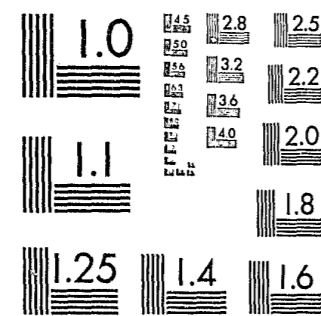


National Criminal Justice Reference Service



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The Cover: Confrontations with irrational, violent individuals are day-to-day occurrences which threaten the safety of police officers everywhere. (Staged training photo.) See article p. 1.

Federal Bureau of Investigation
United States Department of Justice
Washington, DC 20535

William H. Webster, Director

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Identification

Interstate Identification Index

"Establishing a national system to provide automated criminal history information requires considerable effort and close coordination with many agencies."

By
EMMET A. RATHBUN
*Supervisory Management Analyst
National Crime Information Center
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Washington, DC*

Criminal arrest records concerning 9 million individuals are presently accessible through the FBI's National Crime Information Center (NCIC). In most cases, the requested records are provided in minutes. This rapid availability is proving to be invaluable to investigators, prosecutors, courts, and other users of NCIC. A cooperative Federal/State effort known as the Interstate Identification Index (III) is making possible this record exchange. The III concept would decentralize the FBI's record keeping responsibility by making the States primarily responsible for record maintenance and dissemination. Agencies using the relatively new system have acclaimed it as one of the greatest new assets since NCIC was initiated in 1967.

Twenty State identification bureaus are either participating in III by assuming responsibility for dissemination of their records or are actively working toward participation. When NCIC receives an online request for a record originated in one of these States, NCIC automatically sends a message to the State computer so the State can respond directly to the requesting agency. The State identification bureaus are located in California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho,

Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and Wyoming. The FBI provides records for all other States, Federal agencies, the District of Columbia, and U.S. possessions. Limited data from some foreign countries are also provided.

Establishing a national system to provide automated criminal history information requires considerable effort and close coordination with many agencies. The records originate from more than 17,000 arresting agencies in the United States, as well as from some foreign countries (which submit data to the FBI when a U.S. citizen is arrested). Records are supported by information on a criminal fingerprint card completed at the time of arrest. In the 20 participating States, the fingerprint cards are first submitted to a State identification bureau for processing and the assignment of a State identification number. Two cards are forwarded for each individual so that one can be retained at the State level while the other is sent to the FBI Identification Division. If no prior record is on file, the FBI assigns an FBI number and a new record is established in the Identification Division computer. A corresponding index record also is created in the NCIC III identifying the State of origin that will provide the record upon request. For arrests in other than the 20 participating States, a III record is established with the FBI as the agency responsible for providing the record.



Mr. Rathbun

The use of III has increased by more than 25 percent during the last year as Federal, State, and local agencies become more familiar with the system's capabilities. Over 500,000 inquiry transactions are processed each month. The majority of these are "name checks" used to determine if a person has a criminal history. On the average, a positive response is provided for one out of four inquiries. The responses include identification information such as an individual's name, aliases, place of birth, physical description, scars, marks, and tattoos, identifying numbers, and fingerprint classification. Based on this data, the person making the inquiry determines whether the record can be associated to the individual being inquired upon. (About 9 percent of the positive responses will contain multiple records with similar names, birth dates, sex, and race.)

Inquiry transactions are processed at a remarkable rate by the NCIC computer. The time required to search the 9 million records (more than 20 million names and aliases) is about 1/4 of a second.

In addition to inquiry capability, the III provides a means for authorized NCIC users to obtain criminal history records by using a computer terminal. Record requests must contain the unique FBI number or State identification number assigned to an individual. NCIC users obtain these numbers either from a III "name check" or from criminal records previously obtained in response to a fingerprint card submission. More than 50,000 criminal histories are provided monthly through the III.

For an NCIC user, requesting a record is simply a matter of transmitting a message from a terminal and

waiting for the response to be returned (usually within a few minutes). The actual process of providing the record is more complex and involves as many as seven or more computers located in various parts of the country. (See fig. 1.)

The Concept

The FBI's involvement with III began in April 1978, when a formalized concept was developed by a "working group" of NCIC users. The group met to discuss a means of eliminating the FBI arrest records that duplicated those kept at the State level.

