
Technical Procedure for Photomicrography

1.0 Purpose – To provide guidelines for producing and preserving photomicrographs for casework in the Firearms Unit.

2.0 Scope – This procedure applies to all cases examined in the Firearms Unit which result in an identification.

3.0 Definitions

- **Photomicrograph** – A photograph taken through a microscope.

4.0 Equipment, Materials, and Reagents

- Leica Application Suite (LAS) software

5.0 Procedure

5.1 Procedural Background for the Use of Photomicrography in Firearms Identification

5.1.1 Photomicrographs are used to document the characteristics which are used to make a microscopic identification and/or for an examiner's future recollection of an identification. Photomicrographs are intended for documentation purposes only, and shall not be used for comparison, verification, or conclusions. In cases where photomicrographs are used in court, the examiner should explain the limitations.

5.1.2 Firearm and Tool Mark examiners do not use photomicrographs to make comparisons and reach conclusions for the following reasons:

5.1.2.1 A photomicrograph is a two-dimensional image of a three-dimensional object.

5.1.2.2 Photomicrographs can be altered.

5.1.2.3 Photomicrographs often contain insignificant detail which may be misinterpreted by people not trained in firearm and tool mark identification.

5.1.2.4 Visual data in photomicrographs, particularly when highly magnified, may be misinterpreted by people not trained in firearm and tool mark identification.

5.1.2.5 Photomicrographs provide an incomplete representation of the entire comparison process. A photomicrograph is still and freezes the hairline. An actual comparison is very dynamic, and continuous movement of the hairline is an integral part of the examination process.

5.1.2.6 The human eye has a greater tolerance to light variations than photography.

5.1.2.7 Digital cameras and their display devices lack the resolution to portray all that is seen by the eye.

- 5.1.2.8 Bubble jet, inkjet, laser and color-dye sublimation printers are not capable of providing sufficient resolution to capture the detail necessary to interpret individual characteristics present on a bullet, cartridge case, or shotshell when printing digital images.
 - 5.1.2.9 A photomicrograph limits the field-of-view from what the examiner sees through the eyepieces of a comparison microscope.
 - 5.1.2.10 Many comparisons deal with multiple areas over a large portion of the surface of the evidence and a photomicrograph is unable to pick up these related areas.
 - 5.1.2.11 The incorrect interpretation of a photomicrograph may adversely impact one or both parties in a criminal case.
- 5.1.3 Due to these inherent limitations in the use of photomicrographs, the following language shall be contained on each photomicrograph produced for casework in the North Carolina State Crime Laboratory:
- 5.1.3.1 “This photomicrograph was created for documentation purposes only as it is a two-dimensional representation of a three-dimensional object and therefore does not fully and completely depict what was viewed through the comparison microscope. **Do not use this photomicrograph for comparison or to draw conclusions as to whether items were or were not fired by the same firearm or whether marks were or were not produced by the same tool.**”

5.2 Production of Photomicrographs

- 5.2.1 Photomicrographs shall be taken of the area(s)/detail from which an identification conclusion was made.
 - 5.2.1.1 At least two (2) photomicrographs shall be produced.
 - 5.2.1.1.1 A representative overall photomicrograph of one identified item shall be produced. This item may be a test fire or an evidence item. This allows the supporting documentation of the detail used for identification to be chronicled using one item as long as the detail described or depicted is representative of that seen on subsequent items.
 - 5.2.1.1.2 A photomicrograph containing two identified items shall be produced for each area that contains detail from which the identification conclusion was drawn. The items in the photomicrograph shall be situated side-by-side with a clear dividing line separating the images. The items shall not overlap in such a way as to prevent the entire area of detail from appearing in the photomicrograph.
 - 5.2.1.2 A sufficient number of photomicrographs shall be produced to depict every area containing detail from which the identification conclusion was drawn. The number shall be determined by the Forensic Scientist based on his/her training and experience and based on the nature of the evidence and the identification.

5.8 Calculations – N/A

5.9 Uncertainty of Measurement – N/A

6.0 Limitations – See 5.1.2.

7.0 Safety – N/A

8.0 References

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Heard, Brian J. *Handbook of Firearms and Ballistics: Examining and Interpreting Forensic Evidence*. Chichester, West Sussex, England: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 1997.

Leica Microsystems. *Leica FS C Operating Manual*. 2003.

Leica Microsystems. *Leica DFC420, Leica DFC420 C, Digital FireWire Color Cameras for Analysis and Documentation*. 2006

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Roberts, J. L. “Photography of Identifications: Professionalism or Personal Preference?” *AFTE Journal* Spring 1991: 694 - 697.

9.0 Records

- FA Case Record Object Repository

10.0 Attachments – N/A

Revision History		
Effective Date	Version Number	Reason
10/16/2013	1	Original Document
09/05/2014	2	Header and various subsections – corrected to reflect organizational change.