THE VIGILES OF ANCIENT ROME

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Roy Ernest Hollady

1962

ABSTRACT

THE VIGILES OF ANCIENT ROME

by Roy Ernest Hollady

This thesis is a study of the Vigiles of ancient Rome and the establishment, structure and organization of this branch of the municipal government of that city.

The Vigiles were established by Augustus in 6 A.D. and served as both policemen and firemen. The public safety function had been badly neglected by Republican governments and Augustus, by reason of general public demand as well as his own desire to improve the law enforcement and fire fighting arrangements, created the unit to serve in the dual capacity. Previous experiments had been totally unsuccessful since crimes of violence were prevalent and frequent conflagrations devastated the city. Augustus wanted to insure domestic peace and security and the Corps of Vigiles was one of the instruments developed during the Emperor's lifetime to accomplish his purpose. That the Vigiles were effective is attested to by the unit's long life as a public safety mechanism.

Roy Ernest Hollady

In addition to a more or less descriptive account of the Corps, the major hypothesis of this thesis is that the Romans developed methods and techniques of manpower distribution and the concept of prevention long before 1829, which is the year the London Metropolitan Police was established. The similarities between the two systems is striking in many respects. This paper explores the possibility that the English were aware of the ancient Roman developments and employed them in the establishment of the London system.

THE VIGILES OF ANCIENT ROME

By

Roy Ernest Hollady

A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Political Science

1962

Approved
Dr. Lloyd Musolf

PREFACE

My attention was first drawn to the Vigiles of Rome in the fall of 1959 while reading a book by Charles Reith, a British historian, entitled The Blind Eye of History, published by Faber and Faber, Ltd. (London) in 1953. The author, while discussing the development of the police systems of Europe and their importance to the growth of Western civilization, briefly referred to the Vigiles as Roman policemen-firemen.[1] The Vigiles superseded the aedi-les, a purely police arm, as the major force responsible for the safety of the citizens of Rome from the depreda-tions of the criminal element as well as the recurring scourge of catastrophic fires. Reith added that the Vigi-les remained the chief instrument of law enforcement and fire prevention and extinguishment until the fall of the Empire, c. 400 A.D.

My interest was aroused because I had served with the Department of Public Safety in Oak Park, Michigan for a number of years before accepting an appointment as an instructor in the School of Police Administration and Public Safety of Michigan State University. The Oak Park Depart-ment is totally integrated in that the traditional

separation of functions, administratively and operationally, between the police and fire "departments" does not exist. Public Safety Officers perform the functions of both policemen and firemen and have done so since the summer of 1954 when the separate units of the municipal government were merged. The primary purpose, ostensibly, for the integrating the police and fire departments was to increase the number of men responding to any type of incident requiring the services of either policemen or firemen. In actuality, neither department was operating efficiently before the consolidation. Training was poor, if not totally absent, morale and salaries were low and services to the citizens of the community were often grudgingly and ineffectively provided.

A succession of unfortunate incidents involving the fire department finally prompted the city council to instruct the city manager to eliminate the departmental entities and form a consolidated unit. The City of Oak Park employed a competent, young, professionally trained police administrator as the Director of Public Safety in August of 1954 and total integration was accomplished by January in the following year.

The Corps of Vigiles, too, was borne out of incompetence and indifference. As the research progressed, comparisons were inevitably made between Roman "integration" and the consolidated systems of which I am familiar in the United States. Certainly there is no similarity relative to equipment, uniforms, conditions of service, rank structure or a host of other administrative and operational practices. There is, however, a definite similarity between the integration of two thousand years ago and that which is practiced in the relatively few municipalities in the United States and Canada regarding purpose, function, manpower distribution, and law enforcement and fire-fighting techniques.

There will be considerable speculation relative to the influence the Corps of Vigiles may have had on the development of subsequent law enforcement and fire control systems. I wish to emphasize that much of the speculation, if not all, will be based not on indisputable historical, literary and/or epigraphical evidence but on inferences and conclusions drawn from comparisons between Roman law enforcement and fire prevention and extinguishment practices and later English and American systems. In large

part it will be impossible to prove by documentation my opinions, statements and/or hypotheses because of the absence or loss of documents and artifacts relating the day-to-day administration of a complex and sprawling organization composed of thousands of men. If at all possible, evidence will be presented to buttress personal beliefs and opinions.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Lloyd Musolf, my thesis advisor, for his time, efforts, and many excellent suggestions contributed during the development of this paper. My thanks, also, to the other faculty members of the Department of Political Science and the History Department who read, commented and assisted in the preparation of this work.

In addition, I am particularly indebted to Dr. William Hardin, Librarian, of the Metropolitan Police Department, St. Louis, Missouri, for his assistance in discovering and obtaining source materials which made it possible to continue the fascinating and personally rewarding study of the Vigiles of Rome during the years of the Empire.

It is hoped that this modest treatment of the Vigiles will stimulate more penetrating studies of this arm of the civil government of Rome.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since the inception of police-fire integration in 1928,[1] adverse professional opinion relating to it has not diminished in the United States. Criticism has been particularly vociferous from professional firemen's associations. Police administrators, while not really reserved about the "threat" of a movement to consolidate the services on a fairly wide scale, maintain a more balanced outlook and more or less silently, but fervently wish it might go away.

Also, police and fire administrators tend, in the main, to possess a conservative or rather insular attitude toward conceptual, philosophical or theoretical treatments of their "trade" and its social function. It is hoped that this study will illustrate that civilized men two thousand years ago were willing to experiment and that their administrative and operational concepts were, in some respects, precursors of what is often thought to be relatively new today--not only in the area of police-fire consolidation

---

[1] The City of Huntington Woods, Michigan was the first to consolidate its police and fire departments in this country.

but in specific areas of police administration such as resource and manpower distribution and the development of the concept of prevention.

Academicians and police administrators interested in the history and development of the police idea generally believe that the English first conceived of the preventive concept of law enforcement and that they also developed a fairly "scientific" method of manpower deployment and patrol distribution. It is not surprising that this is so since police literature, both English and American, is replete with references to the "original" English developments.

Sir Henry Fielding, the novelist and police magistrate, is considered to be the first to suggest cautiously that prevention rather than brutal suppression and inhuman penal laws would be a more effective solution to the unbridled criminality which was so prevalent. Sir Henry broached the idea of prevention in An Inquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robberies which was published in 1751. His intense concern with the atrocious social conditions in England appeared in his next novel Amelia, which was published in 1752 and "is more concerned with

social problems and popular grievances than its forerunners."[2]

Sir John Fielding was appointed as his stepbrother's assistant in 1750 and succeeded him as the Bow Street magistrate upon the older man's death. Throughout his career, he attempted to establish reform methods in the administration of London's criminal justice system and "was a pioneer in the treatment of juvenile offenders and in numerous details of police administration."[3] Sir John published in 1775 A Plan for Preventing Robberies within 20 Miles of London. In the tract he stated that a more logical distribution of police resources, an upgrading of the quality of policemen, and attention to prevention instead of apprehension would contribute more to the safety of citizens than traditional methods.

The concept of prevention was extended to other types of policing by a Scotsman, Patrick Colquhoun, also a London police magistrate, who published A Treatise on the Commerce and Police of the River Thames in 1792.

---

[2]Edmund Gosse, "Henry Fielding," The Encyclopedia Americana (1961 Edition), XI, p. 183.

[3]Ibid., p. 185.

Unfortunately, the ideas of the Fieldings and Colquhoun went unheeded for several years before their final implementation by Charles Rowan and Richard Mayne, the first co-commissioners of the London Metropolitan Police, which was enacted under the authority of legislation engineered by Sir Robert Peel.

Rowan and Mayne viewed the concept of prevention as a weapon against the brutish laws and the popular practice of hanging as a panacea for the appalling criminal conditions spawned by ignorance, hunger and rapid industrialization. The commissioners translated the concept into reality but not without great personal sacrifice. The Fieldings were bitterly attacked but the calumny against Rowan and Mayne was particularly ferocious.

Charles Rowan was the dominant intellect and took office after retiring from the British army as a full colonel. He obtained his humane philosophy while serving under Sir John Moore, an English general. Rowan observed that Moore's commands invariably were the best behaved in the English armies and that his soldiers were not too inclined to supplement their low incomes and meager possessions by acts of criminality. Moore's discipline was

one of kindness--he eliminated the whip as a form of punishment and instituted new disciplinary measures which influenced Rowan tremendously in later years when he developed the London Metropolitan Police. Rowan taught his "New Police" that they prevented first; failing that they apprehended but they were not to punish. He repeatedly emphasized that punishment, if imposed, was the function of the courts of the community.

Rowan's and Mayne's reforms were not accomplished overnight. Within the first three years of their administration, five thousand men were dismissed from the department. It is not known how many voluntarily resigned.

The commissioners also developed a refined system of manpower deployment by dividing the city into districts according to the incidence of crime in each and assigned an appropriate number of men as the need indicated. The idea appears rather simple now but at the time it was a profound development.[4]

Subsequent police historians have uniformly attributed the concept of prevention and the first systematic

---

[4]For additional material concerning the English Developments, see A New Study of Police History by Charles Reith.

deployment of manpower as a unique contribution of the English. H. W. Melville Lee did so in 1902 when his A Police History (London: Methuen Company) was published. An American, Raymond Fosdick, attributed the developments to the English in his European and American Police Systems which was published in 1919 by McGraw-Hill. More recent American authorities have continued to do so, e.g., O. W. Wilson, Police Administration (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1951), V. A. Leonard, Police Organization and Management (New York: The Foundation Press, 1950) and German, Day and Gallatti, Introduction to Law Enforcement (Springfield: Thomas Publishers, 1962).

Charles Reith has treated the subject extensively in his books. His penetrating and perceptive analysis of the development of the English police system and its governing philosophy, has contributed immensely to the universal belief that the English originated the concept of prevention and modern manpower deployment techniques. One book in particular, A New Study of Police History, delves deeply into the writings of the Fieldings and the early lives of both Rowan and Mayne. He studied personal correspondence and diaries of Rowan and Mayne and their families which were

written before the men were appointed as commissioners in an attempt to delineate the evolution of the idea of prevention both historically and intellectually. Rowan's years in the army were scrutinized closely to illustrate the growth of the man's outlook toward policing and the effects his experiences had upon his subsequent administration of the Metropolitan Police Department.

In Police Principles and the Problem of War, published in 1959, he extended the concept of prevention to the sphere of the United Nations. Reith maintains that it is ludicrous to attempt to legislate peace--a preventive instrument is needed which will in effect force compliance in somewhat the same manner a modern police agency accomplishes its objectives.

These, then, are the major writers and historians who have done most to reinforce the belief in the English development of the concepts. From the study of the Corps of Vigiles, the writer is certain that the concepts discussed as well as others we look upon as modern, i.e., since 1829, were formulated between the years c. 50 B.C. and c. 400 A.D. and were conceivably known by the early developers of the English system. There is no documentation

available to buttress such a statement at the moment[5] and perhaps there never will be but the comparisons between the two systems, the English and the Roman, from the administrative aspect, are too striking to ignore. Unfortunately, modern historians, other than those specifically interested in the development of the police, totally ignore the tremendous importance of law enforcement and its contribution to the development of civilization. All the histories of England which the writer has perused mention the start of the London Metropolitan Police briefly and in some instances in a rather perfunctory manner. None mention Rowan or Mayne or the impact of the police or their eventual development as an important segment of society. P. K. Baillie-Reynolds neatly sums up the case against modern historians in the following statement:

> In the English history books we used to learn that Sir Robert Peel instituted the London police, and that they were therefore called "Bobbies," but, that statement made, the history books were concerned with them no more, and for fuller information we have to turn to the press and contemporary fiction.[6]

---

[5]The writer has written the Honorable J. R. Granville Bantock, Governor of Her Majesty's Prison in Manchester, England for assistance in this matter. He is an authority on the Roman occupation of Britain and may be of help.

[6]P. K. Baillie-Reynolds, The Vigiles of Imperial Rome (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 14.

One other significant point bears mentioning at this stage of development of the paper. History has shown that military force alone has never been able to maintain internal peace and order in any given nation or community for any length of time.[7] Military power cannot prevent or effectively cope with mass criminality for long periods of time. London in the first four decades of the nineteenth century illustrates this fact quite clearly. Military power can suppress criminality and overt evidences of civil discord temporarily as in the case of Cromwell's military government in the seventeenth century but sustained enforcement is difficult, if not impossible to accomplish.[8] The Roman Vigiles illustrate this quite well. They contributed greatly, indirectly perhaps, to the growth of the Empire by insuring a peaceful and ordered community in which a government could direct its energies and intelligence toward the solution of problems of war and expansion. It is dangerous to do so, but one might infer that Rome survived the social and political cataclysms of the last days of the Republic and the early days of the Empire because the

---

[7]Charles Reith, The Blind Eye of History (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1953), p. 7.

[8]Ibid.

Vigiles, a non-military body, assisted the Praetorian Guards and Urban Cohorts in preserving and maintaining an orderly society while administrators and politicians literally pulled together a domestic society racked and tortured by strife, discontent and incipient revolt.

Importance of the study. To the writer's knowledge, nothing specifically about the Vigiles has been written since 1926 when P. K. Baillie-Raynolds' The Vigiles of Imperial Rome was published by Oxford University Press. Reynolds' book was actually a compendium of the writings and research of a handful of German classical scholars. Reynolds admits that there are no new findings in his work but he did draw quite a few conclusions and inferences from the work of the others. Of course, Reynolds did not write his book with the intention of comparing the organization and administration of the Vigiles with modern police agencies as will be done in this paper to a certain extent.

Other than passing references in more or less standard works on Roman history, there is no indication that any research and writing concerning the Vigiles has been done in this country at all. The writer would hazard the opinion

that the Vigiles are almost totally unknown to modern American police and fire administrators.

The fundamental purpose of the study is to portray a consolidated organization as it existed during extremely trying periods of history and under conditions much worse than that experienced by most modern agencies. In addition, the hypotheses already discussed briefly should be of some interest to students of law enforcement interested in the evolution of the police concept.

Scope of the study. Chronologically, the scope of the study will embrace the years from c. 50 B.C. to c. 400 A.D.--the span of time over which the Vigiles and their immediate predecessors played an important role in the municipal affairs of Rome. A brief overview of Roman history from the expulsion of the last of the kings in c. 509 B.C. up to the last years of the Republic will be presented.

Most of what is known about the Corps of Vigiles has been obtained from first, second and third century artifacts, historical writings and classical literature, architecture and epigraphy.[9] Therefore, emphasis will be

placed upon developments during these time periods. Particular emphasis will be placed upon the early development of the Vigiles and subsequent historical treatment will be limited to explanations of and about occurrences as they affect or cause changes in structure and administrative and operational techniques in the Corps. Actually, as far as is known, the structure, organization and basic purposes of the Vigiles changed but little from the time they were activated until the twilight of the Empire. However, even though organizational changes were relatively minor when they were made, some were of immense significance.

Limitations of the study. The greatest hindrance to a study in depth, other than a general lack of available evidence, of course, is that the vast majority of authoritative works regarding the Vigiles are in German. This limitation is alleviated somewhat by the fact that the sources at my disposal for the most part use a great amount of material from the German documents and are translated into English.

The language barrier has caused difficulty when a particular scholar was treating a subject or topic in

microscopic detail and employed the original Latin or Greek word or phrase for descriptive purposes or because of a lack of a specific English equivalent. In some instances it was possible to grasp the meanings from the contextual material.

Source materials and methodology. Several source documents are at the writer's disposal. Most of the works dealing specifically with the Corps of Vigiles were published in England, in English, or were translated into English from the original German and Italian.