With the NFF, fingerprint contributors would channel fingerprints through State identification bureaus for processing. Two cards would be forwarded when the contributor was uncertain whether the person had a prior record established with the FBI. One card would be retained at the State level and the other sent to the FBI Identification Division. When the contributor was certain that an arrestee had a prior record with the FBI, only one set of fingerprints would be submitted to be used for updating the State file. Thus, the States would become the primary record holders with the FBI serving as a national index. The III system would provide for the interstate exchange of records.

Three phases were eventually developed to test the feasibility of the III concept; two phases have now been completed. The first phase tested the exchange of single-state records (representing persons arrested in only one State); the second phase tested the exchange of multistate records (representing persons arrested in more than one State); and the third phase to be tested will be the Nation-

al Fingerprint File (discontinuing the sending of fingerprints to the FBI for the second and subsequent arrests). At the end of phases one and two, an evaluation was made concerning the operational/technical, fiscal, managerial, and political impacts of the program.

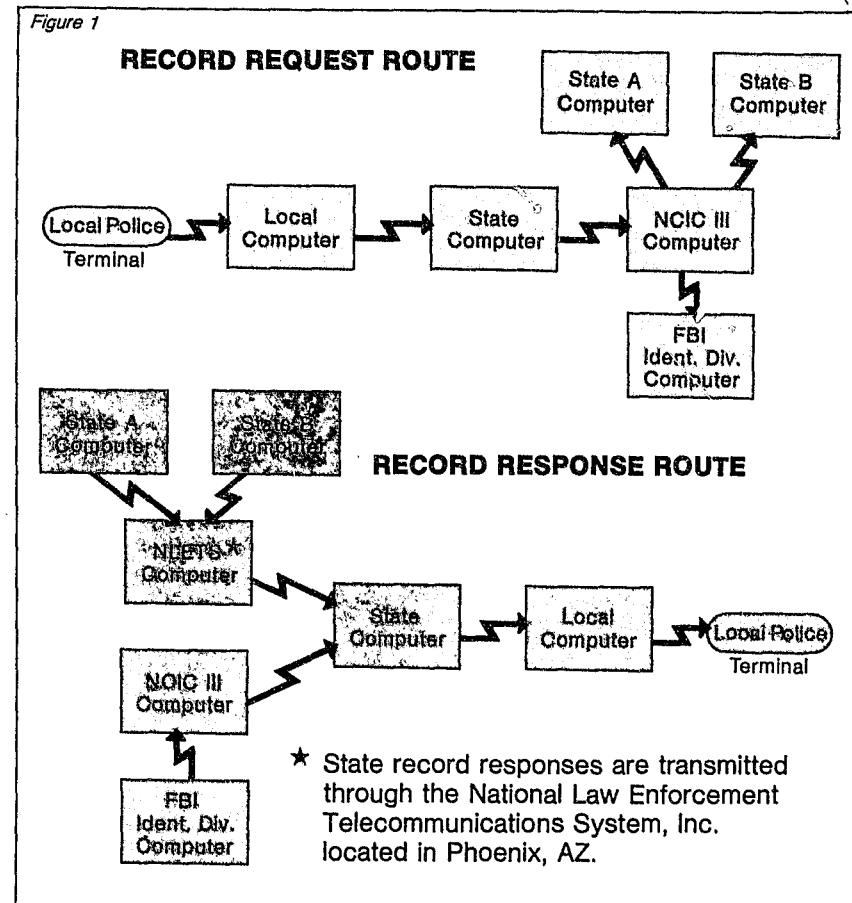
PHASE I

Phase I began in June 1981, using records of persons arrested only in Florida. The test was expanded in February 1982, to include five additional States with about 1.25 million records being made available in the test file. These records had previously been available from the NCIC computerized criminal history file. This testing demonstrated that State records could be exchanged interstate through the use of a central index in NCIC.

Existing systems and resources were used during the first phase to minimize the fiscal impact. Summarized criminal records were provided online by the States. Since Congress had prohibited the use of NCIC for relaying messages from State to State, these records were provided to the requesting terminal via the National Law Enforcement Telecommunications System, Inc. (NLETS). When requested, more detailed records were provided by mail. About 80 percent of the user agencies expressed satisfaction with the service provided during this first phase.

PHASE II

Based on user comments during the first test and other test findings, a plan was devised to conduct a second phase test of III. The online summary record was replaced with an NCIC III response providing only identification information and the location



of the criminal history. A separate transaction was used to request records from the State and Federal files. Participating States were required to respond with records of sufficient detail to satisfy the majority of agency needs. A revised Federal record was developed to serve the same purpose.

