

# Hundreds of cops comb area for missing girl

By SUZANNE BARRIE  
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

One room in an abandoned building of the Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC) contained about 20 large desks, two refrigerators, an oven and stove unit, several metal cabinets, piles of old mattresses, about 10 hospital cribs and an old sewing machine — all heaped on the floor in a state of disarray.

Multiply this scene by 28 multiple-story abandoned buildings full of such rooms and you might have some idea of the number of objects and areas police looked through yesterday during what Capt. William Wallace, commanding officer of all Staten Island detectives, described as "an all-out effort" to search for Jennifer Schweiger.

The 12-year-old Westerleigh girl with Down's syndrome has not been seen since last Thursday.

About 300 police officers assembled in front of Building 1 of SIDC at 9 a.m. yesterday to search through SIDC's buildings, tunnels and surrounding wooded areas. The search lasted for about six hours. The extra manpower was available for yesterday's search only.

Clad in their uniform shirts, blue jeans, sneakers and work shoes, the police, and about 60 police department vehicles that were parked in the area, formed a sea of blue.

Also on hand for yesterday's search were 40 auxiliary police, 40 volunteers from New York Telephone Co. in Manhattan, a 17-person volunteer unit from the National Guard, two trucks from the Salvation Army of Greater New York providing water and meals, a truck from the American

Red Cross of Greater New York to provide first aid, and a number of local volunteers, according to Lt. Joseph Scotto, police department community affairs supervisor for Staten Island.

"We've searched the area and now we're going to re-search the area. We will conduct a shoulder-to-shoulder search of the wooded area and a building-to-building search as well," said Assistant Police Chief Samuel Marino. "When you do it with a lot more people you can ensure you've covered the place."

Wallace said police dogs tracked Jennifer's scent to the area yesterday.

"This is to absolutely remove any possibilities that the girl could still be here and to do it in one sweep. The trail ends here, so we have to make sure that nothing is left uncovered," said Wallace.

Jennifer is 4 feet 3 inches tall, about 65 pounds, and has brown hair and hazel eyes. She was wearing a pink "Sesame Street" shirt, pastel shorts and had a yellow pocketbook.

The man with whom she was seen is described as being mentally retarded, about age 60, thin, 5 feet 11 inches, and with a bald spot on the back of his head.

Jennifer and the man were seen together at SIDC last Thursday.

Wallace said detectives have questioned at least 12 people fitting the description of the man and have eliminated most of them. "We are still following some leads, though," he said.

He declined further comment about possible suspects.

Jennifer's parents, Karen and Kenneth Schweiger, also went to the scene yesterday.

"We are optimistic, scared, but hopeful. She could be anywhere. We're praying and staying together," Mrs. Schweiger said.

"This is a massive complex — a city within itself," said Mr. Schweiger. "If the man who took my daughter knows this complex, it would be impossible to find her without this effort."

"We're keeping cool and calm. Otherwise, what good would it do our daughter? If they find her and we're sick and in a hospital, what good would it do?"

Together, Officers Antonia Vega and James Reyes of the 120th Precinct searched the first floor of one building, while the rest of their unit searched the building's remaining areas.

The officers used long poles to look through piles of debris and behind old mattresses. They searched many of the area's darkened corners with flashlights.

Vega, who had been involved in the search for eight days, said he was eager to find Jennifer. "I am

The German shepherd came from the Bloomingdale (N.J.) Police Department State Special Enforcement Unit.

The search for Jennifer will resume today through local police and volunteer efforts. Wallace said police will concentrate on Willowbrook Park.

The search will continue tomorrow, although the location of that search is not yet known. Wallace said he will determine tomorrow's site on the basis on today's progress.

Anyone wishing to volunteer to help look for Jennifer, or who has any information on her whereabouts, should call the police's 24-hour confidential hotline number at 447-4168.

Volunteer searchers can also contact Bob Cacciola of the Radio Emergency Associated Citizens Team (R.E.A.C.T.) at 948-4251.

