

Point/Counterpoint

The RCMP has lately been the centre of much news, some good and some bad. Because the Quarterly is a social magazine, we try as much as possible to avoid political acclaim or disclaim. When the following editorial by Bob Wyman of the Coquitlam Herald was sent to us though, we felt we had to print it. Here was a man describing his impressions of a night on patrol, neither romanticizing the facts to make them more glamorous nor twisting them around to bring out hidden meanings. He was just describing what it was like to be an average policeman on detachment. (From THE HERALD, June 6, 1978.)
Ed.

There has been considerable concern expressed to me over the last year regarding the activities of the RCMP. Attacks on the government in the House of Commons centering around the question of political control of the Security Service for the Force have unfortunately and inaccurately been diverted by the government to attacks on the RCMP generally.

As a result, the credibility of the men who protect us has come into question. As a child I was brought up to respect and possibly even fear the consequences of any encounter with the RCMP. I knew they were the finest police force in the world and that they were all tall, young and strong men assuring a firm and fair enforcement of our laws. Experience with life tarnished this viewpoint somewhat, and now in 1978, having just recovered from the scurrilous "pig" label, the men of the scarlet are finding themselves accused as common criminals for illegal breaking and entering.

As a result, when an off-duty RCMP officer phoned me, partially in frustration and partially in resentment to current public attitude, and challenged me to

spend a few hours patrolling in a police car to acquire some first hand knowledge of the activities of the RCMP, I knew I must respond.

A call to Supt. Heywood of the Surrey Detachment and his enthusiastic response soon had me sitting in front of him for a briefing prior to my stint in a squad car on duty. His unique and interesting concept of community zone policing could be the subject of several columns, but it is sufficient to note here that its success can be judged not only by its impact on our community, but also in the fact that it has now been adopted by several other jurisdictions both inside and outside of Canada.

On Friday evening about 10:00 p.m., after a brief tour of the station — now modernized by an impressive bank of computers and communication devices, and necessarily, but unfortunately, a large number of cells — and a spirited discussion with several constables including the section in charge of homicide, we set off in a squad car.

- Car overturned in a ditch and now abandoned — check ownership — has it been reported stolen?
- A hundred yards away two boys about 14 or 15 are hitchhiking in the rain — officer takes names as boys try to hide obvious smell of alcohol — officer drives boys to their home.
- Radio call for assistance from an apartment — woman says man is drunk and threatening her — urges caution in approach because there are several rifles in house.
- Three car accident on Patullo Bridge — send ambulance — several teenagers injured — once again a drunken driver out of control.