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REPORT ON THE POLICE OF COLOMBIA

AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Colombia is a land of contrast, wealth and poverty, culture and illiteracy, mountains and beaches, desert and swamps. It is more than one and a half times the size of the state of Texas and has a population of some 14,000,000. The Colombian heartland is mountainous with the major part of its people concentrated in the valleys of the Cauca and Magdalena rivers. Its history has been marked by periods of civil war and strife.

The crime picture in Colombia today is not a happy one. In the past seven years reported crime has doubled. The highest percentage of increase occurred in the year 1956. From that time to the present there have been annual fluctuations in the crime rate, with a crime peak in 1959. Although crimes against the person are said to constitute a much less serious problem than during the years 1948 - 1953, the present day rate is inordinately high. Annually, about one of every 500 persons is a victim of some form of physical violence. This is the rate based on reported crimes and is said to be conservative. The police contend that many such crimes go unreported. Statistics relative to the crimes against property category are even less reliable. In 1960 and 1961, about 15,000 thefts were reported in each year. This is an average of some 45 per day. The thefts in Bogota alone will far exceed this figure. Juvenile delinquency is a problem and is of growing concern to the police. In 1961 50% of those arrested for various crimes were under the age of 25.

The chronic violence which is centered in Valle, Tolima, Antioquia and Caldas is a problem in itself. Several survey teams have addressed themselves to this problem and have recommended courses of action. An intense effort is being made by the military, the police and DAS to bring the violence under control.

This is a brief summary of the situation in Colombia on 14 October 1962, the date of the police survey team's arrival in Bogota. The team had interviews with Generals Ruiz and Ramirez and was given a briefing by Colonel Camacho concerning the National Police, its organization and administrative practices. During the following week the team visited Headquarters units, the three police schools in or adjacent to Bogota, Bogota Headquarters, Station 100, and the Headquarters of Cundinamarca Department. Subsequently, the team inspected the police station at Espinal and visited Departmental Headquarters at Ibague. An additional

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week was devoted to an inspection of police facilities in the Departments of North Santander, Bolivar, Antioquia and Caldas.

Although there are areas of the country which have not been seen, the team believes that the facilities, procedures, personnel and problems in the areas visited constitute a representative sampling of what would have been observed elsewhere. Although no short term study of a department of this size can be more than superficial, with the professional assistance of officials of the National Police, the team was able to form a number of conclusions.

The officer corps of the National Police is of high caliber. Every officer with whom the team had any contact appeared to have a thorough grasp of his duties, responsibilities, and of the problems with which he was required to deal. It was a usual practice for the officer in charge of a section to give a brief explanation of his responsibilities, the organizational structure of his unit, his personnel strength, and the relationship of his unit to the Departmental organization. Without exception these expositions were lucid and well delivered. The team had little opportunity to observe subordinate personnel in the actual performance of their duties, however, the work turned out by those assigned to clerical duty was of uniformly good quality.

In every school or headquarters visited the personnel was well disciplined. There was dissatisfaction in Bolivar and Antioquia over the national government's failure to pay salaries on time. In both places it was alleged that the men had not been paid for more than a month. This appeared less excusable to the men because before the police were nationalized the provincial governments had paid promptly. With this single exception the men to whom the team talked seemed satisfied with the conditions of service and there is an obviously reawakened pride in the force and a determination to reestablish the police as a professional, apolitical organization. No one denied that in the past the police had brought discredit upon themselves and that their complete rehabilitation in the eyes of the public would be a tedious and hard earned achievement.

It was interesting that the Carabineros are regarded more favorably by the rural populace than are the police. This appears to be due to at least three factors. First, the Carabineros are an elite corps. The men are selected from among the more qualified police and are given a course of intensive training before being assigned to duty in the field. Second, although the Carabineros are not a new organization, it was not until 1959 that they were used in rural enforcement. Their uniform differs somewhat from that of the police and they are not identified by the people of the rural areas as being members of the police force. Thus they avoid the stigma which still attaches to the police. Third, the Carabineros are making a sustained effort to create a favorable public image. Theirs' is somewhat more than a public relations program. It approaches a program of civic action.