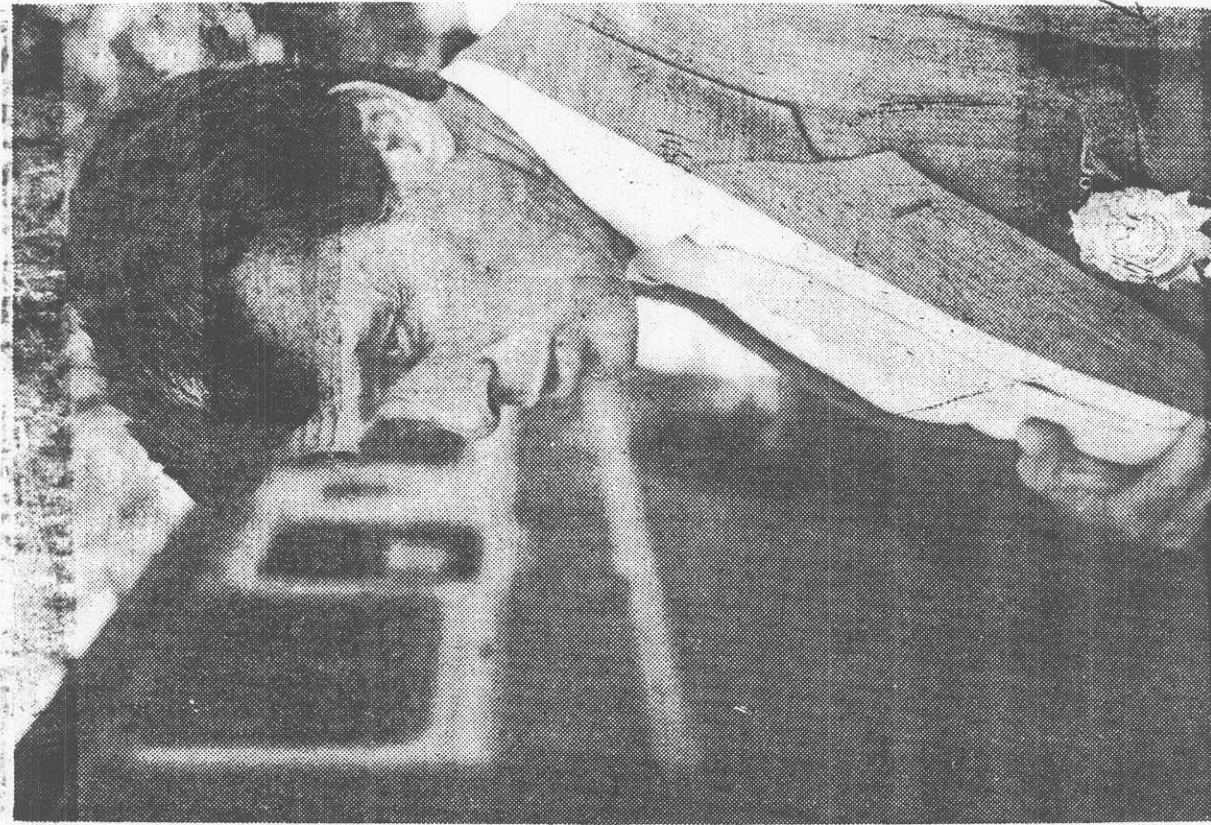
somewhat hopeful," he said. Armed with insect repellent, 17 off-duty National Guard volunteers and about an equal number of police officers searched dense brush areas and the abandoned Farm Colony area in Willowbrook.

"We really want to find this little girl," said Capt. Richard Naccio of the National Guard.

