

Cambodian Street Gangs :

A Case Study of Six Crime-Guns in Stockton



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Introduction

Every shooting scene and crime-gun has a story to tell. The story lies in the unique markings imprinted on fired ammunition components and in the transaction records of the crime-gun itself. Well-managed ballistics and trace data can provide police with invaluable crime-solving information for the short-term, and allow intelligence analysts to see patterns and trends in order to develop strategies for the longer term. This internal ballistics and trace data must be exploited to link crimes, guns, and suspects.



The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) administers the National Integrated Ballistics Information Network (NIBIN) connecting over 225 labs across the country with automated ballistics analysis technology. NIBIN helps users solve more shooting crimes and has proved to be very effective in situations involving gang-related violence.



The technology that NIBIN depends on is IBIS®(Integrated Ballistics Identification System). IBIS can find the "needle in the haystack," by suggesting possible matches between pairs of bullets and cartridge cases at speeds well beyond human capacity. The ability to sustain this comprehensive analysis of ballistics information has only been possible in the last ten years or so because of advancements in technology. Today, more than 39 countries rely on IBIS as the backbone of their firearm-related, crime-fighting efforts.



Forensic Technology's 3D Bullet Imaging Station, BulletTRAX-3D.





Six Guns in Stockton

Stockton is California's 12th largest city with a population of approximately 280,000. It consists of 56 square miles along the Interstate 5 / 99 corridors. Stockton is a multi-ethnic city and is home to a large Hispanic and Southeast Asian population.

Between December 1999 and November 2003, a very productive partnership was nurtured between the Stockton Police NIBIN Lab, various Investigative Units within the Stockton Police Department and a California Department of Justice Forensic Laboratory.

IBIS Specialists at the Stockton Police NIBIN Lab worked in collaboration with Stockton Investigators and forensic experts at the California Department of Justice, Bureau of Forensic Services in Ripon, using IBIS and the NIBIN database to cultivate actionable intelligence from test fires from recovered firearms and a collection of various items of ballistics evidence.

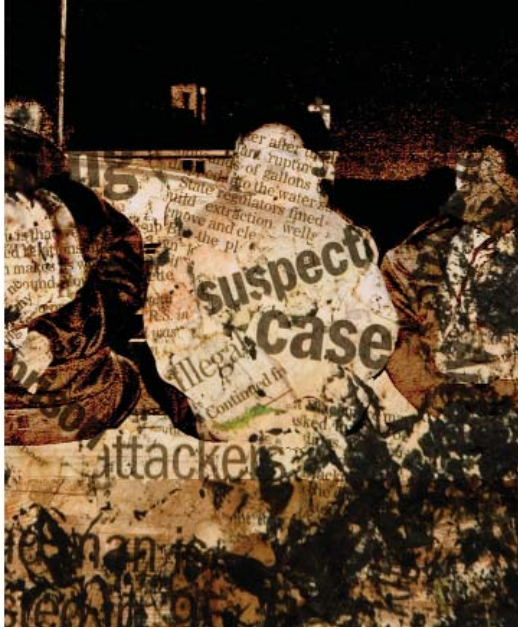
The work focused on an abhorrent series of violent crimes that were committed by Cambodian street gangs. Some are aligned together, some with other gangs, and some align with no one. One gun dubbed the "Bottle Cap Gun" had a particularly active role to play as the NIBIN database tracked its path of destruction through one gang-related shooting incident after another, before it was finally taken off the street by police.

The Stockton collaboration remains a sustainable model of how dedicated people, efficient processes, and innovative technology, can work together to effectively solve firearm-related crimes, and remove armed and dangerous offenders from the neighborhoods upon which they prey.

The following absolutely phenomenal statistics were produced during the two year period in question:

- Thirty-five guns including two machine guns, 83 gang-related crimes linked, 55 search warrants, 25 "gangsters" arrested.
- Actionable intelligence provided in six homicides, 22 assaults by firearm, and 50 gang-related drive-by shootings.
- 16 convictions with lengthy sentences, including life without parole and a death penalty verdict.

Of the 35 guns involved, six stood out from among the rest. These six firearms and their stories are explored in detail in the following pages of this document.



Gun No. 1

Make: Sturm Ruger

Type: Pistol

Caliber: 9mm

Location: Lodi, California

Crime: Murder

Links: Seven gang-related crimes in Stockton

Suspects: Three arrested - all pleaded guilty

Outcome: Anthony Do (suspect one) - 25 year sentence; Sunny Sihavong (suspect two) - 15 year sentence, Michael Fierro (suspect three) - 6 year sentence

Narrative

On June 24, 2003, at an East Walnut Street party in Lodi, a fight broke out between two gangs, the "Nortenos" and the "Original Gangster Crips". First the words: "What are you gonna do - shoot me?" The resulting gunfire claimed the life of Luis Eduardo Caracosa, a "Norteno." An associate of his was wounded.

