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Police Services Study Fact Sheet No. ~~2~~

THE MAJOR INVESTIGATIVE TEAM OF POLK COUNTY (IA) -

by

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ACQUISITIONS

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**WORKSHOP**

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## THE MAJOR INVESTIGATIVE TEAM OF POLK COUNTY

A relatively recent interjurisdictional cooperative effort for solving serious crimes is found in the Des Moines, Iowa, metropolitan area. Des Moines, capital of Iowa, had a 1970 population of 200,000. The metropolitan area, defined as Polk County, at that time had a population of 286,000.

Polk County contains the City of Des Moines and 15 other municipalities, 12 of which have some form of organized police protection. Police manpower varies from part-time in some departments to the specialized ranks of 316 officers in the Des Moines Police Department. The character of the 15 municipalities also varies, from suburbs adjacent to Des Moines to small rural centers.

The "peak load" problems faced by smaller police departments in the event of a major crime were recognized by the chiefs of Polk County law enforcement agencies, and so the possibility of establishing an organized unit for dealing with episodic major crimes, principally homicides, was discussed. A representative of the county's chiefs spoke to officials in Kansas City, where the nation's first major case investigations unit was established 10 years earlier. He returned to Polk County, and discussions among representatives from state and local police agencies continued. The forum for these discussions was the Polk County Chiefs of Police Association.

The Major Investigative Team (originally termed Major Case Unit) was formally approved in November 1974 with the passage of by-laws, even though the unit had been formed and operated without written charter several months earlier. The Major Investigative Team closely follows the Kansas City Metro Squad model, as do at least two other metropolitan area-wide investigative units, the Topeka (Kansas) Capital Area Major Case Squad and the Major Case Squad of Greater St. Louis.

The Major Investigative Team (MIT) will not enter a case unless it has been contacted within eight hours after the discovery of a major crime and two directors have concurred to act upon the request submitted by the jurisdiction where the crime was reported. The host jurisdiction maintains control of the investigation, except by written relinquishment to the MIT and the approval of at least one director. If a case has not been disposed of within five days, the Board of Directors must decide whether or not to continue the investigation. Members of MIT have been deputized by the Polk County Sheriff to facilitate their work when operating on an MIT case.

Investigators are called from the membership list according to the estimated personnel needs for a particular investigation and the special skills required. Officers work 12-hour shifts and are directed in the investigation by supervisory officers of the Major Investigative Team.

Twenty-five investigators are presently available to the MIT. An attorney from the Polk County Attorney's staff has also been assigned to advise on legal aspects of an investigation. In addition, upon request of the MIT, the Iowa State Patrol will send in two to six officers, as needed. Agencies represented on the Major Investigative Team include the Polk County Sheriff, the Iowa State Bureau of Criminal Investigation, and the police departments of Des Moines, West Des Moines, Urbandale, Clive, Windsor Heights, Johnston, Pleasant Hill, Altoona, and Ankeny. All new member investigators attend two one-week seminars (48 hours). Special training continues in the form of every-other-week seminars conducted by the MIT investigative supervisor, who is also the chief investigator of the Iowa Bureau of Criminal Investigation. In the on-going sessions, earlier cases from BCI files are analyzed, providing an opportunity to discuss the kinds of cases MIT may be asked to handle.

The Board of Directors sets policy, makes decisions about entering and continuing cases, and acts in an advisory capacity during the course of an investigation. The Board is composed of three law enforcement officials: the Polk County Sheriff, the Polk County Attorney, and the President of the Polk County Chiefs of Police Association. During an investigation, the Chief of the host department becomes the fourth member of the Board.

The Major Investigative Team will consider a case within any Polk County jurisdiction at the request of the appropriate official. Having accepted a case, the host agency is obligated to provide space for investigative headquarters and adequate telephone and radio communication facilities. When an agency is unable to provide these facilities, the Bureau of Criminal Investigation will provide them for that department, and the MIT investigation proceeds. If the MIT Board of Directors rejects a request for assistance, the requesting jurisdiction may ask the Iowa Bureau of Criminal Investigation to enter the case and conduct the investigation, which it is required by state law to do.

The Major Investigative Team is not funded by any source and does not levy any charge on a requesting agency. During an investigation, officers remain on the payroll of their home department and are covered by their disability and liability insurance.

The Team's first case came in September 1974. This was prior to the final agreement among agencies, but the MIT had been well enough planned by this time that the investigation was carried out by Team members under the auspices of the Polk County Sheriff's Office. The Hawbaker murder case began with the discovery of apparent homicide in a cornfield in an unincorporated part of Polk County, which was under the Sheriff's jurisdiction. Six agencies provided manpower: the Polk County Sheriff's Department, the Iowa Bureau of Criminal Investigation, and the Ankeny, Pleasant Hill, Urbandale, and West Des Moines Police Departments. An arrest was made within one week. The suspect was subsequently arraigned and declared incompetent to stand trial.

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