

Times Tribune

Friday, June 24, 1988

25 cents



Bruce Moran of the San Mateo County Sheriff's Department carefully stores the gun suspected of being the murder weapon in the death of an East Palo Alto police officer.

Times Tribune staff photo by Joe Melena

Officer's murder

Brothers arrested in killing

By Jeff Brazil
and Michael McGuire
Times Tribune staff

Two brothers taken into custody in an intensive, around-the-clock manhunt were being questioned today in connection with Wednesday's slaying of a rookie East Palo Alto police officer, authorities reported.

"We're looking at two of the prime suspects (in the shooting), and the other was integrally involved," East Palo Alto Police Chief Dan Nelson said today of the arrests of Raymond "Jimmy" Price, 32, and his brother, Ronald Price, 30.

Nelson, saying he had to speak with members of the San Mateo County District Attorney's Office, declined, however, to disclose what alleged connection either of the men had in the shooting of Joel Michael Davis, 26.

Raymond Price was arrested about 9:30 p.m. Thursday at a house at 1254 Carlton Ave. in Menlo Park, police said.

Although he was questioned in connection with the death of Officer Davis, Raymond Price was being held at the Main Jail in Redwood City only on two misdemean-

'Cadillac' of crime guns killed officer

By Jeff Brazil
Times Tribune staff

The gun police believe was used to kill East Palo Alto police Officer Joel Davis was the same kind used in the assassination attempt on George Wallace and the murder of Beatles star John Lennon.

The gun — a Charter Arms .38-caliber "Undercover" revolver — is popular enough with criminals to be labeled the "Cadillac of crime guns" by proponents of gun control.

"This particular gun is coveted by discriminating thugs," Marjolijn Bijlefeld of the National Coalition to Ban Handguns said, citing a report entitled "The Snub-Nosed Killers: Handguns in America."

Of the 15 models of handguns most frequently used in violent crimes, the "Undercover" ranked sixth, according to

Please see GUN, A-12

Please see ARREST, A-12

ARREST

Continued from A-1

or warrants for shoplifting and possession of narcotics paraphernalia, police said.

Price's brother, Ronald, was arrested by Redwood City police at a motel on El Camino Real about 2:15 a.m. today. Details of his arrest were not immediately available.

He was being held at the Main Jail on two felony warrants — one for a narcotics charge and one for assault on a police officer unrelated to the Davis case, said East Palo Alto police Sgt. Ron Sibley.

Raymond Price became the subject of an intense manhunt after police named him Wednesday morning as a suspect in the slaying of the police officer.

An informant interested in a \$10,000 reward tipped off police to his whereabouts in Menlo Park, police said.

Under a special section of the state Penal Code, police officials Thursday arranged to get the reward money from the governor's office.

"Any time a reward is offered it gives us more leverage," said police Sgt. Frank Churchill, who is leading the murder probe. "The informant said he (Raymond Price) was in the garage, and sure enough, that's where we found him."

About 15 officers from Menlo Park, the San Mateo County Sheriff's Department, the county's Narcotics Task Force and East Palo Alto stormed the house.

Raymond Price, who has a criminal record involving mostly misdemeanor offenses, cooperated with officers, Churchill said. Price gave no indication that he even knew police were looking for him, Churchill said.

An unidentified woman also was arrested at the house, Churchill said.

Police questioned the Price brothers and the woman well into

the early morning hours.

Police stressed that the investigation was continuing and that they were looking for more people in connection with the killing.

Davis was fatally shot about 1 a.m. Wednesday while chasing a gunman through a yard in the 2500 block of Gonzaga Street in East Palo Alto.

Davis, who had been on the force only six weeks, suffered two wounds — in the head and shoulder. Doctors at Stanford University Hospital tried for seven hours to revive him but he died at 8:32 a.m.

Just before the killing, the gunman was riding in a car with another man and a woman.

Thursday night, investigators were on the verge of calling off their manhunt when the informant called about 9:15 p.m. and said he knew where Raymond Price was, Churchill said.

