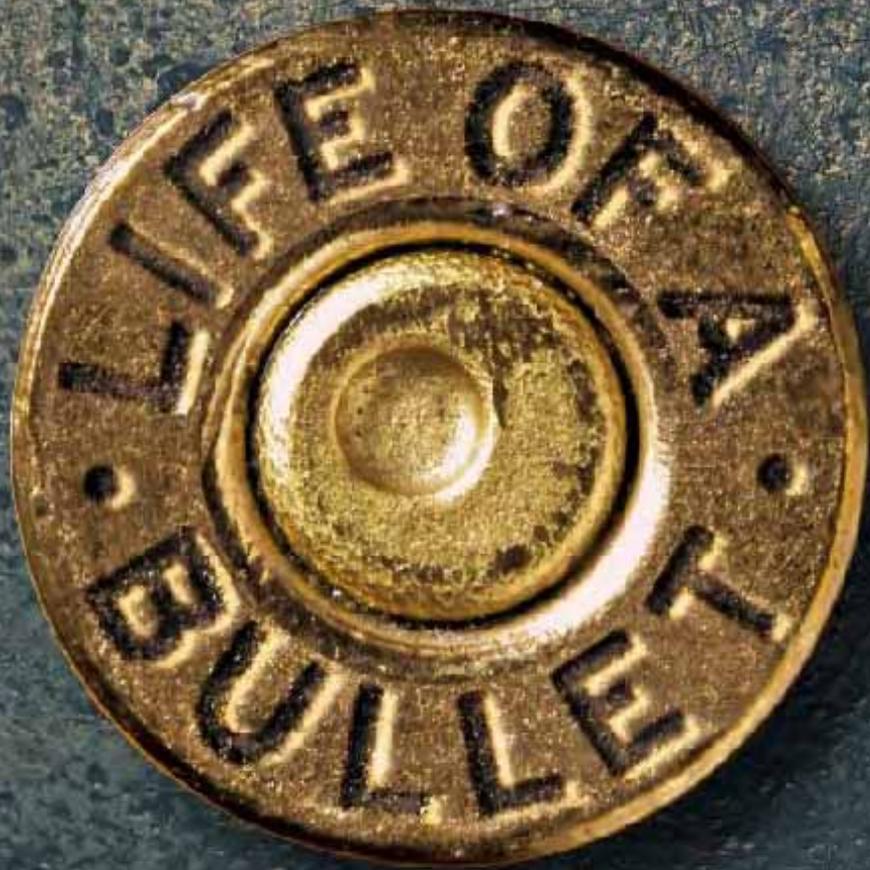


From its birth in a small Minnesota town  
to its deadly firing on the streets of North Philadelphia,  
the path a 9mm bullet travels is shaped by more than just  
the man who pulls the trigger



• BY RICHARD RYS •  
Photography by Pier Nicola D'Amico

## THE BULLET

**THE BIRTH OF THE FEDERAL CARTRIDGE COMPANY'S** 9mm Classic jacketed hollow-point bullet is a wonderfully laborious thing. Trailers haul raw lead, copper and brass by the ton into the factory's side gates before chemical and metallurgical analysis weeds out sub-par stock. The bullet itself is born of a 90-pound billet of lead that's drawn into a wire nine millimeters in diameter and cut off into slugs, which are then shaped by a punch-and-die and wrapped in copper sleeves, or jackets. A flat strip of brass is elongated to form a casing and stamped with its caliber and Federal's name around its circular base before receiving the bullet's heart—the primer. The projectile is then loaded into the case along with primer powder, and the completed round is given a final polish before it's ready for action.

As the bullet sits in the chamber of a gun, the primer stands face-to-face with a firing pin. A pull of the trigger rams the pin into the primer, crushing its metal components and causing a brief flash. That delicate spark is enough to ignite the smokeless powder, creating the miniature explosion that launches the bullet out of the casing and along the barrel with a burning reservoir of energy and a terrible velocity, covering the length of nearly four football fields in a single second.

Designed for law enforcement and self-defense, the tips of 9mm hollow-points aren't points at all—they're scooped out to create quick expansion upon impact and remain lodged in the body, reducing the chance of hitting a second, unintended target on the way out. This also results in a wider tunnel of destruction on the bullet's path through organs, vital tissue and bone.

## THE SHOOTER

**LITTLE BOYS LOVE TO SNEAK OFF TO THE WOODS,** and Javier Ortiz was a little boy. He'd escape to the forest from the Oakbrook Homes housing projects in Reading and play with his cousin, combing the underbrush for snakes like an explorer in some mysterious world he only knew from the movies. But for Javy, growing up in the early '80s, the forest was more than just a playground after the blacktop and monkey bars lost their appeal. It was a lifeline, a shadowy place of trees and wormy little creatures that slithered around him, so different from what he knew at home, so much safer.

