

# PART 1



# DETECTIVE PERSPECTIVES

## ON CRIME GUN INTELLIGENCE

### PART 1: EVERY CRIME GUN HOLDS A STORY

#### **THE TERM “CRIME GUN”: WHAT IT MEANS AND DOESN’T MEAN**

The definition for the term “crime gun” can be found in the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives’ (ATF’s) Firearm Tracing Guide: *“Any firearm illegally possessed, used in a crime or suspected to have been used in crime. This may include firearms abandoned or otherwise taken into law enforcement custody that are either suspected to have been used in a crime or whose proper disposition can be facilitated through a firearms trace.”* The term “crime gun” in no way is meant to suggest that guns are inherently bad or of a criminal nature; it is merely a term of convenience especially when used repeatedly in writings about crimes involving the use of firearms.

#### **WHERE IS THE INFORMATION THAT EVERY CRIME GUN HOLDS?**

When firearms are involved in the commission of crimes, investigators should look for certain pieces of information that originate from inside and outside the gun.

# PART 1: EVERY CRIME GUN HOLDS A STORY

## 1



**FROM THE INSIDE:** Commonly referred to as “Ballistics data” – it consists of the unique marks left on fired ammunition components during the firearm discharge process, that forensic experts rely on for use in comparison analysis. For example, fired evidence from crime scenes and victims can be linked to a crime gun in police custody or one still in criminal circulation through ATF’s National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN). This information can help police answer the question, “What previous crime or crimes has this firearm been used in?”

*LEFT: Firing pin impression left on a spent cartridge case. RIGHT: Manufacturer’s information on side of firearm.*

**FROM THE OUTSIDE:** Various types of useful data can be found on the outer surfaces of the firearm. Federal law requires that firearms bear certain identifying information that is visible on the outside, such as the name and location of the manufacturer and a unique serial number. In addition, gun manufacturers and dealers must generate and maintain records documenting their transactions. These records make it possible for ATF to trace the history of a recovered crime gun from manufacture or import to the first retail purchase and share that information with law enforcement. Firearm trace information provides law enforcement with a starting point to trace a crime gun’s progress from a lawful transaction to its use in a crime. In addition, other valuable forensic data, such as DNA, latent fingerprints, and various types of trace evidence (blood, hair, fibers, etc.) can be found on the surface bearing areas of the firearm. This information can help police answer the question, “**Who has been associated with this firearm?**”



# PART 1: EVERY CRIME GUN HOLDS A STORY

## 1

### WHAT IS CRIME GUN INTELLIGENCE (CGI)?

In 1998, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), defined criminal intelligence as *“information compiled, analyzed and/ or disseminated in an effort to anticipate, prevent, or monitor criminal activity.”*

Combining ATF’s term Crime Gun with the IACP definition of intelligence, the term Crime Gun Intelligence can be viewed as all information compiled, analyzed and/or disseminated in an effort to anticipate, prevent, or monitor criminal activity involving firearms.

While there may be some basic building blocks of CGI such as ATF’s firearm transaction trace data and its NIBIN ballistics data network, there are many other types of data that can contribute to actionable CGI, all of which will be discussed in more detail during this twelve-part series.

### The benefits of collecting comprehensive Crime Gun Intelligence

The crime solving and prevention benefits of the tactical application of CGI by law enforcement in linking crimes, guns and suspects is evidenced by the rapid spread of Crime Gun Intelligence Centers (CGICs) across the country over the past twenty-four months or so.

In terms of the tactical application of comprehensive CGI, the good news is that police are collecting an enormous amount of crime gun intelligence; the bad news is that police are

collecting an enormous amount of crime gun intelligence. Investigators will need new tools and processes to manage it effectively and in a timely manner. The CGIC concept can be a sustainable solution.

The strategic application of CGI however, is a different matter. Researchers studying NIBIN data found, “More strategic approaches capable of identifying trends, patterns, and links between cases are sorely needed.” CGI’s strategic value derives from data that have been collected over a time period, which can help reveal patterns and trends. For example, NIBIN data indicating that certain firearms have been used repeatedly by one criminal group against another can be used to help develop investigative and prosecution strategies.

Additionally, ATF eTrace data can help explain how criminals are getting their guns and uncover gun trafficking schemes and conspiracies.

Furthermore, CGI can be used to stimulate strategic thinking and discover potential opportunities for more problem-oriented approaches to the investigation and prevention of crimes involving firearms .

The Office of Justice Programs recently posted an NIJ sponsored study entitled: ***Research on a 15-Year Statewide Program to Generate Enhanced Investigative Leads on Crime Gun Violence***

# PART 1: EVERY CRIME GUN HOLDS A STORY

## 1

[www.ojp.gov/library/publications/research-15-year-statewide-program-generate-enhanced-investigative-leads-crime](http://www.ojp.gov/library/publications/research-15-year-statewide-program-generate-enhanced-investigative-leads-crime)

This research is the first formal assessment of New Jersey's unique statewide collaboration and information sharing effort. This study examined the tactical integration of firearms evidence, particularly shooting event information, ballistics imaging, and crime gun tracing with intelligence analysis to provide investigators with new avenues of lead generation.

From a strategic perspective the researchers' analyzed ballistics imaging submissions over a multi-year period in addition to examining open source and agency documents that tracked many of the crime reduction projects the New Jersey State Police incorporated into their crime gun intelligence effort. This project demonstrated the critical importance of fusing firearms forensic evidence such as ballistics imaging with locally available information, such as arrest and incident data on a statewide basis. Moreover, it demonstrated the value of ballistics imaging to connect, previously unconnected incidents, individuals, and weapons particularly when combined with other law enforcement data sets.

More on all of this, as this series progresses.



**NEXT UP ON DETECTIVE PERSPECTIVES:**  
**Part Two of Twelve:** The Building Blocks of  
Crime Gun Intelligence

#### SOURCES:

1. BUREAU OF ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, FIREARMS AND EXPLOSIVES' (ATF'S) FIREARM TRACING GUIDE
2. ARTICLE - "IN THE CROSSHAIRS: CRIME GUN INTELLIGENCE", POLICE CHIEF MAGAZINE (JULY 2018)
3. WILLIAM KING ET AL., OPENING THE BLACK BOX OF NIBIN: A DESCRIPTIVE PROCESS AND OUTCOME EVALUATION OF THE USE OF NIBIN AND ITS EFFECTS ON CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS, OCTOBER 23, 2013.

