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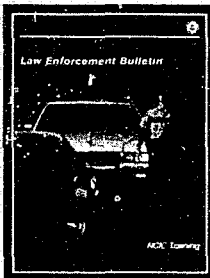
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The Cover: Thorough NCIC training can be an important factor in the safe completion of routine vehicle stops. Cover photo of Officer Thomas Kauffman of the Upper Allen Township, Pennsylvania, Police Department is courtesy of Blair Seitz. See article p.1.

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The Rat Patrol Rides!

By
PAUL C. RICKS



In the fall of 1988, the rate of automobile thefts increased dramatically all across the Nation; the City of Colorado Springs, Colorado, was no exception. Although the department continued to emphasize traditional anti-crime measures, such as information bulletins at roll call, and alerting the auto theft unit—the rate continued to increase. In fact, within 1 year, the number of automobile thefts occurring within the city jumped an astonishing 77.9 percent.¹ It became

obvious to the department that only through a well-organized, permanent response could the department solve existing auto theft cases and prevent future thefts. After considering the various options available, department administrators decided to form a special auto theft detail.

Emergence of the RAT Patrol

The newly created detail, christened the RAT Patrol (Reduce Auto Theft), consisted of two of-

ficers from the Tactical Enforcement Unit, two officers from each patrol shift, and a sergeant. The patrol shift officers were assigned to the detail and were trained for a period of approximately 90 days. They were then rotated back to their shifts and were replaced by different officers. This insured a constant infusion of training and tactical information to the patrol shifts.

The team worked in plain clothes and used unmarked vehicles borrowed from the Investigative

Bureau. However, in order to provide enough vehicles for the RAT officers, local insurance companies were approached for help. One company responded by supplying two vehicles—a recovered stolen vehicle and a corporate vehicle.

Selected RAT Patrol officers received special training in locating hidden vehicle identification numbers, restoring obliterated vehicle identification numbers, recognizing stolen vehicles, conducting investigations involving auto thefts, and interviewing/interrogating suspects. These officers then prepared a 4-hour block of inservice training for all Patrol Bureau personnel. Several sessions were needed to train the 355 persons assigned to the Patrol Bureau, and these sessions were scheduled around the clock to accommodate shift scheduling and to avoid overtime expenditures.

Attacking the Problem

The mission of the RAT Patrol was to enable the department to deal with the rising auto theft rate in a more effective manner. Therefore, in order for RAT officers to have a better understanding of the problems that faced them, the Crime Analysis Unit (CAU) conducted a detailed analysis of the crime, which revealed the following information about the auto thefts occurring within the city:

- The suspects were usually juveniles or young adults
- The same suspects or their close associates were suspects in a high percentage of cases cleared

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Through innovative thinking and...a cooperative spirit...[the RAT Patrol] successfully attacked a major problem in the community.
”

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- Juvenile suspects taken into custody for auto thefts were not detained by the juvenile center
- Juveniles adjudicated as delinquents were not usually incarcerated; if they were incarcerated, their sentences were very short
- Young adults convicted of auto theft were generally not incarcerated until they had multiple convictions, and then, the sentence was minimal

In addition to the suspect information contained in the profile, the RAT officers also learned that high-performance cars were the most popular target and that most thefts occurred in the eastern part of the city during the evening hours. The most popular methods of theft included taking cars with keys left in the ignition, breaking the steering column, or hot wiring the car.

Investigative Techniques

Information contained in the crime analysis served as an important tool in the development of new investigative techniques. One investigative technique developed by RAT officers to use in stolen auto cases was working pattern cases “backwards.” To do this, they began with known auto thieves and identified the cases that fit an individual’s (or group’s) pattern. They also did “link analysis” charts on known auto thieves and their associates, as well as gangs of thieves.

RAT officers also focused special attention on cases that involved the most popular target vehicles because these cases were generally found to involve repeat offenders. To increase the probability of cooperation, they devised a system to allow off-duty RAT officers to interrogate suspects immediately after their arrests. This “call-out” system ensured that experienced officers were available to

process recovered stolen vehicles thoroughly for items of evidence. RAT officers also varied their work hours to coordinate their schedules with the times most vehicles were stolen.

A final investigative technique used by RAT officers was to monitor closely potential outlets for stolen vehicles and parts and accessories. Popular stolen accessories included CD players, tape decks, radios, and cellular phones.

Cooperation With Judicial Systems

The Analysis Unit profile shed light on yet another problem the department faced in its efforts against auto thefts—ensuring that offenders were incarcerated. If persons in the judicial system could be convinced of the necessity of incarceration, it would remove repeat offenders from the streets, and perhaps, serve as a deterrent to those who may be considering auto theft.

RAT officers believed that “vertical prosecution” for all auto theft cases was the key to ensuring that auto theft offenders would be incarcerated. They gained the cooperation of the District Attorney’s office, and an agreement was reached to have one prosecuting attorney assigned to conduct all phases of any auto theft cases brought to them for filing. This prevented an offender who had cases pending simultaneously in several different divisions of the district court from receiving “first offender” treatment in multiple cases. In return, the department agreed to have an auto theft investigator present at every stage of all

court proceedings that involved either the theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle. The investigator was prepared to testify not only to the facts of the specific case under consideration, but also to the general scope of the auto theft problem within the area and the impact it had on the community.

