

PRACTICAL HOMICIDE INVESTIGATION

TACTICS, PROCEDURES, AND FORENSIC TECHNIQUES

VERNON J. GEBERTH



ELSEVIER

Practical Homicide Investigation

**Tactics, Procedures,
and Forensic Techniques**

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This book is dedicated to
the men and women entrusted with the profound duty
and responsibility of investigating
society's ultimate crime—homicide.

To my wife and family,
I wish to extend a very special acknowledgment.
To my children,
Vernon Anthony, Robert Joseph, Christopher James, and Laura Marie
and to my wife, Laura,
who shared this wonderful experience with me
and assisted me with her support and encouragement.
Without their love and devotion
this book would not have become a reality.

Foreword

Professionals involved in the administration of justice will discover that *Practical Homicide Investigation: Tactics, Procedures, and Forensic Techniques* by Vernon J. Geberth is both an indispensable teaching text and a viable desk-top reference for field practitioners.

The book was written with the premise that the wealth of homicide experience accumulated by the author has given him an insight and understanding of an area of violent crime that is now being highlighted by both our nation's President and Attorney General. He has achieved his goal and has produced a text that will pass on, to those who peruse it, the benefit of his years of practical experience in the specialty of homicide investigation. I can visualize the information contained in this book as being directly applicable to a wide strata of law enforcement agencies throughout the United States, regardless of size or jurisdictional scope.

The text is organized into a scenario that will enable the novice to proceed from Chapter 1, "The Homicide Crime Scene," to more advanced chapters including "The Identity of the Deceased," "The Autopsy," and "Managing the Homicide Investigation." The expert or highly qualified investigator may find specific data that could reveal new avenues of approach, including bite-mark identification, psychological profiling, hypnosis, psycholinguistics, and psychics as additional investigative tools.

Collectively, the chapters of this book are a source and definitive guide for professional law enforcement officers. It has been designed to reveal the experiences of the author in a practical, useful, and progressive manner. The research is empirical, and the results are a text that will be used for many years in law enforcement.

It was my privilege to observe and encourage Vernon Geberth as a student in the FBI Academy. His progression has been in accordance with a desirable trend in law enforcement academics. His educational background includes both undergraduate and graduate degrees and he is a distinguished graduate of the FBI National Academy Program. He has researched and published several articles in the field of homicide investigation, and above all, he has had the extensive practical field experience that provides credibility for this excellent book.

Quantico, Virginia

CHARLES W. STEINMETZ
FBI Academy

Preface

The purpose of *Practical Homicide Investigation: Tactics, Procedures, and Forensic Techniques* is to provide practical conventional information to the detective charged with the profound responsibility of conducting an intelligent homicide investigation.

This text is based on the author's personal experiences as a homicide detective supervisor, personal interviews and associations with experts in the sphere of forensic science and criminal investigation, and extensive research of written materials in the field.

Identifying and apprehending criminals has never been an easy task. In homicide cases this task is further complicated by the fact that the complainant, your main witness, is deceased, and therefore, will never be able to "point the finger" at the accused. Instead, the investigator will have to rely not only upon eyewitnesses or circumstantial evidence obtained from the crime scene, but oftentimes endeavor to elicit from the suspect an account of what actually took place. The detective must then make a determination of whether or not this account is consistent with the other facts he or she has accumulated.

Higher crime rates and increases of violence put a strain on the resources and capabilities of law enforcement agencies. Many criminals today are more sophisticated, and in many cases are "graduates of the penal system." They have been duly schooled by the "jailhouse lawyer" according to constitutional law as to just what the police can and cannot do. In addition, as our cities grow larger and more impersonal, many people become reluctant to get involved. Add to these factors some of the restrictive court decisions that have been forced down the throat of law enforcement agencies, and one can readily

understand that the investigation of homicide and the initial actions by the police at the homicide crime scene may eventually determine whether or not the crime is ever solved or the guilty person brought to justice.

The homicide detective, in order to be successful, must have an eye for details and the ability to recognize and evaluate evidence. He or she must have an above average intelligence in order to absorb the many details that arise during a case and an ability to effectively interview and interrogate, not to mention relate with many different types and personalities of persons he or she may come into contact with. Actually, the secrets of an effective homicide investigation are *flexibility* and *common sense*.

The investigation of murder necessitates a certain tenacity and perseverance that transcends the ordinary investigative pursuit. Homicide investigation is an aggressive business. You must be prepared to use tactics and strategy for any given situation. "Good-guy, or bad-guy," it never grows old. However, any number of tactics might be employed. The limit is only set by the imagination and initiative of the homicide detective, acting of course within the boundaries of constitutional law.

One thing is certain, homicide is a tricky and devious business. Whenever you deal with people, even under ordinary circumstances, they are at best unpredictable. It has been my experience that if you add murder to this obscurity, human behavior becomes a series of contradictory maneuvers involving all the ramifications of the human mind. There are many factors that will complicate effective investigation. Whether it be the apathy and indifference of society, human behavior patterns, or the ridiculous over-concern of the defendant's rights by the courts, the homicide detective must be able to overcome these obstacles and concentrate on what results he can obtain from the scene, and then through dedication and perseverance pursue the case.