Due to the nature of the study, library research was the only investigative method employed to obtain facts relating to the Vigiles. The Michigan State University Library, the Wayne State University Library and the St. Louis, Missouri, Public Library were relatively rich sources of information while the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Library was also helpful. Reynolds' book was obtained on loan from the Los Angeles Public Library.

Enquiries were made to the W. J. Bryce Ltd., Booksellers, London and the Patterson Book Company of Patterson, New Jersey relative to books, monographs and articles

concerning the Vigiles but the writer was informed that nothing was presently available to them and that a thorough search would take many months.

Journals such as the Journal of Roman Studies, American Journal of Philology, Journal of Hellenic Studies, Classical Journal and others contributed nothing in the way of information about the Vigiles.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND THE CITY OF ROME

Pre-Republican Italy

The origins of Rome have always been of deep interest to classical scholars. Until recently it has always been thought that the Indo-Europeans came to Italy from the north and swept southward. The theory has been seriously questioned by a rival theory that the country was settled by peoples moving from east to west across the Adriatic.[1] At any rate, the movement of the Indo-Europeans into Italy occurred simultaneously with their migrations into Greece.

Approximately two thousand years before the birth of Christ, two waves of invaders entered the peninsula--the Terramaricoli and the Villanovans. Recent research has indicated that the former group is of little significance in comparison to the more advanced Villanovans and that the latter culture is of immense significance to modern scholars.[2]

---

[1] Raymond Bloch, The Origins of Rome (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1960), p. 22.

[2] Ibid., p. 23.

As early as 1200 B.C., the Latins, a tribe of Villanovans, established villages and settlements in the Alban Hills near the seacoast and on the highpoints on the south bank of the Tiber River.[3] The Latins were one of a large number of tribal communities of different origins. Of even more importance than the Villanovans, were the Etruscans and the Greeks. The Greeks began to settle from the middle of the eighth century before Christ and the Etruscans began to infiltrate around 700 B.C. Both peoples contributed greatly to the cultural and social development of the then insignificant Rome.[4] "Through the Greek infusion, religion and art of the Italian peoples were decidedly and permanently influenced." While the Etruscans were instructing the Romans in engineering and transmitting to them many social, religious and governmental institutions from which subsequent generations drew to perfect what historians of future centuries would describe as "magnificent

---

[3]Edward H. Weatherly et al., The Heritage of European Literature (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1948), p. 258.

[4]Bloch, op. cit., p. 28. Rome, at first small numerically and geographically, was surrounded for many centuries by powerful neighbors.

[5]Ibid., p. 30.

Rome," they were also being richly influenced by the more intellectually inclined Greeks. The Etruscans had learned writing from the Greeks long before and had adopted military equipment similar to that employed by the soldiers of their teachers' homeland. Architecturally, the Etruscan temples bore a strong resemblance to those of the Greeks.[6] However, Etruscan political institutions were singularly unlike those of the Greeks; there were no democratic tendencies since their princes were sheer autocrats.[7]

By 600 B.C. Etruria had established its power over the whole of Central Italy, including Rome. The Etruscans were a "richer, more brilliant people but less dogged and able in matters of political organization"[8] than the Romans and the Etruscan domination ended with the expulsion of the kings in 509 B.C.[9] A patrician state developed after the expulsion of the kings and all essential power fell into the

---

[6] Ibid., p. 30.

[7] Ibid., p. 7.

[8] Ibid., p. 11.

[9] Bloch mildly disagrees with the date. He submits that the Etruscans left about 450 B.C. and bases his theory upon the fact that Etruscan pottery was still being imported as late as 450 B.C. He admits his theory would be difficult to accept.

hands of an oligarchy, or princeps. The political crises which eliminated the Etruscan monarchy were not confined solely to Rome; the whole of Central Italy experienced similar eruptions and Rome was not an isolated case.[10]

The monarchy was replaced by a republic with a senate and popularly elected officials. From 509 to 265 B.C., referred to as the first period of the Republic, Rome fought a succession of wars of consolidation. One by one, the hill tribes of Central Italy, the Etruscans, the Greek cities of Southern Italy, the Samnites, Greece, Asia Minor and Sicily were crushed by the overpowering military might of Rome. The defeated territories were subsequently organized into a federal union.

The years from 264 to 133 B.C., the second period of the Republic, witnessed a series of wars in which Macedon, Carthage, the Seleucid monarchy in Asia and the tribes of Gaul and Spain were conquered. Rome was the Western Mediterranean--militarily, economically and politically. Every aspect of life was influenced by Rome and its power, not only in Italy but outward to the fringes of its conquered territories.

---

[10] Ibid., p. 15.

The third period of the Republic embraces the years from 133 to 27 B.C. Class strife and political and social upheaval characterized this phase of the history of ancient Rome. The differences between the plebeians and the aristocracy led to almost continuous civil strife which eventually destroyed the Republic.[11] "The terrible succession of civil wars, of which there had been three between 90 and 30 B.C., had shaken the very structure of Roman society; disorder was prevalent, confidence had vanished, and a sort of despair was numbing the people's hearts."[12] Politically ambitious leaders capitalized upon military power in their bitter factional struggles. Boak states that the "growth of the professional army and the inability of the Senate to control its commanders contributed most to the failure of the Republican form of government."[13]

Plutarch, in his life of Cicero, speaks of civil disorder and the lack of a competent, centralized government

---

[11]Henry Francis Pelham, "Rome," Encyclopaedia Britanica (1958 ed.), p. 498.

[12]Martin P. Charlesworth, The Roman Empire (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 211.

[13]Arthur E. R. Boak, A History of Rome to 565 A.D. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1943), p. 264.

continually.[14] Partisan mobs were frequently incited by anyone who captured the interest and loyalty of the people for a moment. Clodius' vendetta against Cicero is an excellent example of the inability of the government to control and eliminate the excesses of irresponsible, temporarily powerful persons. When appearing in public, Cicero could not escape Clodius' ruffians who "often pelted him with mud and stones."[15] After Clodius had driven Cicero from Italy, he "burned down his (Cicero's) villas and burned down his house in Rome . . . the rest of his property he put up to auction. . . . His conduct terrorized the nobility, he swept the people along with him on an unbridled course of extravagant action and insolent behaviour. . . ."[16] Plutarch added that the only alternatives for Cicero were exile or to meet his antagonist with armed force.[17] Cicero chose the former alternative.

---

[14]Plutarch, Six Lives, translated by Rex Warner (London: The Penguin Classics, edited by E. V. Rieu), p. 306.

[15]Ibid., p. 304.

[16]Ibid., p. 305.

[17]Ibid.

Finally, when Caesar defeated his arch-rival and former close friend Gnaeus Pompey and his supporters and assumed supreme power, Rome had a leader who was strong and powerful enough to establish a unified, competent government. The elder Caesar climaxed the deadly class struggle at home after his defeat of Pompey and brought the Republic to an end.

Beginning of the Empire

Within five years after his assumption of supreme authority, Caesar was assassinated on the Ides of March in 44 B.C. His strength and brilliance had controlled the disintegrating forces for only a short time. However, his murder did not destroy his dreams for Rome. On the contrary, they were brought to fruition by his grand-nephew Octavian, a surprisingly tough and resilient fighter who was not originally taken as a serious antagonist by those seeking the high office after the death of Julius Caesar. Upon the defeat of Cleopatra, the Egyptian queen, and Marc Antony at Actium in 31 B.C., Octavian's powers were ratified by the Senate and he became the first Emperor of Rome. In 27 B.C., Octavian formally restored to Rome a Republican form of government and "as he later expressed it placed the

commonwealth at the disposal of the Senate and the Roman people."[18] Not entirely by accident, he was immediately rewarded by the grateful Senate by virtually complete authority in the military, civil and religious spheres; in addition, and not without significance, he was awarded the title of "Augustus."

Augustus refused to accept the appellation of Emperor. By declining the title, by repeated emphasis on his refusal to pre-empt the dignity of the Senate, which in fact retained only nominal power,[19] and by studiously playing down his own vast powers, Augustus succeeded in accomplishing what Julius Caesar had died in attempting--uniting Rome's supreme authority in a single, powerful administrator. The desire for a strong head of state, one who would not hesitate to face responsibilities of immense magnitude, is an indication of the debilitated state of the national government of Rome.

Within fifteen years Augustus brought foreign and

---

[18] Boak, op. cit., p. 263.

[19] Mikhail states that there was a "gradual reduction of the popular assembly under Augustus to a pure formality." Mikhail I. Roslovtsev, The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire, 2nd ed., revised by P. M. Fraser (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 81.

domestic peace to Rome. "When Italy was perishing through fratricidal strife, the day of peace and a new order has dawned."[20] Augustus provided the strong hand and personality needed to bring order out of the disintegrating forces his grand-uncle had started to harness more than a decade earlier. Whether he was a dictator (or monarch) is of no importance to this paper.[21] It is important that under the administrative genius of Augustus, Rome quickly recovered from a century and a half of revolution and civil strife and of chaos and corruption in government. His disciplined competence, though cautious at times to an extreme degree, made the office of Emperor a virtual necessity." He knew what he wanted to do: to give peace and security to the Roman world and to restore public and private morality among the Roman people . . . tranquility and order were far more important to Augustus than the

---

[20]Alban R. Winspear and Lenore K. Geweke, Augustus and the Reconstruction of Roman Government and Society (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1935), p. 11.

[21]Dio refers to Augustus repeatedly as "monarch" and "dictator" and states that "from his time there was genuine monarchy." Dio's Rome, translated by Herbert Baldwin Foster (Toy: Pafraet's Book Co., 1905), Vol. IV, Book 23, Chapter 17. Also, see Winspear and Geweke who state that Tacitus was "not sure he was good," but that "Horace thought he was." Op. cit., p. 11.

creation of a monolithic autocracy."[22]

The City of Rome

Rome had a population of approximately seven hundred fifty thousand people when Augustus formed the Corps of Vigiles.[23] The physical structures were a mixture of magnificent buildings, fountains, places of worship, great stadia, monumental private palaces as well as tenements constructed of timber, straw and mud (a primitive brick) which in some instances rose several stories above the ground level. The streets and alleys were narrow and crowded and an orderly flow of traffic was impossible to accomplish because of the lack of officials to control it

---

[22]Joseph R. Strayer et al., The Course of Civilization (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1961), pp. 100-111.

[23]P. K. Baillie-Reynolds, The Vigiles of Imperial Rome (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 10. Population estimates of Rome during the general time period vary somewhat, but the estimates are consistent enough for one to accept fairly easily. For example, in Cyril E. Robinson's History of Rome 753 B.C. - A.D. 110 (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1941), p. 103, he states that "By the middle of the first century B.C., the total population of Rome must have been well over half a million, of which some forty per cent were probably slaves." Allowing for growth, Reynolds' estimation is probably fairly accurate.

and because the city grew in a totally unsystematic manner.[24] "It had narrow and ill-built streets, and the central portion, between the hills and the river, was cramped and over-crowded, though it had already overflowed into the Campus Martius."[25]

The Political Atmosphere

For one hundred fifty years before the creation of the Empire, Rome was the seat of political connivance and social unrest. Revolution or the threat of it was continually in the atmosphere and there was a substantial number of politicians who did not discourage these tendencies." Italy swarmed with discontented men, and no regular police force for the maintenance of order existed. Who or what was there to resist a bold revolutionary stroke?"[26] Anarchy was rapidly approaching and there was an abundance of men in Rome who were ready and capable of committing arson, murder and pillage. Starr speaks of urban mobs and

---

[24]W. E. Heitland, The Roman Republic (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909), p. 451.

[25]John E. Sandys (ed.), A Companion to Latin Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), p. 39.

[26]Heitland, loc. cit.

how easy it was to incite them.[27]

During the periods of civil disorganization, the various political groups often employed private armies of their own. In most instances, the armies at the disposal of the politically warring factions were well able to cope with the forces at the disposal of the authorities at the moment.

P. K. Baillie-Reynolds, an authority on the Vigiles, describes the ailments of the crumbling Republic as follows:

> During the last one hundred fifty years before the Christian era, the increasing corruption of the official classes, the incompetence of the magistrates and the ever-growing bitterness of the party politics, lead to more and more frequent and finally to almost continuous civil riots and bloodshed with which the existing police services were utterly insufficient to deal, even if they had wanted to do so, and with which the government could not cope, since it had no standing army to call upon to restore order. The political parties employed organized gangs of roughs to drive opposition voters from the polls or to attack houses of the leaders of the rival party; the personal hatreds of the professional leaders of these gangs led to frequent pitched battles in the streets between their supporters, and the life of the ordinary citizen became intolerable. The responsible authorities did little to stop it; if their own supporters were successful, they had no cause of complaint;

---

[27] Chester G. Starr, Civilization and the Caesars (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1954), pp. 25-26.

> if their rivals won, they had no force with which to coerce them other than bands of the same type in their own pay.

The Cambridge Ancient History comments that "every reader of the works of Cicero must have been struck by the almost complete absence in the Rome of his period of any machinery for the preservation of public order."[28] Frequent conflicts between and among classes, parties and leaders continued without abatement until Julius Caesar came into power. He unceremoniously terminated the riots and the bloodshed, even though he had been the principal employer of one of the most notorious gangs before his ascendancy to power. Although he held power only a short time, he made several police regulations for the improvement of the City of Rome, notably in the area of traffic regulation.[29] His assassination terminated, prematurely,

---

[28] G. H. Stevenson, The Augustan Empire (Vol. X of The Cambridge Ancient History, ed. S. A. Cook et al., 12 volumes; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934), p. 200.

[29] Jerome Carcopino, Daily Life in Ancient Rome (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), p. 49. Caesar prohibited transport carts from using the streets of Rome from daylight to dusk. Only pedestrians, horsemen, litters and carrying chairs were allowed on the streets during the day. Carcopino did not say what agency of the government enforced these regulations.

the evolvement of a satisfactory police system.[30] Caesar was able to crush mob rule and violence by employing the powerful legions he had efficiently organized.[31]

Internal order was not destined to last long, however. Fourteen years of domestic chaos and civil war followed Caesar's murder and did not cease until his grandnephew Octavian obtained total supremacy in Rome in 31 B.C. The development of an effective non-military, locally operational law enforcement body was left to him.

An interesting comparison can be drawn between the civil conditions of London, England, during the first thirty years of the nineteenth century and Rome of the first century before the advent of the Christian era. Generally, the same type of lawless conditions prevailed in both

---

[30] P. K. Baillie-Reynolds, "The Police in Ancient Rome," The Police Journal, Vol. I, No. 3 (July, 1928), p. 412.

[31] In only one recently published book, that by Boak, has more than the most abrupt treatment been made of the significant need for law enforcement machinery (and the tragic lack of it) during the latter years of the Republic. One historian, John Wesley Heaton, in his Mob Violence in the Late Roman Republic (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1939) does not even mention the need for a competent, centrally controlled law enforcement machinery to maintain domestic peace and order.

societies.[32] Political rivalry of the most unrestrained and vicious sort played upon the passions of the hungry and destitute London mobs and inspired numerous riots of great magnitude. Mobs were repeatedly incited by leaders of political factions to gain specific political ends and became instruments for the accomplishment of political blackmail and coercion. Military forces relentlessly and brutally crushed the mobs with great loss of life. The Massacre of Peterloo in 1819 and the Gordon Riots of the 1780's are eminent examples of the use of military might to crush and disperse riotous mobs after they had served their political purposes. In London, as in Rome, military power conquered temporarily but was repeatedly recalled to quell new disturbances. Unlike a civil police arm, a military force is not designed to prevent outbreaks of internal lawlessness--its basic purpose is to counter and eliminate external threats to the nation. It remained for a civil police organization, in both instances, to control civil populations on a continuous basis and at the same time employ humane methods. Sporadic annihilation of

---

[32]Lawless in the sense that neither government was able to maintain order for any significant periods of time and that mob rule was often prevalent.

lawless mobs has never succeeded in insuring the continuance of a government permanently.[33]

Criminality in Rome

The latter years of the Republic and the Early years of Augusts' tenure were blighted by conditions of criminality difficult for the modern mind to comprehend. Carcopino constructs a rather grim picture of the social conditions, including criminality, of the twilight years of the Republic and the period immediately following the rise to supreme power by Augustus.[34] We can move about in comparative safety in the United States today but such freedom of movement in the Rome of two thousand years ago was almost impossible, if not unwise, if one did not possess the means to employ a substantial bodyguard. The type and amount of criminal activity in any society is a reflection of the social, political, economic and religious conditions existing during the particular era. Modern America has a definite crime problem, but contrary

---

[33] The Blind Eye of History, previously mentioned, contains an excellent exposition of the social and political conditions in London from 1800 to 1840 and the role that was assigned the police.

