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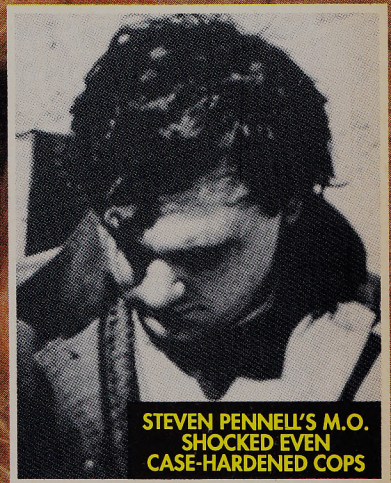
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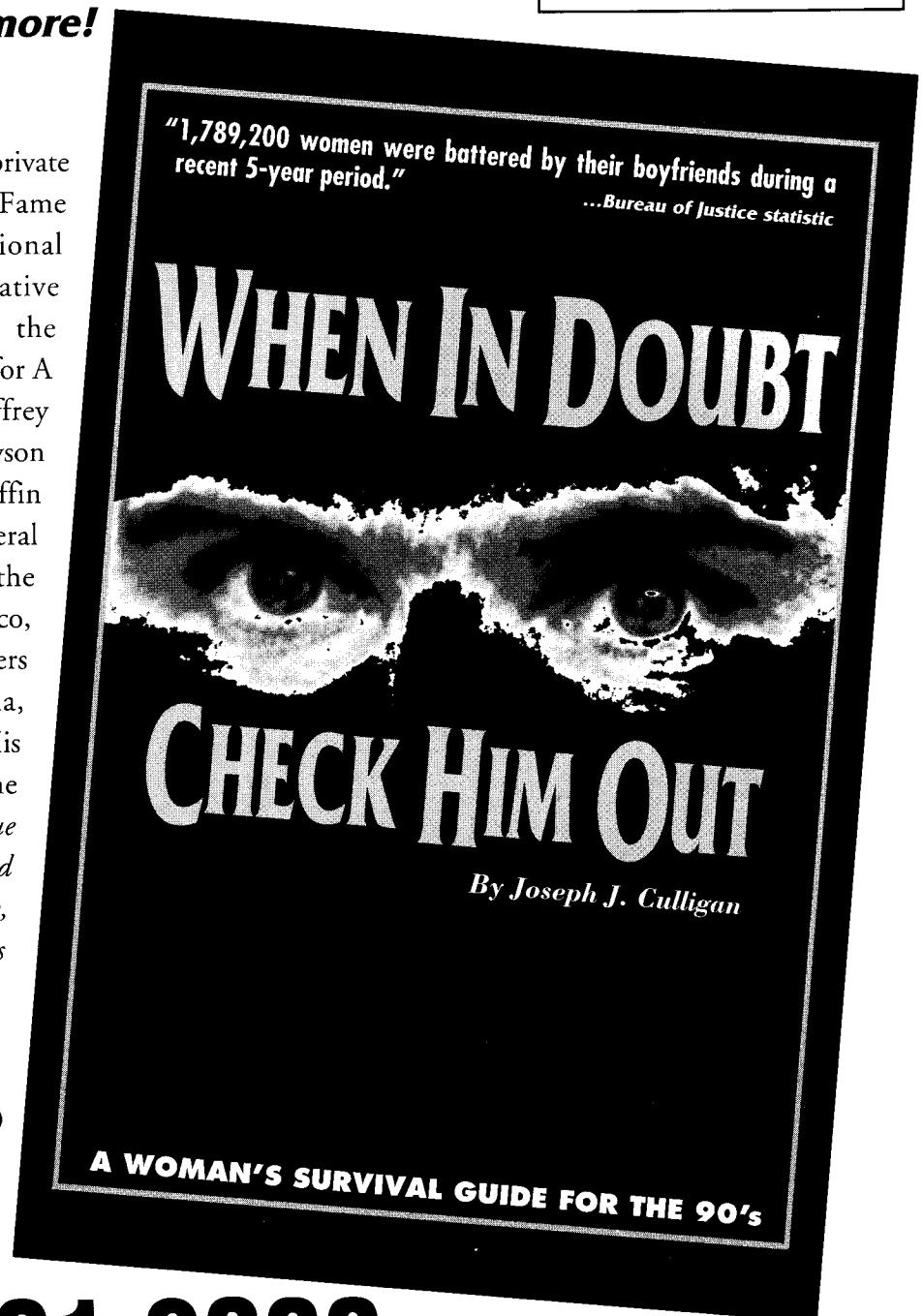
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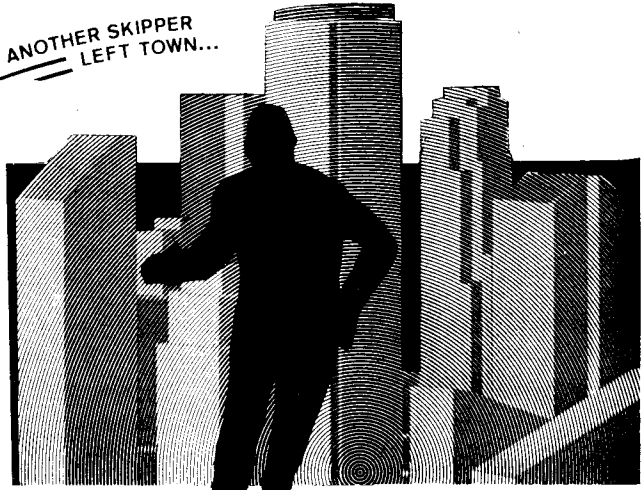
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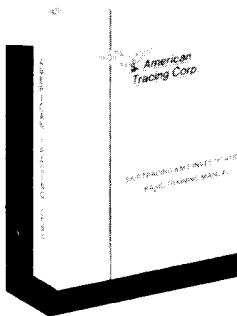
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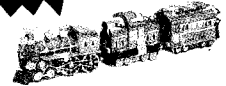
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\*Hint: the product that brought him that huge order is pictured on this page. Can you guess which one? (Read on, and find out!)

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As a rookie cop in August 1986, Renee Lano, now a detective, went through an unnerving hazing when she offered herself as a human decoy for a bloodthirsty killer.



Detective Renee Lano put her life on the line to

# Get Delaware's Serial Killer/ Rapist/Butcher

**Eight months after learning the nuts and bolts of police work, the attractive cop put it all into practice by posing as a hooker along the highways to lure a vicious serial killer who wouldn't be stopped.**

by STEVEN BARRY

**R**ENE LANO was a cadet at the New Castle County Police Academy when the first murder took place. At the time, she was too busy learning the nuts and bolts of police work to pay any attention to it. But just eight months later, when the case developed into the first serial killing episode in the history of Delaware, the attractive 23-year-old blonde woman would be asked to put her life on the line. Night after night, Renee Lano would offer herself as a human decoy for a diabolical killer who was stalking and butchering young women.

It all began on Sunday, November 29, 1987.

By 9:30 p.m., the temperature had dropped into the mid-40s, and it was drizzling as a young couple pulled into a lovers' lane behind the Old Baltimore Pike Industrial Park some 10 miles

south of Wilmington. They did not even have a chance to park when the couple saw a body lying on the ground. They left at once and phoned the Delaware State Police.

Joe Swiski was a ruggedly handsome 32-year-old man with close-cropped dark hair. After nine years as a state trooper, he'd been assigned to the major crimes unit just two months earlier and this was his first homicide investigation.

The body, still warm, was that of a young white female, 5-foot-6 and 165 pounds, who was nude except for a pair of turquoise sweatpants that had been pulled down around her calves. Her skull had been crushed, and blood was soaking her shoulder-length dark hair. Her entire body had been badly bruised. Strangulation marks ringed her throat. But what caught Trooper Swiski's attention most of all was the duct tape that was binding the victim's hands and feet and the fact that one of her nipples had

been torn off her body.

Evidence technicians searched the crime scene all night but failed to uncover a single piece of evidence. Furthermore, they were unable to establish whether the murder had taken place where the body had been discovered or somewhere else.

Meanwhile, the body was transported to the medical examiner's office for autopsy. Using fingerprint comparisons, the M.E. identified the victim as 23-year-old Shirley Ellis and narrowed the cause of death to any one of three violent blows to the head—each of which had driven shards of bone into the victim's brain. He described the murder weapon as a blunt instrument, most likely a hammer.

The next morning, Trooper Swiski drove to Brookmont Farms, a housing subdivision on U.S. Route 40 about three miles from where the body had been found. There, relatives told him





The same year Lano graduated from police academy, five women disappeared from this strip between U.S. Routes 13 and 40. One was never found. Four turned up dead.

that the victim had left the house around 6:00 p.m. on Sunday to visit a friend in a Wilmington hospital. They said Shirley left on foot and had been wearing turquoise sweatpants, a denim jacket with a pink hood, and white high-top sneakers.

That evening, Swiski stopped at a convenience store on Route 40, directly across from the entrance to Brookmont Farms. A clerk told him he remembered that Shirley Ellis had stopped at the store shortly after 6:00 on Sunday evening, bought a pack of cigarettes and one red rose, then left to hitch a ride toward Wilmington.

At the hospital, Trooper Swiski interviewed the victim's friend. The friend verified the victim's visit and said that Shirley left the hospital at 7:30. But that was as far as the state trooper could trace the victim's last steps. From there,

Swiski theorized, Shirley must have hitched a ride home from the hospital and gotten picked up by a deranged psychopath who tortured her, mutilated her, then dumped her body. The whole gruesome deed had taken place between 7:30, when Shirley had left the hospital, and 9:30, when the body was found—a difference of just two hours.

Renee Lano graduated from the police academy three months later in February 1988 and became a rookie cop with the New Castle County Police Department. The rookies called themselves "road grunts" and Renee traveled from community to community within her jurisdiction, responding to complaints and trying to resolve domestic disputes before they escalated into violence or actual crimes.

In the meantime, no progress had been made in the Shirley Ellis homicide



Veteran sleuths Joe Swiski (l.) and Jim Hedrick, charged with finding the serial killer, received invaluable assistance from a brave newcomer named Renee Lano.

and none would be forthcoming for another four months. To Joe Swiski, it was beginning to look as if his first murder case would remain unsolved.

Then, at 6:30 a.m. on June 29, 1988, construction workers found the second body.

"It looks like she was pushed out of a car," one of the workers told the New Castle County PD dispatcher, "and she's beat all to hell. The back of her head's crushed and her body's all covered with bruises."

Jim Hedrick responded to a construction site three miles from where Shirley Ellis' body had been found and a mile from where she'd last been seen. At 32, Hedrick was a sandy-haired man with a receding hairline and neatly-trimmed mustache and he could easily pass for a college professor or businessman. Instead, he was a homicide detective and what he found was shocking, even for someone with nine years of police work under his belt.

The nude body was that of a white female about 30 years of age. Duct tape bound her hands and feet, and her breasts had been mutilated. Hedrick, who had familiarized himself with the state police investigation of the Shirley Ellis case, recognized the similarities between the two victims at a glance.

Hedrick shut down the construction site and called for help. For most of the day, state police helicopters, 21 police academy cadets, and a pair of mounted policemen searched the dirt piles and excavations for clues. But, as in the case of Shirley Ellis, none were found.

That afternoon, family members identified the victim as Cathy DiMauro, 31 years old and a divorced mother of three small children. She had lived at the Greenfield Manor Apartments on U.S. 40 and had last been seen at home on the day before the construction workers discovered the body.

The M.E. listed the cause of death as a series of blows to the head, administered by a hammer. He vacuumed the body and recovered nearly two dozen different types of fibers—the most prevalent of which were blue ones.

That night, Hedrick called Swiski to compare notes. Both women were young and white. They lived near one another and both were frequent hitchhikers on U.S. 40. They both died from hammer blows to the head, they'd both been tied hand and foot by duct tape, and both had suffered breast mutilations. Based on that conversation, the two investigators struck up a partnership.



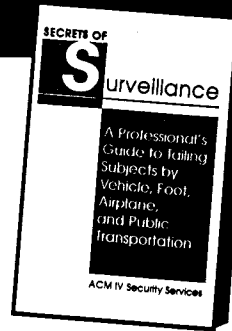
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A Professional's Guide to Tailing Subjects by Vehicle, Foot, Airplane, and Public Transportation

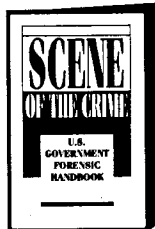
by ACM IV Security Services

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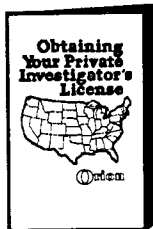
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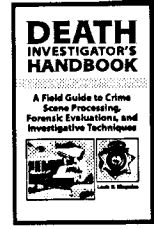
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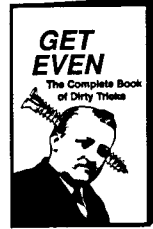
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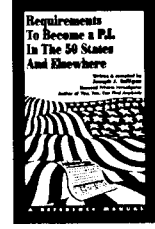
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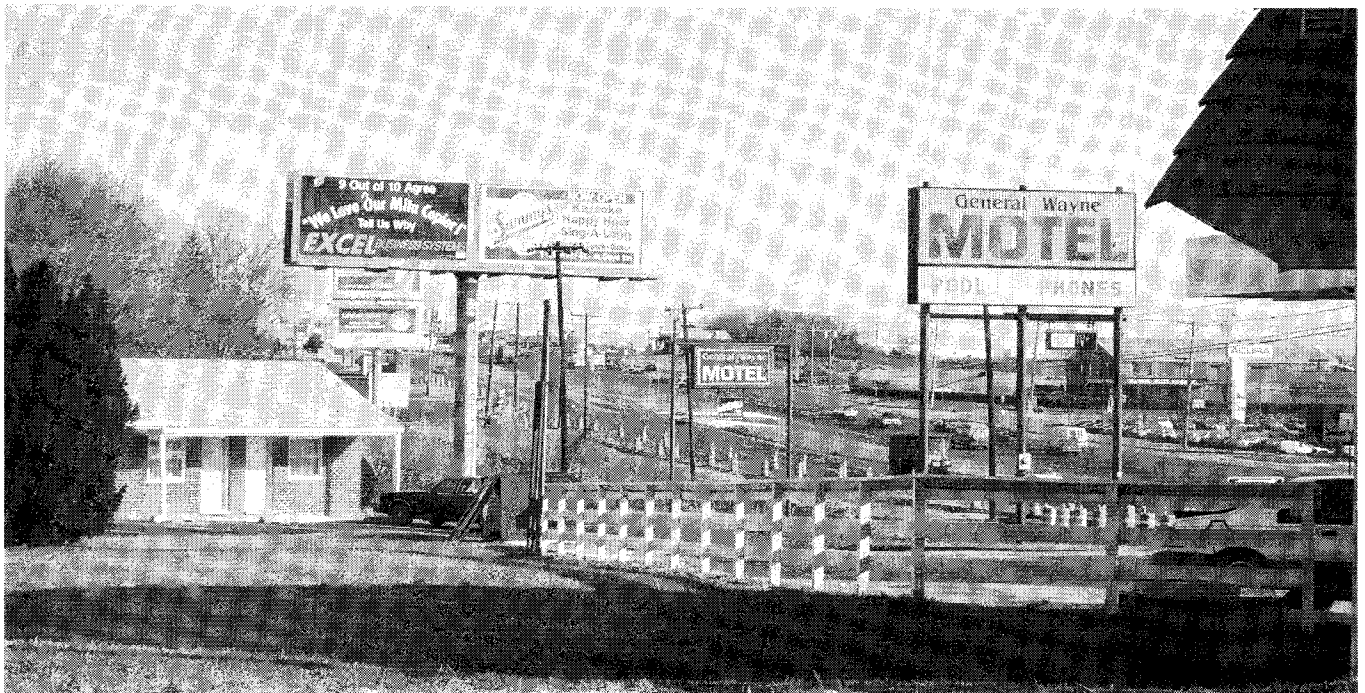
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Hookers were the killer's prime prey. The third victim, Maragaret Finner, was seen getting into a blue van near this motel.

They drove to the FBI offices in Washington and met with Special Agent John Edward Douglas. Ten years earlier, Douglas had helped design the FBI's Criminal Investigation Analysis Program, more commonly referred to as the Behavioral Science Unit, where criminologists analyzed violent crimes, interviewed the perpetrators, and catalogued the psychological profiles of murderers. In the course of his work, Special Agent Douglas had personally interviewed Charles Manson, Richard Speck, John Wayne Gacy, and David "Son of Sam" Berkowitz.

"When we first talked to the FBI," Hedrick would say later, "they told us we had the beginnings of a serial killer case. And they told us: Serial killers don't stop killing. You will continue to get bodies until this individual is apprehended."

Special Agent Douglas explained that serial killers always kill three or more people, allowing a cooling-off period after each killing. Douglas said this M.O. differed from mass murderers, who kill four or more victims in separate incidents, and from spree killers, who kill their victims without cooling-off periods until they're caught or commit suicide.

"There's a lot of fantasy involved," Douglas told the Delaware investigators, "and serial killers like to keep mementos from their kills. Above all, serial killers are not stupid people; their IQ is generally between one hundred

and one-forty-five."

For the next two weeks, the Behavioral Science Unit analyzed the data Hedrick and Swiski had given them. Then Agent Douglas phoned Delaware.

"The man you're looking for," he said, "is a white male between twenty-five and thirty-four. He lives near the sites of the killings, and he's employed as a carpenter, a mason, or an electrician."

Douglas also recommended the use of a decoy.

In the era before interstate highways, the U.S. 13/U.S. 40 corridor south of Wilmington—called the South DuPont Highway—had been the main route connecting New England, New York, and Philadelphia with Baltimore, Washington, and points south all the way down to Miami. Today, despite the construction of I-95, heavy traffic still flows along the eight-lane confluence of roadways that interconnect Wilmington with downstate Delaware and Maryland. The U.S. 13/U.S. 40 corridor is a string of gas stations, restaurants, motels, adult book stores, trailer parks, apartment complexes, and housing developments—and it has an abundance of hookers.

While the newspapers stopped short of calling Shirley Ellis and Cathy DiMauro prostitutes, the innuendo existed. It was a known fact that both women walked and hitchhiked along that strip and that more than 60 prostitution arrests had been made in the same spot

during the previous year.

Up until this point, Swiski and Hedrick had been interviewing everyone remotely involved with the businesses along the strip. They parked outside of porno shops, copied down license numbers, and traced the customers. Inside the shops, they looked at the "personal" ads on the bulletin boards and questioned the proprietors: Are any of your customers acting in a nervous or suspicious manner? Any customers interested in bondage? Who's been asking where they could find hookers?

"The cops asked me if any weirdos have been coming in," one proprietor recalled. "Hey, in this business, what can I tell them? All my customers are weirdos."

Swiski and Hedrick interviewed dozens of men and eliminated all of them as suspects, except one: Billy Henderson. Just 72 hours before Cathy DiMauro's body had been found, witnesses saw Henderson, who worked at a truck stop on Route 13, take DiMauro for a ride.

"I knew her by face, but not by name," Henderson told the detectives. "She was one of the prostitutes who congregated at the truck stop hustling the truckers. That night, I drove her to a construction site. We had sex and I dropped her off a little while later."

With no other suspects, the detectives kept an eye on Billy Henderson. At the same time, the police brass ran the FBI's idea past Renee Lano. What they wanted her to do was pose as a hooker and

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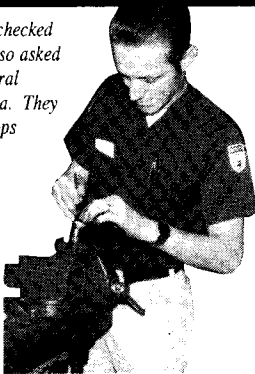
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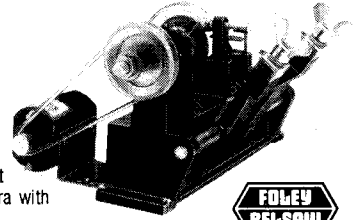
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try to lure the killer into approaching her.

"I'm Catholic," she would say later, "and I had some real moral questions about doing this at first."

Lano had grown up in West Chester, Pennsylvania, in a tight-knit family with a brother and two sisters. When she was 16, her family moved to the Wilmington area.

"I was considered a tomboy," Lano recalled, "yet I was a cheerleader. We moved at a crucial stage of my life—boys and cars—and I didn't really apply myself in school. If it weren't for cheerleading, I might not have made it through school. But it gave me some focus."

Near the end of high school, Lano got involved with the police Explorers' program and found the regimentation of police work to her liking. After high school, she worked as a cook during the day and took criminology courses at night. Then she applied at New Castle County PD.



"I'm hard-headed and stubborn," Lano continued, "and I have real good gut instincts. I would do my regular eight hours on the street, then come in and get into my [shoulder-length brown] wig and walk the highway. I usually wore jeans and a tank top—I'd put on a flannel shirt if it got cold—and I carried a handbag."

"They didn't tell me a lot about what was going on in the investigation. I was very new—still on probation—and didn't need to know most of the details. They didn't want to confuse me with too much information. About all I knew was that young women were being killed and blue fibers had been vacuumed from one of the victims."

For Lano's safety, she wore a "wire" and officers were stationed as close as possible in unmarked cars, watching her movements and monitoring her conversations. But sometimes, the wire malfunctioned.

"It was very important to me to know that people I trusted were out there,"

Armed only with a "wire," a hooker disguise, and her gut instincts, Lano (top) survived a harrowing encounter with the owner and operator of this van (bottom).



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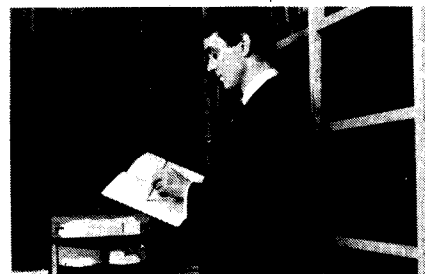
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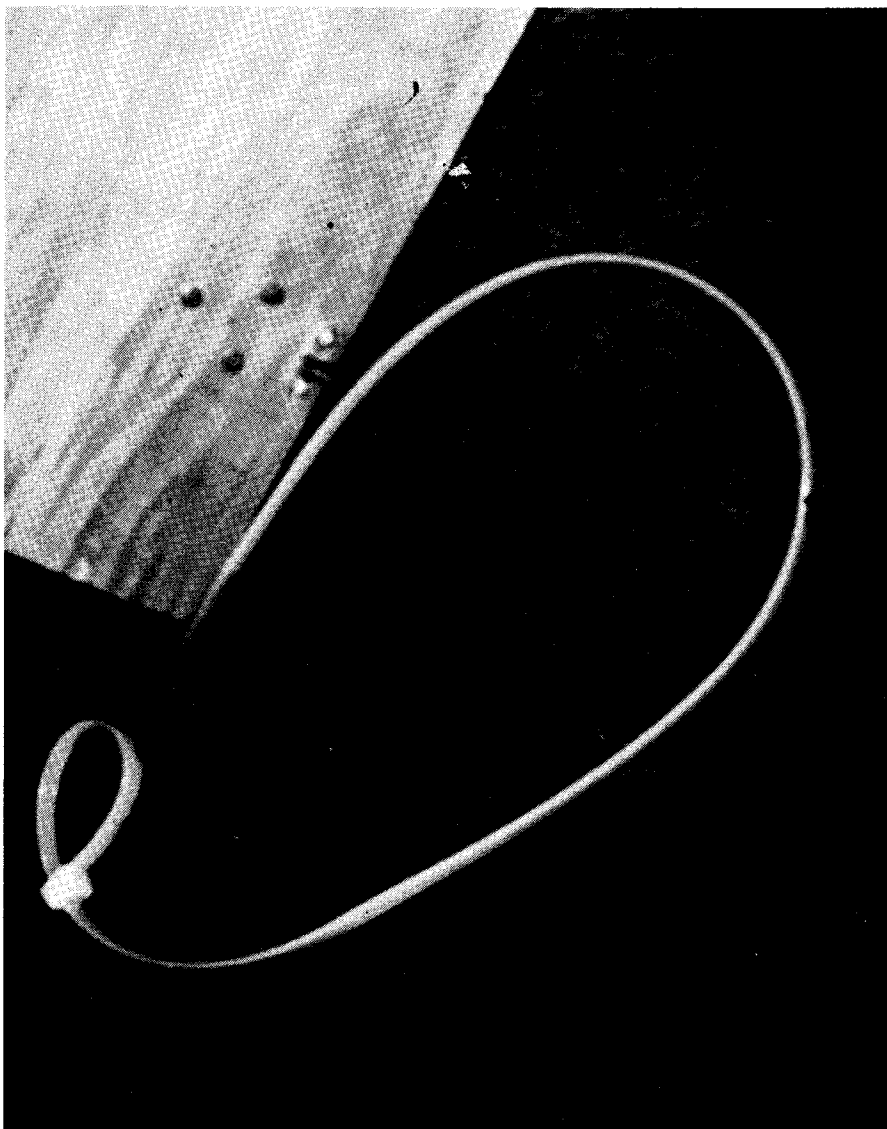
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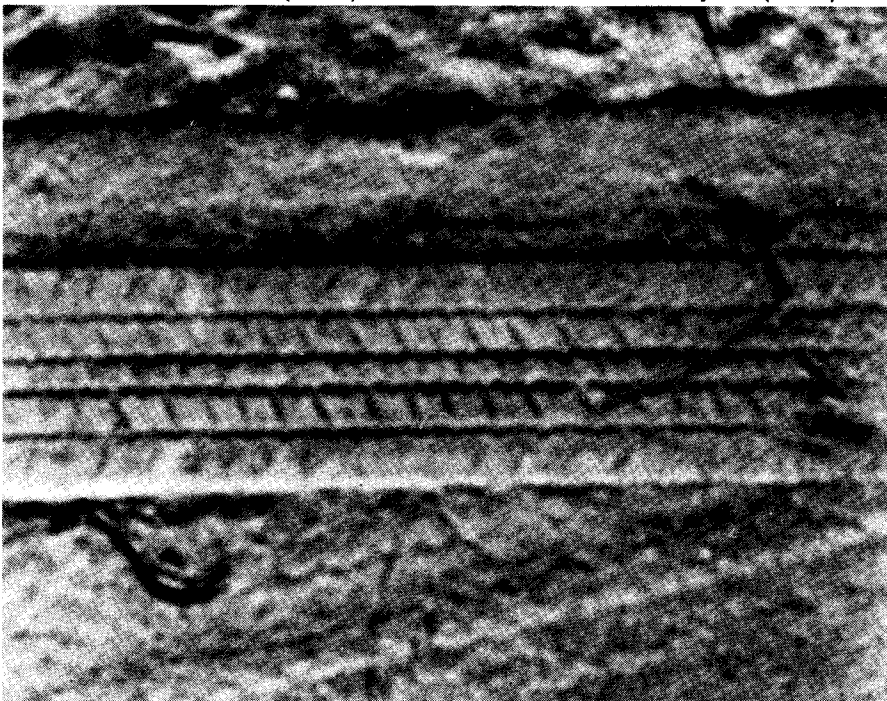
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Important evidence against the van owner included restraints and carpet fibers found inside the van (above) and tire tracks found at one body site (below).



Lano recalled. "Jim Hedrick, Joe Swiski, and all of the officers who took turns watching me were very supportive, along with my whole family. In fact, my father called every day to make sure I was all right."

The decoy operation began at the end of July.

"At first, we had five or six guys working on the case," Hedrick recalled. "We'd work all day investigating leads and then we'd go out with Renee until two or three in the morning. Then we'd come back in later that morning and start all over."

"The hours were unreal," Swiski echoed.

Still, the killings continued.

Margaret Finner was 27 years old, and a supermarket cashier with two small children. On the night of August 22nd, while Renee Lano was working one section of U.S. 13/U.S. 40, Margaret Finner disappeared from another.

Swiski, Hedrick, and Lano found out about it the next day when Finner's family reported her missing. Moving fast, Hedrick and Swiski located a barmaid who had seen Finner standing in a motel parking lot the night before.

"A van pulled up," the barmaid said. "They talked for a while and she got in."

Hedrick asked her to describe the van.

"It was blue," the barmaid replied.

"What about the driver?"

"I couldn't see him," she said.

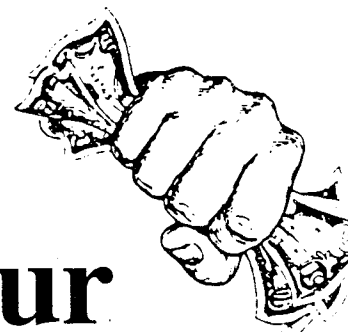
Nineteen days passed.

Shirley Ellis and Cathy DiMauro were dead, Margaret Finner was missing, and Renee Lano was still walking the corridor every night, hoping to make a connection with the killer. Then, on the night of September 10th, the "Corridor Killer," as he would soon come to be called, claimed his fourth victim.

