

Voiceprint Admitted as Evidence

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U.S. District Court Judge Oliver Gasch ruled yesterday that the "voiceprint" of a defendant—the first used in a case here and the first to be accepted in a federal court—may be entered as evidence against him.

Voice spectography, the electronic plotting of vocal sounds with a series of lines, is a relatively new technique. Since 1966, it has helped lead to convictions in several lower court cases around the country but only a few law enforcement agencies have their own voice print equipment.

The voiceprints are being used here in the trial of two Northeast men charged with wounding a police officer in an apparent ambush near a Safeway store last April. The prints were made from the tape recording of an anonymous phone call to police headquarters reporting a policeman in trouble outside a Safeway at 5110 Grant St. NE.

Police said that sixth district Sgt. Ronald Wilkins, dispatched to the scene in response to the call, discovered that the only policeman in trouble was himself, as two waiting men tried to entice him into a dark alley and then began firing into his scout car. Wilkins was wounded in the wrist and leg and the ambushers fled.

More than 50 policemen searched the area unsuccessfully, but three days later, the two suspects surrendered.

Police said Wilkins had arrested both on disorderly conduct charges the week before.

Prosecuting attorneys said in a pretrial hearing yesterday

that they intend to prove with the voiceprints that one defendant, Albert H. Raymond, 17, of 5117 Grant St. NE, phoned in the false report. Raymond is being tried as an adult in the felony case along with Roland F. Addison, 20, of 704 51st St. NE. Both are charged with assault with intent to kill and assaulting a police officer.

Defense attorneys had asked that the voiceprints, produced

by a Michigan State Police spectograph expert, be excluded as evidence on the grounds that the technique isn't reliable as a legal device and hasn't been tested enough. The prints were obtained by the U.S. Attorney's office here; the metropolitan police department has not yet employed the technique in its investigations.

During the day-and-a-half pretrial hearing, a good deal of which was spent establish-

ing the expertise of expert witnesses, voiceprints were compared favorably by the prosecution with fingerprints, and disparagingly by the defense with lie detector tests, which are considered too inaccurate to be admissible as evidence.

Dr. Oscar Tosi Michigan State University speech professor who made a recent study of voiceprinting for the Justice Department, testified

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in D.C. Case

that no two human voices can produce the same spectogram. As an identification tool, he said, the voiceprint of a person is as unique as a fingerprint.

Dr. Donald G. Stuart, a linguistics professor at Georgetown University who testified for the defense, said Tosi's studies—of the voice prints of male students at Michigan State speaking "general American midwestern dialect"—left

unanswered "the question of whether all human voices are inherently different from other human voices."

The impulses that create the voiceprints mainly reflect the size and shape of the vocal tract, he said, and "it is always possible for someone else's vocal tract to assume that size and shape."

After denying the defense's motion, Judge Gasch began selecting a jury. The trial is expected to begin this morning.