

TEN YEARS OF FOUNTAIN VALLEY POLICE DEPARTMENT

by WILLIAM DENISI

Several people wandered about the front offices of the Fire Station located on Bushard Street at El Camino on that warm summer evening in the hours just prior to midnight of June 30, 1967. A few hours earlier, a teletype message had rattled throughout the California Law Enforcement Teletype System announcing that at precisely 0001 hours July 1, 1967, the Fountain Valley Police Department would begin operation.

A few hours before midnight, two officers approached white 1967 Fords which only days before had been prepared with the decals stating "POLICE" and bearing the seal of the City of Fountain Valley. The officers checked out their equipment, entered their vehicles, and under the watchful gaze of Chief of Police, Mayor, several Councilmen, and other interested parties, prepared to give birth to a brand new southern California Police Department.

It all began with a blue-sleeved hand reaching out picking up a radio mike, pressing a button, and stating "40-21. 10-8." The statement could hardly be called profound. The phrase meant 'in-service'. However, that is precisely what it was intended to convey because, for more than ten years since that night, the Fountain Valley Police Department has been "in-service" supplying a continuing stream of police officers and professionals to respond to calls for assistance, investigate crime, maintain peace and order, and in general, simply be there when needed.

The early Fountain Valley Police Department was organized by the Department's first Chief, Charles Michaelis. Chief Mike, as he was known, had been involved in Orange County Law Enforcement for many years. One of the original

members of the Garden Grove Police Department, Chief Mike rose through the ranks to the position of Chief. When Fountain Valley decided to initiate its own police service, Chief Mike tested and was selected from applicants throughout the State of California. Chief Mike had a reputation for running a professional, highly efficient, no-nonsense Department. It was no surprise that twelve of the original fourteen officers of Fountain Valley Police Department came from the ranks of Garden Grove Police Department. With fourteen men and five women (four dispatchers and one records clerk), the Department began its operation.

The City then had about nineteen thousand population. It was not quite one-half developed. In those early days, the Department would field approximately two men to a Watch. Very often, a Watch would consist of one patrol officer and one sergeant who did as much work as the patrol officer. There was, of course, a radio dispatcher on duty whose job it was to answer incoming calls and then dispatch the officers. During the early days of operation, the twenty-four hour Daily Bulletin would have included the standard or routine calls that any police department's Daily Bulletin would show. These were of course family fights, thefts, medical aid calls; but interspersed you would see an occasional theft of cattle stock, trespass on cultivated lands, theft or malicious mischief to crops, and of course, there was always the occasional traffic accident. For those occasional "hot" calls, the Department relied heavily on follow-ups from our neighboring communities (Huntington Beach, Westminster, Santa Ana, and occasionally Costa Mesa). The surrounding "big brother" agencies took very good care of the fledgling Fountain Valley force. These acts were of course looked upon as favors which have been returned manyfold over the years through the Mutual Aid Policy and Procedures that exist for all of the

Orange County Communities.

Police reports, traditionally given the prefix "DR", include all of those reports such as crime reports, accident reports, and incident reports that police officers have occasion to write throughout their day to day activities. During the Department's very first year of operation, 1,552 "DR's" were taken. One significant indicator of this community's phenomenal rate of growth lies with this "DR" file system. In 1976, Fountain Valley Police Department logged 7,514 DR's. As this article was written, there were over 5,000 for 1977.

The City grew steadily. While not acquiring much area, population grew as the agriculture areas were turned into residential developments. As the population went up, the size of the police department expanded. There is a time tested & proven formula 'where you have people, you have need for police service. Add more people, the need for police service increases'. Soon it was apparent that the Fountain Valley Police Department could no longer function out of the tiny front four offices of the Fountain Valley Fire Department. Besides, there were too many instances where those policemen kept waking up those firemen in the middle of the night. So, long about 1969, the Police Department's facility was constructed alongside City Hall on Slater Avenue just east of Brookhurst Street. The Department moved into its facility. As such things go, it was not too long before the Department was literally bursting at the seams of its new building. So in 1972, the police facility was expanded slightly more than one-third. This provided a little more breathing space and for the time eliminated the problem of one officer stepping on another. The police facility currently consists of approximately 3,700 square feet. Within this facility are housed Communications (telephone and radio), Records, Police Administration, the Detective Bureau,

squad room, operational officers, the Department's forensic criminology lab, photography lab, property and evidence storage, locker room, photo and fingerprint room, two interview rooms, and three detention rooms.

