

February 7, 1963

TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE DEPARTMENT

For several years the Dallas Police Department has had a policy that its Officers will give all possible assistance and furnish all possible information to the representatives of the legitimate news media, except when such assistance would hinder an investigation under way, or when such information concerned Departmental policy or personnel.

The General Order covering this subject is not merely permissive. It does not state that the Officer may, if he so chooses, assist the press. It rather places on him a responsibility to lend active assistance.

There are many reasons for this requirement of assistance. The news media constantly works under deadlines. Frequently, it must arrive at the scene and obtain what it needs immediately, or it is too late for it to be of any value.

Also, as a Department we deal with public affairs. It is the right of the public to know about these affairs, and one of the most accurate and useful avenues we have of supplying this information is through the newspapers and radio and television stations.

Implied in the General Order is a prohibition for the Officer to improperly attempt to interfere with the news media representative, who is functioning in his capacity as such. Such activity on the part of any Police Officer is regarded by the press as an infringement of rights, and the Department shares this view.

Twice within a week we have received justified complaints that members of this Department have actively interfered with newsmen in their proper performance of their duties.

In the first instance the Officer stated that in his opinion a photographer taking pictures of persons involved in an automobile accident was using bad taste. The Officer is entitled to his opinion. He may believe what he chooses. But he must exercise great caution that his personal opinions do not lead him into improper official action.

We are responsible for the enforcement of the law. Certainly we would not be fulfilling this responsibility if we permitted a newsmen, or any other person, to violate the law in our presences. But we have not been appointed the supervisors of the tastes of the news media. We have no right to impose what we believe to be a proper sense of responsibility on anyone. Our standard must be the law. If a law has been broken, or we have reasonable cause to believe one is about to be broken, we have the responsibility to act. If such is not the case, we have a responsibility of silence..

In another instance newsmen were kept at the scene of a police incident for more than an hour awaiting the arrival of specialists who would assume command of the investigation before they were permitted to take pictures. They were not barred from the scene. They were permitted to approach as closely as they would have needed to take their pictures. But they were not permitted to take those pictures. They believed this to be another infringement of their rights. The Department agrees.

We have no right, of course, to permit newsmen onto private property when the owner of such property does not want them there. This the newsmen understand. As in the past, information concerning policy of the Department or of its personnel will be released by the Chief of Police, or by his authorized representative. But newsmen have a right to cover incidents occurring in a public place without unwarranted interference by the police.

General Order 61, which governs the contact of the Officer and the newsmen, should be obeyed, just as all other rules and regulations of the Department should be obeyed. The importance the Department places on this cannot be overemphasized. It will be necessary in the future for violation of this General Order to be considered an adequate cause for disciplinary action.

J. E. Curry
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CHIEF OF POLICE

Talbert, Cecil E. Exhibit 2