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Merle M. Mosier

Everett R. Hames

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POLICE SCIENCE



FRED E. INBAU [Ed.]

THE IDENTIFICATION OF AN AMNESIA VICTIM BY THE USE OF SCOPOLAMINE— AN EXPERIMENT*

MERLE M. MOSIER and EVERETT R. HAMES

Introduction:

On March 15, 1935, a young man approximately thirty years of age was observed loitering near the Kalamazoo, Michigan, Police Station. He came to the attention of a police officer who questioned him regarding his identity. He claimed to be unable to remember his name or any other facts concerning himself except that he believed he had "got off from a bus coming from Chicago." He was taken into the police station for further questioning and later detained there for safekeeping.

The man was held for seven days while all customary police procedure of identification was canvassed. His finger prints were cleared through the Federal Bureau of Identification and his photographs were broadcast to leading newspapers. At the end of seven days all means of identification had failed. General Hospitals refused to admit him on the grounds that he was a "mental case." State institutions for the insane refused immediate admission because of their "overcrowded" conditions.

The physician called by the authorities examined the subject on the first day of his detention and reported that there was some evi-

*Scopolamine administered by Albert Hodgeman, M.D.

dence of a possible brain injury since scar tissue on a limited area of the scalp was discovered and since the patient complained of a severe pain in the region. The physician stated at that time, and later to one of the experimenters, that the man, in his opinion, was "not trying to hold back information."

Observation by one of the experimenters was made on several occasions during the detention of the subject. This observation revealed the following facts: The subject sat for many hours with his hands on his head and appeared to be in a state of almost complete apathy. He remembered nothing; not even an incident which took place a few minutes before. After having been asked some three or four questions the subject usually began to cry. His only answers to any questions were, "I don't know, sir," "I am sorry sir, but I can't tell you," "I couldn't say, sir," "my head hurts me so I can't tell you," and "if I knew I would tell you."

In the seven days of his detention he lost seven pounds in weight and was reported to have eaten but one hearty meal. He slept very little and smoked many cigarettes. He preferred to sit on the edge of his cot and remain as quiet as possible. He walked only to and from the bath. He shaved and bathed himself on one occasion and otherwise attended himself quite normally. He was amiable at all times, complied with all requests, and seemed eager to cooperate generally. His reaction time was unusually slow and all movements were deliberate. He was morose and gave evidence that he was aware of his state of confusion.

On March 22, 1935, permission was given to the experimenters by the City Health Officer, Dr. John L. Lavan, as an emergency measure, to attempt to identify the man through the use of scopolamine injections.

The physician retained to administer the drug after examination of the patient reported the following findings: "blood pressure 120/80, pulse 78, heart excellent. The man is in good physical condition, remembers nothing, entirely inaccessible but cooperative. This man is apparently suffering from amnesia." (After the experiment the physician reiterated the diagnosis of amnesia.)

Scopolamine Dosage and Injection Schedule:

Instructions for dosage were furnished by the Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory of Northwestern University School of Law.¹ The drug was prepared in carefully measured doses and administered

¹Through the courtesy of Mr. C. M. Wilson, a member of its staff.

at fifteen minute intervals until five injections were given: first injection 4:26 P.M.; second injection 5:11 P.M.; third injection 5:25 P.M.; fourth injection 5:40 P.M.; fifth injection 5:55 P.M.

Reaction to Drug:

No reaction was in evidence until after the third injection when the subject showed dilation of the pupils and pronounced drowsiness. After the fourth injection questioning became exceedingly difficult because of the extreme drowsiness of the subject. Previous to this time he had shown a desire to be allowed to remain seated on the edge of his cot, but now he wished to lie down. The subject displayed momentary interest at the time of each injection and called the physician "doctor" on one occasion. When asked how he knew that the physician was a doctor, he replied: "because you gave me those shots."

Questioning:

Prior to the third injection no information of any value was given by the subject, except that he was able to identify a cigarette, interpret the meaning of a tattoo on his arm, give his approximate age, answer "yes" to the question "were you ever in Chicago?" and respond correctly to the command "let's have your right arm." After the third injection among many other questions he was asked, "do you know where Halsted street is?" with the reply, "it's the longest street in the city." He later said, "no sir," to the question "did you live on Halsted street?" He complied to the request "roll up your left sleeve."

After the fourth injection he responded to simple commands such as "hold out your hands," "spread out your fingers," "shut your eyes tightly" and "keep your hands down." Throughout most of this interval the subject was allowed to sleep.

After the fifth injection he responded with "yes" to the question "do you want to go home?" and with "E———" (name of city is withheld) to the question "where is your home?"

Other typical questions and responses were: (approximately one-fifth of the total questions and answers are recorded here, and names of cities and persons are withheld).

Q: "Do you want to go to a hospital?"

A: "Yes—makes no difference."

Q: "What hospital?"

A: "State Hospital."

- Q: "Do you want to go to the Kalamazoo State Hospital?"
 A: "Yes sir."
 Q: "Did you run away from a hospital?"
 A: "No sir."
 Q: "Do you want to go home?"
 A: "Yes, I want to go to K———."
 Q: "Does your mother live in K———?"
 A: "No, in S———."
 Q: "What is your name?"
 A: "C———."
 Q: "Have you any children?"
 A: "No sir."
 Q: "Are you married?"
 A: "I'm not sure."
 Q: "Were you in the State Hospital in S———?"
 A: "Yes, sir."
 Q: "Were you in the war?"
 A: "No."