As with most police departments, before too long Fountain Valley Police Department members had thoroughly entrenched themselves in the community. Most had purchased homes in the community and many became involved in community activities such as service clubs, scouting, coaching or advising Little League Baseball & Football, and a host of other activities.

In addition to the standard services expected from a community service agency, Fountain Valley Police Department became involved in a number of "extra curricular" activities. For example, in conjunction with members of the educational community, Department personnel composed and participated in the presentation of Special School Educational Programs designed to foster a more clear understanding of the local responsibilities of young people as they grow and become productive members of the community. These programs included Bicycle-Pedestrian Safety, Drug Abuse Education, Youth and the Law, Drivers Education as well as a number of other topic areas. Members of the Department provided in-service training for school personnel and have acted as instructors in local colleges, and have continually provided representatives to guest speak for community groups on behalf of the Department.

One of the biggest areas of "extra curricular" activity has been that of crime prevention. Recognizing quite early that the prevention of crime must be a cooperative effort between members of the Police Department and the people of the community, the Department embarked on a series of Crime Prevention Programs designed to educate and stimulate citizen participation. Over the years, these programs have gained much attention and have contributed

directly to the holding of the line or in some cases lowering of selective crime category rates for this community while the same crime category rates had risen in our surrounding communities.

Early on, about 1969, members of the Department were approached on the sponsoring of a Police Explorer Scout Troop. Shortly thereafter, Troop #1007 began and was chartered by Boy Scouts of America as one of the first coeducational Police Explorer Scout Troops in the nation. The Scout Troop presently consists of approximately forty-five young men and women between the ages of fifteen and twenty who are advised and counselled by members of the Department on a totally voluntary basis. Staff members provide training and the opportunity for troop members to participate in the day to day activities of the Department. This exposure has provided many avenues of benefit to not only the community and the Department, but to the participant as well. Many of our Explorer Scout "graduates" have gone on to enter careers in the field of law enforcement.

Throughout the ten years existence of Fountain Valley Police Department, there have been many changes. There has been, of course, considerable growth and expansion. New people have come, a few have retired, and still few others have left for other fields of endeavor. Over the years there has been much work, moments of inspiration, levity and occasional heroism. This, of course, is the human side. In ten years, the men and women who comprise this Department have faced thousands of emergencies, provided hundreds of often life-saving gestures or services. The majority of these go by and blend into the day to day routine, but many linger in the minds of those few who were so touched as to never forget...

"I remember the time the guy was drunk and he had a loaded .45 and he fired two shots into the ceiling and only two cops came. After quickly assessing the situation, both of them walked right into that house and while one stood

back, the other walked up, talked to the man for a few moments and then finally reached out and gently removed that loaded, cocked .45 from his hand..."

"There was this terrible wreck. One woman's face was very badly cut. The officer who arrived began to give her first aid and bandage her face and stop the bleeding. After a few minutes, someone noticed that there was another person in the car who was unconscious. The officer went over to her, pulled her out of the car and noticed that she wasn't breathing. He began mouth to mouth resuscitation and kept it up until the Fire Department arrived. This was before we had paramedics..."

"The little girl had fallen into the pool and gone unnoticed by her mother for several minutes. When the call went out that a child was drowning in a pool, a police officer and the fire truck arrived at the same time. The fireman dove in first, scooped the little girl from the bottom of the pool and gave her to the officer who began mouth to mouth. Another officer came and they drove in the police car directly to the hospital. They said she was dead, but she lived and today is normal..."

