

**Expand Violently on Impact**

# Dumdum Slugs Used By Some Area Police

10/8/72 By Philip A. McCombs  
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Police in Prince George's, Montgomery and Fairfax counties, joining a growing national trend, are carrying flat-nosed bullets that many authorities call "dumdums" because they expand violently inside human or animal targets they hit.

These flat or hollow-tipped bullets differ from the round-tipped .38-caliber slugs that have been the standard police cartridge in the U.S. since the beginning of the century. The "dumdums" rip wider wound channels through flesh, sometimes shattering into many pieces and tending to stop inside bodies rather than going through cleanly, according to weapons experts.

The suburban Washington police who use them say they like their increased stopping power, greater penetration of car doors and other shields used by criminals and their tendency not to ricochet off pavement,

endangering innocent bystanders.

The U.S. armed services do not use expanding bullets because a 1907 Hague convention, to which the U.S. is a party, outlawed bullets "calculated to cause unnecessary suffering," according to the U.S. State Department Office of Treaty Affairs.

Rachel Hurley, a foreign affairs officer there, said the unnecessary suffering clause "has been interpreted to include . . . dumdum bullets."

Instead the tips of U.S. military bullets are pointed rounded and the soft lead is covered by a hard metal jacket that tends to keep the bullets intact when it hits a target.

Lt. Charles Federline of the Montgomery County police department said, "There was an alarming increase of people who were shot with

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those things (the old standard police slugs), continuing their assaults on people."

Montgomery switched to dumdums with hollowed tips in 1966, said Federline—though he did not use the term dumdum, which police and others tend to shy away from as an emotionally loaded word.

Dumdum is popularly applied to any bullet that expands or "mushrooms" inside its target rather than tending to remain a small, intact pellet of lead, according to David Petzal, a firearms expert and the managing editor of Field and Stream magazine.

The word originally derives from a town near Calcutta, India, where flat-tipped or notched cartridges first were made in the last century, and became notorious for the gaping wounds they caused.

Montgomery County police switched to a new brand of hollow-point two weeks ago for greater accuracy, according to Federline.

As elsewhere in the Washington area, there has been little controversy in Montgomery over the dumdums.

"Our guidelines are such that when an officer pulls his gun, he's shooting to kill," said Federline. "So it's pretty irrelevant how bad the wound is."

Like other police in this area who use dumdums, Federline said the Montgomery police simply don't do enough shooting to actually know whether the bullets have been useful or not.

There is one known case in Montgomery of a person being wounded by one of the new police bullets—a policeman himself. In June, patrolman John J. Louthan was shot in the hip with a .38-caliber, high velocity, hollow-point dumdum. The bullet "shattered his hip socket and fragments (of the bullet) lodged in the base of his spine," Federline recounted. The shot was fired by another policeman who was engaged in "horseplay," Federline said.

Louthan spent a number of weeks in the hospital and now has returned to limited duty.

Prince George's has used a

flat-tipped dumdum for three ears and the department's officers are enthusiastic about it.

"Basically we were looking at the ricochet effect," said Deputy Chief John Rhoads. He said he knew of one instance of a municipal policeman in the county—not a member of his county force—shooting at a criminal only to have the old round-nosed bullet miss, ricochet and hit a nearby woman.

Rhoads also said the dumdums were reputed to have greater stopping power and while there had been no problems in the county with wounded criminals continuing to charge and fight—there might be. Although the dumdums cost more, Prince George's decided to use them.

"It's like a varmint load," said the department's armorer, Sgt. Carlisle Peterson, of the bullet. "It's a bullet that goes fast—when it goes there it totally destroys the animals."

There have been no complaints about the bullet in the county, according to Joseph M. Parker, chairman of

the county human relations commission.

Fairfax County police officials cited similar reasons for switching to flat tipped dumdums, a move they made about a year ago. The U.S. Secret Service, U.S. Park Police and the Executive Protective Service use hollow-point dumdums. Deputy Treasury Secretary Eugene T. Rossides defended the use of these bullets early in 1970 in a letter to a person who had complain about the type of wounds they cause.