Javy lived with his mother, father and two younger brothers in a world controlled by drugs and guns. It didn't help that some of his father Angel's family stood atop Oakbrook's narcotics food chain. Angel was tight with the police, who

thought he was the only honest man in the family. Javy knew different. Popi was crooked, a liar. He didn't push narcotics or run guns, but he used his home to stash them for his relatives. It was the last place his cop buddies would think to look. He also had a tendency to beat the piss out of his wife, Vicenta, and all three of their children.

The view outside Javy's apartment wasn't much brighter. Oakbrook was a stain on Reading, a beacon for junkies and suburbanites trolling the city's southside for a fix or sex on the cheap. Javy was a bright kid, and cute, always a favorite of the little girls with that dimpled baby face of his. But the 'hood rats weren't so sweet on pretty boys, especially smart ones. His cousin Manny watched over Javy like an older brother, encouraging him to stick up for himself, to fight back. Javy wasn't much of a fighter.

At home, the beatings grew so vicious that Vicenta ran off with her sons and hid at her sister's house up in Hartford. Eight-year-old Javy was in a Connecticut schoolyard one day, standing in line for recess, when he saw Angel. He'd found them. The boy escaped to the bathroom, and when his father caught up with him, they both wept. Javy's tears were of fear, even anger. One day he'd look back on the tears his father cried and see only cowardice streaming down Angel's face.

Vicenta demanded a divorce with custody, but Angel took advantage of her limited English, tricking her into signing papers that gave the boys to him. She moved to the Bronx, where her kids spent summers to escape their father, as violent as ever and now bringing a revolving cast of easy women home. By the time Javy was 12, his father had contracted HIV; he took the boys to Puerto Rico in search of cheap medication until full-blown AIDS crippled him. Angel finally went back to Reading to die. Javy stayed behind with an aunt, and while his father lay in Oakbrook, covered in lesions and unable to care for himself, Vicenta returned to comfort him until his death.

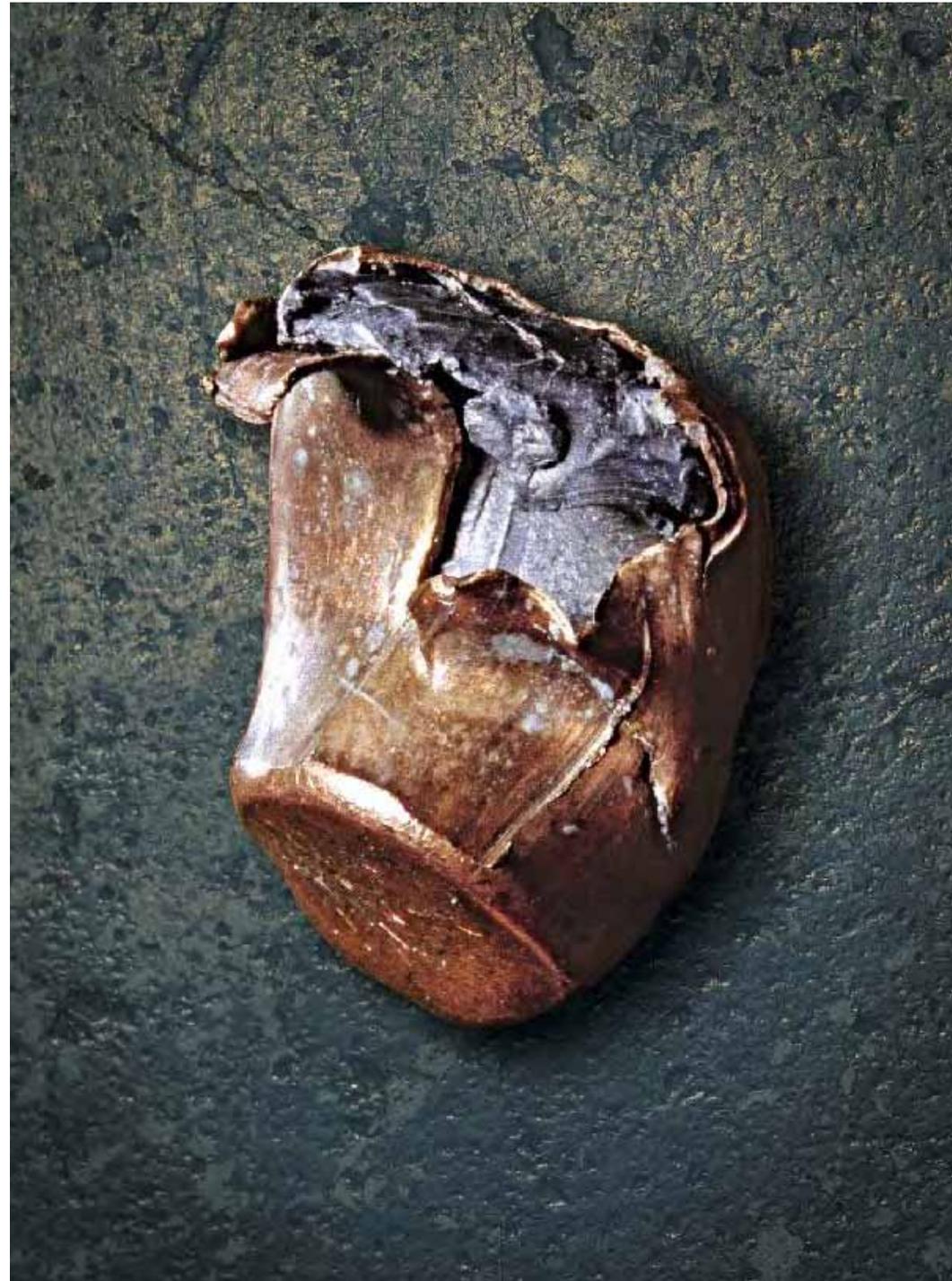
Then Vicenta and her other sons joined Javy in Yabucoa, about an hour southeast of San Juan. She had relatives there, and thanks to some cash from Angel's death, the family settled into a two-bedroom house in a quiet suburban neighborhood. Javy had a yard to play in, and neighbors who would give him \$10 to mow theirs. It was all so different from Oakbrook. But the money from Vicenta's factory job and her dead husband's Social Security checks only stretched so far.

