

I DISARMED A

BESIDES THE TENSE man opposite me, there were several persons in the bar. Suddenly I was desperately aware that their lives as well as mine depended on what I was going to say to this man in the next few minutes.

I looked down at his hands. He had two sticks of dynamite partially concealed in his right pocket. Two wires led from them to a pair of flashlight batteries in his left hand. He held one of the wires against the bottom of one battery; he posed the bare tip of the other wire a couple of inches away from the second battery. If he had a blasting cap inserted in the dynamite, a contact between the wires would blow us all to eternity.

I was certain Don Runyon had inserted that blasting cap. He was a desperate man with a miner's knowledge of explosives.

In 14 years of police work, I had run into a lot of dangerous situations, but nothing like this. If somebody takes a shot at you, you think maybe he'll miss. But when you stand a foot away from a man armed with dynamite—well, as I mentioned, everything depended on what I said to him.

The story began about 3:30 p.m. last Oct. 9 when Runyon telephoned the police station in Oroville, Calif., and asked for Russ Bergman, a fellow officer of mine. "I'm at a bar on Montgomery Street," Runyon said. "I want to talk to you about my family. I've got a couple of sticks of dynamite ready, and if you pull anything I'll kill myself and everybody around me."

Bergman knew Runyon's problem. Only the day before he had talked to Mrs. Runyon, who told him her estranged husband had obtained dynamite and had threatened to blow up her and their three little girls if she didn't agree to a reconciliation.

Capt. Robert Phippen decided not to send Bergman to the bar. Runyon, he reasoned, might hold a grudge against the officer who had interviewed his wife. "Who else knows Runyon?" the chief asked.

"I know him," I volunteered.

"Well, here's what you do," the captain said. "Try to lure him out of the bar and into the squad car. Fix the two-way radio with a toothpick or something so the mike will stay open, and we can read you here. Then try to drive him into an unpopulated area; stall until we get there—and try to grab that dynamite! But take him out of downtown. No telling how many he'll kill if something goes wrong there."

I wasn't able to find a way to keep the radio open, but I didn't bother with it long. Every minute counted in getting Runyon and the explosives away from innocent people.

While driving to the bar, I kept telling myself that Runyon was just bluffing. But as I approached him and saw him lift the dynamite half out of his pocket, I realized I was dealing with a berserk man. Any idea I had of disarming him vanished when I realized that the explosive was "60 percent dynamite," a type easy to detonate and extremely powerful. It might kill everybody in the building.

Runyon warily accepted my explanation that Bergman was busy transporting prisoners and had been unable to come. "I want to talk to you, Don," I said, trying to sound calm.

"No tricks," he said. I promised that. "Okay, but we're going some place your police buddies won't know." His eyes were alert and his movements precise. I tried to figure-out what was going on in his mind. He had said he wanted to die—yet he was willing to talk to me. That offered hope—hope for all of us. But what might set him off? What innocent gesture or word might



The detective froze. The miner was holding the tip of the wire inches from the battery. A slight movement—and the dynamite would go off!

He was a desperate man with two sticks of primed dynamite in his pocket; this detective's assignment was to stop him from committing suicide—and mass murder