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# Crooks take to new weapon designed for self-defense



Jack Cover displays his controversial Taser electric dart gun which, he told a government panel, is a safe, effective alternative to firearms.

WASHINGTON (AP) — The inventor of an electric dart gun designed as an alternative to firearms and sold for self defense says the weapon has been used as much by criminals as by persons protecting themselves from attack.

John H. Cover, president of Taser Systems Inc., says he has received reports that his controversial "Taser Public Defender" has been used at least 20 times, "one-half in self defense and one-half by crooks."

The Taser, a hand-held device resembling a flashlight, fires two, inch-long barbs connected to a battery by a 15-foot copper and stainless steel wire. The electric charge that pulses through the wires is sufficient to immobilize a person, but not cause permanent damage, Cover says.

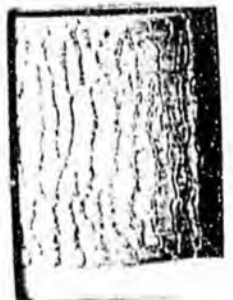
COVER MET recently for 75 minutes with staff members of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission to review the medical and engineering tests performed on the device since he began developing it eight years ago.

The device has law enforcement and other government officials puzzled. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms has decided that it is not covered by the federal Gun Control Act of 1968.

In California, where it was developed, it is termed a gun and must be registered and bear a serial number. New York City has ruled that carrying a Taser is a crime, as has Canada.

"THE RISK of this potentially lethal weapon falling into the hands of criminals is too great to allow it to be sold, manufactured or imported into Canada," said Canadian Justice Minister Ron Basford, in announcing the decision to ban the Taser.

THE SHOCK FROM the weapons causes muscles to contract, incapacitating the victim for up to a minute





WILLIAM LAWSON, LEFT, WEARS PATCH OVER ELECTRIC GUN INJURY

On right, a dummy holds the gun, which has shot a dart into its left side

## Zap! 50,000-volt Blonde Stages Shocking Robbery

MIAMI — (AP) — The young blonde in a pink sweater walked into the gas station and zapped the attendant, William Lawson, with 50,000 volts. Then she and a mate accomplice robbed the station and fled.

Police said Lawson was the first known victim of an electronic-age dart gun, which immobilizes its victims.

Lawson told police the young woman entered the station and asked to use the phone. As he showed her where it was, she turned toward him and, "calm and smiling," shot him.

"It was like sticking your finger in a wall socket," he said. "I fell on the floor and couldn't move. It was the worst pain I ever felt. My whole right side was jumping. I couldn't control my muscles."

Lawson said the woman was joined

by a man who leaned over and pulled the wires from the darts in his belly, then helped the woman clean out the cash register of an undetermined amount. One of the darts was left in his flesh.

The Taser, which Lawson said reminded him of a gray flashlight, launches two small darts attached to batteries by 18-foot wires. The darts can penetrate 1½ inches of clothing and the 50,000-volt charge is described as incapacitating and very painful.

The weapon's makers, Taser System Inc. of Los Angeles, describe it as a nonlethal crime prevention device for stopping attackers in their tracks. Literature that comes with it says that, in early testing, a blast from the gun using only 30,000 volts flattened a 250-pound bull.

The New York Times

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department has begun a criminal investigation of the circumstances surrounding the destruction of a threatening letter delivery by Lee Harvey Oswald to the Dallas office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation shortly before the assassination of president John F. Kennedy.

The investigation, which is being conducted by lawyers in the department's criminal division, is said by authoritative sources to be focusing on "conflicting statements" given by present and former FBI agents and officials about their roles in — or knowledge of — the decision to destroy the letter following Kennedy's murder on Nov. 22, 1963.

The letter in question reportedly contained a threat by Oswald, the accused assassin of the late president, to "blow up" a Dallas police station unless the FBI ceased its efforts to locate and interview him in Dallas and what he described as its harassment of his Russian-born wife, Marina.

According to several sources familiar with the results of a recently ordered administrative inquiry by the FBI into the incident, the Oswald letter made no mention of any intention on his part to commit a murder, or of any animosity toward Kennedy.

The FBI's efforts to seek Oswald in the days before the assassination



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# Stun Gun on the Market

## *Criminals Buying It, Police Fear*

LOS ANGELES — (AP) — Promoted as a humane defensive weapon that will immobilize but normally not kill, the electric stun gun may be winning unwanted acceptance in the underworld as a sort of jailhouse insurance.

