The Portuguese who controlled certain areas of the maritime provinces of Sri Lanka did not effect any serious changes to the existing system of civil administration of the Country. The Dutch, who arrived in Sri Lanka in 1602, were able to bring the Maritime Provinces and the Jaffna Peninsula under their rule by 1658.

The concept of policing in Sri Lanka started with the Dutch who saddled the Military with the responsibility of policing the City of Colombo. In the year 1659 the Colombo Municipal Council adopted a resolution to appoint paid guards to protect the city by night. Accordingly, four fat and slow soldiers were appointed to patrol the city by night. Hence they could be considered as the fore-runners of the police in the country. It was the Dutch who established the earliest police stations. Three Police Stations were initially opened: one at the northern entrance to the Fort, second at the cause-way connecting Fort and Pettah and a third at Kayman's Gate in the Pettah. In addition to these the “Maduwa” or the office of Disawa of Colombo, who was a Dutch official at Hulftsdorp, also served as a Police Station for these suburbs.

The British Period:
The Dutch surrendered to the British on the 16th February 1796. After the occupation of the City by the British, law and order were, for some time, maintained by the Military. In 1797 the office of Fiscal, which had been abolished was re created. Governor Fredric North, having found that the Fiscal was over-burdened with the additional duty of supervising the police, obtained the concurrence of the Chief Justice and entrusted the Magistrates and Police Judges with the task of supervising the Police.

1805 police functions came to be clearly defined. Apart from matters connected with the safety, comfort and convenience of the people, police functions also came to be connected with prevention and detection of crime and maintenance of law and order. The rank of police constable was created and it came to be associated with all types of police work. Act No. 14 of 1806 the City of Colombo was divided into 15 divisions and Police Constables were appointed to supervise the divisions.

The National Police
The Governor, who was looking for a dynamic person to reorganize the police in the island, turned to India to obtain the services of a capable officer. The Governor of Bombay recommended Mr. G. W. R. Campbell, who was in charge of the “Rathnagheri rangers” of the Bombay Police, to shoulder this onerous responsibility. Mr. Campbell was selected by the Governor and he assumed duties as the Chief Superintendent of Police on the 3rd of September 1866. In 1867, by an amendment to the Police Ordinance No. 16 of 1865, the designation of the Head of the Police Force was changed from Chief Superintendent to Inspector-General of Police. Therefore, 3rd of September 1866 can be considered as the beginning of the country’s present Police Service.

Mr. Campbell is credited with shaping the Police Force into an efficient organization and giving it a distinct identity. He brought the whole island under his purview and the police became a national rather than a local Force.
First Superintendent of Police & his Staff
Mr. Thomas Oswin, Secretary to the Chief Justice, was appointed the first Superintendent of Police of Colombo, C.M. Schubert was appointed as the Chief Constable, 5 Dutch Constables, 10 Police Sergeants and 150 Peons were also appointed. Mr. Lokubanda Dunuwila, who was the Disawa of Uva, was appointed as the Superintendent of Police for Kandy. He goes into history as the very first Sri Lankan to be a Superintendent of Police. Mr. Colepeper was entrusted with the task of re-organizing the Colombo Police. He divided the Force into three classes of officers – the Inspectors, the Sergeants and the Constables. The new rank of Peon was abolished. In 1847 the ranks of Assistant Superintendent of Police and Sub Inspector of Police were created. Inspector De La Harpe was promoted as the first Assistant Superintendent of Police.

First Sri Lankan Inspector General
On the 1st of June 1947 Sir Richard Aluvihare, was the first Sri Lankan to hold the office of Inspector General, assumed duties. The Police Department, which was under the Home Ministry, was brought under the purview of the Defense Ministry Sir Richard was faced with the unenviable responsibility of transforming the Police Force from its colonial outlook to a National Police with the gaining of independence 1948. To this end he introduced a large number of innovative measures, which embraced the welfare of the men, investigation, prevention and detection of crime, the women police, crime prevention societies, rural volunteers, police kennels, public relations, new methods of training and improvement of conditions of service. He transformed the Police Force into a Police Service. Its role was narrowly defined and restricted to the maintenance of law and order and prevention and detection of crime.

The Traffic Administration and Road Safety Range has been formed under the supervision of a DIG at the Police Headquarters for the purpose of bringing under its control the growing number of motor vehicles that converge on to the main thoroughfares everyday. This Range is also responsible for the prevention of motor accidents from occurring, together with protecting property from such motor accidents, and also issuing circular instructions to all the Territorial Police in order to implement a better traffic management in the county. In order to carry out these tasks in an organized manner throughout the country, Traffic Branches have been formed in each of the Police Stations in the County. Range Traffic Divisions also have been set-up to supervise and guide these traffic branches who should liaise with the respective Range DIG’s and the Police Headquarters Traffic Range.

