

Police Mobilize, but July 29 Comes And Goes With No Sign of .44 Killer

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"What will you have for July 29?" demanded the "Son of Sam" in a letter last May.

It was this taunt—or warning—from a psychopath to remember the first anniversary of a year of terror, during which he had killed five persons and wounded six others with a .44-caliber Charter Arms Bulldog revolver, that mobilized hundreds of plainclothes men, uniformed and off-duty New York policemen for a 48-hour period that ended yesterday at dawn.

Detectives moved through the streets of the Bronx and Queens—the only two boroughs where the killer has struck—in unmarked cars, vans and taxis. Volunteer officers from the Manhattan District Attorney's office waited at bridges and highways surrounding the boroughs, prepared to block all possible escape routes.

Policewomen with long brown hair—the same color of most of the killer's victims—sat in cars parked outside discothèques and singles bars hoping to lure the Son of Sam to strike, while young women throughout the city either pinned up their long hair or passed up a weekend night on the town.

"It's the ultimate test," said a detective patrolling Queens with three other officers, one of them a woman. "Sam holds all the aces. We're sending all these men out to comb the city, daring Sam to strike."

'Nothing Happens'

It was a dare the Son of Sam refused to accept. The first anniversary of the death of Donna Lauria, 18, passed without another shooting. The mystery and the frustration continued into its 367th day.

"Nothing happened again tonight," said Deputy Inspector Timothy Dowd, who directs the homicide task force in the 109th Precinct in Flushing that is hunting for the Son of Sam. "That's what makes it so frustrating. We have no theories. We have no leads. And that is just the truth."

Through the evening of July 29, pairs of policemen poured out of the 109th Precinct station house to begin the search for an unknown murderer. The officers came from all boroughs. Some were assigned and others were volunteers, working without pay during their off-duty hours to participate in one of the biggest manhunts in the city's history.

"It's important to get this guy—that's why I'm here on my own after putting in a full day," explained Sgt. Andrew Rosenzweig of the Manhattan District Attorney's office. He arrived at the Flushing command headquarters with 10 of his men, all volunteers.

4 Sketches of Killer

These officers and all the others joining in the hunt were given a brief run-down of the descriptions of Sam (the police have four sketches, and all are different) and a warning that is one of

the certainties in this case: The killer is armed and dangerous.

Inspector Dowd spent the evening in his second-floor office like a general cloistered in his war room as his troops deploy for battle. He plotted the movements of his units on a large map and monitored their reports, which came in on a special police radio frequency assigned the task force.

Throughout the evening and into the early morning hours the inspector managed to appear unruffled. He remained neatly dressed in his blue-cord suit and tightly knotted tie as his men—nearly all dressed in sports shorts and slacks or dungarees—continued their hunt.

Occasionally during the night the long hours of tedious waiting would be abruptly broken. A report of "shots fired" would come in over the special radio frequency.

At 12:08 the radio barked: "Report of shots fired at Queens Boulevard and 102d Street."

Immediately the command post quieted. Inspector Dowd bent over his radio, his ear pressed to the receiver, as the report was repeated.

Officer William Connolly began searching for the street on the large wall map as the inspector yelled, "Who's got that sector? Who's got it covered?"

Suddenly another report came from the radio: "Shots-fired at 126th Street and 95th Avenue."

"They're both good locations," said the inspector, his tone calm. "They're both the kind of neighborhoods Sam might choose to strike in."

While the inspector waited for confirmations of the shootings, he wrote the two addresses on a pad with a rough map of Queens he had just drawn. Officer Connolly waited next to him absently clenching and unclenching his fists.

Nearly 10 minutes, during which the command post was uncommonly quiet, passed before the police, responding to the scenes, announced over the radio: "Flushing base, the report of shots fired is unconfirmed." As this was repeated, Inspector Dowd drew two big "X's" next to the addresses he had written on his pad.

Search Embarrasses Detective

And so, throughout the city, it was a night of unconfirmed reports. A man waiting for a half an hour in front of the 109th Precinct station was searched by a suspicious detective. The embarrassed policeman discovered that the man was just waiting for his wife to arrive at the corner bus stop.

"Still, it could have been Sam. It would have been just like him to come right to our front door," the detective insisted.

The phones at the precinct house rang throughout the night. An officer noted that calls came in during that one evening from as far away as California and



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Inspector Timothy Dowd, right, at phones with Patrolman William Connolly

New Mexico. There were more than a dozen calls from people identifying themselves as the .44-killer, and every call was followed up.

Officers even rushed to a bar after a man describing himself as a "cop's son" announced he had caught Sam.

By 3 A.M., the police decided that the warning Sam had written for July 29 to the columnist Jimmy Breslin would pass unfulfilled.

"No, I don't think Sam will strike tonight," Inspector Dowd announced with relief. And then he knocked twice on wood.

Tomorrow night the waiting—and the knocking on wood—will continue into its second year.