

## CHAPTER VII

# Protocol for the Transfer of Human Remains

The legal code protecting unidentified human remains varies among provinces and states. In British Columbia, for example, such material is covered by the Anatomy Act as administered through the authority of the Office of Chief Coroner, while in Alberta all such cases are administered by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner under the terms of the Provincial Human Fatalities Enquiry Act. At any rate, the investigating officer has the initial responsibility of ensuring that approval has been obtained from those in authority in accordance with policies and the law, before passing the material on to a specialist for expert analysis.

The working arrangement for all R.C.M.P. detachments in British Columbia is that, with approval from the local coroner or from the Chief Coroner, all unidentified skeletal remains and associated relevant evidence are delivered, usually in person, to the R.C.M.P. Crime Detection Laboratory (Vancouver) who then re-allocate some materials. The contributing officer may then bring the remains to us.

Most forensic anthropologists are fully aware of the rigorous demands of maintaining continuity of evidence. However, when an archaeologist, anatomist or physical anthropologist has only occasional involvement in forensic cases it may be necessary for the law enforcement officer to remind the recipient of the need for continuity of evidence. This includes signing for the material, keeping it in secure storage at all times, being able to account for keys and persons with access to the remains, and signing for its release at the end of his investigation.