

How Do Many Small Latent Print Units in America Outperform Some Large Crime Labs?

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by Ed German, CLPE



MIND THE GAP

Answer:

They Follow FBI Latent
Print Search Guidelines.



"Mind The Gap" is a sign posted in most British train stations as a reminder for travelers to not injure themselves by stepping into the gap between trains and the passenger platform.

Unfortunately, many large crime labs (including some large, accredited crime labs) in America are not minding the gap insofar as FBI Next Generation Identification (NGI) latent print search guidelines.

Since November 2015, official FBI guidance for searching latent prints has stressed there is no such thing as a latent print suitable for comparison but not suitable for searching in the FBI's databases.

This means every latent print of value for comparison should be searched in NGI.

FBI Latent Best Practices

FBI Latent Search Strategies

Simply stated, the FBI guidance linked above includes the following:

- If a latent print is good enough to compare, it is good enough to search against NGL.
- The practices of assessing latents that are of value for comparison but low quality as “Not Suitable for IAFIS” (or establishing a distinct quality threshold for “AFIS searchable”) are not supported.

Eight and a half years after the latent search guidance was pushed to US law enforcement, there are still latent print units (including some large, accredited crime labs) issuing latent print reports in direct conflict with FBI Latent Best Practices. For example, they issue murder case latent print reports stating there are multiple latent prints (from various crime scene items/surfaces) analyzed as suitable for comparison, but most of the latent prints were determined to be unsuitable for AFIS searching.

Whether accredited or not, all latent print units/labs typically perform casework in a manner as thorough as personnel and equipment/technology resources allow. Accredited crime labs are not required to follow all forensic standards, guidelines, and best practices (e.g., OSAC, IAI, FBI, and SWGFAST documents). They are merely required to document why they are not conforming to requirements or guidelines, i.e., they document their lack of equipment, technology, or personnel resources as a reason for non-compliance.

As explained in the above Latent Print Search strategies, FBI guidance does not mean you cannot withhold or skip some additional, follow-up latent print searches or other exhaustive AFIS processes after initial examination searches. It simply means you should search every "suitable for comparison" latent print in NGI during your initial casework.

Also, the FBI guidance does not mean every latent print suitable for comparison needs to be entered in the NGI Unidentified Latent File (ULF). Entering latent prints with low numbers of minutiae (some labs use 11 as a minimum) into the ULF can waste hours weekly or daily because of useless potential Unidentified Latent Match (ULM) results.

There will sometimes be those exceptions to document insofar as why NGI was not searched, e.g., an obvious (not just possible) barefoot impression. However, launching at least a fast and simple LFIS search of unidentified, suitable for comparison latent finger and palm prints in NGI at least gives some chance of helping to solve a case which might otherwise go unsolved.

If you work in a small American latent print unit searching every "suitable for comparison" latent print against the FBI's NGI database, be proud you are solving cases which might otherwise go unsolved if the case were worked at a much larger crime lab ignoring FBI latent print search best practices.

For more information, see the FBI CJIS Latent Investigative Services page at

<https://fbibiospecs.fbi.gov/biometric-modalities-1/latent>

And if you are not already doing it, also consider becoming an [OSAC Registry Implementer](#)