"All ammunition, domestic or imported, which is used for taking game is of the expanding bullet variety," he wrote. "This is so for humanitarian reasons" because "80 per cent of the time" an animal hit with a nonexpanding bullet "would be capable of fleeing out of effective tracking range."

Citing the "immediate" stopping power of dumdums, Rossides wrote, "Denying the use of the superior ammunition to the Secret Service would lessen the protection afforded the

President."

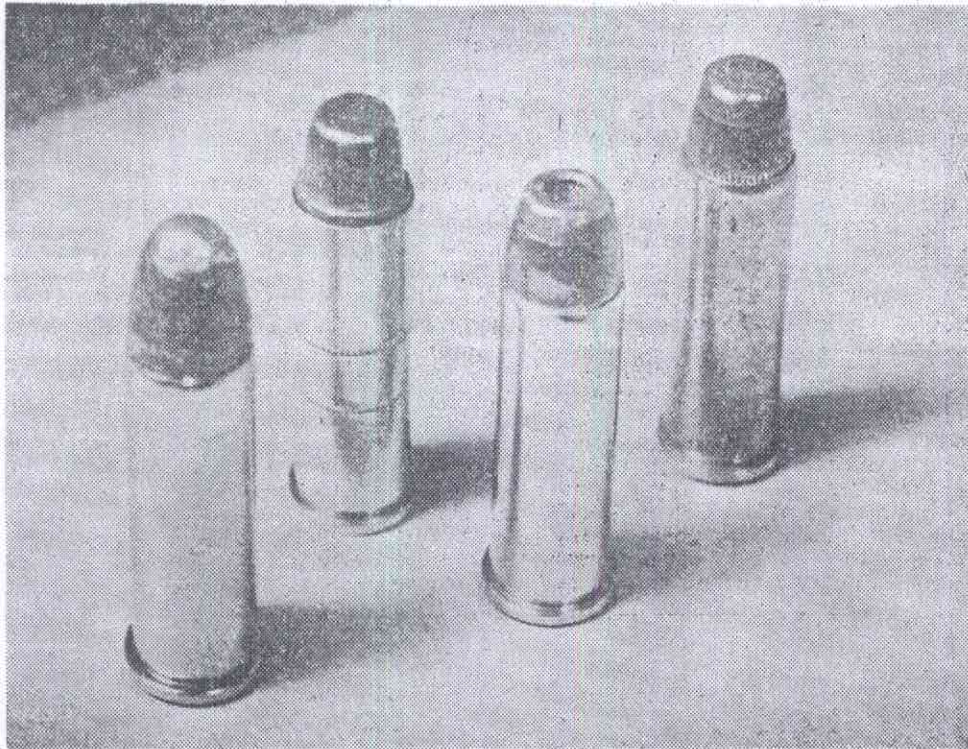
At that time, he estimated that 300 police departments across the nation had moved to hollowpoint dum-dum bullets. William Vanderpool, a firearms consultant to the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) estimated last week that about 900 police departments now use dumdums.

But not all policemen are enthusiastic about dumdums. Police in Arlington and Alexandria as well as Maryland and Virginia state police, continue to use the old bullets.

So does Washington's police force—a force that has been in the national spotlight since the Nixon administration declared a war on crime and began increasing the number of police here.

"The citizens themselves, anything with a hollow point, they call it a dum-dum," said Det. Sgt. George R. Wilson, a ballistics expert on the Washington force. "We would go to nothing with a hollow point, just because of the reaction."

Wilson, no relation to Chief Jerry V. Wilson, said the department wants to maintain a "low profile" and



By Ken Feil—The Washington Post

Comparison of police bullets, from left; standard .38 long used by most departments; the "semi-wadcutter," a low-vel-

city bullets used in New York City; flat-tipped hollow-point, Montgomery County; flat-tipped .38, Prince George's.

that any move to dumdums would not help.

Detective Wilson conducted ballistics tests on different types of bullets this summer when the department was considering whether to switch bullets.

Using high-speed camera equipment and firing bullets into big lumps of gelatin, Wilson and his men were able to analyze the properties of the different kinds of bullets. Cost: \$26 per round fired.

