

Westchester Sniper Is Using a Dartgun To Attack Women

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YONKERS, July 23—Several Westchester County women have been struck in the neck, chest and shoulders by sharp steel darts shot through their lighted windows late at night by a sniper lurking outside garden-apartment buildings.

Since last February, 17 women in seven communities have been struck as they sat or stood before open windows. Some were grazed, some suffered puncture wounds and in some cases the dart became embedded and had to be removed surgically.

The latest victim, Lucretia Valvano, 21 years old, of Yonkers, was hit in the shoulder at 10:30 last night as she stood in the kitchen of her ground-floor apartment.

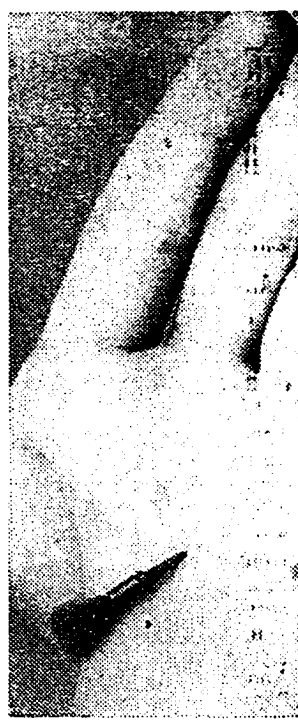
Artery Pierced

A Greenburgh woman was struck in the throat around midnight on June 23 as she sat near her dining-room window. The dart, which lodged in an artery, was removed in a long operation and the woman is still partly paralyzed.

Most of the victims have declined to tell their names or discuss the incidents. But one, Linda Leavitt, a 30-year-old freelance writer who lives in a large garden-apartment complex in Hartsdale, said she wanted to warn Westchester County women to keep their windows closed and shades drawn.

"The precautions are simple, this is something you can

Continued on Page 20, Column 5



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Linda Leavitt standing in front of kitchen window where she was shot with dart, right, last month. Mrs. Leavitt is one of several women living in Westchester County who have been shot at by a sniper.

Dartgun Sniper in Westchester Has Shot 17 Women in Homes

Continued From Page 1, Col. 7

avoid," she said today. She pointed to a small hole in a kitchen-window screen where a dart entered one night last month.

Mrs. Leavitt, who is expecting a baby in October, was washing dishes in front of the window at 12:30 A.M. on June 16. Her husband, Richard, was standing by her side.

"He had come in about five minutes before and had noticed that mine was the only lighted window," Mrs. Leavitt said. "As we stood there I heard a sound like a gun going off, and at the same time I felt something hit me very hard. It hit my collar bone and glanced off and fell in the sink."

Before the attack, she recalled, "I didn't hear a sound, not a car, not even a rustle." Her husband found the dart in the sink, she said, adding: "It was very sharp at one end and had a green feather sticking out of the other end."

Mrs. Leavitt said she was nervous and upset for days after the attack. "I couldn't even walk in the kitchen," she said. "I couldn't even sit in front of a window. My first impression was, 'What have I done? Who have I offended?' even though I knew rationally it had to be a random thing."

The darts that have hit the women are about three-quarters an inch long, with a feather at one end. They are ejected by a type of air gun, probably a rifle, that can be bought at any sporting-goods or discount store, according to Lieut. Henry Gustafson of the Greenburgh Police Department.

The police in the seven communities where the attacks have taken place are working together on the case, Lieutenant Gustafson said. "There is no reason for mass hysteria," he asserted. "I'm a little leery of the publicity, though—I'm afraid it will bring out the kooks."

Most detectives investigating the incidents "think this is one individual riding around the county, but it is just as possible that there is more than one," he said.

A special telephone number, (914) 682-5322, has been set up for anyone with information or knowledge about the attacks.

Most of the victims have lived in ground-floor apartments in large garden-type complexes. One lived in a private house

next to an apartment building.

There have been five attacks in Yonkers, four in Greenburgh, two each in White Plains, Tarrytown and Eastchester, and one each in Dobbs Ferry and New Rochelle. Most have taken place in the last six weeks.

The youngest victim, a 15-year-old from White Plains, was struck on June 14 as she sat at a kitchen table doing her homework, according to Sgt. Michael Harrington of the White Plains police.

The only victim who had not been in a lighted room was a Greenburgh woman who was hit while she slept. The dart came through a bedroom window screen at 4 A.M. on July 3, Lieutenant Gustafson said.

Last night's incident in Yonkers, which took place several hours after a local newspaper and two television networks had carried stories about the attacks, "was very possibly because of publicity," said Detective Tom Powrie of Yonkers. "We think it's someone who's a little bit perverted," he added.

Tracking down the assailant is "extremely hard," said Lieutenant Gustafson. "No one's seen anything. He's working under the cover of darkness." By late this afternoon there were some leads, but "nothing definite," he said.