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Remarks by the Honorable James K. Stewart

Director of the National Institute of Justice

To The

VICAP International Homicide Symposium

June 20, 1988

NOTE:
Because Mr. Stewart often speaks from notes, the speech as delivered may vary from the text. However, he stands behind this speech as printed.

[Chips: would it be appropriate somewhere in the speech to mention an incident from your detective experience?]

Thank you, [ ].

I'm honored to be included on today's agenda with Attorney General Ed Meese, FBI Assistant Director John Glover, and Congressman Glen English [Chairman of the Government Information, Justice and Agriculture Subcommittee of the Government Operations Committee].

[other acknowledgements]:

- o John Burke, Assistant Director of FBI (Quantico)
- o Terry Green
- o Roger Depue
- o

The FBI performs a tremendously valuable service to the nation's law-enforcement officials in operating VI-CAP. By putting national information resources at the disposal of

local agencies, it empowers them to do what none could hope to do on their own.

Thanks to the original inspiration and work of Pierce Brooks, and to the additional efforts of Terry Green [other names to mention here?], the police now have a diagnostic center to which we can turn when we have an unsolved murder. We can turn to VI-CAP -- just as doctors who have an unsolved medical case can turn to the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta.

But as with any such system, success ultimately depends on the participation of local practitioners. The doctors who first began noticing the symptoms of legionnaire's disease or AIDS made the identification and understanding of these diseases possible because they reported what they saw to the Centers for Disease Control. They pooled their information and their analytical and investigatory resources. This kind of collaborative work is a long-standing practice in the medical profession. It has made it possible for medical practitioners to control many epidemics, and even to eliminate killer-diseases like smallpox.

In law enforcement, we are just beginning to understand the need for research and collaboration of this kind. We need to broaden and deepen our research base. And as professionals, we need to report our findings and collaborate on new discoveries. VI-CAP is a model program in these respects. That's why we felt it was essential for NIJ to provide the start-up funding for VI-CAP, as well as funding for the NCAVC (National Center for Analysis of Violent Crime) -- of which VI-CAP is a part.

The research base is essential, because the threat -- as you know -- is serious. The good news is that we do solve most murders. But the alarming news is that the clearance rate for murder has been dropping. In 1970, 86% of murders were solved. In 1986, we only succeeded in solving 70% of murder cases.

In the past couple of decades, the threat of random violence has become a frightening part of daily life in this country. Our chances of being a violent crime victim today are greater than our chances of being hurt in a traffic accident. We may escape victimization this year, or next year, or the year after that.

But the fact is that during our lifetimes, five out of six of us will be victims of a violent crime. Among young black men in this country, homicide is the leading cause of death (black men have a 1 in 30 chance of being murdered).

Of all the criminal threats that ordinary citizens face, the fear inspired by serial killers is probably the greatest. [When Jack the Ripper stalked the East End of London and killed at least six people -- exactly 100 years ago -- he was a terrifying phenomenon. But he was unique for his time.] Today his crime is no less horrifying and frightening, but it has grown almost commonplace. VI-CAP represents an important new crime detection tool, but its development is just the beginning of needed efforts to reduce serial murder and other types of violent crime.

Our recent and ongoing work at NIJ is aimed at further expanding our knowledge about homicide, and strengthening our ability to collaborate in its detection. Today I'd like to give you a brief account of some of the work we've been doing.

One of the most important developments to grow out of VI-CAP has been the Multi-Agency Investigative Team Manual, or MAIT -- an NIJ-funded project that Pierce Brooks and Terry Green were once again instrumental in accomplishing. [mention other people involved too?] VI-CAP can help put together the data on serial murders. But once armed with the data, how do we organize the investigation? Since serial murders involve at least two agencies, and usually many more, we needed some way to coordinate their efforts. When agencies have collaborated on these investigations, which tactics worked? Which ones didn't?

At an initial conference, we brought together 23 officials from different agencies throughout the country who had had experience with investigating serial murders. The guidelines laid down in the manual were developed from their experiences. The manual itself was just issued in March of this year. We've published 1,000 copies which are available for distribution on request. I think the MAIT manual is going to be an important resource for interagency investigations.

Another NIJ homicide study that is currently underway is the Washington state study. In this project, we will be building on VI-CAP's data-collection process to create an even more comprehensive system at the state level. We're collecting data for over 1,200 solved and unsolved homicide cases in Washington state between 1981 and 1986.