IBIS Specialists at the Stockton NIBIN Lab entered cartridge case evidence found at the crime scene into the NIBIN database. The gun was recovered in a yard near the scene the day after the shooting. The gun was test fired and the acquired images were entered into IBIS. It was subsequently confirmed as the gun used in the Lodi homicide and was directly linked to seven additional gang-related shootings in Stockton.

Consequently, the District Attorney's Office and local law enforcement teams simultaneously executed a series of "association" search warrants seizing 24 guns, including two machine guns, cash and narcotics.



Gun No. 6

Make: Berretta aka "The Bottle Cap Gun"

Type: Pistol

Caliber: 9mm

Location: Stockton, California

Crime: Two Murders

Links: Eighteen drive-by shootings, 5 ADW's, 35 other guns used in 83 incidents

Suspects: Two arrested – two convicted

Outcome: Rattanak Kak (suspect one) – Life without parole + 200 years, Mao Hin (suspect two) – Death Penalty

Narrative

A 29-year-old male victim was killed and two other people were badly injured. On October 10, 2003, the victim was walking with his girlfriend in American Legion Park, in Stockton. They were approached by two members of an Asian gang, Kak and Hin, who robbed and shot the couple. The victim was killed and his girl friend survived a head wound. Kak and Hin were linked to a three-month spree of violence in which 45 people were injured; eight went to hospitals and two to the morgue.

Their life of crime began to unravel when Hin was stopped for drunk driving on November 9, 2003. An inventory of his towed vehicle turned up several expended cartridge cases. Images of the cartridge cases were acquired and entered into IBIS. A search of the NIBIN database suggested that the cartridge cases were linked to a series of other crimes committed by a still unrecovered gun dubbed the "Bottle Cap Gun" by forensic examiners. This information alone was important because the surviving female victim was convinced that her assailants were African American and the "Bottle Cap Gun" had been previously linked to only Asian Gang related crimes.

Police interviews of Kak and Hin led to a series of search warrants which in turn led to the recovery of the "Bottle Cap Gun" - the Berretta pistol identified as Gun #6. The searches also turned up a Sturm Ruger, .44 caliber, revolver identified as Gun #7. The ensuing investigation would put the "Bottle Cap Gun" in Kak's hands during the murder. Following the conviction of Kak and Hin, the judge in the case remarked that in his 23 years on the bench, this case had the most gunfire. Kak was sentenced to life without parole plus 200 years. He would be spared the death penalty only because he was 16 years old at the time. Hin was not so lucky.





Gun No. 7

Make: Sturm Ruger

Type: Revolver

Caliber: .44

Location: Stockton, California

Crime: Murder

Links: Two additional guns used in the murder

Suspects: Four arrested – three convicted – one awaiting extradition from Philadelphia

Outcome: Mao Hin (suspect one) – Life without parole, Rattanak Kak (suspect two) – 55 years to life, Sarun Chun (suspect three) – 40 years, Suspect Four – Still pending trial

Narrative

On September 12, 2003, a drive-by shooting occurred on Hammer Lane in Stockton. Three people were shot, one fatally. The November 9, 2003, search warrants executed in the American Legion Park murder case turned up this Sturm Ruger, .44 caliber revolver along with the infamous "Bottle Cap Gun".

The .44 caliber Sturm Ruger linked back to the Hammer Lane murder as one of three firearms used in the drive-by shooting. The same suspects, Mao Hin and Rattanak Kak, from the American Legion Park homicide, and a third suspect, Sarun Chun, were found guilty. During the investigation of the American Legion Park homicide, Hin confessed to using this .44 caliber revolver.

The only piece of evidence from the Hammer Lane shooting scene that could be linked was a small copper jacket fragment that was a confirmed match to the .44 caliber Sturm Ruger.



Gun No. 23

Make: Berretta

Type: Pistol

Caliber: 9mm

Location: Stockton, California

Crime: Murder

Links: Five additional guns used in the murder and twenty-two more

Asian Gang related shooting cases

Suspects: Six arrested – six convicted

Outcome: Hong Le (suspect one)