Earlier in the evening, the same informant had told police he would bring Price into the Police Department to surrender before 8:35 p.m.

Investigators were skeptical but hopeful.

"Every other lead we had had fizzled out," Churchill said. "But we've been following up on everything we get. We can't afford to not."

When the informant did not show by 9 p.m., the team of detectives, who had been working around the clock, were ready to call it a night.

But then the telephone rang. "I was very much surprised," Churchill said. "I was going home. I had just called my wife and told her I was on my way."

Earlier, investigators spent much of the day following leads from people who said they had spotted Raymond Price.

Two people said they saw him in Menlo Park, one call came from Hayward and two more from San Mateo. Police responded to each tip, but they were "chasing ghosts," East Palo Alto police Cmdr. William Kelley said.

At one point, investigators believed Price might walk into their hands.

Another informant told police he had set up a meeting with Price. Scores of officers staked out a house on Fordham Street where Price and the informant were supposed to rendezvous. However, when police raided the house, Price was nowhere to be seen.

In the last two days, Churchill said, investigators have conducted an estimated 50 interviews, many with informants and known drug dealers and users.

Word on the street travels fast in the tightly knit East Palo Alto underworld, especially among the city's vast network of drug dealers.

"Everybody out there is talking about what happened," Churchill said. "And everybody out there knows something about what happened."

In other developments Thursday:

- Forensic experts examining the .38-caliber pistol believed to be the murder weapon found a palm print, Churchill said.

However, investigators are still awaiting results of tests that will show whether the five-shot revolver, which had two empty chambers, is connected to the killing.

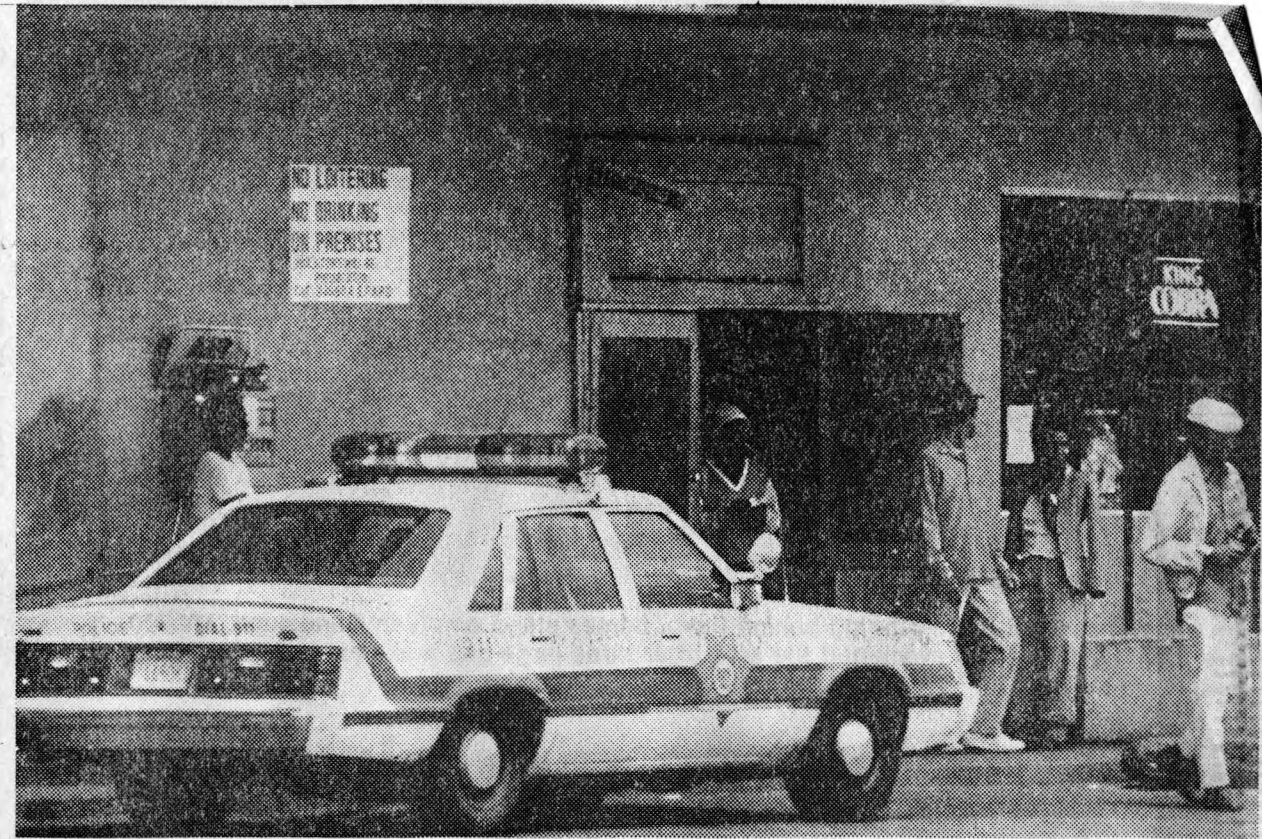
The gun was found in the yard near where Davis' body was discovered by two fellow officers.

