

COMMENTS: TO SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF FORENSIC SCIENTISTS. Friday, April 21, 1972

Forensic science has played an increasingly important role in our criminal justice system in the last few years mainly due to certain United States Supreme Court decisions which have greatly affected criminal investigation techniques and procedures. No longer can an officer rely on a few facts and a confession to make out a criminal case. Due to these Supreme Court decisions, today's investigator should be prepared to prove every element of his case without reliance on a confession. Today's legal decisions have meant the advent for forensic science in criminal law. Few criminal cases are tried without the aid of forensic science. Our system of criminal justice now needs and uses, forensic science more than any time in history. The role of forensic science in solving criminal cases cannot be over-estimated. But the role that forensic science is playing that is so important, is that of providing corroborative, substantiating evidence for a majority of our criminal cases. Scientific evidence that substantiates courtroom testimony is a priceless weapon in our criminal justice system. Not enough praise can be given to you forensic scientists for your efforts in this area. We can never fully appreciate the psychological impact substantiating scientific evidence can have on a defendant. I feel sure that substantiating scientific evidence has led to innumerable guilty pleas and convictions in our state. Your role in convicting a guilty man, and freeing the innocent, is a great one and is appreciated by those of us whose responsibility it is to see that justice is done.

For the future of forensic science, I see the need for improvement in the investigative techniques of law enforcement officers. The first and most crucial of all needs is the proper appreciation and understanding by officers of the importance of detailed and thorough crime scene investigation. A crime scene investigation is the beginning, and can be the end, of a criminal investigation. Well meaning citizens can completely destroy potential evidence by tampering with the crime scene prior to a lawful search. All the King's men then cannot put the crime scene together again. Forensic science cannot do the job that it can do without a thorough crime scene search and proper preservation of scientific evidence. Our criminal justice system needs more training and expertise in this vital area. We need to stress to our officers the importance of proper preservation of scientific evidence. Our system still suffers from a mishandling of scientific evidence in some cases. Certainly, a proper crime scene search is of no value without proper preservation of the evidence. Our law enforcement officers are in need of further education and instruction in this important area in order to make potential evidence admissible in court purposes.

We need to increase the amount of factual and background information that is given to our forensic scientists by our law enforcement officers. The more information available to forensic scientists, the more potential analysis and therefore, more possible clues available. These would be clues not anticipated by the officers at the time of the discovery of the evidence.

I feel that law enforcement officers should be made aware of the capabilities of forensic scientists in our criminal justice system. It

appears that some law enforcement officers still do not fully realize and appreciate what can be accomplished through forensic science.

Following that, there is a need to encourage the utilization of the forensic science facilities.

Last, we need an overall cooperative effort between our citizens, medical examiners, law enforcement officers and forensic scientists so that each has a better understanding of the other's authority and ability. We are all seeking the same goals. The sooner we appreciate and understand each other's authority and ability, the better our criminal justice system will be.