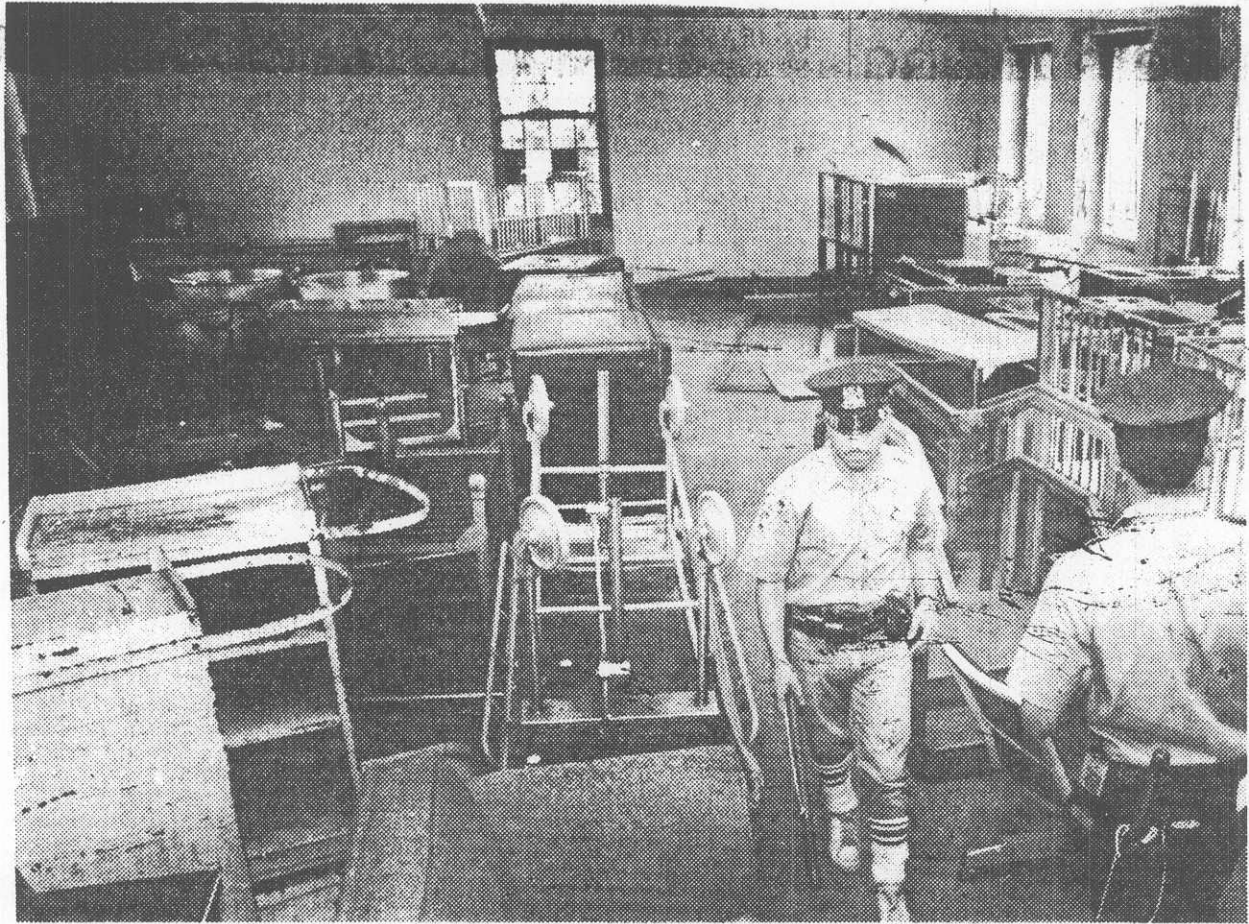
Merle Steiner, a 60-year-old accounting manager for New York Telephone and co-worker of Kenneth Schweiger, has been involved in the search for three days and spent the morning searching wooded areas.

"It's very dense in there. Nothing has been in there for years," he said. "It's very frustrating and disappointing. You keep thinking that hopefully you'll find her."

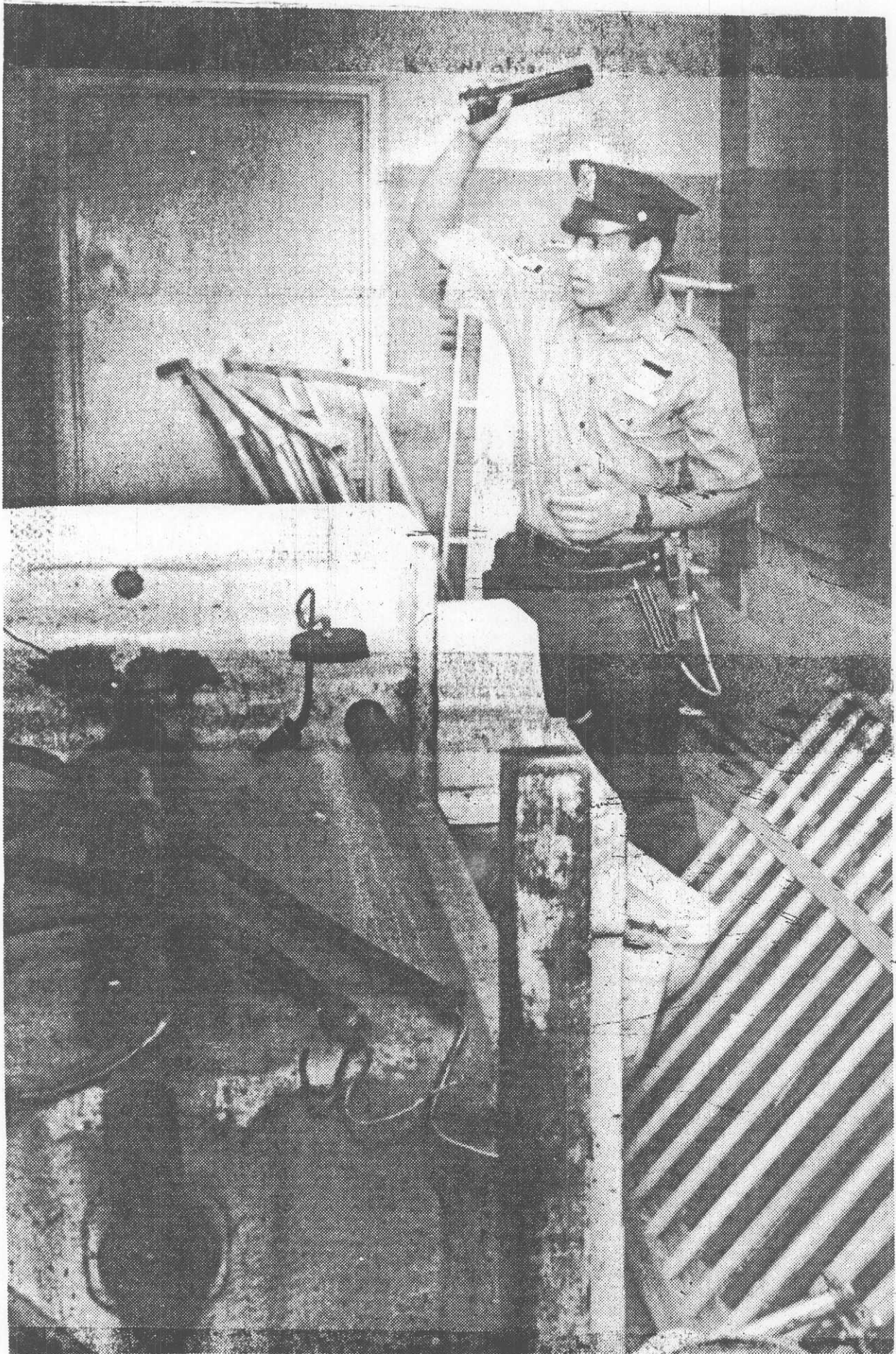
A new dog was also used in the search of SIDC's Building 2, the largest building in the complex.



