

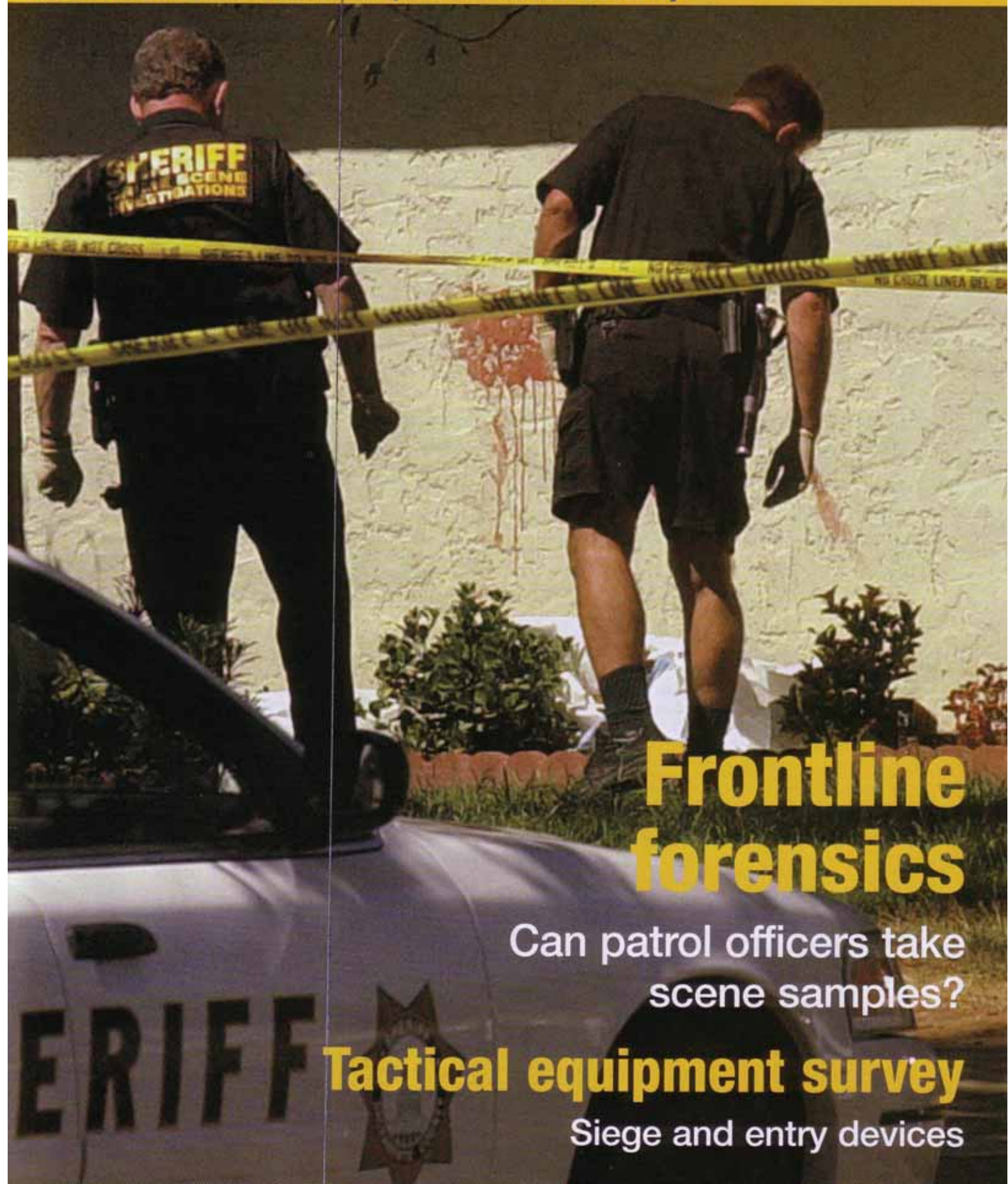
Jane's

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Frontline forensics

Can patrol officers take
scene samples?

Tactical equipment survey

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Integrate to accumulate

New technology can save money and improve performance.

Sue Lampard looks at how the UK's Surrey Police has integrated control room and contact centre systems with significant results

Technology has got smarter. It is now common for police forces to integrate systems and the information they contain. Information and technology are both central to the smooth running of control rooms and contact centres – so where better for forces to start integrating their systems?

Since taking over as head of operational support and communications at Surrey Police, one of my goals has been to do just that. The process is not complete, but for other forces considering "technology-enabled, people-empowering" programmes of this kind, the benefits are measurable.

Our dispatch performance has steadily improved, with the priority attendance (within one hour) category up by eight per cent. More efficient call handling has led to a year-on-year drop in the number of crime calls of nearly 20 per cent compared to the level of crime reported, and we have also used technology to cut the number of crime reports we need to produce by around 10 per cent during the same period (November 2007 to November 2008).

Looking at budgets, the force has achieved some £150,000 of efficiency savings (to date) by changing business processes – using the full power of our Intergraph I/CAD command and control system and by multi-skilling staff. The same approach has been visible outside our contact centre in the form of a pilot project that looks set to transform stop and account reporting through smarter use of I/CAD and Airwave technology.