While in Cucuta the team was given a briefing at police headquarters by a member of the Peace Corps and a Catholic priest. Both had been

working cooperatively in one of the districts of North Santander for about a year. They reported at some length on their own work but in addition gave the team some insight into the citizens' reaction to the police and the Carabineros. They said that the police were viewed with suspicion and distrust and that they received but little cooperation from the villagers or farmers during an investigation or in making an arrest; on the other hand that the Carabineros had found general acceptance and that this could be attributed at least in part to the fact that they gave advice and help to the people in many of their everyday problems. At this juncture the police Commander said that the police were also making a concerted attempt to improve their public relations; that the police in the non-violence areas were unarmed; that this resulted in fewer altercations.

The team found wide variation in the condition of the buildings which house police stations and schools. The buildings appear adequate for their purpose but generally are not well maintained. There does not appear to be any program of continuous maintenance. Even in the newer buildings there was a need for plaster patching and spot painting. The principal deficiencies lay in the kitchen, bath and toilet facilities. In one of the schools there were but ten showers for some 200 men. At two locations the officers' toilet would not flush. The kitchens were invariably unscreened and food which was in process of preparation was often covered with flies. Storage accommodations for food, supplies and equipment were generally quite adequate.

The team was impressed with the police training program which has two interrelated aspects: academic training and in-service training. The basic curriculum is developed in Bogota and sent to the various training establishments where the training staff develops lesson outlines and lecture material. The academic courses are divided roughly into three categories: military subjects such as close order drill, manual of arms, firearms instruction, etc; police subjects such as self defense, arrest and search techniques, law and judicial procedure, etc; and such general studies as elementary Spanish grammar, history and arithmetic. Although a high school education is required of all officer candidates, many of the police candidates have had no more than two or three years of formal schooling and an attempt is made in the academies and later in the in-service training, to give them the equivalent of a grade school education.

The team visited six of the nine existing police schools: The Escuela General Santander, the Escuela Gonzalo Jimenez de Quesada, the Escuela de Carabineros, all of which are in the Bogota area; the Escuela Gabriel Gonzalez in Espinal, the Escuela Carlos Holguin in Medellin, and the Escuela Alejandro Gutierrez in Manizales. Except that the cooking and sanitary facilities were below par, the buildings and grounds were generally in better condition than other police buildings in Colombia. The staff seemed to have a sense of mission and student discipline was excellent.

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The police academic program is supplemented by a formalized program of in-service training which is conducted in the stations during the six hour periods of reserve duty. The course material is essentially the same as that given in the schools.

The police are said to be developing an additional school at Pamplona, however, although the team visited Pamplona there was no opportunity to inspect the school. In Cartagena, the police have acquired an abandoned navy facility which they propose to convert into a police school. The buildings appear to be quite adequate for the purpose, with ample space for dormitories and class rooms, however, their present condition is such that their complete rehabilitation should prove costly. The departmental commander said that he had an appropriation of some 80,000 pesos and that he believed he could make the necessary alterations and repairs for that amount.

The survey team inspected the F2 sections in the Directorate and in the several departmental headquarters. This section was created in 1957 and is officially a statistical unit charged with the collection, collation and analysis of all crime data. Unofficially, this section conducts criminal and subversive investigations and has had a measure of success in penetrating subversive organizations and in infiltrating bandit gangs. It is making a major contribution in Colombia's effort to control and eradicate violence.

The team took an especial interest in F2's facilities, personnel, operations and capabilities for a number of reasons. Although the team concedes that police action is not the complete answer to the problem of crime and violence, it believes that in a trained and disciplined police force of 32,000 officers and men, Colombia has an asset of great potential worth. No police force can be fully effective if handicapped by archaic legal procedures, inadequate communications, the absence of records, fingerprint files, and forensic laboratories, and above all, a lack of authority to conduct criminal investigations. There may have been good reason in 1953 for transferring police records and investigative authority to another agency, but there is no evidence that that reason exists today.

