

100 MOMENTS

FIREARMS REFERENCE FILE

By Victor Murillo (1982-current)

The laboratory firearms reference file is one of the Midwest's largest collections of long guns, handguns and pistols. It contains over 5000 firearms, and its goal is to possess one of every different make and model of firearm ever manufactured.



The reference collection idea was started when the Iowa crime lab was created in 1971. The lab's first director, Mike Rehberg, previously worked in the Wisconsin State Crime Lab, which is where the first collection firearms came from when it was started in 1974 by SA Andy Newquist. From that time the collection has grown to its present size due to the firearm confiscation laws, here in Iowa. Any firearm that is confiscated or seized must eventually be forfeited to the crime lab for destruction. The nearly 2000 destruction

firearms that are submitted to the lab every year are inventoried and checked against the reference collection. Any new makes or models of firearms are then added to the collection and can be used by the lab for a number of different investigative purposes.

Parts from the reference firearms can be used to make casework firearms functional by replacing broken or missing parts. The now functional casework firearm can then be test fired and used for comparison purposes. Many casework firearms possess obliterated serial numbers and the same make/model of reference firearms are used to determine where the serial number was located and to visualize the letter/number sequence and style of the obliterated serial number on the case firearm.

The firearms are used to train new examiners allowing them to study the safeties and internal functionality of the firearms before working firearms in casework. Many of the firearms are also used for investigative purposes in the field, for demonstrative presentations in trials and for investigative officer familiarization. Laboratory crime scene investigators often also use the

reference firearms for familiarization and training. Each year the crime scene investigators learn to load, unload and shoot reference firearms so they may feel comfortable handling many different type of firearms. The training is critical when they are challenged to document, unload and secure a firearm that has been found at a crime scene. Many of the reference firearms are used for research projects, to further advance the science of firearms identification and to loan to private companies and other law enforcement agencies for research projects.

The reference collection consists of rifles, shotguns, pistols and revolvers, old and new. Many antique firearms exist in the collection from the late 1800s to the early 1900s and are on display within the collection room. One of the most unusual is a Chicago Firearms Co., Protector Palm Pistol (pictured below) that fires 32 caliber rimfire ammunition.



The reference firearms also contain many military-adopted firearms like a Thompson “Tommy-gun” .45 Auto rifle, an original Browning BAR .30-06 rifle and a Maxim water-cooled machine gun. Full auto rifles and pistols from the early 1900s to present day, such as modified AR15’s, AK 47s, English Stens, Uzis and many others are also displayed within the

collection. Unusual firearms that possess gold plating, detailed artwork and monetary collector’s value help make the laboratory’s firearms reference collection both unique and valuable to the forensic examiners.

VIC MURILLO – 2021

Vic is currently a criminalist in the firearms and toolmark section of the DCI Criminalistics Laboratory. Vic began his career with the BCI in 1982. In addition to being an expert in firearms and toolmarks, Vic has processed hundreds of crime scenes as a longtime member of the DCI Crime Scene Team.