[34] Carcopino, op. cit., pp. 47-48.

to popular opinion, crimes of violence in our country do not wholly picture the tone and texture of our society. The number and classifications of the so-called "white collar" crimes also are an indication of prevalent societal conditions. Such crimes in our time indicate as much as any other social ill the spiritual and moral malaise of the popularly conceived better classes in the United States.

But Roman society was characterized by the presence of criminality of all descriptions. The city was periodically terrorized by well-organized bands of cutthroats and hoodlums functioning without fear of apprehension.[35] Schmitz comments rather dramatically that "it was not uncommon for assassins to roam about with their daggers in broad daylight, without anyone being bold enough to check them."[36] As we shall see, Julius Caesar extirpated these bandits with great resolution and force soon after gaining power and made Rome relatively safe at least for a while. Civil disturbances and criminality had

---

[35] Baille-Reynolds, Ibid., p. 14.

[36] Leonard Schmitz, History of Rome (Andover: Allen, Morrill and Wardwell, 1847), p. 372.

hastened the downfall of the Republic and this was a fact of which Augustus was acutely cognizant.[37]

Lanciani offers a partial explanation of one of the causes of the criminality of the times: "Ancient Rome has never enjoyed a good name for its respect of private property and the personal security of its citizens. The principal cause of disorder is to be found in the almost incomprehensible fact that the metropolis, in which all of the wealth, luxury and comfort of the world was concentrated, was kept in perfect darkness at night."[38] He adds, however, that "one peculiarity of ancient Rome, common, I dare say, to all large capitols not belonging to the Anglo-Saxon race, was the perfect accordance of all classes of citizens in evading, as much as they could, police regulations."[39] Lanciani obviously was not at all acquainted with English history. At any rate, brigandage was a social ill which afflicted Rome and her law abiding citizens from time immemorial.[40]

---

[37] Ibid.

[38] Rodolfo Lanciani, Ancient Rome (New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1879), p. 207.

[39] Ibid., p. 213.

[40] Ibid., p. 208.

CHAPTER III

PUBLIC SAFETY IN ROME

PRIOR TO 6 A.D.

A loosely controlled, poorly organized police mechanism did exist in Rome, but, as indicated earlier, was for all intents and purposes almost totally ineffective. "Nowhere was the incompetence of the Republic more marked than in the measures which were taken to protect the City of Rome against fire and the citizens against violence."[1]

The policing function was decentralized and was the responsibility of several unconnected agencies and Public Safety had been "neglected almost completely by the government under the Republic."[2] Baillie-Reynolds comments that "it is almost inconceivable that Rome could have gone so long, and have reached such a high standard of civilization, without an organized police force."[3]

---

[1] Alban D. Winspear and Lenore K. Geweke, Augustus and the Reconstruction of the Roman Government and Society (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1935), p. 212.

[2] Arthur E.R. Boak, A History of Rome to 565 A.D. (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1943), p. 283.

[3] P.K. Baille-Reynolds, The Vigiles of Imperial Rome (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 14.

I. LAW ENFORCEMENT UNITS

Aediles

Before Augustus, responsibility for police activity within the City of Rome was one of the functions assigned to a group of men referred to as aediles. Actual law enforcement, insofar as it existed, seems to have been executed by slaves during the early years of the Republic and, on the whole, the system was ineffective.

The aediles replaced Tresviri Nocturni, a board of citizens basically responsible for the safety of the city against fire. Baillie-Reynolds states that the Tresviri Nocturni possessed this responsibility for around three hundred years but that they disappeared before Augustus commenced his reforms. The board used bands of state-owned slaves as fire-fighters; the same slaves enforced the laws to a limited extent. When the aediles replaced the citizen board, which was never effective,[4] the Princeps demanded stricter performance from them regarding fire prevention and extinguishment. The duties imposed upon the aediles foreshadowed those assigned to

---

[4]Boak, loc. cit.

the Vigiles in later years.[5] As a matter of fact, the aediles administered the public water supply up to ca. 20 B.C.; subsequent to this date, the particular responsibility was transferred to a commissioner of consular rank.[6]

In the latter years of the Republic (24 to 20 B.C.), the aediles were performing quite effectively as police, but were a definite failure as a fire brigade. Because of the seriousness of the failure, Augustus formed a special fire brigade of six hundred state-owned slaves as a fire-fighting unit and placed them under the control of the aediles.[7] This point will be discussed later in the paper.

Urban Cohorts

Rome became a relatively "safe place" when Augustus introduced an efficient police instrument, the Cohortes Urbanae. Unlike the Vigiles, created in 6 A.D., these

---

[5]Baille-Reynolds, op. cit., pp. 21-22.

[6]H.F. Pelham, Outline of Roman History (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1909), Fourth Edition Revised, p. 447.

[7]Dio's Rome, Translated by Herbert Baldwin Foster (Pafraet's Book Company, 1905), Book 54, Chapter 5, Section 5.

cohorts were an integral part of the army, but their major function was the repression of criminality.[8] That this force was military in structure, organization and training is borne out by the close connection between it and the Praetorian Guards. Men from the former unit were often promoted into the latter and the battalions of the two forces were numbered in sequence.[9] In effect, the urban cohorts were a supplement to the Praetorian Guards. The Guard was not a policing unit as such but occasionally worked in concert with other organizations to suppress riots and civil disturbances.

Very little is known about the day-to-day duties of the urban cohorts. Contemporary writers and historians make no mention of their routine duties or activities. It is known, however, that their effectiveness decreased and that Augustus reduced their law enforcement activities drastically after he came to power because of the loss of effectiveness. Baillie-Reynolds speculated that

---

[8]G. H. Stevenson, The Augustan Empire (Vol. X of The Cambridge Ancient History. 12 volumes. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934), p. 203.

[9]Baillie-Reynolds, op. cit., pp. 21-22.

they probably did not measure up in the fire-fighting function.[10]

Praefectus Urbi

The Praefectus Urbi was the chief police official of Rome. The position was always filled by a Senator of high repute and one who possessed experience in administration and public service. This official also served as the chief police court magistrate in addition to his duties as the chief executive of the police of the city of Rome.[11] The functions of the Prefect differed considerably from those under Caesar. During the reign of Caesar, his Prefects acted only in his absence. The office became continuous upon the prolonged absence of Tiberius from Rome after 6 A.D. Incidentally, the justice of the peace so familiar to us today and originally created in 1361 A.D. in England, was structured similarly--a union of the executive and the judicial branches of the government.[12] The Praefectus Urbi had direct control over

---

[10] Ibid., p. 19.

[11] Ibid.

[12] The English system collapsed approximately seventy-five years after its inception whereas the Roman development survived for roughly five centuries.

the urban cohorts. Each cohort had an establishment of one thousand men; each was commanded by an officer with the rank of Tribune and was subdivided into ten centuries of one hundred men each. A century was under the command of a Centurion.[13]

Conclusion

The aediles, urban cohorts and Praetorians, then, comprised the police arrangements of Rome before the initiation of the Corps of Vigiles. For the most part, these units were most effective, it at all, against civil disruptions and mob violence. Daily, routine law enforcement was still basically the responsibility of the citizenry--it had to protect itself from the depredations of the criminally inclined. The government was slowly moving toward the development of an institution which would serve in a twin capacity--crime control and fire prevention and extinguishment.

Even though the Praefectus Urbi was the chief police official in the city, he did not have total control in the administrative or command sense. His function was more judicial in nature. Responsibility was

---

[13] P. K. Baillie-Reynolds, loc. cit.

still splintered and there was very little conjunction in the operations of the various units responsible for the safety of the people. Concerted action was often accomplished but only after the government thought that it might be threatened by an enraged and hungry civil and slave population. Minor and seemingly unimportant aberrations of the criminal element were almost totally ignored until Augustus came upon the scene.

II. FIRE DEFENSES

In addition to the problems of mushrooming criminality, the almost daily occurrence of fire terrified the population. There was no such thing as a small fire; containment was virtually impossible once a fire was able to gain even a little headway.

Prior to the establishment of the Vigiles (after a murderous fire had leveled vast sections of the city), fire-fighting arrangements were extremely haphazard in structure, organization and control; tactical planning existed in only rudimentary form, if at all. Responsibilities regarding fire prevention and extinguishment were largely a personal one. Fire protection, government controlled under a centralized, disciplined

administration, did not exist as a community service. Actually, the task of developing an adequate fire control system had been grossly neglected throughout the Republican era.[14]

Baillie-Reynolds is appalled at "the terrible frequency of devastating conflagrations" and states that this fact "is one of the most remarkable things in the history of Rome, and hardly less extraordinary is the apparent inadequacy of counter-acting measures."[15] The "counter-acting" measures are described below.

Familia Publica

Throughout the years of the Republic, authorities stuck consistently with the employment of state-owned slaves in their anemic efforts to combat the frequent fires.

The familia publica were under the control of the local magistrates and were stationed, one supposes, at more or less strategic locations throughout the city. Each group of slaves functioned independently of the

---

[14] G. H. Stevenson, The Augustan Empire, loc. cit.

[15] P. K. Baillie-Reynolds, op. cit., p. 14.

others, and that centralized command was at an absolute minimum. They did not prove to be particularly effective judging from the frequency and intensity of the fires. It is also rather obvious that the magistrates were not overly concerned about the problem.

It is not known how many slaves were employed in the fire-fighting capacity at any given time during the Republic nor if they were exposed to even a modicum of training.

Private Fire Brigades

Citizens of the higher classes[16] maintained groups of privately owned slaves for fire-fighting purposes and apparently charged for their services when needed elsewhere. There is no evidence available to indicate who paid for the use of the slaves--the owner whose house or other property burned or the state; occasionally, though, the owners of the slaves offered their services gratuitiously.[17]

---

[16]Plutarch in his Life of Crassus, mentions his group of slaves who doubled as fire-fighters.

[17]Baillie-Reynolds, op. cit., p. 19.

This system prevailed, in conjunction with the aediles, until 21 B.C. when Augustus, forced to intervene, assigned six hundred public slaves to fire-fighting duties specifically and placed them under the command of the aediles. This move, precipitated by a fire of great magnitude, eliminated in part, private subscription or subvention of fire brigades.[18]

The arrangement subsequently proved to be unsuccessful, also. Another serious fire in 7 B.C. caused a rapid re-organization of the city's inept fire defenses. The city was divided for administrative and operational purposes into fourteen districts,[19] and the lower magistrates, aediles, tribunes and praetors cast lots for the regions for which they would be responsible. The administration and control of the familia publica was transferred to the Vicomagistri.[20]

Such an arrangement actually as organizationally weak as the previous ones, continued until 6 A.D. and

---

[18] G. H. Stevenson, The Augustan Empire, op. cit., p. 200.

[19] Carcopini, in his Daily Life in Ancient Rome (previously cited) states that "The fourteen regions of Augustus lasted as long as the Empire," p. 14.

[20] Baillie-Reynolds, loc. cit., p. 22.

then collapsed when a series of devastating fires illustrated the desperate need for a third re-organization of the fire-fighting scheme.

After the fires burned themselves out and a semblance of civil control was re-established, the important equestrian office of the Praefectus Vigilum was created. The Corps of Vigiles was formed and remained, organizationally, much the same throughout Imperial history.[21]

---

[21] S. A. Cook et al, loc. cit.

CHAPTER IV

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COHORTES VIGILUM

The preliminary experiments were attempts to develop or devise a functioning system out of the old, rigid and more or less petrified Republican governmental institutions. ". . . .Because some of the important branches of the government of the city were either neglected or mismanaged, Augustus felt compelled, partly in response to popular appears, to organize them on an efficient basis and assume continuous responsibility for them. Of prime importance, since the days of the Gracchi, was the problem of the policing of Rome and the suppression of mob violence and crime which had been a threat to orderly government. . . ."[1] The danger of fire had to be faced also and Augustus was acutely aware, as well as men like Clodius and Milo, of the dangers of the lack of an adequate and competent public safety arrangement.[2]

---

[1]Arthur A. E. Boak, A History of Rome to 565 A.D. (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1943), p. 287.

[2]H. H. Scullard, From the Gracchi to Nero (London: Methuen and Company, Ltd., 1959), p. 237.

In fact, the entire municipal organization was set on a sounder basis.[3]

Government administered by amateurs failed miserably and Augustus, after thirty years of hesitation and vacillation, finally acted decisively in the matter of public safety and created the Vigiles even though he was highly reluctant to introduce a force of men which might be taken as a military service and as an instrument of potential tyranny. That the Vigiles were not used as such an instrument is illustrated by the fact that only once in four hundred years, so far as is known, were the Vigiles used as a purely political and military instrument. Such employment of the body occurred in 31 A.D. upon the fall of Sejanus when the Praetorians were not to be trusted.[4] In addition, Augustus had his Legions, Praetorians and Urban Cohorts to sustain him and his government during times of turmoil and domestic strife.[5]

---

[3] Ibid.

[4] P. K. Baillie-Reynolds, The Vigiles of Imperial Rome (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 28.

[5] Legions were not allowed to establish barracks of camps in Rome, but were approximate enough to be "on call" during periods of domestic tension and/or strife.

Augustus' caution is further illustrated in that the force was originally entirely composed of freedmen. A large and disciplined body of armed slaves could not and would not be tolerated. The memory of Spartacus and the havoc he wrought had not yet been dimmed by the passage of time. The recruitment of freedmen also served to emphasize the non-military nature of the body. Originally, the Vigiles did not enjoy as high a status as other troops.[6]

The recurring re-organizations of the fire control and law enforcement arrangements are indicative of the efforts of a civilized community to meet and conquer natural and/or man-made obstacles.

Before going further, it might be well to review the governmental and social conditions of Rome immediately before and after the formation of the Corps of Vigiles.

Rome from 5 A.D. to 8 A.D.

In 5 and 6 A.D., great disturbances broke out in Rome "in consequences of a famine probably due both to a bad harvest and to the habitual carelessness of the

---

[6] P. K. Baillie-Reynolds, loc. cit.

officials responsible for the corn supply."[7] Hordes of people left the metropolitan area by governmental decree. The situation became so disturbing that even gladiators were forced to leave for a while. Food shortages were critical and outbreaks of disease threatened. Ferrero describes the chaotic conditions as follows:[8]

> These extensive removals naturally disorganized the public departments, which were already disorganized enough. In the half-empty city, outbreaks of fire became both more frequent and more dangerous; there was no one responsible for their extinction, whole districts were devastated, and general misery prevailed in consequence. The situation was already highly strained and was far from relaxed by these disasters . . . the Emperor determined at least to save the town from complete destruction from fire: for this purpose he ventured to infringe aristocratic tradition and the rigid nationalist principle. He hastily enrolled a large body of poor freedmen and divided them into seven bodies, one for each quarter of town. . . . This was nothing more than a temporary expedient and when order had been restored, these bodies were to be disbanded.