Although experienced homicide investigators have been following the principles in this book for years, it is not always the experienced homicide detective who "catches the case." The multitude of duties to be performed and the vast amount of information which must be documented can many times be overlooked or lost for lack of a comprehensive and pertinent guide. It is my intention that this book be such a guide.

This book will cover the entire sequence of events in a homicide investigation. It will begin with a comprehensive discussion of the homicide crime scene. Then it will evolve chronologically from the initial notification to police that a homicide has occurred, to how the police should react to this notification, and what procedural steps are

necessary in order to conduct an intelligent homicide investigation. The early chapters act as an instructional guide to the patrol officer, including a *Patrol Officer's Checklist*. The text then proceeds into the details of criminal investigation at the scene, utilizing an *Investigator's Checklist* to assist these officers in reviewing their actions at the scene and refresh their memory.

The book then proceeds into the more technical aspects of homicide investigation, augmented by pictures and illustrations, which will graphically portray exactly what to look for and what to do at the homicide crime scene and how to conduct the investigation.

I am fully aware that many volumes have been written on the subject of homicide investigation, and several are fine examples of professional accomplishment. I do not intend that *Practical Homicide Investigation: Tactics, Procedures, and Forensic Techniques* supercedes these proficient texts, nor do I propose that my book represents the absolute or total homicide manual. There can never be a totally complete homicide text because just about every homicide is distinctively unique. *One* book could *not* possibly encompass *all* the various possibilities of *all* homicide investigations.

Instead, it is my intention to present to the practitioner a practical, down-to-earth, homicide handbook, with emphasis on "The New York City Experience." A book which falls somewhere between advanced medicolegal books and the academic textbooks already in the field. A book that is capable of refreshing the memory and stimulating the investigation.

This book stresses the basics, indicates the practicalities of certain investigative techniques, and provides the reader with patterns upon which to build a solid foundation for a prosecutable case. There is deliberate repetition throughout the text; it has been strategically placed with malice aforethought because certain principles can never be stressed enough.

In actuality, you only get one shot at the homicide crime scene and limited opportunity to question the suspect. Therefore, I recommend that the reader follow the basic principles in this text and remember, do it right the first time, you only get one chance.

I sincerely hope that this book will prove to be informative and workable, as well as interesting and enjoyable.

VERNON J. GEBERTH

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Contents

Foreword	xv
Preface	xvii
Acknowledgments	xxi
1 The Homicide Crime Scene	1
The Crime Scene	2
<input type="checkbox"/> At the Crime Scene	3
The Homicide Investigation Starts at the Crime Scene	6
Determining the Dimensions of the Homicide Crime Scene	8
Protecting the Crime Scene	12
2 First Officer's Duties: General	25
Notification of a Possible Homicide: The Official Notification to the Police	25
First Notification of Homicide Received in Person by Patrol Officer	29
First Officer's Duties on Arrival at the Scene	30
<input type="checkbox"/> Protection of Life	31
<input type="checkbox"/> Safeguarding the Scene and Detaining Witnesses or Suspects	33
The First Officer Initiates the Homicide Investigation	35
Dealing with Emergencies at the Scene	37
Conclusion	39

3	First Officer's Duties: Specific	41
	The Suspect in Custody	42
	Transporting the Suspect	44
	Examination of the Suspect for Evidence	44
	The Dying Declaration	44
	The Victim Removed to the Hospital	45
	The Victim Pronounced DOA at the Hospital	45
	The Officer's Duties at the Hospital	46
	The Victim Confirmed DOA at the Scene	47
	Handling Witnesses at the Scene	47
	Additional Officers at the Scene	48
	Handling News Media Personnel at the Scene	48
	The Documentation of Events by the First Officer	49
	The Changing Sequence of Command	50
	Patrol Officer's Checklist	50
4	The Preliminary Investigation at the Scene: The Detectives	55
	Initial Receipt of Information	55
	Arrival at the Scene	56
	Describing the Scene	58
	Implementing Crime Scene Procedures	59
	Direction of Uniformed Personnel at the Scene	60
	The Teamwork Approach	61
	Directing the Investigation at the Scene	61
	Duties of the Detective Supervisor on Arrival at the Scene	62
	Preliminary Interview of the First Officer	63
	Interview of Ambulance Personnel	65
	Handling Curious Onlookers	67
	Handling Witnesses at the Scene	68
	The Canvass	71
	The Preliminary Medical Examination at the Scene	76
5	Specific Investigative Duties at the Scene	79
	The Suspect in Custody	79
	Interview and Interrogation of the Suspect in Custody	80
	Examination of a Suspect for Evidence	81
	Evaluation of the Suspect's Demeanor and Mental Capacity	82
	Obtaining a Dying Declaration	83
	<input type="checkbox"/> Questions to be Asked in a Dying Declaration	84
	<input type="checkbox"/> Documentation of the Dying Declaration	84

