

## BOOK REVIEW

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### *A Review of Practical Homicide Investigation: Tactics, Procedures, and Forensic Science Techniques*

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**REFERENCE:** Geberth, V. J., *Practical Homicide Investigation: Tactics, Procedures, and Forensic Techniques*, Elsevier Science Publishing Co., Inc., New York, 1983, 460 pages, no price listed.

The author of this publication initially deserves recognition for an organizational structure whereby chapters are arranged in the same sequence as the duties that develop during any well managed homicide investigation. Difficulty is created by the limitations of a book devoted totally to homicide investigation. Broad knowledge of evidence collection and preservation, as well as investigation of deaths other than homicide, is available to the homicide investigator through other publications. These topics receive inadequate coverage in this volume.

The book is filled with platitudes, commentary, and personal glimpses from the author. These are rendered in street jargon, which becomes a contradiction to the author's stated purpose of providing a practical guide for conducting an intelligent investigation. Repeated injection of vignettes into the text creates a volume that ultimately contains too much useless information to be used as a procedure manual, while remaining too simplistic in total content to be effective or authoritative as a textbook.

The author makes exhaustive use of illustration with over 245 black-and-white photographs, drawings, or charts in 443 pages. The majority of the photographs depict insufficient detail to be effective teaching aids and often are redundant variable perspectives of the same scene. Eight color photographs, which are repeated elsewhere in the book, are also inserted at approximately mid-text. These are presented with such captions as: Decomposed Body, Gross Postmortem Mutilation, Insect Infestation, Close up of a "Floater's" Face, and so forth. This effort serves no apparent purpose other than to be eye-catching.

Some illustrations also contain extraneous evidence of questionable investigative practice ongoing at the time of production. Examples are: the discussion of the simple use of a chalk outline surrounding a victim to be removed from a crime scene includes an illustration on page 46 depicting a sketch made in "afterthought" following such a removal. Two photographs on pages 66 and 67 depict removal of emergency medical apparatus from a body while at a crime scene without pointing out the fact that this practice often negates the value of subsequent autopsy findings. Pages 122 and 123 purport to represent two crime scene sketches of the same incident; yet the dates upon the drawings are one year apart. On page 258 the author

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co-mingles the terms bullet wound, birdshot, and caliber when discussing the same shotgun injury.

The chapters that are devoted to the scientific disciplines of pathology, odontology, anthropology, and psychiatry rely almost totally upon borrowed information from other authors or from brief interviews. The resultant discussion of scientific material then amounts to little more than an outline of available resources in these respective fields. The previously published case histories within these sections are a notable improvement over the remembrances of the author inserted elsewhere in the book. Such original observations as: "just too damn many variables" (in determining the time of death), "the presence of larvae from a housefly found on a body outdoors will indicate that the body had previously lain indoors," and "bodies found lying on the ground are usually in areas that are abundant with plant life" tend to detract from originally sound information.

In summary, the reader of this book is plagued by pitfalls. If one is experienced as a homicide investigator, the book offers nothing new. If a novice, the material is far too simplistic to provide an effective base of knowledge. The material presented is commonly found in hand-out form in police training programs and the subsequent impregnation of standard information with snapshots and vignettes does not improve the quality.