Secret Service Probes Lab Notebooks

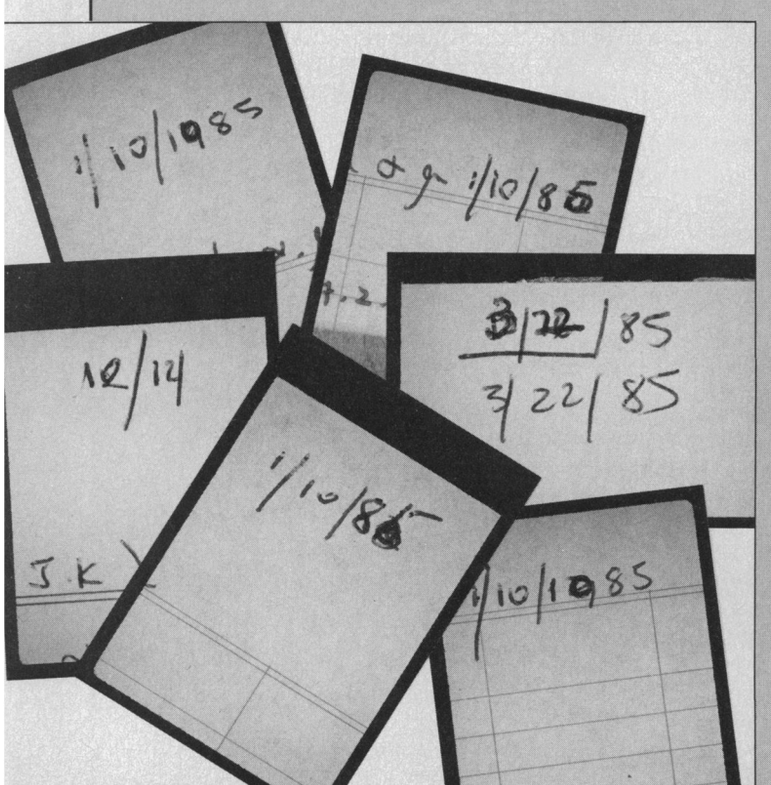
"The reason [Representative Dingell's staff] came to us initially," says John Hargett, chief document examiner of the Secret Service's forensic services division, "is that they thought there might be an ink-dating problem" with information in Thereza Imanishi-Kari's lab notebooks. The Secret Service has a unique ink library, containing 6000 types of ink and detailed information on their chemistry, smear qualities, and dates of formulation.

As it turns out, there was a problem with dates, but the ink analysis played a minor role in bringing it to light. More important was a study of paper and ballpoint pen imprints.

Dingell's staff suspects that entries in a 1984 notebook were altered much later—in 1986, after questions surfaced about the quality of data in them. Imanishi-Kari's lawyer wrote to the committee on 27 March that "all of the data presented in the *Cell* paper were assembled contemporaneously with the scientific experiment and placed in the notebooks in a timely fashion." The committee asked the Secret Service to see if forensic evidence agreed with this statement.

Hargett and another agent, Larry Stewart, found evidence leading them to conclude that dates in the notebooks were changed and that at least one page purportedly written in 1984 was actually written in 1986. Four other pages "in all probability," they say, were written in 1986 and put into the 1984 book. Twenty additional pages fall under suspicion but do not reveal conclusive evidence of misdating.

"We didn't consider [Dingell's request] all that unusual," says Stewart. "Through the international ink library we get many requests from other agencies and from outside the country." The library's international role dates back to the 1920's, when its files belonged to the cantonal police of Zurich, Switzerland. This year, Stewart worked on two murder cases for the Canadian government, analyzing diaries and other records to prove that defendants were not where they claimed to be. In the past, the library has worked on the phony Howard Hughes will, on records implicating Nazi war criminals, and spy cases. More commonly, it helps convict Medicaid cheats.



Altered dates. *Dates on some of the pages of Imanishi-Kari's notebooks were altered by overwriting in different inks.*

Hargett thinks the best evidence in this case comes from a British-made machine called an "electrostatic detection apparatus." Hargett explains: "You place a document on top of a metal mesh and stretch a material like Saran Wrap tight across the top. It sucks the document and the plastic tight onto the mesh and uses something like Xerox toner carried on small glass beads." The toner clings to the charged areas and is sealed onto a superimposed sticky plate. The original document is then peeled off, revealing a clear image of all the impressions on the page. The image is matched with other such images and with the original documents written on paper from the same pad. If the alignment is right—"in register," Hargett says—it is relatively simple to reconstruct the sequence in which pages were written on and torn from the pad. It is also possible to tell whether words were changed after the paper was torn from the pad.

Hargett and Stewart also examined the two types of ballpoint ink used in Imanishi-Kari's notebooks and, through analysis of printing patterns and paper thickness, determined that much of the writing was done on two pads of paper. Finally, they scrutinized the dates and discovered that some had been changed in a way they consider suspicious. This is what they found:

- A 1986 notebook of Imanishi-Kari's contains many pages in numbered sequence from pads the Secret Service labels "A" and "B." A 1984 notebook also contains four pages, not in sequence, from pad B, which suggests that they were written in 1986.
- One of the four B-pad pages in the 1984 notebook was written while directly atop another page on that pad. The odd thing is that the top page is numbered 41 and the one directly underneath is numbered 113.
- Page 25 in the 1986 notebook comes from pad B. So does page 30 in the 1984 notebook. Curiously, the imprint of page 25 is found in alignment on page 30, indicating that it was written, torn from the pad, and put in the 1986 notebook before page 30 was written and put in the 1984 notebook.
- On page 96 of the 1984 notebook the date "10/12" was changed to "1/10/1985." "We can show with ink analysis that the "10/12" was produced with one ink and that the "1 slash" put in front of the "10/12" and the "9" and the "85" were produced with another ink." Hargett asks: "If you got the date wrong, why go to all this extra effort with two different pens, when you can just scratch it out and put in the right date?"
- On page 97 of the 1984 notebook the date "10/12" was changed to "1/10/1985," again with a different ink, although of a similar color. Initially the date was overwritten to 1986, then changed to 1985.
- On page 89 in the 1984 notebook, the date "10/2" was changed to "12/12." Hargett: "They made the 10 into a 12, and it's kind of a strange-looking 2, it catches your eye." He concludes that the numbers were changed to conceal the real dates. Imanishi-Kari denies this (see facing page). She admits, however, that she did indeed record data in the notebooks as much as 2 years after the experiments were done.

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