These unhappy conditions continued on into 7 A.D. Open sedition and violence to the Emperor were common. Rioting and civil unrest grew because of the continuous shortage of food and the threat of military invasion. Not

---

[7]Guglielmo Ferrero, The Republic of Augustus (Vol. V of The Greatness and Decline of Rome, translated by H. J. Chaytor. 10 vols.; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1907), p. 307.

[8]Ibid., p. 308.

the least cause for the civil disturbances was the unpopularity of Tiberius, the last great general of the Roman aristocracy.[9] Tiberius was away conducting a war with the Panonnians. He ignored public sentiment by refusing to meet his enemies on open ground and eventually triumphed by doncuting a guerilla operation. He lived to be acclaimed by the same Romans who were thirsting for his downfall earlier. At home, the outbreaks of fires became less serious owing to the efforts of the Vigiles which had not been disbanded by Augustus, although they had been retained to act only as a temporary force.[10]

In addition to these difficulties, the Vigiles were expensive to maintain and the state treasury was depleted. Augustus obtained funds for the payment of the force by "appropriating the subsidy paid to the praetors for gladitorial shows, and was able to secure approval of a tax of two to four per cent upon the sale of slaves."[11]

---

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., p. 316.

[11] Ibid., p. 317.

In 8 A.D., the conditions vastly improved. The great number of people who had been removed from Rome returned, the food supply increased and the public dissatisfaction concerning the conduct of the war against Pannonia gradually decreased. As mentioned above, Tiberius refused to bow to public pressure, did not meet the Pannonians in open battle but contained them and eventually won by reverting to unconventional methods and defeating them piecemeal.

The Establishment

The ruinous fires of 6 A.D. appears to have convinced Augustus that an effective fire brigade must be placed under centralized control. The responsibilities of the Vicomagistri were transferred to the Praefectus Vigilum (a board responsible for the maintenance of public safety).[12] The pressures of Augustus' office--threatened invasion, food shortages, a disturbed population and scheming political rivals--must have been extreme, but "what seems to have engaged his attention more than

---

[12]G. H. Stevenson, The Augustan Empire (Vol. X of The Cambridge Ancient History, ed. S. A. Cook et al. 12 volumes; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934), p. 460.

anything else was the restoration of peace and safety in the city. . ."[13] Indeed, public safety throughout the peninsula of Italy was of concern to him. Military and police stations were established throughout the country.[14] Apprehended highwaymen were either "executed on the spot or taken to be prey to the beasts in the amphitheatre."[15] As a method of eliminating the crime of robbery "Augustus rewarded people for arresting robbers."[16] It is interesting to observe that regardless of the foreign or domestic crises, the circus and other forms and places of entertainment did a thriving business, even when a large portion of the population was out of the city in 5 and 6 A.D.

---

[13]Leonard Schmitz, History of Rome (Andover: Allen, Morrill and Wardwell, 1847), p. 372.

[14]The police stations were not manned by Vigiles, who were stationed only in Rome and Ostia. It is believed that Urban Cohorts enforced the laws of the Emperor in the cities throughout Italy, while the legions suppressed criminality in the rural areas.

[15]Rodolfo Lanciani, Ancient Rome (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1879), pp. 210-211.

[16]Dio's Rome, Translated by Herbert Baldwin Foster (Troy: Pafraet's Book Company, 1905), Vol. IV, Book 54, Chapter 5.

The Vigiles were created to solve a dual problem with one highly organized, well-disciplined, tough and efficient unit. "It was one thing to prevent sedition and violence with Praetorian Guards and Urban Cohorts, and another to provide against the petty crime which nowadays occupy so much of the time of the police courts, while the question of conflagrations also needed facing."[17] Once started, the Vigiles seemed to be accepted by the people of Rome and became part of everyday life--so much that they were often the butt of ribald and raucous jokes.

At their inception, the Vigiles were looked upon as little better than slaves since the fire-fighting function was traditionally a servile one; consequently they were regarded as merely public servants. Since they did not possess the status of soldiers, or even auxiliaries, their prestige did not begin to rise until the enlistment of freeborn citizens became common.[18] In time, however, the law enforcement and fire-fighting functions became recognized as honorable ones not to be

---

[17]Baillie-Reynolds, op. cit., p. 14.

[18]Infra, Chapter V, Section III, "Conditions of Service."

relegated to slaves. By the middle of the second century of the Christian era, the Vigiles were an important body and enjoyed the prestige of the army. Actually, officers of the Corps were part of the army and were promoted to important command positions in the armed services within a short time after the inception of the Vigiles.

Contemporary References to the Corps of Vigiles

Literary references are almost totally nonexistent with the exception of a very few comments made by the third century jurists. Later historians make no mention of the Vigiles, and nothing is available in reference to the great changes which took place "in the scope and status of the Vigiles between their original establishment by Augustus and the sudden magnificent glimpse we get of them at the beginning of the third century."[19] Baillie-Reynolds added in an article published in 1928 that "there is nothing whatever in the nature of an official description of the organization of the police force in the Roman writings which have survived . . . Such

---

[19]Reynolds, op. cit., p. 28.

references as Roman authors do make to the police are few and merely incidental, and give no insight into police working, the writers evidently assuming that the reader is familiar with the general outlines of the system, so that very little can be gathered from them."[20]

No records of the daily administration of the Corps of Vigiles have come down to us in a substantial amount. Scattered official records, a few literary comments, inscriptions, epigraphs and the remains of a few barracks which have been excavated do indicate, however, that in the first four centuries after the birth of Christ, Rome had a well-organized and efficient police system. The Cambridge Ancient History comments that "If on the accession of Augustus the police force of Rome was almost non-existent, by the end of his reign it had attained dimensions which are probably unequalled in any modern city."[21] The statement could certainly be challenged at the present time but in 1934, the editors of the History were probably correct.

---

[20] P.K. Baillie-Reynolds, "The Police in Ancient Rome," The Police Journal, Vol. I, No. 3 (July, 1928), p. 410.

[21] G. H. Stevenson, op. cit., p. 202.

Epigraphical Evidence

Epigraphical evidence of the establishment and continued existence of the Cohortes Vigilum has not been too extensive to say the least. The artifacts extant, particularly those relating to the early years of the third century, do provide a fairly adequate source of information about the Corps. Inferences and assumptions based upon a knowledge of other phases of Roman life and government make it possible for historians and archeologists to construct a "prototype" of the law enforcement and fire-fighting force which existed throughout the years of the Empire.

The paucity of physical evidence is due to the fact that ancient Rome slowly disintegrated over the centuries. The buildings of Imperial Rome were not buried in a sudden and great cataclysm as was Pompeii. The disintegration was gradual and the remains became concealed by the rising level of the ground.[22] Human habitation throughout the centuries as well as the elements have destroyed most of the buildings of particular interest

---

[22]A. W. Van Buren, Ancient Rome (London: Lovat Dickson Publisher, exact date of publication unknown), p. 101.

to us--the Stationes and Excubitoria, or Sub-stationes. The remains of only one Statio and one Excubitorium are extant. The remainder of the structures, six Stationes and thirteen Excubitoria, have all been destroyed or have disintegrated over the centuries. There have been no recent discoveries and, as mentioned above, the greater portion of the available evidence dates from the third century. The first century evidence is very disappointing while the second century is somewhat more productive; the half century from the accession of Septimus Severus (211-217 A.D.) to the death of Gordian III (238-244 A.D.) produced a relative abundance of material, and thereafter the evidence is almost non-existent.[23]

The discovered inscriptions are to two kinds:

1. Those of the Vigiles collectively
2. Those of the individual members of the Corps.

Those of the first class are dedications by the Corps or by the individual cohorts to the reigning emperor.

The second class may be subdivided into:

---

[23] P.K. Baillie-Reynolds, The Vigiles of Imperial Rome, pp. 28-29.

1. Dedications to the reigning emperor or to some particular divinity by individuals

2. Laudatory or sepulchural monuments to individuals.

The first sub-section of the second class in inscriptions for the most part "give all the honors the man earned during his lifetime; service in the Vigiles being mentioned along with the others," while of the second sub-section of the second class, the majority were erected by Prefects.[24] Oddly enough, not until the reign of Trajan (98-117 A.D.) were any monuments of the second sub-section inscribed and not until the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161-180 A.D.) are inscriptions of the first sub-section made and then only at Ostia.[25]

Rather than devote a section or chapter to discussion of pertinent grafitti, the writer would prefer to refer to material of an epigraphical nature throughout the paper when discussing specific facts regarding organization, duties, conditions of service, and/or other areas of interest.

---

[24] Ibid., p. 29.

[25] Ostia was the port of Rome, where the Vigiles had a barracks. It was the only location away from Rome where Vigiles were stationed.

II. THE OFFICE OF THE PREFECT OF VIGILES

No change that Augustus made early in his reign was more significant of the revolution which had taken place than his appointment of a Prefect and placing, as it were, the city under his immediate control. Pelham states that Augustus was "compelled to appoint a Prefect of his own, who was not merely the chief of a fire brigade, but had also a police jurisdiction over incendiaries, burglars and other nocturnal disturbers of the peace. Both the City Prefect and the Praefectus Vigilum had, moreover, what no Republican magistrate had ever possessed in the city, a regular and numerous force of police."[26] Early in the development of the Office, the Vigiles were primarily a fire-fighting brigade and were under the ultimate authority of the City Prefect as they were three centuries later. During the intervening years, however, the Prefect of Vigiles was a distinct officer and answered only to the Emperor. Another distinction should be made at this point since Pelham only hints at it--originally, the Vigiles policed only at night and the

---

[26] H. F. Pelham, Outlines of Roman History (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1909), p. 448.

daytime law enforcement function was a duty only gradually imposed upon them. Eventually, "the Prefect of the Vigiles was second only to the Praefect of the Praetorians among the equestrian officials of Rome and frequently succeeded to his office."[27]

Augustus' consolidation of the normally separate function of the administrators of the police and fire services enabled him to coordinate two supposedly and historically distinct operations. He must have recognized the fundamental similarity of both functions even though the techniques employed to accomplish their objectives differed widely.

Augustus undoubtedly created the office of the Praefect of Vigiles to serve primarily as a fire brigade commander, but by emphasizing the prevention aspect of the work of the Vigiles he involved them in police work almost immediately. The preventative efforts of the Corps of Vigiles will be discussed in more detail below.

Duties of the Prefect--Early Years

Originally, the Prefect was a person of relatively little importance in the scheme of government of Rome.

---

[27]G. H. Stevenson, op. cit., p. 235.

This is evidenced in part by the fact that the writers of the early period largely ignored the office. The comparative abundance of inscriptions found to be of third century origin support the assumption that their prestige rose steadily through the decades.

The length of time prefects held office is not exactly known but there is no specific evidence that any particular one remained in office for more than five successive years.[28] One reason for this may be that the Office of the Prefect of Vigiles was often the training ground for future Prefects of the Praetorian Guards.[29] Upon Augustus' appointment of the first Prefect of Vigiles, the magisterial function was not included in his duties; he was simply a person designated to eliminate the constant threat of city-wide conflagrations and rampant criminality. Gradually, over the years, hearing and judging cases became another of his duties.

---

[28] P.K. Baillie-Reynolds, The Vigiles of Imperial Rome, op. cit., p. 31.

[29] Laurence Lee Howe, The Pretorian Prefect from Commodus to Diocletion (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), p. 50.

Judicial and Enforcement Functions

The office of the Prefect of Vigiles evolved slowly into the function of the police court magistrate, "for in order to prevent outbreaks of fire, he had been made responsible for seeing that all houses had fire fighting appliances, and he could even mete out summary corporal punishment to persons whom he considered had fires on their premises which were negligently looked after and so likely to cause an outbreak . . ."[30]

It was only natural to extend his judicial powers over crimes of all types committed during his tours of duty. In time, this power was extended further to include judging criminals who committed crimes during the hours of daylight.[31] The judicial aspect of the Prefect's function began to encroach upon the jruisdiction of the City Prefect since more and more crimes, previously regarded as civil, came under the purview of the police courts as criminal matters.[32]

---

[30] P.K. Baillie-Reynolds, The Police Journal, op. cit., pp. 435-436.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

The Prefect was also required to investigate every fire that occurred and judge the case. If it was determined that the fire was caused by negligence, the party responsible received a solemn public warning or, in serious cases, physical punishment fixed according to the degree of responsibility. Arsonists were bound over to the higher courts to receive the death sentence.[33]

In addition to the punitive powers possessed by the Prefect, his powers of arrest were radically extended into four other areas:[34]

1. Prior to the extension of his authority, only the Prefect of the City of Rome could arrest and try for the crime of arson; the additional jurisdiction gave the Prefect of Vigiles considerably more prestige.

2. The power to bring before his court criminals charged with the crime of burglary and robbery committed at night was granted.

3. Within a relatively short time, the same crimes committed in the daytime came within his purview.

---

[33]Rodolfo Lanciani, Ancient Rome (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1888), pp. 222-223.

[34]P. K. Baillie-Reynolds, The Vigiles of Imperial Rome, op. cit., pp. 38-39, from Pomponius, Dig. xii. 4.15., and Julianus, Dig. xlvii. 2.57(56), paragraph 1.

4. Eventually, crimes of all classifications --petty pilfering of cloakrooms to larceny of safe deposit boxes--came within his jurisdiction.

Prevention

Even though the Prefect of Vigiles and his officers and men had the authority to summarily punish people who committed infractions of the fire regulations,[35] the concept of prevention was paramount. Lanciani states that the "spirit of the police regulations was rather to prevent than to punish."[36]

The operational procedures of the Vigiles indicate that apprehension and punishment, though necessary at times, was of secondary importance. The social payoff was negligible if the arsonist was apprehended and the city was leveled by fire. The fundamental technique employed by the Corps of Vigiles to prevent the frequent fires and acts of criminality was what is called in modern terminology "conspicuous patrol." The second primary

---

[35] In his book Ancient Rome, (p. 226) Lanciani quotes in full the inscription on a pedestal dedicated in 205 A.D., in which Severus and Caracella direct a Prefect of Cigiles to punish with the rod or with the whip (fustibus velflagellis) the janitor or any of the inhabitants of a house in which a fire had broken out because of negligence.

[36] Lanciani, op. cit., p. 223.

function of the unit was one of inspection, a concept which modern fire departments only quite recently started to employ as a routine preventive technique, and then only with the permission of the householder because of the constitutional limitations. Inspections can be made of public buildings, heating plants of apartments and other structures of similar nature but the laws in most jurisdictions do not permit inspections of private dwellings without a waiver by the occupant; this includes abodes in tenements.

The case can conceivably be argued that Augustus, in his search to establish a criterion of effectiveness of his force, based his decision to keep the Vigiles activated on the reduction of crimes and the number and severity of fires somewhat similar to the English concept that the absence of crime rather than the number of arrests is the best indication of effectiveness. While the Vigiles possessed governmental sanctions to punish harshly and as often as necessary, prevention was the fundamental concept under which they performed their daily duties.

Final Development

The relatively rapid multiplication of the Prefect's duties indicates a corresponding increase in his prestige. With the extension of his authority, a decided change in the type of person holding the office occurred. "As in the third century the Praetorian office came to be held by great jurists, so the same thing happened to the Praefecture of Vigiles . . ."[37] In addition, men were holding office in the third century and later who had "worked themselves up from the ranks of the Legions or of the city toops via the centurionate, tribunate and frequently the Praefecture of one or both of the fleets."[38] Baillie-Reynolds states in the final stages of the development of the office "the duties which fall to the official's lot are sundry and manifold, but the extinction of fires is not among them."[39] The same writer theorizes that the Prefect of Vigiles had enjoyed

---

[37] P.K. Baillie-Reynolds, The Vigiles of Imperial Rome, op. cit., p. 39.

[38] Ibid., p. 35.

