

How Comanche County Slows Crime

RUNNING counter to current trends, cops are staying even with and may be a little ahead of robbers in Comanche County, says Dick W. Tannery of Lawton, district attorney for Comanche and Cotton counties.

Total crime for the state showed a 7.9 percent increase for the first nine months of 1980 compared to 1979. Crime in Comanche County is up less than 1 percent. This formerly was rated a high incidence crime area. What is the reason for the difference?

Tannery attributes it to two policies he put into effect when the 36-year-old prosecutor took office two years ago. He believes that tough prosecution deters crime, and he believes that taking those who habitually commit crimes out of the community and incarcerating them reduces the amount of repeat crimes committed.

His policy of tough prosecution does not include "plea bargaining," a practice whereby prosecutors agree with defense attorneys on specified punishment in exchange for guilty pleas. Because judges

usually follow such recommendations, this frequently results in light sentences. It also enables prosecutors to avoid considerable work.

If a defendant decides to plead guilty, Tannery declines to recommend punishment, leaving that to the judge. If the defendant prefers to face trial by jury, Tannery is ready to prosecute.

"When you find 12 people out of 40 who throw up their hands and plead guilty instead of going to trial, it shows something for no plea bargaining," Tannery said when that happened in one docket.

Prosecuting attorneys may argue that plea bargaining saves expense and avoids overloaded dockets, but Tannery says Comanche County courts are not behind in their work and could handle more cases.

During the first half of 1980, the district attorney's office had 132 cases on docket. Of these, 27 defendants pleaded guilty before trial, 56 were convicted by jury and 13 were found innocent. A total of 352 years imprisonment and \$28,750 in fines were imposed.

"If people who sit on juries real-

ized that persons convicted of crimes in Oklahoma seldom serve more than a quarter of the time they're sentenced to serve, juries would mete out stiffer penalties," Tannery said.

When Jim Kirk, chairman of the state board of corrections, said "I think the people are sick and tired of seeing their money go for more concrete and steel" in building more prisons, Tannery responded that more prisons need to be built and kept on prosecuting.

"I am totally against the reduction of the prison population by making it easier for the criminals, and I am against the lessening of sentences," he said, blaming the legislature for seeking easy solutions to crime problems instead of providing money for more prisons.

There still is plenty of crime and law-breaking in Comanche County, but it is not flourishing as it is elsewhere. Perhaps a statewide turn-around could be accomplished if all prosecutors cut out plea bargaining for short sentences and juries got a little tougher everywhere.