Earlier that night, 26-year-old Kathleen Meyer had an argument with her boyfriend and left the house in a huff. The couple shared a home in Brookmont Farms, the same development where Shirley Ellis, the first victim, had lived. Family members reported Meyer missing.

Although the bodies of Margaret Finner and Kathleen Meyer had not been found, the authorities assumed that the two young brunettes had become victims number three and four. They contacted Russell Vorpapel, a retired Behavioral Science Unit agent, for additional input.

"Your killer is akin to a wolf on the prowl," he told the investigators. "He



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kills just for the fun of it.

“Serial killers get pleasure from the pain, the dominance, and the crying of their victims. But the pleasurable effects of killing wear out more rapidly with each occurrence, and he becomes jaded.

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This was exactly what was happening. The time between the killings was growing shorter and the killer was hiding the bodies. As a result, Swiski, Hedrick, and Lano moved with an increased urgency. They wanted to catch the Corridor Killer before he struck again.

By September 14th, the investigators had conducted more than 500 interviews, but they did not have one suspect. Even Billy Henderson had been eliminated because he could not be tied into the disappearances of Shirley Ellis, Margaret Finner, or Kathleen Meyer.

In the seven weeks that Lano had been operating as a decoy, she had been approached by more than 100 johns.

“I was supposed to talk with them,” she explained, “try to ascertain their names, their business, and why they were in the area. Most were interested in sexual acts, but at no point did I ever enter a vehicle.”

None of them panned out as suspects.

On the night of September 14th, Lano was walking along the highway, close enough to the shopping center to be partially illuminated in a yellowish light. Around 8:30, a blue van drove slowly past...once...twice...a third time. It was a blue windowless Chevy.

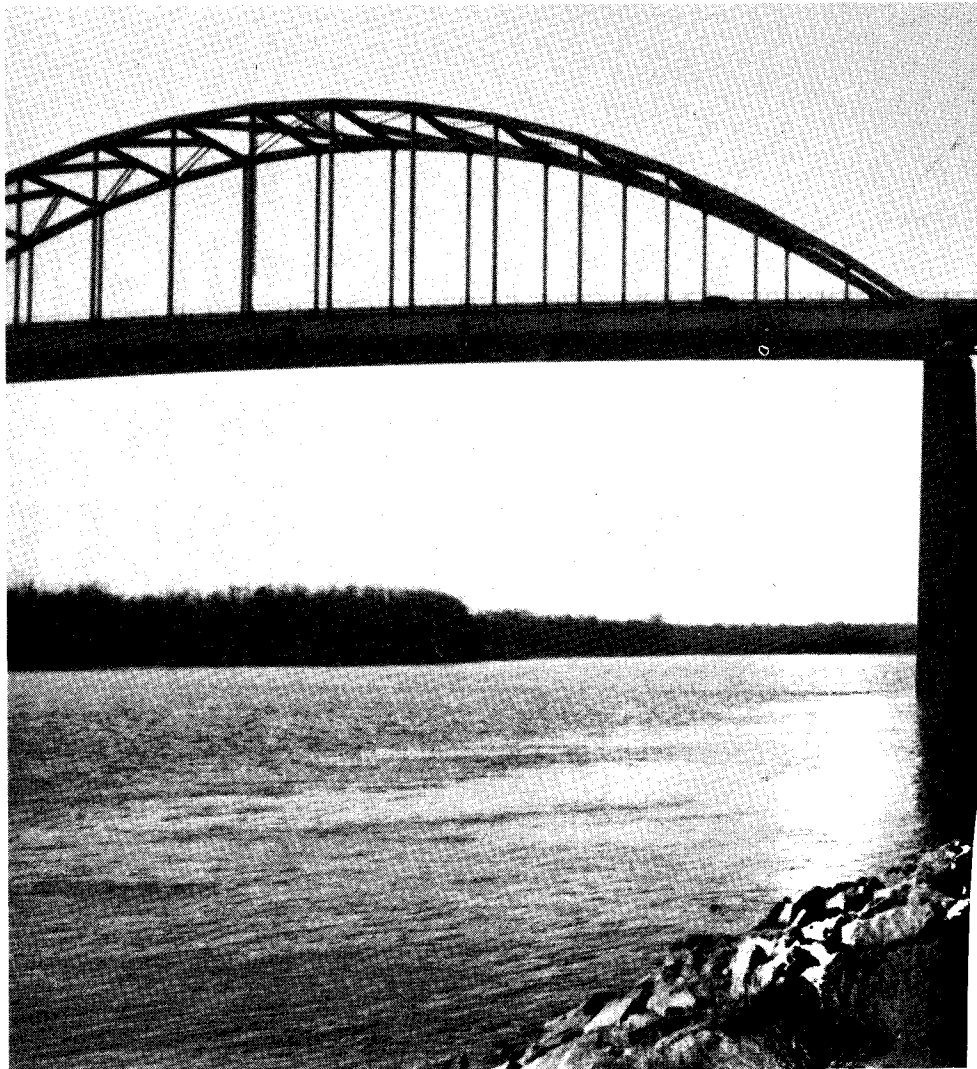
“Jim,” Lano said into her wire, “if you can hear me, honk.”

About 100 yards away, a car horn beeped.

“This guy’s been scoping me and it feels weird,” Lano said.

Lano gave Hedrick the van’s tag number and he ran it through the Bureau of Motor Vehicles computer. It was registered to a Steven Pennell, age 30, who lived in the nearby Glasgow Pines Trailer Court.

“My guys picked me up,” Lano recalled. “They were in a T-bird and we disappeared for a while to make it look like I was doing a trick. At that point, we all huddled and decided to move me to someplace where it was darker, hop-



ing this guy would stop and try to pick me up.”

Around 11:30 p.m., the officers dropped Lano further down the road. A few minutes passed.

“Here he is,” Lano said into the wire.

The van pulled onto the shoulder and the driver waved her over. As Lano approached the van from the passenger side, she felt her heart pounding.

“Hi, I’m Jackie,” Lano said. “What’s your name?”

“Jim,” the driver answered.

Lano looked into his eyes, trying to get a quick read.

“They were brown,” she recalled, “and lifeless, as if he were looking right through me. It was like they were dead and everything about him was very different. He was big and hairy and very intimidating.

“Most of the other guys who tried to pick me up would really try to woo me into their cars—‘You’re really gorgeous, baby, you’re this, you’re that, come on, let’s go somewhere and party’—but not this man. He just sat there and stared at me and I kept babbling. I

had to do most of the talking.”

After a while, Lano asked him if he wanted oral sex.

“Are you a cop?” he asked her.

“No, are you?” she shot right back at him.

“Get in,” the driver told Lano.

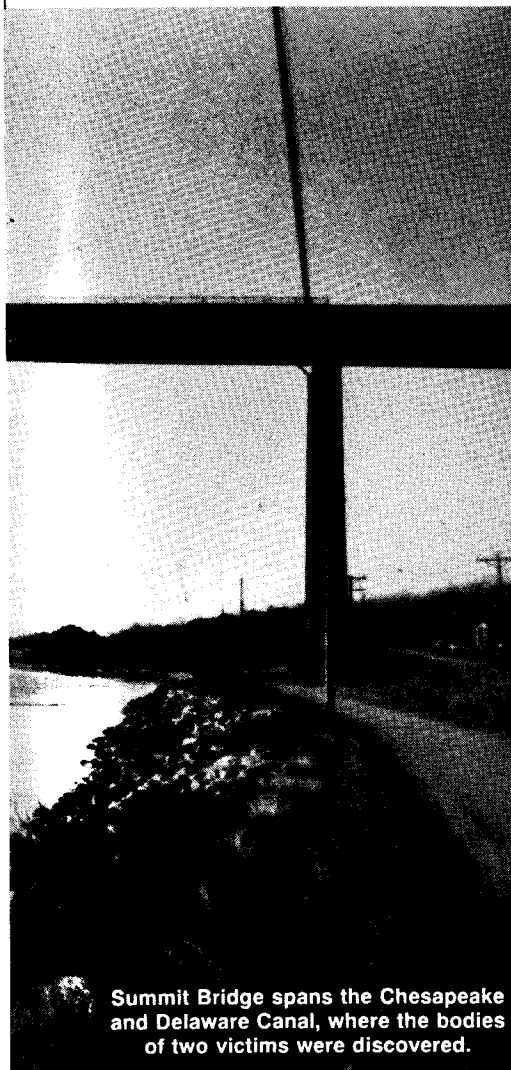
Lano opened the sliding door in the middle of the van and looked inside. It was possible that, if this were the killer, he might be working with an accomplice.

“Turn the lights on,” Lano said. “I want to see what your van looks like.” He turned on the interior lights.

Lano looked inside but didn’t see anyone hidden in the back.

“I saw all this blue carpet,” Lano recalled, and she remembered the blue fibers that had been found on Cathy DiMauro’s corpse. “My heart really came up into my throat and I said to myself, ‘Oh my God, I’m looking at the man who did all those things to those women.’ No way did I want that done to me. So I kind of played the dumb, stoned routine.”

“Get in,” the driver said, more insis-



Summit Bridge spans the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, where the bodies of two victims were discovered.

tence in his tone this time.

"Your van is really sharp," Lano replied, and she started running her hand over the blue carpeting.

"Get in," he said for the third time.

At this point, Lano began to feel threatened.

Jim Hedrick was sitting in his car, 100 yards away, listening to the conversation.

"Don't get in, Renee!" he said out loud to himself. "Whatever you do, don't get into that van!"

"Look, I've got a bad headache," Lano told the driver, "from doing too much dope. We'll party next time."

Lano shut the van's door and walked away. But before she did, she'd pulled several strands of carpeting from the floor of the van and hidden them in the palm of her hand.

When the van drove away, Hedrick followed.

A few minutes later, the blue Chevy pulled onto the shoulder and the driver propositioned a hooker. She got into the van with him and he drove away. When they stopped at a convenience store and

bought a six-pack, Hedrick got a better look at him. He was a tall, burly man in the neighborhood of 300 pounds. He drove the hooker to a nearby motel, and the pair entered one of the units.

Hedrick parked in the lot and called for backup.

An hour later, the driver and the hooker exited the motel room. He dropped her off on the highway and went home.

The next day, the investigators sent the carpet fibers that Lano had extracted from the van to the FBI lab for analysis. They also ran a background check on Steven Pennell and learned he was married, the father of two young children, and was also helping raise his wife's teenage daughter from a prior marriage. He worked as an electrician and his ar-

rest record showed only one misdemeanor. But they found nothing that implied violence or sexual deviance.

"He's like the biggest teddy bear you'd ever want to meet," was the way one of Pennell's friends described him, "and he wouldn't hurt a fly. He was always talking about being a cop and that was his sole goal in life. He applied, but when he took the physical, he had a hard time doing the pullups. That was the only thing that kept him from being a cop."

Steven Pennell graduated from St. Mark's High School in 1976. His assistant principal remembered him as a good student and "a quiet kid who never got in trouble." After high school, Pennell spent two semesters taking criminology courses at Brandywine



The killer's demonic sadism is graphically portrayed in this photo of one of his victims. Others were similarly bruised and slashed on their legs and buttocks.

College to better prepare himself for a career in law enforcement. From all indications, Pennell appeared to be merely a husband who was cheating on his wife. But Renee Lano felt otherwise.

"Guys," she told her partners, "this is him. I'm telling you it's him."

As innocent as he looked on paper, Pennell matched five of the FBI's guide-

lines: he was white, he possessed above average intelligence, he was 30 years old, he worked as an electrician, and he lived close to the crime scenes.

A surveillance was established. Detectives got on Pennell's trail in the morning and followed him to work. They stayed with him during the day, followed him home from work, and

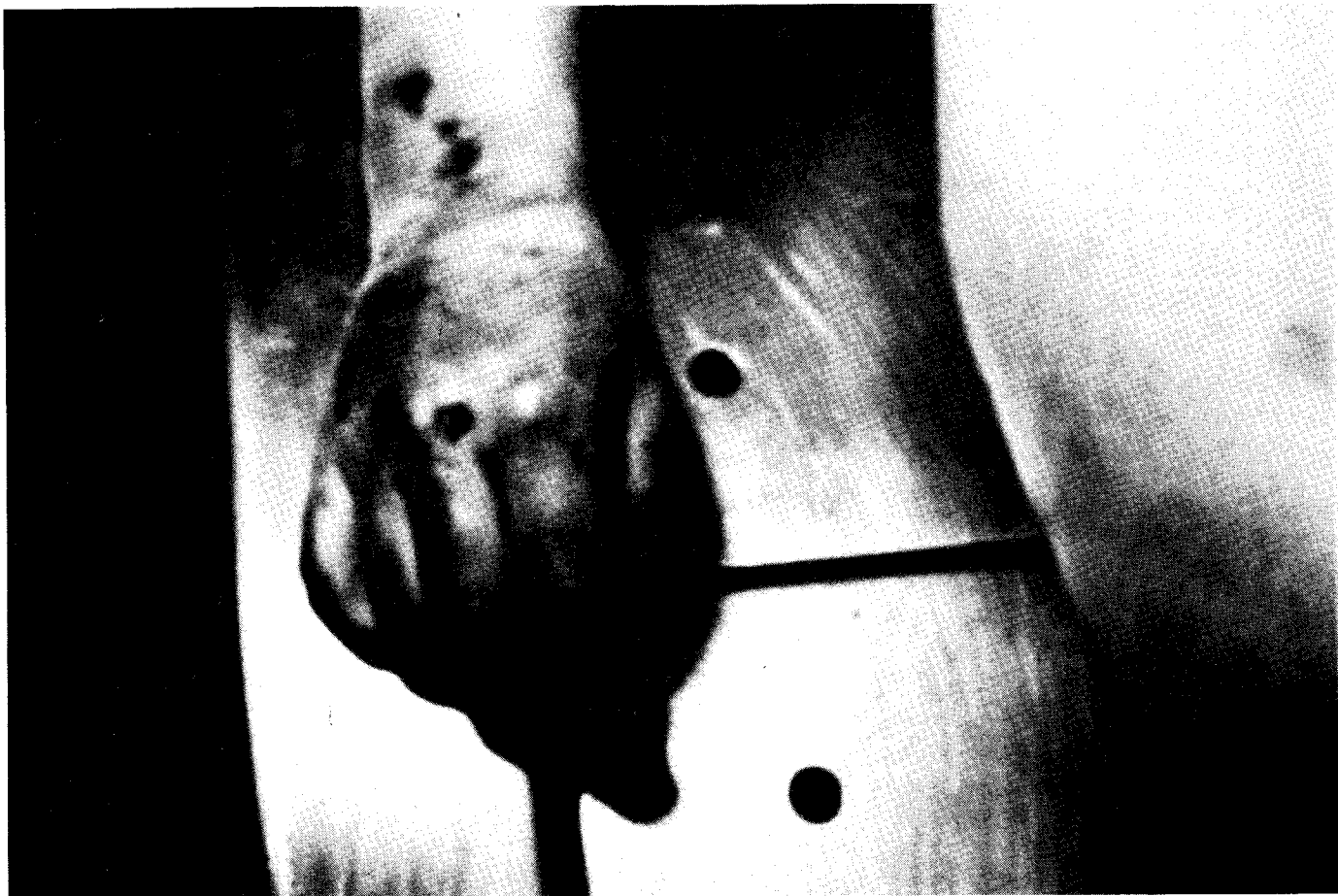
monitored his movements until he went to bed. Then the investigators terminated the surveillance until the next morning.

Two days passed without incident.

The third day, September 17th, was just like the first two. Nothing suspicious happened. When Pennell turned in for bed around 11:00 p.m., the detec-



The killer was fond of torturing his victims with a wrench, the "pincher" marks of which are visible on this victim's scalp and ear.



This victim's right hand shows signs of having been bound with some type of ligature and punctured with a sharp object.

tives terminated the surveillance for the night and went home.

Shortly after midnight, the suspect grew restless. He got dressed and went for a ride. A little while later, Pennell pulled into a motel on U.S. 13/U.S. 40, where a 20-year-old brunette was soliciting in the parking lot. Her name was Michelle Gordon and she weighed 116 pounds. Born in England, she had moved to America with her family at the age of four, but her teenage years had been filled with one after another minor brush with the law.

"She's a suburban kid who got involved with drugs," was what her public defender had to say about her.

In the early-morning hours of September 18, 1988, Michelle Gordon got involved with more than drugs.

She got into the blue van and Pennell took her for a ride into a remote area a couple of miles away. He parked and asked Michelle if she liked bondage.

She told him, for the right price, she liked just about anything.

They climbed into the back of the van and he wrapped duct tape around Michelle's hands and feet. He didn't bother gagging her. For one thing, they were in

the middle of nowhere. For another, his van was soundproof. Besides, he wanted to hear Michelle's screams.

As soon as he was in complete control, Pennell sliced off Michelle's clothing with a knife, then cut fine lines up and down the fronts and backs of her legs with the tip of the blade. Pennell then rolled Michelle onto her belly and spanked her hard across the buttocks. He said dirty things to her. Then he took a pair of case-hardened steel pliers out

of the toolbox he kept in the van.

Michelle Gordon must have screamed her lungs out as Pennell pinched her abdomen with the pliers and slowly worked his way toward her breasts, pinching here and squeezing there at his whim. One at a time, Pennell twisted Michelle's nipples until streams of blood ran down her chest. Then he pulled each one off.

No one reported Michelle Gordon missing. As far as Swiski, Hedrick, and Lano knew, nothing had changed and the surveillance on Steven Pennell was leading nowhere.

Two days later, on September 20th, boaters discovered Michelle Gordon's nude body floating close to the west bank of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal. By the time the police officers arrived, the body had washed onto the rocks, face down, less than a mile from the Summit Bridge.

Nearly 100 lawmen searched the area for evidence. This time, they found something: fresh tire-tread impressions in the dirt road that ran alongside the canal in close proximity to Michelle Gordon's corpse. Plaster casts were made.

---

*Pliers found in Pennell's van were consistent with marks made on the victims' abdomens and breasts. His hammer matched damage to the victims' skulls...*

---

At 4:30 that afternoon, detectives followed Steven Pennell to a tire store, where he dropped off his van to have four new tires mounted. Later, Detective Hedrick returned with a search warrant and seized all of the used tires in the storage bin. Out of 30 discarded tires, he found the three 15-inch Firestone Supremes that had been removed from Pennell's van—Pennell had kept the fourth for a spare. Hedrick sent the tires and the plaster casts of the tread imprints to the FBI lab for comparison.

Meanwhile, the medical examiner had determined that the injuries and mutilations suffered by Michelle Gordon

“The FBI says whoever got the fibers deserves a medal.”

The fibers which had been vacuumed from Cathy DiMauro's corpse matched the fibers that Lano had plucked from Steven Pennell's van. They were trilobal polyester fibers produced by the DuPont Company and distributed to six carpet manufacturers in Georgia. Specifically, they matched imperial blue “Captivate” carpeting, Style 46, manufactured by the World Carpet Company in Dalton.

Detective Swiski flew to Georgia. He traced the fibers from the manufacturer to a carpet retailer in Wilmington to the

were constantly being pressed to hurry. We had a search warrant, but we didn't want the suspect to know he was under surveillance. So, after the search, we had to restore the van as it appeared when we first entered.”

The technicians seized carpet fibers and swatches of upholstery. On the carpet, they found bloodstains and several hairs. Newspaper articles about the murders of Shirley Ellis and Cathy DiMauro were on the van's dashboard. The investigators sent the evidence to the FBI lab for testing and awaited the results.

A month later when Pennell “made his tail,” it was time to move. That



FBI magnification of a serrated steak knife seized from the suspect's home shows human hairs clinging to several teeth.

had been consistent with those inflicted upon Shirley Ellis and Cathy DiMauro. The main difference between the three corpses was that Gordon had been in the habit of shaving her pubic hair and the others hadn't.

The next morning, September 23rd, Lano had a court appearance. After court, she returned to the squad room.

“Renee,” one of the investigators said to her, “did you hear the news about the fibers?”

From the tone of his voice, it sounded like bad news. Renee's heart began to sink.

“It was a hit,” the straight-faced sleuth continued.

“What do you mean?” Lano asked, confused.

customer who bought the carpeting and installed it in Pennell's van. There was now no doubt in the detectives' minds that Steven Pennell was the serial killer, but they lacked sufficient evidence to make an arrest.

A task force was empowered and a round-the-clock surveillance was established.

A week passed with no developments. Then, on September 30th, police officers stopped Pennell for a traffic violation as he was driving through Wilmington. While officers escorted him to magistrate's court, evidence technicians “tossed” his van.

“As I recall,” one of the technicians would later say, “we were able to stretch it out to about an hour, but we

night, officers executed a search warrant of his home and van. In the process, they seized several hammers, sets of pliers, rolls of duct tape, and pornographic videotapes and magazines. The titles of the videos were *Our Secret Spanking Sessions*, *Domination and Submission: Masters and Their Slaves Spill Their Sleazy Secrets*, and *The Taming of Rebecca*, which was cued to a scene that showed one man ordering another man to pierce a naked young woman's nipple with a safety pin. The rest of the movie showed a torture chamber where men experimented on young women who were enslaved, torturing them until they were all dead.

The evidence was growing, but it was still not enough to make an arrest.

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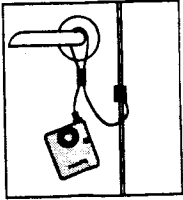
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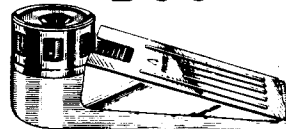
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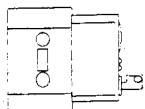
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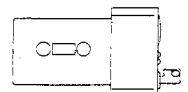
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On November 12th, deer hunters stumbled across a badly decomposed body in a section of thick marsh reeds along the edge of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, less than two miles from where Michelle Gordon's body had been discovered. Although the corpse was unrecognizable, it bore similar mutilations to those inflicted upon Shirley Ellis, Cathy DiMauro, and Michelle Gordon.

Two days later, the M.E. used dental charts to identify the remains as those of Margaret Finner.

On November 18th, the lawmen called off the search for the missing Kathleen Meyer, but the test results had started coming in. The discarded tires matched the casts of the tread imprints. The pliers found in Pennell's van were consistent with the pincher marks made on the victims' abdomens and breasts. Pennell's hammer was consistent with the damage to the victims' skulls. Red fibers that had been vacuumed from Cathy DiMauro's body matched upholstery fabric from the van's bench seat. Cotton fibers found in the hinge of Pennell's pen-knife matched Shirley Ellis' turquoise sweatpants. DNA testing matched bloodstains found in the back of the van with Cathy DiMauro. And pubic hairs vacuumed from the back of the van matched those of Michelle Gordon.

"The tips of the pubic hairs had been cut," FBI Agent Paul Bennett explained, "and I can assure you, most individuals do not razor-cut the tips of their pubic hairs."

At 11:30 p.m. on November 29, 1988—a year after the killings began—police officers arrested Steven Pennell. Two days later, a grand jury indicted him for three homicides: those of Shirley Ellis, Cathy DiMauro, and Michelle Gordon. Margaret Finner's body was too badly decomposed to retain sufficient evidentiary cause to charge Pennell for her murder, and Kathleen Meyer's body had never been found.

The trial began nearly two years later in October 1990 and lasted two months. The jury of seven men and five women listened to 126 witnesses and looked at 283 exhibits.

On the trial's 25th day, Steven Pennell took the stand on his own behalf. He denied ever meeting Shirley Ellis but admitted knowing both Cathy DiMauro and Michelle Gordon. Pennell told the court he had been experiencing marital problems and started cruising the highway looking for women.

"I was driving up U.S. Forty and I



The night Renee Lano stared death—in the form of a burly, bad-tempered serial killer—in the face, she was linked by "wire" to Detective Jim Hedrick (r.).

saw a lady hitchhiking," he testified, referring to Cathy DiMauro. "I asked her if she needed a lift. She mentioned going to an area bar. That's when she informed me she was a prostitute.

"We decided to have intercourse and settled on twenty-five dollars. I pulled into the parking lot and we hopped in the back and undressed. I noticed she was on her period and I mentioned it to her. So we decided to have oral sex and she gave me back ten dollars."

Pennell said he saw Cathy DiMauro on the night she was murdered.

"I asked her if we could do inter-

course," Pennell told the jury. "She said fine. So I parked behind a mobile home dealership and we hopped in back, undressed, and had intercourse."

After they finished, Pennell continued, DiMauro got out of the van and he drove home. A friend came over and the two of them drank a few beers and some daiquiris and they watched porno videos.

Pennell said he met Michelle Gordon on September 14th while she was walking along U.S. 13/U.S. 40. He said he drove her to a convenience store, then to a motel. And, he told the jury, he met

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FBI agents, including John Douglas (l.), got involved in the case when it was clear a serial killer was on the loose. The Bureau predicted the killer lived near the scene of the vanishings. Suspect lived in this trailer park (r.) near the two highways.

her again two nights later.

"She said she was a prostitute," Pennell swore, "but she refused to have intercourse. Then I asked her about oral sex and she said fine. I parked outside a convenience store along the highway and paid her an extra five dollars to take off her clothes. Afterwards, she got dressed, hopped out, and said, 'Maybe I'll see you around some time.'"

When Pennell finished his testimony, his defense attorney approached him.

"Look the jury in the eye," the attorney told Pennell. "Did you kill Catherine DiMauro?"

"Absolutely not," Pennell replied, staring at the jury.

"Did you kill Shirley Ellis?"

"Absolutely not."

"Did you kill Michelle Gordon?"

"Absolutely not."

The jury deliberated for six days.

At 1:25 p.m. on Thanksgiving Day, the jury found Steven Pennell guilty of murdering Shirley Ellis and Cathy DiMauro, but not guilty of murdering Michelle Gordon. He was sentenced to life imprisonment.

Eleven months later on October 30, 1991, Pennell pleaded "no contest" to charges that he killed both Michelle Gordon and Kathleen Meyer. Although he maintained his innocence in all five deaths, he made the pleas on the condition that he would quickly be put to death.

"I do not wish to put my family through another trial," he told the judge. "This court has found me guilty, so I ask that the sentence be death. 'Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be put to death! Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed!'"

Detective Lano drove to the Delaware Correctional Center on Saturday morning, March 14, 1992. At nine

o'clock, she entered a brown, windowless trailer. She sat in a small white room with two large windows. On the other side of the glass was the death chamber.

Twenty minutes later, attendants led a bearded Steven Pennell into the death chamber. He was wearing a blue prison jumpsuit and two clergymen stood at his sides.

The attendants strapped Pennell onto a padded metal table with custom-made arm wings. A gold cross was pinned to his collar and a large woven cross of blue and white cloth was tucked into his left breast pocket.

Shortly after 9:30, intravenous tubes were inserted into his arms and, mo-

ments later, his chest heaved once.

Steven Pennell was pronounced dead at 9:49 a.m. It was the first execution in Delaware since 1946.

Renee Lano received a unit citation for her work in bringing Steven Pennell to justice. Today, she is a detective with nearly six years on the force. She works with the Family Services Unit, dealing with sexual assault and physical abuse cases. ◆◆◆

EDITOR'S NOTE:

*Billy Henderson is not the real name of the person so named in the foregoing story. A fictitious name has been used because there is no reason for public interest in the identity of this person.*



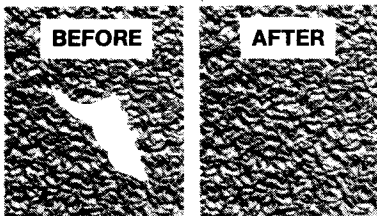
Friends said Steven Pennell (c.) was "the biggest teddy bear you'd ever want to meet," but Lano got a more chilling impression from his cold, dead gaze.

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by JOHN GRIGGS

**T**HE BANK alarm call came into Thomasville, North Carolina's police headquarters at 12:37 p.m.

In their cruisers, officers rushed to the Home Savings & Loan at 22 Winston Street. The building was just two blocks from police headquarters. The financial institution is right in the heart of Thomasville's downtown. It was May 17, 1990, and the mercury was reading 82 degrees on this early afternoon.

The heat was on—in more ways than one.

Thomasville officers are trained that, when a bank alarm goes off, any situation can become a hostage situation. They are taught that if they rush in, they will most likely trigger a hostage situation. They're taught to allow the robbery to happen inside, while setting up parameters outside to hopefully snare the robber.