[39] Ibid., p. 40, from Cassidorus, Var. vii., 7 and 8.

too much power and authority under the despotism of Severus and Caracella and was reduced to his proper place by the pro-Senatorial Alexander (222-235 A.D.). The writer prefers to assume that the fire-fighting function had become so common to the Vigiles by that time that it was not thought to be necessary to repeat one of the primary reasons for their existence, therefore only relatively new and/or unusual duties were enumerated. Secondly, there is no indication in the works researched of any other unit undertaking the fire-fighting function in the place of the Vigiles. Certainly Rome had not developed structurally to the point that fires did not occur occasionally.

III. DUTIES OF THE VIGILES

The actual performance of the functions assigned to the Prefect of Vigiles was accomplished by the members of the Corps, of course, with the exception of his judicial duties. This section is really an extension of the previous one and will be devoted to a more microscopic examination of their routine, day-to-day duties.

Fire Prevention

The subject of fire prevention has been discussed in the previous section but a little more should be said about this important duty. It was not necessary for an arresting officer to bring before the court of the Prefect a person thought to be negligent of the stringent fire control regulations. The Vigiles could and did mete out corporal punishment on the spot to violators. Certainly this power must have been misused innumerable times by ignorant and/or brutish officers and men of the Vigiles.

Conditions conducive to quickly developing conflagrations were common throughout the city and the threat of fire was serious enough to be of equal importance to the authorities as threatened invasion. The results of both were almost the same. As in war, strong measures were necessary to eliminate the problem.

That the Vigiles were unable to totally eliminate the recurrent scourge of horrible city-wide conflagrations is evident from various comments made by contemporary poets and historians writing in the late first and early second centuries.

Tacitus, in his History, states that "I am entering on the history of a period rich in disasters, frightful in its wars, torn by civil strife, and even in peace full of horrors. . . . Rome was wasted by conflagrations, its oldest temples consumed, and the capital itself fired by the hands of citizens."[40]

Juvenal, in his third satire entitled, "Against the City of Rome," written about 110 A.D., speaks

> Roofs caving in, and the
> Thousand risks of this terrible city . . .
> No, the place to live is out there, where no
> Cry of FIRE!
> Sounds the alarm of the night, with a neighbor
> yelling for water.[41]

Comments about "Nero's fire" in 64 A.D. are particularly interesting because of what is said (in Dio's case) and what is not said (in Tacitus' case) regarding the Vigiles and their part in the fire. Dio said that 'Many houses were destroyed through the lack of someone to

---

[40] The Complete Works of Tacitus, Modern Library Edition (New York: Random House, 1942), Book I, January-March 69 A.D., p. 420.

[41] The Satires of Juvenal, translated by Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958).

defend them. . . . for the soldiers (including the night watch), having an eye upon plunder instead of extinguishing any blaze, kindled greater conflagrations."[42] Baillie-Reynolds believes that Dio was biased because he is "full of the story of Nero's responsibility for the fire so that any other action on the part of the Imperial troops would be inconsistent with the rest of his tale."[43] Tacitus, however, buttresses the comments of Dio by saying that no one could stop the fire because there were "incessant menaces from a number of persons who forbade the extinguishing of the flames, because again others openly hurled brands, and kept shouting that there was one who gave them authority, either seeking to plunder more freely, or obeying orders."[44]

Perhaps the efficiency and effectiveness of the Vigiles had lowered in the intervening years between their establishment by Augustus and the great fires that Tacitus wrote about. At any rate, even Dio commented that

---

[42] Dio's Rome, op. cit., Vol. V, Book 62, Chapter 17.

[43] Reynolds, The Vigiles of Imperial Rome, op. cit., p. 72.

[44] The Complete Works of Tacitus, op. cit., p. 420.

their aid and assistance were valuable and necessary to Augustus and gave that as the reason for their maintenance.[45]

To prevent fires at their origin the Vigiles were to "watch and examine kitchens in every house, and state whether the supply of water in the kitchen corresponded to the importance and size of the house and whether the furnaces and heating apparatus worked properly."[46] Some authorities, notably Baillie-Reynolds and Middleton, are of the opinion that the Vigiles "had a certain control over the water supply of Rome."[47] Such as assumption seems very reasonable, since at least in the early years of Augustus and a few years after the initiation of the Corps of Vigiles, municipal corruption and incompetence were common and the supply of water had to be maintained at any cost. Another point in favor of the assumption is that lead water pipes have been excavated which have the word VIGILES stamped on them.

---

[45] Dio's Rome, op. cit., Vol. IV, Book 55, Chapter 8.

[46] Lanciani, loc. cit.

[47] J. Henry Middleton, The Remains of Ancient Rome (London: Adams and Charles Block Publishing Company, 1892).

Patrol

Working in small groups of three or four in number, the Vigiles systematically patrolled specifically assigned areas (beats) of which several composed a district.[48] It is not known how many patrols were sent out from each cohort, but "there was obviously a considerable number left in barracks including a fire engine squad for we are not told that the engines were taken out by the patrols."[49] If even a sketchy knowledge existed of the divisions of functions along with an approximate number of men assigned to the functions, deductions could be made from which one could estimate the number of men on duty at any given time. The accuracy of such an estimation would, of course, be highly questionable because the length of the workday is not known, nor is there any information available which would indicate furlough and leave schedules and sick time policies. There is some disagreement as to whether the Vigiles worked during the hours of daylight at all.

---

[48] Patrol distribution will be discussed further later in the paper.

[49] P. K. Baillie-Reynolds, The Vigiles of Ancient Rome, op. cit., p. 101.

The preponderance of opinion seems to lean toward the belief that the Vigiles policed on a twenty-four hour basis. It is certain that they fought fires around the clock. It does not seem reasonable that the law enforcement function would be divided so sharply between the Urban Cohorts and the Vigiles. The evidence indicates that the Urban Cohorts were supplementary to the Vigiles and were primarily employed to assist when and where they were needed, e.g., crowd and riot control. Baillie-Reynolds believes the Urban Cohorts would have nothing to do during the day. One would think that the traffic conditions in Rome alone would be enough to keep them occupied. The writer would discount Reynolds' contention since many Legions were kept idle for long periods of time. Their idleness was interrupted periodically, of course, by revolutionary activities of their leaders and occasional wars in addition to tours of frontier cities.

Baillie-Reynolds also assumes that the main night patrols "must surely have come from the main station of the cohort."[50] This assumption could be true but not

---

[50] P. K. Baillie-Reynolds, The Vigiles of Imperial Rome, op. cit., p. 101.

enough is known of the numerical and geographical distribution of the Vigiles to accept his statement without some reservations. The Stationes and Excubitoria will be discussed later in the paper, but suffice to say at this point that their methods of patrol distribution appear to be much too sophisticated to concentrate large numbers of manpower at one point. The danger of lightning-quick conflagrations and/or civil disturbances would appear to prohibit such distribution. The writer agrees that more men may have been kept at the main stations than the substations but does not agree to Reynolds' reasoning nor with his tabulations.

Specialization

As in virtually all large organizations, specialized functions appeared to be necessary for the Corps of Vigiles to accomplish its major objectives. The specializations were not extensive but served specific purposes. Both Lanciani and Baillie-Reynolds mention special detachments on duty at the public baths to guard against petty thefts and more serious larcenies. The latter historian comments "but until Alexander Severus allowed the baths to keep open at night, this would have been a daytime

duty.[51] If the Vigiles were confined to night duty as Baillie-Reynolds believes, the specialists were probably detached as "plainclothesmen." Lanciani claims they arrested wardrobe keepers, or capsarii, every time the loss of wraps or overcoats was complained of by a customer."[52] He added that "the policemen themselves . . . did not enjoy, as usual in European cities, the favor of the populace. . ."[53]

There were many other specialized functions in the Corps of Vigiles but a discussion of such duties has been reserved to be included in the section devoted to rank structure.

Investigation

So far as is known, the only group of Vigiles performing an investigative function was that assigned to the duty of searching out runaway slaves. The duty was probably too time consuming to be assigned to the

---

[51] P. K. Baillie-Reynolds, op. cit., p. 101.

[52] Lanciani, op. cit., p. 223.

[53] Ibid.

regular patrols. Baillie-Reynolds draws the conclusion from various inscriptions found in the remaining Excubitoria that the duty was an extremely dangerous one.

However, Sinnigen believes that the frumentarii, secret service operatives who were regular army, non-commissioned soldiers, worked closely with the urban police force in the later years of the Empire and that "their headquarters on the Caelin was across the street from a station of the Vigiles. . . . a graffiti scratched on the walls of another such station in the city. . . . shows centuriones frumentarii integrated in the chain of command under the praefectus vigilum."[54] The frumentarii were actually a federal secret police and their main responsibility was to deal with treason and/or subversion. They served the central government as spies in the first quarter of the second century.[55] The close relationship of the frumentarii to the Vigiles is unexplained by Sinnigen. However, it would seem reasonable to assume that the Corps of Vigiles gave information and assistance

---

[54]William G. Sinnigen, "The Roman Secret Service," The Classical Journal, November 1961, Vol. 57, No. 2, p. 272.

[55]Ibid., p. 273.

to the secret police whenever possible. The frumentarii were eventually replaced by agentis in rebus who were organized by Diocletian. "Their duties as supervisors of the postal system suited them admirably as spies."[56] They performed administrative functions as well as police duties.[57]

Traffic Control

Another factor in favor of the opinion that the Vigiles operated on a twenty-four hour basis is the enormous traffic problems which must have existed. The Circus Maximus could hold 285,000 people, the Circus Flaminius 150,000 and the Colosseum 50,000. With very few exceptions, modern baseball and football stadia seem rather puny in comparison.

The circuses were an almost daily form of entertainment. It seems inconceivable that special units were not permanently assigned to control pedestrian and vehicular traffic at these events as well as in the everyday operation of the city. It must have been incredibly

---

[56]William G. Sinnigen, "Two Branches of the Late Roman Secret Service," The American Journal of Philology, Vol. LXXX, No. 3 (1959), p. 244.

[57]Ibid.

difficult to control crowds of such proportions in view of the poorly laid out streets and the modes of transportation used.

Lamplighters

The Sebaciarii, those who were responsible for the lighting of the city of Rome, did not appear until late in the second century or early in the third. Middleton states that "from the time of Caracella, who did much from 210 to 215 A.D. to enlarge and organize the body of Vigiles, the streets of Rome appear to have been lighted with torches which were set in sockets fixed obliquely to the walls."[58] Middleton's statement that Caracella enlarged the body of Vigiles is interesting. He gives no evidence of a documentary or epigraphical nature to substantiate his remark. All of the authorities the writer researched, with the exception of Middleton, state that the Corps of Vigiles remained fairly constant in numbers and that there is no evidence to indicate that its authorized strength was increased at any time during the period of its existence as a unit.

---

[58] J. Henry Middleton, op. cit., p. 256.

Apparently the job was an inordinately dangerous one since many inscriptions on the walls of the remaining excubitoria allude to both the danger involved and the importance of the assignment. Statements in the inscriptions indicate that the duty lasted only a month for those assigned to it and then others were rotated in to the duty.[59] Baillie-Reynolds and Lanciani believe that the sebaciarii sought out runaway slaves, which might account for the numerous references to the arduous nature of the duty.

Additional Specialized Functions

The fire-fighting duties of the Vigiles afforded them much more opportunity for specialization. The technical aspects of a fire control operation are conducive to the limitations of specialization. Such specialization and a discussion of it is placed in Appendix A since the equipment used by the Vigiles does not contribute to the overall theme of this paper.

---

[59] P. K. Baillie-Reynolds, The Vigiles of Imperial Rome, op. cit., p. 94.

CHAPTER V

ADMINISTRATION, ORGANIZATION AND RANK STRUCTURE

It has already been mentioned that the Corps of Vigiles was not considered to be a military force. They were certainly considered to be non-military by Tiberius and Augustus and continued to be considered so even in the time of Trajan (98-117 A.D.). This is clear from their "pointed omission by Tacitus in his review of the armies of the Empire."[1] However, under subsequent emperors, the tone and texture of the Vigiles became increasingly military in nature.

The Vigiles amounted to almost one third of the garrison of Rome and throughout the years, as the population increased, their numbers remained remarkably constant. Evidently, their effectiveness negated any needs for increasing the number of cohorts or the men comprising them.

Unlike modern police and fire agencies, which are divided into divisions, units, bureaus and/or offices,

---

[1] P. K. Baillie-Reynolds, The Vigiles of Imperial Rome (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 17.

the Corps of Vigiles was composed of Cohorts. Internal divisions may have existed but there is nothing extant to illustrate such divisions. There were separations of functions but the separation appears to have been limited to small groups of individuals--not to divisions or "bureaus."

I. ADMINISTRATION AND ORGANIZATION

Cohorts

There were seven cohorts in the Corps of Vigiles, each of which was comprised of more than one thousand men of all ranks. Each cohort was composed of seven centuries. The strength of each of the seven centuries varied from a minimum of one hundred twenty-five to a maximum of one hundred seventy-three men. The seventh century was usually an exception and was composed of approximately ninety-four Vigiles. Reynolds accepts Von Domazsewski's and Kellerman's opinion that the seventh century was comprised of recruits in training. Incidentally, nothing is known of the type, quality and amount of the training given to the new members of the organization.

These tabulations were obtained from one pedestal inscribed with the rolls of 105 A.D. upon which it lists

one hundred fifteen officers and nine hundred thirty men and another roll of 110 A.D. upon which the officers decreased to one hundred nine and the men increased to one thousand thirteen.[2] Of course, authorized strengths could change with varying conditions such as the rise and fall of the crime rates, shifting and/or increasing or decreasing population, reduction in the number and frequency of fires and a host of other factors, but the figures portray a general picture of the overall structure of the Corps.

Each cohort was responsible for the safety of two regions or districts. It is known in which regions the cohorts were stationed but it is not known how the remaining regions, those not possessing a main station, were distributed. It can be assumed that the two for which any given cohort was responsible were adjacent. It is also assumed that the barracks or Statio of a given cohort would be as closely placed as possible to the boundary line between the two regions for which it was responsible. Where the locations of the Stationes are known, it is

---

[2]Rodolfo Lanciani, Ancient Rome (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1879), p. 229.

relatively easy to determine which two regions a particular cohort controlled.[3] Unfortunately, only five of the sites are known and one of the five has not been definitely determined; therefore, there is still room for doubt as to the exact allocation of the cohorts.

Distribution of the Cohorts and Placement of the Stationes

The Stationes of Cohorts I, II, IV and V are definitely known; the location of the barracks of Cohort III is doubtful. The list of Cohorts, Stationes and the adjacent regions for which they were responsible is taken from The Vigiles of Imperial Rome, upon which the writer has depended so heavily for material in this section:[4]

Cohort I	Stationed in Region VII	(Region IX)
Cohort II	Stationed in Region V	(Region III)
Cohort III	Stationed in Region VI	(Region IV)
Cohort IV	Stationed in Region XII	(Region XIII)
Cohort V	Stationed in Region II	(Region I)
Cohort VI	Stationed in Region VIII	(Region X)
Cohort VII	Stationed in Region XIV	(Region XI)

---

[3] Baillie-Reynolds, op. cit., p. 24.

[4] Regions in parenthesis is the second region assigned to the cohort listed.

It is interesting to ruminate about the administrative and decision-making efforts which must have gone into determining the manpower distribution and the sites of the Stationes and Excubitoria. There is no hint in the works researched that historians considered the magnitude and the complexity of administering such a large organization. The record keeping alone must have been a monumental problem; internal communications, or rather its lack, undoubtedly precipitated many conferences. In all probability, the major reason for lack of comment is that absolutely nothing of a concrete nature, such as supply accounts or duty schedules, has survived to pique the interest of classical scholars. Yet we know from Tacitus that written police records were common.[5] He relates a case where a wooden amphitheatre, constructed hastily to accommodate large crowds, collapsed and fifty thousand people were killed and injured. Such a figure is almost impossible to comprehend, yet Tacitus obtained the number of casualties from the official reports submitted to the Emperor by the police.[6]

---

[5]Rodolfo Lanciani, op. cit., p. 27.