In addition, there are awareness-building programmes, which are being carried out which various segment of society as target groups in order to give them an orientation on the correct usage of roads.

With a view to curb the high incidence of crime in the country, which is assuming alarming proportions, Range Crime Detection Branches have been established in all the Police Stations. These Range Branches are headed by Senior Gazetted Officers.

There is also a Division in the Police titled as Bureau for the Prevention of Abuse of Children & Women that is assigned with the task of taking different action against all crime perpetrated on women and children, which ranges from physical violence to sexual abuse.

There also facilities available to them for their complaints to be recorded by female Police Officers and that too in a place away from public gaze so as to insulate them from any derisive
comment by uncouth elements that would affect their self-respect. Specially selected Officers attached to all the Police Stations in the country have been trained by this Bureau to carry out these services island-wide.

The growing menace of drug addiction that is assuming alarming proportions particularly among the youth segment of our society is in constant check with the establishment of the Police Narcotic Bureau, based in the Police Headquarters. Also, every Police Officer is being given the necessary training on how they should deal with such instances of drug addiction. These steps have been taken because the Police is conscious of the need to wipe out this scourge from our society as soon as possible.

Also, in order to provide protection to Police informants, strict measures are being taken not to expose them by revealing their identity to general public. Provision is also available for any member of the general public to convey to the Police any information relating to crime committed or about to be committed, even through anonymous telephone messages or letters, all which will be entertained and looked into. This would provide a fool-proof method for such Police informants to perform their tasks unhindered and without any danger of their identity being revealed, which would otherwise have serious consequences to them for being duty-conscious in their obligations to society. This information can be furnished either to the respective Police station or to 1-1-9 Emergency Service. As an encouragement to such civic-conscious citizens to bring to the notice of the Police vital information that will lead to the detection and apprehension of offenders, there is provision for informants to be rewarded handsomely as an incentive for their public-spirited initiatives.

The Police of today in principle is committed to serve the needs of the people in particular. In order to do so, its personnel are expected to treat them with fraternal care which attitude should be well understood by both the Police and the general public. For, it should be borne in mind that when there is a need to make a complaint or seek redress the public almost invariably have to go to the Police Station close to them. If under such an atmosphere of cordiality, investigations into such complaints are conducted with mutual goodwill and understanding, then, it will be possible to develop a healthy relationship between the Police and the neighboring community that comes within their area. It is therefore from such Police officers who have the qualities of leadership, honesty and efficiency that civil society would be benefited in no measure.

It is duty cast on us, this occasion when we are commemorating the 147 Anniversary of the establishment of the Police service in our country, to recall with gratitude the great sacrifices of all those officers who have preceded the present generation of such officers, even at the cost of their own precious lives. They had done so in that manner in the course of carrying out their duties conscientiously not only to maintain law and order in the country but also to preserve its territorial integrity in the midst of so many odds. In this regard, the risk taken by the Special Task Force which was set up in 1983, cannot be allowed to pass unnoticed which, to say the least, is an example to the rest of their brethren in the Police Service today. They also play a key role in providing security to VIPs.

Presently there are 43 Territorial Divisions 67 Functional Divisions 432 Police Stations with strength of more than 84,000. We also consider this occasion to be opportune to extend a hearty handshake to all those who continue to serve the Police Service today with dedication and devotion in order or uphold the hoary traditions their predecessors have left behind for them to emulate and to solicit the public cooperation as stake holders of policing.

To fulfill the expectations of the General Public, future policing activities have been planned out,
where the society should be made free of fear of crime mainly. Few activities, which are to be completed and implemented during the year 2007, are Closed Circuit Television Surveillance System to strengthen the security in Colombo City, Automated Finger Print Identification System to track criminals efficiently, establishment of Scene of Crime Labs in all 43 Police Territorial Divisions well equipped and manned with specially trained Scene of Crime Officers for enhancing capacity of crime investigations and establishment of Central Criminal Intelligence Electronic Database for intelligence led policing.

1796: - The Dutch Surrendered to the British on the 16th Feb 1796.

1797: - The office of Fiscal was created and Fredric Barron Mylius was appointed as Fiscal of Colombo and entrusted with responsibility of policing the City of Colombo.

1806: - The regulation No. 6 of 1806, appointed a Police Vidane to each village, for prevention and detection of crime in rural area.

1832: - A committee appointed by the governor was instructed to form a police force. It was decided by this committee that this new police force was to be funded by a tax to be paid by the public. It consisted of One Superintendent, One Chief Constable, Five Constables, Ten Sergeants and 150 Peons. They were responsible for maintaining law and order in the capital city of Colombo.

1844: - As the police force was restricted to coastal areas only, a second police force was created to cater to the hill country.

1858: - The police force in the coastal area and the Police force in the hill country were unified to make one Police force.

1864: - The first death of a police officer whilst on duty occurred when he attempted to apprehend a brigand by the name of "Saradiel" who was subsequently compared to "Robin Hood" of "Sherwood forest".