The survey team has found that the police have little regard for DAS, for its operational capabilities or the quality of its personnel. It is probable that DAS has much the same opinion of the police. There may be reasons for this that are peculiar to the Colombian milieu, but the team believes that much of this animosity could be eliminated if there were a clearer line of demarkation between the areas of responsibility of the two agencies. There must always be some overlap between the maintenance of law and order and the preservation of internal security, but it need not be as pronounced as it is in Colombia today. The criminal investigative function which is vested in DAS is clearly a proper responsibility of the police while F2's activity in the subversive and political fields belongs to DAS by charter. Since any conspiracy or act against constituted authority is inherently criminal, F2 cannot close it's eyes to such activity. F2's intelligence activities in the violence zone are

commendable and should be intensified where possible. F2's subversive and political activities are unquestionably dictated by a conviction that DAS is incapable of performing effectively in this field. But the team believes that the police would profit by according DAS exclusive jurisdiction in this field. In the past most of the criticism of the police has stemmed from a too active participation in activities of political character. The police should be an apolitical force without any party alignment.

In a democracy the police should be dedicated to the maintenance of law and order and to the equal enforcement of the law. Its effectiveness lies in its ability to feel the pulse of the people, to inspire confidence and trust, and to enforce the law with a minimum of coercive force. Although quasi-military in character, the police mission is quite different from that of a military force, and it should never be identified with the military. In Colombia the police were placed under military control to remove them from party political control and it is believed premature to consider their reverting to their former status. However, the team believes that at some future time when the current violence has abated and the opposing factions have resolved their differences, serious thought should be given to bringing the police under some sort of bi-partisan civilian control.

The team recognizes that police activities in the past created a justifiable fear of the police in the minds of many Colombians. However, the reaction to that fear has resulted in the emasculation of the police. In addition to their being required to operate without benefit of investigative authority or identification facilities, they are handicapped by a judicial system, which may be excellent in theory but inadequate in fact. The permanent judges and the judges of instruction are for the most part students or political appointees who may have a knowledge of the laws and of legal and judicial procedures but are without other qualification. Criminal investigation is a science which requires theoretical knowledge and practical experience. No person devoid of this knowledge and experience is capable of directing a criminal investigation which may involve the questioning of witnesses, the interrogation of suspects, the collection and preservation of physical evidence, the lifting of latent fingerprints, or other such procedures and techniques. The team has been assured that the lack of qualifications is complicated by the fact that there is a constant turnover of judges; that few judges remain long enough to acquire experience. While no one would advocate a system which failed to provide adequate control over police operations, it would appear that the judges' role might well be limited to investigative supervision for the purpose of assuring that the rights of the accused were protected and that the evidence was sufficient and legally admissible. It is alleged that the present system is responsible for the low rate of criminal convictions.

If the responsibility for criminal investigation were returned to the police, F2 appears to be the logical unit in which to place the responsibility. F2 has a nucleus of trained investigators around which could be built a Department of Criminal Investigation. The team has been

unable to obtain any exact figure of F2 strength but by projecting the partial figures obtained, it seems reasonable to assume that F2 has 500 or 600 men who are currently working on statistics, records and investigation. Since it is the practice to take men out of uniform for special F2 duty there should be another few hundred men who with some additional training could fill the required F2 complement.