Javy used to think his father's side of the family was rotten, but Vicenta's nephews made Angel's relatives look like the Puerto Rican answer to the Cosbys. Javielito, as the old-timers called him, started hanging with his drug-dealing cousins, who sold everything from pot to crack to heroin (continued on page 1kk)



**IN THE LINE OF FIRE** From left, Federal Cartridge employee Doug Nelson at his 20-year anniversary; the Shooter Shop in Port Richmond where the bullet was sold; Javier Ortiz at age 20, the year before he killed Shorty Mac-10; ballistics cop James Kwong. Opposite page: The 9mm hollow-point bullet slug labeled "B-5."

NELSON: COURTESY OF ANOKA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY; GUN SHOP: TREVOR DIXON; YOUNG ORTIZ: TREVOR DIXON; KWONG: COURTESY OF PHILADELPHIA POLICE DEPARTMENT



## Life of a Bullet

(continued from page 191)

in the infamous Cupey ghettos, the birthplace of boxer Felix Trinidad and a playground for drug lords. The path to school was a dangerous one, and Javielito often got jumped by bigger, tougher kids. He didn't have his cousin Manny to defend him anymore, or the woods to escape to. But he had those cousins. In one month, they made what his mom worked for two months to bring home. Nobody fucked with them, either. Javielito was smart enough to figure out what to do next.

## THE BULLET-MAKER IN MINNESOTA

DOUG NELSON FIRST WALKED PAST the guardhouse of Federal Cartridge Company in 1964 to do what his father did, and what his grandmother did before him, and what hundreds of his neighbors did. For nine hours a day, \$2.20 each hour, Doug Nelson made bullets.

Much of his handiwork ended up in the magazines of GIs charging and crying and roaring through jungles half a world away—good for man-hunting, but too powerful for the pheasant-hunting Nelson enjoyed back then. Federal, with nearly 1,000 workers at its height, was the lifeblood of tiny Anoka, Minnesota, and still is. To this day, newborns wear FUTURE FEDERAL EMPLOYEES t-shirts, and when Nelson was a boy, schoolkids in December were as excited about the company's Christmas party as they were about Christmas itself. In 1951, Federal donated \$50,000 to build Anoka a new city hall. From the ground, the building is shaped like an L. From the sky, with the police station sitting where a trigger would be, it looks like a revolver.

