



By Dick Schmitt

Case not closed

The desperate search for the East Area Rapist cost millions of dollars and thousands of man-hours. Now, 10 years later, Sgt. Jim Bevins is a posse of one.

By Bob Sylva
Los Angeles Times

A SPARE BEDROOM in the Fair Oaks home of an inveterate outdoorsman has become the final repository of the exploits of the infamous East Area Rapist, a man widely characterized as a "sexual terrorist."

The dog-eared files, brittle police reports, fading crime-scene photos, rolls of incooperative flow charts, bundles of computer printouts, scattered scraps of evidence and the muted whistles of 44 victims of Sacramento's most cunning criminal ever sit like boxes of old tax forms, accumulating dust and ignominy.

In an understated irony, the crime archives share proximity with an array of hunting gear and slick paraphernalia evoking the fishing in Montana. This is one notorious quarry that got-catch away. Brains, stealth, cunningness of his ploys and undeterred by the most formidable of security devices, he quietly crept into homes and executed his assaults sensibly at will. Consequently, the EAR was the subject of the most intense manhunt in Sacra-

mento County history. To the dismay of many, he has never been apprehended.

And what records and documents can't be contained in the bedroom, spill out onto the granulated floor of the garage, stacked up against the dependable implements of suburban a blader, hook, 16-pipe, coolant, a stash of fishing poles, bait and baiter with saltcrusting tubes, and a rarely used lawnmower. Like some scrapbook of the abhorrent, the voluminous crime case has come home to roost, decay and occasionally rankle.

"I have no other place to put it," pleads Sacramento Sheriff Sgt. Jim Bevins, its custodian, creator and veteran bird dog. "You can't just throw it away," he adds with a hint of abject. And, bowing his head in resignation, he vows with a mixture of wan fidelity and grief, "I'd like I'm married to it."

THE EAST AREA Rapist first emerged from a drainage ditch in Rancho Cordova (then his monkey) on the warm evening of June 14, 1974. He entered a nearby home wearing a ski mask

and gloves and wearing a flashlight, all of which would soon become his calling card. He last struck in Sacramento 10 years ago next month, on April 14, 1978, when he kicked in the back door of a residence in the city's south area, twice assaulting a 15-year-old baby sister.

In between, he single-handedly held a panicked community hostage. No culprit before or since has galvanized the city like the EAR. His method of operation was as distinctive as it was diabolical. Without warning, he would suddenly appear at the end of a victim's bed in the dead of the night, wrenching a gun or knife or both, he would kick the bed and shove a flashlight into his victim's startled eyes.

Under the threat of death, he would instruct the wife (half the cases involved cooped) to blind her husband's hands behind his back. As the husband was left face-down on the bed, the wife was led off into another room of the house. To prevent his interference in the outrages to follow, dishes were stacked atop the husband's back. The EAR swore to kill the wife if he heard a disturbing noise.

From there, the EAR commenced his terrifying drama that rarely veered from his vile script. He would ransack the house, pocketing trinkets as souvenirs. He would mouth obscenities to his victim before commencing repeated sex acts. To throw police off his trail, he would continually affect different accents, and deliberately drop misleading clues as to his true identity and whereabouts. He would ransack and

linger in the houses for hours, and just when relieved victims were certain he had left, he would suddenly reappear and start his torments all over again. He was bold, ruthless, calculating, and time and again he somehow eluded capture.

"He thrives on terror," one victim testified. Another victim declared, "with grim candor, 'He's done it mentally, not sexually."

Understandably, as the list of victims mounted and the media joined the crime as though the perpetrator were a one-man juggernaut — telling their reports with pinpoint maps and, one time, publishing a suspect composite that resembled half the white males in Northern California (which resulted in police switchboards being flooded with 2,400 calls in 36 hours) — the criminality coalesced in fear.