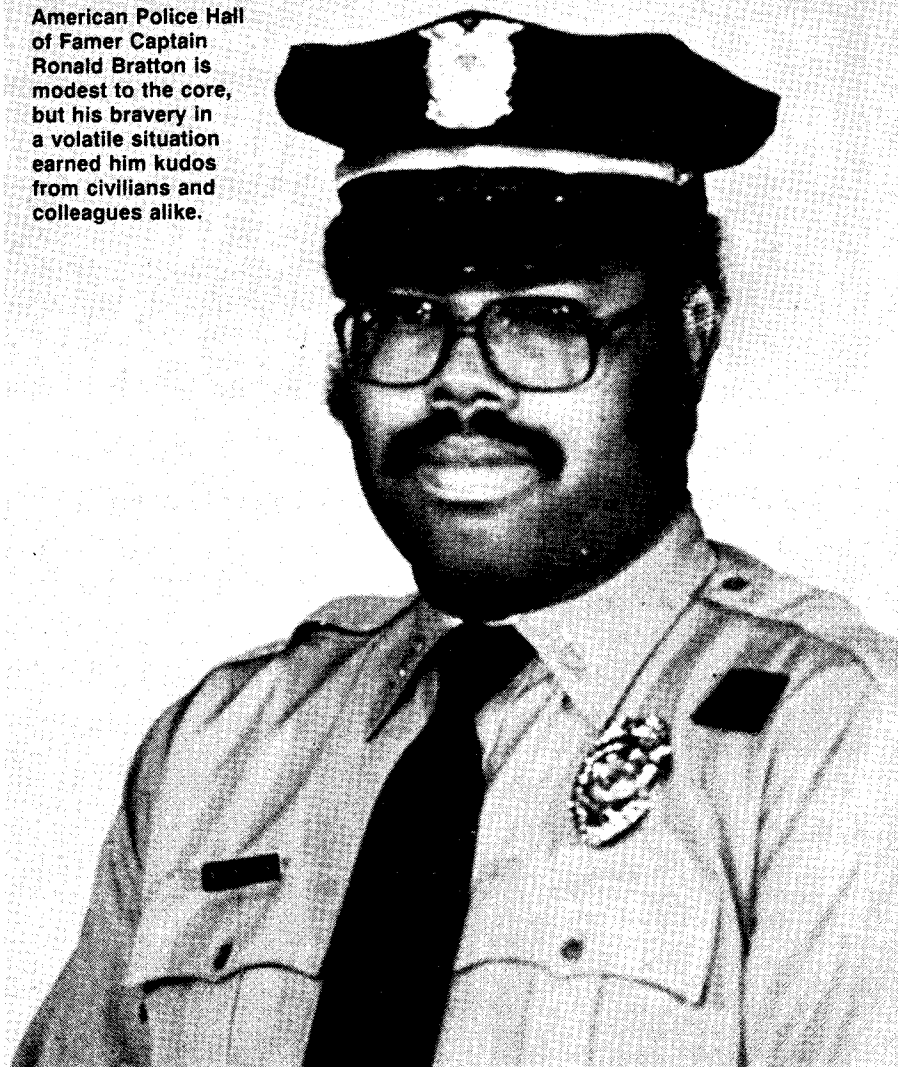
As the officers arrived on May 17th, they saw the apparent robber leaving the bank with teller Suzy Sloan at his side. He had a gun on her and she was clutching a bag of money.

Unfortunately, this hostage situation was already made, despite the officers' best training.

As the officers wisely held back, the robber, who'd entered the bank around 12:30 p.m. demanding cash at gunpoint, led Suzy to his 1988 Hyundai, and ordered her into the front passenger seat as he sat down in the driver's seat. He then pushed Suzy down into his lap as he held what appeared to be a .25-caliber pistol to her head.

Within minutes, almost 20 officers, some off-duty, responded to the scene, blocking off the nearby roads to prevent escape and taking strategic positions around the Hyundai. The officers on the

American Police Hall of Famer Captain Ronald Bratton is modest to the core, but his bravery in a volatile situation earned him kudos from civilians and colleagues alike.



scene made up almost half of the city's total police force. Thomasville has a population of about 16,500.

Lieutenant Ronnie Phillips, one of the first to arrive, took up position near the Hyundai. Officers got close enough to talk to the gunman. They told him in no uncertain terms that all avenues of escape were blocked and that he wasn't leaving the parking lot with his hostage.

Officers noticed that the gunman was switching his pistol from one hand to the other. If they could just get close enough to gain control...

Thomasville is normally a quiet furniture manufacturing town in North Carolina's Piedmont. The city's claim to fame is its "Big Chair," an actual chair, large enough for a giant, that graces the downtown area.

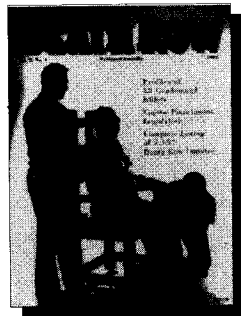
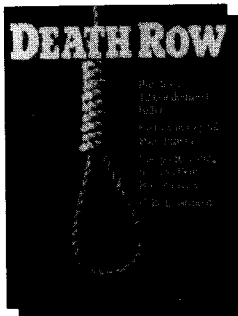
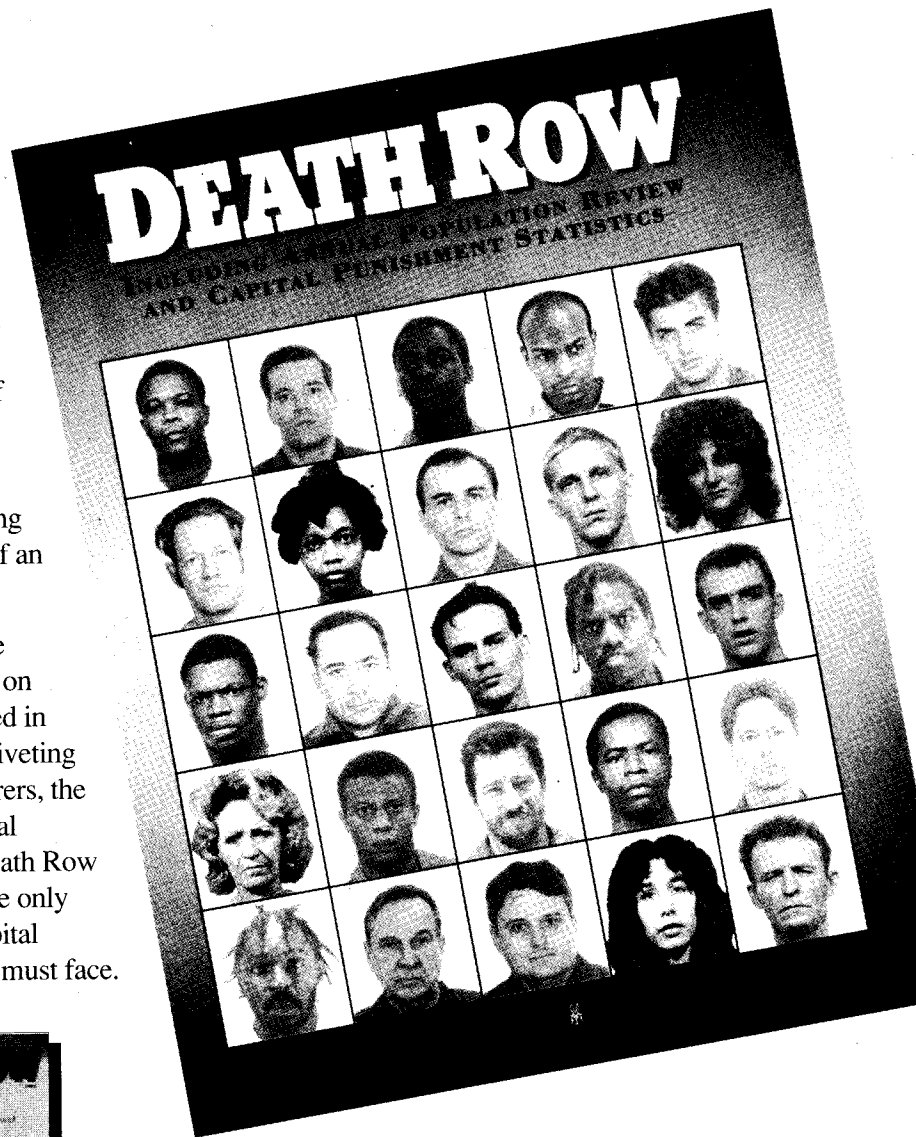
# CAPTAIN RONALD BRATTON'S GUTS ALONE ENDED A BANK JOB

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A limited number of the first and second edition *Death Row* books are still available at \$19.95 each, or you can save by ordering all three books for \$39.95

# It was all in a day's work for the humble captain when a bank-robbing gunman held police at bay until Bratton took advantage of the opportunity when the gunman, for a split second, let his guard down.

The city's officers are no strangers to violence. On January 8, 1977, Officers Dennis F. Spinnet and Robert G. Crawford were fatally shot answering a domestic call. Thomasville police officers have learned to be sharp, knowing that

afternoon would be the crackle of police radios and the clicking of press cameras.

Ronald Bratton, a captain on the Thomasville Police Department, saw the crowd and walked up to see what was going on. Bratton, a friendly bear of

Charles' back to the crime scene. She confirmed that Charles was the bank-robbing gunman.

Bratton soon became the only officer the 27-year-old Charles would talk to. Bratton had never met Charles. He later speculated that the gunman talked to him because the gunman was black and Bratton was the only black officer on the scene that day.

Bratton, who'd served 17 years on the force, analyzed the situation as he talked to the gunman, running over various strategies in his head. But he kept talking. Once, he even answered a request from Charles by getting him a pack of smokes and a Coke.

Bratton and his fellow officers were concerned because they recognized the weapon as a "Saturday night special," which they knew could go off accidentally. Even though a police sniper was in a hidden position about 50 to 75 yards away, Charles might easily pull the trigger on his pistol by reflex if shot at. And Charles kept moving the cocked gun from the left side of Suzy's head to the right, and then back around again. So an accidental discharge was a very real concern here. In fact, the officers were more concerned over an accidental discharge than they were with Charles intentionally shooting his hostage.

On the plus side, Captain Bratton knew from experience that the longer Charles stayed with his hostage, the more rapport he would build with her, steadily narrowing the chances of him shooting her.

There was no chance Charles would drive away.

To Bratton, the whole principle was, if they let Charles leave, they'd lose control of the situation. Grimly, Bratton and his fellow officers determined that they weren't going to let that happen. It was going to have to end right there.

Charles had said he would let Suzy Sloan go when he got away from the bank. But neither Police Chief Don Truell nor his officers wanted to take that chance.

Suzy was holding together well—staying calm, not struggling or screaming or crying. She'd been well trained.



Thomasville officers leap into action after Bratton managed to wrestle a gun from the grip of a bank robber who had been holding a teller hostage in his Hyundai.

anything and everything can happen—even in a small town.

There had been at least 150 bank robberies in the Piedmont in the last four years, and Thomasville had been hit by a few of those. But almost all of those robberies had gone down without a hitch. Today was different, though.

A crowd of rubbernecks that would quickly number in the hundreds had already begun to gather to watch this real-life drama. Fortunately, they kept quiet. In fact, it would soon be almost too quiet. Soon, the only sound on this still, hot

a man, was off-duty that day, taking law enforcement classes at the local community college. In civilian clothes, Bratton, then 38, pushed his way through the crowd and joined his fellow officers. They quickly briefed him on the situation.

By now, officers had run a computer check on the Hyundai's license plate with the Department of Motor Vehicles. They found out that the car belonged to a Gregory Lewis Charles, a man with a local address. Officers had gone to that address and brought a relative of

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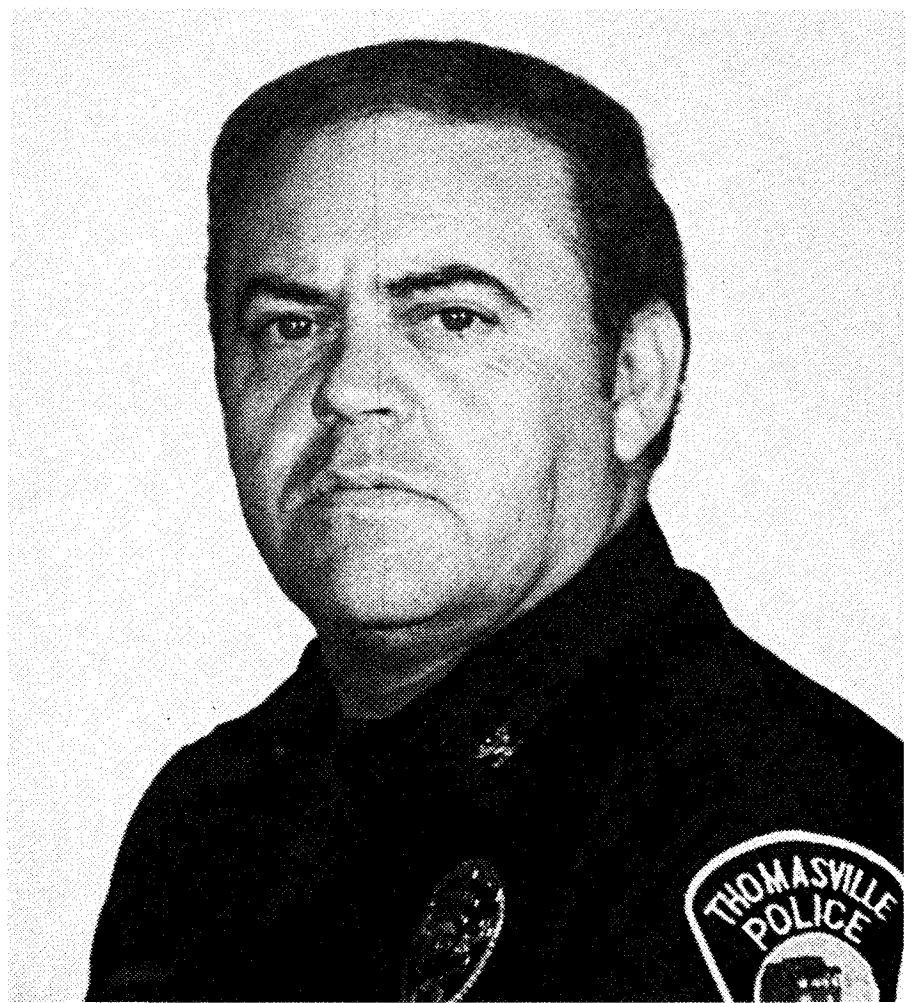
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Bratton's colleagues on the force include Lieutenant Ronnie Phillips (l.), one of the first on the scene, and Chief Don Truell (r.) who praised Bratton's cool.

The city police department works with all employees of Thomasville banks. Sergeant Clarence Stinson usually gives the employees a training session twice a year, telling them to stay calm and meet the robber's demands in the event of a robbery. Of course, no one is told to give themselves voluntarily as a hostage. The idea is not to become a hostage if it can be avoided. In Suzy Sloan's case, there was no way she could have avoided it.

About an hour had passed since Gregory Charles had grabbed his hostage. The officers had made good use of the time. While most officers stayed at the scene, others had followed a classic, time-tested strategy: they had set out to learn all they could about their gunman, to "profile" him and "get inside his head."

The gunman's relative, whom police had brought to the scene earlier, had told officers that Charles was under a lot of pressure, plagued by unpaid bills and other financial problems. He'd gone to his job at a furniture factory that morn-

ing, the relative said, but just hadn't been himself. The relative said she didn't know Charles had a gun until now.

Officers punched Charles' name into the police computer for a record check. The man who now held a small town's unblinking gaze had been strictly small-time up to now. He had been convicted of assaulting a relative the month before. He'd received a two-year sentence, suspended on the condition that he be on probation for two years.

Officers relayed all the information they'd gathered to Captain Bratton and the other officers on the front line. Bratton decided to make a move. He talked to the gunman's relative. Slowly, he led her to the Hyundai where Charles and his hostage were.

The relative told Charles that, whatever problems they had financially, they could work them out and he didn't have to do this. Let the hostage go, the relative pleaded.

After a few minutes, Charles got agitated and told his relative to leave. Brat-

ton led her away. Apparently, the relative had done more harm than good, making Charles more agitated than he'd already been.

Bratton and his fellow officers kept talking to the gunman. As long as they could keep Charles talking, they were okay. As long as Charles was talking, they knew he hadn't made up his mind about what he wanted to do.

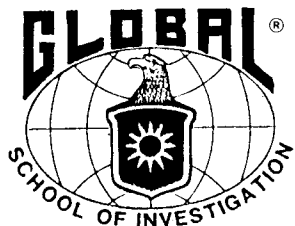
But they were worried: if he cranked up that Hyundai and tried to drive off, if he played that hand, he'd bring it to a head. This one tiny, scared, powerless, poor man had become a shaky gambler holding the police force at bay.

Several times, Charles started the car, then cut it off after a tense few seconds. Hopefully, he understood what the police had told him when the standoff began: that if he drove off, they'd have to shoot him.

An hour and a half passed since the standoff began. Finally, Charles began to calm down and listen to the officers' pragmatic arguments. Then, he let his guard down. At 2:10 p.m., Charles let

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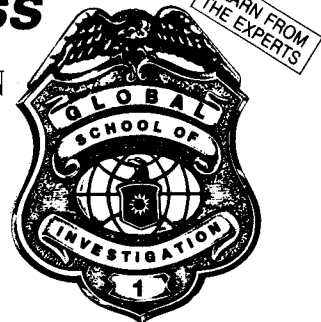
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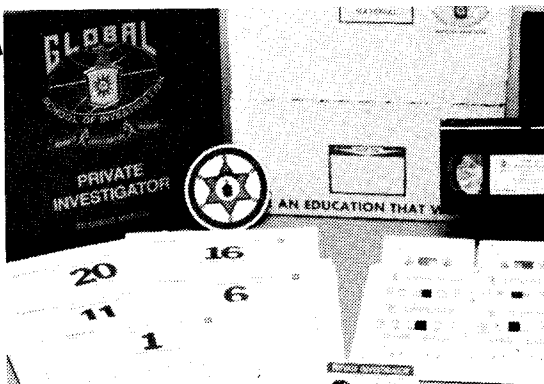


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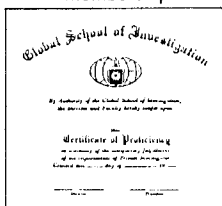
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his left arm, holding the gun, come down and straighten toward the dash. In a split second, Captain Bratton, knowing his fellow officers would move in when he made his move, reached into the car and clamped Charles' left arm with a vise-like grip.

The gun fell outside of the car. Bratton held onto Charles' left arm until Sergeant Millford Miller and other officers were able to get Charles out of the car. Lieutenant Phillips pulled Suzy Sloan out of the car.

The hundreds of rubberneckers gathered in the surrounding blocks began

cash, intact, from the car. Police did not disclose how much was taken.

As officers led Gregory Charles away in handcuffs, he told a relative that he was sorry. She told him to keep praying and that "God would help us through this."

Since bank robbery is a federal crime, FBI agents drove Charles from the scene. They charged him with bank robbery, hostage taking, and using a gun to commit the crimes. He was placed in jail in nearby Greensboro.

A relative of Charles' said of him, "He just wanted a way out. Why would

Dan Wozniak, then the area FBI director, said Charles fell under the "situational criminal" type of hostage taker. Wozniak wasn't sure Charles had had a plan. But even if he had, Wozniak said, "I guess it's only a good plan if you get away with it."

Obviously, whatever plan the former small-time thug had had was no match for Thomasville's finest—especially Captain Ronald Bratton.

One Thomasville city employee told a reporter, "He [Bratton] has convinced me that nobody in the world could've done that but him. He was tremendous. A job had to be done, and he did it. No one in the world could've done better than that. I'm so proud of him."

Thomasville Mayor James Norton said Bratton's actions were typical of his service to the city.

"That took a lot of nerve on his part," Norton said. "I think it's tremendous. He's a good all-around police officer who does a lot for the city. It's just a continuation of his good service to the city. He's a superb officer."

Chief Truell beamed as he spoke of Bratton to reporters.

"Captain Bratton did an excellent job," Truell said. "He kept the situation under control. I'm real proud of him."

Bratton told reporters, "Things like that are a team effort. We had almost twenty people out there. You have to have good communications out there and everyone was real disciplined and didn't talk much on the radios.

"There were no shots fired, and no one was injured. Yeah, I was nervous. My adrenaline was pumping and all, but I wasn't scared. I was nervous though, you bet you," he said with a chuckle.

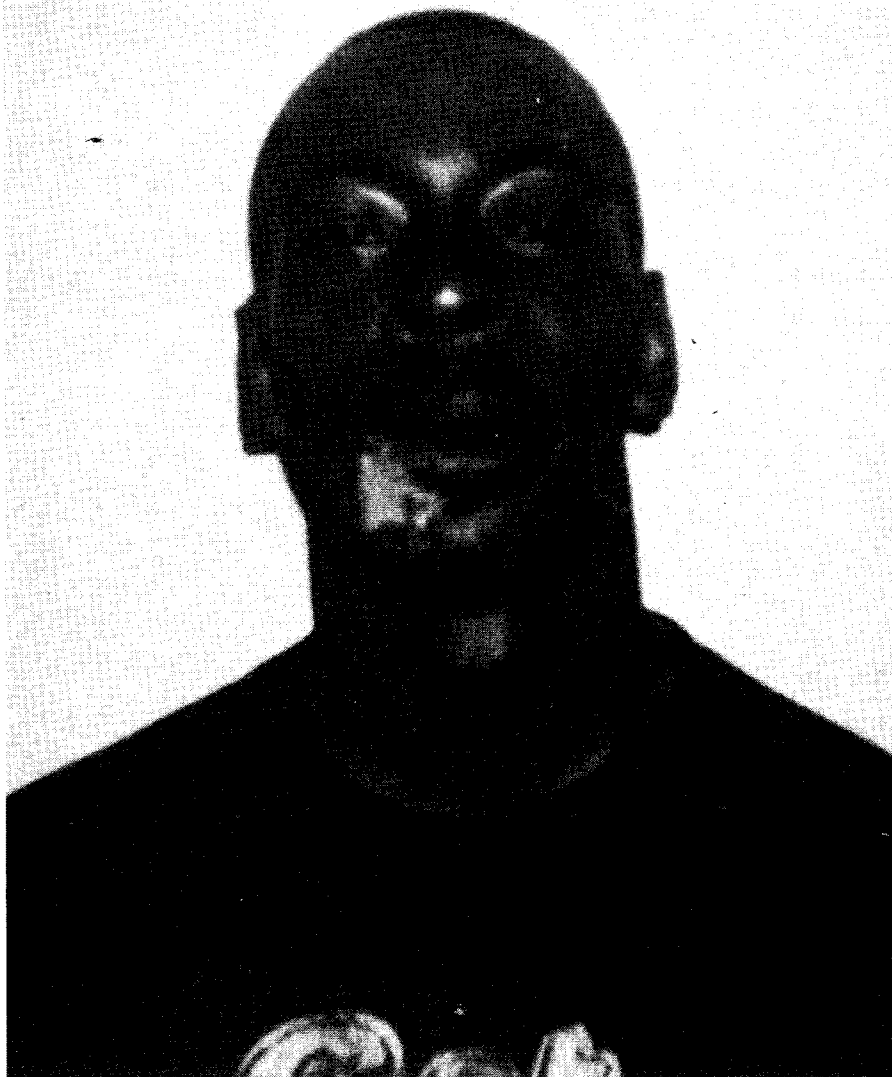
Truell bestowed a departmental commendation on Bratton. The modest captain also received an award from the American Police Hall of Fame.

In November 1991, the television show *Top Cops* featured Bratton, who continues to work at the Thomasville Police Department.

On January 11, 1991, in federal district court in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Gregory Charles was convicted of bank robbery, taking a hostage, and using a gun to commit the crimes. He was sentenced to 15 years in prison, and is currently serving that sentence. ♦♦♦

#### EDITOR'S NOTE:

*Suzy Sloan is not the real name of the person so named in the foregoing story. A fictitious name has been used because there is no reason for public interest in the identity of this person.*



Gregory Charles went from being a small-time thug to being a big-time criminal in a single afternoon when he held center stage in a small-town hostage drama.

clapping and cheering, thrilled that the hostage situation had ended without harm to anyone.

Suzy Sloan was as calm as anyone they'd ever seen in that situation. She told the officers that she had just kept telling herself to keep calm. She even went back to work that afternoon.

Officers retrieved the bag of stolen

he do it [commit a robbery] right here near the police station?"

Chief Truell would later tell reporters, "I think that when [Charles] decided to commit an armed robbery there, that he had decided to take a hostage with him. She held together real well to the end."

Suzy Sloan told lawmen that Charles said he wasn't going to hurt her.

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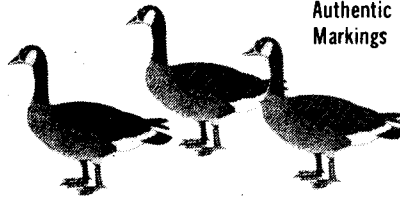
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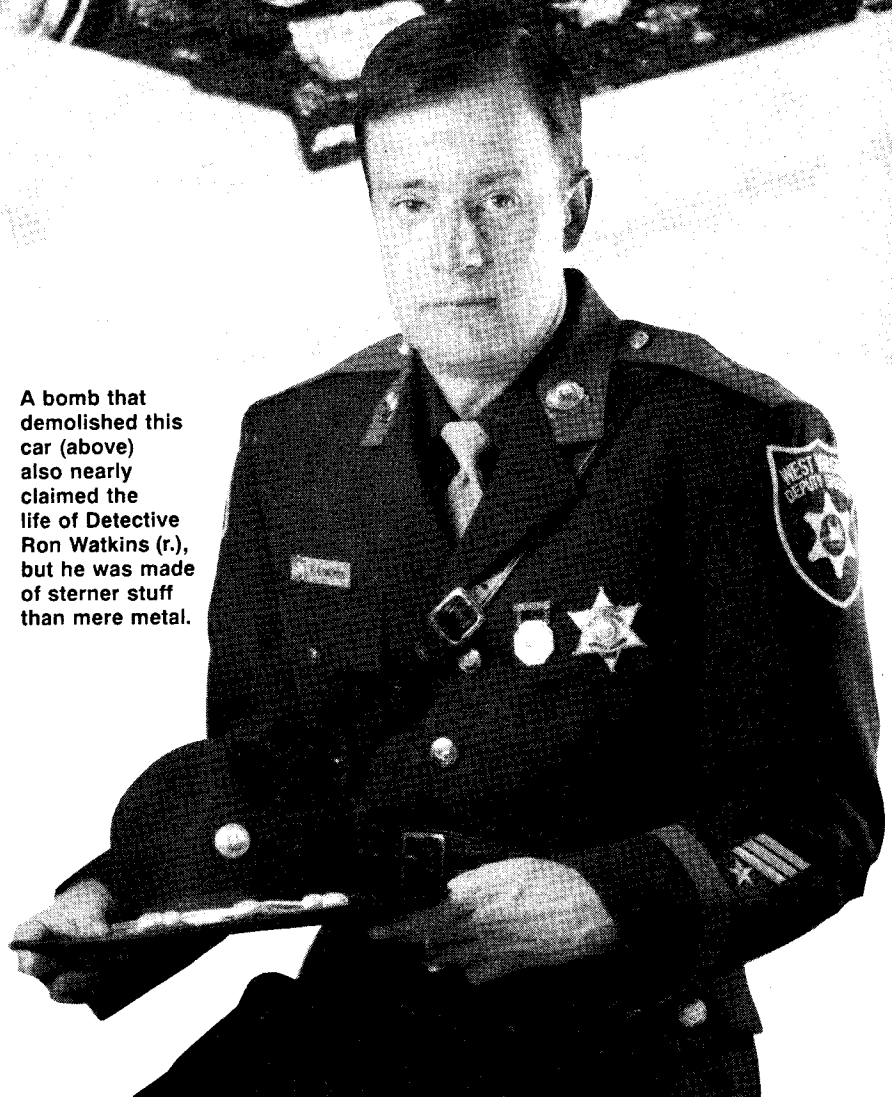
by CATHERINE  
L. HENDERSON

**W**HAT CAUGHT the officer's eye was the expired tag on the white 1981 Plymouth Horizon.

As Police Chief Dave Watkins turned on his siren and prepared for a routine stop on a registration violation, the male driver, ignoring the cruiser's flashing lights, kicked the compact into full throttle and took off with as much speed as the little car could muster. Chief Watkins fell in behind, and the chase picked up speed.

Later, Watkins would recall, "I kept thinking to myself, 'Why is he running? I have to stop him before he hits somebody.' "

A bomb that demolished this car (above) also nearly claimed the life of Detective Ron Watkins (r.), but he was made of sterner stuff than mere metal.





# 14 STICKS OF DYNAMITE COULDN'T STOP SHERIFF RON WATKINS!

Watkins drew his pistol and fired into the air, once, then twice. The only response from the Horizon was more speed. Pulling his cruiser up close, Watkins tried to force the car into a ditch. Still the driver refused to even so much as slow down.

Chief Watkins radioed into the Marion County dispatch that he was pursuing a speeding vehicle and needed assistance.

As luck would have it, a side road appeared up ahead. The Horizon whipped off the pavement and roared up the unpaved road, kicking up a choking blanket of dust behind it. This sudden maneuver surprised Watkins. He tried to follow but couldn't make the abrupt turn. By the time he turned around, visi-

bility was zero and he lost contact.

