

The Lennon Gun: Could It Happen the Same Way Now?

By colleen long, associated press

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On a cold night 35 years ago, [Mark David Chapman](#) waited for [John Lennon](#) outside the New York City apartment building where the former Beatle lived with his wife, Yoko Ono, and his son. When Lennon appeared shortly before 11 p.m., Chapman opened fire with a Charter Arms .38-caliber pistol. Here's a look at how he easily circumvented New York's restrictive gun laws, and whether it would be possible today.

WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

Chapman bought the gun legally six weeks before the shooting from J&S Sales Ltd., a shop in Honolulu, Hawaii, where Chapman had been living. He reportedly paid \$169. Chapman had a permit and no police record and the dealer wouldn't have had any reason to block the sale.

HOW DID IT GET TO NEW YORK?

Authorities at Honolulu's airport said Chapman probably got the gun past airport security simply by placing it in his luggage. At the time, baggage checked with an airline was not searched or X-rayed. Chapman flew first to Atlanta, then on to New York City.

SINCE HE HAD A PERMIT, WAS THE GUN LEGAL?

No. New York does not recognize the validity of handgun permits issued in other states. Out-of-towners who bring handguns into the city frequently face criminal charges, even if they have a license elsewhere.

COULD CHAPMAN FLY WITH HIS GUN TODAY?

Air travelers are still able to take a gun with them on a flight as long as they declare the weapon, unload it, lock it in a hard case and check it in their luggage. Security experts say there's nothing to prevent people who follow proper security procedures from collecting the firearm from the baggage carousel at the destination airport, even if the weapon is illegal to possess in the jurisdiction to which they have traveled. "The airline knows the gun is there, the TSA knows, and you're declaring it, but they're not doing the second piece, which is asking whether the firearm is licensed in the ultimate destination where you're going," said attorney Jeremy Saland, who represents gun owners in airport arrest cases. "It's an extra headache for them."

A spokesman for the U.S. Transportation Security Administration said Tuesday that the agency's screening procedures are designed to detect potential threats to aviation and aviation passengers.

"While we notify law enforcement during the security screening procedures if an officer discovers an item that may violate the law, it is the passenger's responsibility to know and abide by the law," the spokesman said.

SO, IS NEW YORK CITY'S BAN EVER ENFORCED AT AIRPORTS?

It does get enforced at New York airports, but usually only on outbound flights. Saland said he gets about 15 calls a year from out-of-state gun owners who have been arrested at New York airports trying to leave with the firearm in their checked baggage. The National Rifle Association has been lobbying for a federal law that would require states to honor gun permits issued in other states.

WHERE'S CHAPMAN'S GUN NOW?

The revolver is stored behind bullet-resistant glass at the Forensic Investigative Division in Queens, New York, where it has been in police custody for 35 years, stored alongside the gun wielded by "Son of Sam" killer [David Berkowitz](#). The division has about 800 guns, most of which are hung on the walls.

WHAT ABOUT CHAPMAN?

Chapman waited for police to arrive and was arrested. He pleaded guilty after initially planning to mount an insanity defense. Chapman is serving a 20 years-to-life sentence at Wende Correctional Facility in western New York. He was denied parole in August 2014. He is eligible again next year.

"Your actions have devastated a family and those who loved the victim," the parole board said in denying the application.