

## BRIEF COMMUNICATION

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### Identification of a Homicide Victim by a Casio Data Bank Watch

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**REFERENCE:** Costello, J. and Zugibe, F. T., "Identification of a Homicide Victim by a Casio Data Bank Watch," *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, JFSCA, Vol. 39, No. 4, July 1994, pp. 1117-1119.

**ABSTRACT:** A positive identification of a homicide victim was made possible by observing an inconspicuous Casio watch worn by the deceased.

Identification of deceased individuals are usually made by fingerprints or dental matching, visual means, DNA studies, X-rays of other bodily structures, tattoos, etc. When all of these methods fail and no suspects are known, medical examiners are caught between Charybdis and Scilla. This assumes greater importance in cases of homicides. It is the purpose of this paper to present a homicide case in which an identification was made by observing an inconspicuous object, a small Casio watch worn by the deceased.

**KEYWORDS:** criminalistics, death investigation, homicide

#### Case History

A 24-year-old man was found murdered in a wooded area of a local state park. The body was fully clothed and lying face down with the rear back pocket turned inside out. No wallet or identification was present. There was a mild to moderate decomposition with discoloration of the skin and the presence of carrion insects, larva and eggs. After processing the scene, the body was transported to the medical examiner's office for autopsy. A preliminary information profile, which included physical characteristics, clothing, shoe size, jewelry, and anthropomorphic findings, was tabulated and submitted to the police and local newspapers. Odontological charting, dental X-rays and full body X-rays were completed. A full set of fingerprints were taken by the Rockland County Bureau of Criminal Identification and immediately sent to the Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) in Albany, NY for comparison. There were no reports of missing individuals on record that matched our case and no fingerprint match was found by the DCJS.

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An autopsy conducted on the following day revealed multiple stab wounds of the whole body with penetration of the chest causing multiple wounds of both lungs and a marked hemothorax. During the autopsy it was noted that the victim was wearing an inexpensive Casio silvertone watch on his left wrist. When the watch was carefully examined, it was noted that it was a data bank telememo variety (Fig. 1). The crystal face had been crushed but the LCD display was still functional. Each screen was scrolled and three entries that included names and phone numbers were displayed (Fig. 1). These were recorded and photographed. This information was submitted to the police investigators who called the telephone numbers and were informed of the alleged name of the victim. The fingerprints were resubmitted to DCJS accompanied by a tentative name and a positive fingerprint identification was obtained.

### Discussion

This case points out the fact that when faced with a difficult identification, it behooves any forensic investigator to accrue as much information as possible such as physical

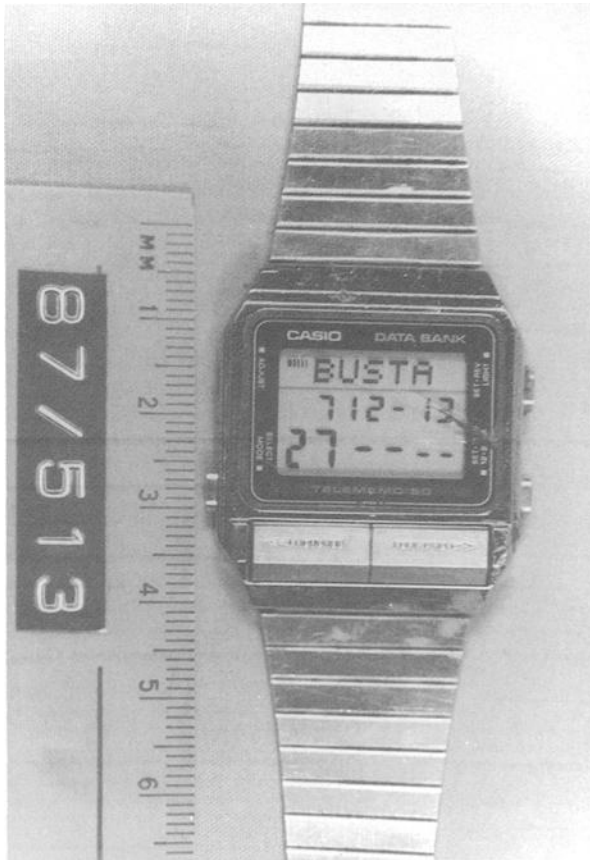


FIG. 1—Casio data bank watch. The select dial at the left side of the watch activates the face of the watch, the right upper dial lights the face and two rectangular buttons at the base of the watch scrolls the data. "Busta" refers to a person's nickname and 712-1327 is the telephone number.

characteristics and measurements, tattoos, prostheses, congenital anomalies, scars, anthropomorphic studies, jewelry, clothing and clothing labels, etc. and to meticulously examine every shred of evidence for clues to the victim's identification. A careful analysis of this information frequently leads to the ultimate identification of the decedent.

There are also cautions that must be exercised in identifying the remains of deceased individuals from fingerprints. In this case, although ten fingerprints were initially submitted to DCJS for comparison, the report came back negative. Later when a name was submitted along with the prints, a positive identification was made. Full sets of prints are often not matched in large data bases, particularly if no information as to possible suspects are submitted with the prints. Moreover, we frequently find that a suspect has no fingerprint, dental and X-ray records on file. In this case, careful observation revealed the inexpensive Casio data bank telememo LCD watch. This watch is a multifunction time piece that digitally displays time in hours, minutes and seconds along with the day of the week, the month, and year. Most important in this case, as well as any other is the fact that along with the above information, up to 50 alphabetical entries can be made with six spaces for each entry followed by up to 12 numeric entries for phone numbers and area codes. It is obvious that the assailant(s) was not aware that the watch contained such vital information.

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