

Police expand search for Jennifer

By GLENN CHAPMAN
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

A helicopter, police dogs and a team of specially trained officers brought in from throughout the city scoured the marshes and brush bordering the Fresh Kills Landfill yesterday as the search for Jennifer Schweiger was expanded.

"Deputy Chief of Department (Robert J.) Johnston offered us any assistance we need, and told us to keep going," said Assistant Chief Samuel Marino, commander of Staten Island's police force. "Now we are extending the perimeter of the search."

Police officers and volunteer searchers have been working for more than three weeks in an effort to find the 12-year-old girl who vanished from the street near her Wardwell Avenue, Westerleigh, home on July 9. Witnesses and a bloodhound led investigators to the Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC) in Willowbrook.

The SIDC facility had been the main focus of the police search for weeks. Volunteer groups have been targeting wooded areas, cemeteries and shoreline areas throughout the North Shore.

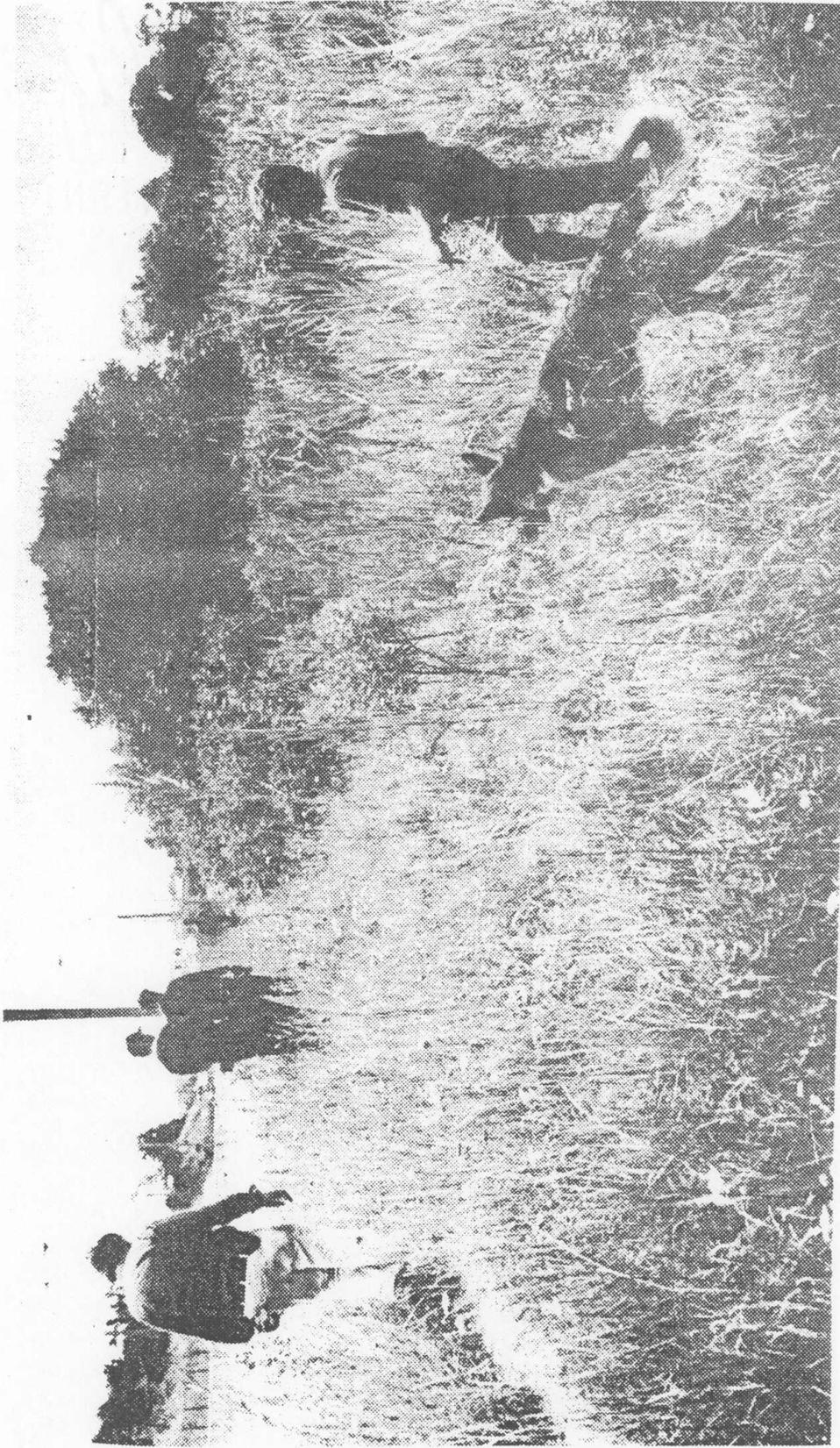
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ADVANCE PHOTO/STEVE ZAFFARANO

A police helicopter searches the marshes near Fresh Kills.

