

**Halton Regional Police...**

**...Identification Squad**

# They want 'hard' evidence

By GORD KOLLE

They say they've never read any Sherlock Holmes stories but the six officers of the Halton Regional Police Identification Bureau help to reconstruct crime scenes in a manner that would make the master sleuth proud and criminals quake.

Headed by Staff Sgt. Paul Chapman, under the wing of Criminal Investigations Division Inspector James Currie, the five 'ident' officers, Sgt. Keith Woods, and Constables Len Shaw, Glyn Parsons, Carey Smith and Sandy McMurrich, are called to gather and process evidence for cases all over Halton.

Whether it's a traffic accident, homicide or identifying a suspect, the goal is to present the courts with hard, incontrovertible evidence.

Speculation and assumption do not exist in their world. Objectively, impartiality and a desire to get the cold, hard facts are key traits in the makeup of an identification officer.

"We have to be a little detached from the other officers in the force," says Constable Glyn Parson. "We have to remain objective. Sometimes an investigator in his eagerness will ask us to confirm a suspect's responsibility for a crime but we don't do that. Ever."

The scene of a crime compares to a scattered jigsaw puzzle and the identification officers must sift through the chaff to come up with the goods.

To do this, they rely on experience as police officers, the benefit of an 11-week course in identification techniques at the Ontario Police College and advice from the Provincial Centre of Forensic Sciences in Toronto.

"We don't hesitate to say 'I'm not sure about this,'" explains Constable Len Shaw. "Whenever we have a problem, we call a forensic scientist to confirm our deductions. There's no room for mistakes in the courtroom."

A typical case would involve dusting the scene for fingerprints, gathering all types of items in the area, such as pieces of clothing and analyzing stains.

The technician visits the scene in one of the bureau's two vans, which are practically mobile laboratories.

Everything from dental plaster material for making molds to picks, shovels and hip waders are carried.

"We've even got metal detectors," adds Const. Shaw.

Photography is a major part of the technician's work. The officers are trained in taking pictures but their subjects would never grace the pages of Good Housekeeping Magazine.

"We take pictures of injuries, gunshot wounds, bruises and the like," says Const. Shaw. "And we are trying for stark reality because they are used as courtroom evidence. We shoot what's there, not what's good."

Because the identification officer often works at particularly grisly crime scenes, their emotional stability must be beyond reproach.

"It's a discipline," says Staff Sgt. Chapman. "These guys are professional and they don't have time to show revulsion. Most of the time they've got too much to do."

But that is not to say they have no respect for decency, says Shaw.

"In gathering evidence on rape cases, there's no justification for a police officer to be present during the medical examination of the victim," he says. "The Attorney General's office sends us rape kits, which are sealed boxes with instructions for the victim and physician on how to gather the evidence we need."

Plastic sample bags equipped with seals are provided for the gathering of evidence, which the doctor will give to police at the close of the examination.

"It no longer has to be embarrassing for the victim," adds Const. Parson. "And it's a lot better than the old method, where the officer questioned the victim about intimate details."

For major cases involving homicide, or accidental death, the identification officer collects blood and tissue samples and holds them in the small freezer at headquarters

for the forensic pathologist assigned to the case.

Bodies are not kept by the police. They go to the forensic centre where more detailed examinations are done, by qualified doctors and experts.

The officers may analyze smaller samples of evidence through microphotography, a method of attaching an SX 70 instant picture camera to a microscope and photographing the evidence.

Paint chips, strands of clothing and hair are common candidates for this procedure, says Const. Shaw.

One of the more interesting aspects of the job for the officers is suspect identification.

In evaluating a witness's description of a suspect, the police use the identi-kit, a tool which provides a variety of slides depicting human features from noses to hair.

The witness first fills out a general description sheet which gives the technician a loose composite of the suspect.

Then, the witness is asked to tell the officer what is wrong with the result.

Through the use of plastic slides depicting hundreds of different human features, from noses to hair color, a detailed picture emerges.

When the witness is satisfied, a photo lineup sheet is produced with the suspect and 11 other similar faces.

If the witness identifies the suspect from the lineup, hard evidence has been obtained.