[6]The ancients lacked a desire for exactness, therefore the figure quoted should be suspect.

It is particularly unfortunate that some records of an administrative nature have not come down to us. Even without them it is possible to see a great similarity between the division of the city for law enforcement purposes (and fire-fighting) and the sector system as it was developed by Charles Rowan and Richard Mayne for the London Metropolitan Police in 1829. Rowan and Mayne, as the Roman Emperors almost certainly did, distributed physical facilities and police power where it was most needed, instead of on an equal distribution basis.

Modern historians (since 1829) give no indication that Rowan and Mayne even knew of the existence of the Vigiles. If a connection could be found that related Roman and English innovations, the history of the development of law enforcement over the centuries would of necessity have to be rewritten. In addition, it would prove that modern manpower distribution techniques are not "modern" and that only until very recently, particularly since 1958, has police administration really forged ahead in the scientific distribution of manpower. Since the latter 1950's, mechanical computers have been employed to perform this function in a few large American

police departments, notably St. Louis, Missouri and Oakland, California.

The members of the Research Division of the International Association of Chiefs of Police have embarked upon some significant research projects in this important area. They are concentrating their attentions upon the development of patrol plans that are flexible and subject to change within hours whereas formerly a change of distribution on a large scale used up months of precious time. An example of an extension of their ideas is the work being done in the Metropolitan Police Department of St. Louis. At the present time that department is using the data processing equipment of the McDonnell Aircraft Corporation to develop original patrol plans. After pertinent data is collected (police hazards, incidence of particular crimes, response time, census tract information, the number of police officers available and other related data) and instructions given to the computer, a redistribution of manpower can be accomplished in little over an hour.

Needless to say, the research is tremendously complex at this stage of development but from all indications

police manpower distribution practices are being revolutionized.

The point of this side discussion is that judging from the placement of the Stationes, one can speculate that the Romans were not ignorant of the ramifications of manpower distribution and in all probability the various Prefects maintained a primitive "crime analysis unit" to assist the administration in the deployment of the officers and men of the Vigiles. This assumption is based upon the writer's knowledge of the poor procedures and methods of deployment employed by some American police departments of today. For instance, one large department distributed its two thousand police officers equally among three platoons and twelve districts until 1955, regardless of the high crime areas and the times of occurrences. In contrast, the Romans had varying numbers of men in each station and substation throughout their city; in addition, fewer men were on duty during the day than during the hours of darkness.

II. RANK STRUCTURE

The rank structure of the Corps of Vigiles appears to be much more complex than that of a modern police or fire organization, although there are certain similarities among the various functions. The Corps had numerous special ranks which were in keeping with the tradition of the military since in many instances the army had similar ranks.

Almost all of the facts known about the various ranks and specialized functions in the Vigiles were obtained from the nominal rolls of the Vth Cohort inscribed both in 205 and 210 A.D.[7] The roll of 210 A.D. is on a statue base dedicated by the Vth Cohort to Caracella and the inscriptions are remarkably clear.

For purposes of clarification we will discuss the ranks in descending order as they are assinged to the various commanders.

Headquarters Staff of the Prefect of Vigiles

The Prefect had an immediate staff of sixty-two members of the Corps to assist him in the administration

---

[7] Baillie-Reynolds, op. cit., p. 70.

and command of the organization. A listing and description of each rank is as follows:

Cornicularius

It is supposed that two cornicularii were assigned to the Prefect because they occur in the Vth Cohort in both 205 and 210 A.D. The exact responsibility of the rank is unknown.

Commentariensis

This officer seems to have been a private secretary to the Prefect. Baillie-Reynolds states that the rank was not a "military rank or officer at all but belonged to officers who had civil functions to perform as well."[8] This point is not at all clear and the authority did not extend his discussion of the office enough to clarify it.

Tabularius Benificiarus

This officer was in charge of records for the entire Corps.

Princeps

The function of this officer is also unclear. Some authorities believe it is only a special duty of the Benificiarus.

Librarius Instrumentorum Depositorum

This office does not appear on any of the rolls but does appear on a bronze tablet. According to the inscription, he ranks senior to the Vexillarius (below) and junior to the Benificiarus. Other than this, nothing is know about the rank.

---

[8] Ibid., p. 79.

Benificiarii

Five men of this rank were assigned to the Prefect's office from each cohort. His exact duties are also unknown but their large number indicate that they possibly performed a clerical or staff inspection function. The rank appears in a dedication of the IInd Cohort in 205 A.D.

Actarius

Each cohort supplied one man of this rank to the Prefect. This was a clerical post and is found on both rolls of the Vth Cohort.

A Quaestionibus

This also was a clerical post and two were supplied to the Prefect by each cohort. This rank, too, appears on both rolls.

In addition to the staff of the Prefect, there were three other ranks stationed at headquarters, which was the Statio of the Ist Cohort. The senior is that of Imaginifer. The cohorts had no standards as the Legions did but had instead an image of the reigning Emperor. Evidently, the rank was one of considerable importance and honor. The two other ranks were designated optiones and their functions are uncertain. They are described in the inscriptions as OPB(A) and OPA. Both appear in the rolls of 205 and 210 A.D.[9]

---

[9] Ibid., p. 84.

Sub-Prefect of Vigiles

When the Prefect's judicial burdens became too heavy for one person to meet the responsibilities of both administrator of a large organization and judge, an assistant was appointed to relieve him of some of the load. The Sub-Prefect had a staff composed of one Cornicularius, one Benificiarius from each cohort and a Librarius, making a staff of nine men.

Tribune

The Tribune was the commanding officer of a cohort. He served under and was directly responsible to the Prefect of Vigiles. One would think that the Tribune would be responsible not to the Prefect but the Sub-Prefect. Evidently, the concept of shortened span of control and a more equitable distribution of command and administrative responsibility either was unknown or was ignored. Oddly enough, the Tribune's staff officers were designated Immunes and were of lesser rank for some unknown reason than those assigned to the Centurions. The latter ranks will be discussed below.

The Tribune's staff and the officers performing the various technical and special duties are described as follows:

Benificiarius Tribuni

The specific duties of this officer are not explained by either Lanciani or Baillie-Reynolds. The latter does explain, however, that "Domazsewski shows that it was necessary to hold the post of Benificiarius Tribuni before promotion to the post of Taktische Chargen." (See below.) Men who held this particular rank often served beyond their time because of the reasonable prospects of further advancement.[10]

Exactus Praefecti

This individual was an understudy of the Actarius already mentioned. The rank appears only on the roll of 210 A.D.; perhaps he was appointed only when the Actarius was due for promotion or discharge.

Librarius Sub-Praefecti

This rank was also found only on the roll of 210 A.D., "though one turned up in the roll of the Vth Cohort in 113 A.D."[11]

Optio Carceris

There were two or three of these officers per cohort. It was a special duty rank. This officer was in charge of the jail where prisoners were held who were arrested by the nightly patrols.

Parenthetically, it should be mentioned that imprisonment was never recognized as a form of punishment in

---

[10] Ibid., p. 84.

[11] Ibid., p. 85.

Rome. Police cells were provided in the barracks to house prisoners under arrest and awaiting trial.[12]

Optio Convalescentium

This was also a special duty rank and the person holding it was responsible for the daily activities of men placed, for various reasons, on light duty. There was one per cohort.

The following is a list of numerous special duties and technical posts. In some instances, the functions are completely unknown.

Victimarius

This individual was concerned with the arrangements for the religious functions of the cohort.

Karcerarius

This man was responsible for the cleanliness of the jail.

Harrarius Cohortis

This officer performed the functions of the cohort quartermaster.

Sifonarius

This individual was responsible for the maintenance of the "Siphon," a force draft pump.

Uncinarius Cohortis

Men with such designations were responsible for handling long poles equipped with hooks for pulling

---

[12] P. K. Baillie-Reynolds, "The Police in Ancient Rome," The Police Journal, I (July, 1928), p. 437.

down tottering walls. They were also equipped with climbing irons.

Falcarius

These were men equipped with a Falx, a long pole with hooks to pull down walls in danger of collapsing or falling. They served the same purpose as the Uncinarius. There may have been other differentiations between the two ranks but, if so, they are unknown.

A Balneis

An orderly who looked to the baths of the cohort.

Aquarius

This post has caused a great deal of speculation among the authorities. Since no one really knows what specific function this person performed, it is suggested that he performed one or more of the following jobs:

1. He tended to the water supply of the barracks.
2. He was responsible for the periodic testing of the hydrants, if such existed.
3. He maintained accurate knowledge of where water could be obtained for fire-fighting purposes. This is suggested because lead pipes have been found bearing the names of the Corps.
4. He was a water carrier who formed a chain for buckets at scenes of fires.[13]

Emituliarius

The meaning of this word is unknown. It was inscribed twice on the wall of the Excubitorium of the VIIIth Cohort, but does not appear on the nominal rolls in 205 and 210 A.D.

---

[13] P. K. Baillie-Reynolds, The Vigiles of Imperial Rome, op. cit., p. 90.

Adiutor

The meaning of this term is also unknown. Authorities do not agree as to the function of the person with such a designation, but a few believe that officers of this rank were members of a mounted unit which was employed for crowd and riot control purposes.

Secutores

There were fourteen Secutores in a cohort and they formed a bodyguard for the Tribune. It is not known why he needed one.

Codicillarii

These men composed the clerical staff of the commander of the cohort. Their normal scheme of promotion was to Secutor.

Librarius

This officer was quartermaster for the cohort.

Exceptor Tribuni

The function of this officer is unknown.

Buccinator

This post was held by a bugler. The bugler appears to rank among the staff of the Tribune, even though assigned to a Centurion.

Centurion

This officer was in command of a century and there were seven centuries to a cohort. The important posts under the Centurion's command have been designated

"Taktische Chargen" by Von Domazsewski. Baillie-Reynolds accepts his terminology and uses it throughout his book. The "Taktische Chargen" are subordinate in rank to the higher staff appointments under the Tribune but are superior to the Immunes.

The ranks are three in number and occur in every century of the Ist and Vth Cohorts in the roll of 205 A.D.

Vexillarius

This officer was second in command of the century and rose from the ranks. He carried the Vexillum of the century and was responsible for the deductions of sums as savings from the pay of the Vigiles.

Optio

This officer appears in all of the infantry of the army. He was the Centurion's "right-hand" man. He was appointed either by the Centurion and/or the Tribune and can be compared to a modern-day master sergeant.

Tesserarius

This is another rank common to the armies of Rome. The person holding the rank was an orderly-sergeant to the Centurion.

Detachments on special duties seemed to be under the command of one or the other of these supervisors. It was necessary for a man to hold one of these ranks before attaining further promotion. For this reason, the three

positions were equal in rank. The fact that this was so did not prohibit a man from holding all three in succession.[14]

Medici

The doctors assigned to the Vigiles were qualified physicians but possessed no military rank. Four Medici were allotted to each cohort.[15] The number seems unusually large and indicates that they had plenty to do and were kept busy with casualties from fires, street accidents and criminal assaults.[16] More often than not these men were freedmen and were of Greek origin.

This class of Medici is not to be confused with the Medici Ordinarii, which were assigned to auxiliary cohorts and were really medical orderlies or what we might refer to as "corpsmen" or "medics" in the modern military services. The Medici occupied a much superior position.

---

[14] Ibid., p. 76.

[15] John E. Sandys, A Companion to Latin Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), p. 727.

[16] Baillie-Reynolds, op. cit., p. 73.

III. CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

Originally, members of the Cohortes Vigilum were recruited from freedmen. There was some difficulty in obtaining men at first because of the long service, arduous duties, and the poor prospects of promotion. Probably the major detriment to recruitment was that the reputation of the corps was extremely poor. Eventually, however, free-born men were accepted for service and the prestige of the Vigiles gradually rose until it became comparable to the military services.

Length of Service

When the Corps of Vigiles was first activated, its members must have served the same number of years as the men of the fleets of Mesenum and Ravenna. The sailors received their "honesto missio" after twenty-six years of service. Subsequent rather rapid changes in the constitution and structure of the Corps led some German historians to conclude that the years of service were reduced to twenty. Von Domazsewski, whom Baillie-Reynolds quotes often and at some length, believes that by the time of Severus the term of enlistment was

reduced to sixteen years to conform to the Praetorian enlistment.[17] Von Domazsewski drew his conclusions after examining the two nominal rolls of the Vth Cohort which had dates of specific enlistments and discharges upon them.

That some inducement was needed to obtain recruits is indicated by the fact that in 24 A.D. Roman citizenship was offered to Junian Latins who were willing to enlist in the Vigiles.[18] Beginning in that year, six years of service in the Corps qualified a man for full citizenship in the Roman state. "Possibly the same Lex Visellia which conferred citizenship after six years' service also allowed freeborn men to enlist."[19] Baillie-Reynolds admits that this date is highly doubtful as the one in which entrance to the Corps by freemen was allowed. Most historians believe that the freeborn were recruited before 166 A.D. without doubt because a bronze tablet in the Palazzo dei Conservatori Museum, originally

---

[17] Ibid., p. 200.

[18] G. H. Stevenson, The Augustan Empire (Vol. X of The Cambridge Ancient History, ed. S. A. Cook et al. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934), p. 200.

[19] Baillie-Reynolds, op. cit., p. 68.

erected in 203 A.D., "records the admission to citizenship of sixteen men of the second century of the IVth Cohort who enlisted in the latter half of 199 A.D. and the first months of 200 A.D." and "of the sixteen men whose names are given, only five are freedmen, so that at some time during these two centuries the recruiting for the Corps was thrown open to men of free birth . . . we can only say for certain that it was before 166 A.D., for which year we have epigraphic evidence of freeborn men in the Vigiles, but from the proportion of one freedman to ten freeborn, we may suppose that the rule had already been in operation for some time."[20] Around this time a member of the Corps qualified for citizenship after three years of service.[21] The relatively rapid reduction of the number of years a man would have to serve in the Vigiles before attaining citizenship is an indication that there was still some difficulty in obtaining a sufficient quantity of recruits.

None of the historians the writer researched commented at all upon the problem of obtaining replacements

---

[20] Ibid., pp. 67-68.

[21] Sandys, op. cit., p. 468.

to fill the jobs which became available due to injuries and deaths occurring in the line of duty. For such a large organization, one could assume that this would be a pressing administrative problem. The historians do mention attrition due to retirements and transfers to other of the armed services but nothing else. Casualties caused by fire must have been large, not to mention those caused by criminal assault and traffic and riot control duty. Since the administrative records of the period are non-existent, there is no way to assess personnel replacement numbers.

Recompense

The exact pay of the various ranks of the Vigiles is unknown but most authorities agree that it was less than that of the soldiers of the Legions. Domitian (81-96 A.D.) raised the pay of the Vigiles slightly but it was still less than the soldiers received.

There were some "fringe benefits," however. Upon attaining citizenship, members of the Corps obtained their portion of the free distribution of grain. This practice was started by Nero originally when he issued

free grain to the Praetorians.[22] Originally, the Vigiles paid for their rations as the army did.

The inducements which were offered served to bring the Vigiles materially into line with other of the armed services. Another inducement, at first glance a minor one but of major importance from the point of view of morale, is that by the third century, when the other units were allowed to call themselves after the reigning emperor, we find the Vigiles enjoying the same honor.[23]

Promotion and Transfer

The historians researched devoted very little attention to discussions of promotions and transfers other than to mention occasionally the fact that inter-cohort transfers were fairly common. Most of the information known about transfers and promotions was obtained from the rolls of the Vth and VIIth Cohorts inscribed in 203, 205, and 210 A.D. where the same names would often appear with different and higher ranks. More will be said about the rolls elsewhere in this paper.

