

- Tolson
- Belmont
- Mohr
- DeLoach
- Casper
- Callahan
- Conrad
- Evans
- Gale
- Rosen
- Sullivan
- Tavel
- Trotter
- Tele Room
- Holmes
- Gandy

Despite Concern, It's Still Easy to Buy Guns

By Elsie Carper

Staff Reporter

After the assassination of President Kennedy, there was national concern over the ease with which anyone, whether a madman, a juvenile or a criminal, could buy a gun.

Lee Harvey Oswald purchased an Italian carbine from a mail order house in Chicago and a .38-caliber revolver by mail from a Los Angeles firm, giving in both cases an assumed name.

The rifle was used to assassinate the President and the revolver to kill Patrolman J. D. Tippit of the Dallas police.

A year has passed and, despite the pressure for legislation to tighten gun laws, it is as easy as ever for a prospective killer to obtain a gun by mail.

A bill designed to curb mail order gun sales to persons obviously unfit to own deadly weapons was introduced in the Senate Commerce Committee, a victim of the active and potent gun lobby.

State Bills Killed Off

Similarly, the gun fanciers, the hobbyists, the sportsmen, the marksmen and the gun dealers effectively killed off bills introduced in state legislatures to restrict gun sales. The National Rifle Association reports that during the year no major changes were made in state gun laws. Only two mild gun bills were defeated in both the Mary-

land and Virginia assemblies, and in Washington legislation sought by the Commissioners and the U.S. Attorney requiring the registration of guns suffered a similar fate in Congress.

Arguments used against gun legislation follow this pattern: The right to own guns is guaranteed by the Bill of Rights; a well armed citizenry is essential to protect the country from a Communist invasion; gun laws disarm the law-abiding, leaving weapons in the hands of the lawless.

The lobby has been effective in advancing these arguments despite an apparent desire on the part of the public for some regulation.

8 of 10 Favor Law

A Gallup poll last January showed that 8 out of 10 persons favor a law that would require a police permit to buy a gun. Both men and women, in all age groups, living in all sections of the country, favored legislation by an overwhelming percentage.

The question of whether Congress should enact legislation in the strictest regulation of the sale and possession of firearms was put on the ballot in the Democratic primary. The vote was 17,394 for and only 1,141 opposed.

The gun lobby has been effective because it has been active, well organized and zealous. It flooded members of Congress, state legislators and local officials with letters, and when hearings were held the gun fanciers then

ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY

62-109060-A
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- The Washington Post and Times Herald
- The Washington Daily News
- The Evening Star
- New York Herald Tribune
- New York Journal-American
- New York Mirror
- New York Daily News
- New York Post
- The New York Times
- The Worker
- The New Leader
- The Wall Street Journal
- The National Observer
- People's World
- Date

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out in large numbers. On the other hand, arguments for gun legislation generally are carried by law enforcement officials and by a few citizens who find themselves labeled as do-gooders, crackpots or subversives.

NEA Distributes Booklet

The National Rifle Association, with a membership of more than 600,000 and a large office building on 16th Street nw., campaigns against almost all forms of gun legislation.

After the death of the President, NRA's Executive Vice President Franklin L. Orth went on record favoring the bill introduced by Sen. Thomas J. Dodd (D-Conn.) to curtail traffic in mail order guns. His was not a popular stand among many affiliated local rifle clubs, whose members testified against the bill and were instrumental in killing it.

The Association's legislative service not only keeps an eye on Congress but all state legislatures. The NRA membership is kept informed of proposed laws and the legislators who will deal with it. Members are encouraged to write their representatives.

A booklet on ways to fight gun legislation distributed by the NRA reminds members that "the best defense is a good offense."

Lawmen Disagree

The NIRA states it will not oppose laws prohibiting sale of firearms to convicts, fugitives and mental incompetents or oppose laws making the sale of guns to juveniles subject to parental consent.

But it adds that firearms legislation "is of insufficient value in the prevention of crime to justify the inevitable restrictions which such legislation places upon law-abiding citizens."

Law enforcement officials disagree on the value of such laws, particularly gun registration laws, which the NRA strongly opposes. New York is the only state with a statute requiring a license to possess a pistol or small firearm.

Gun registration is supported by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, who said just last week, "There are licenses for automobiles and dogs, why not guns?"

The Dodd bill originally was aimed at the mail order traffic in hand guns and was an outgrowth of hearings before his Juvenile Delinquency Subcommittee.

Cheap Guns Flood Market

Testimony before the Subcommittee showed that juveniles were purchasing cheap guns through mail order catalogues. After the President's assassination, the bill was broadened to include rifles and shotguns.

Mail order business has picked up in recent years as inexpensive foreign surplus military weapons have flooded the market. Most of the guns are of a kind not generally used for sport and recreation.

The Dodd bill was innocuous. It merely required

persons ordering guns by mail to include an affidavit that they were over 18, had not been convicted of a felony and that the purchase was not against a local or state law. The affidavit was to be forwarded by the mail order house to local police officials.

Dodd said the bill was killed because of the protests of people "misinformed or bamboozled" by those with financial interests in importing mail order guns and those "cloaked under the false cover of anti-communism."

Mounted National Drive

A number of witnesses testified that the bill would soften up the Nation for a Communist invasion. Dodd, a former FBI agent, was shocked to find his bill aligned with Communist causes.

The NRA mounted a nationwide drive against the gun bill proposed for the District by the Commissioners and the Department of Justice. The bill would have been similar to New York's Sullivan law, requiring the registration of pistols and small guns.

The rifle group took the position that if the District had such a law, it was only a matter of time until the entire country had one. Rifle club members were asked to write to Congressmen on the House and Senate District Committees urging them to kill the bill, which they did.

The Virginia General Assembly voted down a bill that

would have allowed, but not required, counties to restrict gun sales. Speaking for her bill, Del. Marion A. Galland (D-Alexandria) said it was as easy for juveniles, mental patients and criminals to buy guns as it was for them to buy pocket radios.

Would Allow Investigation

Under the bill, police would be given time to check on a purchaser before the gun was sold.

Arlington County and Alexandria had such a regulation. Fairfax County and Falls Church used their police powers to adopt similar restrictions.

The action was prompted by the Valentine's Day pistol slaying in Fairfax of four children by a mentally disturbed mother who then killed herself.

She took their lives shortly after buying the gun. The husband urged adoption of the ordinance that could have saved his wife and children.

The Fairfax City Council, though, tabled a similar pistol control regulation. Four witnesses testified against it and no one for it. Former mayor John C. Wood said such proposals "favor criminals to the detriment of honest citizens."

In Maryland the House of Delegates voted down bills requiring a cooling off period while police checked prospective hand gun purchasers. Del. Leonard S. Blondest (D-Mont.), who introduced one of the bills, reported he received phone threats.

After the Maryland legis-

ature failed to act, the James S. McAuliffe testified Montgomery County Council for the bill. He said it would considered and then tabled a make it more difficult for bill giving police 72 hours to criminals to get guns and check on prospective gun purchasers.

More than 100 persons Montgomery County, too, had showed up at a public hearing, most of them gun collectors and dealers, sportsmen and members of gun associations.

Only Police Superintendent

old gun month. State Police required a 10-day wait between application for a pistol and actual purchase. The county is "fast becoming a mecca wherein juveniles, habitual drunkards, criminals and mental cases drug addicts, recent mental patients, convicts or juveniles under 21. Police would keep

He cited specific instances of shootings that had occurred. Members of the gun lobby pistol purchased a day or two in advance.

County Attorney Robert Mathias drew up an ordinance in a pigeonhole.