Officials would not release the detailed report, but Wilson said the results were standard: the dumdums flattened out or expanded inside the gelatin lumps, sometimes going to pieces and generally doing worse damage than standard bullets. Also, as expected, the dumdums tended to stay inside the blocks rather than go through. The gelatin has some of the consistency of flesh and ballistics experts customarily use the

substance to conduct such tests.

Asked about the alleged advantages of the dumdums, Wilson countered that if a policeman misses a criminal with a dum dum, "there's always somebody behind him, some old lady crossing the street with her kid."

"The bullet we have does the job," said Lt. George R. Long, a firearms expert with the Washington department.

He said that with dumdums, "You almost always have a fatality because of the expansion rate and the massive hemorrhaging. The object is to apprehend, not to kill, the individual."

Deputy Chief Maurice Cullinane said Washington police have had no significant problems with their traditional bullets ricocheting or failing to stop criminals who may be threatening lives.

The ballistics study here came at the same time the New York City police department, the largest in the nation, switched to a new flat-tipped bullet, called a semiwadcutter, this summer.

New York police officials said a year of testing convinced them that the semiwadcutter had less tendency to ricochet or pass through bodies than the traditional round-tip bullets they had been using.

Unlike the dumdums adopted in some of Washington's suburbs, however, the semiwadcutter is not a high velocity bullet. New York officials felt that high velocity bullets would give a recoil or "kick" when fired that could reduce marksmanship.

Frank Zunno, head of the

IACP police weapons center in Gaithersburg, said the semiwadcutter undergoes a "mild expansion" inside bodies, mild enough to enable New York to "avoid all the emotional criticisms that tend to accompany" the high velocity dumdums.

The high velocity bullets used in the Washington suburbs have a muzzle speed of about 1,200 feet per second, as opposed to 800 for regular bullets.

Both the dumdums and standard bullets are .38-caliber and fly straight through the air without tumbling. It is their tips that first hit a target—and if the tip is flat or hollow instead of round, the force of impact tends to cause the soft lead to flatten out.

Zunno said there is a good deal of subjectivity involved in analyzing the properties of different bullets and that, "what's one man's fancy is another man's poison."

A leading pathologist, Maryland Medical Examiner Dr. Russell Fisher, said he has examined dozens of .38-caliber fatalities and found that dumdums cause the wound channels inside the body "to get bigger and bigger."

However, Dr. Fisher said that while the dum dum "stops them quicker" and has "a harder hitting power," he thinks that it "doesn't increase lethality much."

Both he and Zunno emphasized that the standard police bullets also kill easily and cause bad wounds.

In 1966, the Super Vel Co., a small munitions firm in Shelbyville, Ind., began mar-

keting high velocity, flat and hollow-tipped expanding bullets that police departments could use in their .38 special revolvers, the standard police weapon.

Super Vel beat the major munitions manufacturers into the growing market for this kind of shell. Winchester and Remington and the other big makers now are marketing similar kinds of ammunition. Prince George's police used the Super Vel hollow-point shells.

Super Vel promoted the new bullets in gun, sports and police magazines, according to Ernest Wallien, the firm's vice president. Writers for the magazines tested the new bullets and many liked them.

"Just about the ideal police cartridge," wrote one firearms specialist in Sports Afield Gun Annual in 1971.

"Super Vel ammunition with its 110-grain, hollow-point bullet made a world of difference," wrote Dean Grennell in Gun World in 1967. He wrote that tests showed that where standard .38 caliber police slugs deflected from car doors, the Super Vel "walks smartly through."

A Super Vel brochure says, "The pure lead core of the bullet, combined with the thing gilding metal jacket and the ultra-high velocity, produces the ultimate in hydrostatic shocking power."

Another Super Vel brochure says, "And, for those who shy from the discussions of the pros and cons of high velocity, highly destructive loads because of the widespread opinion and various old wives' tales con-

cerning so-called 'legal ammunition,' it should be emphasized that Geneva Convention rulings do not apply to police departments."

"It was The Hague convention," said Wallien. "We never signed The Hague convention."

Wallien said he could not reveal the numbers of rounds that Super Vel sells, but that the company has been successful.

"We tried to develop a round to give the officer a better break," he said.