More than 1,000 Taser Public Defenders, which pack a 50,000-volt wallop, have been sold since the weapon was first marketed in March, and a company spokesman said new orders are straining production lines. Only 10 guns have been sold to police, the intended buyer.

Just who is buying the stun guns, the manufacturer, Advanced Chemical Technology of Los Angeles, can't say. It is a question some police worry over.



—A. Photo  
THE TASER—PROMOTED AS A HUMANE DEFENSIVE WEAPON

It shoots tiny darts with a 50,000-volt wallop

Recently a holdup woman in Miami and a burglar in Redondo Beach fired Tasers at their victims. Miami police also reported nine Tasers stolen from a distributor.

Some Los Angeles police theorize that criminals may like the weapon because if they are forced to shoot and are caught later, the potential prison sentence will be far lighter than if they had used conventional firearms.

The laws of many states carry much different penalties for robbery and armed robbery, or simple assault and assault with a deadly weapon. Criminals who shoot their victims are commonly charged

with attempted murder or murder if the victim dies.

The Taser is a flashlight with two mechanisms for firing tiny darts which are attached to the light's nickel cadmium batteries by 18-foot-long wires. When the darts strike a person and the low current, high voltage charge hits, the victim's nervous system is effectively short-circuited and they normally drop, temporarily stunned. The flashlight is not integral to the weapon other than helping the user to aim at night. The darts and wires are enclosed in cassettes which cannot be re-used.

The gun's name is a loose acronym taken by inventor Jack Cover from the book title, "Tom Swift and His Electric Rifle."

Some authorities have questioned just how effective and safe the weapon really is.

In the Redondo Beach burglary, Michael Mattingly was hit by both darts from one Taser. He was knocked to his knees and stunned. But he was able to pluck out the darts and tackle the burglar, who after a scuffle escaped empty-handed.

Dr. Peter Rocovich, a Los Angeles neurosurgeon, said the gun potentially is lethal. He said such a heavy shock could result in cardiac arrest for a victim with heart trouble.

"Electricity is very unpredictable and hard to control. What would be a strong shock to one person

could be fatal in someone else," Dr. Rocovich said.

Cover said: "There is no medical evidence that a heart patient would necessarily be killed. The shock does not affect heart pacemakers. We have never said this is a nonlethal weapon."

Only one sale has been made to a law enforcement agency — 10 stun guns have been delivered to the Lauderdale Lakes, Fla., police force.

Los Angeles police chief Ed Davis, dismissing all "gun substitutes" now on the market, said: "None of these devices can ever replace a police firearm . . . If the bad guy knows that his worst fate is tranquilization and the policeman knows his worst fate is being killed by the bad guy, the bad guys would become roaring lions."

"Is the Taser a good idea? Well, we already have had two felonies committed with them," says Lt. Dan Cooke, spokesman for the Los Angeles Police Department. "It is potentially a thoroughly deadly weapon in heart cases."