In its visits the team found that the police attitude toward the military was quite different from its attitude toward DAS. There is respect for the military but there is also a conviction that the solution to the violence problem lies in police type rather than in military type action. While in Manizales the team was told of an experiment which may test the relative merit of the police versus the military approach to the violence problem. Quindio District which is the southernmost district of the province and is contiguous to the provinces of Tolima and Valle, has been divided for operational purposes into two almost equal sections. The police have exclusive operational jurisdiction in the eastern portion while the military have jurisdiction in the western half. The police say that as a rule the bandits do not operate in large bands; that they assemble on call for a specific operation, then cache their arms and return to their normal way of life where they are indistinguishable from other farmers. They employ hit and run tactics, and will not stand and fight when faced with superior force. Their intelligence is excellent and they are seldom ambushed or trapped. Few bandits are prosecuted successfully due to the unwillingness of witnesses to appear against them in court. The bandits enjoy some sympathy in their areas of operation but much of their support is obtained through fear and coercion. The police assert that to this point the military has had little success in combatting the violence because of their inability to find the bandits; that when a large uniformed patrol enters an area, the bandits are informed and disperse. The police believe that a partial answer to the problem lies in the development of informants, penetration of the bandit gangs, patrol action, stakeouts, counterambushes, and in killing the bandits on sight. Rewards have produced little information. There is a large outstanding reward for Chispas but no one has attempted to earn it. It is said that the unwillingness to give information to the authorities is due to a fear of bandit reprisals and to a skepticism concerning the ability of the informant to collect the reward. In Tolima the team was told that the police had captured two juvenile gang members; that they had "turned" them and were using them successfully against the bandit gangs with which the boys had been associated.

The team has given particular attention to the organic structure, the administrative procedures, personnel practices, and operations of the police. Although the police are proposing a departmental reorganization, there appears to be nothing fundamentally wrong with the present structure. There is a logical grouping of related activities, there are well defined lines of command, and the span of control comes well within acceptable limits. There appears to be a proper delegation of authority; at least, this observation seems warranted by the fact that work is done efficiently and orders are issued and carried out, without the commanding officer's being engrossed in a mass of detailed paper work. There

is one organizational anomaly which the team believes would bear attention. There are three full Colonels in the department. Colonel Camacho is second in command to the Commanding General. Colonel Jose Remiriz is Inspector General, a post of importance in the Colombian Police. The third full Colonel heads the General Santander School. The nine police schools are subordinate organizationally to the F3 section which is commanded by a Lieutenant Colonel. The training function is of such importance in the Colombian Police that there might be justification for removing it from the F3 section; creating an F6 section (Training) which would be responsible for curriculum and instruction and for the management of the nine academies. It would be logical for a full Colonel to command such a section.

The team has only the highest praise for the administrative procedures which have been developed in the police. Records are typed, indexed and for the most part are filed in open shelves. Although there has been a tendency to recommend metal file cabinets, the team believes that there are distinct advantages to open shelf filing in a secured area. One of the tests of a filing system is the ability to reclaim filed material readily. The team has tested the system repeatedly, asking for various sorts of recorded information, which invariably have been produced without delay.

Personnel records are thorough and complete. Each man has a dossier which contains his baptismal certificate, application for employment, recommendations, DAS clearance, marriage certificate, information concerning his family, training records, assignments, transfers, promotions, commendations, disciplinary actions, and all other information pertinent to his personal and professional life. The dossiers of the officers, non-commissioned officers, policemen and civilian employees are filed in separate sections. In addition there is a Cardex file containing a summary of the information in the dossier. The dossiers of officers and non-commissioned officers are filed in the central personnel section, while those of the policemen accompany them to their areas of assignment. The policeman's headquarters dossier is a duplicate of the original.

While the police, officers and men, are underpaid by U.S. standards, there are certain compensating benefits. Single men are housed in dormitories and married men receive a living allowance amounting to 30% of their salaries, with an additional 5% for one child and 4% for each additional child. There is a police home loan program through which men are assisted in the purchase of homes. There is a police pension program which assures an adequate pension after twenty years service. Pension funds are invested in Bogota real estate from which the fund derives a relatively high percentage of return. There are police commissaries through which the policemen can purchase many of the necessities of life at a reduced cost. There are police welfare and social service programs. Some of these programs are supported by salary deductions while some of the services are free.

The Social Welfare Section deserves special mention. It has a headquarters in Bogota and branch operations in six of the Departments.