– Life without parole, Khammey

Keomanivong (suspect two) – Life

without Parole, David Inthirath

(suspect three) – Life without

parole, Veasna Oth (suspect four) –

21 years, Chanratha Chun (suspect

five) – 19 years, Manora Ek (suspect

six) – 16 months

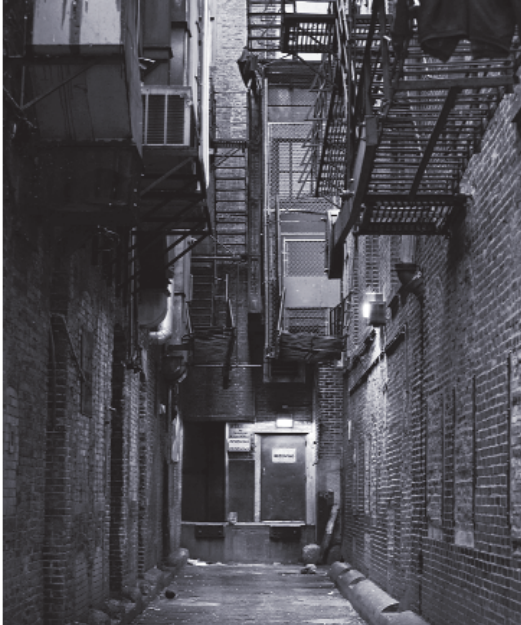
Narrative

On March 17, 2002, an Asian gang hosted a party in north Stockton. A member of gang renounced his membership and returned to the party with a member from a rival gang.

Six firearms were used to fire over 20 shots at party goers leaving an Asian gang member dead. Witnesses provided police with descriptions of the get-away cars. One of the suspects, Khammey Keomanivong, was pulled over in a traffic stop in connection with a surveillance of his residence. A subsequent search of his vehicle recovered Gun No. 23, a 9mm Beretta pistol.

IBIS specialists were able to establish multiple NIBIN links with the evidence from the shooting, and test fires from this Beretta pistol, to twenty-two additional gang-related shooting cases. Links were also made to two additional guns, one of which was the then still unrecovered "Bottle Cap Gun".





Gun No. 29

Make: Springfield Armory

Type: Pistol

Caliber: .45

Location: Stockton, California

Crime: Shooting into an occupied dwelling and criminal street gang activity

Links: Ten shooting crimes

Suspects: One arrested – One pleaded guilty

Outcome: Suspect One – 94 months

Narrative

On September 9, 2001, Stockton Police were conducting surveillance in a neighborhood where gang shootings frequently occurred. Two officers heard the sound of gunshots nearby. The officers responded to investigate the matter and they saw two suspects run through an alleyway. As the officers pursued, they saw one suspect drop an object over a fence into a yard next to the alleyway. The suspect was apprehended and a search of the yard next door produced a .45 caliber semi-automatic Springfield Armory pistol. The suspect was arrested for shooting into an inhabited dwelling and two unoccupied vehicles. The second suspect escaped.

The recovered firearm was subsequently test fired at the Stockton Police NIBIN Lab. There, IBIS Specialists entered the acquired images of the test-fired cartridge cases and evidence from the scene of the shooting crimes into the NIBIN database. A search of the NIBIN database linked the .45 caliber semi-automatic pistol to a drive-by shooting which had occurred in a nearby area just prior to the incident in question, and to nine additional shootings dating back to 1999.



Gun No. 33

Make: Mossberg

Type: Shotgun (sawed off)

Caliber: 12-gauge

Location: Stockton, California

Crime: One Murder - three attempts

Links: A second gun used in this murder, a 9mm Glock pistol, was recovered in a field on March 9, 2001 and also linked using IBIS to another ADW which occurred on December 18, 1999

Suspects: Two arrested – two pleaded guilty

Outcome: Sophath Voeun (suspect one) – 20 years, Phaathit Phaysaleum (suspect two) – 15 years

Narrative

On April 29, 2000, a drive-by shooting homicide involving a 12-gauge shotgun and a 9mm firearm occurred in north Stockton. a man was killed and three others were wounded. On May 4, 2000, investigators responded to a tow yard to investigate an impounded stolen van that had been abandoned and "torched". A search of the van produced an expended shot shell and 9mm cartridge cases that had been in the fire.

The expended shot shell brass case was imaged by IBIS Specialists at the Stockton Police Department's NIBIN Lab and searched through NIBIN. A link was found to shot shell evidence found at the original shooting scene. This was the very first NIBIN match that the Stockton IBIS Lab initiated.



Epilogue

The Lodi News – Sentinel ran an interesting account of the sentencing of Sunny Sihavong and Anthony Do, the convicted killers of Luis Eduardo Caracosa. Jorge Caracosa, the brother of murder victim, spoke directly to his brother's killers in court. He did not speak of his brother and he did not seek an apology. Instead he asked Sihavong and Do to denounce the gang life style and convince others to do the same. He asked them to tell people that gang life is a roller coaster ride of violence, drugs, and alcohol abuse that can derail at any moment. He said that life in a gang leads only to life in prison, then death.

Jorge Caracosa then took in a deep breath in an effort to speak through the emotion welling up inside him. He paused, and then told his brother's killers that he forgave them. They hung their heads and cried while, throughout the courtroom, people rummaged through pockets furtively searching for tissues. This visualization represents the futility and senselessness of the situation and, at the same time, hope for the future. It must be this hope that motivates the dedicated men and women of law enforcement to tirelessly apply their processes and innovative technology so that this scene does not play out, over and over again, in courtrooms across the country.

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