"He used to come to our school and park his motorcycle and come inside and tell us about safe driving and that the law had to be fairly applied to everyone. We didn't believe it until the day he saw his own nine year old son violate a traffic rule and stopped him and wrote him a bicycle violator citation. He made him sign it, gave him a copy, and rode away. I understand he later attended the Bicycle Safety Lecture with his son as required..."

"There was this terrible collision and the car started to burn, the gas tank I think. The officer ran over and pulled the unconscious man from inside the car as the whole thing was engulfed in flames..."

"He was acting like an absolute animal. We couldn't control him. Everything he would do would be wrong or bad. He would accept no responsibility. The officer who came out was very understanding; he talked to us and then he talked to him. He even came back a few days later and then a third time about a week or so. No other person has made such an impression on my son as that officer. I really think that he may have saved him..."

"The lady had run two red lights in the wee hours of the morning. The officer filled out the citation and began to explain it to her calmly and noticed that she was

crying (tears running down both sides of her face). He said, "It's really nothing to cry about, ma'am. It's only a ticket. It will only cost you a few dollars. The idea is so that you don't do it again." She said, "It's not that, officer. It's... Well, you see... I'm just coming home from the hospital. My husband just died..."

"She was shot several times in the chest and was bleeding badly. The officers placed her in a police car and drove with red light and siren to the hospital. They got her there just in time. The doctor said that if they had waited for an ambulance, it would have been too late..."

The stories go on and on. Every day incidents happen that could easily become the substance of mass media drama. Police work is a unique combination of the routine and mundane punctuated with moments of intense excitement, elation and danger. True, our community is not situated in a hot bed of urban sprawl, but even cities such as Fountain Valley, that typify American middle class, experience their moments of crime and crisis and need. Perhaps the seeds for that truism were sown on the third day of operation of this Police Department when the very first arrest was made by a Fountain Valley Police Officer. That arrest was for attempt murder where one man stabbed his neighbor in the chest several times with a knife in the heat of a political argument. Over the years there have been many tragedies which have affected the lives of many people. Over the years members of this Department have handled crimes such as rapes, kidnaps, hostage situations, barricaded suspects, multiple murders and a host of other gruesome and tragic situations. For the most part, these incidents were handled in an extremely efficient and professional manner. This then is the essence of what a police department is all about. The name of the game is service; to be able to handle the situation as it arises.

Today, ten years later, your Fountain Valley Police Department is an organization of people who are highly trained and well organized into effective teams; teams that interact with the community and react to situational needs. We believe that Fountain Valley Police Department is backed up solidly by a community that really cares. They, the Police Department and the community, share a two-fold common goal:

"- to protect the right of all citizens to be free from criminal attack, to be secure in their possessions and live in a peaceful environment."

"- as closely as possible, approach the ideal of a community free from crime and disorder."

Ten years after its humble beginning, Fountain Valley Police Department is still going strong. The original Chief Michaelis retired in 1973. Stepping up to take the helm was the then Captain Marv Fortin. Under the direction of Chief Fortin, Fountain Valley Police Department has grown to its present compliment of fifty-eight sworn officers assisted by fifteen highly skilled civilians in such capacities as dispatcher, lab technician, criminologist, secretaries and clerks. These people work for you every day of every week of every year all around the clock providing the appropriate response for the needs of their community. They earnestly strive to do the very best possible job to provide the highest level of service. They are members of a profession that requires exacting performance and standards. Exactly who they are was perhaps best put by this writer:

"Police people are different, although not really unique. They are most often dedicated, well-meaning and professionally oriented. They are courteous and businesslike, but not officious. They are regarded favorably by their community because they communicate well. They react appropriately to the situation and are responsive to the needs and desires of their community. They are neither servants or caretakers. They are concerned professionals."

The members of the Fountain Valley Police Department have been every bit of that description and they've been that for more than ten years. Moreover, they plan to continue. While this may not be apparent to the casual observer or to the person whose only contact with the Department has been a traffic stop or citation, it is reality for the hundreds of persons who use their services each week. When the chips are down and you are the person who needs a cop, pick up the phone and call. If you live in Fountain Valley, it's a safe bet that in a few moments the officer standing at your door will be one of the very best in the State!