Gun sales soared, women fled to shooting ranges, hardware stores ran out of deadbolt locks, security firms were under siege and, as the county reward for the EAR rocketed to \$50,000, "citizen patrol" started circling plagued areas with CB radios, giving rise to fears of vigilanteism. One enterprise, if it became couple ever started marketing EAR T-shirts.

"There were more bizarre crimes, more crimes that left destruction in their path, but none were more emotionally trying," recalled Duane Love recently, an experienced lawman who had the unenviable

3/17/88

Sgt. Jim Bevins reviews evidence in the spare bedroom of his home, where the stores boxes of material for the East Area Rapist case.

New product puts twist on underwater exploring

By Ditle Reid
Los Angeles Times

P LACKVILLE — This barely seems the place for a submarine company, but here it is, 130 miles from the nearest ocean.

It can be found upstairs in an old brick building where the pressions used to stand. Before that, some sailors occupied the site. Now the building is mostly empty, for some traditional fishermen and this odd oceanic concern.

"We wanted to be the next generation," Stafford said. "We know that tourists are going to demand new recreations. Maybe they don't want to go yet but still want to see the beauty and tranquility of the ocean."

Libelborn is the partner of Sub Sea Systems, two months after launching their company, someone else would begin marketing a tourist submarine. It had little windows the use of periscopes, and a small-cabin atmosphere. Staff Stafford, "We wanted to take the next step — make it more futuristic. We made ours look like Luke Skywalker's."

The engineering and design was done by the Canadian firm of Birco Technology Corp., which was working on a similar eight-passenger amphibious submarine when the California men started their business. The companies have forged a licensing agreement, meaning that either can build the Sub Sea Systems craft.

The Sub Sea partners are looking for an assembly plant location either in Sacramento, over the port, or in San Diego. "The best thing about our submarine," says Dick Stafford, "is that it's completely modern, nobody else has that. Ours is the only one in the world."

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ble job of being county sheriff at the time. Noting the community pressure, the accelerating pitch of emotion, the palpable disquiet, he said, "Some people were on the brink of hysteria, (feeling) that not enough was being done."

But, of course, much was done. In 1982, the EAR investigation was almost herculean in its effort and, in local crime annals, without parallel in its expenditure of money and manpower. At its height, some 100 beleaguered officers had accumulated 10,000 hours of investigation, at a cost exceeding \$2 million. And it was all for naught.

After a two-year spree in Sacramento, leaving 26 victims, the EAR, for whatever reason, left to prey on other communities — Stockton, Modesto, Davis, Concord, Danville and Walnut Creek. Evidence suggests, and Sgt. Bevins believes, in February of 1980 he may have even murdered a couple during a thwarted attack in Santa Barbara. After that, there was nothing. The attacks stopped just as suddenly as they started. And the trail went cold.

Now, 10 years later, from a full-time task force of 37 officers, the once sensational case has become the onerous inheritance of one man — Sgt. Jim Bevins. A career sheriff's deputy, Bevins has headed the EAR task force from the very beginning. He knows the case better than anyone.

It has become his cause celebre, his private quandary, which, jettisoned from the sheriff's property warehouse for space, he has moved into his own home. As he himself admits wearily, he has become "married" to it. Since Bevins is divorced, that knot is more than just figurative. Though far from obsessed with the case, Bevins is nonetheless haunted by its grievous memories, its infernal mystery. His is the detective's classic dilemma: Did he overlook some detail? Did he fail to make some obvious connection?

"I've read them and re-read them," he says of the reports, "hoping that something would pop up." He slowly shakes his head. "I can't actually say that not a day goes by that I'm not reminded of the case, by a question, a thought, some (potential) suspect," he says. "And there's not a time that I drive by a victim's house that I don't think about it. I always wonder what brought the guy here, to this neighborhood."

SGT. JIM BEVINS is sitting behind his cluttered desk in his windowed office at the sheriff's main station. A poster of Arizona, his home state, hangs on one wall, and taped to the door is a flier that reads, "Happiness is when you wake up in the morning and see your best picture on a milk carton."