---

[22] P. K. Baillie-Reynolds, op. cit., p. 68.

[23] P. K. Baillie-Reynolds, op. cit., p. 64.

More is known of the commissioned officers. The Tribunes and Centurions were apparently equal in rank to officers in the armed services, including those in the Praetorian Guards and the Urban Cohorts. Promotions and transfers were very common between the Vigiles and the Legions and the Guards. The officers were not freemen.

Apparently, the commissioned ranks of the Corps of Vigiles were little more than rungs of a ladder leading to better and more lucrative positions in other units. The tenure of Tribunes and Centurions seemed to be relatively short. The Vth Cohort had different Tribunes in A.D. 111 and 113 while the same applies to the IVth in A.D. 203 and 205. These instances may be coincidences but Baillie-Reynolds mentions "a very striking example of the brevity of tenure of office, this time by centurions in the two nominal rolls of the Vth Cohort. There is probably not more than five years between the two rolls, and many of the same men appear in both, yet all of the seven centurions are different in the two cases."[24] Again, the historian is not taking

---

[24] P. K. Baillie-Reynolds, loc. cit.

the possibility of deaths, injured and retired officers into consideration but seven new centuriones is quite unusual in so short a time.

IV. STATIONES AND EXCUBITORIA

Almost nothing is known of the stations and barracks which were originally used to house the Vigiles during the first century or so of the Empire. They were stationed in private houses which were confiscated by the government specifically for that purpose. In time the private residences were replaced by building of a more military style which were better suited to house members of a quasi-military unit. No one knows when the more palatial buildings were constructed.[25] There is no evidence of a concrete nature indicating the specific sites of the Stationes for more than a century after the establishment of the Vigiles. In the years 111 and 113 A.D. references were made in two inscriptions of the Vth Cohort to the construction of two aediculae (dedications) to the genii (divinities) of two centuries of that cohort.

---

[25] P. K. Baillie-Reynolds, op. cit., p. 43.

In both instances the construction is spoken of as something new and not as a restoration. In addition, a century, a century of the IVth Cohort erected an aediculae to its genius in the year 130 A.D.[26] This rather brief amount of evidence tends to indicate that constructions started in this general time period.

Baillie-Reynolds cautions that "it must be borne in mind that the remains found on the sites of the stations that we do know are all of a much later date than Augustus, and that the Vigiles as originally established may have been posted in rather different places; but in view of the usual Roman practices with regard to military forces any very great changes are unlikely, and we can be pretty certain, at any rate, that the region assigned to the cohorts or their area for duty were never changed."[27] The writer believes that Baillie-Reynolds' assumption could seriously be questioned from a theoretical standpoint but in view of the lack of evidence to prove otherwise it would be without profit to argue the

---

[26] P. K. Baillie-Reynolds, op. cit., pp. 43-44.

[27] Ibid., pp. 22-25.

point at length. Suffice it to say, it seems highly unlikely that any given station would remain at one location for almost three hundred years--ecological and demographical conditions would almost dictate periodic rebuilding and re-allocations of manpower and facilities. In addition, the development of the Roman public safety mechanism indicates an amount of sophistication that would prohibit a satisfaction with the status quo.

Stationes

Five Stationes of the Vigiles have been discovered at the following locations:

Cohort I	At the foot of the Quirinal near the Vio Datoria
Cohort II	On the Esquiline near the Temple of Minerva
Cohort III	Near the Thermae of Diocletian
Cohort IV	On the Aventine near the Church of S. Saba
Cohort V	Near the Caelian Hill in the Gardens of the Villa Matei (now Villa Hoffman)

The Statio of the VIth Cohort was probably near the Forum Romanum, and the VIIth Cohort Statio in the Trans Tiberine part of the City.[28]

The barracks of Cohort I was discovered in 1644 under the Pallazo Muti Savorelli at the northern end of the Piazza dei SS. Apostoli. The building contained the headquarters of the entire Corps of Vigiles and the administrative offices of the Prefect. Unfortunately, palaces and other costly structures have been erected over some of the sites. "The Stationes appear to have been buildings of great splendour, with marble halls, mosaic pavements, columns of richly coloured marbles and porphyry, and many statues and other works of art."[29]

The floor plan of the Statione of the Ist Cohort was found on a marble fragment within the building when it was discovered. The plan of the station is given to us by the marble fragment, and it consists of three parallel and roughly rectangular courts, each surrounded by rooms. Each court measures 35 x 135 meters, and the

---

[28]J. Henry Middleton, The Remains of Ancient Rome (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892), p. 257.

[29]Middleton, loc. cit.

whole building is about 155 x 175 meters. From the inscriptions found on the site, it seems evident that the Prefect of Vigiles had his headquarters here, and this will account for the large dimensions of the station for a cohort of just over a thousand men. We must not suppose the other stations to have been so big."[30] The Statio of Cohort I had "huge halls, ornamented with columns, pedestals, statues, marble incrustations, mosaic pavements, waiting rooms and offices having marble seats around the walls which were covered with finely designed frescoes."[31] Beautiful shrines were also part of the Statio.

Not until very recently have modern law enforcement agencies attempted to finance and construct headquarters facilities even remotely reminiscent of the beautiful stationes the Vigiles enjoyed. Of course, the modern buildings are not as ornate as those of Rome since they are primarily functional in nature and designed to facilitate speed and efficiency of operations. Nevertheless, those of St. Louis, Cincinnati and particularly

---

[30] P. K. Baillie-Reynolds, op. cit., pp. 46-47.

[31] Rodolfo Lanciani, Ancient Rome (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1879), p. 225.

Los Angeles are very pleasing architecturally and not unkind to the eye.

Excubitoria

In addition to the seven Stationes of the cohorts, there were fourteen sub-stations or excubitoria. It is assumed that one excubitorium was located in each region of the city "but whether or not they were part of the Augustan system it is impossible to say. Only one indisputable excubitorium has hitherto been found while possibly two other have come to light, though they are doubtful. In the one certain case, the building is Hadrianic, and the traces of occupation by the Vigiles only begin with Caracella; so it may be that the excubitorium system was started by him or it may be that this particular house was only taken over by him. All one can say definitely is that the excubitoria existed certainly from towards the beginning of the third century till the completion of the Notitia in the fourth century; they probably continued until the end of the Western Empire, and they may have been originally started by Augustus."[32] It

[32] P. K. Baillie-Reynolds, op. cit., p. 26.

would be highly improbable that the organization of the Vigiles would be completely pre-planned before their actual institution and remain the same structurally and organizationally throughout four centuries. A great deal of development and continual refinement must have taken place before the administrators were satisfied that a workable and efficient arrangement had evolved. Constant change and adjustments would be inevitable--even needed in so large a unit. Lanciani in particular makes much of the fact that early in their infancy as an organization the Vigiles were billeted in private houses and were moved periodically as circumstances dictated and not until some measure of societal stability was attained were they committed to operating from specific locations.

The excubitoria were less magnificent than the parent Stationes but were large and attractive structures, nevertheless. Only one of the sub-stations has been discovered to date and that in the Trans Tiberim Region for which the VIIth Cohort was responsible. The structure exists in quite good condition since a large part of the building remained unexcavated until early in the twentieth

century. The inscriptions on the walls are of particular importance to Latinists. This sub-station is the private house which Baillie-Reynolds mentions as being constructed during the reign of Hadrian.

Each cohort had to man two sub-stations in addition to the main Statio. There is no way of knowing the size of the various detachments assigned to the excubitoria, although, because of the varying criminal and structural conditions in the regions, it is a certainty that the men were not evenly distributed.

It is not known what duties the detachments in the sub-stations performed. The inscriptions in the one extant excubitorium nearly all deal with the duties of the sebaciaria. It has already been mentioned that Baillie-Reynolds believes that the main patrols came from the main station of the cohort. The historian has no concrete evidence upon which to base his assumption and it could certainly be true but the arrangement would have been too unwieldy operationally for everyone but horse patrols, if they existed. The writer would prefer to believe that patrols came from the sub-stations for the most part because of the convenience the arrangement

offered. It is also suggested that reserves and special duty officers came from the central station in the regions in addition to regular patrols. Sub-stations, even today, are constructed to be used and are employed to conquer distance and time as much as possible. Primitive transportation systems such as those that existed in the time of the Vigiles would make it imperative that the excubitoria be used to the greatest extent to reduce response time for all types of incidents requiring the services of the Vigiles. In the last twenty years, and particularly in the last ten, there has been a trend away from the construction of "district" or "precinct" stations because of the rapid development of transportation facilities and systems. Great distances were historically the only justification for the maintenance of decentralized physical facilities.

Baillie-Reynolds also states that the officers stationed in the excubitorium would be under the command of a centurion. He disagrees with those who hold that an optio, comparable to a modern sergeant-major, or a Tessararius, an orderly sergeant for the century, was in charge of the sub-station. Excavations of the remaining

excubitorium of the VIIth Cohort has uncovered inscriptions which indicate that excubitorium command was entrusted to non-commissioned officers rather than to centurions. There were seven to a cohort and it would appear to be ridiculous to assign the seven to the main station. The writer would speculate that probably three were assigned to each excubitorium leaving one to assist the Tribune in the main station. Such an arrangement would provide enough command officers to provide relief for off days, leaves and sick and injured time.

Such speculations are tantalizing but completely unproductive in light of the total absence of evidence upon which to work. Lanciani and Middleton believe that further excavation may clarify some of the disputed points. The one remaining excubitorium is being used as a rubbish receptacle by residents surrounding it and the chances for additional work here are rather dim.

V. BUDGET AND FINANCE

As in almost all aspects of the actual administration of the Corps of Vigiles, very little is known about the annual cost of financing the cost of the

organization. The only reference the writer could find relative to this important subject was a footnote in a source document which listed the yearly operating expenses of the Praetorian Guards and the Urban Cohorts. The costs of maintaining those units are as follows:[33]

9,000 Praetorians at 750 denarii per soldier per year. . .	6,750,000 denarii
3,000 Urban Cohorts at 360 denarii per soldier per year. . .	1,080,000 denarii
Officers for these troops. . .	1,000,000 denarii
Total	8,830,000 denarii

These tabulations are undoubtedly estimations unless the totals given include all costs for supplies, equipment, facilities, administration and a host of other costs. The writer assumes that the costs listed above are extremely conservative and would not be too accurate.

In a footnote from the same work and on the same page, Frank States that in 1900 Von Domazsewski estimated that the Vigiles "cost about 9,000,000 denarii per year."[34]

---

[33] Tenney Frank, Rome and Italy of the Empire (Vol. V of An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1940), p. 5.

[34] Ibid.

Tabulated on the same basis as the moneys allotted the Praetorians and the Urban soldiers, an individual member of the Corps of Vigiles would receive 1,232 denarii for his services per year. Even by subtracting a substantial amount of the total for officers' pay, the Vigiles would still be receiving more pay than the other services. We have already learned that the policemen-firemen were paid less than Praetorians, an elite group.[35] Von Domazsewski was probably including all costs in his tabulations but even so the total appears to be unreasonably high or the other estimates are extremely low.

At any rate, nothing of an evidentiary nature has survived to clear away the mists shrouding this particular subject.

---

[35]As mentioned earlier in the paper, funds to finance the operations of the Vigiles were obtained by assessing a two to four per cent tax upon the sale of slaves.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

For four hundred years the Corps of Vigiles existed as an integral and vital adjunct of the civil government of the City of Rome. Indeed, by the middle of the first century of the Christian era they were already established as a municipal institution and had become accepted as a permanent division of the city government.

Prior to the establishment of the Corps, the Republic was racked and tortured and near total disintegration not from the pressures and forces of external enemies but from the debilitating influences of deadly political rivalries, unruly civil populations (slave, plebeian and aristocratic) incompetent civil servants, criminality of grave proportions and the everpresent threat of crippling fires of great magnitude. Rome had been fairly successful in eliminating external threats to its existence, but had failed miserably in combating seemingly less important internal conflicts which were by no means less grave. Caesar

recognized the gravity of the situation, but his untimely death prematurely ended his attempts at municipal reform in its many facets. Octavian ably took up where his grand-uncle left off. He rightly saw that the most serious threat was internal and that his power and authority rested upon domestic peace and tranquility as much as his ability to conquer foreign enemies.

While the Empire was occasionally temporarily disrupted as a result of domestic turmoil and tumult, conditions after the inception of law and order never were quite as serious in later years as they were in the twilight of the Republic. One of the major hypotheses of this paper is that the activation of the Corps of Vigiles was important to the development of Roman civilization and consequently to the eventual development of the Western world in that the body helped make it possible for the government to survive the civil disruptions and chaotic conditions that prevailed at the fall of the Republic. It is quite possible that municipal authorities were able, as a result of the stabilizing influence of the Vigiles, to continue in their efforts to bring some sort of organization out of the uncertainty

that existed on the domestic scene. This body of men, perhaps more than any other unit responsible for the maintenance of a stable society, made it possible for those whose main function was to direct and coordinate the growth and development of Rome as a community and the center of world power, to operate in a political and social atmosphere relatively free from perpetually recurring domestic chaos and mob violence and control. The Vigiles in conjunction with other municipal agencies were able effectively to control the conditions of criminality and periodic outbreaks of widely destructive conflagrations within a relatively short time after their establishment.

The citizens of Rome were receiving protection from their twin internal enemies, criminality and fire, by a revitalized government that had traditionally left the solution of such mundane matters to the ingenuity of the individual citizens or group of citizens concerned. The half-hearted and incompetent efforts of the governments that existed prior to the advent of Julius Caesar were little more than token attempts to protect a citizenry harrassed by brigands, politically inspired

and controlled cut-throats, mobs and devastating conflagrations. The energies expended by Republican "rulers" were almost totally devoted to self-perpetuation, political intrigue and efforts to keep their heads on their shoulders. Consequently, very little time remained to devote to domestic matters pertaining to the peace and welfare of the people comprising the population of Rome.

The Vigiles certainly did not bring to an end the varieties of political intrigue and the occasional assassinations that occurred. The extirpation of such conduct was not their function at all. Their specific objective was the maintenance of some semblance of law and order, the elimination of criminal activity and the prevention and extinguishment of fires. Their employment as a military and political instrument was negligible. In only one instance, as mentioned previously in this paper, were they employed for purely political purposes and then only because the loyalty of the Praetorians was in serious question by the Emperor Nero. One might assume that it would be inevitable that administrators and politicians would make attempts to use the body for

political purposes somewhat in the manner that latter day police agencies have been occasionally and are in some instances controlled by unscrupulous politicians but there is no evidence to document this assumption.

That the Vigiles existed and accomplished their objectives is certainly important in history, but of even more significance is that the Corps was distributed or deployed on a somewhat scientific basis and that their fundamental objective, actually the only justification for their existence, was to prevent crimes and outbreaks of conflagrations. In addition, the body was the first integrated "department of public safety."

These developments should be of immense significance to police administrators for two reasons. First, that historical research is not necessarily useless and that it can point to new directions and tell us what has gone on before. Perhaps of even more importance, it should illustrate that basic research need not be devoted solely to its operational results. Second, in view of the present disagreements among professional police and fire administrators and the adamant

attitudes of the rank and file in their associations, a knowledge that a consolidation of public safety services existed two thousand years ago under conditions which, in comparison to modern ones, make present problems relatively insignificant, should be enlightening. Such knowledge should at least precipitate a re-appraisal of present philosophies and attitudes which in most instances are based upon emotional reactions to an incipient "threat" rather than to the facts as they actually exist.

