

## CASE REPORT

Nancy A. Davis,<sup>1</sup> B.S.

### Problems with the Dating of a Polaroid SX-70 Photograph

---

**REFERENCE:** Davis, N. A., "Problems with the Dating of a Polaroid SX-70 Photograph," *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, JFSCA, Vol. 38, No. 5, September 1993, pp. 1243-1245.

**ABSTRACT:** In most cases the dating of a Polaroid SX-70 photograph is accomplished by deciphering the manufacturing code found on the frame located on the reverse side of the photograph. However, instances arise where the numerals are either faded or obliterated to the extent that the reading and deciphering of such numbers are impossible. Research has determined the existence of chemical pod codes which can also be used to date Polaroid photographs.

**KEYWORDS:** questioned documents, dating, Polaroid SX-70, photographs, manufacturing information code, frame, chemical pod sleeve, pod component, pod code

As Document Examiners we are all familiar with problems that arise when attempting to date a document. Identifying a specific date or time frame in which a document originated can either be extremely complex or relatively simple.

In the past few years several cases have been submitted into the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, Forensic Laboratory that required the dating of a Polaroid photograph. With the reference of Frankie E. Franck's paper "Polaroid Film ID Numbers" [1], the tasks have proven to have been successful and quite simple. However, one particular case submitted posed a problem that could not be answered with use of the Manufacturing Information Code.

#### Case Report

A photograph, produced from a Polaroid SX-70 Land Camera, was submitted to the lab for date of manufacture determination. The photograph depicted a white male, convicted in 1981 on drug charges, standing in a field of what appeared to be marijuana, holding and wearing approximately five guns. Convicted felons are not allowed to buy, sell, possess, touch, or even knowingly be in the vicinity of a firearm. His presence in the marijuana field was an additional charge for the agents to pursue. It was important for the investigators to establish that the picture was taken after the 1981 drug convictions.

Received for publication 2 Oct. 1992; revised manuscript received 8 Feb. 1993; accepted for publication 9 Feb. 1993.

<sup>1</sup>Questioned Document Examiner, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, Forensic Laboratory, Atlanta, Georgia.

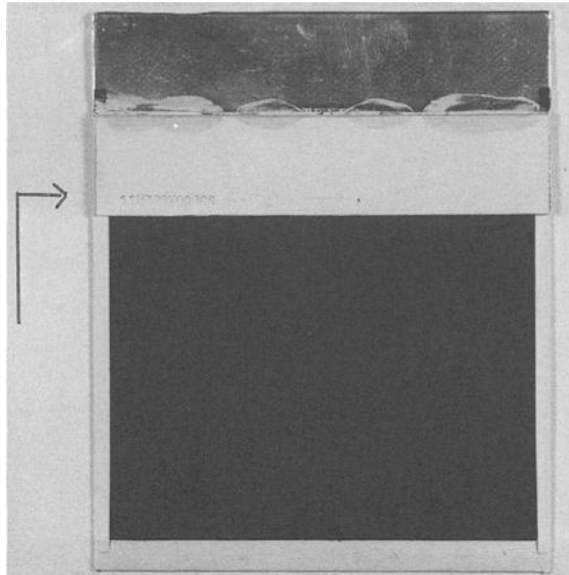


FIG. 1—The series of numerals found within a chemical pod component of a Polaroid Land camera photograph.

Unfortunately, the manufacturing information code number on the back frame was badly faded and only partially legible.

**Examination/Research**

Nondestructive visual examination (magnification, side lighting and various filtered light techniques to include UV and IR examinations) provided negative results. Experimentation was then begun with samples of polaroid photographs. Upon slitting open the chemical pod sleeve, which is also on the back of the photograph, another series of numbers were found (Fig. 1). These numbers differed from the others already noted on the outside frame. No documented information could be found pertaining to this series of numbers.

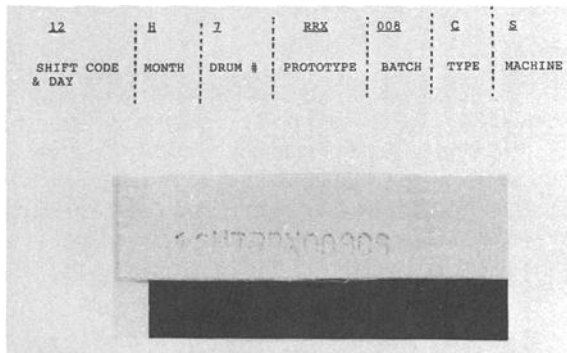


FIG. 2—The decoded numerals noted on the inside of the pod component from the sample photograph of a Polaroid SX-70 Land camera.

Correspondence with numerous individuals connected with the Polaroid Corporation concluded with the contact of the Integral Film Manufacturing Plant's Customer/Marketing Support Manager, who at that time was Mr. Pete Touchette. He was extremely knowledgeable and most helpful. Mr. Touchette provided the information needed to complete the search. The following is the pod component deciphering code (Fig. 2).

shift code & day/month/Drum #/prototype/batch/type/machine

The year is not printed on the pod code. The Polaroid Corporation relies on the frame code to tell the year. However, they can (and will upon request) go back to their chemical manufacturing records and look up the "prototype" to determine the year it was manufactured. In most cases this will also be the same year the film frame was produced.

### Summary

Dating of a Polaroid SX-70 Land Camera photograph is normally easily accomplished by deciphering the manufacturing information code. Situations do arise, such as fading or obliteration, in which the reading of such numbers is not possible. This case study revealed a series of numbers located within the chemical pod sleeve on the back of Polaroid photographs. These pod code numbers can be deciphered to provide an alternative method for dating this type of Polaroid film.

Cases as the one I encountered are rare. Should anyone encounter a similar problem, they should contact:

The Polaroid Corporation  
Customer Service  
Phone: 1-800-343-5000  
or write  
Customer Service  
Polaroid Corporation  
784 Memorial Drive  
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

### Reference

- [1] Franck, F. E., "Polaroid Film ID Numbers (Decipher/Associate/Date)" presented at the 42nd Annual Conference of the American Society of Questioned Document Examiners, Nashville, TN 1984.