"But even then, we are cautious," says Const. Shaw. "No two people see something the same way. Sometimes three crime witnesses pick out three different suspects and we then go back and try to narrow it down again. But if it's hard evidence, we hand it over to the investigators and leave it to them to sort it out."

The nature of the identification officer's work calls for dedication and a willingness to spend long hours on the job.

With the entire region of Halton to cover the team works 12-hour shifts four days a time and that doesn't include emergency calls.

"The worst time is you're just getting of

shift and five minutes to quitting time, a case comes up," grimaces Const. Shaw. "But you have to go to it."

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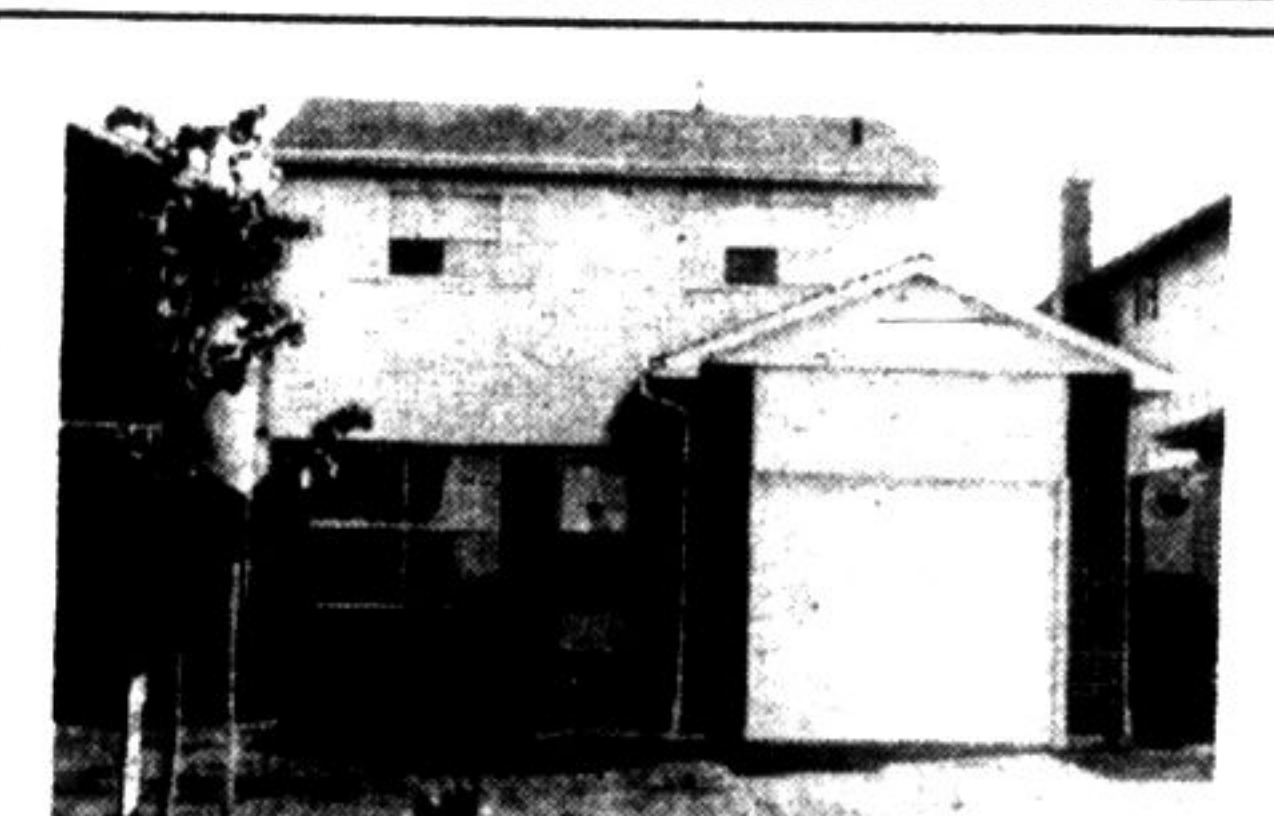
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