Soon, the county deputy arrived, and he and Chief Watkins backtracked, retracing the Horizon's rugged escape route. There, a ways up the hollow on an isolated old logging road, sat the Horizon, abandoned and stripped of its plates. Finding both doors and the hatchback locked, the officers broke the vent window on the driver's side to get in. Documents and papers gave a name for the apparent owner—William Bowman. Chief Watkins radioed for a tow truck.

In the tiny town of Farmington, West Virginia, a wrecker service furnishes not only towing but impound facilities for the local police. For the time being, the white Horizon was parked on the

wrecker service lot while Watkins, Farmington's chief, as well as its entire department, investigated.

Farmington, west of the county seat of Fairmont, is removed from serious crime and nearly any senseless violence. So even when the white Horizon disappeared from the lot, Chief Watkins had little reason to suspect that the car would become such a lethal weapon aimed directly at a police officer—any police officer.

Two days passed with no sign of the white Horizon until April 26, 1989, when the car mysteriously reappeared on Main Street in Worthington, another small town, just minutes from Farmington. The car was parked at an obvious location—a spot where children

# **When Ron Watkins answered a motorist-assist call, he never realized that the vehicle was rigged with dynamite, which went off in his face when he reached for the door handle. But despite his numerous injuries, and doctors' predictions that he'd never work in law enforcement again, Watkins went on to become sheriff, sworn into his post from a hospital bed.**

gathered each morning to wait for their schoolbus.

Meanwhile, in Fairmont, Marion County Sheriff's Detective Ron Watkins (no relation to Dave Watkins) was in the Communications Center making public service returns to people who had called him during his shift. Detective Watkins hadn't been scheduled to work that day, but in the afternoon he had received a call. "We need you in uniform. We're short-handed." Watkins responded immediately.

Now as he talked on the phone, Detective Watkins heard the dispatcher say, "Unit 32, what's your 20?"

"Leverage Mine," was the response on the other end.

"What do you have on this?" Detective Watkins asked the dispatcher.

"A stolen car, Main Street, Worthington," Watkins was told.

"I'll take it," said Watkins.

"As I was leaving, I passed one of our detectives who was headed to the Communications Center and we waved at each other," Watkins would remember later.

"What's Ron going on?" the detective asked the dispatcher.

"A stolen car."

Ron Watkins began the five-mile drive to Worthington, calling in along the way that he was going to the scene on a motorist-assist call. Less than an hour after receiving the call, Detective Watkins arrived on Main Street, unaware that this would be very nearly the last investigation of his 15-year career.

He immediately spotted the dusty white Horizon. "I nonchalantly got out of my cruiser and walked around the vehicle," Watkins would recall later. "I noticed there weren't any plates on it."

Completely unsuspecting, Detective Watkins reached for the door handle.

In a brilliant flash, Watkins' world

exploded. The hatchback had been rigged with 14 sticks of an explosive more powerful than the standard TNT dynamite.

Worthington Mayor Tracy Smith, who was one of the first to reach the fallen deputy, would later remember, "I didn't think he had a chance. I tried first aid but his skull was exposed, his face was split from both sides of his nose and his eyes were totally white."

"I remember the shrapnel entering my body and [me] being blown through the air," Watkins recalled, "and my right leg felt like it was ripped off. That was because it was caught on the guard rail, which was about six feet from the vehicle."

Although Watkins had been thrown 35 feet through the air, at the time he didn't know where he had landed. "I had crashed down in the middle of the road, but I couldn't see because my eyeballs were completely blown out of their sockets and were resting on my cheeks."

A motorist sitting in his pickup truck nearly 50 feet away from the explosion was knocked off his seat by the impact of the blast and the driver of the tow truck nearby was seriously injured. Parts of the car littered a perimeter that extended several hundred yards around the exploded car. A bent steering wheel and four tires would be the only recognizable remains of the white Horizon.

Yet, Detective Ron Watkins fought to stay conscious.

"I remember hearing someone say I was going to die. Right then I began to fight," he would say later.

Watkins was air-lifted to the hospital by helicopter. "During the ride, all the trauma cases of the recent weeks that I had been involved in ran through my mind and I relived each in vivid detail."

A trooper had been shot and killed

just a couple of weeks earlier, and on that very same day, a second trooper had been wounded. Days later, two children were sexually assaulted and Watkins had arrested their stepfather for the crime. Then, only a week later, a hotel fire in Fairmont had claimed the lives of seven people.

"I was burning up in that fire. I kept screaming and going berserk, trying to get away," he now recalls.

"I lay there many hours and then my wife came in. I said, 'Tell me straight out—how do I look?'"

"She said, 'Oh, it's not too bad.' Then she leaned over and kissed me on the chin, the only place I had any skin left.

"Actually," Watkins would say later, "I had no face."

Although astounded that Watkins had survived the explosion, doctors warned Deputy Detective Ron Watkins that he would be known, from this time on, as Mr. Ron Watkins, his only title. His law enforcement days were absolutely over.

But Detective Ron Watkins had a dream—to be Sheriff Ron Watkins of Fairmont. Following the explosion, that realization became his goal. "Four months after my accident, I said I would run for sheriff in '92. There was a lot of laughter."

For seven months Watkins remained in the hospital, then on to a grueling routine of physical therapy. It was the left side of his body that had taken more of the force of the blast. Watkins lost the use of his left arm and his left leg was partially paralyzed. His right leg was crippled from the loss of the Achilles tendon and he was deaf in his left ear and blind in his left eye. Extensive muscle damage and numbness has made nearly every day a painful struggle. For the rest of his life, he would be disabled.

And then there were the horrendous

facial scars. Watkins began the painful series of skin grafts and reconstructive surgery. Now, after 27 operations, he says, "I have no skin left on my body for them to do any more surgery, but I'm satisfied with the way I look."

Now folks no longer stare nor do some restaurants ask Watkins to enter through the rear so that he won't disturb diners. "People whispered and pointed, wanting to get close-up photos," Watkins recalls. "And then they wanted to know what happened. When I said fourteen sticks of dynamite went off in my face, some didn't believe me."

In exchange for the years he had cared about others, Watkins would now suffer, up close, the agonizing returns of cruelty at the hands of others and the trauma of being a victim.

"I think a lot of time in law enforcement, we don't have the inside feelings of what it's like to be a victim," Watkins says. "I know especially with children who've been sexually abused, I've often told them to go on into the courtroom and testify, even though the perpetrator is in their presence.

"And until the day I walked in there to face the individual who was accused of this ordeal, I never really understood inside what it was like to be a victim. It was a terrifying experience."

Immediately after the explosion, the driver of the white Horizon, 32-year-old William Bowman of Rachel, was arrested and charged with rigging the bomb. Bowman confessed, and a relative who had been the passenger in the Horizon during the high-speed chase eventually gave police statements that confirmed Bowman had been the driver and that he had bragged about rigging the car to explode.

In February 1990, William Bowman was tried in state court in Fairmont. Each day, Ron Watkins, accompanied by his wife and two daughters, walked slow, painful steps to the courtroom. Watkins listened to testimony about events that were at best nothing more than a hazy blur in his memory.

"I had nothing to say because my memory was so sketchy," Watkins recalled. "You must remember that when you wake up from a trauma, you don't even remember what happened."

For weeks following the explosion, Watkins had been told bits and pieces about the accident. "After I learned about the blast, I wanted to know who they arrested. It took them a couple of days to tell me because I knew this family and had had no problems with them."

Jury members deadlocked in their decision. For the maiming and near-killing of a police officer, there would be no state conviction of William Bowman.

In June 1991, federal charges were then brought against Bowman and a new trial began in Wheeling. Bowman was charged with conspiracy, possession of an unregistered bomb, making a bomb without an application to the federal government, malicious destruction of personal property owned by an institution receiving federal funds, and malicious destruction of personal property affecting interstate commerce.

According to U.S. Attorney William Kolibash, several of the charges against Bowman resembled those brought by the state, but the federal charges weren't double jeopardy because the allegations were filed on a different judicial level.

For this round in court, Watkins could remember, often times all too vividly, the events that had led up to the bombing. As a string of witnesses gave their testimonies, a tale of senseless vengeance unfolded.

Although William Bowman's own taped confession couldn't be used a second time, Assistant U.S. Attorney Robert McWilliams related how Bowman and his passenger had watched from the woods as the police had his white Horizon towed. He had become incensed at police for taking his car and vowed to get it back.

Bowman had then sneaked to the wrecker lot, broken the window on the driver's side and stolen back his car. For two days, he hid the car, then drove it to Worthington. There he parked it, rigged and ready to blow away a cop. Not necessarily a certain cop, prosecutors would say, just any cop. One witness testified that "Bill wanted to blow as many cops away as he possibly could."

Watkins would say later that the prosecution speculated Bowman had parked the car on the Main Street of Worthington because Police Chief Dave Watkins, who had pursued Bowman during the high-speed chase, drove down this street every day as he delivered his children to their babysitter.

"I believe in the back of William Bowman's mind, he felt Dave would see it and pull over there and the bomb would go off on him" says Ron Watkins.

Determined to obtain a conviction this time, federal prosecutors shaped an airtight case. A search of the Bowman property turned up 47 sticks of the same explosive that had been used in the car bomb.

Assistant State Fire Marshall Robert Hall testified that the serial numbers on these recovered explosives matched those stolen from a nearby powder magazine at a coal mine. A special agent for the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) testified that about 10 pounds of an explosive similar to a type used in coal mining was used to make the car bomb.

One relative of the defendant's testified that William Bowman had boasted about stealing explosives from a nearby powder magazine. Another relative recounted how he'd led police to an area where Bowman had buried a bucket of explosives.

Worthington Mayor Tracy Smith, who had tried to give the wounded detective first aid, testified that he was the one who received an anonymous call that first reported the reappearance of the white Horizon. Smith had, in turn, radioed the Marion County Sheriff's Department. According to the mayor, the caller had said that the car was on the street there in Worthington. The voice pleaded with the mayor to tell police that a bomb was under the front seat of the car.

That anonymous caller, who turned out to be another relative of Bowman's, was brought to the stand.

Why had he called the mayor rather than the police? prosecutors asked.

"Because I didn't believe that Bill was capable of committing a car bombing," the witness replied.

Tapes of the call that the mayor then placed to the Marion County Sheriff's Department had recorded Smith conveying the message about the bomb. Both the mayor and the dispatcher had laughed at such a totally ridiculous possibility.

Mayor Smith continued his testimony, remembering Detective Watkins' arrival in Worthington. "I saw him reach for the door handle. But before I could holler, he opened the door."

Reconstruction of the accident would show that the doorpost had taken some of the force of the blast, protecting Watkins' vital internal organs. Six feet tall and thin at 170 pounds, Watkins' form and excellent physical conditioning saved his life. "Just that little piece of car saved an awful lot. Had I been fatter or a little shorter, I would've taken more of the impact," says Watkins. "Thank goodness it was me and not a child."

Throughout his trial, Bowman denied any involvement in the explosion. "Bill Bowman didn't know Ron Watkins and didn't have any intention to hurt Ron



**A tow truck waits to haul off what little is left of the exploded car. Some good came out of the wreckage: Marion County lost a detective but gained a sheriff.**

Watkins," said the defense attorney. "Bill Bowman has sympathy for Ron Watkins."

Defying his attorney's advice, Bowman took the stand.

"Did you have anything to do with building a bomb or stealing a car?" the defense attorney asked Bowman.

"No, I did not," Bowman responded. "I am not guilty."

Although William Bowman denied stealing the car, he would admit to abandoning it after the chase.

Apparently jurors didn't believe Bowman's version. William Bowman was convicted of conspiracy and possession of stolen explosives and sentenced to 25 years at a federal prison in Pennsylvania.

As for Ron Watkins, he didn't need sympathy, from Bowman or anyone else. Before the federal trial had begun, Watkins had announced his bid for sheriff of Marion County.

In a race with eight other candidates, Watkins saw his dream realized. In spite of his doctors' predictions that he would never be in law enforcement again, 40-

year-old Ron Watkins became Sheriff Watkins, sworn in from a hospital bed in December 1992.

But even the election had been a fight. Two of Watkins' primary opponents mocked his handicap, limping around saying, "Who does this look like?" Both opponents tried to convince voters that Watkins was unfit to handle the job. Letters were written repeating the claim. "Adults can be a lot crueller than children," would be Watkins' only comment.

"I have a debt to pay," Watkins said shortly after his election, "to the people who had faith enough to choose me, and to police officers all over the country who have invited me to speak about my experiences."

Most of all he felt he owed his wife Karen and two daughters "who gave me strength and believed in me while others wanted to write me off as an invalid."

Even so, Sheriff Watkins refuses to deny his total disability. After 38 surgeries, the most recent in April 1993, he says, "I'd never deny my disability. I'd never take that from the kids and adults

in this country who are disabled, because I want to set the idea that they can be anything that they have the ability to be."

Meanwhile, Watkins filed a civil suit against William Bowman. The federal trial had established that Watkins hadn't been told that the car was rigged. After only 90 minutes, a jury awarded Watkins compensation for his injuries.

As for Sheriff Watkins, each day he proves just what he can do. Determined to upgrade his department of 23 deputies and 20 correctional officers, Watkins wanted "to take the politics out of the job, to protect my men and give the people in the county what they deserve." In doing that, Sheriff Watkins would work alongside his officers. To him, that meant road work, running radar and Driving Under the Influence (DUI) checks.

Although he doesn't go alone, Sheriff Watkins drives his own car, free of any handicapped modifications. "The only thing that survived the explosion was my driver's license and that was very important to me. The department of motor vehicles took away my license while I was still in rehab." After a long and difficult fight, Watkins won back his right to drive.

Now, Sheriff Watkins puts in long days at the department, but he readily admits, "It takes an awful lot of psychological willpower to get your physical endurance built back up."

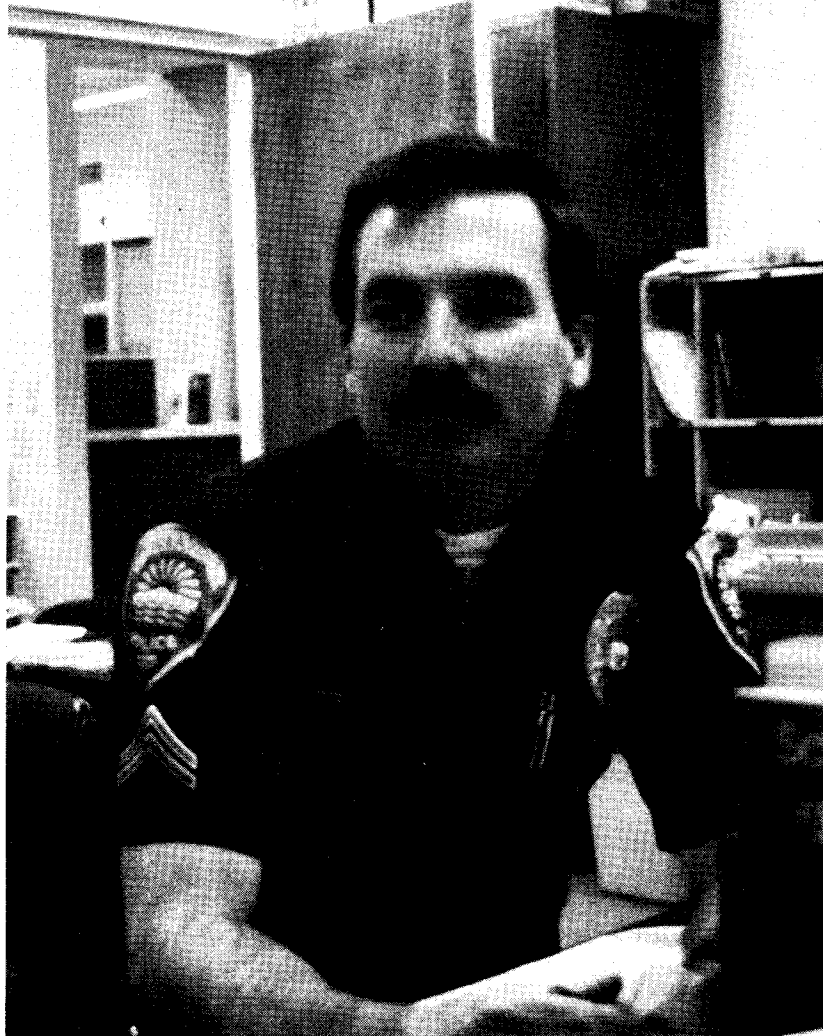
Whether Watkins' tragedy refined his refreshing honesty and his unfettered openness or the virtue accompanied him to that precarious edge, he freely admits that "it took me a long time to say publicly that I forgive everyone associated with this ordeal. But I do. I believe in forgiveness and that you never really live until you almost die. Then you re-evaluate your life and see what you can do to help people."

And Sheriff Ron Watkins gives his all, not only to the citizens of Marion County, but also to the West Virginia Police Self-Support Group, a national program designed to help former officers retired from law enforcement by serious injuries to cope with no longer being a cop and to encourage them to get on with their lives.

"You know, it's something you get inside you and there's no way to describe it until they tell you you're not going to be one anymore," says Watkins.

Modest almost to a fault, Sheriff Ron Watkins attributes his determination to the grace of God. "But," he says quietly, "it's very hard sometimes." ♦♦♦

Easygoing, calm, and unflappable, Chula Vista's Corporal Ron Lederle has the perfect temperament to sit in the hostage negotiator's hot seat.



# 10 HOSTAGES+ 1 DESPERATE GUNMAN= A 24-HOUR ORDEAL

by DETECTIVE  
TOM BASINSKI

**A** COP HAS TO be at his or her best in the area of hostage negotiations. Each word is recorded for posterity and court. A story-hungry press corps usually waits in a staging area filled with empty pizza boxes, cigarette butts, and coffee cups. If the hostage situation ends peacefully, it was supposed to. If there is violence and anyone gets hurt in the hostage situation, the negotiator usually takes the criticism right in the neck.

The very concept of hostage negotiations started in 1972 after the Olympics in Munich, Germany when several Israeli athletes were captured and executed by terrorists.

The policymakers in law enforcement realized there was no method to handle hostage situations, both on the international front and in the cities. A concept

was eventually formed to deal with these crises. In the mid-1970s, the leading instructor in hostage intervention was Harvey Schlossberg. He was a patrolman for NYPD, but he was also a licensed psychologist.

Over the years, Schlossberg has personally instructed thousands of police officers in the art of hostage negotiations all over the United States.

I myself was one of Schlossberg's students in San Francisco in 1977. My partner, Dave Miller, and I were the first negotiators in the Chula Vista Police Department. Since then, a Spanish speaker and a woman have been added to our team.

Over the years, hostage situations in our city were few and far between.

Mostly we had what is called "barricaded suspects." These are people who are armed, or thought to be armed, but have no hostages. The major concern in that kind of case is bystanders. The SWAT team will evacuate the area and the negotiations will begin. Since the suspect has no hostages, he has no bargaining power. If things don't progress fast enough for the SWAT commander, they'll lob in the gas.

Dave Miller and I worked a few of these, with less dramatic results. One night we had a drunk lady with a knife who was going to "stick the first cop who came in here."

We talked soothingly and understandingly to her until she fell asleep. The officers tiptoed in, gently lifted the knife from her hands, and handcuffed her.

Generally speaking, hostage negotia-



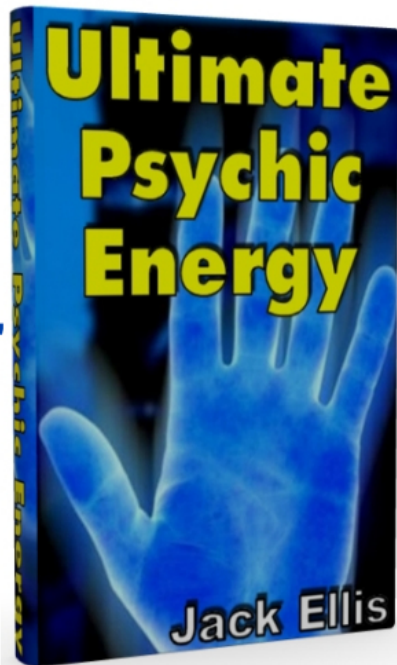
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***As members of the hostage negotiating team, Gary Wedge and Ron Lederle were used to tense situations, so when a killer/burglar ran into a clinic and took 10 hostages, they did what came naturally—they settled the matter peacefully with no bloodshed.***

tors in Chula Vista attend meetings, check the batteries in field phones and tape recorders, and wait for the “big case.”

It never happened, for us anyway. I left the police department to do investigations for the district attorney. Miller was promoted first to sergeant, then lieutenant, and his duties became more complex and demanding. He reduced his own negotiation responsibilities to that of a “consultant.”

We passed the torch to a couple of youngsters named Ron Lederle and Gary Wedge. Both were easygoing, calm, and unflappable, as negotiators should be.

The phone rang on February 27, 1992. For one week prior to this, the entire department had been looking for a man who had killed another man during a bungled burglary.

William Warden, 72, went to the bathroom about 3:30 a.m. on February 21st and found 35-year-old Robert Jacobsen going through a desk in his den. Warden advanced on Jacobsen, who fired seven shots from a .45 he had with him. The result was predictable. Warden died on the operating table.

The homicide detectives focused on Jacobsen within two days, and they had good evidence. Tips were coming in fast and furiously on Jacobsen’s location, but none were accurate.

Finally, on February 27, 1992, officers cornered Robert Jacobsen in a small shopping center. He eluded his hunters, and officers searched every business.

Two detectives checking out an emergency medical clinic in the shopping center finally found Jacobsen. He was inside the center aiming a .45 at them.

Officer Susan Rodriguez fired once, grazing Jacobsen in the collarbone. The officers dove for safety. They had Jacobsen, but not the way they wanted him. He had 10 hostages.

Detective Wedge’s phone rang 15 minutes before he was about to leave police headquarters for the day. Wedge and Lederle drove to the bank across the

street from the clinic where the command post had been set up.

The negotiations area was on the second floor, and if they looked out the window they could see the front door of the clinic. Usually, a command post is farther away from the hostage situation than this one.

Wedge said, “Hey, this is nice. Now we can see him surrender.”

Their first task was to establish communications with Jacobsen. This is often a problem. Many times a suspect wants to talk with people, but not necessarily with the police.

This case was no different. Some of the hostages wanted to call their families, and Jacobsen wanted to talk with a relative.

While the negotiation preparations were starting, a local radio station was in touch with Jacobsen for an “exclusive.”

Soon enough, Wedge was speaking with Jacobsen. Wedge told him they would be delivering police department phones to the front door because the clinic phones would be inoperable. Wedge didn’t use the word “dead.”

Detectives Wedge and Lederle got the impression that there was a lot of activity in the clinic. Wedge spoke with the supervising physician who quietly told him there were 10 hostages. She said Jacobsen was only aware of about 7 of them right now. Three were hiding in a bathroom.

Lederle conveyed this to the SWAT commander to see if they could quietly stage a rescue on the three hiding hostages. The decision was made not to attempt the rescue. The officers were unsure of the location of the bathroom, and they worried that Jacobsen might go off the deep end and think he was under attack if he heard glass breaking and other sounds of a rescue. There was no back door.

A hostage by the name of Abdul got on the phone. He was excitable, telling Wedge that he had better get some help in a hurry. Then Abdul hung up. Wedge said to Lederle, with a touch of sarcasm,

“This guy’s going to be a big help. Just wait.”

The physical setting of the negotiation was a cubicle in a large meeting room on the second floor of the bank. Wedge was the primary negotiator sitting at a large table. He had paper, pencils and a cup of water. Lederle was his backup, sitting next to him. Lederle wore earphones, listening to everything that was said, but without ability to speak on the phone. Lederle took notes, and monitored the talk to make sure that Wedge stayed on track. Sometimes, when a hostage situation goes on for many hours, a negotiator might get

**Detective Gary Wedge, without fuss or fanfare, showed professionalism of the highest order when he faced down an unbalanced hostage taker.**



overly tired and say something not quite correct.

Also, there is a phenomenon called "The Stockholm Syndrome" where hostages become sympathetic with the hostage taker or his outlook. There is a possibility that if the hostage taker is a strong personality, and has a glib tongue, a negotiator might become influenced by him.

For this reason, negotiators work in pairs. The negotiators would scribble notes to one another. Lederle would also communicate with the SWAT commander and with the chief of police on matters requiring his decision.

No one was allowed to speak with the negotiators. Richard Coulson, the tactical manager of the SWAT team, stood by to help the negotiators, as needed.

The conversation with the hostage taker was predictable. Wedge urged Jacobsen to let some of the hostages go. Jacobsen learned of the three in the bathroom, decided he had an unwieldy number, and agreed to let three go right away. So far, so good.

SWAT members met the hostages and

debriefed them at the command post. Officers made a detailed drawing of the inside of the medical building, including rooms within the structure.

They also learned that Jacobsen's gunshot wound was nothing more than a slight grazing. A doctor who was released said it was an "abrasion."

Jacobsen appeared to be excited, but also seemed to enjoy being in control. He was polite to everyone and never really threatened them. The people said he was a nice guy, if he just didn't keep pointing the gun at them.

One of the major goals in hostage negotiation is to get the hostage taker in a "problem-solving" mode. That is, he got himself into this mess, how is he going to get out?

A standard procedure is the cutting off of the phones, as they had already done. Removing phone access isolates the hostage taker so only the police can speak with him. It also makes the hostage taker dependent on the police for communication.

Police department field phones were delivered to the front door of the clinic

by a SWAT team member.

Jacobsen wanted to speak with a relative. Wedge assured him the police would notify her that he was okay and would continue to remain that way. Soon, Jacobsen sent out another hostage because the man was having chest pains. That left Jacobsen with six people. The man turned out to be fine.

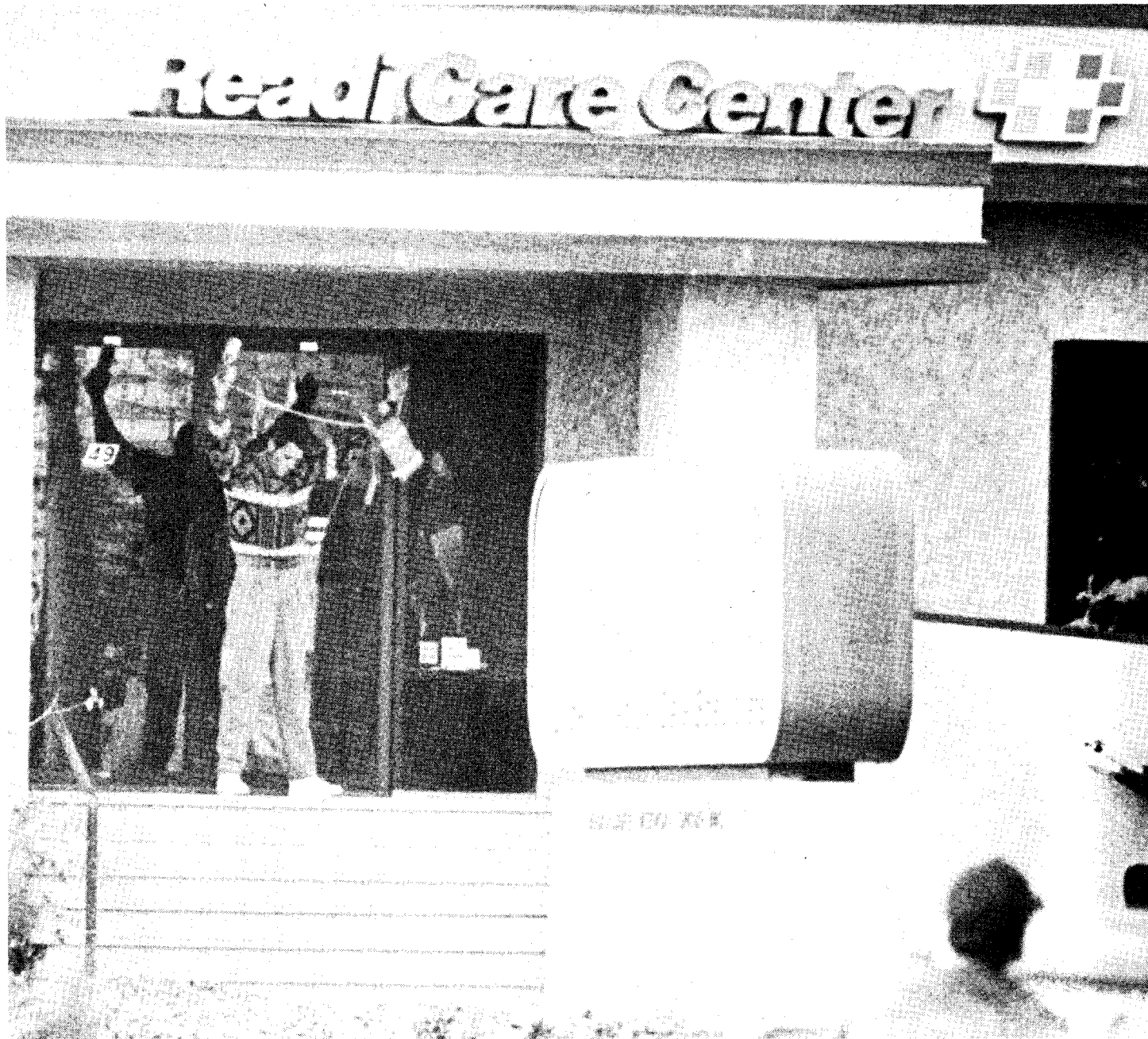
Jacobsen continued to want to talk with his relative, and with a well-known local priest who had a special ministry in helping the homeless.

