Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

1. Describe the historical context of criminal investigations.
2. Differentiate between the RAND corporation study and the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) study.
3. Define investigations and discuss what they involve.
4. Differentiate between a crime scene investigator and a criminal investigator.
5. Identify the differences between field notes and official police reports.
6. Analyze and explain photographic evidence.
7. Describe how to process a crime scene.
8. Recall how to construct follow-up investigations.

Written Lecture

The historical context of criminal investigations can be traced back to England during the Industrial Revolution. Crime was sweeping across England, and law enforcement took action. Thief catchers were recruited to assist law enforcement in locating criminals. Two classes of thief catchers were hirelings and social climbers. The first police force worked at night, and they were called the Watch of London. During the late 1700s, burglaries and robberies were frequent in the streets of England. In order to reduce the profits of criminals, the Bow Street Runners were formed. They were the first investigative body in England. In 1829, the London Metropolitan Police was formed, and they were the first full-time police force in England. It took a decade longer for the London Metropolitan Police to form its first investigative branch. Scotland Yard was formed as a small division within the department.

In 1837, the first U.S. professional police force was established in Boston. By the 1870s, every major U.S. city had a police department. In 1924, the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) was formed. This was viewed as the single most important development in U.S. criminal investigations. In 1924, John Edgar Hoover announced that he would vigorously attempt to eliminate corruption and get the FBI out of politics. In doing so, he raised the qualifications of agent personnel, reduced the number of agents nationwide, and closed some field offices (Lyman, 2011).

Today, science and technology has changed criminal investigations and the way crime is committed. Computers use artificial intelligence and make recommendations to systems operators. These expert systems depend on the user interface, a knowledge base containing known information and a program that compares user input and stores information. Relational databases permit fast and easy sorting of large records. The national sex offender registry is a good example of this. Computer technology has been used to identify missing children by projecting what they would look like at an older age.

Reading Assignment

Chapter 1: Foundations of Criminal Investigation
Chapter 2: The Crime Scene: Field Notes, Documenting, and Reporting
Chapter 3: Processing the Crime Scene

Supplemental Resources:
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Key Terms
1. Ballistics
2. Baseline technique
3. Bow Street Runners
4. Chain of custody
5. Coordinate method
6. Corpus Delicti
7. Crime Scene
8. Cross-projection method
9. Data mining
10. Deductive reasoning
11. Expert systems
12. Field interview cards
13. Field notes
14. Follow-up investigation
15. Forensic dentistry
16. Inductive reasoning
17. Latent evidence
The premise behind the criminal investigation field is that people make mistakes while committing crimes (Lyman, 2011). Basically, a murderer may leave behind fingerprints, clothing fibers, or blood. Every crime requires an investigation. The extent of the investigation depends on the crime and available resources. Criminal investigations are conducted by using reactive, proactive, and preventive responses. Reactive response refers to crimes that have already occurred. Proactive response differs from reactive response in that the investigation is conducted prior to the crime being committed and the suspect is identified before he or she commits the crime. Preventive response utilizes deterrence by making an arrest and aggressively prosecuting the offender.

The patrol officer is usually the first unit on scene. In the past, patrol officers would get basic information and pass it on. Modern police departments have recognized that patrol officers play a vital role in the crime scene process. This includes rendering aid to the injured, evaluating the situation, obtaining basic information, securing the scene, and interviewing witnesses. Lastly, the patrol officer briefs the investigator handling the case.

Photographs are excellent sources of evidence to document the crime scene (Lyman, 2011). Photos of the scene should include general, medium-range, and close-up views. Many organizations have a departmental policy that dictates procedures when collecting evidence. In addition to photographs, surveillance photography has its own benefits. For instance, it can aid officers in identifying locations and criminals, it can help in formulating tactical plans, and it can record illegal transactions. At times, the crime scene sketch can show details better than photographs. A crime scene sketch can supplement the verbal description to present spatial relationships of the evidence. The main objective of the crime scene sketch is to portray the scene accurately.

Police officers and investigators should document all relevant information and write it down. Some examples of topics that can be written down are names, dates, time, locations, descriptions, wounds, and notes regarding the collection of evidence. After all of this information is compiled, the report should be completed. During the course of an investigation, a supplemental report may be written to document any follow-up investigations. Omitting critical information could weaken a case.

Reference