Bevins is 48 years old and has been on the force for 23 years. He has silver-gray hair, sympathetic brown eyes and a watrful, imperforable manner that is both cautious and self-contained. His profession wouldn't be any more apparent than if he had the word "cop" stenciled on his forehead. And, from all accounts, Bevins is a good cop. "A detective's detective," laws homicide Lt. Ray Biondi, who himself has nursed a few enigmas in his career. "He's a rock-solid guy."

It's evening now, on the 24-midnight shift. Bevins is night supervisor of the detective division, which means — since most mayhem occurs when the moon is

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out — he and his detail of 10 detectives are kept occupied with real, urgent cases. But he's still officially in charge of the East Area Rapist, a case that is still classified as "open." Explains Sheriff Glenn Craig: "I don't want anyone to think that nothing is being done or that nobody cares. If I were a victim, I would like to know that someone was still keeping an eye on it."

However, Bevins' pursuit of the EAR is mostly confined to afternoon lulls. Or in response to tips and inquiries, which are surprisingly frequent. "On average, I get from one to two calls a month on possible suspects, either from Secret Witness or from other jurisdictions," says Bevins. "I just got a call the other day from Washington (state) on two suspects with similar EAR m.o.'s (method of operation)." But he quickly dismissed them, saying with a wry grimace, "It's not unusual for a suspect to enter a house wearing a ski mask and gloves."

Bevins can quickly discount most suspects just on physical description alone. Others simply fail to measure up to an extensive EAR profile. (In fact, file cabinets in Bevins' department office bulge with more than 5,000 suspects who have been cleared in the case.) Asked if his pulse ever quickens by a warm lead, Bevins smiles wearily. "It used to. But now I get so many of them (tips) that it gets to be routine."

Asked if it's conceivable that the EAR is still in the Sacramento area, Bevins carefully crafts his reply. "I don't believe he's still in town. If he was still here, he would still be operating. Or, if he is, he has completely changed his m.o." The latter appears unlikely.

But Bevins fields other calls on the EAR as well — from victims. Women, and in a few cases, spouses, who can never forget the EAR and the indignities he put them through. The experiences were more than traumatic. They were devastating.

"I just had a call from a victim who is getting a divorce and seeking counseling," says Bevins. "She is still getting flashbacks from the incident. When they were awakened," he notes, "the victims were thoroughly convinced that they were going to die." In fact, says Bevins, "I only know of one married victim still married to the same person. Many of them (husbands) have gone through tremendous guilt trips, (thinking) that 'I let this guy do these terrible things to my wife.'"

Few victims live in the same house where they were assaulted. Many have moved out of the area completely. Most have undergone some form of counseling to quell their anguish. All, of course, would like to see their tormentor captured.

TWO WEEKS ago, Bevins received another call. "She said, 'This is the 10th anniversary. Anything new?'"

Well? What exactly is the official status of the case? Bevins sits up and clears his throat. "The investigation can't go anywhere if the guy's dormant," he begins. "And I haven't heard of any activity in a long time. Other, similar

cases are brought to my attention, like suspects wearing ski masks. I'll call the jurisdiction and find out the physical characteristics . . ." his voice trails off from the dull recitation.

In other words, the investigation is futile? "I'm not any closer to the suspect than I was when I first joined the task force in May of 1977," he admits. He pauses for a moment, then adds wearily, "I'm mad to say."

Still, he plugs along. Asked to provide a physical description of the EAR suspect, Bevins brightens. "We are confident in saying that he is around 5 feet 9 inches in height, I'm confident with 160 pounds or thereabout. There are conflicting stories about the eyes. A child did see him in the light and said his eyes were blue. Another female said they were hazel. If I could catch him, I wouldn't care if they were pink!" Bevins allows himself a rare smile.