Detective Wedge never brought up the crime of killing William Warden, but Jacobsen did. In effect, he confessed, saying that Warden surprised him during the burglary. Then, Warden kept coming after Jacobsen, who fired a warning shot.

This was good evidence, but Wedge wanted Jacobsen to start figuring how he was going to get out of this predicament.

After three hours, Jacobsen said they were hungry. He asked for some pizzas, salads, and soft drinks. Jacobsen said, "I don't have any money. Have the





damned mayor pay for it.”

Wedge said he would get him the food, but it would cost Jacobsen three hostages. Jacobsen seemed relieved. “Yeah, you can have ‘em. Just get those pizzas here.”

After an hour, Wedge notified Jacobsen that two SWAT officers would bring up the food after three hostages came out the front door and were safely across the street. The food was delivered. Soon, Jacobsen was back on the phone asking for coffee and cigarettes. The cost was a couple more hostages. Two hours later, the items were delivered after more hostages were released.

Now, Jacobsen had only one hostage, Abdul, who had spoken with Wedge in the beginning. Wedge and Lederle had

been going at it for eight hours. Wedge rubbed his hands together, cracked his knuckles, and said, “Okay, he’s got one hostage. Let’s get this thing wrapped up.”

It was easier said than done. After midnight, Jacobsen began talking about suicide. He had a bad experience in prison and did not want to return there. He said death was preferable to prison.

Abdul got on the phone and said things like, “Wedge, you better get us out of here.” Then Abdul would hang up.

Wedge said to Lederle, “That guy’s a big help. I’m trying to get him out of there and he hangs up on me.”

Jacobsen had been under so much stress during the past week that he had

to be exhausted, the lawmen reasoned. Wedge thought he might be able to soothe Jacobsen to sleep.

About 3:00 a.m., the SWAT team cut off water and electricity to the building. At first Jacobsen was furious. Wedge didn’t get rattled, but continued to talk in his deep, melodious, soothing voice. He hoped the darkness and the stuffiness from the lack of air conditioning would make Jacobsen drowsy.

A little before dawn, Abdul got on the phone. He said Jacobsen was sleeping. Wedge came alive, telling Abdul, in hushed tones, that this was his chance to tiptoe out the front door. Wedge said he would alert the SWAT team and Abdul could leave in five minutes.

Abdul refused. He said he was com-



SWAT team (above) descended on scene to lend muscle to negotiator's bargaining position. A day later, Wayne Jacobsen (l.), with his arms raised, surrendered.



himself and was sending Abdul out. Within a half hour, the two were seen at the front door. Jacobsen offered Abdul his hand. Abdul took it with both of his hands and warmly shook Jacobsen's hand for a full 30 seconds. Then Abdul walked outside toward the SWAT leader who was around the corner of the bank.

Jacobsen was seen through the windows holding the pistol at his throat, then at the side of his head. He would talk for a while, rambling and trying to set his affairs in order.

Since Jacobsen had no hostages, the SWAT commander decided he was not going to let this continue into darkness. At 4:47 p.m., the order was given to shoot gas into the building.

As the glass broke and smoke rose from within, the officers waited to hear the single gun blast which Jacobsen had threatened for so long. It never came.

Two minutes later, the tall, thin figure of Robert Jacobsen emerged from the front door. He was coughing and his hands were raised. The police entry team handcuffed him and took him to jail where he gave a statement to Detective Jon Heggstuen.

Across the street, Gary Wedge rubbed his eyes. He had been very tired an hour before. Now he was alert and somewhat trembling. It was over. He had done his job. No one got hurt, and no one got killed. This was what he was trained to do.

Gary Wedge and Ron Lederle had succeeded. Without fanfare, the negotiators were given rides back to police headquarters. From there, they drove their own cars home where they slept until late Saturday afternoon.

Robert Jacobsen pleaded guilty to first-degree murder and was sentenced to life in prison without parole.

Abdul filed a multimillion dollar lawsuit against the city of Chula Vista for emotional distress.

Insiders, who would not speak on the record because of the litigation pending, said that Abdul prolonged the ordeal at least 12 hours by refusing to walk out when Jacobsen was sleeping. The SWAT team could have flushed out Jacobsen at 4:00 a.m. instead of 5:00 p.m.

Wedge would not make a statement about Abdul and only shook his head when informed of the lawsuit. ♦♦♦

**EDITOR'S NOTE:**

*Abdul is not the real name of the person so named in the foregoing story. A fictitious name has been used because there is no reason for public interest in the identity of this person.*

ing out when Jacobsen did. Wedge was furious after he hung up the phone. It was one thing to do something for a hostage taker when he had a gun pointed at you. It was another to refuse to escape while the guy was asleep.

Jacobsen awoke a short time later refreshed, at least for the present. Wedge hoped Jacobsen's nap had cleared his head into thinking that the only way out of this was a peaceful surrender.

This was not the case, however. Negotiations continued all the next day, which was Friday. Jacobsen was not asking for anything. Sometimes hostage takers asked for a plane to Cuba and 30 million dollars. So far, Jacobsen only wanted a large pepperoni pizza and to talk with a relative and a priest. He

rambled on about his family and what a failure he was. Wedge listened. Jacobsen threatened suicide. Wedge listened. After a while Wedge sized Jacobsen up as a man who wanted to kill himself, but did not have whatever it took to pull the trigger.

Wedge envisioned Jacobsen running from the clinic with his gun blazing. This would mean that some poor SWAT officer would do the dirty deed for Jacobsen. It had happened before.

The SWAT team had been alerted to what Jacobsen might do. They were also doublechecked on knowing Jacobsen's physical description, and that of Abdul. If Abdul came running from the office, they did not want to kill him. If Jacobsen came running, they had no choice. Jacobsen had killed once and could not be allowed to escape.

By now it was mid-afternoon on Friday. Nobody said anything, but the chief of police had mentally calculated what this operation was costing the city in terms of overtime. About a dozen businesses and a junior high school had been shut down. The cost to everyone was substantial.

Around 3:00 p.m., Jacobsen notified the negotiators that he was ready to kill

# DWIGHT STALLS HAD MORE COMBAT IN 2 YEARS THAN CITY COPS SEE IN A CAREER

by CHARLES W. SASSER

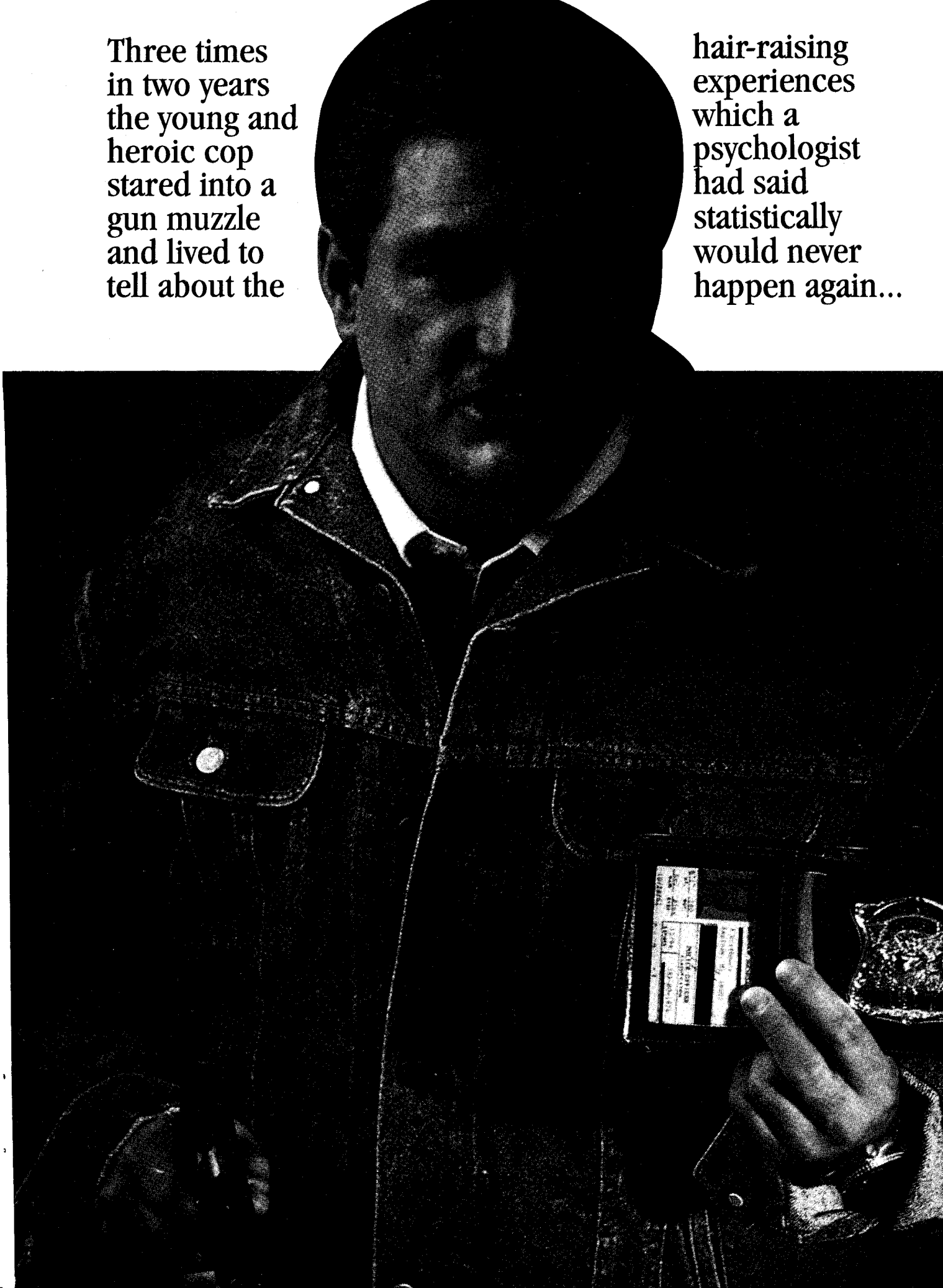
**P**OLICE OFFICER Dwight Stalls II of Newport News, Virginia, kept coming back for more. It took guts; everybody said it. The guy had courage. Some cops went 20 years on the streets without ever having fired their gun in combat. And here Stalls was—either getting himself shot, shooting someone else, or getting himself in situations where about anything could happen. And sometimes did.

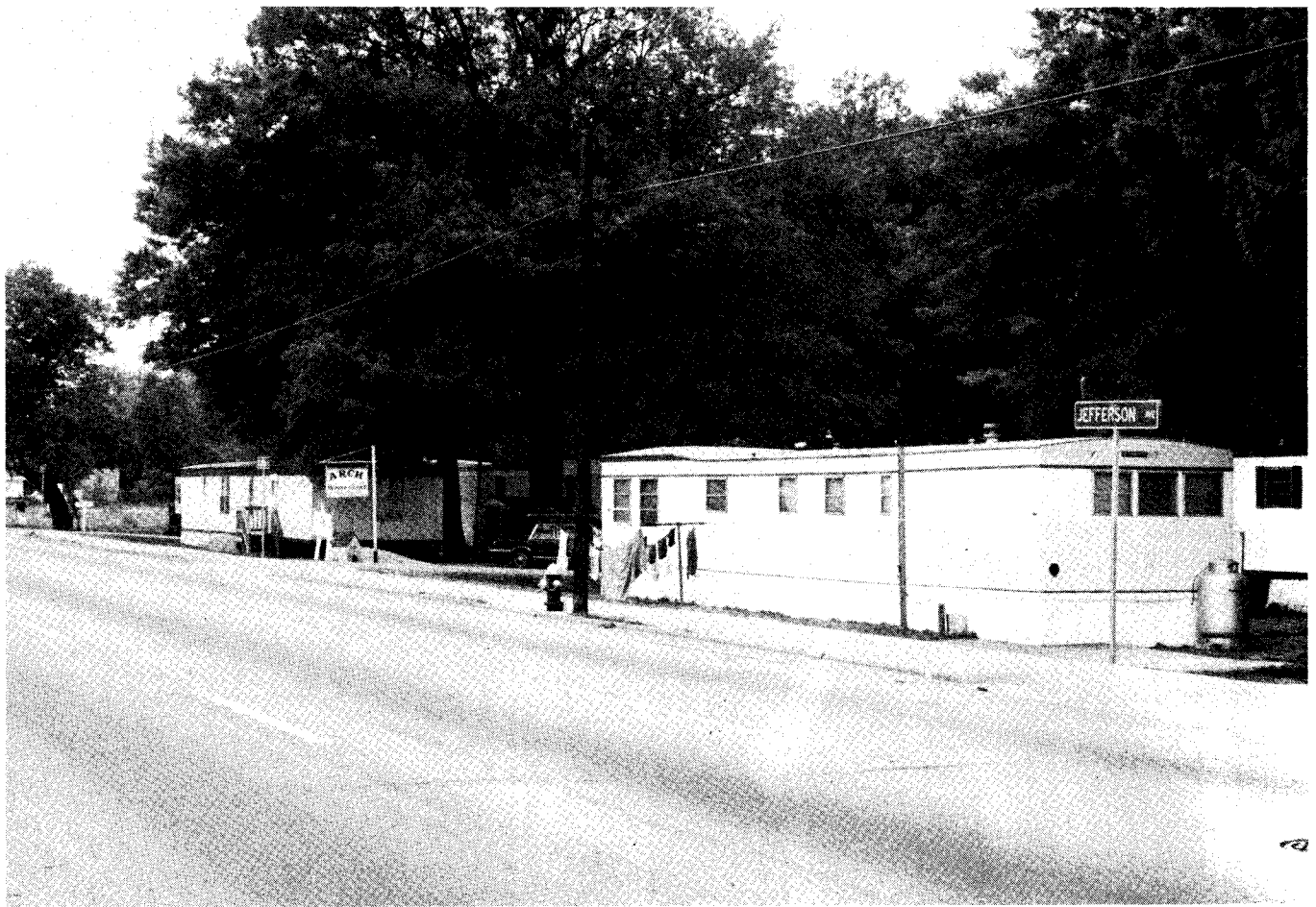
Stalls was a good cop. In his early 30s, Stalls had a mop of light brown hair on top of a stocky frame slightly taller than average. He had a quick grin and a rapid way of speaking, as though his brain worked faster than his mouth. His police personnel file bulged with commendations and awards attesting to not only his courage but also his good judgment and professionalism. His awards included the Police Cross, his police department's highest award for valor and heroism.

One award read: "You came to the aid of a fellow officer who was under fire from a suspect discharging a large-caliber rifle with the intention of killing the officer and anyone else who got in his way. As a result of your swift actions, the

Three times  
in two years  
the young and  
heroic cop  
stared into a  
gun muzzle  
and lived to  
tell about the

hair-raising  
experiences  
which a  
psychologist  
had said  
statistically  
would never  
happen again...





When Officer Dwight Stalls responded to a call at this trailer park, he expected nothing unusual—until the shooting began.

situation ended quickly with no officers or bystanders being injured..."

Another award proclaimed: "...You were confronted by a charging man with an eight-inch butcher knife in one hand and a hand axe in the other hand. Despite the narrow hallway, poor lighting and having only seconds to react, you were able to defuse and control the situation without resorting to the use of deadly force."

Still another: "...You were instrumental in saving the lives of two occupants of a house that was on fire..."

Like most larger cities, especially those along the seaboards, the city of Newport News was bursting at the seams from drugs. Narcotics cops sometimes commented that they felt half the city's population of 150,000 either dealt or used narcotics. They joked cynically that the night glow over Chesapeake Bay wasn't from the lights of Norfolk, Virginia Beach, or Portsmouth which neighbored Newport News: it came from all the dopers getting high on their nightly glows. If somebody seized all the dope in the area and dumped it into the Chesapeake River, cops quipped, the politicians in D.C. would be getting

stoned just from the mist.

"Maybe they *are* getting high off it," a policeman grouched. "Maybe that's what's wrong with our government."

In the early fall of 1987, Dwight Stalls was working the undercover narcotics detail with his partner R.F. Dawes. Stalls had been a cop for six years. He grew his hair long in disguise to match a short beard. Dawes, on the other hand, was a 20-year veteran with gray flecking his scruffy "street" hair. He had earned the lines in his face the hard way.

Stalls and Dawes were working a street informant in a neighborhood on Roanoke Avenue. The government projects—Dickerson Court, Newsome Park, Seven Oaks—bred dope and dopers. Dudes in pimp trousers and Reeboks swaggered about in front of the projects and dealt crack like used car salesmen.

It was shortly after nightfall on September 28, 1987. Stalls and Dawes drove along Roanoke Avenue with the stoolie hiding in the backseat. The stoolie stuck his head above window level to point to a two-story cream-yellow house on Roanoke, then ducked

to hide his face again.

"That's the baby right there," the stoolie exclaimed. "That's where they're dealing."

According to the informant, who had been deemed reliable in previous cases, two guys living at the residence were dealing cocaine. One was called "Mac." He didn't know the other dude. The narcs were going to use the informant to make a "controlled buy."

Dawes first frisked the informant so he could later testify in court that he had no dope on him at the time. The cops then gave the stoolie \$100 in bills marked for evidence and watched from hiding as he traipsed up to the cream-yellow house and was let inside.

After a few minutes, the stoolie re-emerged. The narcs waited until he was out of sight of the house, then picked him up. He forked over about a gram of cocaine. Stalls grinned.

"You did good," he said approvingly.

"I always do good, man," the informant responded.

It took the two cops several hours to round up a judge at that time of night to sign a search warrant. By that time it was nearly midnight. September ice had





A deranged gunman on this porch exchanged shots with Officer Stalls. Only one lived to tell about it.

already laced the breezes sifting in off the Chesapeake. Stalls stuffed his stainless-steel Smith and Wesson model 60 into his trouser belt and pulled his light windbreaker closed against the chill. He and a little army of six other narcs parked their cars down the block.

Shadows flitted as they surrounded the house. Two narcs took the back door, while two others crouched in the shadows to watch side windows. Dawes, Stalls, and a husky narc named J.T. Henderson slipped to the front door.

Once such a raid commenced, it was almost like turning on the lights in a filthy kitchen. Junkies and pushers scurried like cockroaches.

Henderson played decoy at the front door, while the two other cops flattened themselves against the darkened wall out of sight. If the pushers inside spotted a narc's face at the door, everything in the house except the sofa would go down the toilet.

Henderson knocked. The door eased open about a foot, framing a black man. Dim orange light from behind silhouetted his head and shoulders. He wore a multicolor silk pullover shirt with expensive black slacks. Pushers, like

pimps, could afford to go first class.

"Yeah, man? What do you want?" the man asked.

"Mac" was supposed to be the code word that got the door opened.

"Let me talk to Mike," Henderson

whispered through the crack.

Stalls caught his breath. It was "Mac," not "Mike." Pushers were so paranoid they wouldn't let their own mothers in if everything wasn't right. A wary expression crossed the dealer's features.

Everything was starting to go wrong.

Before the door could slam in Henderson's face, Stalls sprang into view with his badge thrust out at arm's length and his model 60 grasped in his other hand. Underneath his shirt he wore a bulletproof vest. Adrenalin coursed through his veins.

"Police officer!" Stalls yelled.

Stalls had always heard about how time went into slow motion when danger threatened. It was like that now, like a nightmare when the monster was coming. The officer watched the dealer's left hand go down, down, down. It came back up in the same slow motion, this time filled with a black revolver. The two men faced each other so closely that Stalls could feel the dealer's breath. He felt the gun muzzle thrust against his belly.

It exploded.

It was like a camera flash going off.



Officer Stalls points to where a dope dealer's bullet would have claimed his life if not for his bulletproof vest.

But instead of white light, it was the same orange light that glowed from inside the house. Stalls felt the bullet strike him, like someone had suddenly pounded him in the belly with a fist.

He staggered back. At the same time, he returned fire. He squeezed off four quick shots in the perp's direction, making the orange camera flash go off in rapid sequence. He was close enough to his target that he could have reached and slapped the guy on the head. Yet, two of his four shots missed; the other two struck the dope dealer in the forearm and in the thigh.

The suspect fell to the floor, screaming and squirming. Stalls retreated off

The shrink said Stalls suffered from stress symptoms like those of a Vietnam combat veteran. For months after the shooting, Stalls experienced recurring nightmares in which a gun muzzle the size of a water pipe pumped lead screaming and tearing into his body.

It would never happen again, Stalls told himself. It would never happen again. But still...

The police department transferred Stalls from the narcotics detail back into uniform. He was on day watch, writing up burglary reports from overnight break-ins, and issuing parking tickets. It was an older cop's dream to "retire" to day shift with weekends off. Although

snatched his radio mike.

"I'll advise on backup when I arrive," he reported.

Most disturbances were nothing anyhow.

This one would prove to be different. According to later reports, three men at the trailer court on Jefferson Avenue had got into an argument following a weekend drinking binge. Gunfire followed. Two men holed up in one mobile home and exchanged bullets with the third man who was holed up in another mobile home down the block. Two trailers were hit. A woman who ran to use a public telephone booth was fired upon.

A crowd of excited people met Stalls at the graveled horseshoe entrance to the court. The trailer park was a known trouble spot. It was a jumble of cheap and junky trailers occupied by an assortment of drunks and unemployed laborers. Police said the residents were always going off on each other.

"Everybody just calm down," Stalls consoled the spectators. "Where's all this happening?"

The park stretched back from the street for more than a block. A kid of about 18 offered to act as a guide. Stalls radioed in his situation, then followed the kid along narrow trailer court streets littered with abandoned junk cars and old bicycles. Other residents stayed behind and huddled near the telephone booth for security.

Stalls followed his guide down one street, then across to another, cutting between trailers. He heard no gunshots, no loud voices. He noticed, however, that all the streets had been abandoned.

"They're right around the corner," the kid whispered, hesitating.

Suddenly, a single gunshot reverberated through the flimsy trailers. It startled the kid; he leaped about 20 feet into the air, it seemed. Stalls dropped to one knee and slapped for his holstered 9mm semiautomatic that the department now issued to replace the standard service revolver. Stalls had recognized the gunshot as coming from a high-powered hunting rifle. Apparently, somebody meant business.

With weapon in hand, Stalls darted around the end of a trailer and emerged onto another street. The kid crept after him. Ahead of them, standing in a trailer doorway less than 70 feet away, loomed the threatening figure of a tall skinny man with an unkempt reddish beard. The low afternoon sun sheened off sweaty bare muscular arms extending from a dirty T-shirt. He appeared to be in his late 30s, although subsequent



Stalls, a member of his department's motorcycle squad, stands behind his Harley.

the porch to check his own wound while the other narcs overpowered the wounded dooper and handcuffed him. To Stalls' surprise, he found that his bulletproof vest had caught the lead slug, leaving him unscathed except for a growing bruise.

"I was lucky," Stalls would later say. "That's all I can say—I was lucky."

Only a sheet of crisscrossed nylon a quarter-inch thick had saved the narcotics detective's life. Sometimes, afterwards, Stalls would take out the vest and thrust his finger into the bullet hole.

"Statistically, it will never happen to you again," the police psychologist assured him.

Stalls wasn't an older cop, he was temporarily content to answer his radio calls and be waiting at the station house early for end of watch.

Two years after the Roanoke Avenue shootout, on July 16, 1989, when Stalls had nine years on the streets, the patrolman received a late disturbance call to a trailer court on Jefferson Avenue.

"Several drunk-and-disorderlies discharging firearms," the radio dispatcher informed him. "No backup available."

Stalls rode a single-man unit. Normally an officer never responded alone to a gun call. But it was the end-of-watch time, quitting time, and everyone else was tied up on other calls. Stalls



The Newport News SWAT team, of which Stalls (lower left) is a distinguished member, is a well-oiled squad trained to confront dangerous situations often involving the presence of weapons and the threat of violence against innocent bystanders.

events would show him to be 45. The bill of a ball cap shaded his eyes.

In his hands, the man gripped a .30-.30-caliber hunting rifle. He gazed intently down the street before he levered another round into his rifle and slowly raised the weapon to fire again. Stalls later learned that for the past 15 minutes the guy had been steadily pumping lead into his enemy's trailer, round after methodical round, while his enemy hugged the floor and prayed for either divine or police intervention.

The gunman hadn't spotted the policeman.

"Police officer!" Stalls shouted in his most authoritarian voice. Stalls' knees bent into a combat stance, his pistol aimed.

"Drop the rifle!" he commanded.

The old nightmare began—only, this time, it was for real. The bearded man pivoted toward the policeman's voice. In one smooth motion, he pointed the rifle. For the second time in less than two years, Stalls found himself staring into the muzzle of a gun barrel. Maybe statistics were against it happening again—but it was happening nonetheless.

Stalls remembered experiencing all those old familiar emotions all at once—fear, dread, sadness. It was like when the dealer had shot him and he shot the dealer back.

*Not again!* The thought slammed into his brain. *Not again!*

The bearded man squeezed his trigger. *Crack!*

The rifle bullet superheated the air as it exploded past Stalls' head.

Stalls experienced no paralysis as in his nightmares. He reacted to training and to a sense of survival—smoothly, professionally. The piercing bang of his pistol chased the echoes of the deeper-throated rifle.

From a distance later measured at 69 feet, Officer Stalls' combat marksmanship nailed the gunman one-half inch above the left nipple, right through the heart. The impact of the 9mm bullet knocked him sprawling back through the trailer door. He died before his body hit the floor.

Instantly, even before Stalls could catch another breath, a second scruffy man appeared in the doorway and wrenched the rifle from the dead man's hands. For the second time within mere seconds, the third time within two years, the young cop stared into a gun muzzle.

As Stalls darted for the cover of a nearby tree, he snap-fired twice more. He missed both shots. Terror gripped his heart at the double barking of another pistol from behind. Half-wheeling to face this newest threat, Stalls was relieved at the sight of another blue uniform. Officer Barry Haddix, who had

broken all speed limits in his haste to reach an endangered beat partner, crouched in a combat position. His pistol still smoked.

The fight was over.

The second shooter had gone down on the little porch. He lay moaning slightly and twitching, all the fight shot out of him. Apparently, Haddix had scored with both bullets; one penetrated the gunman's hand, the other creased his belly. He would live to face trial.

Sirens wailed in the distance. Officer Stalls stepped slowly from behind the tree. His knuckles were white from gripping his pistol. His gaze fastened upon the two bodies in the doorway of the mobile home. One of them was already a corpse.

"Statistically, this time, it can't possibly happen to you again," he was assured.

It would never happen again. It would never...

But still...

"You have been chosen as a recipient of the Police Cross," began Officer Stalls' commendation from Police Chief Jay A. Carey Jr., awarded for the successful performance of an act of extraordinary heroism while in personal combat with an armed adversary at imminent personal hazard of life in the intelligent performance of duty...

"Your courage in the face of immedi-

ate personal danger is a tribute to you as officer and to the entire Newport News Police Department..."

It was only one of the many commendations the officer received. In 1988, the Kiwanis Club of Warwick selected Stalls as Police Officer of the Year for catching a nine-year-old boy dropped from a second-story window during a fire.

Officer Stalls, wrote Police Chief Carey, "should be congratulated on [his] heroism, and know that the department is proud of [him]."

The year 1990 passed, as Stalls described it, in "routine police work." Starting with the gunfight on Roanoke Avenue, Stalls had experienced more police combat in a mere two years than most city cops experience in an entire career. And it wasn't over yet.

Stalls was unable to sit back on his laurels. Maintaining that he was a street cop and that a street cop was what he wanted to be, Officer Stalls volunteered for his department's motorcycle squad and for the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team. SWAT members are trained to confront extraordinarily dangerous situations in which the presence of weapons and violence requires exceptional teamwork and professionalism. Until they were needed, SWAT cops performed regular duties as patrolmen or detectives.

Shortly before 10:00 p.m. on January 31st, while off-duty, Officer Stalls received a page to report to an assembly point near Concord Crescent in Newport News. Police had a man barricaded inside his house. Shots had already been exchanged.

Donning his black SWAT jumpsuit and his 9mm semiautomatic, the policeman sped through the nighttime streets on his way to once again face gunfire.

According to later reports, a 39-year-old self-employed carpenter, barricaded inside his house on Concord Crescent, had become obsessed with Operation Desert Storm. For nearly two weeks, the man had sat huddled in front of his TV watching the Gulf War unfold on CNN. On Wednesday, January 30th, he rushed to a supermarket to stock up on groceries. He thought the U.S. was under nuclear attack and "there wouldn't be any food the next day."