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ADVANCE PHOTOS/STEVE ZAFFARANO

Police search a wooded area near the Fresh Kills bridge of Richmond Avenue.

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doing," the assistant chief said.

Detectives assigned to track down Jennifer, and to determine if she has been the victim of foul play, continued to follow up leads in the case yesterday. The girl had been seen walking with a transient the day she disappeared, and police believe the man may be linked to cases involving three other missing Staten Island children.

According to Marino, police still have no evidence to indicate Jennifer has been the victim of a crime.

Lt. Louis Fiori, commander of the detectives searching for the girl, yesterday continued to refute a report televised on a Thursday evening news report stating that an arrest in the case was expected this weekend.

Wilhelmina Holliday, city police deputy commissioner of community affairs, made an unscheduled stop at the mobile headquarters yesterday afternoon to check with Marino on the progress of the search. She was on the Island yesterday to review a community program in Clifton.

"It's very difficult with so many places (to search)," Mrs. Holliday said as Marino and Mills conferred with officers who had just returned from the landfill's perimeter. "(Island residents) should be concerned, but they shouldn't be afraid."

Volunteer efforts yesterday were aimed predominantly at alerting Island residents to a massive rally today at noon at Holy Family R.C. Church on Watchogue Road in Westerleigh, said Donna Cutugno of a group called the Friends of Jennifer.

Volunteers are calling today "Search for Jennifer Saturday," and hope that hundreds of people will turn out for the balloon re-

An Emergency Services Unit (ESU) and Special Operations Division mobile headquarters were stationed at the corner of Richmond Hill Road and Richmond Avenue in New Springville yesterday morning. ESU officers worked out of the headquarters along with 10 handlers and dogs from the police canine unit.

The German shepherds, trained to sniff out "human scents" from people living or dead, crisscrossed the buffer zone separating the landfill from Richmond Avenue.

Police supervisors yesterday hoped to search as much of the perimeter of the landfill as possible while the daylight lasted.

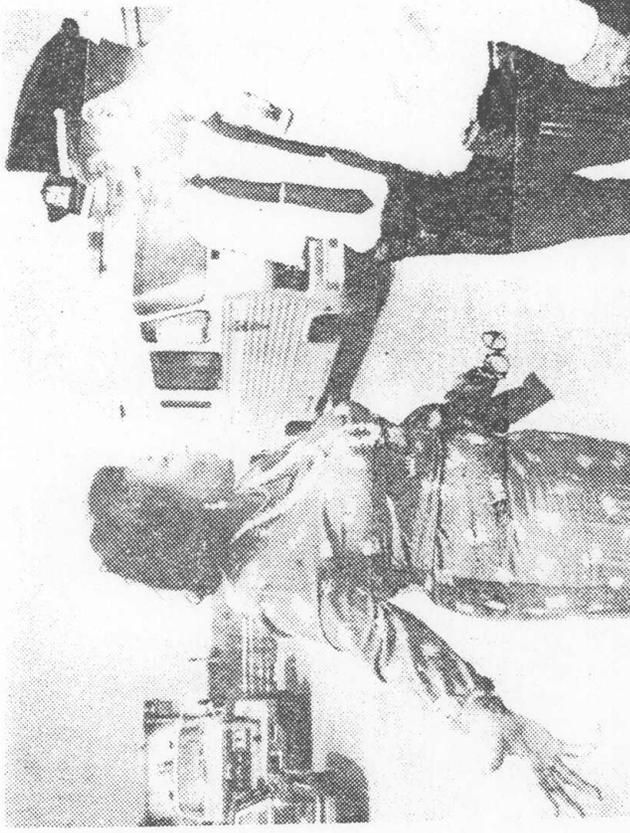
"It's going well," said Lt. James Mills, who was in charge of the canine team. "There are a lot of swampy areas, a lot of water. We are going to try to call on (the Harbor Patrol)."

According to Marino, scuba divers and boats from the Harbor Patrol would be needed to search the streams and deeper water in the marsh area. While officers combed the ground, a police helicopter circled the area, occasionally coming in so low that the wind from its propeller parted the thick swamp vegetation.

Mills, Marino and other search supervisors also used the helicopter to familiarize searchers with the area and outline the search pattern to them.

The team of officers will be in the area for "as long as it takes to cover every base," the borough commander said. The hunt will later be expanded to the William H. Davis Wildlife Refuge and La-Tourette Golf Course, according to Marino.

"We said we should continue searching, and that is what we are



Deputy Police Commissioner Wilhelmina Holliday talks to Inspector James Mills and Assistant Chief Samuel Marino, right.

lease and widespread hunt that Box 961, Staten Island, N.Y. 10314. Money not used for the reward will follow.

Efforts are still under way to increase a \$5,000 reward being offered for Jennifer's safe return. Donations should be sent to The Jennifer Schweiger Fund, P.O. Cutugno said.