Is Consolidation The Answer To Better Crime Control?

City Judge Kaliste Saloom, in a recent speech to Acadiana lawmen, warned that crime would increase in this area, that there are bountiful pickings in Acadiana, and that the criminal know us are here.

He pointed out that ease of transportation, our prime location, our solid economy, all are as much incentive to criminals as to industry and must face the ever increasing problem we wish to attract here.

The criminal in Acadiana will be more sophisticated, more professional, he said. There will be more crimes, more expertly done. And there are indications that these predictions are coming true.

All law enforcement departments in Lafayette have improved in all phases of their operations in recent years. They show higher degrees of professionalism, more manpower, more equipment. Unfortunately, the problems in Acadiana are growing more rapidly than the departments—all of which are hampered by inadequate funds. Without money, these problems will be compounded. Sooner or later, the public will have to foot the bill if we are to have a modern, streamlined law enforcement organization.

Five recent safe burglaries in Acadiana were undoubtedly done by professional according to policemen who investigated them.

In 1966, the Lafayette City Police Department answered 22,623 service calls. That number jumped by 10,000 to 32,421 service calls during 1969. The city department alone investigated 781 burglaries, 65 robberies, 1,417 thefts, 133 aggravated batteries, 162 shootings, as well as a too full quota of rapes, murders, and other violent crimes. Narcotics offenses in the city and parish increased drastically to alarming proportions. In the last three months of the year alone, more than 90 persons were arrested for drug and narcotic violations, according to lawmen's reports.

Traffic law enforcement became a staggering job. In no month last year did the city police investigate fewer than 300 accidents. A total of 4,653 accidents were recorded by the city department in 1969. Crime records for traffic fatalities were set: 36 persons died.

"The crime rate in the Evangeline Economic Development District (the area we call Acadiana) has kept pace with or exceeded the rate of population growth," law enforcement planners reported to the state crime commission. They noted that from 1964-1968 in Lafayette crimes of felony almost doubled, narcotics arrests tripled, and juvenile arrests more than tripled, and this is how they explained it:

"Law enforcement agencies are beset by problems which arise from trying to operate efficiently under understaffed organizations. The larger agencies need special personnel trained in investigative methods and techniques. There is a shortage of personnel with juvenile specialization. "Administrative procedures should be streamlined and standardized to eliminate the time and effort now expended in written communication between law enforcement agencies."

In September, 1969, the General Fund Committee of the 43-man Citizen's Committee which studied city finances came to much the same conclusion: "The police force is seriously understaffed," it said, noting that the force is at about one-half the 148 men recommended for a city this size.

The answer to this very serious problem may be found in consolidation of the police agencies in the parish. Combination of the city police department and the parish sheriff's department would eliminate costly duplication of facilities, equipment and personnel.

The two forces combined bring the manpower at a realistic level. As the departments are now operating, their manpower is spread thin, while each duplicates many of the services provided by the other.

Narcotics operations are only one instance of this. Overlapping and duplicate services are found in every division in the departments.

Now neither department can afford to pull men off the job for specialized training because neither can afford the loss of manpower for extended periods of training time. But greater specialization and professional is a vital necessity if we are to meet the challenge of more sophisticated and more professional crime. The Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Criminal Justice, acting as the Task Force on Crime in Louisiana, made these recommendations: "Consolidate law enforcement jurisdictions to serve naturally compatible crime control areas when this would increase effectiveness and efficiency," the committee reported. There is no area which is a more "naturally compatible crime control area" than this parish.

The first step toward such a combination, the formation of a Metropolitan Police Force to serve the entire parish, might be the formation of a Central Intelligence Bureau. Such a bureau would deal with areas in which cooperation and coordination of efforts would provide the greatest results in the areas of vice, narcotics, gambling, subversive activities. By creating such an agency, it would free men in both departments to work on their problems.

As things are now, narcotics investigators are sometimes called on to investigate burglaries, thefts, to split their time between what is actually two jobs—and cannot do the best job at either.

Creation of the single force would free regular detectives to work on the thefts and burglaries and robberies and shoplifting and other crimes while leaving intelligence detection to work in that area, exclusively.

This newspaper pledges its wholehearted support in any endeavor to keep our city clean of the crime element.

(Tomorrow: Water Pollution.)