While VI-CAP deals with about 190 variables, this program will add about 250 more. Our aim is to provide a prototype for a state homicide investigation system. Washington state officials, including the state Attorney General, are cooperating closely on the project.

I'd like to mention several other recent NIJ studies which have refined our knowledge about specific types of homicides.

For instance, we did a study to learn more about murders committed during robberies. About one in ten murders begins as a robbery. Among other findings, we learned that the presence of a gun was the single feature that distinguished ordinary robbery from robbery/murder. This information suggests that sanctions

against robbery based on whether the robber carries a gun may help to reduce the murder rate.

Another recent project studied sexual homicides. The object was to test the validity of classifying sexual homicides according to whether the criminal and the crime scene showed so-called "organized" or "disorganized" behaviors. We found that there are indeed clear differences between these two modes of sexual homicide -- a fact which can improve our ability to profile criminals.

A fourth NIJ study which was just completed was designed to refine our knowledge of various types of homicide -- family, stranger, acquaintance and justifiable homicide -- by looking at the social and environmental factors involved. This study produced a large database which future investigators, (police ~~or reseachers~~) can use, and gave us a more precise understanding of the differences between various state and city homicide rates, racial and gender differences, and the factors influencing family homicides.

While the aim of all these efforts is to improve our ability to apprehend and convict murderers through improved management of investigations and better understanding of the killer's motivation and behavior, there is one other NIJ project that has yielded what is probably the most significant forensic breakthrough in my lifetime.

In the near future, the average urban police department will be able to make a positive identification from a single hair found at the scene of the crime -- and they'll be able to do that in about 24 hours.

Working with [CETUS], NIJ has developed an automated method of taking even the smallest human specimen -- a hair, a drop of blood or semen, a skin cell or two -- and making enough copies of the DNA in that specimen to positively identify an individual. DNA "fingerprinting" is a very recent technology. But previously, we needed a considerably larger sample of human tissue or fluid in order to do this kind of testing. Now, a single DNA molecule is enough to tell us what we need to know,

because of the technology (not cloning?) that enables us to generate sufficient copies of the DNA for testing purposes. Since every individual's DNA is unique (with the exception of identical twins), we can then make a positive identification of an individual.

I'm tremendously excited about this prospect. While it is still very new technology, I am certain that it will soon be accepted in courts of law. [Through kits that will be available to police], law enforcement will have a relatively inexpensive yet highly potent new weapon to detect murderers and other offenders.

If you think about it, this is the kind of "miracle" research breakthrough that we read about all the time in medicine. But until recently, it's been a rarity in criminal justice.

It doesn't have to be that way. If our society is willing to make the investment in research and development to control crime, we can achieve breakthroughs like DNA fingerprinting or

VI-CAP that are every bit as important and life-saving as medical discoveries are. Because in medicine, the so-called "miracle" drugs or surgical breakthroughs are not, of course, miracles at all. They are the direct result of a massive investment of money, time, energy, and brainpower in research and development.

But my message here today is really a double one. As I've been saying, we need to recognize the essential importance of R & D to reduce violent crime. (legislation)

We have VI-CAP.

Well, as the marriage broker said when the poor boy agreed to marry the princess -- that's half the battle.

The other half is using our resources effectively. Research and development give us the tools, but local law-enforcement will determine whether those tools make a difference. Local police still have the responsibility for investigating and solving cases. VI-CAP doesn't do anything to change that. Local police still have the power to determine whether or not to use the MAIT

manual when setting up a Multi-Agency Investigative Team. Local police and other officials still have the option of developing -- or not developing -- state homicide associations (such as Florida, California, and Texas have done).

I'm convinced that if we do make progress in the detection and apprehension of violent criminals, it will be because we will have learned to collaborate as scientists and medical researchers have long done.

There's a kind of chemistry to the process of criminal detection. There are certain essential bits -- certain atoms of information -- that are vital links in the chain. Taken singly, they are inert. Bring them together and they start a reaction.

In the modern world, one of those atoms of information may be in Florida while the other is in California. Or one may be in Alaska while the other is in Italy -- because as the world gets smaller, violent criminals travel not only from state to state, but from country to country. So in addition to local or state systems, and in addition to VI-CAP, we need an international

system and an international database to coordinate efforts between countries.

Whether it's between local agencies, between states or between countries, we need to develop teamwork to hunt down the criminal terrorists among us. I hope that all of you will carry that dedication away with you from this symposium.

Thank you.