It derives its financial support from the money which the police department receives as compensation for special police protection to certain business establishments, fines levied for police disciplinary infractions, and an annual subvention of 5,000 pesos from the Ministry of Education. The team visited its headquarters and talked with the Director, Mother Maria de San Luis. She is an interesting personality, energetic, enthusiastic and dedicated. She runs schools for the children of enlisted personnel. There are several hundred currently in attendance. There are adult education classes for the wives of policemen in which they learn cooking and sewing. There is a night school for non-commissioned officers, policemen and civilian employees. There is a nursery for the children of mothers who because of illness or another reason are unable to care for them. The section assists policemen with social or domestic problems. While the team was there a policeman was seeking assistance whose wife had just been taken to an asylum because of some mental derangement. Everyone praised the purposes and accomplishments of this section. This was interesting because the team encountered so much outspoken anti-clericalism among the police.

Many of the operational deficiencies found in the police can be attributed to the Government rather than to the police hierarchy. Police deployment is an exception although, even here, the problem is complicated by high-level political pressure. The patrol force works in four watches or "turns". A man works the street for six hours and spends an additional six hours in reserve duty at the station. A part of the reserve time is spent in in-service training. During every 98 hours the man will work one of the four six-hour turns. Under this system a man is working a twelve-hour day. During every four days he will spend 24 hours on patrol, 24 hours on reserve, and 48 hours off duty. A married man has one full day with his family every four days. If this schedule is rigidly adhered to, and it is said to be, no more than 25% of the force is on patrol at any given time. In actual practice, the number of men available for patrol duty is less than 10% of the total force. This is due to illnesses, vacations, and to fixed post assignments. The police guard embassies, diplomatic residences, the homes of government officials and VIPs, government buildings, and certain businesses. Businesses which are privately owned compensate the department for the salaries of the police. Since it requires four men for each 24 hour fixed post assignment, it can be seen that this depletes the patrol force.

The sole virtue of this system is that it provides a constant station reserve for emergencies. On the other hand, it has little flexibility and takes no account of periods of high crime incidence. The police propose increasing the size of the force. The team does not believe that this would materially increase police effectiveness. An increase of 10,000 would entail an additional annual cost of 75,000,000 pesos in salaries and allowances. This is a rough estimate and may be conservative. There would be the additional expense of equipping and uniforming this force. This sum of money should be sufficient to replace the present automotive equipment, rearm the force and modernize the communications network. If the present force had greater mobility, better communications and increased fire power, and were deployed to better

advantage, its effectiveness should be increased to a degree as great as that which could be achieved through a sizable increase in personnel.

Generally, the police are operating under the handicap of obsolete equipment. Transportation equipment is no exception. There are currently 970 pieces of transportation equipment in the entire country. About half of these are the property of the National Police while the rest are the property of departments and municipalities. When the police were nationalized last year the national government did not acquire title to police property owned by states and municipalities. However, the accompanying charts and tables include this as well as federally owned property. Three hundred and twenty-two of the vehicles have been acquired since 1956, the others in 1956 or before. Two hundred and twenty-eight are considered to be completely unserviceable and the cost of keeping others in running condition is prohibitive. Many of these vehicles no longer have any trade-in or resale value.

Because of the high import duty on automobiles, a two-year old car in fair condition will sell for about the tax free cost of a new vehicle. The police argue that if they were permitted to do so, they could buy new cars, tax exempt, use them for two years and sell them for the cost of a new replacement. Originally, the police motor fleet consisted almost entirely of Fords. This year they purchased 27 Mercedes 190s for the official use of the higher ranking police officials. Although they are said to be more economical than the Ford, this complicates the problem of stocking replacement parts. The Commander of the Transport Section is anxious to purchase additional Fords. He can buy them equipped with red light, spot lights and radio antenna for about $2600 delivered in Bogota. Emergency vehicles are not equipped with sirens and in most of the cities visited they would be worthless. In Bogota the streets, except for the main boulevards are narrow and will permit the passage of no more than a single line of traffic. At certain times of day these streets as well as the boulevards are so congested that traffic moves at a snail's pace. At least half of this traffic appears to be taxis and buses. In the absence of street cars, the government has offered tax concessions in the purchase of taxis and buses, and everyone with a few thousand dollars appears to have entered the business of public transportation. Bogota would be a traffic man's nightmare and in spite of the tax on autos the problem is increasing. The only solution would appear to lie in some rather radical traffic engineering which the government could hardly afford at this time.

