

The Home News

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Cops say they found ammunition in purse

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Seventeen rounds of live ammunition were found in a red pocketbook allegedly owned by accused murderess Jo Anne Chesimard, a state police detective testified yesterday.

Detective Ernest Wrzensky said he was assigned to inventory the contents of a white, 1965 Pontiac which had been impounded after the May 2, 1973 shootout on the N.J. Turnpike in which two persons—one of them a state trooper—had been killed.

The vehicle was brought to the garage at state police headquarters in West Trenton. The pocketbook was

found in the right front passenger seat—the place Mrs. Chesimard had occupied, according to previous testimony.

When asked by First Assistant Middlesex County Prosecutor Edward J. Barone to describe what he found in the pocketbook, Wrzensky replied:

"Various items—I believe you'd call them cosmetics—lipsticks and so forth; eyeglasses, some money and some ammunition."

Sixteen rounds of ammunition were

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found inside an eyeglass case, while a single round was found loose in the purse, he added.

The detective testified that he also found two boxes containing ammunition in a suitcase which was removed from the car during the May 8, 1973 inventory.

One box was full of bullets, but the other had only nine remaining rounds inside it, Wrzensky noted.

An inspection of a brown leather purse turned up no ammunition, he said, under direct questioning by Barone, but several pieces of glass were found among the cosmetics personal papers and keys.

The brown purse and another similar bag had been discovered in the car. One was found in the back seat, according to previous testimony.

The three pocketbooks and two jackets were introduced as evidence for the first time yesterday, which also was the first court session held on Saturday since the trial began Jan. 17 of this year.

Presiding Superior Court Judge Theodore Appleby set the Saturday sessions pending a ruling by the U.S. 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals on a defense motion that Mrs. Chesimard should not be forced to be present in court on Fridays, which are the Moslem sabbath.

The prosecution will attempt to prove that the brown suede-type jacket presented yesterday belonged to Mrs. Chesimard. The other outer garment, a tan, safari-style jacket, is alleged to have been worn by Clark Squire.

Squire, Mrs. Chesimard's former co-defendant, was the driver of the Pontiac involved in the shoot-out. He subsequently was convicted of murdering Trooper Werner Foerster, and is serving a sentence of life plus 24 to 30 years at N.J. State Prison.

Under direct questioning by Assistant Middlesex County Prosecutor William Welaj, East Brunswick Patrolman Robert Zygmund described the dramatic scene of Squire's capture 39 hours after the gun battle.

The search party was made up of some 30-40 officers, both East Brunswick policemen and state troopers, who formed a "skirmish line"—officers five feet apart in horizontal formation.

"The area we searched was wooded—ranging from heavy thicket to trees," he said. "We were looking for a black male suspect in the murder."

The area was about ¼-mile from the N.J. Turnpike in East Brunswick, and about 3-4 miles from milepost 78 on the roadway where the shootings occurred.

"I saw a black male lying on the ground, covered with leaves. He was on his stomach and had mud on his face and jacket and grass stains on his clothing," the officer recalled.

"His right arm was by his head and his left arm was under his stomach. I pointed a shotgun at his back and he said 'I give up, man'," Zygmund said.

After a "pat-down" search of the suspect, the officer said he asked him "Where's the gun?"

"He answered 'I don't have it—I don't have it. I lost it,'" the patrolman said.

He also recalled there were cuts between the thumb and forefinger of Squire's right hand at the time of his capture.

State Police Detective Sgt. Edward Wilke also returned to the stand for additional cross-examination by defense attorney Lawrence Stern.

The identifications officer related that he found spent shells at the scene of the shoot-out. When shown the red and brown pocketbooks, he attested that he saw them in the Pontiac while doing cursory investigative work at the scene.

Under questioning by Barone, Wilke demonstrated how three empty automatic ammunition clips fitted inside a 9mm Llama pistol.

The handgun, supposedly used by Mrs. Chesimard, had been found next to Foerster's body.

Wilke also showed the clips did not fit into two other Browning pistols found at the scene.

In response to Barone's questions concerning fingerprints found on the red purse or on the guns, he replied that the textured alligator-like surface of the handbag "was not conducive to fingerprints."

"Prints have to be made on a clean, hard surface, because they are the impressions made by sweat from the pores on the fingertips," Wilke explained.

For the same reason, no fingerprints could be taken from rough-textured handle of the Llama pistol.