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FIRST PATROL ON THE CRIME SCENE

In the article analyzed and grounded the necessity of grant to the patrol policemen of certain plenary powers - realization of primary review of place of crime and use basic technical and forensic methods immediately after arrival. It is advisable to extendient the competence of the patrol, which first arrive on the place of crime (identification and marking of evidence, taking pictures and video, etc.). The main approaches to the optimization of these procedures is to organize specialized training for police officers patrol and consolidate these initiatives at the legislative level.

Keywords: police patrol, crime scene, forensic examination, evidence, investigate the crime.

In this article I open up the concept of the first patrol on the crime scene. This idea is strongly linked to the criminal investigation and forensics as a way of thinking and doing things.

When I started my police studies about eighteen years ago in police school, Tampere, Finland, we students were learnt from the very beginning that after graduating we must be able to do all kind of police work. This meant that we were learnt basic police work but also forensics, photographing, making notes and sketches about the crime scene and naturally also criminal investigation and interviews. So, when graduating after the two and half year of education, all of us had a basic knowledge about police work, including forensics and crime investigation.

Later on, when working as uniformed police in the police district located in a rural area, it happened sometimes that I and my colleague were the only police patrol on duty. Quite often, when coming to the crime scene we were not only trying to find and take the perpetrator in the custody, but we also made some basic forensic

investigation. For example, in one domestic violence case we were collecting DNA-samples from blood strains, photographed the victim and her injuries, the perpetrator and after labeling all the traces of the crime with number tags, we photographed the crime scene. From the very beginning it was obvious that we will do the forensic investigation in this case, even though the victim had serious injuries so it was a question about a serious crime. At the time the nearest forensic unit was about 130 km away from the crime scene. Since we had the knowledge and the necessary equipment to make those forensic actions needed on the crime scene, we did it.

Efficiency and economy. If we had used the forensic unit in this above mentioned case, how costly would have it been? The forensic unit works also at least in patrol of two officers, so let us do some basic calculations. First, travelling to the crime scene and back would have been totally 260 km. It was winter and roads were icy, so it would have taken at least 1 h 30 min for one direction, totally 3 hours to the crime scene and back. Since there is two officers in the patrol, that would have meant totally 6 hours of work only for travelling. Then, actions on the crime scene would have taken at least one hour in this case, again multiplied with two. Totally, by doing basic forensic actions on the crime scene, our patrol was able to save eight hours of forensic unit work plus fuel costs for the vehicle.

Someone may find these calculations quite unimportant or irrelevant in the big scene, but I think this is not the case. Actually, if you put these calculations in to the big picture, and think how many crime scenes can be investigated with basic forensic tools and methods, the number is quite high. It is cost effective to leave more complex crime scenes to the special forensic unit and let the police patrol to deal with less complex crime scenes, when they have knowledge and tools to deal with it.

Of course, the principle is that you cannot put the price tag on the justice. Another thing is that cost efficiency and effective way to do things is one crucial factor if the organization wants to survive in the situation where the costs are increasing and economical resources are decreasing. This is a case in many police organizations around the world. Everyone is responsible on doing things right and still economically but the guide lines are defined on managerial level so this is also a question of good leadership.

About the crime investigation

Crime investigation in whole, including forensic investigation, is aiming to one thing; to reconstruct the circumstances in the act of crime. As it mentioned in the literature «It is a probing from the known to the unknown, backward in time, and its goal is to determine truth as far as it can be discovered in any post-factum inquiry» (Weston et al p. 1).

The idea of first patrol in the crime scene fits to this because in most of the cases the uniformed police are among the first ones in the crime scene. This means that they can see the physical evidence, traces of crime, and people on the spot i.e. they get to know the circumstances on the crime scene much better than anyone else arriving to the scene after them. In other words, in time line they are closer to the actual time of crime than other authorities arriving after them. The closer one is to the actual time of crime at the spot, more intact the crime scene is and this gives more opportunities to find traces and physical evidence relevant to the crime investigation.

This is the reason why these units should have capability to perform basic forensic procedures. If these units have basic education about forensic and crime investigation, they are able to think and observe the crime scene also from the forensic point of view. This means that they are able to discover important pieces of physical evidence or traces and collect or protect them properly. Since the electronic equipment like cameras and video cameras are relatively cheap, it is possible that first patrol can also take first pictures and videos from the crime scene. In addition to that, in some countries police uses so called body cams, small camera worn in uniform and taking video while police is working and this video can later be used as evidence if needed.

How to enable the idea of using first patrol on the crime scene to forensic purposes?

To enable single uniformed police officer to practice simple forensic methods requires training and the change of attitude. Training is simple to organize. I will not give any recommendations how to do that, it can vary a lot, possibilities are different in different places but I think that about 40 hours including theory and active training can give a good basic knowledge about the basics of forensics to the officer who has

never been trained to it. It is important to know how to do some basic evidence collection but as important is to have a forensic way of thinking when entering to the crime scene.

The change of attitude is more complex. Since this is an organizational decision, supervisors and chiefs must support the idea. Only after that it is possible to implement this way of working. Another challenge is the employees. How do they feel if they must do something new?

As always, some think it is quite ok with them, and they can be even satisfied when getting more responsibility. Some can think that it does not matter to them and some may think that they do not like the idea at all. It is always an organizational question how to lead and manage the change, I will not take any stand on that.

First patrol actions on the crime scene. Like I mentioned in the beginning, my intention is not to give a lecture how things must be done, there is too much variables around, starting from how the police studies are organized, organizational history, legislation, tradition and way to do things, just to mention few of those. Apart from this, the crime scenes themselves vary a lot as well as the actions needed. Never the less, there are some basic elements to think about what to do when entering the crime scene:

1) Save lives and prevent any further damage to the health and property.

Saving lives is always the priority number one, after that come actions to save property. If there are paramedics and/or rescue units at the scene, there will do their work and police can cooperate if needed and take care about the police work at the scene.

2) Secure the crime scene.

Close the access to the crime scene wide enough. Do not let any unauthorized persons to enter to the scene and spoil the traces or contaminate them. This includes police officers too, no unnecessary entering to the crime scene, this can cause contamination to the evidence material.

3) Identify persons at the crime scene and write down their contact details.

This is almost too obvious, that's why it sometimes happens that some persons are not identified or contact details are not written down.

It is a huge advantage to the investigation if the investigator has the information of all persons on the scene at the time of the crime.

4) Identify and collect or protect physical evidence.

Sometimes it is important to collect evidence as quickly as possible. For example, tire marks on the muddy road can easily disappear if it rains. If the patrol has the knowledge and the equipment to collect the evidence that's good, if not they should at least take some actions to protect the traces until the forensics arrive. This will not happen if they have no training and ability to consider scene also in forensic point of view. Remember the protective clothing, at least clothes and shoe protection should be found in patrol car.

5) Take photos or video of the crime scene.

If nothing else, this is something to be done. Sometimes there is a need to change the crime scene, or the scene of the traffic accident, so only way to reconstruct the scene somehow is to use photographs or video taken from the scene.

Afterword. I hope the reader has got the basic knowledge about the idea first patrol on the crime scene. This idea is not a new one, but I have been able to see it's benefits in every day work during my career. In police work we are fighting together the crime and preliminary investigation starts from the actions of the first patrol on the crime scene. Of course, the special skills are needed, this is true, but if all the actors on the crime scene have some basic knowledge about the forensics, this can have a good impact to the quality of whole preliminary investigation.

REFERENCES

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