

Pig Vigilantes

Joe Check

1969

It has recently come to light that the Detroit Police Department has armed and trained a volunteer force of 1,500 civilians as Emergency Police Reserves.

This force was created after the 1967 Detroit rebellion to aid police in case of another major bid for freedom by the black community or during a natural disaster.

According to information now available, the main function of the reserves in peaceful times is the guarding of police stations against possible attackers.

For example, during July of this year 183 reserves put in 1,200 armed hours guarding four police precincts. Reservists without arms also performed clerical duties at these precincts and accompanied scout patrol cars as unarmed observers.

Lt. Alfred McGhee, in charge of the reserves, said the reserve membership list is not available to the public or the press. McGhee said that making this list public might subject reserves to harassment by groups hostile to their civic involvement.

Thus far the only time the reserves have been activated on a mass basis has been during disturbances following the assassination of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. The reserves put in 22,000 hours following the assassination.

There is no record presently available of what they guarded, who they were, where they were deployed or if they made arrests. According to McGhee, they do not have special arrest powers, but use "citizen's arrest" powers available to everyone.

McGhee did not comment on whether a citizen with a badge, a rifle and official police sanction does in fact command more power in attempting this type of arrest than a citizen who lacks these aids.

The reserves are issued rifles and badges by the police department but supply their own boots and green fatigues. They do not have to pass any written test to qualify or have to meet any minimal education requirements, but they cannot have a police record or be a member of any organization considered "subversive" by the FBI.

They attend 14 hours of class lectures, according to McGhee, and can load their own rifles, which they fire at least twice a year.

Although it is illegal for citizens to carry handguns, even citizen-reserves, the reserves are encouraged to practice pistol shooting at the police range. The department feels that the reserves are qualified and well trained to act during a civil disturbance.

Speaking in a recent interview, McGhee said, "We all hope we'll never have to call out the reserves."

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