Nelson has held a slew of jobs over the years: making shotshell, working the machine shop, pumping a press in the .22 plant that molds raw lead into a shapely round, and loading that lead into a gleaming sleeve of brass. A small man with thinning hair, a full mustache and tinted glasses, Nelson celebrated his 20-year anniversary in 1984 as a machinist; two years later, he married a secretary named Carolyn. He survived cutbacks in the early '80s and late '90s, and plans to commemorate the eve of his 40th year with the company by retiring this month. Until then, he's up early every day, and says good-bye to Carolyn and their dachshund, Gem, before leaving his rancher and walk-

ing the few hundred yards up his street, named after a former Federal chairman, to the factory gates.

By 7 a.m., he's inside Federal's guarded walls, where you'd swear it was still the '50s for all the machinery that looks untouched by time. Nelson's job now, his last, is to shape tiny brass cups into casings that hold the 100 million 9mm bullets Federal casts each year—a fairly small percentage of its annual ammo production. Most bullets of that caliber end up on the hips of cops, who prefer 9mm handguns over .45s or .22s for their compact size, large payload and “stopping power”—the nasty habit the bullets have of doing enough damage to put their victims down. For the same reasons, semiautomatic “nines” are the weapon of choice on the streets, where thugs can unload a 15-shot magazine in as many seconds.

Doug Nelson is a faithful company



THE VICTIM: The rod shows the possible path of the bullet that killed Shorty Mac-10 in 1999.

man, but he doesn't use the bullets his company makes anymore. Stopped hunting years ago. Lost interest in it. Doesn't like to kill anything.

## THE STREETS OF PUERTO RICO

JAVIELITO WAS ONLY 16 THE NIGHT he decided to stay in the slums of Cupey instead of taking the hour-long drive south to his home. He'd been hustling all night, selling dope, crack and weed. Of the seven grand he was handed after his father died, he gave two to his mother and “invested” the rest, which he easily doubled in weeks. His neighbors knew him as the kid who hung out at the pizza shop up the road and always had girls all over him, the sweet one who'd

wash your car and refuse the cash you'd stuff into his palm. The neighbors never seem to know. Mothers always do, though. Vicenta knew what her eldest was doing up in those projects. She also knew she couldn't support her family on \$500 a month. All she could do was try to keep him in school, beg him to be careful, and pray.

Business didn't come easy in Puerto Rico, and there's a reason Javielito and his homeys called those projects “Vietnam.” He had just finished his shift that night when he saw Chapo. Chapo was a dope fiend, a shell of the man he was before smack waged war on his body and his soul. Javielito knew what to do with a dope fiend who's out so late at night that it's morning. He's sick. Soothe him with a free fix. He'll thank you and, more important, buy from you later. Javielito would give Chapo a taste when he needed it, so seeing his emaciated silhouette this night was nothing unusual. Until the junkie cried out, “They're coming!”

What followed sounded like someone opened up a blowtorch in a fireworks shop—the roar of bullets exploding, the payloads of automatic weapons released. Rival gangs were disagreeing, violently, and Javielito was caught in the middle. He bolted up the street to the house of a woman who watched out for him, offering him shelter if he needed it.

Javielito ran inside, right into the face of a child holding a .380 semiautomatic

pistol. Javielito didn't have time to explain he wasn't one of the bad guys, so he sprinted back outside, and the boy chased him. Pain surged through Javielito's left flank before he collapsed. Three days later, he woke up in a trauma unit with three gunshot wounds. The slugs to his right side and chest passed clean through him, he didn't even feel those, but that third one stuck—that's what dropped him. His face and torso were also cut up. He later learned why—Chapo had dragged him to safety, and found someone to drive him to the hospital, which was just minutes away. Had it been any farther out on the island, Javielito would have died at the hands of a scared little boy he never knew.

In less than a year, he was selling drugs again, buying jewelry for his mother, keeping his family together, being the provider they'd never had. In January of 1997, an older dealer he knew from Cupey asked the 18-year-old a question that's posed to thousands of small-time pushers in ghettos everywhere, every day: “You want to make some money for real?” He had a spot in North

Philly and needed help running it. Javielito's buddy went to the States with the understanding that if business really was better over there, he'd call. A month went by with no word from the friend. Javielito figured he wasn't missing anything.

