

# **The FBI**

by Nathan Shepard

The FBI has always been an essential agency for ensuring justice. Charged with investigating all violations of federal law except those expressly assigned to another agency (US. Federal Bureau of Investigation, *The FBI Mission...* 1-20), its history is eye-catching, its methods are inventive and unique, and its many case files prove to be interesting to the last arrest.

In the early 1900s, the trusting, friendly land of opportunity where doors could be safely left unlocked changed. As cities became larger and streets harder, gangs formed and thrived in inner-city areas. Large banks were regularly robbed; criminals were using more inventive methods of robbery, leaving the police baffled. It was the Gangster Era. Hit-and-run robberies kept police from finding the criminals because when the local authorities would finally arrive, the robbers would be gone, and the officers wouldn't find the essential evidence needed to convict law-breakers (US Dept of Justice, *The Story of the FBI* 1-10). The government needed a special follow-up team to find the evidence needed to convict the perpetrators (US Dept of Justice, *The Story of the FBI* 14-15). Therefore, in 1908, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was founded. Starting out as a low-budget, experimental agency, the bureau had to use inventive, efficient, and inexpensive methods to catch criminals. J. Edgar Hoover, the first official director of the bureau, convinced the US government to give the Bureau more money and more responsibility. The FBI also provided the government with new police training techniques, such as basic fingerprinting of the crime scene, hair and fiber collecting and storing, and basic bomb recognition and treatment (US Dept of Justice, *The Story of the FBI* 2-5). They also adopted and pushed the National Drug Strategy (NDS), which included an in-depth review and analysis of the problems that the drug trade creates in society, drug-trafficking routes, and the FBI's role in supply reduction (US Dept of Justice, *FBI Drug Program* 1-20). When enough money had become available, the FBI built the Crime Lab as a formal office in which crimes could be investigated more efficiently. By that time, FBI agents were known and feared as the G-men in the underworld because of their seemingly impossible success at catching criminals. By 1934, 11,153 gang members and thousands of other small-time thieves had been arrested by the FBI and convicted of their respective crimes in the US Court of Law. Hundreds of small gangs were busted, and the larger ones laid low (US Dept of Justice, *The Story of the FBI* 5-10).

When the Sci-Crime Lab was built, law enforcement specialists were brought in from all parts of the county to form units to handle every aspect of a given crime. Say, perhaps, two girls, 12 and 9 years of age, are left home alone while their parents, Matt and Barbara Dilinger, enjoy a romantic dinner at a famous restaurant. According to their

parents, when they returned home that evening, there was no obvious sign of a forced entry; however, the alarm had been disabled, the girls were gone, and there was a ransom note nailed to the door. They called 9-1-1. The first unit at the scene is the Identity Unit. Searching frantically for fingerprints, the oily residue that collects on one's finger's ridges sometimes left on objects touched, sometimes they find latent (visible) prints, but mostly, they have to search for patent (invisible) ones. To find such a print, specialists use superglue, iodine, lasers, and even organic chemicals, depending on the surface. When they find prints, they cannot tell the age, sex, occupation, or any other information about its owner. In fact, an unidentified print is worthless. A matching print with identification is needed to show that the suspect was there, sometimes found on an existing criminal record. Fortunately, all this information is easily accessible within the FBI's computers. A newer branch of the FBI is the DNA division. Any blood, flesh, or hair can be identified as easily as prints can be, thanks to modern technology (Davis 126-175). Because it can process evidence so quickly, this unit handles over 36,000 law enforcement identification requests per day (Diamuid 177). The next unit on the scene is the Material and Elemental Analysis unit. This unit examines materials (mainly clothing) of the victim, family, and any foreign clothing at the scene in order to identify and indict suspects. They also deal with chemicals, poisons, drugs, or any other evidence that doesn't squarely fall to another unit (Davis 159-170). Another unit, the Explosives unit, skips this case. This unit usually only visits scenes where a bomb has gone off or another explosion has occurred. A bomb is simply a initiator causing a power source to begin a chain reaction in an explosive substance. Having arrived at the scene, they immediately start to piece together what the scene was like just before the detonation. When it is reconstructed, it is fairly easy to find pieces of the bomb. Contrary to common thought, ninety-five percent of the actual bomb survives the explosion in a recognizable form. When the bomb is put together, components are identified, and they can be matched with other bombs in order to learn the bombers habits, identify similar bombs made by the same bomber, and eventually find the bomber. Agents also study the victims' bodies. They can learn where the bomb was, how big it was, and even what type it was (Davis 59-95). Meanwhile, back at the Dilingers' house, the Hairs and Fibers unit arrives. Looking for hairs and cloth fibers, they stuff almost everything into plastic evidence bags to take back to the lab and study. They can identify everyone who has been in the house during the past year. The job is overwhelming, but these agents are well trained and prepared to handle this type of situation. They take hair samples from the adults, and they take samples of the girls' hair from their rooms. No two people have the same hair, but each hair on one's head is the same as the others on his head. Furthermore, humans are constantly losing hair! People shed hair constantly wherever they go. They trade hair with others whom they meet or walk near. Hair is the most frequently used evidence when convicting criminals because they don't realize what an obvious trail they have left behind (Davis 96-125). While the Hairs and Fibers Unit is searching for evidence, the Photo, Video, and Polygraph unit talks to the adults. Photos of the children are scrutinized and distributed to all the units, and the Dilingers are taken in for a polygraph, or lie detector, test (Davis 265). When they leave, the Firearms and Toolmarks unit begins their search. Looking for any guns or bullets, this group is looking for the weapon, if any, that the kidnapper used to get the girls to come with him/her so quickly. Because each gun leaves an individual mark on the bullets that it fires, and only

