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Book

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Hanrahan's

'bullet holes'



Not since 1948, when they told us that Thomas E. Dewey had been elected President, has there been a journalistic scoop to compare with Thursday's "exclusive" in the Tribune.

State's Atty. Edward Hanrahan managed to convince the Trib that nails are bullets, and a bathroom is a bedroom. And the Trib passed it on to their many readers.

He also continued the mystery of the vanishing bullets.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT, this is what happened: Hanrahan has been upset because people are raising questions about the raid on the Panther apartment.

In order to answer the questions, he went to one newspaper — the Trib — with "exclusive" information.

It included his men's version of what happened last week, and pictures that are "evidence" in his case.

One of the pictures showed "bullet holes" in the woodwork next to the back door.

The "bullet holes" were supposed to prove the Panthers were firing at the police as the police came in.

Hundreds of thousands of readers looked at the picture, read the words below it, and said: "Ah-hah! Here is proof that the Panthers were shooting."

The "bullet holes" turned out to be old nails in the woodwork. Even Hanrahan admitted that later in the day.

ANOTHER GREAT "EXCLUSIVE" PICTURE was that of a bullet-riddled "bathroom door."

This was further "evidence" that the Panthers had been blazing away.

You see, Hanrahan says some of the Panthers were in a bedroom opposite the bathroom. And when the police pleaded with them to surrender, they fired shotguns out of the bedroom, hitting the bathroom door.

The only trouble with the picture of the bullet-riddled "bathroom door" is that it wasn't a picture of the bathroom door.

It happened to be a picture of a bedroom door.

As thousands of people who bothered to go through the apartment could have told Hanrahan, or the Tribune's writers, there are no bullet holes in the bathroom door.

As far as the holes in the bedroom door go, they appear to have been made by police bullets that ripped through the parlor wall, into the bedroom and the bedroom door.

THE LAST PART OF THE "EXCLUSIVE" showed a big "bullet hole" in the apartment's front door.

This hole was supposed to be evidence that somebody in the living room fired a slug through the door with a 12-gauge shotgun.

Yet, there are no holes in the wall a few feet beyond the door. Somehow a big slug that could tear a big hole in a thin door wouldn't have the momentum to travel a few feet more and dent a plaster wall.

This final point, however, appears to be irrelevant at this moment, because Hanrahan's men have since gone on TV.

and changed their version of how the battle began.

They had told the Tribune the battle began with that big bullet coming through the closed front door, after they had knocked.

But on TV they said the first shot was fired at them after they burst into the apartment.

It gets confusing, I know, but that is the way it is being told. Bedroom doors are bathroom doors, bullet holes are nails, and so on. You might glance at the pictures on Page 14.

I DON'T CLAIM TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED that night. Like Hanrahan, I wasn't there.

And I'm not accepting the Panthers' version, either. Racists of any color, and especially those who hoard guns and preach violence, are not my favorite people.

But, unlike Hanrahan, I have gone through that apartment, and more than once. And his story — whichever one he happens to be telling at the moment — doesn't mesh with the condition of the place.

It's obvious that Hanrahan isn't going to willingly provide straight answers, if he has them.

That's why an impartial agency, if it can be found, should investigate the matter.

Besides being impartial, the agency should also know the difference between a nail and a bullet, a toilet and a pillow. It's really not that difficult.