

'Son of Sam' Investigators Trying To Trace All 44-Bulldog Pistols

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'Son of Sam' Investigators Trying To Trace All .44-Bulldog Pistols

By PETER KIHSS

The New York Police Department, frustrated in hunting the killer who calls himself "Son of Sam," yesterday began an extraordinary canvass of 2,000 governmental agencies, businesses, clubs and groups in the United States and Canada.

It sought, through questionnaires, to track all 28,000 .44-caliber Charter Arms Bulldogs ever made. That weapon was used to kill five persons in the Bronx and Queens and wound six others in 11 months.

The police further intensified their efforts by assigning 10 more men to the special homicide task force under Deputy Inspector Timothy J. Dowd that has been investigating the case since last April, operating out of the 109th Precinct station, at 37-05 Union Street, Flushing, Queens. There were more than 50 detectives in that special unit.

Patrol forces in the Bronx and Queens

have also been increased, making more than 100 men involved in the case.

"This is worse than looking for a needle in a haystack," Police Commissioner Michael J. Codd commented. "In that situation at least you know where the haystack is. Here we don't even know what the haystack looks like."

The widened dragnet for persons with access to the .44-caliber guns was spread as Chief of Detectives John L. Keenan said "we certainly didn't get too much from canvassing the neighborhood" after last Sunday's 3:20 A.M. shooting of 17-year-old Judy Placido and Salvatore Lupo, 20, chatting in a parked car in Bayside, Queens, on 211th Street south of 45th Road.

One man, Chief Keenan said, reported seeing a tall man in a light suit running into 45th Road. A woman said she had

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Police Seek to Trace Bulldog Guns

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looked out a window and saw a man in a white suit get into a mustard-color car and race away, and had an impression of the license.

The New York State Motor Vehicles Department has checked out various license plates during the investigation so far, but with only one number available, there could be 1.7 million vehicles; with two numbers, 175,000; three numbers, 17,000.

The police questionnaires, sent out under Inspector Dowd's name, say "we are endeavoring to identify all persons who now possess, or have possessed, a .44-caliber Charter Arms Bulldog revolver."

"This is a comparatively new gun," it goes on. "The first of 28,000 of this model was manufactured in 1972 and subsequently distributed throughout the United States and Canada. We are surveying all agencies, businesses, clubs and groups whose members possess such a gun either individually or as part of a gun pool."

The request asked for serial numbers of the revolvers and identities of persons with access to them, and said "all information will be kept confidential."

'He May Be a Quiet Guy'

Inspector Dowd renewed appeals for any information to be telephoned to a special number, 844-0999. In the task-force office, detectives yesterday handled telephones ringing virtually incessantly with calls offering suggestions.

"This guy can't live so far away," Inspector Dowd remarked. "He may be a very quiet guy. He may be able to camouflage his feelings. But after he uses a gun, he has to clean it.

"Maybe Joe Blow upstairs may smell gun-cleaning equipment, oil-cleaning equipment. Do they have a person who stays out late at night—3, 4, 5 o'clock in the morning, especially weekends?"

The hard facts so far known have been the method of operation and at least two notes by the self-styled "Son of Sam," one of which has been reproduced to show printing with unusual tilting of the top of letters like "I," "E" and "T."

In five instances since July 29, 1976, the gunman has approached parked cars from the back and fired through the side window. Once two girls were wounded on a porch and another was killed walking.

Five victims were killed, six wounded. Three were male companions of the young women targets. Four incidents followed visits to movies or a discothèque. Yesterday investigators reported that all 11 victims were Roman Catholic, but suggested this might be only coincidental.

Mr. Lupo, who was shot in the right

forearm Sunday, was discharged yesterday from Flushing Hospital in Queens. Miss Placido, his passenger, was reported off the critical list. After a four-member surgical team removed a bullet that had penetrated her right temple and another that came within a half-inch of her spinal cord.

Inspector Dowd said there have been a number of suspects over the last few months, and currently there are still "several we are looking into." There have been "stakeouts of different people and different sites," he said.

Chief Keenan said that teams of detectives had divided sectors for patrols looking for suspicious people near parked cars. One patrol, he said, passed the Elephas discothèque in Bayside 30 minutes before the predawn shooting last Sunday.

Aside from intensive questioning of people associated with the victims, there have been checkups on mental patients. New York stores, required to record ammunition sales, have been queried about purchases of .44-caliber ammunition.

Six sketches have been drawn based on available descriptions of possible suspects. But Inspector Dowd stressed that the gunman might in fact differ from the "weird guy, weird eyes" suggested by some sources.

'A Sick Person'

Inspector Dowd said there had been some people who decried the gunman as "a cowardly guy who approaches unaware and innocent people when they are not paying attention and assassinates them."

He said he and Chief Keenan, however, believed the man was "a sick person, with a psychiatric problem, who may not even be aware of the aspect of cowardliness in his actions."

The Police Department, Inspector Dowd said, proposes that the man "communicate an explanation of what he is trying to accomplish, his motivation, what happened in the past that he believes may be justification for what he is doing."

Chief Keenan separately said:

"I think he's a very shrewd person, and he's not doing this just to tantalize us. He's motivated by an inner force or tension, and when it explodes, he commits a crime.

"Despite the fact that we believe he's emotionally motivated, he's got his wits about him. He's a carefully canny person, and he's taken careful precautions not to be caught."