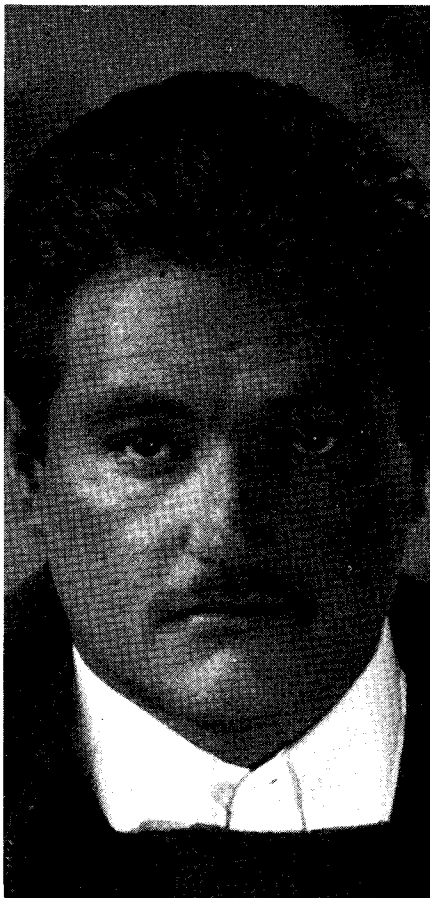
On Thursday night, when a frightened female relative attempted to leave him, he threatened her with a gun and even fired a shot into the ceiling with his .22-caliber pistol. The woman escaped and ran to a neighbor's house to call police.

"I was afraid," she cried. "I had never been afraid of him before, but I was afraid then....When you start living what you're watching, something is wrong. When all you see is this stuff, it can make you feel like there's nothing to live for."

For over six hours, for most of the night, the SWAT team surrounded the carpenter's house in the quiet suburban neighborhood and kept the crazed gunman contained while negotiators attempted to talk him into surrendering. Several times during the long night, negotiations broke down. Raving and shouting, the carpenter ran from window to window popping shots at policemen. On at least two occasions, officers returned fire with a shotgun and a 9mm.

Officer Stalls held fire. He was part of the assault team whose job it was to actually break into the house and capture the man if everything else failed. Stalls took cover in a neighbor's yard across the street. He waited.

"I heard a number of small-caliber rounds being discharged from what sounded to me to be inside the residence," Stalls would later explain. "These rounds...came from various locations from within the house. It seemed



Proud recipient of the Police Cross, his department's highest honor, Stalls was commended for his bravery and courage.

like it would be in one room and later I would hear something from the back portion of the house. That went on for a considerable amount of time...

"Because of my proximity to the house, when the weapon was discharged the rounds would be coming out into the front yard and across the street and striking the fence line to the rear of my position and in the area of the houses nearby..."

By 4:00 a.m., it became obvious that the gunman did not intend to surrender. Officers fired teargas through the front window. Officer Stalls and four other policemen on the assault team, wearing gas masks, broke through the front door and entered low and fast. All the lights were off inside. With adrenalin pumping, the policemen fell to their bellies and drew down on a pair of dummy decoys that the suspect had constructed using old clothes propped up on an ironing board and hanging from the ceiling.

In the meantime, the suspect withdrew to the bathroom and locked himself inside. He fired two quick shots through the closed door. Officers responded with one shotgun blast and a brief volley of pistol shots fired through the door.

There were no injuries. Negotiations resumed. The dialogue lasted over an hour.

Police Sergeant Burgess reasoned with the disturbed man. He cajoled, he bargained, he pleaded. Several times it seemed the carpenter was about ready to lie down his weapon, open the door and come out. But always, at the last minute, the man's raving would set in again.

"There ain't nothing but war, nothing to live for," the gunman ranted. "If I come out, you're going to cut my head off. The whole world's going to be destroyed. We're all going to be blown up..."

Just before dawn, the standoff ended in a dramatically different way than the other two shootouts in which Officer Stalls had been involved. Waiting outside in the darkened hallway, the officer heard one final shot from the bathroom. Then he heard a dull thud as the gunman's body struck the floor.

He had committed suicide.

Officer Dwight Stalls II, a cop with courage, gathered himself and went home in the first wintery light of a new day.

"Statistically, this time, it can't possibly happen again..." he thought to himself.

But still...



# JACK PINA WOULDN'T GIVE UP UNTIL HE LINKED TWO MURDERS TO HIS SUSPECT

by DUKE FOXX

**I**N SOUTHERN California, people call it "the desert," or simply Palm Springs. For the record, it's a 50-mile stretch of sand and cactus between the Little San Bernadino Mountains on the northeast and the San Jacinto and Santa Rosa Mountains on the southwest. Officially, it's the Coachella Valley and it lies equidistant from Los Angeles, San Diego, and Mexico—a two-hour drive from each.

From November through April, the mountain peaks are snow-capped and picturesque. In summer, temperatures can reach 120 degrees on the valley floor, but area residents are quick to point out that it's a dry heat.

Thanks to man's ingenuity and irrigation, the valley has been transformed from a parched wasteland into a lush green oasis that's become the grapefruit and golf-course capital of the United States. More than 500,000 people call it home—whites, black, Hispanics, native Americans, and Asians—and they live in relative harmony in a string of a dozen towns with names like Desert Hot Springs, Rancho Mirage, and Indian Wells.

In addition to the common folk, the valley's close proximity to Hollywood and its mild winters have made it a haven for showbiz celebrities for nearly half a century. Its street-names—the Bob Hope, Frank Sinatra, and Dinah Shore Drives and the Gene Autry Trail—bear witness to some of the region's famous residents. For that matter, Sonny Bono was mayor of Palm Springs from 1988 to 1992.

It's an area that, despite the encroachment of gang influences from L.A. and the growing menace of drug-associated crimes, on the average, only 27 homicides are committed here each year. Yet,



Senior Investigator Jack Pina was called on to oversee the initial investigation into a pair of back-to-back shootings that shook swank Palm Springs, California.



Jerzy Abratowski (left) was found bleeding to death on the parking lot of this post office. Sleuths found out he'd been shot by a perp in search of a getaway car.

**As a senior investigator with the district attorney's office's Bureau of Investigation, Jack Pina provided continuity and follow-up from the moment a case began until it was disposed of—which was usually several years down the road...**

in January 1989, two of that year's murders were committed within a four-hour period, and the victims, both upstanding citizens, were as different as night and day.

The first 911 call came into the Riverside County Sheriff's Department at 8:36 p.m. on Saturday, January 28th. Within minutes, Dave Florez and Marc Bender, each driving one-unit vehicles, responded to the Palm Lake Apartments in Palm Desert at the same time. Landscaped in the desert motif, this was a one-story garden-type complex with orange Spanish-tiled roofs.

In the parking lot, a man was waving at them.

"My friend's been shot," the man told the deputies.

Bender got a good look at the black male. He was tall and thin, well-groomed with a mustache, and somewhere in his early 30s. All Florez saw was the back of the man's head.

When Florez got out of his car, the man started running. Believing he was leading him to his fallen companion, Florez jogged after him. But the man wasn't jogging. He was running and he

was running fast. The deputy, who kept himself in good shape, picked up his pace but he was no match. It was too dark and the man was too fast. Florez lost him when he disappeared into a large section of undeveloped desert nearby. Florez called for additional help.

Meanwhile, Marc Bender had located the victim. He was lying in a pool of his own blood. As nearly as the deputy could tell, he'd been shot twice in the chest with a small-caliber weapon. He was still breathing, but the officer could not find a pulse.

The victim's name was Harry Adams. He was a strapping 20-year-old black man—6-foot-1, 200 pounds, and good-looking. He attended the College of the Desert, a junior college in Palm Desert, and he was a starting defensive back on the football team.

"He was a very popular young man with the students, teachers, and coaches," was the way the school's athletic director later described him. "He did a great job for us for two years and he was a great kid. Harry was from Beaumont, Texas, but he was going with a local girl and he'd really become a

Palm Desert kid."

Adams' work in the classroom and on the gridiron had earned him a football scholarship from Texas Southern University in Houston. He planned to enroll there in the criminal justice curriculum in the fall, and he hoped to play pro ball one day.

"Every time I saw him," a friend would later recall, "he was talking about going to school and playing football. That was his dream, and he had the determination to make it."

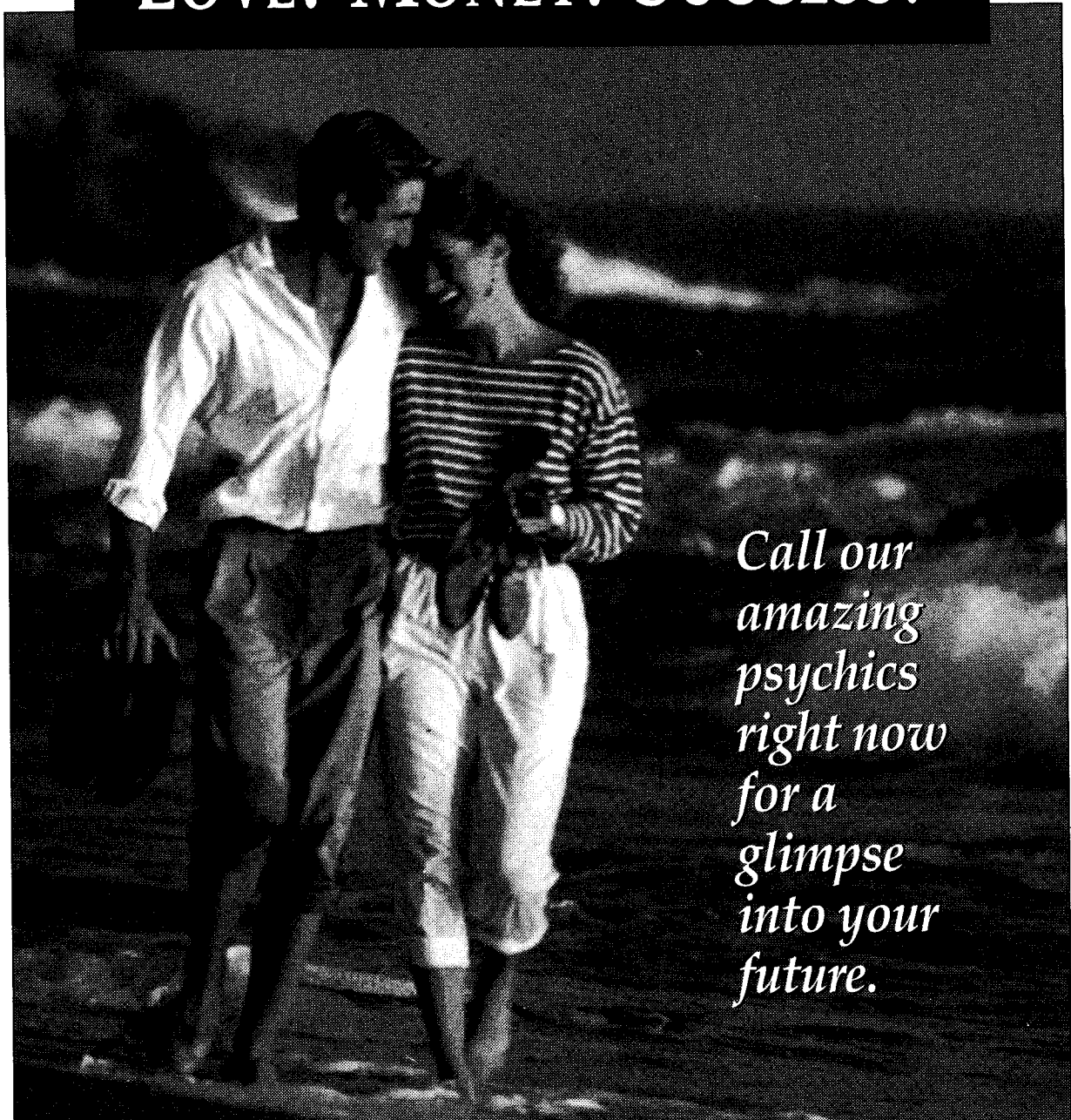
Other friends described Adams as cheerful, outgoing, and considerate. A teacher said he was a happy, fun-loving youth with a ready smile.

But Adams never got to see his dreams come true. He died within minutes of the deputies' arrival.

While Bender initiated the normal police work associated with a shooting—finding out who did it and how and trying to locate witnesses—Florez had been joined by 20 squad cars from surrounding municipalities, two four-wheel-drive vehicles, and a K-9 from the Cathedral City Police Department.

One of the officers found some foot-

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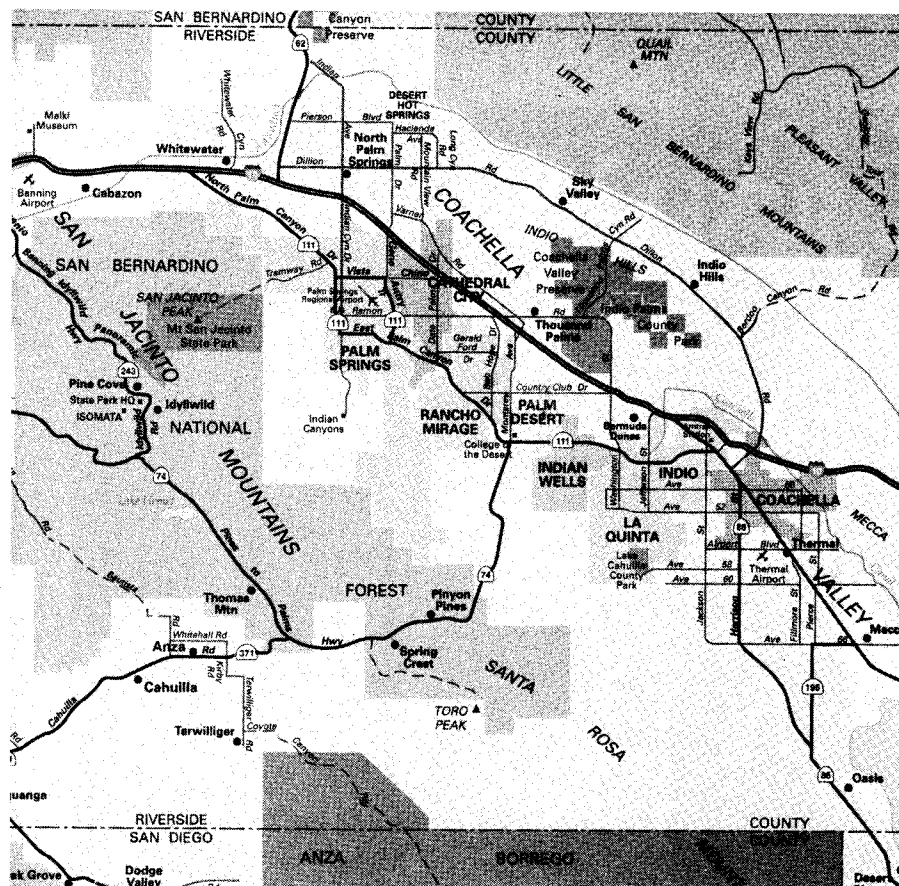
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Area of the killings is better known for glamor and scenic beauty than for crime.

prints in the sand, and the police dog picked up the suspect's scent. From there, with flashlights and headlights piercing the darkness, the dog led nearly 50 officers through the dunes and tumbleweeds. When the dog reached a bus that was parked on a road at the edge of the desert, it started pulling harder and barking frantically. With weapons drawn and exercising extreme caution, the officers entered the bus. They considered the suspect armed and dangerous.

Row by row and seat by seat, they searched the pitch-black bus. Judging from the dog's reaction, the suspect had been hiding there not long before, but he was no longer in the vehicle.

By then, Jack Pina had awakened from a sound sleep. A senior investigator with the district attorney's office's Bureau of Investigation, he'd dressed and driven to the crime scene. It was Pina's job to assist and oversee the initial investigation. More importantly, while other officers might be promoted, transferred, or retired along the way, Pina provided continuity and follow-up from the moment a case began until it was disposed of—which was usually several years down the road.

Pina interviewed two witnesses at the

crime scene. The first was a resident of the apartment complex who said she'd seen the whole thing through her window. Pina listened to her story but heard conflicts. What the witness was saying just didn't add up to the facts at hand. It wasn't that she was lying, it was more like she'd heard the shooting but hadn't actually seen it. In an attempt to be a good citizen and provide help, the witness was fabricating and embellishing. Pina had to dismiss the woman's statement as unreliable—which left the only eyewitness who'd been located.

He said his name was Eugene Johnson and he told Pina that he'd been with the victim all night. He said Harry Adams lived in the complex and they'd been playing dominoes and drinking beer in Adams' apartment, along with the victim's roommate, whose name was Larry Austin.

They'd run out of beer around 8:00 p.m., so all three men drove to a convenience store in Johnson's Chevy Blazer and bought some more. When they returned to the complex, a teenage girl was walking through the parking lot. Adams got out and started talking to her. He asked her if he could walk her home. To the eyewitness, it sounded as if she was about to say yes when Austin

walked over and horned in on the conversation. He said he wanted to take her home.

"She's too good-looking for you," Adams told Austin, "so why don't you just beat it and let us alone."

Austin took the remark to heart. He became belligerent and confronted Adams, who wound up pushing Austin away, then getting into a boxer's stance with his fists raised. That proved to be a fatal mistake.

The next thing the eyewitness knew, Austin reached into his waistband and pulled out a gun. It was a silver, two-shot .25-caliber, derringer, which he aimed at Adams.

"You better not shoot me, Larry," Adams said, backing away from the gunman. "You better not shoot me."

Austin shot his roommate once in the chest from a distance of 15 feet.

Adams then turned and looked at Eugene Johnson. Adams had a stunned look on his face and blood was spurting out of his mouth. When Adams turned back to face his roommate, Austin emptied the second barrel.

"I was scared," the witness told Detective Pina, "and I started running. At first, Harry was right behind me, running. But, suddenly, he just collapsed in the parking lot.

"I kept running and told some people to call 911."

"What about the girl?" Pina asked him.

"I don't know who she is," Johnson replied, and neither he nor anyone else knew where she was.

What Johnson had told Pina seemed to add up, so he pressed Johnson for more information about the suspect.

Johnson told him that Austin was 33 and he'd moved to the desert from the Inglewood section of L.A. a few months earlier. He worked at a Baskin-Robbins ice cream store in Palm Desert, not too far away.

By then, it was after midnight. Playing a hunch, Pina decided to drive past the ice cream shop. There, he determined that someone had just broken into the establishment. It appeared as if some money had been taken and he found one .25-caliber bullet on the floor. To him, it looked as if Austin had robbed the store to help finance his getaway.

That was when the second 911 call came in. A man and a woman had seen a man lying on the ground in the parking lot of the Rancho Mirage post office, some two to three miles from the Palm Lake Apartments. It looked as if he'd





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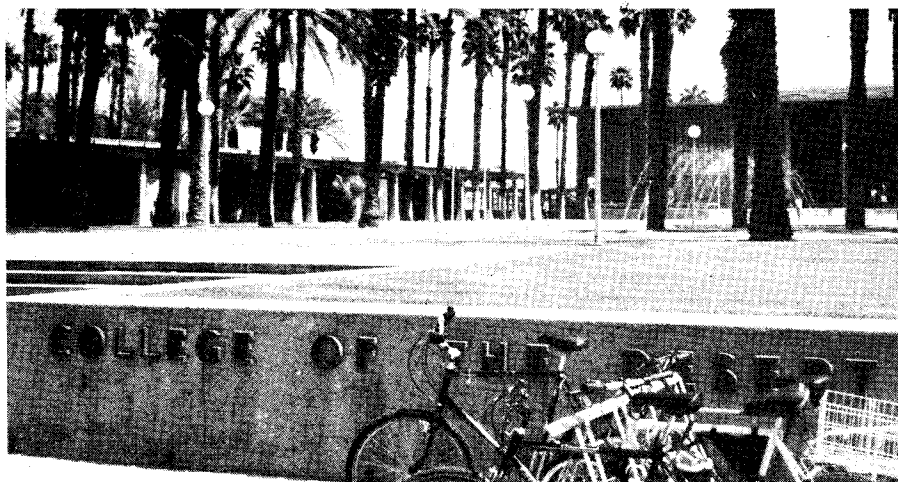
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Harry Adams (left), a promising young football star at College of the Desert, got into a lethal altercation with his roommate.



been struck by a bullet.

Pina got in his car and sped toward Rancho Mirage.

A county fireman arrived first and found an older white male lying face down in a pool of blood. The fireman checked for vital signs but found none. He then secured the area until help arrived.

Pina reached the scene a few minutes later. Near the dead body, he saw a hat, keys, and several pieces of mail, along with a pair of glasses—they'd been bent out of shape and the lenses had been popped out. To him, it was obvious that a struggle had taken place.

Detective Pina counted two wounds, one to the victim's face, the other to his chest, apparently made by a small-caliber weapon. The investigator found neither the victim's wallet nor any piece of I.D. However, the mail that was scattered on the ground provided tentative identification. But what caught Pina's attention most of all was not what he saw, but what he didn't see: There were no cars in the parking lot. Where was the victim's vehicle? he wondered.

"We just had a small-caliber shooting," Pina would later say, explaining what was going through his mind at the time, "and now we see this. Physically, it's close to the first shooting and both victims are in relatively the same condition. If the suspect's running, he needs a vehicle and he kills again to get one. With no remorse. So our assumption was: It could be the same person."

Within the hour, relatives of the slain man identified the body. His name was Jerzy Abratowski, age 59, and he'd been born in Poland where he was a famous pianist, composer, and arranger. He'd moved to the United States in 1966 and gotten married four years lat-

er. Called Jurka by his Polish relatives and George by his American friends, he'd performed concerts in Carnegie Hall, Las Vegas, Italy, Germany, and throughout the Soviet Union. In 1986, he'd moved to Cathedral City and for the past eight months, he'd been performing nightly at a restaurant on El Paseo, Palm Desert's chic strip of boutiques and restaurants.

"I'm unable to understand why a kind, life-loving man would lose his life like that," a relative told a reporter shortly after identifying the body. "It was senseless. He loved people and he was really loved. He trusted people and that's why he was so vulnerable. He thought no one would hurt him because he would never hurt anyone else.

"He left Poland to find a better, safer, and free life. We're not free in Poland, but people don't die from guns over there."

For Detective Jack Pina, the relative provided the victim's standard M.O.: He drove to the restaurant every evening in a tan 1987 Honda and finished playing sometime after midnight. On the way home, he usually ran errands like picking up cash at the ATM machine, shopping for groceries, or stopping at the post office. His car had a vanity tag: *JURKA*.

"He didn't think Palm Springs was dangerous," the relative told Pina. "To him, it was unthinkable to get hurt in this area.

"All I want is for the person responsible to be eliminated from society."

Detective Pina promised to do what he could.

Back at the Bureau of Investigation headquarters in Indio, Pina accessed the crime computer and learned that Larry Austin had one prior arrest on an alco-

hol-related incident. The computer listed an address in Inglewood, so Pina put out an APB on Austin and alerted the Inglewood Police Department to be on the lookout for him on the chance that Austin might return to his former neighborhood. At the same time, Pina obtained a photo of the suspect through the Bureau of Motor Vehicles and distributed it to the various police agencies.

By mid-morning, autopsies had been completed on both victims and two .25-caliber bullets had been removed from each man's body. The slugs were sent to the crime lab for ballistics testing.

That afternoon, a young woman phoned the Bureau of Investigation to say she'd witnessed the shooting at the Palm Lake Apartments the night before. An hour later, Detective Pina was speaking with her.

"She was only sixteen," the investigator would later explain, "but she was no flake. She came from a good family, nice people, and she was college material. At first, her family feared it was gang violence and told her to stay out of it, she was better off not getting involved. But her conscience bothered her, and she came forward.

"Her statement pretty much followed what Johnson had told us: Two men were vying for her attention. To her, it was something petty. When they started arguing, she turned and started walking home by herself. Then she heard the first gunshot. She thought it was a firecracker.

"She turned around and Adam was on his knees, but she still thought they were just fooling around so she went home. The next day she heard the news and called us."

Two days passed without a trace of the suspect.

On the morning of Wednesday, February 1st, Officer Arlen Vaselenko of the Inglewood PD was sitting in his police car paying close attention to Larry Austin's old neighborhood. Earlier, two neighborhood residents had tipped him that Austin was planning to return to his old apartment to pick up some personal belongings. The tip turned out to be right on the money.

Shortly before 11:00 a.m., a tan Honda pulled onto Austin's old block. A black male fitting Austin's description was driving. There were no passengers.

Officer Vaselenko allowed the car to pass so he could check the license plate. As soon as the officer saw that it read *JURKA*, he pulled away from the curb to make a vehicle stop. But the suspect must have seen him coming in the rear-view mirror. Austin sped up and rounded the corner, putting distance between himself and Officer Vaselenko's car.

At that point, while he began pursuit of the fleeing Honda, the policeman called for backup.

Another quick right-hand turn and the chase was on—then a left and Vaselenko temporarily lost sight of the Honda.

---

*He didn't want to shoot, but he was prepared, arms out, both hands on the gun, trigger-finger poised to squeeze...*

---

Two more rights and he spotted the Honda once again. It was parked in an apartment complex. The door was open and the vehicle was empty. The officer squealed to a stop next to the Honda and exited his vehicle. Maybe 100 yards away, he caught a glimpse of the suspect just as he was racing between two buildings. Vaselenko radioed his new position, then gave chase on foot.

By the time the running policeman reached the general vicinity where he'd seen the suspect turning the corner, he was joined by additional police officers who'd responded to his call for help. But by then, the suspect had vanished.

The policemen decided to conduct a door-to-door search. They started by checking the external doors that were attached to each apartment unit. The doors led to storage rooms and hot-water-heater closets.

With guns drawn, one by one, the officers opened each door and looked inside—six, seven, eight doors without a sign of the suspect. Then Vaselenko opened the next door. Huddled inside, sweating and out of breath, Austin was trying to hide behind a hot-water heater. His eyes met the police officer's.

"Freeze!" Vaselenko ordered.

He didn't want to shoot, but he was prepared, arms fully extended, both hands firmly gripping his police revolver, trigger-finger poised to squeeze.

By then, other officers had rushed to his side.

Outnumbered, Larry Austin gave up without a struggle.

With the help of other officers, Vaselenko spread the suspect on the ground and handcuffed him. Then he searched him. In one pocket, Vaselenko found a .25-caliber derringer with two live rounds in the barrels. In another pocket, he found four additional .25-cal-

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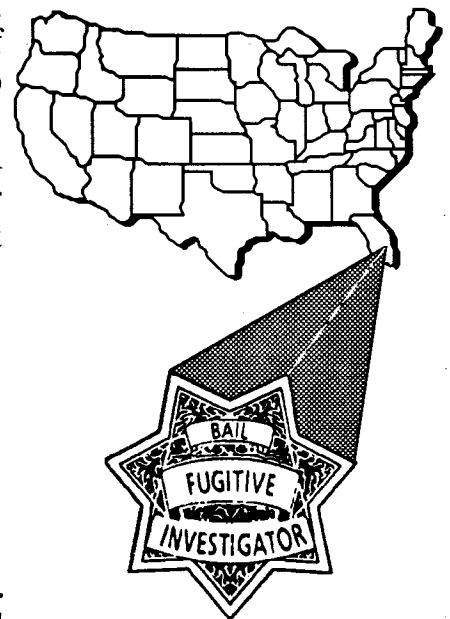
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Suspect left only tracks in the sand (above) at Adams crime scene. Later, spotted in Abratowski's car (below), speedy perp opted to ditch it and flee on foot.



Adams and the suspect lived together in an apartment at this complex. It was also here where they fought over a girl.



Abratowski, a famed composer and musician, played piano nightly at this restaurant.

iber bullets and several rolls of coins.

Later that afternoon, Larry Austin was booked in Inglewood and his bail was set at \$500,000. The next day, deputies transported him, along with the evidence that had been found on his person, to the Riverside County Jail in Indio. The gun was sent to the crime lab to be test-fired to see if it was the murder weapon in either or both cases.

A day later, Friday, February 3rd, Austin pleaded innocent in Municipal Court to charges that he'd killed Harry Adams. Later the same day, the ballistics results came back from the lab: The bullets that killed Harry Adams and Jerzy Abratowski matched. They'd been fired from the same gun.

Austin was back in court the next day, charged with killing Jerzy Abratowski. He was held without bail. In addition, the district attorney was considering filing "special circumstances" against Austin: committing murder to steal a car. In California, when special circumstances are proven, the jury is left with only two alternatives: life imprisonment with no chance for parole or the gas chamber.

"That's something we don't do lightly," Deputy D.A. Dave Downing, assigned to prosecute Austin, told the media. "But it's something we'll be weighing carefully."

This is where Jack Pina's work began. In custody was a man who'd killed twice. At the time of his arrest, Larry Austin was driving the car he'd stolen from one of his victims and he was carrying the weapon he'd used to kill both

men—as ballistics tests would soon confirm. It was up to Pina to build a case that would stand up in court.

He first had to anticipate Austin's defense attorneys. Pina knew they'd try to suppress whatever evidence they could. This meant interviewing the arresting officers to insure that Larry Austin's civil rights had not been violated. Had he been properly Mirandized?