1865: - The Police Ordinance was enacted to stipulate powers and responsibilities of policemen.
1866: - Mr. "William Robert Campbell" then the chief of police in the Indian province of Rathnageri, was appointed as Chief Superintendent of Police in Sri Lanka to be in charge of the Police Force on 03.09.1866. Therefore, the 3rd of September 1866 is considered as the beginning of Sri Lanka Police Service.

1867: - The Chief of Police was designated as the Inspector General of Police. Accordingly Mr. "William Robert Campbell" became the first Inspector General of Police. The Police Headquarters was found at Maradana, in the City of Colombo.

1870: - Muslim rioters attacked the Police Headquarters. The Police were successful in repulsing the attack, but the building of the Police Headquarters was damaged. In this year the Criminal Investigations Department (C.I.D.) was formed.

1879: - The strength of the Police force had tripled from 585 when IGP Campbell was appointed, to a force of 1528. The first police firing range, training college and the publishing of the annual administration report emerged during this year.

1882: - Two three-wheel bicycles were obtained for transportation. These were the first vehicles obtained by the Police force.

1892: - The Depot Police presently known as the Field Force Headquarters was formed. Uniforms and housing were made free for Police officers as well as the payment of a Good Conduct Allowance was initiated.

1908: - Finger printing and photographing of criminals were initiated along with the direct recruitment to the rank of Assistant Superintendents of Police during this year.

1913: - Mr. "Herbert Layard Dowbiggin" was appointed as the 8th Inspector General of Police. 119 Police stations were in operation with a total strength of 2306.

1915: - For the first time two officers were appointed as Deputy Inspectors General of Police.

1916: - 0.22 Caliber rifles were issued in place of shotguns.

1920: - For the first time police officers were deployed for the purpose of controlling traffic.

1923: - A book containing comprehensive details regarding all aspects of the Police called the "Departmental Order Book" was formulated.

1926: - The Sport Division was established.

1930: - A handbook of traffic rules and regulations was issued for traffic duties.
1932: - The Police Headquarters was shifted from Maradana to its present location in Colombo Fort.

1938: - Police telephone boxes were deployed throughout the city of Colombo.

1942: - Temporary forces were employed, known as Temporary Police Constables.

1945: - Police units were deployed at all hospitals. In addition Police units were also deployed for Railway security. However the following year, the Railway Police force was discontinued as a necessity did not arise.

1950: - The Police Uniform was changed. The five bronze buttons in the uniform tunic were changed to silver buttons. Furthermore the four point, army type star worn by Sub Inspectors and above was changed to a six point star.

1952: - Women were enrolled to the Police force for the first time. VHF Radios were introduced for communication. It was decided that in honor of police officers killed in the line of duty state funerals with full police honors would be held. In addition the Police flag would be flown at half mast throughout the country.

1954: - Police stations were graded into five classifications viz. Grade “E” to Grade “A”. The grading of Police stations were considered depending on the work load, population, locality, crimes, important Institutions etc., in the area.

1955: - Policemen were afforded the following benefits:
* Free medical service
* Free railway transport
* House rent allowance for officers below the rank of Chief Inspector
* Transport allowance
* Pension on retirement.

1963: - Divisions in the Police were made as North, Central, South, Administration & Criminal Investigation Department. Mr. D. B. I. P. S. Siriwardane, a Civil servant was the first civilian to be appointed as the Deputy Inspector of Police in charge of Administration.

1966: - The Police Public Relations Division was established on 1st October 1966, at Police Headquarters, Colombo.

1972: - The Crime Detective Bureau was started on 1st August 1972.

1973: - On the 01st of April 1973 the Police Narcotics Bureau was started and The Colombo Fraud Investigation Bureau too was established.

1974: - The Police uniforms for Constables and Sergeants was changed.

1976: - The rank of Woman Police Sub Inspector was introduced. 2 Women police officers were promoted to the rank of Sub Inspector.


1979: - The Children & Women Bureau was established.


1985: - A new promotion scheme was introduced from the rank of Police Constable up to the rank of Inspector of Police.

1988: - A Woman Police Inspector was promoted to the rank of Assistant Superintendent of Police

1988: - The Western Province Intelligence Division was established.

1989: - Women were recruited and enlisted as Sub Inspectors.

1990: - Police Public Relations were enhanced by the three triangle system of involving the Police, Schools, and places of worship.

1990: - Police Sport Division was established.

1991:- The IG's Command Room was established.

1993: - The Police Information Technology Division was established.


1998: - The Marine Division was established.

1999: - The Ombudsman Division was established.

2000: - The Police Examination Division was established.

2002: - The Police Human right Division was established.

2002: - The Disappearances Investigation Unit was established.

2004: - The Judicial Security Division was established.

2005: - The Colombo Crime Division was established.