ocregister.com/articles/cases-county-crime-2503774-fbi-santa>.
- ¹⁴ Conor Dougherty, "As Slump Hits Home, Cities Downsize Their Ambitions," *The Wall Street Journal*, December 2009, A1.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, A8.
- ¹⁶ General Military Law. 10 U.S.C. § 532(2004).
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ Naval Reserve Association, "Direct commission program," July 2009, <http://www.navy-reserve.org/default.aspx?tabid=264>.

¹⁹ Kristina Handy, Monica Gribben and Peter Ramsberger, *Population representation in the military services. Fiscal year 2004*, (Washington, DC: Human Resources Research Organization, 2006).

²⁰ Naval Reserve Association, op. cit.

²¹ Navy Officer Training Command, “Direct commission officer indoctrination course,” July 2009, http://www1.netc.navy.mil/nstc/otc/dcoic_program_overview.asp.

²² Lolita Baldor, “Report: Shortage of cyber experts may hinder govt,” *Associated Press*. 22 July 2009, <http://license.icopyright.net/user/viewfreeuse.act?fuid=ndmzotcwnw%3d%3d>.

²³ Will Wilson, “Hold That Hire,” *Governing*, July 2009.

²⁴ West Group, “311.1PC,” *California Penal Code* (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Co., 2008).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Section 633.

²⁶ State of California, *California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training*, 2008, <http://www.post.ca.gov>.

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