Handling Buried-Body Cases	85
<input type="checkbox"/> The Discovery of the Buried Body	85
<input type="checkbox"/> The Excavation	86
<input type="checkbox"/> The Body	89
<input type="checkbox"/> Search for a Buried Body	89
The Investigative Checklist	91
Selected Reading	101
6 The Crime Scene Photographs	103
The Value of Crime Scene Photographs	103
Crime Scene Photography and the Investigator	104
Admissibility of Photographic Evidence	104
Photographing the Homicide Crime Scene	107
<input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor Locations	107
<input type="checkbox"/> Indoor Locations	107
<input type="checkbox"/> The Body	107
<input type="checkbox"/> Suspects	110
Type of Film	111
Recommended Crime Scene Photographs	111
Practical Application of Crime Scene Photography	113
Videotaping	115
<input type="checkbox"/> Advantages of Videotaping	115
<input type="checkbox"/> Videotaping Procedure	116
Conclusion	117
Selected Reading	117
7 The Crime Scene Sketch	119
The Sketch	119
Preparing the Crime Scene Sketch	124
Selected Reading	130
8 The Homicide Crime Scene Search	131
Methods of Crime Scene Search	132
Formulating the Search	132
The Homicide Kit	137
The Search	139
Examination of the Body at the Scene	141
Release of the Body	145
The Scene	146
<input type="checkbox"/> Examining the Outdoor Scene	149
<input type="checkbox"/> Examples of Evidence Found Outdoors	150
<input type="checkbox"/> Examining an Outdoor Scene at Night	152

Physical Examination of a Suspect in Custody	154
<input type="checkbox"/> Residue Testing	157
Release of the Scene	158
Conclusion	159
Selected Reading	160
 9 Estimating Time of Death	 161
The Process of Dying	164
Body Changes after Death	165
External Agents of Change	177
<input type="checkbox"/> Insects	177
<input type="checkbox"/> Plants	180
<input type="checkbox"/> Animals	180
<input type="checkbox"/> Bodies in Water	181
Information Derived from the Scene	182
Conclusion	183
Selected Reading	183
 10 The Identity of the Deceased	 185
The Identification	185
Identification at the Scene	186
<input type="checkbox"/> Personal Identification	186
<input type="checkbox"/> Clothing and Possessions	187
Identification by Photographs	187
Description of the Body	188
Clothing	189
Jewelry and Watches	189
Fingerprints	189
<input type="checkbox"/> Obtaining Fingerprints from Dead Bodies	190
The Teeth	193
<input type="checkbox"/> Age	194
<input type="checkbox"/> General Facial Characteristics	194
<input type="checkbox"/> Race	195
<input type="checkbox"/> Socioeconomic Group	196
<input type="checkbox"/> Occupation or Habits	196
<input type="checkbox"/> Positive Identification	196
<input type="checkbox"/> Bite-Mark Identification	199
<input type="checkbox"/> Inquiries Relative to Forensic Odontology	199
The Bones	200
<input type="checkbox"/> Age	201
<input type="checkbox"/> Sex	203
<input type="checkbox"/> Race	204
<input type="checkbox"/> Height and Other Individual Characteristics	204
<input type="checkbox"/> Determination of Cause of Death	204

Determination of Whether the Bones Are Human or Animal	205
Examination of the Bones	206
Facial Reconstruction	206
Forensic Sculpture	207
Conclusion	213
Selected Reading	214
 11 Modes of Death	 217
Gunshot Wounds	217
<input type="checkbox"/> The Projectile Striking the Body	218
<input type="checkbox"/> The Nature and Extent of Gunshot Wounds	219
<input type="checkbox"/> Smudging or Smoke	222
<input type="checkbox"/> Searing	222
<input type="checkbox"/> Tattooing or Stippling	222
<input type="checkbox"/> Reentry	222
<input type="checkbox"/> Ricocheting	224
<input type="checkbox"/> Shotgun Wounds	224
<input type="checkbox"/> Contact Wounds	224
<input type="checkbox"/> Bullet Track	226
Cutting Wounds	233
Stabbing Wounds	235
Blunt Force Injuries	236
<input type="checkbox"/> Lacerations	237
<input type="checkbox"/> Chopping Wounds	237
Poisons	240
Deaths by Asphyxia	242
<input type="checkbox"/> Strangulation	242
<input type="checkbox"/> Hanging	245
<input type="checkbox"/> Drowning	247
<input type="checkbox"/> Inhalation of Poison Gases	249
<input type="checkbox"/> Suffocation	249
Autoerotic Deaths	250
<input type="checkbox"/> Typical Cases	253
<input type="checkbox"/> Determining the Involvement of Sexual Asphyxia	255
<input type="checkbox"/> Summary	257
Suicides	257
<input type="checkbox"/> The Weapon	257
<input type="checkbox"/> Wounds	260
<input type="checkbox"/> Motives and Intent	261
<input type="checkbox"/> Suicide Notes	263
<input type="checkbox"/> Background Information	263
Arson and Deaths by Fire	264
Sex Homicides	266
Selected Reading	270