

**DR. JOHN H. GÖHRINGER**  
**BLOODSTAIN PATTERN PIONEER**

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In 1981, during my search for early references to bloodstain pattern interpretation, I chanced to receive a copy of the doctoral dissertation of John H. Göhringer at the University of Heidelberg in 1941. The copy of Göhringer's dissertation was sent to me by Karl Schmidt who at the time was incarcerated in Frankfurt for the murder of his wife. But that is another story for another time. Karl sent me a copy of Göhringer's dissertation which was in German and, as was his custom, he also included an English translation of it as well. Karl translated many articles for me as he was fluent not only in German, his native language, but also articles that were published in French, Spanish, Italian, and Russian.

The title of Dr. Göhringer's thesis in English was, *IS IT POSSIBLE TO ESTABLISH THE FALLING HEIGHT AND DIRECTION OF A FALLEN DOWN DROP FROM THE APPEARANCE OF THE STAIN ON VARIOUS TARGETS?*<sup>1</sup> A synopsis of his research is given at the end of this eulogy.

It was a coincidence that I ever met John Göhringer. Although I had received his doctoral dissertation from Karl Schmidt in 1981, it was not until 1 November 1985, some four years later, when I made a trip to Utica, New York to assist an attorney in a murder case that I would learn more about this pioneer in bloodstain evidence research.

Utica sounded somewhat familiar as I had just read something about Utica while copying portions of Dr. Göhringer's dissertation. I intended to include his research in an article I was writing. Karl Schmidt had not translated the last page of Göhringer's dissertation which was his "lebenslauf" or the life course of the author. Having a passing knowledge of the German language I had noticed that John Göhringer was born in Utica, New York, which, by chance, was my destination the very next day. Interestingly, I have never had another case in Utica, New York in my entire career.

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<sup>1</sup> Göhringer, John H., *IS IT POSSIBLE TO ESTABLISH THE FALLING HEIGHT AND THE DIRECTIONALITY OF A DROPPED DOWN DROP OF BLOOD FROM THE APPEARANCE OF THE STAIN ON VARIOUS TARGETS?*, Inaugural dissertation for the achievement of a Doctor's degree at the High Medical Faculty at the Ruprecht-Karl-University in Heidelberg, 1941.

After Phyllis and I had settled into our room I looked through the Utica telephone directory and found one Göhringer listed. I called the number and spoke to Helen Göhringer who was a first cousin of John Göhringer. She informed me that John was alive and well and lived in Boulder, Colorado and she gave me his telephone number.

After returning to Corning I telephoned Dr. Göhringer on 4 November 1985 and I enjoyed a lengthy conversation with him during which Dr. Göhringer invited me to visit him if I should ever be near Boulder.

My next trip to Denver, Colorado was not until February 1987. At that time I drove up to Boulder and had the pleasure of visiting retired Dr. John H. Göhringer and his lovely wife, Herta. He was delighted that his doctoral dissertation had survived the war and was still of interest forty-five years after he had written it. I was surprised to learn that Dr. Göhringer did not even have a copy of his own early research. The reason for this will become clear shortly. After I returned to Corning I mailed him a copy of his dissertation, both in German and in English.

In August of 1987 I returned to Denver to direct the 34th Bloodstain Evidence Institute. I invited Dr. Göhringer to come down to Denver and see first hand the experiments students were conducting during the Institute. I recall that it was a very hot day and the location where the Institute was held was not easily found. As a result Dr. Göhringer drove around quite a while before he found us. He was very hot and tired from his trip but still, at seventy-eight years of age, he stayed most of the day displaying great interest in the subject he had researched for his 1941 Doctoral Dissertation so many years before. The students were very pleased to have had the opportunity to meet someone who was, in a real sense, a part of the living history of bloodstain pattern interpretation.