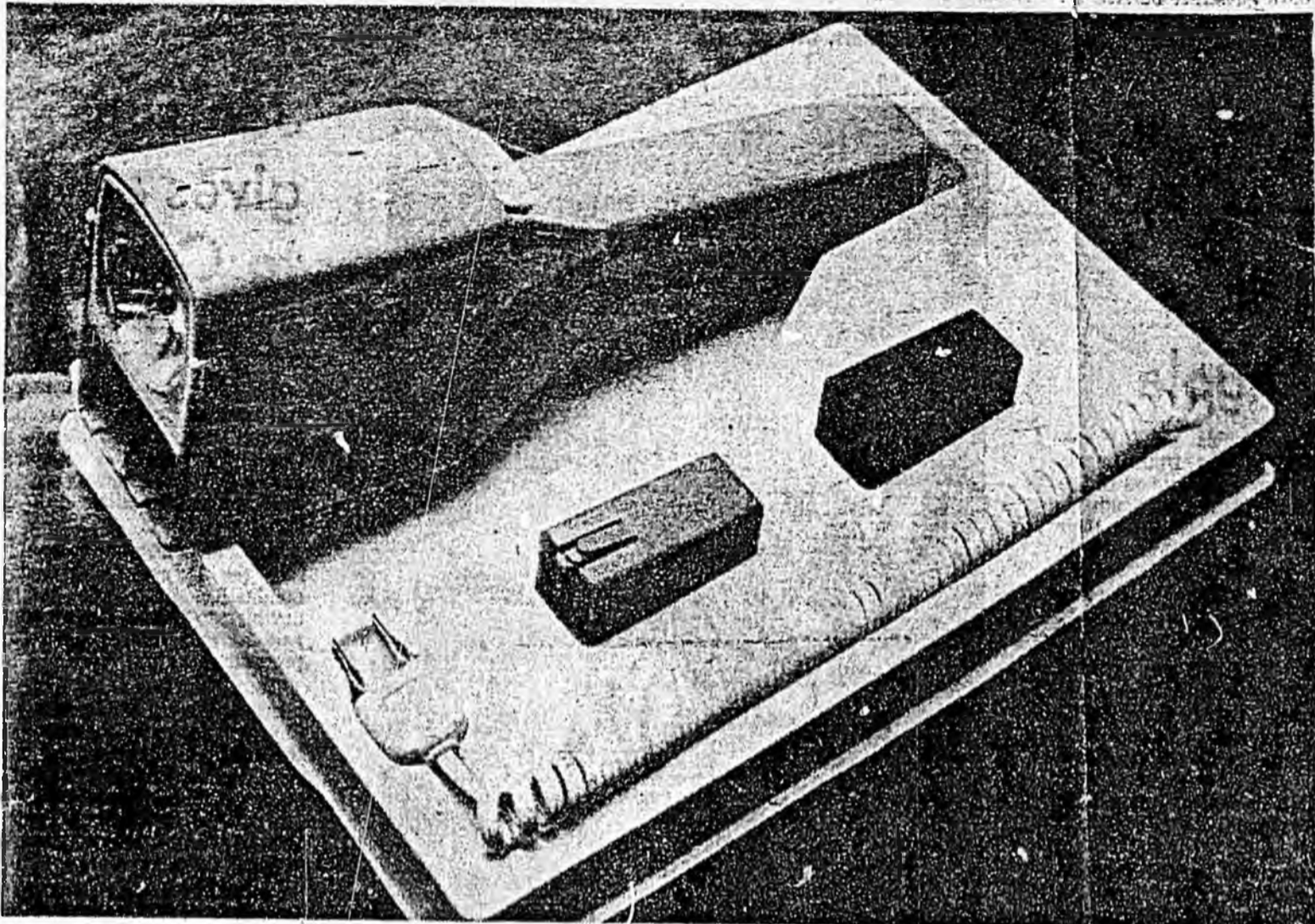
He said it would be up to the courts or lawmakers to decide if the Taser is a controllable deadly weapon or if it is something anyone could own and carry with him.

A sampling of some major Los Angeles gun dealers showed public interest in the Taser, but few distributors are stocking them.

One gun dealer who asked that he not be identified said: "I guess it is supposed to appeal to the antigun people who think they can get something that's not going to kill people. But we aren't all that sure."



# Gun triggers 50,000-volt debar



A Taser, its two dart cartridges and the cord for recharging the battery.

By CHARLES AWEKA

Times Suburban Writer

AUBURN — The Taser Public Defender is for real.

Promoters bill it as an alternative to the gun, designed to immobilize, not kill. It zaps its victims with a 50,000-volt charge that can be maintained for up to five minutes.

But already some grave questions have been raised about the electric-dart gun.

Larry (Dusty) Johnston, an independent distributor for the Taser, says it'll knock down an elephant in five seconds.

"If it was going to be the answer to the gun, I wanted to be in on the ground floor," he said. "I'm looking for an honest way to make a living. I don't like violence. I don't even go hunting."

Since last fall, he said, he has peddled about 40 of the \$200 Tasers, which are manufactured by the Advanced Chemical Technology Co. of Los Angeles.

### WHO ARE HIS customers?

Mostly housewives and nurses in the University District, "because they are afraid 'Ted' might come back," he said. But also private detectives, police officers, boat owners, campers and drug pushers "to guard against persons ripping them off."

