

BTK did Rolex rip

By **BARBARA ROSS**

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Chinatown's Born to Kill gang is heavily involved in the manufacture and distribution of fake Rolex, Cartier and other brands of watches sold on city sidewalks and in Canal St. stores, investigators said yesterday.

Police said Born to Kill's reputed chief, David Thai, has been directing gang members to steal imported generic watches from Korean wholesalers on Broadway. Gang members then put phony luxury-watch faces on the watches for resale, police said.

When Thai and four others were arrested Monday on federal charges of conspiring to commit robbery, police said they found "thousands" of counterfeit Cartier, Lucien Piccard and Rolex watches in assembly production in the basement of Thai's Melville, L.I., home.

Bail will be set today in U.S. District Court in Brooklyn, where Thai, Lan Ngoc Tran, Minh Do, Long Thanh and Dat Nguyen are accused of conspiring to rob jewelry and clothing stores in Manhattan, Rochester, and Copiague, L.I.

Treasury involved

Lt. Joseph Pollini of the major case squad, which probed Born to Kill with federal Treasury agents, said investigators are still looking at the extent of the violent Vietnamese gang's involvement in the counterfeit watch market.

Law enforcement sources said several BTK members, including Thai, who had a jewelry store on Canal St., have been arrested before on charges of selling counterfeit jewelry.

Crime rate down again

Crime decreased for the 11th month in a row, according to statistics released yesterday, and police said the slow, but steady, decline was encouraging.

But Police Commissioner Lee Brown admitted that the numbers don't mean very much if you're a crime victim. "I don't think anyone in the city can take any solace in the fact that we see a decrease in crime because we still have too much crime in the city," he said.

"If we have one homicide and you're the family of the victim or one assault and you're the victim then statistical decline doesn't mean very much to you."

For the first five months of the year, the total of reported crimes in seven major categories went down 5.5% from the same period last year.

—Patrice O'Shaughnessy

In 1988, a bomb loaded with .22-caliber bullets was thrown at a police car on Canal St. Police said it was in retaliation for the earlier arrest of some Chinatown merchants accused of selling counterfeit Rolex watches.