He had.

Next, Pina validated the test results and catalogued the evidence. Including the Honda, there was a roomful of evidence which had to be warehoused and transported to and from the preliminary hearings, arraignments, and the trial itself—a period of time which would



drag out to nearly four years. Most importantly, during that period, Pina had to make sure none of the evidence disappeared.

What sort of strategy would Austin's lawyers use? Most likely, Pina reasoned, they would contend he was insane or claim he'd acted in self-defense.

In regard to the former, this meant scheduling psychological testing for Austin. In regard to the latter, it meant reinterviewing the two eyewitnesses and keeping tabs on their whereabouts. By the time the case eventually came to trial, Eugene Johnson would go on to college at Florida State, graduate, and enter the work force. The teenaged girl would graduate from high school and start college.

As far as Pina was concerned, he had an open-and-shut case. The only loose end was whether or not Austin would be

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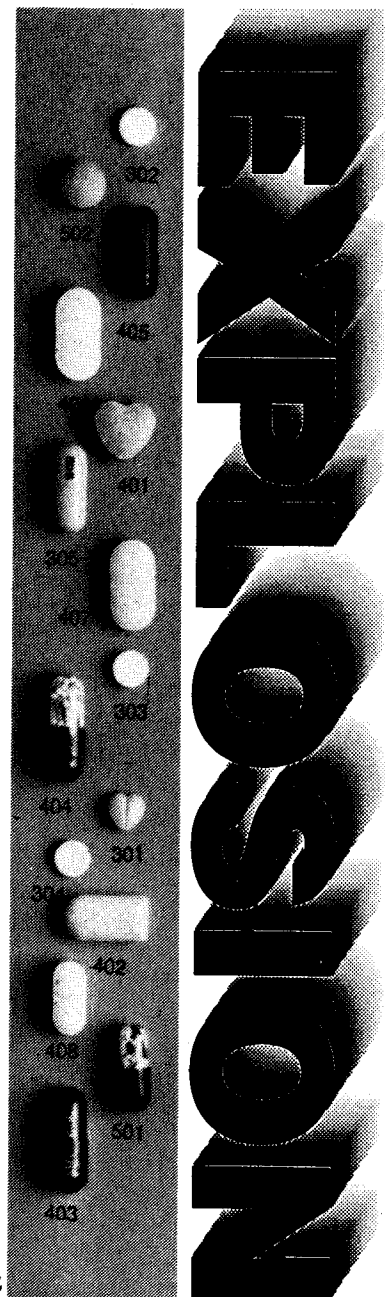
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sentenced to die in the gas chamber. In that regard, the investigator spent several weeks in Los Angeles digging into Austin's background.

He learned that Austin had been born and raised in the ghetto. He was a playground athlete and basketball was his game, but he was a slow-talking man with a knack for irritating almost everyone he came into contact with. He went out of his way looking for fights, even though he lost 90 percent of his battles.

Dozens of interviews revealed Austin's deep-seated contempt for women. He liked to manipulate and control females. To a great extent, he patronized



Larry Brent Austin (above) tried to find freedom in this cramped utility closet. He'll be spending the rest of his life in more spacious but less pervious quarters.

hookers, but he liked to turn the tables on them. To do so, he pulled guns on them, forced them to perform sexual acts at gunpoint, then took their money.

"I am the whore-master," was his slogan.

Detective Pina also learned that Austin had been the last person to see several hookers who mysteriously vanished and were never seen again. When he tried to link Austin to their disappearances, Pina found other hookers reluctant to talk to him because they were afraid of Austin. Although Pina knew

he'd never be able to prove it, he began to suspect that Harry Adams may not have been the first person Austin killed.

Austin's case came to trial at the beginning of November 1992 and lasted for a month. On December 1st, showing no visible emotion when the verdicts were read, Austin heard himself pronounced guilty of voluntary manslaughter in the death of Harry Adams and guilty of auto theft at gunpoint and first-degree murder in the death of Jerzy Abratowski.

The penalty phase of the trial began three weeks later to determine whether or not the state of California would execute Larry Austin. But the jury never got to hear what Pina had learned about the convicted killer's background. The information was deemed to be too prejudicial.

"All I will say," Pina recently reflected, "is that the court system was liberal in this case."

Instead, the jury heard a string of witnesses who painted a picture of a man who overcame his ghetto background to become a surrogate father and role model for his siblings, a hardworking man who juggled three jobs while sharing his

passion for basketball with other family members, a man whose arrest record consisted of one minor infraction.

The sole dissenting voice came from a close relative of Jerzy Abratowski. Over the defense attorney's objection, the judge allowed a taped recording of the victim's last composition to be played. While the courtroom was mesmerized by the haunting melody, the witness bowed her head and cried out loud.

"Why did you have to kill him?" she chastised Austin after the music ended. "He was a kind, loving man, a very accomplished pianist, a talented man. But you, sir, are a disgusting scum in society."

Wearing a brown suit, his hands and feet manacled to dissuade any thoughts of escape, Larry Austin sat at the defense table. He listened to his accuser, but he never responded.

The prosecutor then rose. "Don't give Larry Austin a Christmas present," he said, beseeching the jury to condemn Austin to die in the gas chamber.

On December 22, 1992, the jury reached their decision: Austin was found guilty, but he would not die in the

gas chamber, jurors decided.

"It was difficult," one juror said afterwards.

"We had a long discussion about his background," said another, "and found no felonies. So we concentrated on what happened and what caused him to do it. We think what he did was awful, but we felt it was a one-time thing."

"The background is what made the difference," said a third juror, "and the way he'd worked after the awful beginning he'd come from."

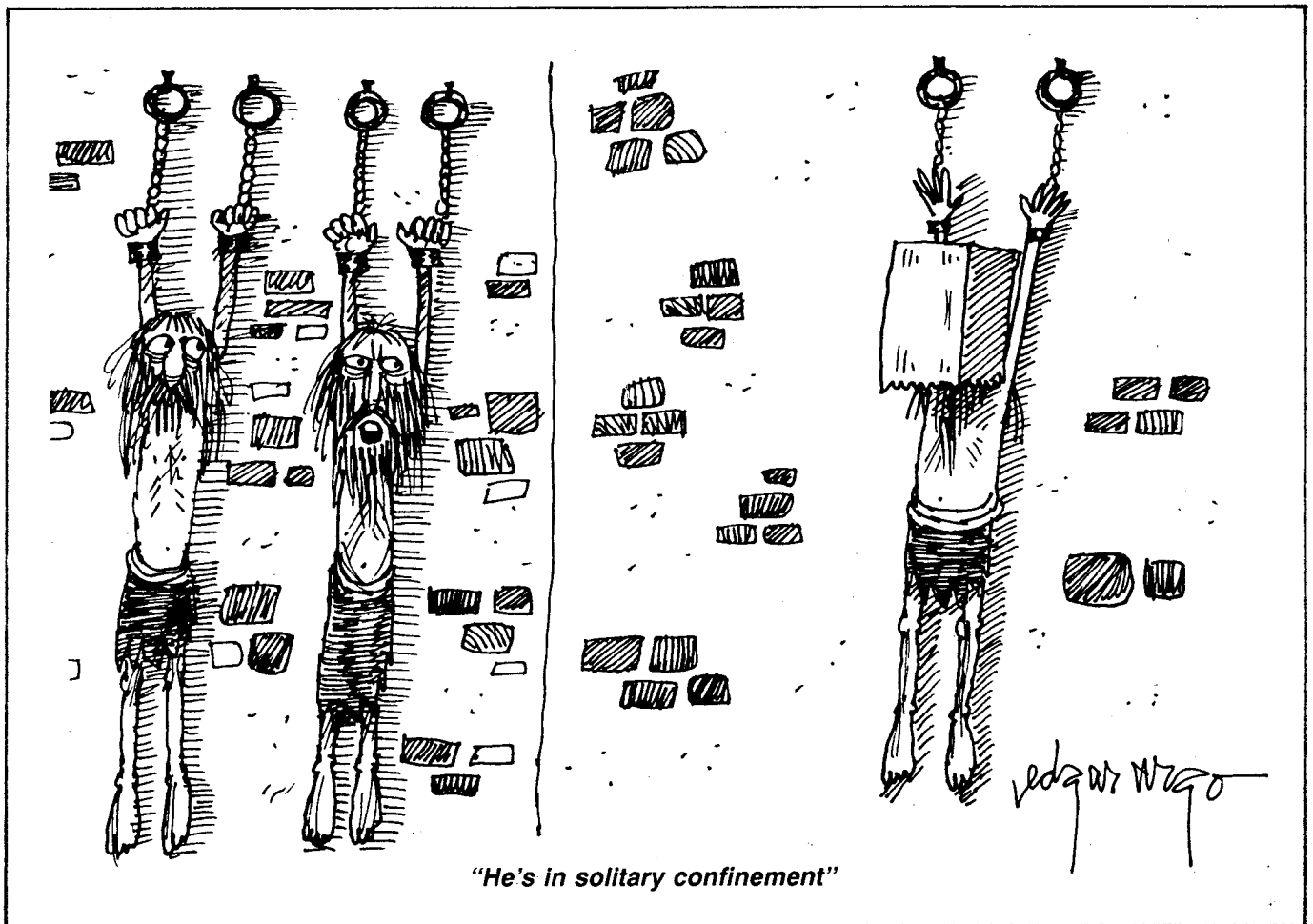
The prosecutor was unhappy with the outcome.

"Larry Austin is clearly not a nice person," he said. "He clearly killed an old man for no reason, but the jurors told me he wasn't bad enough for the death penalty."

Pending the outcome of any appeals, Austin will spend the rest of his life in jail. ♦♦♦

#### EDITOR'S NOTE:

*Eugene Johnson is not the real name of the person so named in the foregoing story. A fictitious name has been used because there is no reason for public interest in the identity of this person.*



# DETECTIVE MARK SMITH:

# HE CRACKED 2 CASES BY FOLLOWING THE TRAIL OF A .38

**T**HE WORD “neighbor” has different connotations in different places. In small towns and in the country, perhaps, the word means a dependable friend and confidante. Often in the city, neighbor means something else. In the gridlocked cities of the United States, neighbors can be obstacles to a person’s self-determination, or nuisances—or even worse.

But even in the most overpopulated, hostile cities in the country, sometimes neighbors become better than that; sometimes friends or lovers. And sometimes they become something even more noble.

At 9:15 p.m. on December 17th, 1990, Hollywood, Florida, Detective Mark Smith was summoned to a quiet section of west Hollywood. The shift supervisor had informed Smith of a homicide at an apartment building on Cleveland Street.

Smith arrived at the scene just before 10:00 p.m. It was a section of Hollywood unaccustomed to violent crime. Smith, considered one of the top detectives in the city, had walked the mean

by **MICHAEL SASSER**

streets of South Florida for years, only most didn’t look like Cleveland Street.

A uniformed officer met Smith outside the apartment.

“What have we got?” Smith asked.

“We had a couple, Mr. and Mrs. De-

Camp, returning from vacation,” the officer answered. “They were assaulted as they opened the door to their apartment by two men. A neighbor two doors down heard the struggle and came out, apparently trying to help. One of the assailants pulled a gun and shot the neighbor. Then both men took off.”

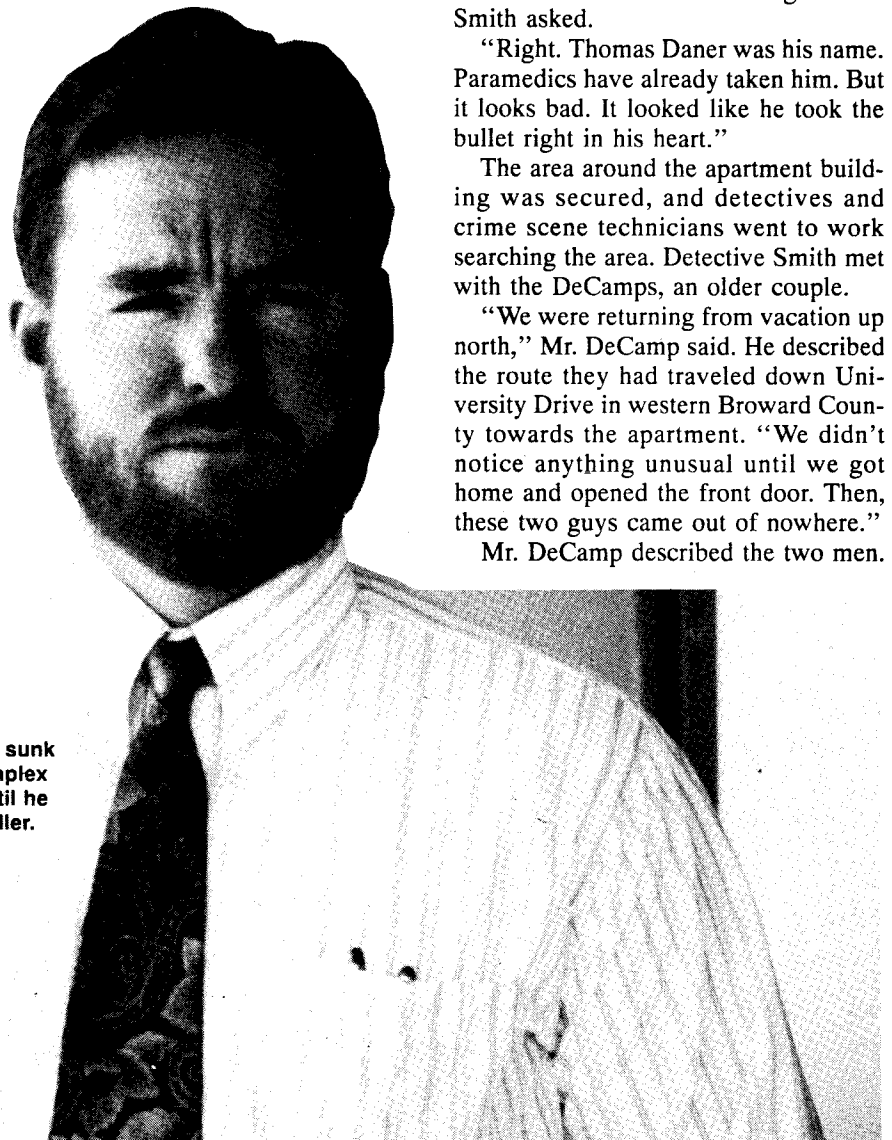
“The victim was the neighbor?” Smith asked.

“Right. Thomas Daner was his name. Paramedics have already taken him. But it looks bad. It looked like he took the bullet right in his heart.”

The area around the apartment building was secured, and detectives and crime scene technicians went to work searching the area. Detective Smith met with the DeCamps, an older couple.

“We were returning from vacation up north,” Mr. DeCamp said. He described the route they had traveled down University Drive in western Broward County towards the apartment. “We didn’t notice anything unusual until we got home and opened the front door. Then, these two guys came out of nowhere.”

Mr. DeCamp described the two men.



Detective Mark Smith sunk his talons into a complex case and held on until he nailed an elusive killer.



One was tall and lanky, the other short and heavysset.

"They tried to force us into the apartment," DeCamp said, "but I was afraid of what would happen if we let them do that. So I started fighting with the taller guy. My wife screamed and I got scratched up."

DeCamp showed Detective Smith the minor wounds on his hands and arms.

"That's when Mr. Daner came out of his apartment," DeCamp said. "He was running to where we were struggling. Then, all of a sudden, one of the men pulled a gun. It looked like a machinegun or something. He shot Tom. Tom fell down, and then the two guys just took off running. One of them dropped another gun in a pile of our spilled luggage and they just left it there."

"Which man fired the shot?" Smith asked.

"The heavier man did. The thin guy dropped the gun, I think," DeCamp answered.

The couple described the gun used in the shooting. It had been dark outside, but they described the strange, angular weapon. To Detective Smith, the weapon sounded like a Tec-9 or similar semi-automatic weapon. Either way, it was not, by any means, a sportsman's weapon. That meant that the two men had been prepared to kill someone.

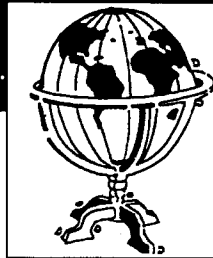
Detective Smith asked the couple more questions. As he listened to their responses, Smith became convinced that the two were near-victims of a follow-home robbery. Perhaps they had picked up the attackers on University Drive or some other main road in Broward County. There were a lot of similar crimes occurring all across the county. The thieves would spot a car driven by older, often affluent people and follow them home. Then, the thieves would force the people into their home and rob them. Sometimes they would beat or tie up the homeowners. Other times, the victims would be killed.

In this case, it was a Good Samaritan neighbor who had been killed. While questioning the DeCamps, Smith was informed that Daner had indeed died from a single gunshot wound. By horrendous luck, the single shot had gone right through the man's heart.

Smith met with another witness who lived in the building directly across a courtyard from where the shooting had taken place.

"I didn't really see either man," the neighbor said. "It was dark and I just really could only make them out—and the

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# The robbery and murder would never have been solved were it not for the relentless efforts of Mark Smith who linked the two cases through videocamera surveillance tapes which he sent to the FBI.



Sleuths search a crime scene for the casing of the slug that slew Thomas Damer.

gun out—in silhouette.”

“Could you describe the weapon?” Smith asked.

The witness described the gun he’d seen silhouetted earlier in the evening. It was a distinct-looking weapon. The description matched that given by the DeCamps. At least, it was a start.

Smith and the other detectives worked late into the night looking for physical evidence on the scene. They could not find the casing from the single round fired. However, they did find the gun dropped by the thin assailant in a

pile of the DeCamps’ spilled luggage. It was a .38-caliber Charter Arms revolver, fully loaded. It had apparently not been fired recently.

As the search continued, Detective Smith found a rubber scuff mark, freshly made, on the street next to where the shooting took place. The mark looked like the kind that would be left by a sudden car acceleration. No one had seen either of the assailants in or near a car, though by the nature of the crime, police knew the suspects had to have been in one.

Around 1:00 a.m., detectives cleared the scene. They arranged to keep it secured until morning when a second search could be conducted in the daylight.

A Be-On-The-Lookout (BOLO) alert was issued for the two men described at the murder scene. But without a complete description and no information on the vehicle they were in, the chances of locating the two suspects were slim at best.

The next morning, December 18th, detectives renewed the search of the area around the shooting scene. This time, they were more successful. Smith found an expelled casing in the grass.

“What is it?” an officer asked.

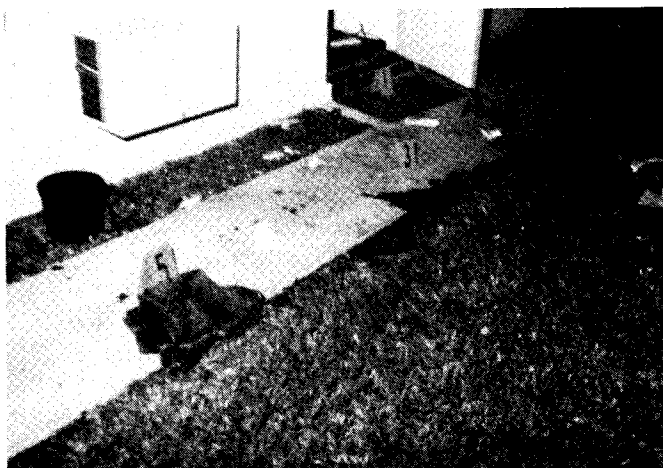
“Nine millimeter casing,” Smith answered. “This looks like it.”

The casing was taken in for evidence while Smith re-questioned the neighbor across the courtyard. The man described what he had seen in silhouette.

“The bigger man fired the gun,” the witness told Smith. “I remember seeing the strange-looking gun in his hand.”

Unfortunately, the witness was unable to provide an actual description of either man except in relative terms. His statement did, however, verify the DeCamps’ belief that the larger man was the killer.

After leaving the scene, Smith returned to police headquarters. There was a report and a message from another detective there. Smith called the de-



Crime scene markers (l.) tell the story of the violence that claimed Damer's life. Stick at right shows track of slug through fence.

tective on the telephone.

"That weapon found at the scene last night was purchased at a gun shop in Miami," the detective said, "by a woman named Diane Summers. This past November fourth, she was the victim of a follow-home-type robbery at her home. The gun was stolen. There is a copy of the report on your desk."

Smith flipped through the report. The details of the crime were similar to the M.O. of the men who tried to rob the DeCamps. The gunman was a heavysset man similar to the one described in the Daner killing. And there was more. The weapon used by the man who robbed Diane Summer fit the description of the Daner murder weapon. And the robbery of Diane Summers had not been solved.

Detective Smith felt that he had discovered the first solid lead in the Daner killing. He hoped that more answers could be found in Miami.

Later that afternoon, Smith met with Diane Summers at her northwest Miami home.

"I was returning home from a club a little before four in the morning," Summers related. "And as I was going into my house, this man approached me and



The shooter's accomplice dropped this gun as they fled the scene of the murder.

held me up." The woman described the gun and it did, indeed, match the description of the Daner murder weapon.

"He got my purse, including the gun I carry for protection," Summers said. "The man even fired at me once before he ran off, but he missed."

"Police never caught the man?" Smith asked.

"No...but they do have a video of him," Summers answered. "What?"

"He used my stolen bank card at two different grocery stores' automatic teller

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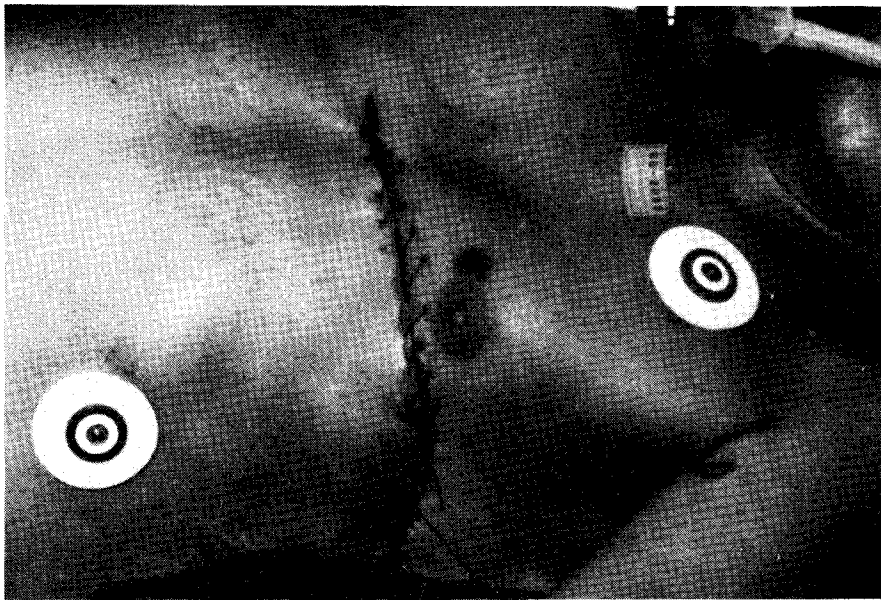
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Stitches (above) mark incision pathologists made to inspect the victim's wound, a clean shot through the heart. His bloody shirt (below) attests to crime's grisliness.



machines to get money out of my account," Summers said. "And those machines have cameras that record every transaction. They have the tapes, but I guess they were not very clear or something."

Detective Smith believed that the man who robbed Diane Summers was involved in the murder of Thomas Daner. Before he left Summers' home, Smith called in a crime scene team and the front yard of Summers' house was searched.

Amazingly, detectives found an expelled 9mm shell casing just on the swale outside the home. Children walked by on the sidewalk every day, but somehow the casing was still there. Police were also able to chart the path of the bullet through the chain-link fence outside Summers' house. Only the fence may have saved Diane Summers from the same fate as Thomas Daner.

On December 21st, Smith contacted the company responsible for the surveil-

lance cameras at the stores where Summers' card had been used. The films were turned over to police and to Smith, who viewed them immediately.

The tape was of poor quality, but Smith could plainly see a man and a young woman use the card in the machine, then walk around the corner. Just moments later, a white car drove back around the corner and then left the view of the camera.

Detective Smith believed it was possible that the two suspects were in the car in the video. The timing was just about right. However, the quality of the film was too poor to even use the photos in a lineup for witnesses to the Daner murder.

Ballistics experts checked the casing from the Summers robbery and matched it to the one from the Daner murder. Smith then had proof that the two crimes were connected. A surveillance was set up on the two supermarkets where Summers' cards had been used,

but Smith felt it unlikely that police would see one of the suspects there.

Fortunately, Smith knew that he had another direction to go. He contacted the FBI and sent the surveillance tapes to them for enhancement. Through its complex technology, the Bureau would be able to enlarge and clarify the pictures from the grocery stores. Then, maybe, the man in the video could be traced. Smith wanted the man because he believed that the man was involved at least peripherally in the murder of Thomas Daner.

After sending the tapes to the FBI, leads in South Florida ran dry. Despite attention by the local media, no solid witnesses or leads panned out. The holidays and winter passed, and then spring turned into summer.

On June 10, 1991, Detective Smith received the enhanced photos from the FBI. Both subjects—and especially the car—were much clearer. The vehicle in the photo was a white four-door Mercedes. The pictures of the subjects were released to the media and broadcast across Florida.

The day after the broadcast, a Miami man contacted Hollywood police and arranged a meeting. At the meeting, Smith showed the man the photos from the automatic teller.

"Yes, I thought I knew that man," the source said. "Now I can tell for sure. That's Jack Olsen. I know him. I don't know who the woman is. But that is Jack."

"What about the car?" Smith asked.

"That's Jack's. He had a four-door Benz. That looks like it."

The source gave Smith an address for Jack Olsen in Opa Locka, a west Miami suburb.

Detective Smith drove by Olsen's address and found the car from the photo. He ran the license plate and found out that it was indeed registered to a Jack Olsen.

On June 19th, Smith showed the photo from the auto teller to an Opa Locka police officer who knew Jack Olsen. The officer said that the man in the photo was indeed Olsen.

Next, Smith showed both the DeCamps and Diane Summers a photographic lineup that included Olsen. The DeCamps were unable to identify anyone, but Summers gave a tentative identification of Olsen as the perpetrator in her robbery.

Despite the tentative identification from Summers, something bothered Detective Smith. The original description of the criminal was of a heavysset male

of average height. Olsen was a little taller than average and not a heavy man.

Could that explain the witnesses' inability to give a positive identification?

Still, there was enough evidence for a warrant to be issued.

On June 24th, detectives arrested Jack Olsen at his residence and took him in for questioning. There, he was informed of the situation and shown the enhanced photos.

"I didn't have anything to do with those crimes," Olsen said.

"Is that you in the pictures?" Smith asked.

"Yes, it is."

"And who is the young woman?" Smith asked.

"I don't know," Olsen answered.

Detective pressed Olsen for more information, but he refused. Olsen did, however, continue to profess both his innocence and the fact that he did not know the woman in the photos with him. Smith very much doubted the latter point, in particular.

Olsen gave permission for police to search the interior of his vehicle. There was one thing of interest in the car—a Florida driver's license issued to a man named Tom Bryant.

Smith checked on Bryant and found that he was wanted for a probation violation and two counts of grand theft. With the help of Opa Locka police, Smith searched for Bryant but was unable to locate him. But on July 4th, the Opa Locka police located and arrested Bryant and brought him in for questioning. Smith interrogated Bryant.

"I've known Jack Olsen for a couple of years," Bryant said. "I don't know anything about any bank card or crimes or anything. I just know the guy."

Smith showed Bryant the photos from the bank machine. Bryant identified Olsen.

"Do you know who the woman is?" Smith asked.

"I believe that's Jack's niece, Carla Kane," Bryant said.

That made sense to Smith. Whatever his involvement in the killing of Thomas Daner, Olsen had seemed content to protect the woman in the picture. If it really was his niece, then Smith could understand why Olsen had been so adamant.

On July 24th, an informant contacted police to say that he had located where Carla Kane's father worked. Smith traveled to the Miami tire store and met with the father there.

"Yes, that's her," the father said when Smith showed him the photo-

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graph. "That's my daughter."

"Do you know where she is living?" Smith asked.

"No," the father answered. "She was staying with her boyfriend, Rudy. But I don't know now. My wife will probably know more."

The man gave Smith his wife's address and Smith headed to the home in Miami. He met with Kane's mother there. The mother identified Jack Olsen and her daughter, Carla Kane, in the photos.

"Carla told me that her boyfriend, Rudy, had given her those cards," the mother said.

"Is Carla living with Rudy?" Smith asked.

"Yes, for about a year now—on

Ninety-fifth Terrace somewhere."

