

# Prints Fail in Soledad Case

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By Harold V. Streeter

A fingerprint expert, like a blood-typing specialist who preceded him to the stand, conceded readily today that he was unable to link either of two defendants to the murder of guard John V. Mills at Soledad prison.

Spiro T. Vasos of the state's Criminal Identification and Investigation Bureau in Sacramento testified that various items of evidence from the slaying had been brought to him for examination.

But the short, thin-mustached witness, an authority of more than 22 years standing in his field, said that despite careful examination and comparison with inked fingerprints of the defendants he could make no identification.

## Hems Checked

The items he examined, he said, included Mills' cap, Mills' flashlight which the prosecution said was used to beat him, a section of the third-tier guard railing where the beating took place, and a bloody palm-print lifted from a wall.

The flashlight was found on wet ground outside Y wing, where the murder occurred, and Prosecutor William Curtis said in his opening statement that witnesses saw George Jackson, since killed in a San Quentin prison escape attempt, use it to beat Mills about the face and head.

Subsequently, Curtis said, the witnesses saw John Clutchette, one of the present defendants, take a towel and wipe the flashlight clean of what appeared to be blood.

## Partial Print

Vasos said there was a partial fingerprint on the flashlight, but that he could find "no matching characteristics" when he compared it with prints from Jackson, Clutchette, or Fleeta Drum-

go, the second of the defendants.

The palm-print had been taken from a wall between a cell occupied by Clutchette on the third tier and another.

"Would it be fair to conclude that your examination produced no evidence to connect Mr. Drumgo or Mr. Clutchette or Mr. Jackson with this case?" asked defense attorney Richard Silver.

"I could make no identification," Vasos conceded.

His answer, which made it clear that the prosecution's case will stand or fall on the testimony of some 20 convict eyewitnesses, was similar to one given yesterday by Theodore R. Elzerman.

Elzerman, also of the CII, went to Soledad a few hours after Mills was murdered and flung from the third-floor catwalk on Jan. 16, 1970.

He photographed the blood splotches on catwalk railings, ceilings, floors and walls. He had latent fingerprints lifted.

## Searches Cells

He searched the cells of five suspects, including those of the two black defendants on trial.

At day's end yesterday, defense attorney Floyd Silliman asked:

"Mr. Elzerman would it be fair to say that the result of all your hard work and effort in this case was a big fat zero?"

"I would say it was," replied the witness, now a criminologist for the Illinois Bureau of Identification.

To date, not one of the eight prosecution witnesses has linked Clutchette or Drumgo with the murder.

The convict testimony may get under way tomorrow or Friday. The trial, now in its third week, is before a jury of nine women and three men.