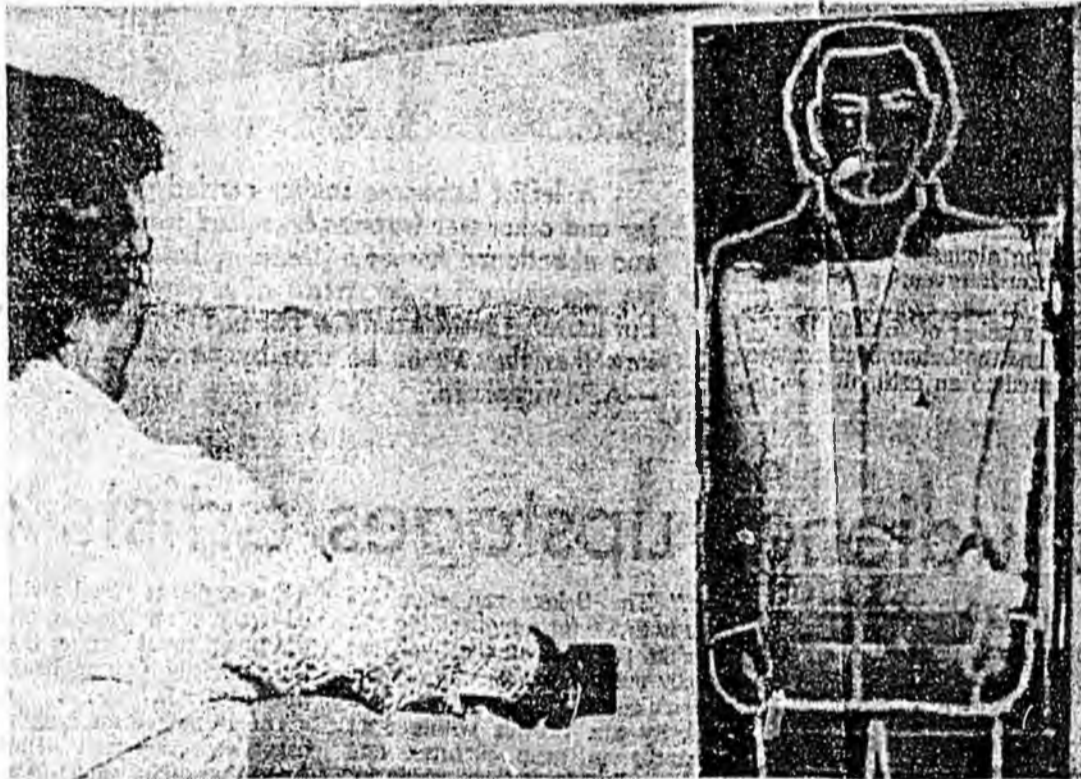
Johnston said he is concerned that the weapon could fall into the wrong hands.

Almost half the Tasers he has sold have been sent via a delivery service to persons he has never seen. Many of them live in Alaska.

He retains the name and address of each purchaser, along with a record of the purchaser's driver's license number, height, weight, color of hair and his guarantee that he is 18 or older.

A Taser has three serial numbers, one of them hidden "for the company's protection."

The first known victim of the electronic-age dart gun was a Miami, Fla., service-station attendant. A young blond woman plugged him



Larry Johnston fired a Taser dart at a target.

with excruciating pain he'd ever had," Johnston said.

Brochures stress that although the Taser is designed to be nonlethal, "there is no guarantee that serious injury will not occur or that harmful after effects will not result" from its use.

Critics warn that victims might suffer a heart attack.

**THE TASER HAS** two cartridges enclosing tiny darts which are attached to nickel-cadmium batteries by wires. When the darts with their barbed tips strike and the low-current, high-voltage charge hits, the victim's neuromuscular system is short-circuited and he hits the deck, temporarily stunned.

The batteries can be recharged, but once the darts have been fired they cannot be reused. Each cartridge holds two darts, which fire

The range is about 15 feet; the charge is capable of passing through 1½ inches of clothing.

The dart gun poses some prickly problems for police.

The Treasury Department's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms determined that the Taser isn't covered by the Gun Control Act of 1968.

California, however, classified it as a dangerous weapon after a Redondo Beach man was shot by a burglar. The victim yanked out the darts after he had been knocked to his knees, then tackled his tormentor.

New York also has controls on the Taser. Officials said Johnston had agreed to demonstrate the Taser for them, but never showed up.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission is investigating a request that it ban the gun.

Jerry Olson, chief of the criminal section, said it would be up to courts or lawmakers in this state to decide if the Taser is a controlled deadly weapon or if it is something that anyone could own or use with him.

**LAST YEAR,** Johnston, a professional skin diver, found use for the Taser when he battled a bluefin shark 40 feet under the water off Catalina Island.

Luckily he had his Taser along with him and used it to ward off the rambunctious shark. Connected to the waterproof Taser was a plastic-coated spear. Protected by a plastic coating, that is, except for the metal end.

"That shark had the biggest shock of his life," he said. "It didn't bother me any more. He took off. I did it on a couple of