



G19 The Torgersen Tooth Mark Case From Norway — An Enigma

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be better informed regarding tooth mark examination and the current American system.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by emphasizing that examinations and reporting should be as neutral and objective as possible.

Torgersen, then 24 years old, was in 1958 sentenced for the murder of a 16-year-old female in Oslo, Norway. Among several types of evidence were toothmarks around her left nipple, which were interpreted as a bitemark. All experts agreed that the marks were made close to the time of death as the indentations were rather clear and there was little, if any, bruising. At the court case, two Norwegian forensic odontologists testified independently of each other that the marks were nearly certainly made by Torgersen's teeth. Torgersen never admitted to having made the bites nor murdering the girl. In 1973, a petition for reopening the case was filed. The tooth marks were then examined by a third Norwegian forensic odontologist with the same result as before, and reopening the case was not granted. In 1998, another petition for reopening the case was presented. The court then went to Great Britain and found two of their most experienced forensic odontologists who concluded that the bite was very likely made by Torgersen's teeth, even though they made a mistake in orienting the upper jaw teeth. The defense now produced one American forensic odontologist, who said that he could exclude Torgersen as having made the bite. He also consulted three other board-certified American forensic odontologists who all agreed that Torgersen could be excluded. Reopening the case was not granted by the Norwegian High Court, even after hearing the evidence of the British and American experts. Next, a special committee was convened in Norway for assessing the possible reopening of criminal cases. This commission held a hearing with the British experts and the American expert in 2006. In addition, another expert was asked to assess the possibility that the marks were made by the teeth of Torgersen and also comment on the other experts' reports. It was concluded that the marks were in all likelihood made by the teeth of Torgersen. Reopening the case was again not granted.

This presentation will examine the findings that indicated that Torgersen made the marks and some of the arguments used by the American forensic odontologist to exclude Torgersen as having made the marks. A couple of those same facts were even found to be possible evidence that Torgersen did, in fact, make the bite. Some comments on the possible reasons for the discrepancies in interpretation and conclusions will be provided. Torgersen died last year and took his secret with him the grave.

Tooth Marks, Examination, American Forensic Odontology