The quality of police communications is spotty. The national network which centers in Station 100 located in Bogota appears to be adequate. During the team's visits to departments at some distance from Bogota there was occasion to contact police headquarters by radio. The connection was made in a matter of seconds and the reception was uniformly good. The same cannot be said for some of the departmental radio networks. In Cartagena an attempt was made to contact one of the radio patrol cars without success. The difficulty does not appear to lie in the qualifications of the Colombian radio technicians but in the quality

and age of the equipment. The police have indicated a need for an expansion of the communications nets to include numbers of district headquarters and police stations which have no sort of radio or telephonic contact with departmental headquarters. The Commander of Bolivar Department told of a station located in a remote area, accessible only by trails, and with which there is no form of communication. Any contact must be by messenger.

The police have expressed a special need for better communications in the violence areas. They believe that it would be desirable to have radio communications between police posts as well as between the posts and operational headquarters. The police are also anxious to equip patrols with walkie-talkies. While there appears to be no need for radio technical assistance, there is need for material assistance in this field. The team is not qualified technically to assess the needs and believes that a survey should be conducted by a qualified US radio expert for the purpose of inventorying deficiencies and assisting in the procurement and installation of equipment needed to meet police requirements.

Special mention should be made of the need in the urban areas for a different type of radio patrol vehicle. The police are using panel body Fords for radio patrol. It is not clear why this is done. Everyone with whom the team has talked has said that a panel body vehicle has little value in patrol work; that no one sitting inside the car can observe anything which is taking place outside. Yet the police have continued to buy cars of this body type for patrol work. The police prefer the four door sedan for city patrol and the jeep for rural patrol work.

The survey team was unable to assess the riot control capability of the police. The team was disappointed, purely from a professional standpoint, that it had no opportunity during its stay in Colombia to see the police in action. The police have ten hose equipped tank trucks of German make which were purchased in 1955 for riot control. Although they appear to be in operating condition they are no longer used. The explanation for their not being used was that the political repercussions attending their use far outweighed their value as a means of mob control. The police are equipped with 18" batons which are carried on patrol and are used in riot control. Currently, the police have a nationwide stock of some 2200 grenades — CN and DM; 6000 shells — blast type and projectiles; 2300 — .38 caliber cartridges; and 6300 shells for riot batons. With the exception of 1500 U. S. military canister grenades, which were received in July 1961, the entire gas stock is outdated. The police have an adequate supply of Federal gas guns and the 5700 masks which have been requested will more than meet the needs of the department. The team has been critical of the watch system and the large number of fixed posts as these effect patrol, however, it must be conceded that the system provides a ready reserve of manpower for emergencies. Since two of the four men assigned to a fixed post or a beat are usually either in reserve or asleep at the station they are immediately available for riot control duty. The police attempt to control demonstrations without the use of gas or other force, however, in 1961 they used 484 grenades and in 1962 to date 353. In 1961 they used 1306 projectiles, shells and

cartridges, while in 1962 they have used 1322. The .38 caliber tear gas cartridge has no value in riot control, but the police find it effective in patrol work. The legal restrictions on the use of firearms by the police, are such that they resort to the use of tear gas in breaking up tavern brawls. When the team questioned the effect of tear gas in such quantity and pointed out the difficulty of unloading a weapon and reloading with gas, the police defended the efficacy of the practice and said that a patrol car is equipped with additional revolvers loaded with gas cartridges.

Police training in riot control and related subjects consists of 32 hours of instruction in mob psychology, the use of force, and police tactics and formation; 48 hours in arms and gases and 32 hours in judo and self defense. This subject matter comprises about a sixth of the total course of 640 hours.

With few exceptions police arms are obsolete and in poor condition. The accompanying inventory provides a picture of their variety and age. The police say that the Army has been reluctant for the police to have arms of a quality comparable to those of the Army. It seems apparent that the police need more modern and standardized weapons.