H125   Resolution of Cold Identity Cases: Resources, Methodology, and a Review of Some Success Stories

Dana Austin, PhD*, and Paul E. Coffman, Tarrant County Medical Examiner District, 200 Feliks Gwozdz Place, Fort Worth, TX 76104-4919

This paper will present the listener with an overview of many resources available for finding the identity of unidentified individuals. Successfully resolved cases will be presented as examples.

This paper will impact the forensic community by providing resource material and examples whereby the resources were successful.

This paper will present the listener with an overview of the methods used by the Tarrant County Medical Examiner District (TCME), located in Fort Worth, TX, to resolve cases of long-standing unidentified bodies. The attendee will be advised of multiple databases and resources for assistance in resolving their own unidentified cases. The TCME has been able to solve several cases recently with a positive identification and notification of family members, in most instances. The time period from death to positive identi- fication ranges from 4 to 22 years. Methods used to make positive identifi- cation include matches from the Missing Persons DNA database, and fingerprint matches made by comparing morgue fingerprints to known fingerprints suggested by AFIS. In this paper, the successful cases are what can be included in our standard protocols in order to lessen the like- lihood of cases remaining unresolved.

As of July 2007, the Tarrant County Medical Examiner District had 76 cases of unknown identity dating back to 1982. The cases, 63 males and 13 females, are assigned to 18 different law enforcement agencies. Forty-six cases were ruled homicide or undetermined and 30 were ruled accident, suicide or natural. We have found that the manner of death has significant impact on the support we receive from the law enforcement agencies that are assigned these cases. Homicide cases necessarily allow for continued manpower from the police agency. Over one-third of the cases had circum- stances that suggested that the decedent was homeless/vagrant at the time of their death.

A grant-funded part time position at the Tarrant County Medical Examiner district provided additional manpower to review the cases for solutions to identification and submission to national databases such as NCIC, Missing persons DNA databank, Unidentified Decedent Reporting System (UDRS) and the Mexican national identification system and DNA database, SIRLI (Sistema de Identificacion de Restos y Localizacion de Indi- viduos). Within three weeks of the new hire we had our first successful reso- lution.

This paper will review successfully resolved cases with specific attention to reasons why the identification was not made initially and lessons learned after the identification was complete that may assist us in future casework. Resources that are available to medical examiners/ coroners and law enforcement will be presented so that others may have access to resources need to resolve their own unidentified cases.

Human Identification, NCIC, AFIS