

Post

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Pistol Permits

It is a pity as well as a surprise that the Federal Bureau of Investigation has declined to cooperate with the Metropolitan police in checking out applicants for pistol permits. Last spring Federal District Court Judge Gerhard Gesell ruled that the FBI must stop issuing arrest records except to the federal government and for law-enforcement purposes. In what seems suspiciously like a fit of the sulks, the FBI has interpreted this as forbidding it to search its voluminous fingerprint files and tell the local police if a pistol-permit applicant has a police record. It would be hard to imagine a request more directly related to law enforcement.

One result of the FBI's noncooperativeness is that the Metropolitan police have a backlog of about 450 gun-permit applications from private citizens. The police say that they will now make the necessary investigations themselves. But they have no adequate resources for this task and cannot do it thoroughly or effectively; instead of access to a comprehensive fingerprint file, they must now can-

vass the police department of every community where an applicant acknowledges he has lived.

It is an anomaly of local law that, although persons wishing to purchase a pistol must obtain a permit, persons in possession of a pistol need not have a permit to retain it; they need only register it with the police. Yet a permit is required for a rifle or a shotgun. A pistol is not only the almost indispensable tool for bank robbery, murder and holdups but is generally the weapon of choice for those fatal resolutions of neighborly and domestic quarrels which have become such a commonplace in the life of the community. Apart from military personnel and law-enforcement officers, very few people have any real need or use for a pistol; sporting purposes, though not criminal purposes, can be served at least as well by a long gun; so can protection of one's home. If the possession of pistols were strictly limited to persons with a genuine need for them, the crime rate, the suicide rate and the homicide rate would all be a great deal lower.