



OGCA MEMBER CALVIN GODDARD; FATHER OF FORENSIC FIREARMS EXAMINATION, BY C. RODNEY JAMES

Ultra-famous Clark Gable was an early OGCA member, but just a few names down on the Membership Roster is the equally accomplished Calvin Goddard. A member from 1941-1949, Goddard is the father of forensic firearms examination, whose work has fought crime and freed the innocent. Enjoy this article by member, author and forensic firearms examiner, C. Rodney James.

It has been called "The Lawless Decade," "The Roaring 20's," "The Gangster Era," but the period 1919 to 1932 also gave birth to a new forensic science now known as "Firearms Examination."

Although the idea of matching a fired bullet to a particular gun barrel had been theorized in the late nineteenth century, a practical system did not exist until after 1920.

Calvin Goddard, born in 1891 in Baltimore, studied medicine, graduating from Johns Hopkins in 1911, and in 1917 from the Army Medical School in Washington. He served in the Army Medical Corps and was eventually promoted to lieutenant colonel. Goddard, however, had developed an early passion for firearms which evolved into a serious scientific study as he amassed a large firearms collection. This study ultimately became his life's work.

The event that started everything was the murder of a N.Y. State farmer and his housekeeper, March 22, 1915. The accused was an illiterate (possibly mentally challenged) tenant farmer named Charlie Stielow. The weapon was .22 caliber. Stielow eventually admitted to owning a small .22 revolver. He was arrested and charged with the murders. Under police questioning he admitted to the crime, but later recanted. An "expert" emerged to testify that the fatal bullets contained unique scratches that could only have come from Stielow's gun. Stielow was sentenced to die in the electric chair. Appeals from Stielow's lawyer and a New York City humanitarian organization resulted in a stay of execution with Stielow literally strapped into the electric chair!

Further examination of the firearms evidence by NYC police and an assistant from the state Attorney General's office (a man named Charles Waite) enlisted an examination by a microscopist from Bausch & Lomb. The unique scratches on the bullets from Stielow's revolver weren't there. Moreover, the fatal bullets contained four groove impressions one of which was twice the width of the others (indicating an incomplete rifling job) while Stielow's revolver left five!



Put crime-fighting, early member Calvin Goddard on a Postage Stamp.

Inspired by this near miscarriage of justice, Waite envisioned the idea of an organization to use the latest in scientific technology in identifying and matching fired bullets to specific guns. Though lacking a scientific background, Waite was an accomplished promoter of his idea. He enlisted Dr. Calvin Goddard, microscopist Philip Gravelle, and John H. Fisher from the Bureau of Standards to set up the first crime laboratory in 1925 -- the NYC-based Bureau of Forensic Ballistics. Though the operation received a two-part article "Fingerprinting Bullets" in *The Saturday Evening Post*, police departments were slow to respond. Following Waite's death in 1926, Goddard took over the Bureau. Working with Gravelle, Goddard developed the comparison microscope -- the basic instrument still used in comparing fired bullets and cartridge cases.

The monetary rewards Waite hoped for never appeared and the operation was dissolved. Goddard continued work, amassing data on firearms, ammunition, rifling systems and characteristics. His expertise gained recognition as he provided genuine expert testimony in some of the most famous gun murders of the era. First was the Hall-Mills shooting that ended the scandalous affair between the Rev. Edward Hall and choir singer Eleanor Mills.

The case of the decade, though, was the Sacco-Vanzetti robbery-murder that dragged on from 1921 to 1927. Goddard testified in the second trial after making a positive identification of both a fatal bullet and a recovered fired cartridge case to the Colt pistol taken from Sacco. This was the first major murder case to be decided almost entirely on the basis of fired evidence.

On St. Valentine's Day 1929 when seven bullet-riddled bodies were discovered in a garage on Clark St., Chicago, police care-

fully collected all the fired evidence. Witnesses stated that two policemen and two civilians emerged from what looked like a police car and went into the garage. Minutes later, following a clatter of shots, the quartet emerged, the civilians (with raised hands as though under arrest) were followed by the policemen. Mortally wounded victim, Frank Gusenberg, told Lt. Tom Loftus, "It was coppers. Coppers did it." Did rogue cops mow down the Moran gang?

Goddard was called. His study concluded that the weapons were two Thompson guns, one with a 50-round drum, the other with a 20-round magazine and a 12-gauge shotgun. A lucky break ten months later netted similar weapons with the capture of a Capone henchman in Michigan. Goddard's test-fire and microscopic examination positively identified the recovered guns as the murder weapons. None were police property.

A local philanthropist offered support for the establishment of an enlarged and reformed version of Goddard's Bureau at Northwestern University where it became the Department of Police Science. For the next ten years Goddard edited and published ***The Journal of Police Science***. Under his directorship, the operation became the model for modern crime laboratories, offering services in a variety of forensic disciplines. Under Goddard, the first prototype polygraph was developed. The FBI soon followed Goddard's lead with its crime lab, as did major police departments across the nation.

Goddard continued to travel the world promoting the science of firearms examination and identification and use of the comparison microscope. Following WWII, he was appointed head of the Army's largest criminal investigation laboratory (located in Japan) from 1948 to 1951. Goddard died in 1955, but his legacy--the fight against charlatanism and the quest for rigorous scientific standards lives on.

Over 800 people have been the subject of a commemorative postage stamp (including member Clark Gable) but only one stamp has honored a lawman, policeman or civilian crime fighter. If you agree with the placement of Calvin Goddard on a commemorative postage stamp, add your name to the petition at the May meeting (look for signage in the book-signing area) or send a letter indicating your wishes. Signatures will be presented to the Citizens Advisory Committee for Commemorative Postage Stamps.