

THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION LABORATORY



Established 1943

The United States Army Criminal Investigation Laboratory's History

In 1943, the world was at war and millions of Americans answered the call to serve their country. The chain of command realized that to defeat the enemy aggressors, they needed to control the internal criminal element. The Army activated its first forensic laboratory, designated as the Scientific Investigations Branch of the Provost Marshal's Office, 12th U.S. Army Group, on 1 October 1943 in Algiers, French North Africa to accomplish this mission.

The laboratory consisted of Second Lieutenant George R. "Pappy" Bird and a photographer. They moved with advancing forces from Algiers to Naples, Italy where Sergeant James Boarders joined the new crime laboratory. The newly formed team moved to Marseilles in southern France where the team conducted its work in borrowed offices of abandoned homes. As the offensive picked up speed, Bird, who had now been promoted to captain, recognized the need for a mobile laboratory.

While in Marseilles, Captain Bird obtained a weapons repair truck and its driver from the 27th Military Police (MP) Detachment (CI). The team converted the truck into a laboratory, adding mobile capabilities to the team. Captain Bird also added a jeep and a chemist to his arsenal before rejoining the allied advance crossing the Rhine River and moving into the heart of Germany. The laboratory ended its wartime duty in Fulda, moved to Wiesbaden, and then eventually to Frankfurt.

In 1953, the European Laboratory undertook a major modernization of facilities and equipment. During this period, the laboratory assumed the additional responsibility of supervising the "lie detector program" and designation as the point of contact between the U.S. Army and INTERPOL.

The Army established the second forensic laboratory in Manila, Philippine Islands shortly after the islands' recapture from the Japanese. In 1946, the facility moved to Tokyo, Japan; unfortunately, due to inadequate facilities and equipment, the laboratory provided only limited services. In 1948, Colonel Calvin Goddard, a noted criminologist, assumed command of the Tokyo laboratory. He modernized the facility, acquired state-of-the-art scientific equipment, and added Japanese civilian and American technicians to the staff.

The third laboratory established 1 May 1945 at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, promptly relocated to Fort Gordon, Georgia in September 1948. The selective service draft provided trained individuals to staff the facility; however, persistent shortages of qualified military police criminal investigation laboratory technicians remained. To alleviate the lack of and to provide trained replacements to meet future personnel needs, the Provost Marshal General established an in-house laboratory training by on 1 February 1956. In September 1983, the laboratory moved to its current location at Fort Gillem, Georgia.

In addition to the three Regular Army Crime Laboratories, there were at least three Army Reserve Laboratories: the 379th MP Laboratory (CI), in Washington, D.C.; the 498th Laboratory (CI), in Wichita, Kansas; and the 380th MP Detachment (Crime Lab), Oakland Army Base, Oakland, California. These laboratories trained and maintained professional relationships with the laboratory at Fort Gordon, Georgia.

During the Vietnam War, the Army established a fourth forensic laboratory, the U.S. Army Republic of Vietnam Crime Laboratory in Long Binh, Vietnam. When America's involvement in Vietnam was reduced, the laboratory was closed, and its mission was reorganized under the laboratory in Japan.

On 17 September 1971, the United States Army Criminal Investigation Command (USACIDC) became a major Army Command. The three existing criminal laboratories: U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Laboratory (USACIL) at Fort Gordon, GA; Detachment B, 9th MP GP (CI) in Frankfurt, Germany; and the 515th MP Detachment B in Japan, integrated into USACIDC and were redesignated as USACIL-CONUS, USACIL-EUROPE, and USACIL-PACIFIC.

In 1985, USACIDC's Commander, Major General Eugene R. Cromartie, directed the reorganization of the USACIDC laboratory structure. His vision was implemented in 1987 with the unification of USACIDC's three crime laboratories under one command - the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Laboratory. USACIL provided a centrally directed criminal laboratory system to provide cost effective, state of the art, full-service forensic service support to the Department of Defense (DoD) law enforcement and legal agencies worldwide.

The 1990s brought the end of the Cold War and with it, a reduction of U.S. military commitments in Asia and Europe. As a result of DoD downsizing in response to reduced commitments, USACIL-PACIFIC deactivated on 15 September 1993 and USACIL-EUROPE deactivated on 1 June 1996. With the deactivations, laboratory operations consolidated, and USACIL-CONUS assumed worldwide mission responsibility.

On 25 November 2002, a groundbreaking ceremony initiated the construction of a new, state-of-the-art criminal investigation laboratory. USACIL officially occupied the facility on 11 January 2006. The laboratory consistently reviews and updates its footprint to ensure top-of-the-line forensic testing is available.

USACIL earned its national accreditation in 1985, making it the 31st forensic laboratory in the United States to become accredited. Due to our global mission, USACIL earned international accreditation on 16 February 2011 and currently maintains accreditation under ISO standards and in compliance with the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Quality Assurance Standards.

Today, USACIL is the most comprehensive full-service forensic laboratory in the DoD. It provides over 24-forensic services to include processing in DNA, CODIS, Trace Evidence, Drug Chemistry, Firearms and Tool Marks, Latent Prints, Digital and Multimedia, and Questioned Documents to all DoD investigative agencies worldwide.

The multiple decades of distinguished service can be directly attributed to the personnel, both military and civilian, of the Army's crime laboratories, who have truly lived up to their motto:

“Justitia Per Scientia” - Justice Through Science