

Who Are the Forgotten Soldiers?

BY CHRISTOPHER A. HERTIG, CPP

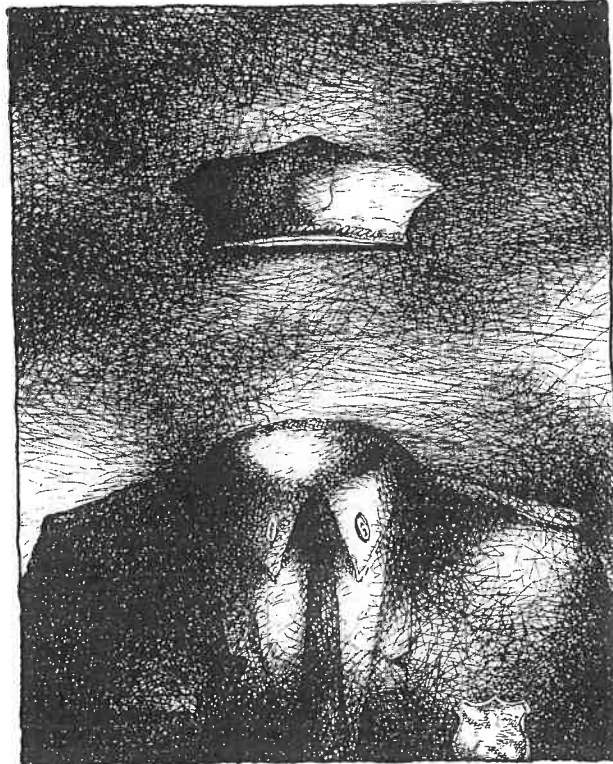
PRIVATE SECURITY IS the invisible empire of criminal justice, largely unseen by the public, whether from the perspective of protective services or career path. Private security is undervalued in criminal justice literature and seldom recognized for the growing importance it plays in society. Similarly, security officers are the forgotten soldiers of this empire, almost totally ignored in the literature and given little in the way of professional standards and training.

The lack of recognition hurts both the security industry and the public. Too few students are entering the industry, and too few colleges and vocational schools are educating and training people for security roles.

Ask a class of college freshmen majoring in criminal justice what courses they intend to concentrate on, and almost all will say law enforcement. A few may mention corrections, and an occasional student will say security.

People often equate the security industry with police work. Many people are surprised when they learn more job opportunities are available in security than in law enforcement, and they are even more amazed that colleges and universities offer degrees in security management.

Public perception about the industry has not changed much over the past decade. Although police are developing an awareness of the security industry, the average citizen is not. This ignorance exists for several reasons. Criminal justice textbooks do not devote much space to private security. Introductory textbooks skim over the topic—usually in a chapter on law enforcement



issues—giving students little insight into private security.

Similarly, textbooks on criminal investigations fail to include information about private investigations and undercover operations. Although most textbooks contain a chapter on crime scene investigation, little is mentioned about the private security role in the preliminary investigation process, even though that role is likely to grow in the years ahead.

In addition, many people simply do not understand the connection between public and private security. While it is inaccurate to equate private security with criminal justice or law enforcement, private security often works in conjunction with criminal justice and law enforcement. For example, private security personnel are often the ones who first apprehend and question a suspected criminal. A number of people

are turned over to the police by private security forces, though accurate statistics are unavailable.

Another reason for the poor understanding of the public and private security relationship is the lack of information available to the public. Bookstores, for example, carry little information on security. In general, novelists have not focused on writing about private security. Also, the movie and television industries rarely portray the security industry. Such portrayal could serve to better educate the public.

The industry itself does not help the situation. Security departments rarely publicize their activities, particularly those involving the criminal justice system. When private security personnel apprehend criminals, police officers—not security officers—make the statements to the media.

When security is discussed, most of the attention is on management. Security officers are ignored. Studies such as the National Private Security Officer Survey indicate that many employers do not even train security officers, which implies a lack of visibility or status in the organization for personnel at that level.

Furthermore, most states do not have training requirements for security officers. Of those that do, the requirements are for select groups of officers, such as armed personnel or contract officers. Proprietary guard forces are generally not included in state training requirements. One exception is the New York state guard standard legislation, which will become effective when regulations are issued in 1994.

Even where standards are in place, *continued on page 95*

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they are minimal at best, and enforcement may be nonexistent. Clearly, the public has not clamored loudly enough at this time to ensure quality training for security officers.

Most literature is geared toward management. Professional publications are almost exclusively devoted to security managers. Only a few newsletters focus on security officers. Most security textbooks are also oriented toward management. Not many focus on the officer's role, although this trend is changing.

Unlike security managers, security officers have few opportunities for networking through professional organizations. The International Foundation for Protection Officers only recently began to offer associate memberships to private security officers in response to numerous requests. A few state crime prevention officer associations admit security officers as members, but the majority of crime prevention organizations consist of law enforcement and community action personnel and do not accept others into their membership.

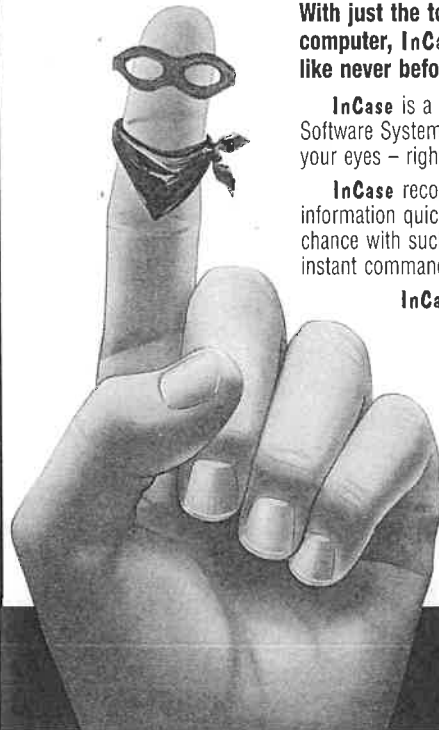
Security professionals who are concerned about the industry's lack of visibility should voice their concerns by contacting textbook publishers, college criminal justice program coordinators, high school guidance counselors, and vocational school directors. School and public libraries must be persuaded to acquire books on security.

Local ASIS chapters should sponsor workshops for security officers, security officer recognition nights, and security officer-of-the-month awards. Appropriate publications should be persuaded to include articles on security officer functions, which managers can read and pass on to subordinates.

These are a few suggestions to remedy an intolerable situation. Security professionals need to develop public recognition for the industry and the people in it. At the same time, a sense of pride, belonging, and professionalism for security officers needs to be established. Security professionals should not be invisible nor should security officers be forgotten. ■

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