certain guns can fire certain ammunition, from the bullet, the gun can be determined, and from the gun, the shooter can be identified (Davis 227-250). The last unit on the scene is the Document unit. They examine the ransom note to make note of the handwriting to compare it to other documents, to learn the kidnapper's personality, and to see what sort of temperament he is in (Davis 192-205). About two hours later, as soon as the search is complete, all the units hold a conference to discuss what they found. No unusual fingerprints had been found save those of the family; no strange clothing or chemicals were found; the hairs and fibers unit could find no evidence of strangers in the house save the dog and the girls' Aunt Marie, who had visited two months before. The girls' parents had barely passed the polygraph test concerning what time they left the house, where they went, and what time they got back. Since they hadn't exactly failed the test, the Polygraph unit decided it was simply stress and worry, but combined with all the other evidence... The Document unit reported serious agitation and fear in the handwriting of the ransom note, and the same kind of paper that the note was written on had also been found on a notepad in the home. The agents working on the case decide to concentrate the investigation on the parents, and later the handwriting on the ransom note is found to match the handwriting on the check that the father used to pay for dinner that evening. The couple is arrested, and the girls mysteriously appear in a poor suburb in the downtown area, not beaten or abused, to the agents' great relief and surprise; however, they have been drugged and they do not remember anything about the kidnapping. The girls' parents are scheduled for a trial in May.

Though this case was fictitious, there were many similar to it, especially in the late 30's. There were also many cases of spies; for instance, on June 28, 1941, 33 German spies in the Duquesne ring were caught and found guilty (US. Dept of Justice, *FBI: Facts and History* 65-82). During WWII, several Nazi saboteurs landed in America to destroy crucial war factories to keep the United States from playing its pivotal role in the upcoming battles. Less than two weeks after arriving, the FBI caught them before they injured anyone or damaged anything. During the period between 1938 to 1941 over two hundred German spies were arrested, encouraging the U.S. to join the struggle in Europe (US. Dept of Justice, *FBI: Facts and History* 71-79).

The FBI has been, is, and will be a vital agency for ensuring justice. Its smart, resourceful agents make sure the law is kept, the truth is heard, and justice is served. Hopefully, it will remain a cornerstone, an upright and lawful protector of the people in the face of the new millennium.

## Bibliography

1. United States. Federal Bureau of Investigation. The FBI Mission: To Uphold the Law. (Washington, D.C.): Dept. of Justice. (1990)?.
2. United States Dept. of Justice. The Story of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. n.p.: Dept. of Justice. n.d.
3. United States Dept. of Justice: Federal Bureau of Investigation. FBI Drug Program. (Washington D.C.): U.S. Dept. of Justice, (1989?).
4. Fisher, Davis. Hard Evidence: How the Detectives Inside the FBI Crime lab Have Helped Solved America's Toughest Cases. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995.
5. U.S. Dept. of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation. FBI: Facts and History. n.p.: Dept. of Justice. c. 1994.