Old school

Importantly, in all cases, the quality of our policing has benefited from this approach and we are now able to better meet the needs of the public. In many ways, for Surrey Police, new technology has enabled new

ways of working that are more akin to 'old-school policing' – where police being at the heart of communities was always a priority.

Historically, Surrey Police has had a crime recording bureau, a call handling centre for urgent and non-urgent calls, and a central switchboard. A single contact centre with 250 staff provides a 24/7 service. Until recently, they worked in 'silos' where crime recording and call handling, although co-located, had different processes and used different computer systems. Each function had a separate team led by specialist supervisors.

An 18-month programme of multi-skilling the call handlers and crime recording bureau (CRB) recorders has recently been completed and we are already seeing increased resilience in staffing levels. Performance has increased and we are hitting targets for our non-urgent call handling that we have never achieved before – a significant improvement.

There are proposals to take the multi-skilling programme a stage further by cross-skilling a proportion of the contact

centre and dispatch staff with the intention of broadening understanding from both perspectives. This should further reduce the 'silo' effect and improve service delivery through a better understanding of how call handling feeds into dispatch.

As a precondition for this, new recruits must now demonstrate competence as call handlers before being able to move into the incident handling room. This gives them

good experience of I/CAD, geographical knowledge of Surrey and crime recording before they move into a different environment of running fast-time, high pressure incidents.

Information hub

As a previous 'hands on' user of Intergraph's I/CAD, I am aware of its benefits and know there is still more to discover. Increasingly, we are using I/CAD as our technology hub for new, improved ways of working.

We are introducing IP (Internet protocol) telephony, which, in conjunction with an automatic call distributor and new switchboard, will allow a skills-based routing approach, which complements the multi-skilling roll out. We will be able to integrate our 'E-business' transactions via the website into this equation in the future, with the automatic call distributor delivering them as on-screen messages to I/CAD.

Previously, our crime recording team had never used the system. It took an average of 25 minutes (sometimes up to 40) to take an incoming call and record a crime. At peak times a paper-based system to call customers back was used, which was inefficient and did not represent good customer service.

I/CAD includes a button that creates a crime report and we trained our CRB operators to use it for the call-back process. The immediate impact was that CRB staff could view other crime incidents being recorded by colleagues and identify crime patterns. At one stage, a series of thefts from cars was reported and the CRB operator was able to be very proactive by co-ordinating follow-up forensic support and the involvement of the local safer neighbourhood team.

Call volumes have been significantly reduced as customers no longer call back

'New technology has enabled ways of working more akin to old-school policing'

to find out when police will ring or if they missed a call back from CRB. Incidents and crimes are now recorded together, which supports better deployment decision making.

Another key objective has been to allow my contact centre and incident handling staff to have an auto-search facility. This streamlines the process even further by allowing information to be presented from different databases together – rather than

INTEGRATION STATION: The UK's Surrey Police has integrated control room and contact centre systems to enable 'old-school policing'



an operator having to search each one individually. We are building the capability to do this and using software called I/Informer that integrates with I/CAD and allows us to view the Police National Computer database, the national firearms licensing register and potentially many other databases in the future. While not yet running in the operational environment, the data bureau is already using this functionality for criminal records disclosure.

Sign of the times

In much the same way as with our call handling and crime recording business processes, Surrey Police will be applying the 'new technology, new ways of working' approach to mobile policing.

For example, we are now running a successful discretionary Government pilot in the critical area of stop and search and stop and account, using a combination of I/CAD and Airwave technology to enable on-the-beat, on-the-spot reporting at the push of a button, saving time and money and improving accuracy and accountability.

We want to develop this a step further, for use by patrol officers undertaking stop-checks at the roadside. My aim is to enable customers to access our services by post, online, by telephone and text, or face-to-face at a police station. Our new ICT (IT and

SURREY POLICE – TECHNOLOGY OVERVIEW

Surrey Police's command and control technology environment is also used as a hub to integrate intelligent, real-time mapping with the processes of call handling, dispatching, records and information management, remote access, and mobile data.

At the Surrey Police contact centre, the technology streamlines call-handling processes and allows call takers to locate, filter and route calls for service.

The same environment drives Surrey Police's dispatch and resource management functions, using digital mapping that provides operators with a minute-to-minute geographic view of their area of operations. They can monitor the location and status of resources in real time and use an 'automated resource allocation' function to recommend resources for dispatch based on best location and suitability.

Surrey Police's command and control system is also used to integrate voice and data – including internet protocol telephony – and has built-in interfaces to radio and telecommunications systems to allow radio messaging and data distribution.

communications) environment gives us the ability to operate a 'virtual' contact centre – another example of technology enabling new ways of working.

In principle, staff could work in some of our larger stations, closer to home, supervised by the duty manager remotely from their desk at the contact centre HQ. Wherever they are working, in the near future our call handling teams will be using 'I/Q&A' to help them do their job. This technology is

already being used by roadside assistance organisations to structure their call handling in a more service-driven, customer-centred environment.

It is a sign of the times – a very positive one, in my view – that a police force will be prioritising the customer in the same way. ■

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