- Investigators minutely checked the car believed to have been used by the gunman and two partners.

Police traced the owner of the Mercury Monarch station wagon to a San Jose resident, who allegedly had loaned the car to Raymond Price. The San Jose resident is not believed to have been involved in the killing, Churchill said.

Davis' funeral, which is expected to draw law enforcement officers from all over the state, has been planned for 1 p.m. Monday at Frost Amphitheater at Stanford University.

Davis, who was single, was the first San Mateo County police officer to die in the line of duty since Redwood City police Sgt. George Garrett was shot to death during a bank robbery in 1981.



Times Tribune staff photo by Joe Melena

An incident at Mickey's Liquors in East Palo Alto triggered the events that left an East Palo Alto police officer dead.

PTT 6/24/88

GUN

Continued from A-1

the 40-page report compiled in 1981 by Cox Newspapers.

The report said the "Undercover" revolver was three times as likely to be involved in a crime in the United States than other "typical" handguns.

Ironically, the five-shot "Undercover" model is popular with police officers for the same reasons criminals like it: It's cheap, easy to hide and capable of carrying lethal rounds.

"It's as small as you can get by with and still pack some good stopping power," Palo Alto police Sgt. Jim Coffman said.

Many police officers use the "Undercover" when they are off duty. Some use it as a backup weapon.

In the world of weapons, "it's the Chevy as opposed to the Cadillac," Coffman said.

"It can't be classified as junk or a Saturday Night Special," East Palo Alto police Cmdr. William Kelley said. "It's reliable and it does the job. I own one myself."

There are an estimated 600,000 "Undercover" model handguns in circulation today, according to the National Coalition to Ban Handguns.

The "Undercover" originally began selling in the 1960s, when handgun sales to Americans boomed. Today it sells for about \$200, substantially cheaper than other brands, such as Smith & Wesson or Colt.

"That's why the crooks like it. It's real cheap," Mark Kinsey, a state parole agent in Santa Clara County, said. "There's a lot of them at pawn shops."

Another selling point — for both police and their adversaries — is its size.

"You can tuck it into a belt, a boot or a shoe real easy. Nobody knows it's there," Kinsey said.

In 1972, Arthur Bremer used the same model to shoot Wallace, then governor of Alabama who was campaigning for president.

In 1980, an "Undercover" — in the hands of Mark David Chapman — was used to slay John Lennon in New York.

Nick Ecker, vice president of Charter Arms in Connecticut, declined to comment Thursday on the "Undercover."

Trade journals say the gun is Charter Arms' best-selling model, according to Bijlefeld.

In 1981, however, company president David Ecker said he felt "pretty sick" that the gun was being used so frequently by criminals.