Then his homey showed up unannounced with an extra plane ticket. It was good over there, crazy good. They had to leave the next day. Javielito gave his mother two grand and took two more on a flight to Philly, along with the wisdom he'd learned in the slums of Oakbrook and Cupey. *Earn respect. Don't be a snitch. Die for your brothers. And don't stop shooting until you hear the gun go click.*

## THE GUN SHOP IN PHILADELPHIA

THE SHOOTER SHOP, JUST UP THE street from Northeastern Hospital and a few blocks south of Kensington and Allegheny in Port Richmond, sells 9mm bullets and the guns that fire them. Owner Larry Haney stocks mostly Remington ammo, but along the wall, behind the counter where rows of bullets are on display, there's an assortment of Federal boxes, including 9mm hollow-points. It's almost closing time on a bright autumn afternoon, and Haney's gum-chewing sister, Judy, is here too, answering the phone as her brother lights a Marlboro and watches the corner of Emerald and Allegheny on a TV connected to surveillance cameras. Scores of rifles and police gear line the walls behind locked glass, along with odds and ends, like teddy bears wearing POW/MIA sweaters. A steely-faced pug with a Semper Fi hat and an eagle tattooed on his left hand works the counter. Over his shoulder hangs a sign that reads AMMO SALE IS FINAL.

Port Richmond doesn't look much like the neighborhood it was 10 years ago, and almost nothing like it did when Haney was a kid in the '50s. Industry ruled the white, working-class district then, with small factories and shops on what seemed like every intersection. Back then, like in Anoka, chances were you'd retire from the company that gave you your first paycheck. Things are different now. Manufacturing dried up in the '80s, and plenty of folks fled to the Northeast, or crossed the Betsy Ross into Jersey for good. Twenty years ago, you'd never see a group of black kids crossing the street, or a Hispanic family out on the steps of their rowhome. Today, when Haney looks out through two mechanically controlled iron gates that separate the Shooter

Shop from the changing face of Port Richmond, it's mostly black and brown faces looking back at him.

Haney sells a lot of guns and ammo to cops. This afternoon, a black security guard needs a holster for his weapon—a 9mm. A white postal worker comes in with his teenage son and younger nephew, and Haney's associate shows the gangly teen how to clean his hunting rifle. There's an odd man who looks like a cross between Harvey Fierstein and Harry Knowles inspecting the assortment of more than 40 handguns in Haney's display cases. The owner talks to all of the customers. He's the kind of jeans-and-high-tops guy who remembers names and the faces they belong to, and he knows his merchandise like he knows the Second Amendment. By law, Haney could sell bullets to 18-year-olds, but the Shooter Shop's policy is more like that of a bar than like Wal-Mart's. Odd as that sounds, it's a good thing—no one under 21 leaves with ammo.

This is where Javielito bought his bullets. No doubt Haney raised an eyebrow the first time he walked in, wearing baggy jeans and gold chains, his cap tilted to the side, looking like a high-school freshman playing hooky. A kid—so young, but a hood. Javielito was no older than 20, but his fake ID checked out, and he got his bullets. Just another day like today. The mailman's son takes his newly cleaned bolt-action rifle into his hands and points to the back wall, his cheek settling against the wood stock for a long look along the sight toward some buck waiting in the brush of his imagination. Haney looks on proudly. This, he likes. It's the best part of what he does.

## THE MURDER

JAVIELITO HAD TO ADJUST TO the hustle in North Philly. Back in Puerto Rico, buyers came to him. Here, he had to work for his sales, but the sweat paid off. A four-hour go-around could easily net \$1,500 cash, more than he'd see in a week back in Cupey. Night and day, out in the open, he sold nearly everything on his turf, a predominantly Hispanic section on the edge of the Badlands at 6th and Clearfield, where product ranged from bogus “burn bags” filled with crumbled sheetrock and passed off as crack, to downright suicidal dime bags of pot laced with PCP and soaked in formaldehyde, called “wet.” Javielito didn't move guns, though. He didn't need to. New Jersey seemed to breed white dudes who would bring him weapons, often straight out of the box and supposedly untraceable, in exchange for drugs. It got to the point where Javielito

## Life of a Bullet

and his crew, *el corillo*, had to tell them to stop with the guns. He already had three of his own, and that was enough. Something else was different in P.R., too. Cops there feared the wicked corners of the barrio, where you could kill and get away with it. Here, death didn't come so easy. Even in neighborhoods the police couldn't clean up, they were sure to follow the blood trails when they appeared, which they did, night after night.

Javielito rented an apartment on the other side of town, a third-floor efficiency in Feltonville, a relatively quiet, mostly black and Spanish-speaking enclave just west of the Oxford Circle, and there he settled back into life in the States. He had a girlfriend from Pennsauken, a kindergarten teacher. He befriended the woman who lived on the second floor, a thin, attractive Latina who had surveillance cameras trained on the side door that led to her apartment and Javielito's. She said they were for personal protection while her husband was away in the Army. Her husband had a lawyer friend, Gerald Ingram, who got to know Javielito, so when one of his buddies got pinched, Ingram got a call. And when Javielito needed ammo for all those guns his Jersey boys brought him, he'd head east, to a little corner shop on Allegheny near Kensington, where he could hand over \$24 to Haney and walk out with 50 Federal Classic 9mm hollow-points.