“
A comparison of the January 1990, figures to the January 1989, figures show a 45-percent decrease in the auto theft rate.
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To further strengthen their position with the courts, the RAT officers asked the CAU to prepare “community impact statements.” These statements outlined the number of thefts and the dollar amount of the losses caused by top auto theft offenders as a result of the current prosecutorial and judicial treatment of youthful auto theft defendants. In an effort to educate the courts concerning the problems the RAT patrol faced, these statements were presented in meetings and discussion sessions held with the District Attorney’s personnel, judges, and juvenile court referees. The statements were also used to encourage stiffer sentences for both juvenile and adult offenders. As offenders were incarcerated more rapidly and for longer periods of time, the auto theft rate began to decline.

Success of the RAT Patrol

In 1989, the stolen vehicle rate dropped approximately 2 percent compared to the 1988 rate. The recovery rate in 1989 saw an even more dramatic change, increasing almost 10 percent to 91 percent. First month statistics for 1990 show that the decline experienced in the last half of 1989 continues. A comparison of the January 1990, figures to the January 1989, figures show a 45-percent decrease in the auto theft rate.

Intra-agency Efforts

While the RAT patrol has contributed greatly to the reduction in auto thefts, intra-agency cooperation has also played an important role. The auto theft detectives continued to follow up on all reported auto thefts, while RAT officers conducted surveillance of high-incidence locations and known auto theft suspects. In addition, the Auto Theft Unit handled followup investigations, isolated auto theft cases, multiple related cases, identifiable pattern cases, and “chop shop” operations. The detectives tracked every reported auto theft case to ensure that it received proper attention and that followup reports were submitted promptly. They also presented auto theft cases to the District Attorney’s office to guarantee precise case coordination, and they inspected salvage yards to ensure that operators did not store vehicles, which may have been stolen, along the roadside in violation of city zoning laws.

The Total Resources Against Career Criminals (TRACC) Unit of the Investigative Bureau con-

The Bulletin Reports

centrated its anti-theft efforts on the apprehension of career criminals active in the stolen car field, and several of these felons were incarcerated as habitual offenders. During the analysis phase of the RAT plan, the department determined that many repeat auto thieves were juveniles, and for this reason, the TRACC Unit did followups on these cases. This resulted in quicker adjudications and longer sentences for these juveniles.

Another successful project has been the Top Auto Theft Offender project, which involves determining a point system for individuals who are either arrested or convicted for offenses involving the theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle. A list of offenders was distributed to all officers, and offenders' names were entered into both the Colorado Criminal Information Center and the department's computerized criminal history files. Any officer checking an individual for wants/warrants would be notified if that person were on the list.

Conclusion

The dedication and total commitment of RAT Patrol officers contributes to the success of this program. Through innovative thinking and a strong desire to create a cooperative spirit, both inside and outside the department, they have successfully attacked a major problem in the community.

LEB

Footnote

¹ There were 169 vehicles stolen in January 1989, compared to 95 vehicles stolen in 1988.

DNA Profiling

The Technology Assistance Program (TAP) of the National Institute of Justice issued a bulletin entitled *DNA Profiling: For Positive Identification*. DNA profiling is a revolutionary scientific technique that is particularly valuable to law enforcement in the investigation and prosecution of violent crimes.

This bulletin gives an in-depth layman's description of DNA and covers the history/background of DNA analysis. It also addresses the collection, preservation, and testing of DNA samples and court cases that considered the admissibility of DNA evidence. The bulletin also provides a list of selected readings on DNA analysis and profiling.

Copies of the bulletin can be obtained by writing or calling the TAP Information Center, Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20850, 1-800-248-2742 or 1-301-251-5060.

Search Warrant Guidelines

A new publication by the American Bar Association's (ABA) Criminal Justice Section provides comprehensive guidelines for the issuance of search warrants. The publication, entitled *Guidelines for the Issuance of Search Warrants*, explores such complex issues as probable cause, specificity requirements, and the imposition of appropriate restrictions on the execution of search warrants. Direction is given in areas where warrants are most frequently sought, as well as in such newly emerging areas as controlled substance warrants, obscene materials, bodily intrusions, and business records.

The book provides examples and is supplemented with useful checklists. It should be noted, however, that the views contained in this publication represent only the views of the authors and should not be construed as official policy of the American Bar Association or the State Justice Institute, which provided a grant for the project.

A copy of the book can be obtained from ABA Order Fulfillment, 750 N. Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, IL 60611, 1-312-988-5555. The order number is 5090046.

The Bulletin Reports, a collection of criminal justice studies, reports, and project findings, is written by Kathy Sulewski. Send your material for consideration to: *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, Room 7262, J. Edgar Hoover Building, 10th & Penn. Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20535.

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