Even if Bevins could catch the EAR, it's doubtful that the rapist could be prosecuted for anything. Except for two possible kidnapping charges involving victims in Sacramento, and the double murder in Santa Barbara (a crime that, though the local jurisdiction doesn't attribute to the EAR, Bevins does, saying, "I'm convinced that's our guy"), all the sexual-assault statutes have long expired in the case. And though the sheriff's department has a wealth of incriminating physical evidence — hair, blood type, some uneliminated finger prints, a shoe impression — Bevins doubts any of it would carry the weight of conviction.

Even the most persuasive evidence — testimony from victims — would be hazy if not contradictory. "If we sat the suspect across the table from all his victims," Bevins confronts, "I don't think any of them could identify him."

So, short of an outright confession on his part, or, after all these years a resumption of activity, it seems unlikely that Bevins will ever capture the EAR — assuming he's even still alive.

"We've talked to psychiatrists and psychologists, experts in the FBI, California Youth Authority, other rapists even, and the general feeling was that eventually he would kill — and then commit suicide," says Bevins. With a deadpan expression, he quips, "If he did that, I would like to think he would be kind enough to leave something for the police, saying that he was the EAR." So far, no such thoughtful admission has materialized.

In some respects, the EAR was just as trying on his pursuers as his victims. Bevins, for one, was run ragged — called from home at all hours of the night, traveling to different cities for weeks on end, interviewing and comforting sobbing witnesses. It wasn't pleasant. His own domestic life suffered. And he was divorced in February of 1979.

"It's too easy to blame that on the case," says Bevins. But, "It did aggravate things. I got a lot of heat that I was protecting everybody in the county except the one person I was married to."

And heading a sensational case

and not solving it is hardly the prescription for career advancement as a cop. Plus, there's a certain psychic cost, too. As homicide detective Lt. Ray Biondi says of baffling cases, "It really plays on your mind. You've talked to all the people. You have all the details in front of you, and you begin to wonder: Did I overlook something? Did I screw-up somewhere? You begin to have a lot of self-doubt."

Bevins acknowledges such gnawing uncertainties, but downplays their relevance in his case. "I've received total cooperation from my superiors," he says loyally. "I don't think it's been a detriment to my career. But, I don't know that it's added to it."

ASKED, IF in hindsight he wished he had never been assigned the case, Bevins readily nods. "Sure. I felt at times that I may have been happier someplace else. Then I wouldn't have been so frustrated." Chuckling, he recalls hallway encounters with then Sheriff Duane Lowe, who would demand, "When are you going to catch that guy? Will you quit screwing around and catch that guy?"

They came close a few times. "He was pretty skilled — and he was pretty lucky," says Bevins. "He probably should have been caught on several occasions."

On one occasion, a neighbor actually saw the suspect enter a back yard prior to an attack, but rather than notify authorities, she merely closed her blinds. Bevins shakes his head in consternation.

At one point, Bevins was so completely immersed in the case that he used to dream about the EAR. "Once, the name of the suspect came to me in a dream," he recalls excitedly. "I woke up and couldn't wait to get to the office." Alas, it turned out to be a taunting chimera. "I would check out anything. We did some pretty elaborate things."

Undoubtedly the most bizarre was the hiring of a psychic, who claimed to be able to identify the suspect. Kneeling in an empty room and holding the hand of a cooperative if increasingly dubious victim, the psychic inexplicably proceeded to eat morsels of raw hamburger. The EAR was that kind of case.

Should the case simply be dropped?

Bevins thumbs the question in his mind. "I don't know," he sighs with discernable exasperation. "After 11 years of my life, I would like to think that it wasn't all for nothing." He gives you a pleading look.

Then, considering it some more, he adds, sounding more defiant, more resolute, "No, it wasn't a total waste. We learned a lot of information. And we did catch a few rapists and other criminals along the way. I'm hopeful that somewhere, something will turn up and we'll get a line on this guy. Whether we can prosecute him or not."

Bevins shrugs. But he isn't about to give up.

Bride



Sonya Po

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Sonya Newman, Pat Chapin

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The bride Date Potter Christian Navy

The couple

Estey

Buster Bow

Estey was the bride of Deborah Estey

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