In the Latino drug community, Javielito had a reputation as one of the quiet ones. Near the end of 1998, that changed. Javielito received an unexpected promotion when his boss went to jail on a murder rap, and he took control of 6th and Clearfield. Like it or not, he'd have to do more than just protect himself. Anyone who disrespected him or *el corillo* faced his wrath, including a cousin who ran from Javielito's gunfire. Business was so brisk that he recruited more soldiers from Puerto Rico. Venture off your turf—even just to the corner across from yours, or near the third stoop instead of the fourth—and you might get a warning. Or you might get shot in the face.

Javielito knew the other hustlers in the area, and knew where they sold. One of them was Luis Delgado, better known as Shorty Mac-10, a 19-year-old with a tattoo on his left deltoid of Bart Simpson holding an AK-47. Like Javielito, he supported his mother with drug money. As a Saturday night in May turned into Sunday, Shorty Mac-10 sat parked in a tan Buick LeSabre in the middle of the 600 block of Clearfield, with his own weed stash and his 15-year-old buddy, Marchello Steele, riding shotgun. Some-

times guys with inventory to unload at the end of the night would roll the dice, wandering out of their areas in hopes of cashing out without pissing anyone off. Shorty Mac-10's property stretched from the first light pole on Wendle up north to Allegheny. This night, Shorty was off duty, just passing time before heading to a local after-hours with another pusher. But when he was on the job, Shorty would sometimes journey a little farther south, past his pole to where Wendle intersects Clearfield—Javielito's territory.

Javielito may have had orders from someone with more clout, or maybe he owed someone a favor. More likely, he wanted to send a message that no matter what you were selling, no matter when, you didn't sell on his block or even sit there unless you paid him for the privilege.



**LOCKDOWN** Javier Ortiz in Huntingdon's maximum-security prison.

A little past 1:30, he walked down Clearfield toward the Buick and took a quick look around. He wasn't alone. A couple of guys were talking up some girls from 7th Street, while a crack dealer on break was getting Chinese at the other end of the block. Javielito pulled up the hood of his black sweatshirt.

He stepped up to the driver's-side window, drew his pistol, and jerked the trigger six times—six Federal hollow-point bullets fired from his 9mm semiauto. Shorty Mac-10 raised his arms in desperate self-defense as four bullets tore into his left shoulder and arm, exiting through the other side, some grazing his head and neck on the way out. Three ended up in Marchello Steele, the nastiest one settling just above his trachea.

One bullet had a particularly wicked directive. As Shorty Mac-10 recoiled from

the muzzle fire, a round entered his skull just behind his ear at a slightly upward angle. It had no trouble breaking through bone, and the gelatin-like consistency of his brain put up even less of a struggle. The bullet cleared a path through the left lobe of his cerebrum, then the right, before finally settling in the far end of his skull.

El Flamboyant Bar at the corner of 6th and Clearfield was still selling cervezas, and the salsa jukebox was so loud that nobody inside heard the gunfire. Not that such shootouts were uncommon; two months earlier, a janitor had stepped out of El Flamboyant's front door and into the middle of one. His killer was still at large. No one ran outside to see Shorty Mac-10's body slumped over onto Steele, who was watching his own life leak out onto the Buick's seats. Javielito ran south, disappearing into the darkness. It was Mother's Day.

## THE RAID

JUST AFTER DAWN FOUR DAYS later, a SWAT team descended on Javielito's Feltonville apartment—early-morning hitters, they call themselves. Squad cars and black vans surrounded the pea-green triplex, and in seconds, 10 cops in ski masks, armed with rifles, broke down the side door leading to the second- and third-floor apartments. The Latina with the video cameras was ordered to her knees, hands clasped behind her head, as the police ransacked her apartment and crashed through the door upstairs. No one was home, and for good reason. Javielito not only had a warrant over his head for the death of Shorty Mac-10 and the assault on Steele, who arrived at Temple in critical condition, but he was also a suspect in the janitor's slaying and was wanted in a third shooting. The cops left with something they found in Javielito's closet—a box of 9mm ammo with 15 live rounds inside, all of them Federal Classic hollow-points.

At the time, that box didn't mean much to the homicide detectives searching for Javielito. Cops spread out across the city gathering evidence, interviewing his associates, seizing stolen cars, guns, and photos of Javielito with his girlfriend on New Year's Eve and striking gangsta poses with his buddies. A few weeks later, police in central Jersey pulled over two Hispanic males hauling a carload of guns, one of which they said belonged to a guy named Joey Cruz, an alias Javielito used. The men had heard he was hiding out in Reading.

