

## **U.S. Police Walk Different Beat in Japan**

*By Elizabeth Reubenfien*

TOKYO-- Boston policeman William Good was walking the beat with two Japanese officers when they saw two teenagers taking part in what looked like a drug deal.

As the police approached, one of the young men broke into a run and darted through the traffic. But the other was stopped, and on a neon-lit Tokyo alley near the railway tracks, Mr. Good witnessed his first police questioning, Japanese-style.

The police asked the teenager what he was doing. He answered. They asked him to turn out his pockets. He did. "I asked them what they would do if he said "no" recalls Mr. Good. "They said, 'they never say no.'"

Mr. Good was one of 23 policemen and community organizers from the U.S. who recently received a rare firsthand look at Japan's police system.

Like foreign businessmen who come here to learn about company management, or teachers who study how Japan achieves such high literacy rates, the policemen came for clues on how an overcrowded, industrialized democracy maintains a peacefulness that is more than a nostalgic memory for many Americans.

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"This is a police paradise," says Sam Baca, chief of police for Albuquerque, New Mexico. "Every law enforcement officer would love to have a community like this."

In a sense, they came to relearn some of the things American officers knew 30 years ago, when U.S. policemen walked their beats - something that many American communities want to recreate. But the group also learned that Japan's successes depend on social disciplines that may not work - or may not be wanted - back home.

The trip was sponsored by the Eisenhower Foundation, a Washington-based organization that promotes community self-help programs across the U.S. The agenda: to observe the Japanese system and bring ideas back to their own communities.

Scott LaChasse, a police captain from Los Angeles, which has begun to re-introduce some community-policing systems, says American policing all too often distances itself from the community it serves. "We're too cold. As we warm up, and learn to deal with people as people, we'll get more cooperation," he says.

In Japan, local police have a close and extensive relationship with community residents. The relationship is fostered by a network of police outposts called koban, one or two-room offices located in each neighborhood.

The visiting Americans tagged along with the koban police. They watched their Japanese counterparts give people directions, answer mundane requests and make regular visits to residents' home to update details on their households - a kind of intrusion many Americans might reject. And they observed that Japanese streets feel safe - partly because the police are so heavily involved in the community.

"Here, it's an honor and an obligation" for citizens to get involved, says Albuquerque's Mr. Baca. Often, retired Japanese businessmen volunteer as non-police probation officers, and parents rotate helping the police in sports events for children. But such community involvement also means that a koban policeman often knows what is new before he makes his regular house visit - he has been tipped off by one of the well-organized neighborhood associations that make informing their business.

This may smack of Big Brother to Americans, but the police and community members of the delegation say the worsening U.S. crime rate has made many Americans ready for more police involvement. In Houston, storefront police stations are the most popular program going, says that city's chief of police, Lee Brown. "The biggest problem I have right now with them is that everyone wants one."

At a police station in Osaka, Japanese mothers watch policemen teach their children kendo and judo. Darnell Bradford-El, a bearded, brawny community organizer from Washington, was also watching. "When I was a kid, I played Boys Club ball with police officers after school," he said. "Now in the city that's gone."

Indeed, while American police also used to have a close relationship with their communities, the antagonism of the 1960s and fears of corruption

pushed the police off America's streets. Drug-related crimes soared, budgets were cut, and in many U.S. communities today, police focus on emergencies and know their neighbors only as potential criminals or victims.

### **Japanese Police Well-Trained**

In Japan, drugs and poverty aren't yet a huge problem, handguns are illegal and police are well-trained and adequately staffed. As a result, Japanese police spend much of their time dealing with incidents that their American counterparts have no time for.

John Bierne's experience provides an example. A deputy inspector from the Bronx's 52nd precinct, Mr. Bierne spends a typical day organizing roadblocks against drug dealers; in Osaka, he walked the shopping-center beat and watched a Japanese officer frisk teenagers who had been smoking cigarettes.

Even the rose the Japanese could show seemed tame to the toughened veterans of American streets. They were taken to Osaka's Airin, the kind of neighborhood most Japanese try to ignore. There, the day laborers huddle in doorways, or under spindly gingko trees along the road. A drunken man rests his head on his carton of clothes, fast asleep on the sidewalk. A shrunken woman shuffles by, rubbing her hands across her dirty blouse.

The Japanese hosts refused to let the Americans get out of the bus - they thought it might be too dangerous. Says Mr. Bierne, "I thought it was quaint. If you've been to New York and you've seen the Bowery 20 years ago, it's like that. It's nice for them that they're able to get all their problems into one area."

Japanese methods would have to be heavily adapted to fit American realities, the delegation members said. "If you look at the police without looking at the culture, you'd be missing what it's about," says Tom Potter, a soft-spoken precinct captain from Oregon.

### **'There's Got to Be Something'**

In Japan, two years of police training reinforce a single set of common values. Police taught not only self-defense, but such cultural skills as tea ceremony and flower arrangement.

"We need to look at what do people in Philadelphia, people in the U.S. value?" says Willie Williams, Philadelphia's police commissioner. "I can't

see talking to guys about doing flower arrangements, but there's got to be something."

Japan generally puts the group's needs above the individual's, so personal freedoms are sacrificed more readily to maintain order. Criminal suspects, for example, are subject to lengthy detentions, and the vast majority of Japanese criminals are convicted because they have confessed. Indeed, Japanese police methods are constantly questioned by human-rights activists.

Japan, of course, has its own crime problems - even the koban police face difficulties. In huge urban apartment blocks, alienated residents slam their doors on policemen's house visits. And police worry that the increase in international drug traffic and foreign laborers emigrating to Japan threatens to undermine the tidiness of Japanese control.

"In a lot of ways this reminds me of the U.S. in the 1950s. Today Japan is riding the crest," says Mr. LaChasse. But, he adds, "it doesn't take much, just time and the disintegration of the pillars of society."