Unsolicited information of a confidential nature was given here and following this time the subject almost led the conversation. He asked, for instance, "who is going to pay the rent?" and stated "I believe I was struck on the back of the head" and "I used to live in D——— by the water fountain."

- Q: "Have you a sister?"
 A: "No."
 Q: "Have you any brothers?"
 A: "No."
 Subject: (unsolicited) "Put your coat on and go down there."
 Q: "Where?"
 A: "To the State Hospital."
 Q: "Which one?"
 A: "There's only one here."

At this juncture the subject became still more conversant and stated that he traveled in "most of the southern states last fall" and mentioned two southern cities.

- Subject: (unsolicited) "I have laid thousands of them out."
 Q: "What do you mean, hit them over the head?"
 A: "I told you I had worked in a State Hospital."
 Q: "What hospital?"
 A: "In E———" (previously gave this city as his home).
 Q: "Were you fired from the State Hospital?"
 A: "No sir."

Q: "Do you know what dementia praecox is?"

A: "Yes."

Q: "Do you know what manic depressive is?"

A: "Yes."

Q: "Do you know what amnesia is?"

A: "Yes."

Q: "Do you know that you have amnesia?"

A: "No."

Q: "How long have you been out of work?"

A: "Ten days."

Q: "How much did you earn?"

A: "Sixty dollars a month and room and board. I never did make much money."

Q: "Where did you buy your shoes?"

A: "I didn't buy them."

Q: "Who gave them to you?"

A: "My brother-in-law in E———." (Same city given before as his home and place of employment.)

Q: "What is his name?"

A: "S———" (subject spelled out a six letter name).

Q: "What does he do?"

A: "Works at a lock company as a fireman."

Q: "Now listen, you say you have no brothers and sisters and yet you speak of a brother-in-law; you must be married."

A: "I must be."

Q: "Would you know your wife if you saw her?"

A: "Yes, I would."

Subject: (unsolicited) "I took a training course at B——— Sanitarium about ten or twelve years ago."

Q: "Do you know Dr. K———?"

A: "Yes, he's the man with the white beard." (The subject smiled and made a gesture as if to stroke a beard.)

Q: "Who used to own the P——— Tavern?"

A: "Charles P———."

Q: "Do you know anyone else in B———?"

A: "I went there with a man by the name of C———, but I never knew what happened to him."

The subject stated here that his parents separated when he was a year and a half old and that he was brought up by his grandparents on the south side of Chicago and that he completed the eighth grade. Other information of an inconsequential nature was given at this time

(about 10:30) but the influence of the drug was beginning to wear off and the patient was rapidly lapsing back into his amnesic state. At 11:00 o'clock the subject had completely recovered from the influence of the drug and presented the same clinical picture as before the administration of scopolamine. He remembered nothing of the information he had given—he did not recognize his name. He again cried when questioned and complained of pains in his head.

Verification of Information:

On March 23, 1935, the State Hospital where, under the influence of the drug the subject claimed to have been employed, was called by telephone and it was learned that an attendant with such a name had been missing from his job for ten days. On March 24, 1935, the experimenters made a visit to the B———— Sanitarium where the subject claimed to have received training and it was found that a man with such a name enrolled in a course in hydro-therapy on May 14, 1922, and left after completing his course on August 9, 1922.

The Sanitarium records were checked for the name of the young man whom the subject claimed went there for training with him and it was found that this man enrolled May 15, 1922, and left October 26, 1922. The records also show that both the subject and his friend came from neighboring small towns in the middle West and that they both had been employed, previous to this training, at a State Hospital near their home towns. The instructor under whom these men took their training at B———— Sanitarium positively identified a photograph of the subject. No attempt has been made to verify other information given.

Disposition of Case:

The State Hospital at E———— informed the experimenters by telephone that the subject's wife, who was also an attendant, would call for him within a few days. On March 26, 1935, this was done and the only subsequent report from the family indicated that the subject's "mental condition was favorable."

Comments:

It is noteworthy that the subject was entirely accurate when he said he had not been discharged from his job. He was again accurate when he stated that he had been out of employment for ten days. According to the subject he trained at B———— Sanitarium ten

or twelve years ago and the Sanitarium records showed that he enrolled twelve years ago. Still again he was accurate in his details concerning his friend with whom he trained at B———— Sanitarium.

It is the opinion of the experimenters that beyond all doubt this procedure should be a subject for further experimentation and study. The technique is extremely difficult inasmuch as it involves piecing together of bits of information into a composite whole and further questions must revolve around these constructed patterns. It will be noted that the experimenters made little progress when they tried to place this man in a State Hospital as an inmate; but great progress was made when this mental set was abandoned and he was questioned from the point of view of his having been an attendant. It is again noteworthy that little success followed the experimenters attempts to project this man into a normal family situation. The technique in handling this procedure cannot be too refined.²

²See Police Science Note in this issue of *Journal*, entitled "Criminal Confessions Under Narcosis."