

Berkeley Police to Test a Gun That Fires a Bag 120 M.P.H.

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By RICHARD WITKIN 23 Jul 70

The Berkeley, Calif., police hope to conduct tests soon of a new "stun gun" in law-enforcement situations.

The device fires four-inch-wide "bean bags" at about 120 miles an hour. The bags weigh about half a pound and they contain steel shot.

The blow is hard enough to stun or incapacitate the person who is struck. But, because the impact is distributed over an area the size of the flexible bag, the police say it is not hard enough to kill or inflict serious injury except in a freak case.

The system was developed by a California rocket maker, MB Associates, which is negotiating with the Defense Department for contracts to conduct two evaluation programs.

Capt. Joseph Hill, assistant to Berkeley's police chief, and two colleagues saw a demonstration of the device on July 15. They were so convinced of its potential that arrangements were quickly made to have the manufacturer donate test quantities of the "bean bags" for experiments by the Berkeley force. The projectiles were expected to be delivered late this week.

"We were very impressed," Captain Hill said in a telephone interview yesterday. "If nothing detrimental turns up in our limited initial explorations, we'll put them in the hands of selected officers to see how well they work in actual law-enforcement situations."

Captain Hill said the "stun gun" concept had a big advantage over devices that fire multiple wooden plugs and were used by the Berkeley police to break up a July 4 riot.

"The bean bags are safer in all respects," he said. "Yet they'll hurt, and take a lot of the fight out of someone."

MB Associates, in San

Ramon, Calif., started working on the "stun gun" months ago, impelled by the widespread feeling that campus and other riots could produce over-reaction by law-enforcement agencies and result in needless deaths and injuries.

The development was accelerated after National Guardsmen killed four Kent State University students on May 4.

In the bulk of the company's tests, the bean bags have been fired from Army M-79 grenade launchers.

The M-79's barrel has a diameter of a little over an inch and a half. The four-inch-wide bag must be rolled up for loading.

The barrel's rifling gives the bag a spin, and as soon as it emerges from the barrel it is stably deployed to its full open size.

There are many other potential methods of deployment, however, according to Robert Mainhardt, president and founder of MB Associates. The company is already testing a version in which bags can be fired from a chamber incorporated in a standard policeman's night stick.

Another big market is seen in household defense against intruders.

"It could be very effective in the average home," said Robert C. Mawhinney, a senior engineer on the project, "and yet eliminate possible accidents that happen when used against someone you did not mean to shoot."

Tests so far have been conducted only against dummies. But it is expected that live guinea pigs, with appropriate protection, will be used if the Defense Department contracts are worked out.

Experts emphasize that there is no such a thing as a 100 per



PACKS A PUNCH: A "bean bag" being fired from a grenade launcher. Developed as a non-lethal weapon against law-breakers, it can hit a person hard enough to stun him.

cent nonlethal weapon—that in a freak case a person can die from a light blow.

But tests with the stun gun so far indicate that the worst

that can be expected is that a person hit, even at close range, could be knocked unconscious, lose some teeth or suffer some skin lacerations.