

March 22, 1972

MEMORANDUM TO: Commission on Community Relations

FROM: Field Division Staff

SUBJECT: Changes in the Detroit Police Department's STRESS Program

In response to criticism of the Detroit Police Department's STRESS unit, stemming in part from the March 9, 1972, raid on a Wayne County deputy sheriff's apartment, Police Commissioner John F. Nichols has announced several changes in the STRESS operation. The announcement was made jointly with Mayor Roman S. Gribbs on March 17, 1972. The changes which the Commissioner announced were:

1. All officers who volunteer for STRESS in the future will be required to undergo psychological testing.
2. Decoy operations will be reduced until miniature radios can be secured and current STRESS officers can be psychologically re-evaluated to determine their capability and stability.
3. STRESS officers will be required to pass six series of firearms decision-making tests. Normally all officers must pass only one series annually.
4. STRESS crews will be larger--probably 5 or 6--and their on-street tactics will be more thoroughly planned in advance.
5. Sergeants will be assigned to supervise all crews on decoy duty.
6. Helicopters will coordinate with the decoy units in order to floodlight the scene to make escape more difficult.

Although the Police Commissioner rejected CCR's recommendations of October 2, 1971, and the rationale supporting them, many of the current changes are consistent with those recommendations, which called for the suspension of the decoy operation until firm steps were taken in the following areas:

1. The program's selection procedures should be fundamentally restructured. The selection of the men who participate in the program is crucial. Officers who have a large number of injury contacts, citizen complaints (both records are kept regularly by the Department) or any other relevant problems should not be allowed to volunteer for the program. Those officers already in the program should be screened on the same basis and some of them transferred to less sensitive duties. Men with only a few years' seniority in the Department should be considered too inexperienced to be allowed in the STRESS unit.
2. Tactics should be developed and non-lethal weapons secured which would facilitate apprehension of suspects without the use of firearms. Changes should be made in the overall strategy whether it means using larger teams, better communications, a few uniformed officers, or merely more

Careful planning. More black officers should be selected in order that all teams could be integrated. If it is necessary, for some reason, to use inexperienced men, they should be used in back-up positions rather than as decoys. Finally, sources of funding and information should be explored in the Federal government and elsewhere in order to secure sufficient non-lethal weapons for use in the program.

3. The Police Department should support and participate directly in the efforts of City Departments and other agencies which seek to reduce crime through methods which attack its causes, such as narcotics control and rehabilitation and more jobs and job training.

No reported changes have been made in the use of inexperienced officers or in the support of other kinds of crime reduction methods or programs. Non-lethal weapons are reported to be completely impractical at this stage of their development for use in undercover operations.

The Michigan Civil Rights Commission report of December 13, 1971, made a detailed set of recommendations:

1. That the decoy method be immediately discontinued as a STRESS technique.
2. That in order to attain a highly professional unit, the Detroit Police Department thoroughly screen all officers volunteering for the STRESS unit prior to assignment. This screening process should also include those officers who are currently assigned, and reassignment should be made where performance records warrant.
3. That officers with a disproportionate number of citizen complaints and/or citizen injury contacts be disqualified from STRESS duty. An officer's length of service and the nature of his assignments may be included as two of the factors in determining what constitutes a disproportionate number of complaints or contacts.
4. That more black officers be assigned to STRESS so that teams can be racially integrated wherever feasible.
5. That the Detroit Police Department, in its screening process, take into consideration an officer's involvement in Michigan Civil Rights Commission complaint activity and any other activities which raise questions of any officer's qualifications to effectively serve in a highly sensitive position. Upon request from the Detroit Police Department, the Michigan Civil Rights Commission will provide the department with information regarding an officer's involvement in complaint activity.
6. That the Michigan Civil Rights Commission staff participate in human relations training programs, particularly for STRESS officers.
7. That an officer on each STRESS team be officially designated as the crew chief of the team. The designation of crew chief will be based on ability, merit and skill in performing in a highly sensitive position.
8. That the Detroit Police Department petition the Detroit Common Council for funds to enable the purchase of communication devices for STRESS officers.



Commissioner Nichols stated at that time that he agreed with all of these recommendations, except 1 and 6. He then announced the following changes in the STRESS program:

1. An increase of 80 hours combined formal and on-the-job training for all new STRESS officers.
2. An effort to increase the black-white ratio to at least 25 percent is being initiated.
3. Administrative review of all potential personnel at top level by the co-district inspector commanders is a part of the screening process.
4. It has always been the policy and procedure of the Police Department to require reports whenever a pistol is discharged and an administrative review of the facts, whether the shots fired were fatal, wounding, or missed. This has always been followed by counseling of officers involved.
5. A screening process, including evaluation of citations, citizen complaint records, Michigan Civil Rights Commission involvement of officers assigned to the unit, has been instituted.
6. An officer has always been assigned as a "crew leader." (The officer concept, as proposed by MCRC, is in direct violation of the merit ordinance and Labor Contract.)
7. Common Council has been presented with the request for funding of radio equipment several weeks ago.
8. All officers of the department involved in shoorings will be reviewed by the medical section prior to return to street duty.

It is still too soon to tell whether the modifications will be sufficient to make the STRESS decoy operation acceptable to the whole community. Most of the measures are directed toward better officer screening and training and more efficient apprehension of offenders--hopefully, so that firearms would have to be used less often.

Although other aspects of the program have received criticism, the primary target has been the large number of citizen fatalities which have resulted from STRESS operations. The Commissioner's recommendations respond in part to the use of firearms by requiring stricter training for STRESS officers, but they do not attempt to limit the broad discretionary latitude which an officer is allowed in the use of his firearms. Many of the changes in the program do seem to be in a positive direction and staff will continue to observe them to see whether their effect on the activities of STRESS will be significant or permanent.