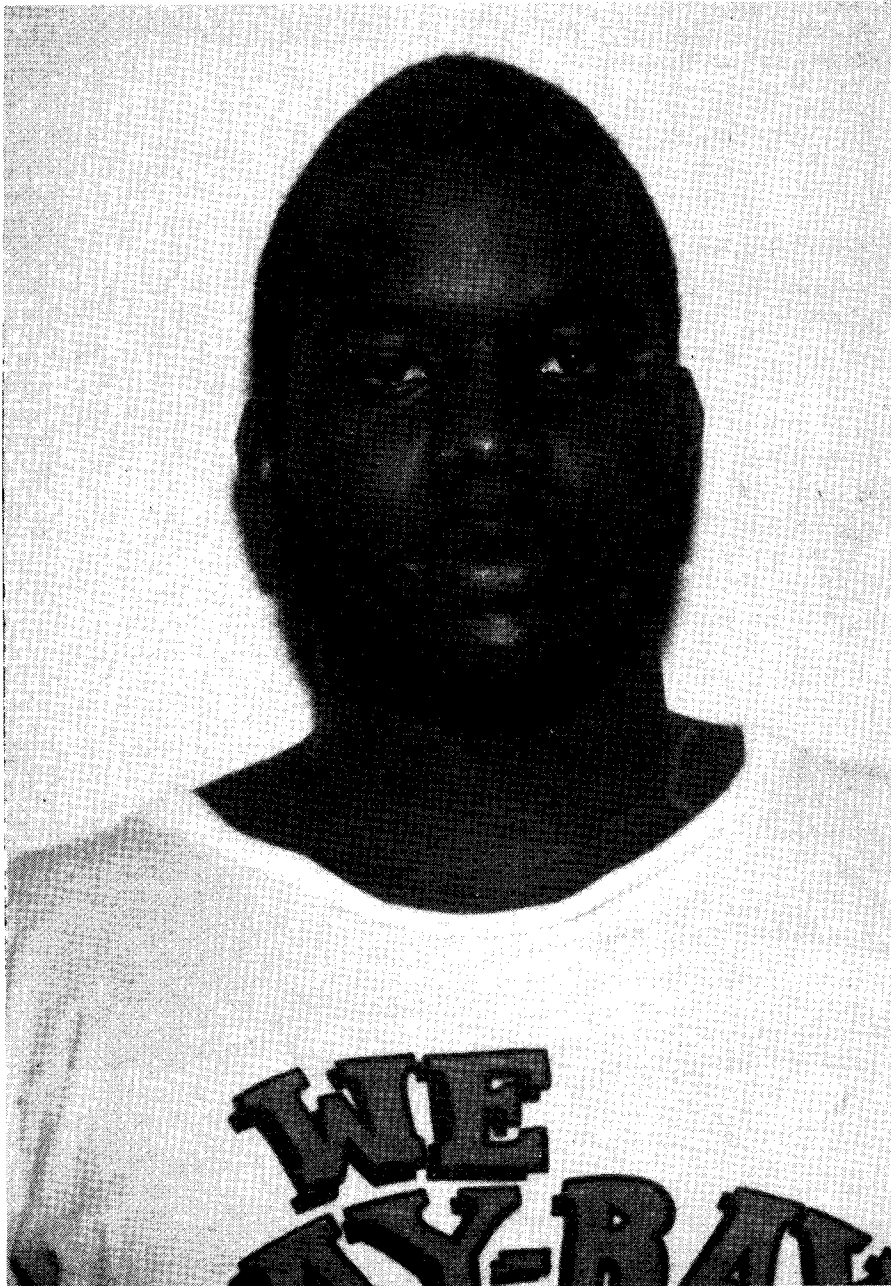
"Do you know this Rudy's full name?" Smith asked.

"Yes, it's Rudolph Wilson."

Detective Smith convinced the woman to set up a meeting between him and Carla Kane.

Back at the police station, Smith checked on Rudolph Wilson's background. The day after Christmas in 1990, Wilson had been arrested for an assault. In that assault, a Tec-9 sub-machine gun was used but not recovered.

There was more. According to records, Wilson was 5-foot-8 or 5-foot-9 and heavysset. That matched the description given by witnesses to the Damer murder, and to the robbery in Miami.



Rudolph Wilson at first denied knowing anything about the Damer shooting, but Detective Smith laid a trap for the husky suspect, and he took the bait.

The next day, July 25th, detectives met with Carla Kane. Kane was crying.

"Rudy gave me those cards," Kane said. "Jack just drove me to the teller machine. He didn't have anything to do with getting the cards."

"How did Rudy get those cards?" Smith asked.

"He followed a woman home to her house in northwest Miami," Kane answered. She described the car, the woman and the house. Smith knew it was the Summers robbery.

"He took his gun and grabbed her purse. He took a thirty-eight out of the purse, and the money and the cards. Then he threw the purse away," Kane said. She described the gun, and it was the same description from the murder and robbery scenes.

Kane went on. She described another occasion when she'd been with Wilson. This time, though, there had been a second man involved.

"I don't know his name," Kane said. "He was a taller, thin man. They pulled into an apartment building in Hollywood and got out of the car."

"You were in the car at this time?" Smith asked.

"Yes."

"Then what happened?" Smith urged.

"Rudy had his 'nine' and the other guy had the thirty-eight from the robbery in Miami. When they came back to the car, the other guy said he had dropped his gun. That's all I heard."

Detectives took a statement from Kane and prepared an arrest warrant for Rudolph Wilson.

Just getting to this point, Detective Smith thought, was a miracle. The dropped .38 had been their only piece of evidence until the gun's travels had been followed. And now, police had the name Rudolph Wilson, and a strong belief that he was the killer.

On July 26th, police arrested Rudolph Wilson at the Miami meat market where he worked. Wilson was transported to a Miami station where Smith questioned him. Smith showed Wilson the pictures from the automatic teller machine.

"I don't know nothing about that," Wilson said. Smith did not want to reveal that Carla Kane had already given her boyfriend up.

"We're interested in a shooting incident that took place in Hollywood in December of 1990," Smith said.

"I didn't have anything to do with that," Wilson said.

Detective Smith changed his approach.

"We know you were there with another man," Smith said. "Our question is who did the shooting."

With that, Wilson decided to talk.

"I was there," Wilson said. "We were robbing that couple. But the guy I was with shot that man when he came out of his apartment a couple of doors down. I didn't have anything to do with the shooting. I was just there."

"What's the other man's name?" Smith asked.

Wilson shrugged.

What Wilson did not know was that witnesses had already picked the bigger man (Wilson) as the shooter, and even Kane had placed the murder weapon in Wilson's hands just before the shooting.

While being questioned, Wilson acknowledged his involvement in the Summers robbery and that subsequently, he'd given the stolen cards to Kane.

Wilson walked into a well-baited trap. He was arrested and charged with first-degree murder, as well as related robbery and weapons charges.

Detective Smith wanted a watertight case. He was originally unable to find the murder weapon, and when he did find it, it had been damaged and was impossible to match to the homicide.

Mr. DeCamp and Diane Summers both picked Wilson out of a lineup as their assailant. DeCamp also assured police that it was Wilson who shot Thomas Daner to death. The witness who had seen the crime in silhouette also pointed the finger at the bigger man—though this witness had disappeared by the trial date.

Smith kept trying to get Wilson to reveal the identity of the second, thinner man.

"You really should tell us who that man was," Smith told Wilson.

Wilson only shook his head.

Despite the absence of the second bandit, Wilson went to trial for the murder of the would-be savior, Thomas Daner.

The defense had little to stand on, and Wilson was found guilty. He was sentenced to life in a Florida prison, where he must serve at least 25 years before even being eligible for parole. ♦♦♦

#### EDITOR'S NOTE:

*The DeCamps, Diane Summers, Jack Olsen, Tom Bryant, and Carla Kane are not the real names of the persons so named in the foregoing story. Fictitious names have been used because there is no reason for public interest in the identities of these persons.*

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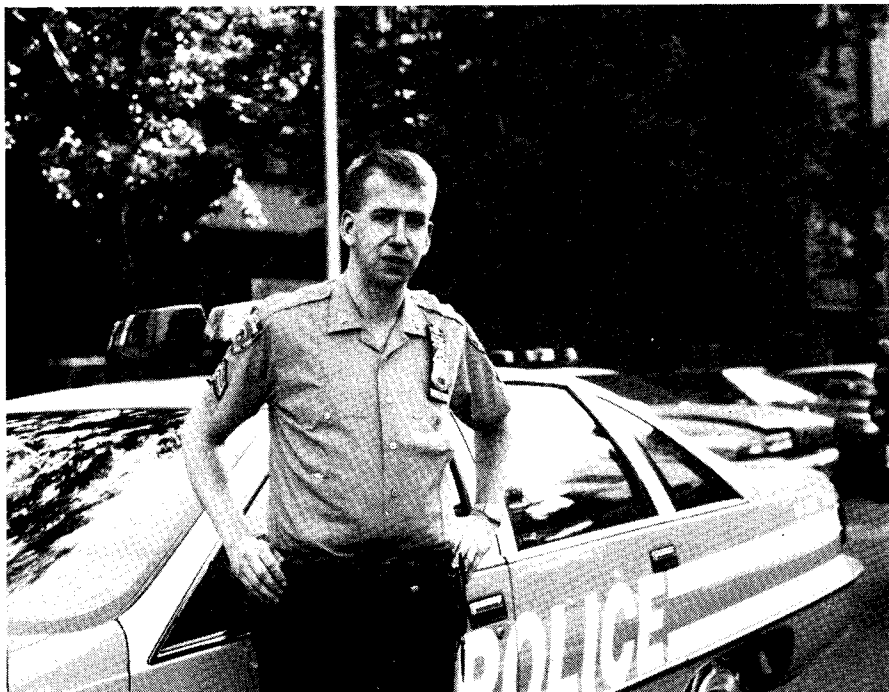
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by DIRK C. KAPO

**A**SK SERGEANT Mike Shea of the 24th Precinct on the Upper West Side of Manhattan what makes a good cop and you'll get a quick answer: "Good memory, caring attitude, and enthusiasm."

Most civilians might think cops rely more on physical qualities, like steady aim or the ability to leap tall buildings in a single bound. But then most civilians don't realize that a lot of the best police work happens in the brain and only rarely in the hands and feet. In those rare moments when a cop does have to spring into action, it's mental abilities like decisiveness, deductive reasoning, and good memory that determine the success of a ticklish operation.

It was just those qualities that helped earn Sergeant Shea a commendation for

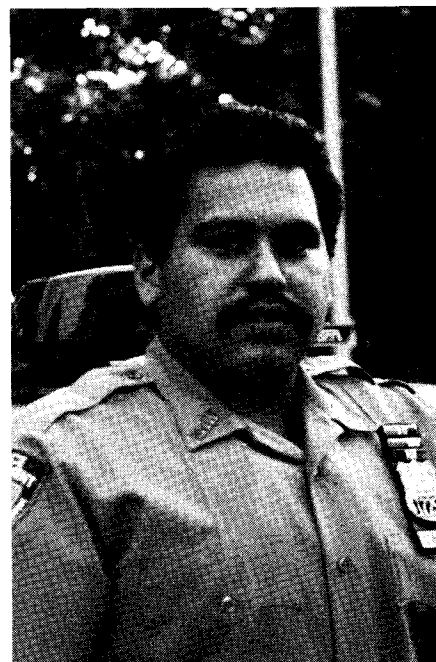
his part in the arrest of a pair of thieves who went on a violent robbery spree in three of New York City's five boroughs over a week in early February 1991.

The first three cases occurred in a matter of hours on Tuesday, February 5th, in the South Bronx and in Shea's own 24th Precinct. Other incidents occurred in Washington Heights in northern Manhattan, Soundview in the Bronx, and near Sunset Park in Brooklyn. Eleven cases in all were reported over five days. All involved a Mutt and Jeff team who used heavy artillery to strong-arm valuables—including jewelry, electronic equipment, cash, a leather jacket, and a Jeep Cherokee—away from their rightful owners.

The most serious attack occurred just after midnight on February 8th in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Park Slope, a fashionable residential area bordering

historic Prospect Park. At approximately 12:30 a.m. that Friday night, Willas Miller and a companion were walking on Prospect Park West when a silver Jeep Cherokee roared down the street and screeched to a stop a few yards away. Two men, one tall and big and the other short and stocky, leaped out and accosted the couple. The large man presented a high-caliber handgun, which he waved menacingly in the couple's faces. Both robbers demanded the couple's valuables.

What the robbers didn't know was that Miller was an assistant district attorney. Perhaps because his job was to put criminals behind bars, Miller refused to cooperate with the robbers. A scuffle ensued. The large man leveled the gun at the A.D.A. and pulled the trigger. The slug entered Miller's head, rolled around his skull, and exited, without doing too much serious damage, un-



Officer Daniel Munoz was in the driver's seat of a radio-monitored patrol with Shea the night of the high-speed chase.



der his right eye.

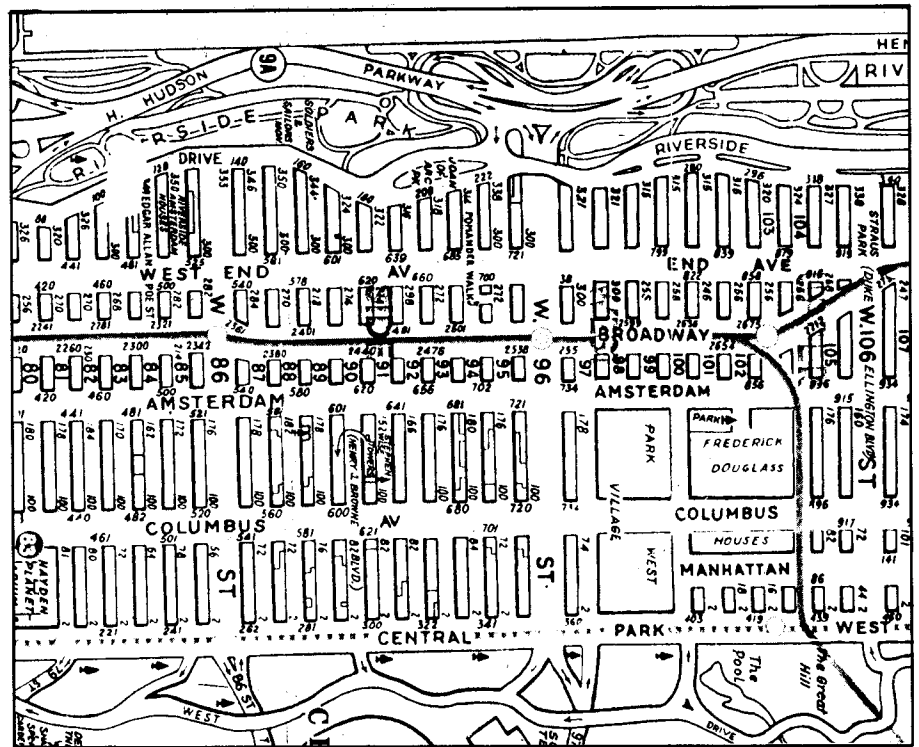
At the time, Miller didn't know how lucky he was; but then, neither did the robbers, who were halfway to the Jeep as Miller hit the sidewalk. The robbers, on the other hand, were not so lucky. Before the pair could speed away, Miller's companion got a good look at the Jeep's tag number and memorized it: New Jersey plates FCS-32D.

When officials from Brooklyn's 78th Precinct responded minutes later to the scene of the attempted murder, they immediately ran a check on the fugitive vehicle. If it had been the Jeep's owners who had attacked A.D.A. Miller and his companion, the case might have been solved within the hour. Unfortunately, the central computer showed that the Jeep had been reported stolen at gunpoint the night before in the Bronx. With no suspects in that case, Miller's assailants could be anywhere. An all-points bulletin went out on the radio to every precinct in the city to be on the lookout for the silver Jeep.

The following night at 11:30, Sergeant Shea reported for duty at the 24th Precinct headquarters on West 100th Street. Looking like a schoolboy with his blond, close-cropped crewcut and bright blue eyes behind wire-rimmed glasses, the 30-year-old Shea is the first in his family to wear a badge for any department. A psychology and business major at New York's Fordham University, Shea decided after graduation in 1984 to go into police work rather than other professions for which he was better trained. "I didn't want to be bound to a desk," the native New Yorker explains. "I wanted to do something more exciting with my life."

Shea got his wish when he joined the NYPD in 1985, taking short-term assignments in a couple of the city's most "exciting" neighborhoods: Washington Heights and the South Bronx, which are both in perpetual competition for the highest crime rate in New York. In November 1989, Shea was transferred to the relatively calmer 24th Precinct in a demographically mixed district sandwiched between Central and Riverside Parks on Manhattan's Upper West Side. While the area is no South Bronx, it has its share of the usual big-city problems—drugs, muggings, and other forms of disorderly conduct—much of which rage after dark.

On the night of Saturday, February 9th, Sergeant Shea and Officer Daniel J. Munoz were assigned to the night watch detail in a radio-monitored patrol car (RMP). The night sky was as clear of



Several of the robberies occurred in this area on Manhattan's Upper West Side.

clouds as the ground was of snow. The night, too, had been clear of trouble in the first hour and half of duty, but that was about to change.

At 1:22 a.m., Shea and Munoz rounded the corner off Central Park West onto West 87th Street when they spotted a man and woman, both apparently agitated, standing on a stoop outside a brownstone. The man, in shirtsleeves, was decidedly underdressed for a chilly midwinter night.

The instant the woman saw Shea's RMP, she waved her arms and yelled, "Stop! We've just been robbed!"

Shea told Munoz to pull over and roll down the window.

"What happened?" Shea asked through the window.

"They took my jacket," the man answered. He pointed at the taillights of a car that was speeding across the intersection of 87th Street and Columbus Avenue toward a red light at the end of



24th Precinct is in a demographically mixed area west of northern Central Park.

# What did a stolen jacket, a rash of robberies, and the attempted assassination of a Brooklyn district attorney have in common? Manhattan's Sergeant Mike Shea put them all together in a flash of a high speed street chase on Upper Broadway...



Perps made a fatal error when they turned the wrong way onto Broadway (above). Officer Tomas Ramos (below r.) nabbed one perp near this street corner (below l.).



the next block, where 87th crossed Amsterdam.

Shea didn't have time to think it over. "Go!" he ordered Munoz.

Without further ado, the RMP picked up speed and raced down the street after the taillights. The driver of the suspect

vehicle, apparently noticing that he had a police car on his tail, ignored the red light and turned right onto Amsterdam. Right turns on red are illegal in New York City. Now the officers had something positive to charge the driver on—if they could catch the car.

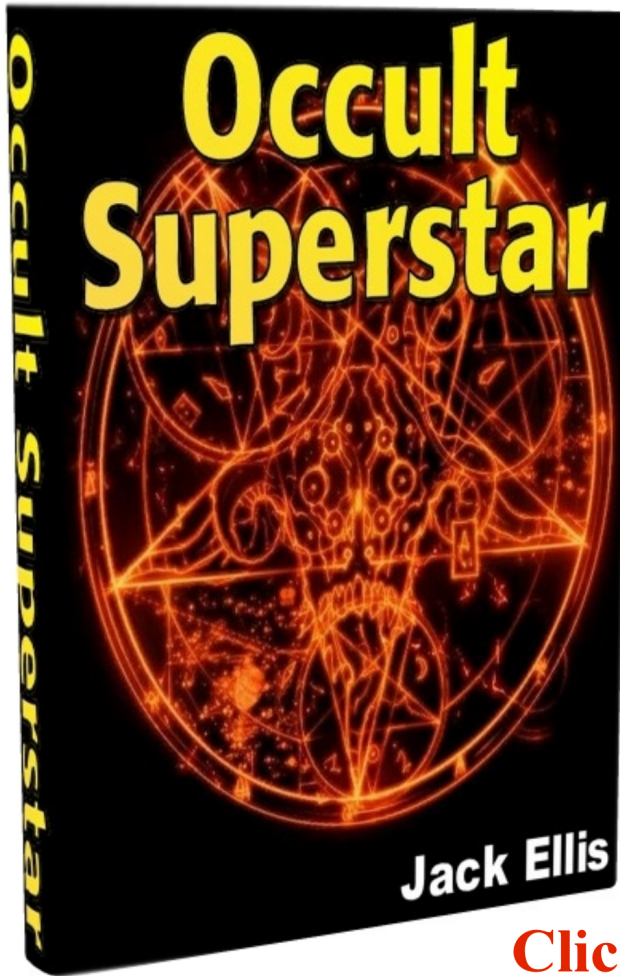
The RMP reached Amsterdam in time for Shea and Munoz to watch the suspect vehicle preparing to turn left onto 89th Street. Shea finally got a good look at the object of their pursuit, a silver 1989 Jeep Cherokee with New Jersey plates FCS-32D. He radioed into headquarters with a description of the vehicle and a request for backup as Munoz maintained the pursuit.

As soon as they reached 89th Street, with their dome lights flashing, Shea and Munoz saw the Jeep speeding recklessly for a red light at the westbound street's intersection with Broadway.

Like a chess grandmaster, Shea was already calculating his adversary's next moves. He knew that the driver of the suspect vehicle was ultimately aiming for the West Side Highway, which was, at the closest, accessible at 96th Street, seven blocks to the north. The highway would be fairly uncluttered by this time of night, and the suspect would have plenty of road to open up throttle and lose his pursuers. But, Shea wondered, how was he going to try to get there? Would he turn right and head north on Broadway or would he continue across Broadway down 89th and turn right onto West End Avenue or Riverside Drive?

Shea could not have anticipated the suspect's actual next move. In horror, the officers watched as the suspect ran the red light, turned left, and headed south—in the northbound lane of Broadway!

Even at that hour, even on the slowest night of the week, Broadway is heavily trafficked. And this was *not* the slowest night of the week. This was a Saturday night. Taxis were rushing Upper West Siders home from their evenings out, and visiting suburbanites were making their way in their cars up Broadway toward 96th Street on their way out of town via the West Side Highway. And now they were heading straight into the path of a fugitive who would clearly do anything to shake the police from his tail. Shea had to decide in a flash whether to pursue the suspects southward down the northbound lane or risk losing them.



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Before Shea had to decide, however, fate decided for him. The Jeep had no sooner turned the wrong way onto Broadway than it crunched into a northbound vehicle. As the RMP reached the intersection, the occupants of the Jeep bailed out and fled on foot in opposite directions, the driver heading south on the northbound side and the passenger heading north on the southbound side.

By this time, backup had arrived with a vengeance. Officer Tomas Ramos, on loan from the East Side's 19th Precinct, was on watch at the 24th's Operation Take Back post nearby when the commotion caught his attention. Ramos apprehended the driver within a block of the accident. A short, stocky man, the driver tried waving Ramos away, to no avail, by yelling, "I have asthma! I have asthma!"

Meanwhile, Officer Munoz had bailed out of the RMP and was in hot pursuit of the passenger, a larger, more physically agile man than the driver. Munoz finally caught up to him at the corner of 91st Street, where another RMP was waiting. The passenger tried to vault the waiting RMP, but he hit the windshield hard, smashing it and cutting himself in the process.

By this time, the victims of the robbery who had alerted Shea and Munoz had arrived at the corner of 89th and Broadway in another patrol car. They had called 911 immediately after Shea's RMP took off after the suspect and had been picked up within a few minutes. Now they identified the two men as the ones who held them up at gunpoint as they were returning to their apartment on West 87th Street. They identified the larger man as the one who wielded the gun. The smaller man, they said, had also gotten out of the Jeep and demanded their money and jewelry and the man's leather jacket.

Officer Ramos recovered a .32-caliber Smith and Wesson revolver and three live rounds of ammunition from beneath the front passenger seat of the abandoned Jeep. Other items of interest, including a leather jacket and several pieces of jewelry, were plainly visible on the vehicle's floor and seats. The car was driven to the precinct headquarters for a more thorough going over.

The driver was identified as 25-year-old Jaime Lopez of Macombs Road in the Bronx. The passenger, 21-year-old Tony Quinones, also of Macombs Road in the Bronx, was treated at St. Luke's Hospital for a minor head injury and released into police custody. Both men were placed under arrest at the 24th Pre-

cinct for a variety of charges, including, among others, robbery in the first degree, criminal possession of a weapon, criminal possession of stolen property, resisting arrest, criminal mischief, and reckless endangerment.

When Sergeant Shea returned to headquarters to process the booking of the two suspects, he was handed a memo concerning the Jeep being sought in connection with the shooting of A.D.A. Willas Miller the previous night in Brooklyn. It was, of course, the very one he and Officer Munoz had pursued that night. Shea put out the word via radio to other precincts that the Jeep was apprehended, adding details of the robbery that led to the apprehension. Almost immediately, officers and detectives in precincts around the city called in to report that they were looking for a pair of robbers with a similar M.O. to the ones Shea and his colleagues had arrested moments before.

For their part in the arrest, Sergeant Shea and Officers Munoz and Ramos received a commendation, dated February 18, 1991, from Lieutenant Paul O'Connor, commanding officer of the Manhattan Robbery Squad. Specifically, O'Connor cited the officers' "instant actions" and "intelligent follow through."

"This arrest," the commendation reads, "executed under difficult circumstances, was noteworthy in itself. The officers' awareness of other facts and circumstances surrounding the instant arrest...was paramount in alerting other units to this arrest. The intelligent follow through by these officers...contributed significantly to the solution of a series of robberies in three boroughs. Most notable of these was the robbery and shooting of Willas Miller, an assistant district attorney in Brooklyn."

Deputy Chief of the Robbery Squad Joseph G. DeMartino added an endorsement to the commendation, stating that Shea, Munoz, and Ramos "acted intelligently and alertly in apprehending [the] suspects."

The action-packed arrest lasted a total of five minutes. That brief time span would ultimately prove tremendously costly to both of the strong-arm robbers.

In November 1991, Jaime Lopez, the brains of the operation, plea-bargained his way down to a sentence of 12½ to 25 years. Tony Quinones, charged also with the attempted murder of A.D.A. Willas Miller, received 6½ to 12½ years. Both men are serving their time in the New York State prison system.

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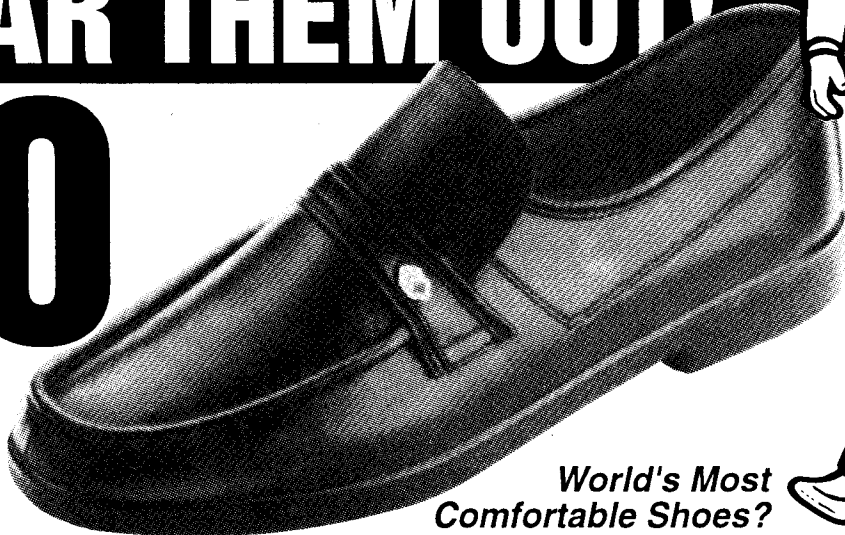
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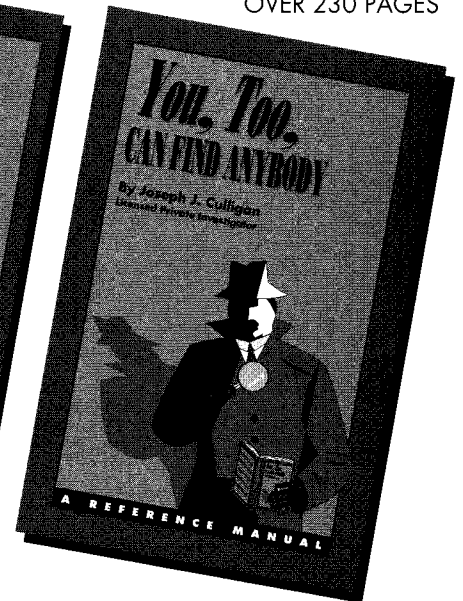
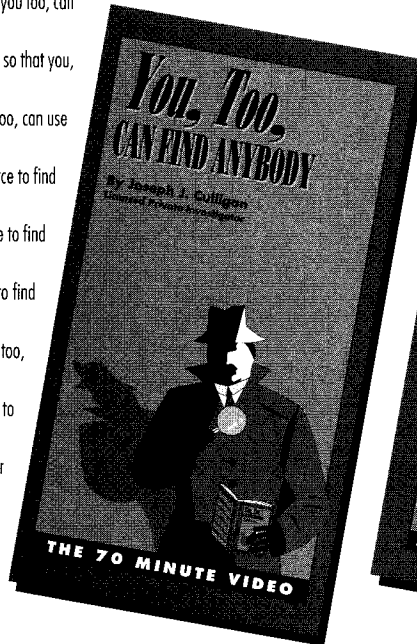
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