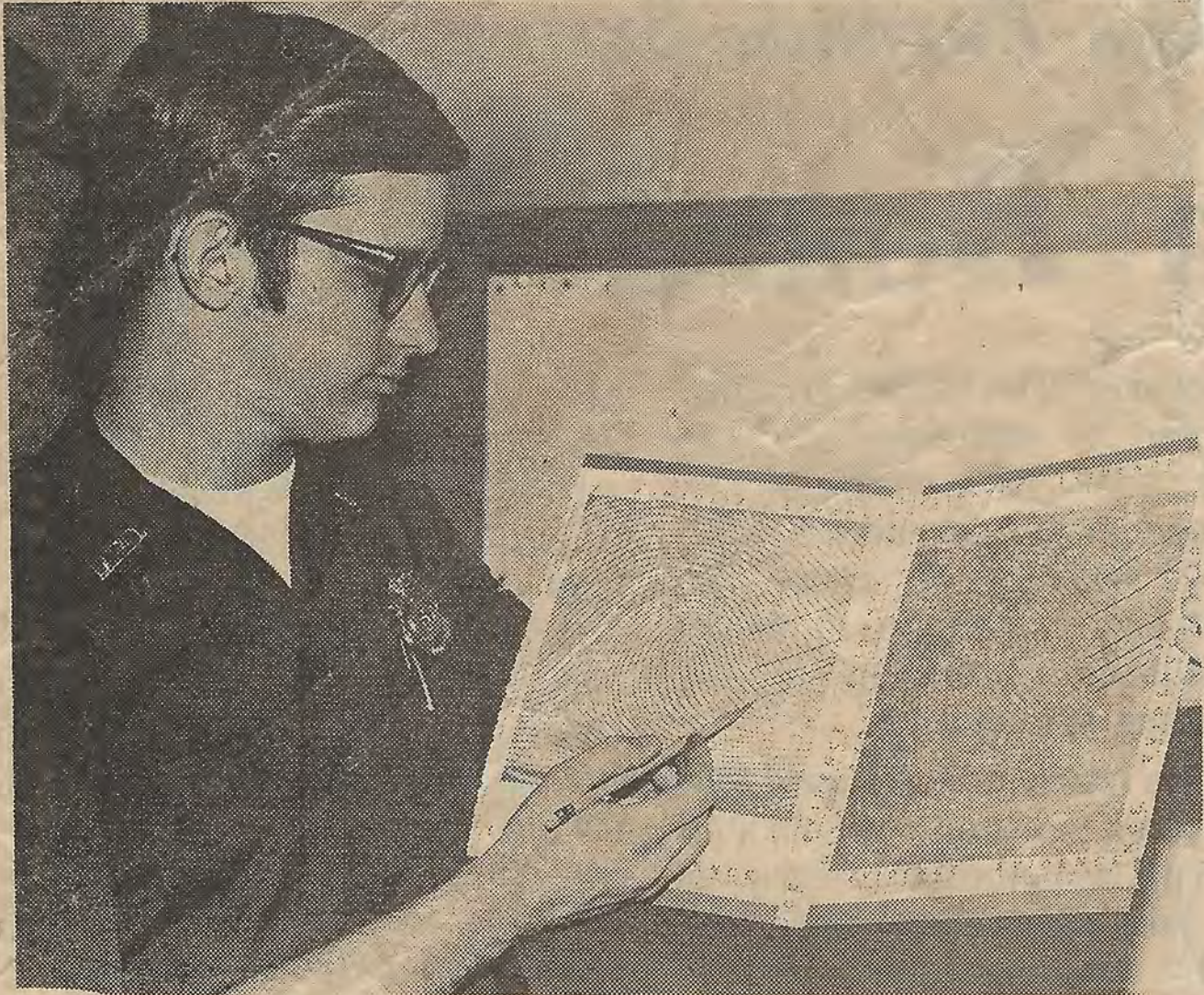
Presenter's Short Biography

- Has worked in fingerprint identification since 1971 and facial identification since 2001.
- Has been employed by state and local law enforcement in three American states, and by the US government in forensic laboratories in Asia, Europe, and the US.
- Certified Latent Print Examiner (IAI) and Certified Biometrics Professional (IEEE)



Section A-6. Sunday, October 8, 1972, Morristown, Tennessee, Citizen.

Ed German's
First
Latent Print
Court Chart
—
October
1972



Identifying Print

Sgt. Ed German of the Morristown Police Department is pointing out identifying lines in a fingerprint lifted at a recent burglary,



Presenter's Short Biography (Continued)

- Lived and worked more than seven years as a forensic scientist at US government laboratories in Asia and Europe.
- During the past 50 years, has visited forensic laboratories in the Philippines, Korea, Japan, UK, China, and many other countries on six continents.
- Has attended more than 30 international forensic science conferences since 1977, and many state and regional forensic science educational conferences.



Ed German
outside his
laboratory in
Japan in
1979...
where he
was one of
the earliest
researchers
of super
glue fuming



...with an
interpreter
and Minoru
Takahashi –
Director of
the Japanese
National
Research
Institute of
Police
Science



Presenter's Short Biography (Continued)

- Now works for the sheriff's office in the midwestern US small town where he and his wife met as teenagers.



Questions?

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