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Police Science Technical/Legal Abstracts and Notes

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POLICE SCIENCE TECHNICAL ABSTRACTS AND NOTES

M. Edwin O'Neill

Detection of Soap Stains on Fabrics

A recent issue of the *Quarterly Journal of Pharmacy* contains an article in which the author, M. W. Partridge, describes a method for the detection of soaps and soap stains on fabrics.¹ The suspected fabric is first examined in ultra-violet light, by means of which the uniformly distributed soap due to washing and that restricted to a definite spot resulting from a stain can be distinguished. An adaptation of Feigl's method of detecting fatty acids by conversion into the iron complex of hydroxamic acid is described. A one-inch square of cloth is cut from stained and unstained areas of the fabric, and each is then extracted with 10 ml. of 95% acid-free alcohol by boiling under reflux for 30 minutes. The extracts are decanted into test tubes, evaporated to dryness, and the residues washed by decantation with three 5 ml. portions of warm ether. The washed material is then dissolved in 0.5 ml. of alcohol, and the solution examined by the iron hydroxamate method. The stained areas give strong reactions which are readily distinguished from the faint reactions obtained on unstained, washed fabrics. Tests for distinguishing various fatty acids are also described.

POLICE SCIENCE LEGAL ABSTRACTS AND NOTES

John E. Reid

Expert Testimony—Lack of Powder Burns to Determine Distance at which a Gun Is Fired.

The Defendant was found guilty of an assault to murder in the case of *Pipher v. State*, 162 S.W. (2) 101 (1942) and appeals from the finding of the Texas Trial Court. It appears the injured woman and her party had visited several taverns before coming to the Defendant's liquor dispensary and there, after a short time, engaged in a heated argument with the Defendant, who brandished a revolver and ordered the party off the premises. The Defendant alleges that when she displayed the weapon, one of the women held her arm while the victim came behind the bar to grapple for the gun and was accidentally shot. The examining physician, after describing the wounds, testified that there was no evidence of powder burns.

The prosecution introduced the testimony of a firearms expert, who stated in his qualifications that he was familiar with the type of firearm used in this case and, although he did not conduct any experiments with the involved weapon to determine its resultant powder burn patterns, testified: "I expect to find powder burns at an approximate distance of twenty inches."

The Court of Criminal Appeals of Texas affirmed the decision of the trial court and ruled the Defendant's objection was not well founded because she did not present any evidence to corroborate her claim of accidental shooting or show that the gun was within twenty inches of the wound, which it inflicted at the time of firing.

¹Partridge, M. W., "Forensic Chemical Examination of Materials Containing Soaps. Detection of Soaps and Soap Stains." *Quart. J. Pharm.* 15: 21-30 (1942).