

BOOK REVIEW

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Review of: *Silent Evidence—Cases from Forensic Science*

REFERENCE: Meyers C. *Silent evidence—cases from forensic science*. Parkway Publishers, Boone, NC, 219 pp.

The discipline of firearm and toolmark identification has the distinction of being one of the more historic fields within forensic science. Yet, until now, there has been little written in the general criminal investigative literature that focuses on the use of this class of evidence to the solution of crimes. The author of this work, a scientific expert dedicated to the profession offers a compilation of personal/professional experiences that emphasize the utilization of firearm and toolmark evidence in the investigation of crime scenes and resolution of the crimes that occurred there.

Some key terms used in forensic science are defined before moving into the main body of the book. The main body of this book is comprised of the resolution of fourteen criminal cases that illustrate the combined efforts of crime scene investigation, detective work and laboratory examinations performed by the firearm and toolmark examiner. Within these investigative short stories, the author does an imaginative job of weaving together the investigative development of each case with discussions of firearm and toolmark identification principles and practices at a level that all readers will understand. Casework examples described are supplemented with photographs, photomicrographs and diagrams that add greatly to the interest and understanding of the reader.

The reader benefits from both the entertainment value of the investigations themselves as well as the informative value of how the firearm and toolmark examiner can assist in such cases. Included within this framework are discussions on such topics as: 1) providing investigative leads as to the manufacturers and models of firearms involved in shooting incidents by the examination of fired ammunition components found at crime scenes; 2) descriptions of the comparative identification process using the comparison microscope; 3) definitions of key terms such as class and individualizing characteristics; 4) functional examinations of firearms; 5) bullet path determination; 6) muzzle to target distance determination from the examination of gun powder residues; and 7) crime scene reconstruction issues. Also included are some discussions on the identification of footwear and latent fingerprint evidence.

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Additionally, at the conclusion of the book, the author provides an addendum for readers interested in a more thorough understanding of the discipline and its scientific underpinnings that is organized into sections on the topics of firearms identification, toolmark identification, historical development, identification theory/criteria for identification and recent developments.

The writing style is somewhat simplistic, but was sufficiently intriguing to compel this reviewer to read on in anticipation of the developing investigation and ultimate conclusion of each case presented. Although many of the cases described in the book involve horrendous crimes, emphasis is placed more on their solution rather than on the details of the crimes themselves. Consequently, the weakness of this book is in its lack of development on a pure entertainment basis and I was left wanting a bit more from each chapter along these lines. Additionally, the photographic illustrations accompanying each chapter lacked detail; not because of the original work of the author, but as a consequence of the printing quality most notably in the photomicrographs of toolmark comparisons. The same images printed on higher quality clay based paper would have been much more informative.

In summary, I would recommend this book on two levels. It is most appropriate as a secondary reference to the interested forensic science student seeking to gain some idea of what it might be like to actually work within the discipline of firearm and toolmark identification. Further, readers in the general criminal justice system would also find this book both interesting and informative. Lastly, this book would be entertaining to the general public, while also providing public awareness of the firearm and toolmark identification profession.

On another level, this book should find its way into the libraries of professionals within the firearm and toolmark examination discipline for historical reasons as it is authored by an examiner with over 40 years of experience in the field and 50 years in the criminal justice profession. Although readers at this level will likely find little new technical information, I found myself nodding in agreement with much of the overall philosophy and approach to casework described by the author. I am confident my colleagues in the profession will appreciate this aspect of the book.