

BOOK REVIEW

Disaster Victim Identification.

Experience and Practice.

Edited by Professor Sue Black, Graham Sutherland, Lucinda Hackman and Xanthe Mallett

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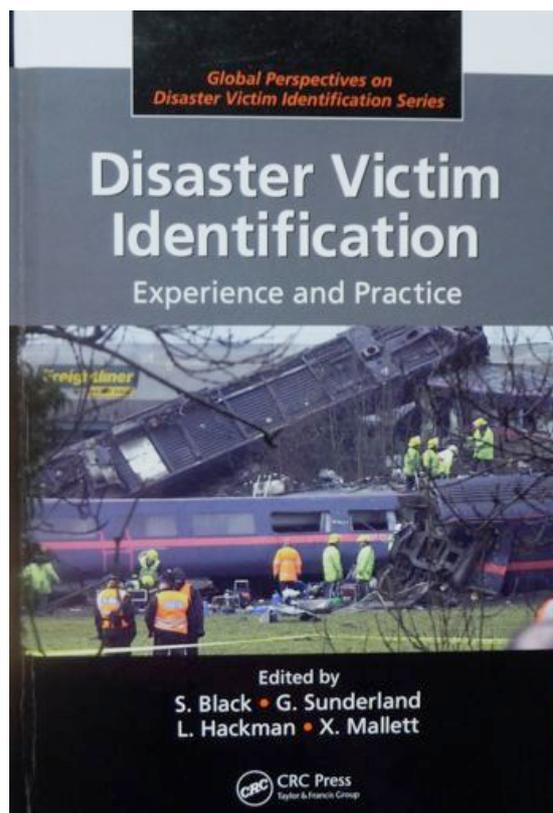
Royalties from the sale go to the charity: Care of Police Survivors.

Edited by the team responsible for the former Dundee university DVI course for UK police officers, this book is the result of required 2500 word essays reviewing a mass fatality incident in the UK or overseas, giving an overview and discussing the management problems involved following the incident, lessons learned and reviewing solutions for future investigative teams.

This hardback book comprises 16 chapters and a total of 248 pages. Fifteen major incidents occurring between 1966 (the Aberfan disaster) and 2005 (London bus and underground bombings) are covered, including those with the largest loss of life (Lockerbie and Piper Alpha), football disasters (Bradford City and Hillsborough), railway incidents and some less remembered incidents such as the Morecambe Bay cockling disaster. Overall, a good cover of various types of disaster over the past few years. Although the Marchioness riverboat incident is reported, the Zeebrugge ferry disaster involving police forces both sides of the channel does not appear. This is unfortunate as the problems faced by UK DVI teams working abroad, in this and subsequent disasters, are very different from those within the UK.

This text will primarily appeal to police officers concerned with major incident management but will be of interest to those in the emergency services, to forensic pathology and odontology specialists and, to a limited extent, those in the coronial service, finger print and forensic science staff.

The book is printed in the USA and, although aimed at the British market, suffers from US spellings such as center. The quality of the photographs (all monochrome) is poor, with some rather out of focus (Figures 5.3 and 7.2 for example) and it must be assumed that it



was originally intended to incorporate some colour photographs as this is referred to in several of the illustrations (see Fig 10.3, 12.3, 16.2).

Each chapter follows a useful general pattern of introduction, background, response/body recovery, identification, post incident, conclusion and comprehensive references. The importance of the four primary identification methods, namely DNA, Fingerprints, Odontology and Unique Medical Condition, are emphasised.

It would have been of great value to have a chart in each chapter outlining the manpower involved, broken down into the various specialities with period on site, also a table showing the methods of identification with numbers and percentages. In some cases this appears buried in the text or is missing altogether (4 rail incidents & the London Bus and Underground bombings).

There are a number of factual errors, possibly because the original essay writer was unable to obtain all the facts or was not present at the disaster. For example, in the Manchester airport disaster, Kenyon's are stated to have dealt only with the personal effects whereas they also undertook the preparation and processing of the human remains and supplied

forensic odontologists. The Chinese Lorry Deaths (Dover) chapter states that identification methods, at this time (2000), were almost unknown in Kent - the Kent police were well aware of identification methods having handled the Zeebrugge disaster (1987). These and other of factual errors in other disaster reports are unfortunate.

The Kings Cross Underground fire contains an excellent report on the identification of the last body 15 years later and demonstrates the value of thorough police and forensic investigation. The Marchioness disaster chapter contains details concerning the 'removal of hands' incident and subsequent public enquiry.

Having worked in several of the disasters covered I found the book an interesting read.

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