



F45 The Use of the Forensic Dentist at the Crime Scene by the FBI

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This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by demonstrating a unique use of the forensic odontologist at the crime scene to decide whether the FBI should continue to investigate the case as the possible victim of a kidnapping or if it was just another homicide case that should be handled by the local authorities.

On June 12, 1998, Christina Williams, 13 years old, disappeared while walking her dog in Ft. Ord, California. The dog later returned to the family home causing investigators to believe that she had been abducted. The fact that this was an apparent kidnapping on federal property was cause for the FBI to become involved in this case at a very early stage in the investigation.

Over the next seven months, the FBI and the Presidio of Monterey Police searched the former military base numerous times. More than 1500 abandoned buildings were searched using teams with search and rescue dogs, volunteers, local police, and FBI agents. Composite sketches were made of two possible suspects from a witness who saw two men in the area where Christina had been abducted.

There was a tremendous amount of media attention on her disappearance. For the next two to three months, every day there was an article on the front page of the local newspapers. This media attention was not just of a local nature. Her parents were guests on "Larry King Live" and the "Today Show." Her story was broadcast on both "Unsolved Mysteries" and "America's Most Wanted" shows.

Needless to say, when human skeletal remains were found in a remote wooded area of Ft. Ord on January 12, 1999, there was speculation that Christina had finally been found. Dr. Landon was contacted at approximately 1730 hours by one of the investigators of the Monterey County Sheriff/Coroner's Office. He asked Dr. Landon if he would be available to come to the scene that evening, examine the remains at the site, and render an opinion regarding the possible identification. Dr. Landon informed the investigator that he would make himself available at anytime to expedite the case.

At approximately 1930 hours, Dr. Landon was again called and asked to come to the scene. He proceeded to the site, which was secured by officers of the Presidio Police. Even at this early stage in the investigation, there were numerous news media vehicles present at the area where the blockade was set up. Once inside the secured area he drove about a half a mile down a dirt road to an area where he met the investigator from the Coroner's Office, and numerous other law enforcement officers. They waited for about thirty minutes in this staging area, which was about three or four hundred yards away from the actual site where the remains had been found. The FBI agent in charge of the investigation had the antemortem dental records of Christina Williams in his possession. Dr. Landon reviewed the records there for the first time with the illumination of a flashlight.

They were taken in a small group to the site where the remains had been found. Until they got there no one had touched the remains. Along with Dr. Landon and his assistant, there were three FBI personnel and the Coroner's investigator. At several points along the way to the site they passed law enforcement personnel who were maintaining the security of the area. About ten yards away from the remains they were stopped while the FBI photographer documented the scene. When they were allowed to actually approach then remains, Dr. Landon saw that the skull was not present at this site; only a portion of the torso was present, presumably due to animal activity. They left the area and it was secured for the night by law enforcement officials. The investigation was then scheduled to begin at 0700 hours. Dr. Landon was again called to the scene at about 1030 hours on the next day after the rest of the remains were found. They were again led to the site by the same team of investigators, but were also accompanied by Allison Galloway, PhD, a forensic anthropologist and her assistant.

The skull was found upside down, such that Dr. Landon could see into the foramen magnum. The mandible was not readily visible but they found it a few inches away, partially covered by leaves and soil. After the scene was well documented by photographers, he picked up the skull and mandible and performed a preliminary dental charting. It appeared that there were no dental restorations present and that there were numerous (nineteen) missing teeth that had been present antemortem.

At this point Dr. Landon informed the investigators that he found nothing inconsistent in the comparison of the antemortem dental records of Christina Williams and the dental remains. Also, Christina's records indicated a severely crowded lower right second bicuspid, and the mandible exhibited this similar peculiarity.

Dr. Landon then returned to his office, and the investigators finished the examination of the crime scene. The remains were removed to the morgue at about 1700 hours. The autopsy was scheduled to begin early the next morning, January 14, 1999. At about 1100 hours the mandible and skull were brought to his office for purposes of examination, radiography, and comparison.

After preparing a postmortem dental chart, photography, and radiography, he was able to make a positive identification in this case. He phoned the coroner's office and advised them of the positive ID and within forty-five minutes a press conference was held announcing the positive identification of the remains as those of Christina Williams.

Dr. Landon was initially told that the FBI wanted the on site "tentative" ID to let the family know that these remains were probably those of their daughter. It turns out the family was not notified about his "tentative" ID, and was not told anything until he had informed the coroner's office of the positive ID.

After learning that the family was never told of the "tentative" ID, he wondered why they had asked him to come to



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the site. In retrospect, he feels that if he had ruled out a possible match at the site, the FBI would have exited the investigation and left the rest of the investigation up to the local law enforcement agencies.

This case exhibits a unique use of the forensic odontologist at the crime scene to decide whether the FBI should continue to investigate the case as the possible victim of a kidnapping or if it was just another homicide case that should be handled by the local authorities.

Skeletal Remains, FBI, Homicide