

The Beat Cop
06-08-2014 by Harry Zirkelbach

Duty assignments in the Police Precinct in his city were made a month in advance. Officers were asked to submit a preference for days off. Vacations had been voted on seniority last December, considered unchangeable

The District Captain did speak to his Shift Sergeants about who would work where, their recommendation not absolute. Once the next months' duty list was typed changes were infrequent.

The Captains that ruled the five divisions on that city were the product of the earlier day when the Beat Officer was dominant. They had walked these same streets, knew merchants, miscreants and many families in their Patrol area. They were reluctant to acknowledge mobility changes made by the auto; felt the Beat Officer was dominant to maintaining peace on their streets. Still, reduced availability of young patrolmen, the expanding city, budgets, caused them to assign two Patrolmen to each Car in their center of responsibility. That very arena veteran leaders wanted a cop walking the beat.

All knew what happened. Officers in autos had little opportunity to talk to merchants and community activists. This deprived them, their superiors of feedback about routine "street" information, crime and criminal. Senior police officers became reliant on complaints from the unreliable phone tips, the Press and Headquarters about the society they were to keep peaceful.

Following WW II every month there was less room for the Beat cop.

Still that was possible on the night shifts. where half of all patrolmen worked. Beats chosen had been the center of mischief in the past; were now commercial areas where businesses, excepting taverns, closed early in the evening.

And so it happened on this night, one veteran of five years was assigned a foot Patrol on a busy Street, 6:30 pm to 1:30 am. He barely had time to visit any proprietors and their customers in that first hour. Then stores began closing. After 10:00 pm, his street was quiet. He went out of his way to greet everyone met, avoiding boredom.

On Beats, old fashioned Pull Boxes defined each end. Offices would use a key open the Box, pull out the phone, report to Headquarters, hourly.

He had checked into Headquarters, spoke to several friends working there, learned the city was almost asleep this night. Increased his boredom.

As he walked toward the center of town, he mechanically began checking store doors, shaking each handle vigorously. It was a mechanical, and a bit of exercise.

Suddenly at the major furrier, the door fell open pulling him inside reflectively. As he began regaining his balance, he was aware of a figure straight ahead. Automatically he pulled his revolver, detected a similar motion from that crouching figure, fired.

The response was instantaneous; he saw he had been shot. He fired again; no return fire. The noise was a shock. His assailant had disappeared. He knew he was bleeding from his outstretched hand.

Then moving from that crouch to stand erect, he realized more. In the haze of one routine movement after the other, he had forgotten; the furrier had a full length mirror just inside the entrance, allowing the customer to observe his garments on entering, be more inclined to upgrade.

His first shot had destroyed the mirror;
a some shard had fallen onto his outstretched arm, cutting him slightly.

Now the test. Using the merchants' phone, he requested the night Sergeant's presence. The explanation was understood. Both shared that nervous laughter following something stupid. The city and furriers' Insurance would cover the damage.

The Patrolman's reaction was fully acceptable. Still, this became a humorous legend to accompany his storied career.

He would be one of the last Beat Office to patrol his city's street.

Months later, Mountain Bell began removing the remaining Pull Boxes, that last vestige of the legendary Beat Cop in the Queen City of the Plains.