By August, Javielito was in police custody in Philly, while assistant district attorney Terri Domsy prepared the state's case against him. Javielito made a call to lawyer Gerald Ingram, this time to enlist his services for himself instead of his pals. With two eye-

ORTIZ AT HUNTINGDON COURTESY OF JAVIER ORTIZ

## Life of a Bullet

witnesses who'd seen Javielito plug Shorty Mac-10, Domsky was confident she could convict him. But one witness was a drug dealer himself—not the most trustworthy source—and Javielito insisted he'd been in Reading that night. The case was strong, but not airtight.

## THE BALLISTICS COP

NEARLY A YEAR AFTER SHORTY Mac-10's murder, Officer James Kwong finally got around to a case he'd been assigned months earlier. Kwong was working in the Philly PD's firearms identification unit, a cramped office on the third floor of the Roundhouse where everything from rifles to handguns to homemade potato cannons hangs on the walls. Up to 7,000 firearms pass through here every year, and each of the department's 10 examiners—all of whom carry loaded 9mm pistols themselves—handles a daunting caseload of about 1,000 crimes. Kwong, who wears thick glasses and keeps his graying hair trimmed in a crewcut, was next in line on the schedule when a bag full of lead and spent casings from Clearfield Street came in. What intrigued him about this job was that box of ammo—evidence that rarely shows up.

Kwong sat down at a double-sided microscope and loaded a casing from the crime scene in one side and a live round from the ammo box in the other. By tweaking a pair of knobs and looking through a split-screen magnifying lens, he lined up the left side of one with the right side of the other to form a full picture. The image he created showed, in microscopic detail, markings made when a bunter at the Federal factory stamped the base of each casing with “9mm,” “FC” and “Luger.” The unique grooves in the metal lined up exactly—they had both been stamped by the same machine. A Federal bunter's life span is no more than 100,000 bullets, so out of the 100 million 9mm rounds the factory produces every year, each bunter stamps just a 10th of one percent of the total. Kwong was certain the casings found with the body of Shorty Mac-10 were from the box in Javielito's apartment.

With a gloved hand, Kwong removed one bullet in particular from the evidence bag. He soaked it in a bleach solution to burn away any leftover blood or tissue, then examined it the way a coroner studies a cadaver. The copper jacket was ripped open, exposing the mangled lead, which had mushroomed out as intended. A piece

of Shorty Mac-10's skull was still embedded in it. He wrote “B-5” on the bullet with a black Sharpie and dropped it in a plastic bag bearing a hot-pink sticker that read “Blood/Body Fluid Precautions.” B-5 was the killer.

Kwong testified at the trial in the winter of 2001 as Javielito sat, stone-faced, next to his attorney. The ADA called on everyone from homicide detectives to an eye-witness to the coroner who'd probed Shorty Mac-10's perforated corpse. No one spoke for Javielito—not his cousins from Reading, not his neighbors from Feltonville, not his homeys from Puerto Rico and the Badlands. His girlfriend almost did, but her alibi wasn't so solid. She told Ingram she'd spent Mother's Day with Javielito and had pictures to prove it. Indeed, she did. The problem was, they were taken on Dominican Mother's Day, a week after the shooting.

Fifteen days after opening statements, the jury declared its unanimous decision: life in prison without parole. Domsky's phone rang a month later—it was Javielito, calling from prison, claiming for the first time that he knew the real assassin, a dimwitted associate from P.R. he could trick into confessing. He wouldn't give up the shooter's name, but said he also had details about six other murders in the neighborhood. None of his claims swayed Domsky or the judge. By April 2001, Javielito began serving the first of two consecutive life sentences he'd receive for both Clearfield Street killings. He'd never use those 15 live rounds the police found in his closet. The bullets from those six casings found at the crime scene not only took a life and condemned Javielito to prison, but also left an unanswered question: Where did the other 29 bullets from that box end up?