PHASE II testing began in February 1983, with records being provided by 14 State agencies and the FBI. A greatly enlarged III data base was created by merging the index records from phase I with additional index records computerized in the FBI Identification Division. More than 7 million individuals were initially represented in the test file. A revised name matching technique was installed in III to accommodate the enlarged file and to increase responsiveness to inquiries.

Through an extensive computer matching process, the index records were correlated with corresponding

State records. About one-half of the records available during this phase could be provided automatically by the NCIC or State computers. The remainder could be requested online with an NCIC transaction, but the response was mailed by the FBI and two of the State participants. The mailing of records was considered to be an interim procedure pending the test results and completion of additional automation capabilities.

Among the questions to be answered by this test was whether users would be satisfied with receiving parts of multistate records from different sources at different times in different formats. During May and June 1983, the FBI sent more than 2,000 survey messages to agencies receiving the III multistate record responses. About one-half of the surveys were returned. According to the survey results, most of the records (73 percent) were requested for criminal investigation pur-

poses. The second greatest use (7 percent) was for bail/bond hearings. Ninety-six percent of the users reported their needs were satisfied by the record responses.¹ Generally, the user comments were overwhelmingly favorable regarding the information being obtained via III.

One user stated that "the III system is the greatest help that NCIC has come up with. I, as well as others in my department, appreciate it very much."

Two side benefits became apparent during the second phase that exceeded all expectations. First, there was improved data quality made possible by the computer matching of State and national records. Discrepancies between the files were identified, studied, and resolved improving the quality of thousands of records. Second, there was substantial cost savings realized by State agencies participating in the program. The State computer interface with III provided automatic update capability of the State file for newly assigned FBI numbers. This feature replaced the mailing of forms and eliminated the manual matching and data entry previously performed by State personnel.

Present Status

After the favorable evaluation of the second III test, the FBI invited all other States to join the III program and begin furnishing their State records. So far, Idaho, Ohio, and Oregon have become active participants. During September 1984, the records of the FBI Identification Division were made accessible online, eliminating the mail delay. Of the two States that still mail records in response to a III request, one State should be able to provide automated records later this year.

System Security

The FBI shares NCIC management responsibilities with control terminal agencies that service users under their supervision. An example of such an agency would be a State police organization which connects many local departments to NCIC through a State computer. Control terminal agencies sign written agreements with the FBI which state they will conform to the rules, policies, and procedures governing III operations. These agencies, in turn, prepare and execute similar agreements with users they service. All agencies are thereby bound to a set of guidelines regulating who may access III, the authorized uses of the system and derived data, the required minimum security measures, etc.

Computerized access tables are maintained in the NCIC and the systems operated by control terminal agencies. The tables are used to restrict agencies from accessing III if there is not a signed agreement and to allow access only through authorized communication lines.

There is written and/or computerized logging of all transactions to assist in the auditing of user agencies and in the investigation of alleged system misuse. Whenever there is a known violation of either security or record dissemination requirements, the offending agency's ability to access III is suspended. Reinstatement may be made upon satisfactory assurance that the violation has been corrected.

At least twice a year, records in III are synchronized and validated with the corresponding State records. To accomplish this process, the FBI provides a computer tape to each State which contains the III records indexed

for the State. The State then compares and validates its records accordingly.

Restricted Use of the System

During the first two phases of III testing, the use of records was restricted to only criminal justice and criminal justice employment purposes. This restriction was necessary because of conflicting State laws and policies regarding the dissemination of records for other employment and licensing purposes. Uses of III along with the feasibility of the National Fingerprint File, are to be addressed in the phase III, due to begin in 1985. Two contractors to the FBI are performing the preliminary analysis of State and Federal agency use of criminal records for noncriminal justice purposes.

Conclusion

The III concept for the interstate exchange of criminal records has been tested successfully through two phases of development. Local, State and Federal use of the system is increasing. Pending the design of a third phase test, the III will continue to provide records for authorized NCIC users.

Each month, more than 60,000 new records are added as persons are arrested for the first time. At this rate, the File will represent about 13 million individuals by the end of 1990 and will include everyone age 34 or younger with an arrest record identified by fingerprints on file with the FBI.

FBI

Footnote

¹ A report on the findings and recommendations concerning the second phase test may be requested from the FBI, National Crime Information Center, Washington, DC 20535.

END