The organization, direction, coordination and operation of the integrated Vigiles, to the writer's mind, constituted a much more complex administrative situation than that faced by modern administrators. One can only imagine the magnitude of the complexities and intracacies of the communications processes, for example, in an organization employing 7,500 officers and men. The Romans did not posses the variety of mechanical devices of all types that are available to the modern integrated department, nor did they have knowledge of present day management techniques. Yet the major argument brought to bear by the opponents of

integration is that it may be feasible to institute in cities of no more than 50,000 population. Such an argument, as well as a multitude of others, is untenable for a number of reasons. First, administrators tend to narrowly identify the term "integration" with total integration rather than recognizing that there are many degrees of consolidation. Second, they ignore the large number of mechanical devices available to make the job much easier. Third, they ignore the possibilities of a progressive and intelligently constructed training programs and the wonders they accomplish. Fourth, they maintain that it is impractical to train a man for two jobs, forgetting, purposely one believes, that public safety is one job. Fifth, they erroneously believe that it is more difficult to administer a large organization than a small one.

These arguments, if they can be termed such, can be devastated one by one with little difficulty. Suffice it to say here that, in the writer's opinion, the premises posed by opposing police and fire administrators are nothing but camouflage for the primary reason for the opposition--the dislike, even the fear, of the possibility of losing the separation of identity which has

been traditionally theirs. The arguments are based upon an emotional reaction to a concept which has not been completely empirically proven either good or bad. There have been both successes and failures in police-fire integration but no one has systematically attempted to determine and isolate the reasons for success or failure in various communities throughout the United States. In all probability, the failures can be attributed to incompetent management rather than to the supposed complexities involved in administering an integrated unit. The Roman experience should indicate that a re-evaluation is needed of the traditional opinion that integration should be limited to smaller communities.

There are two factors which lead the writer to believe that the installation of an integrated operation is possible and feasible in larger cities. First, the physical conditions of modern cities are comparable in many respects to those existing in Rome of the Republic or of the Empire. Second, modern techniques and equipment eliminate in part the difficulties posed by massive tenement districts and high rise structures appearing in most of our large cities. Ancillary to this,

most structures being built now are fortified with highly fire resistant building materials.

To repeat, the failure to approach the concept realistically, intelligently and on an unemotional plane cannot be attributed to the complexity of integration or its inherent unreasonableness, but to the unwillingness to face a challenging situation. A mass, negative state of mind is hindering the development and advancement of the concept more than anything else. The idea of integration deserves more of an opportunity to prove itself than has heretofore been given.

The two other major contributions of the Vigiles, the concept of prevention and the systematic deployment of manpower, have not been recognized to date so far as is known. It is truly unfortunate that documentation is not available in sufficient quantity to recreate the deployment systems used by the administrators of the Vigiles. Only enough is known to indicate vaguely that the techniques employed by the English in 1829 and after were reminiscent of those used by the ancient Romans in assigning their public safety resources.

If the early English writers and police administrators were aware of the contributions of the

Vigiles, not a shred of evidence exists to prove it. An examination of the writings of the Fielding brothers and Patrick Colquhoun shows only, relatively speaking, a cautious approach to the concepts of deployment and prevention as if they were painfully aware that they were entering virgin lands populated by savages. All were acutely aware of the popular opinions against the idea of prevention since punishment, in spite of its failure as a device of social control, was still believed to be the panacea for crime and criminality.

There is one confusing point here, however. The Fieldings, Peel, Colquhoun and Rowan and Mayne were urbane and educated men. It seems eminently reasonable to assume that they had studied what was known of the development of law enforcement up to their time, and it seems improbable that they could have missed learning of the Vigiles and their accomplishments. The first Statio was excavated in 1634 and the purposes of the building must have been known by 1829 and not only in Italy but throughout the circle of classical scholars on the continent and Great Britain. As stated previously in this paper, the writer is convinced that a connection exists,

but has been unable to discover it. He is presently conducting correspondence with Governor Bantock, Charles Reith and police authorities in England in the hope that a diary, letter, book or other official or personal communications by Rowan, Mayne and/or the Fieldings will uncover a piece of evidence which might bring to light information or material which will establish a connection. Baillie-Reynolds states that the eventual fate of the Vigiles is completely unknown and conjectures that they too disappeared along with the many other vestiges of ancient Roman life when the powerful and energetic Germanic tribes invaded and sacked the whole of Italy. Sinnigen, a more recent researcher, believes that the Vigiles, along with the Urban Cohorts and the Praetorian Guard, disappeared during Constantine's reign--"perhaps during some kind of municipal reform in 318."[1] He added that police and fire protection responsibilities were transferred to guilds composed of private citizens.

---

[1]William G. Sinnigen, The Officium of the Urban Prefecture During the Later Roman Empire (American Academy in Rome, Papers and Monographs XVII, 1957), p. 100.

Nevertheless the legacy of prevention, integration and the systematic manpower distribution has come down to us to improve and enrich our knowledge of the development of law enforcement and fire prevention and extinguishment.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. BOOKS

Abbott, Frank F. A History and Description of Roman Political Institutions. Boston: Ginn and Company, 1901.

Baillie-Reynolds, P. K. The Vigiles of Imperial Rome. London: Oxford University Press, 1926.

Boak, Arthur E. R. A History of Rome to 565 A.D. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1943.

Bloch, Raymond. The Origins of Rome. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1960.

Carcopino, Jerome. Daily Life in Ancient Rome. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940.

Charlesworth, Martin P. The Roman Empire. London: Oxford University Press, 1951.

Coatman, John. Police. London: Oxford University Press, 1959.

Coleridge, Edward P. Res Romanae. London: George Bell and Sons, 1899.

Cowell, F. R. Everyday Life in Ancient Rome. B. T. Batsford, Ltd., 1961.

Dio's Rome, translated by Herbert Baldwin Foster. Troy: Pafraet's Book Company, 1905.

Ferrero, Guglielmo. The Republic of Augustus, Vol. V of The Greatness and Decline of Rome, Translated by H. J. Chaytor. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1909.

Fielding, Henry. Inquiry Into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers, etc. London, 1751.

Fielding, John. Extracts from Such of the Penal Laws as Relate to the Peace and Good Order of the Metropolis. London: 1768.

_____. An Account of the Origins and the Effects of the Police, etc. London: 1758.

_____. A Plan for Preventing Robberies Within Twenty Miles of London. London: 1775.

Frank, Tenney. A History of Rome. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1923.

_____. Rome and Italy of the Empire, Vol. V of An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1940.

Hart, J. M. The British Police. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1951.

Heitland, W. E. The Roman Republic. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909.

Heaton, John Wesley. Mob Violence in the Late Roman Republic. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1939.

Hemans, Charles I. Historic and Monumental Rome. London: Williams and Norgate, 1874.

Homo, Leon. Roman Political Institutions from City to State. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Company Ltd., 1929.

Howe, Laurence L. The Praetorian Prefect from Commodus to Diocletian. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942.

Ihne, Wilhelm. The History of Rome, Vol. IV, English Edition. New York: Longman's, Green and Company, 1882.

Jones, H. Stuart. Companion to Roman History. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912.

Juvenal, The Satires of, Translated by Rolfe Humphries. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1958.

Lanciani, Rodolfo. Ancient Rome. New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1879.

Lewis, Naphali, Reinhold and Meyer. Roman Civilization, Vol. II. New York: Columbia University Press, 1955.

Middleton, J. Henry. The Remains of Ancient Rome. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892.

Mommsen, Theodor. The History of Rome, Revised Edition, Translated by William Purdie Dickson. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900.

Moore, Frank Gardner, The Roman's World. New York: Columbia University Press, 1936.

Parker, H. M. D. A History of the Roman World from A.D. 138 to 337. New York: The MacMillan Company,1939.

Pelham, H. F. Outlines of Roman History, Fourth Edition Revised. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1909.

Plutarch, Six Lives, Translated by Rex Warner, Edited by E. V. Rieu. London: The Penguin Classics.

Ramsay, George Gilbert. The Annals of Tacitus--An English Translation, Book XV, Chapters 38-44, "The Great Fire." London: John Murray.

Reid, James S. The Municipalities of the Roman Empire. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913.

Reith, Charles. The Blind Eye of History. London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1953.

_____. A New History of the Police. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956.

_____. The Police and the Problems of War. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959.

Robinson, Cyril E. History of Rome 753 B.C.--A.D. 110. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1941.

Roslovtsev, Mikhail I. The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire, 2nd ed., revised by P. M. Fraser. London: Oxford University Press, 1957.

Salmon, Edward T. A History of the Roman World from 30 B.C. to A.D. 138. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1944.

Sandys, John Edwin. A Companion to Latin Studies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938.

Schmitz, Leonard. A History of Rome from the Earliest Times to the Death of Commodus, A.D. 192. Andover: Allen, Morrill and Wardwell, 1847.

Scullard, H. H. From the Gracchi to Nero. London: Methuen and Company, Ltd., 1959.

Showerman, Grant. Rome and the Romans--A Survey and Interpretation. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1939.

Sinnigen, William G. The Officium of the Urban Prefecture During the Later Roman Empire. Rome: The American Academy, Papers and Monographs XVII, 1957.

Smith, William et al (editors). A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities, 2 Volumes. London: J. Murray, 1901.

Starr, Chester G. Civilization and the Caesars. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1954.

Strayer, Joseph R. et al. The Course of Civilization. New York: Harcourt Brace and World, Inc., 1961.

Tacitus, The Complete Works of, Modern Library Edition. New York: Random House, 1942.

Taylor, T. M. A Constitutional and Political History of Rome from the Earliest Times to the Reign of Domitian. London: Methuen and Company, 1899.

Van Buren, A. W. Ancient Rome as Revealed by Recent Discoveries. London: Lovatt Dickson, Publisher (n.d.).

Weatherly, Wagener, Zeydel and Yarmolinsky. The Heritage of European Literature, Vol. I. Boston: Ginn and Company, 1948.

Winspear, Alban R. and Geweke, Lenore K. Augustus and the Reconstruction of Roman Government and Society. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1935.

B. PERIODICALS

Baillie-Reynolds, P. K. "The Police in Ancient Rome," The Police Journal, A Quarterly Review for the Police Forces of the Empire, Vol. I, No. 3(July, 1928).

Rink, S. E. "The Family Tree of the Police Department," Law and Order, Vol. I(June, 1953).

Sinnigen, William G. "The Roman Secret Service," The Classical Journal, Vol. 57, No. 2(November, 1961).

_____. "Two Branches of the Late Roman Secret Service," American Journal of Philology, Vol. LXXX, No. 3(1959).

C. BOOKS: PARTS OF SERIES

The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. X, The Augustan Empire, Edited by S. A. Cook et al. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934.

D. ENCYCLOPEDIA ARTICLES

Gosse, Edmund. "Henry Fielding," The Encyclopedia Americana (1961 Edition), Vol. XI, pp. 183-185.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

EQUIPMENT

For informational purposes, a brief discussion and listing of the equipment employed by the Vigiles has been included as an appendix. The writer believes that the equipment and materials used by the Vigiles to combat fires illustrates a certain sophistication of design and implementation not generally known by modern and police administrators. Too, the discussion of tools and implements does not belong in the body of the thesis since it would not notably advance the hypotheses presented.

Fire Extinguishment

The Vigiles were generously supplied with devices to assist them in battling the fires in Rome. To be sure, most of their tools and machines were primitive by the standards of today, but in many respects their methods and equipment were well developed and designed and are quite similar to what is employed now by most fire departments.

The most important piece of equipment used by members of the Corps was the Siphon or "fire engine." Each cohort had two siphones; the machines took the form of a double-action force pump "which depended for its action upon the fact that it stood in a reservoir of water."[1] Ordinary lift pumps were used in this capacity too.

Baillie-Reynolds states that "The fact of this necessity for a reservoir must have made the engine somewhat heavy and cumbersome, while the constant refilling of the reservoir must have rendered the working of it a laborious task, . . . nevertheless, the fact that Rome was (probably) provided with fourteen of them, shows that they were fairly efficient."[2] It would seem, however, that there would be more than fourteen of the pieces because of the large distances they would have to be trundled to the scene of a large fire. This is only conjecture, but it would seem reasonable to have such a machine at the main station in each district as well as one in

---

[1] P. K. Baillie-Reynolds, The Vigiles of Imperial Rome (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 94.

[2] Ibid., p. 95.

each of the two sub-stations. It is inconceivable that the personnel of the Stationes and the excubitoria would fight a fire of any substantial size alone. Mutual aid and assistance must have been quite common. The most important point is that response time would have been considerably lessened if more siphones were available and strategically located; the tinderbox conditions of the city would have demanded rapid responses and a great amount of water almost immediately after the reception of the alarm.

It was not known when the machine was introduced to the Corps. It is assumed it was in existence before the formation of the group since the view is commonly held that Augustus modelled the Vigiles after the fire-brigade at Alexandria which had siphones. This could also be true of the other equipment the Vigiles used as well.

The machine was invented in the fourth century before Christ,and Isadore, writing in the seventh century after Christ, mentions the machine as being used occasionally. This is a remarkable example of the continuity of Roman civilization.[3]

---

[3] Ibid., pp. 95-96.

Other items of equipment used by the Vigiles is described as follows:

Scalae

Ladders

Perticae

Poles used to prop up walls which were in danger of falling. Some believe they were smaller and used to beat out flames. This seems doubtful because a relatively thin pole is for all intents and purposes useless to beat out flames of any size and intensity.

Scopae

Brooms made of twigs which were tied together.

Amae

Fire buckets made of ropes which were treated with pitch. The nickname "sparteoli" derived from the fact that the pitch was called spartum. Middleton[4] disagrees with the derivation of the word; he claims that the derogatory term came "from the funei spartei or ropes of esparto grass which formed an important part of their equipment. These ropes with hooks at the ends were used in pulling down the woodwork of a burning house."[5]

Dolabrae

Axes

---

[4]Rodolfo Lanciani, Ancient Rome (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1879), p. 224.

[5]J. Henry Middleton, The Remains of Ancient Rome (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892), p. 255.

Uncinus

Long hooked poles used to pull down walls. A common piece of equipment today as are axes and ladders.

Centones

Patchwork quilts, blankets or mattresses, which may have been used to catch persons jumping from windows or upper stories or to break their fall; however, the weight of opinion indicates that they were probably soaked in water or acetum (below) and used to smother flames and prevent their spreading.

Formiones

Wicker-work mats, probably used also for the same purposes as the centones.

Acetum

This is the most interesting bit of equipment used by the Vigiles to fight fires. Acetum was evidently a chemical fire extinguishing agant and "was enclosed in vessels which were thrown into the fire after the manner of the present-day hand grenade type of fire extinguisher."[6] Its principal use, though, appears to have been to soak the Centones and Formiones.

Ballistae

Each cohort had three such instruments but it is not known as to how they were used and for what purpose. Baillie-Reynolds is the only authority who mentions the instrument and conjectures that it might have been employed to hurl the acetum "grenades" into a fire. Such an assumption is

---

[6] P. K. Baillie-Reynolds, op. cit., p. 97.

> probably near the truth since similar instruments were used by the military in those and later times to project heavy rocks into fortifications and fortified positions.

Police Equipment

Almost nothing is known of the police equipment used by the Vigiles. The only evidence available to illustrate briefly some of their equipment is a gravestone, now in the Vatican Museum, which has an effigy upon it of a long dead member of the Corps. The man it portrays is an officer of rank and his uniform may be substantially different from that of the men in the rank and file.

The figure on the gravestone is not clear due to partial disintegration and the authorities do not agree as to the clothing represented. The man is wearing a military tunic and is carrying a common short sword on his right side. He is not carrying the whip with which some members were equipped to mete out summary punishment to malefactors of the law.

It would seem reasonable to assume that the various ranks were uniformed differently in some respects but it is impossible to surmise any further with any confidence in view of the complete absence of evidence.