

## Roxbury glad to have its new 'Soul Patrol'

Arthur Jones

*Boston Globe* (1960-1979); Dec 8, 1971;

pg. 1



**ROLLCALL** — Members of Boston Police Dept.'s special all-black **Strike Force** receive last-minute instructions at Station 2 in Roxbury before going on patrol. story, Page 3. (Globe photo by Bill Brett)

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—DEPUTY SUPT. HERBERT CRAIGWELL

# Roxbury glad to have its new 'Soul Patrol'

By Arthur Jones  
Globe Staff

It was late on blustery Blue Hill avenue one night recently, but not too late for taxi drivers to still find good fares.

That's why it seemed unusual for one passengerless cab to be stopped in the middle of the street.

Its black driver was talking through the opened window to another black man who was wearing a long coat, his collar turned up, standing alongside the cab. (This time of year cabbies are usually out hustling extra hard for that big tip.)

This scene ordinarily would not arouse suspicion. But for the two men who slowed their late model Chevy, as they neared the scene, this situation had a lot of potential — for crime.

Cabbies have been robbed, and even killed in places more conspicuous than the middle of Blue Hill avenue.

Stopping alongside and about three feet from the cab, the two men studied the hack and the man in the street, waiting for a reaction.

For a moment there was none. Then the cabbie, realizing what was happening, peered around the pedestrian, smiled and gave an 'it's okay' sign. The men in the Chevy, Courtland Ballard and George Vest, waved and drove off.

Ballard and Vest moved to another street in Roxbury, "to check out a tip." They disappeared into a home, emerged three minutes later satisfied that they had gotten a "lot of good information" from a tipster.

That's the way it goes for Det. Ballard and Patrolman Vest. Three

weeks ago, they were anonymous members of the 2700-member (98 percent white) Boston Police Department. Today they are a special leg of the department with special duties. They are a part of the 'Soul Patrol.'

They are plainclothes members of the black strike unit of the Tactical Police Force and they like it.

They like it because it's black people working the neighborhoods they know best. "Community people are glad to know we're here. They feel safe," says Ballard.

The 34-man unit was recently created amid controversy to combat crime in the high crime districts in black communities. An outbreak of violent crimes and an emotional appeal from black community leaders preceded its creation.

Deputy Supt. Herbert Craigwell, who commands the force, said that "everyone expected a certain amount of success with this unit, but no one thought it would come this fast." He referred to the almost over-night success of his squad.

After just two weeks the special unit has compiled an arrest log and other official action large enough to fill a dozen big sheets in the police journal (besides earning two affectionate nicknames — Soul Patrol and Black Tack).

"It's not a force of super cops," Craigwell said. "The community is responding to us and we've clicked, that's all."

The 20-year veteran of the force cited tips and leads offered by a suddenly cooperative community as the basis of his unit's success.

Item Number 4 of the strike force's Nov. 24 log reads:

"As a result of information received, Dets. Thomas Scott and Courtland Ballard, Patrolmen George Vest and Preston Williams along with Prescott Thompson arrested without warrant (three persons) for the murder of Allen Bowser on Adams street, Roxbury on Nov. 21."

The 'information received' came from a phone call to the special unit office upstairs at Station 2. The caller asked specifically for this unit, Craigwell said.

"People in the community feel secure in knowing we're out there and are willing to cooperate."

When they're not following



DEPUTY SUPT. HERBERT CRAIGWELL CONDUCTS ROLLCALL AT STATION 2 IN ROXBURY (Globe photo by Bill Brett)

through with arrests, Ballard and Vest work on leads given them by their own contacts or phoned in to the unit. Ballard, a young veteran of the vice unit downtown, keeps these tidbits of information scratched down on folded pieces of paper and tucked away in his breast pocket.

Unless a big arrest is imminent there are no predetermined assignments for the eight plainclothesmen in the unit. During their 7½-hour shift, they busy themselves freelancing in the community, stopping periodically in the night joints, places where dope is pushed or where bad characters are known to frequent.

The freelance tour is considerably less hectic than the tour duty of a district patrolman who must answer the heavy load of citizen calls as dispatched from the "turret" at headquarters.

"There's more time to investigate", Vest and Ballard agree.

Some investigations are painstaking and slow, even when the investigators have more than a strong hunch that a suspect is involved in some kind of illegal activity.

But Ballard is patient about these things. "The thing to do is catch them right. All (crooks) eventually get caught."

While on patrol last week, they spotted a suspicious looking car parked in the alley adjacent to one of the area's popular night spots. Ballard glanced at the license number as he drove by, yanked his notes from his pocket and matched a number jotted down among his tips with the car in the alley. He was just keeping track.

Ballard appreciates what the unit is doing but would like to go back to the vice unit "once everything here is

cleared up." Vest, a three-year veteran who "wanted to work nights anyway" was already with Station 2 when the unit was formed and likes his new duty.

Like some of his men, Dept. Craigwell, was not particularly elated when assigned to the special strike force. "I had a good day job (9 to 5, with weekends off, in the department's community affairs division) and I wouldn't mind going back," Craigwell said. However, he hailed the unit's creation. "I have to take my hat off to the commissioner. He knew when he formed the special unit there would be flak."

Having taken no time off during the first weeks of operation, Craigwell added, "this unit has proven something — that it can do the job — and I'm proud to be a part of it."

Craigwell anticipates that within a few weeks he will be called on by Comr. Edmund L. McNamara to evaluate and help plan the future of the unit.

The only improvements Craigwell would implement in the unit would be an expansion to daylight hours and an integration of its personnel.

"There should be some white input in this unit. The badge says 'Boston' police not black or white police. We can't work separately."

If the unit became integrated and the black community finds itself again in the situation of having to deal with white policemen, would police-community relations slip back into the incompatible state which helped give birth to all-black unit?

Craigwell thinks this could be a problem. He adds however, "black people may continue to offer information to black cops, but when they're hurt or need a policeman badly all they'll be looking for is that blue uniform."

The foremost objection to the creation of the black strike force came from the president of the Boston Police Patrolmen's Assn., Daniel Sweeney, who has hinted that legal action may be taken against the department.

Asked for a personal appraisal of the unit after two and one-half weeks in operation, Sweeney — who feels that comparisons of police units is ludicrous — said: "I can't knock them."



SOUL PATROL—Detectives Thomas Scott (left) and Courtland Ballard are members of the Boston Police

Department's all-black Strike Force which has met with early success. (Globe photo by Ellis Herwig)