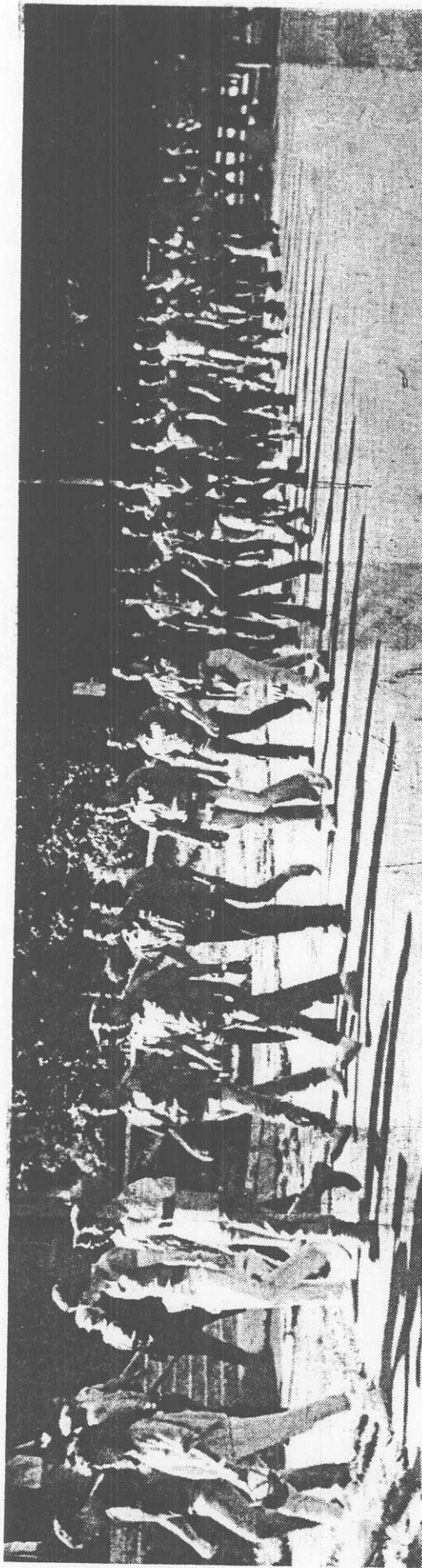
William Wallace, commanding officer of Staten Island detectives, stands in front of the temporary search headquarters at SIDC.



Police officers search a room packed with unused furniture and equipment at the Staten Island Development Center.



ADVANCE PHOTOS/STEVE ZAFFARANO  
Police Officer James Reyes checks a dark corner during a search of an SIDC building.



Police, National Guard members and civilian volunteers seeking the missing youngster prepare to search the grounds of the Staten Island Development Center.

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