## THE AFTERMATH

ON AN UNNATURALLY WARM FALL afternoon in Anoka, Minnesota, Doug Nelson steps out of the shower and into a pair of shorts while his puppy serenades him with a concerto of yips. He lets little Gem out into the backyard and checks an answering machine message left while he was in the bathroom. Nothing too important. Eventually he'll throw on a t-shirt and scrub down his tan Ford pickup before his wife comes home from her word-processing job at the courthouse. Nelson has sold this home, and in a few weeks he'll say goodbye to this neighborhood and the factory at the end of the block that's taken such good care of him for the past four decades. He takes a minute to reflect on his employer, and the beating that companies

like his take so often in the media. All he knows is that Federal is a good place to work, and he always got paid. Though Federal doesn't dominate the landscape in quite Anoka the way it once did, the town is still gun-friendly—only a handful of buildings curb the state's “conceal and carry” laws with signs prohibiting firearms on the premises. Nelson's a quiet man. Probably won't do much to celebrate his retirement, maybe a thick sirloin or Italian from someplace close by, but not much else. After that, he's looking forward to spending time bass-fishing and taking life one day at a time.

A few weeks later in North Philadelphia, a crossing guard stands just feet from where a man was slain behind the wheel of his parked car a few years back. The Potter-Thomas public school is on the cross corner, and thankfully, the guard says, the block is different now. After the Javielito killings, narcotics officers locked up about 20 dealers and set up cameras to monitor the block, with help from the feds. No one's been shot here in the past year, but just two blocks away, thugs selling rock shout at passing cars in broad daylight. A few miles away, over on Allegheny Avenue, as his neighborhood continues to transform around him, Larry Haney is still selling guns and ammunition.

Two hundred miles to the west, clouds the color of ash stretch like a tent above Huntingdon, Pennsylvania's 114-year-old maximum security prison, where Javielito sits within swirls of barbed wire and soulless towers of brick, attempting to appeal his sentences. His face is fuller now, but the thin, wispy mustache across his lip and a shock of black fuzz on his chin remain. Wearing thin-framed glasses, he's articulate and soft-spoken, pausing only to consider the best English word for the Spanish one in his mind.

In the visitation room with a handful of other prisoners and their guests, he displays two testaments to the life he lead before, first by opening his brown D.O.C. jumpsuit to expose three dark, knobby scars from his near-death experience in the streets of Cupey. Then Javielito extends his right forearm. It bears a new tattoo, stretching from wrist to elbow, with flames encircling a tombstone topped with a crucifix. “R.I.P. Javielito” and “1978-2001” is scrawled near the shallow of his wrist, symbolizing the death of his alter ego—the day 12 jurors delivered the first of his two life sentences. “UNO” is scrawled in bold block letters, framed by two skulls. “These are for the bodies they gave me,” he says. “Uno is what they call me here in prison. It means *Un Nino Olvidado*, a forgotten child.”

Spend some time in lockup, Javielito says, and you develop a sixth sense for sizing up other inmates. Look in their eyes, and you can separate the killers from the innocents. When the real murderers look in his, he says, they don't believe he's guilty. That doesn't make his stay any easier. He's used a sock stuffed with soap as a weapon to take on an inmate twice his size, losing the battle but gaining respect, prison's most hard-earned commodity. Upstate at Camp Hill, he spent two weeks in solitary, and saw the blue, lifeless face of a white kid who'd hung himself. He swore he'd never go out like that, so he keeps fighting, dodging homemade shanks and watching men bleed for cutting in line for the telephone. His stay in the Hole was tough, but the alternative could be much lonelier, much colder and much more permanent.

A slew of disciplinary problems at Camp Hill and Smithfield earned him a transfer to Huntingdon, and judging by his behavior in the five months he's been here, a trip to an even tougher prison is likely. He worries about his mother, who lives in Camden now, with her youngest, Eric. He worries about his 23-year-old brother, Elis, who's in prison in New Jersey on a drug charge. Javielito warned his little brother not to follow in his footsteps, but he knows Elis did it for their mother, and he loves him for that. He misses Jelly-bean, the ex-girlfriend, who's married now. As visiting hours end, he makes only one request before returning to his six-by-nine-foot home in A block—he wants movie studio mailing addresses, so he can send them the screenplay he's written. It's inspired by the life he led before they gave him those bodies.

Back in Philadelphia, within the pale blue concrete walls of City Hall's police evidence room, B-5 sits in its own sort of solitude. It resides in a manila envelope, protected by a baggie about the size of four postage stamps, along with the five other lead corpses removed from Marchello Steele and Shorty Mac-10. Unless someone requests to see it, B-5's only company is the police officers who guard it and the thousands of other envelopes, guns, rifles and assorted contraband stacked side by side, one on top of another, from floor to ceiling in the storage room. The lights are turned off every day at 5:30 p.m., and the darkness that follows is as deep as that in Huntingdon and Anoka; in Cupey and Oakbrook; as deep the shroud that touches Clearfield Street and Feltonville and Allegheny Avenue. All places that couldn't be more different but for the darkness, and the bullets that hide within it. **T**

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