While Dr. Göhringer's research was interesting it was, like my own, not really very original as others had done the same thing many years before. He asked me to comment on his research and I told him it appeared he had not considered the effect of target surface texture in producing "spines" or degree of spatter. He accepted this very graciously. Overall, his doctoral dissertation was well organized and accurate. A very brief synopsis of his research is given on pages 4 and 5 of this article.

As is often the case I discovered a far more interesting story in Dr. John H. Göhringer than anything I could ever have anticipated. One of the many questions I asked him during our first telephone conversation on 4 November 1985 was, "What was it like to be an American citizen who was a student of medicine at the University of Heidelberg in Germany in 1941? His answer was quite lengthy and so remarkable that to be sure I did not forget any of it I asked if he would write it down and send it to me which he did. The answer Dr. John Göhringer sent to me from Boulder, Colorado dated March 12, 1986 is included as pages 6 and 7 of this article. His letter is fascinating, to say the least. Read it, it is important history of our discipline and also history of the 20th century. Again, you should read it if you have a genuine interest in this subject.

When the 1992 Annual meeting of the International Association of Bloodstain Pattern Analysts was to be held in Colorado Springs, Colorado, I immediately thought that it would be interesting for our members to hear directly from Dr. Göhringer who I had already characterized as a pioneer in this discipline. I called him on 25 August 1992 and persuaded him to speak at our meeting on Saturday 26 September 1992. Dr. Göhringer was transported to and from the meeting by local IABPA members because at that time he was just two weeks short of his eighty-third birthday. Dr. Göhringer presented an interesting review of his research as well as his experiences during World War II which he had sent to me in an earlier letter.

It was my pleasure to have met and known Dr. John H. Göhringer. He was, without doubt, the last person to conduct meaningful research in the discipline of bloodstain pattern research in Europe before World War II. I am happy that I was able to find him and persuade him to attend the Colorado Springs meeting in 1992 where he so very eloquently gave those present a brief glimpse into living history of bloodstain pattern interpretation, a discipline we should all respect.

The following two pages contain a brief synopsis of the research conducted by the late John H. Göhringer for his doctoral dissertation at the University of Heidelberg:

AUS DEM INSTITUT FÜR GERICHTLICHE MEDIZIN  
DER UNIVERSITÄT HEIDELBERG  
DIREKTOR: PROF. B. MUOLLER

KANN AUS DEM BLUTBILD AUF VERSCHIEDENEN  
UNTERLAGEN DIE FALLHÖHE UND RICHTUNG DES  
GEFALLENEN TROPFENS ERMITTELT WERDEN?

Inaugural - Dissertation  
zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde einer  
Hohen Medizinischen Fakultät der  
Ruprecht-Karl-Universität zu  
Heidelberg

vergelegt von  
John Göhringer  
aus Utica/ N.Y.  
U.S.A.

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1941

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From the Institute of Forensic Medicine  
at the University in Heidelberg  
Professor Dr. Berthold Müller, Director

***IS IT POSSIBLE TO ESTABLISH THE FALLING HEIGHT AND THE  
DIRECTIONALITY OF A DROPPED DOWN DROP OF BLOOD FROM  
THE APPEARANCE OF THE STAIN ON VARIOUS TARGETS?***

Inaugural dissertation for the achievement of a Doctor's degree  
at the High Medical Faculty at the Ruprecht-Karl-University in  
Heidelberg, presented by:

John Göhringer, from Utica, New York 1941

In the case of drops of constant volumes the number of  
spines increased very little with an increase of falling

height, however, the number of spines with rising volumes augmented very fast. The smaller the impact angle, the longer the stain. The length of a stain depends in first place upon the impact angle, and only a little upon the falling height. The volume of perpendicularly falling drops influences the length of the stain only a little. From the length of a blood stain the impact angle can be calculated. Once a certain falling height is attained, at the lower part of the stain several strings appear. The height at which these strings first appear is called the marginal height. If this value is quite small and the impact angle large, the drop fell from a low height. The greater the falling height, the less the spreading out of the stain. The greater the distance between the source and the point of impact, the more stains appeared in the shape of an exclamation mark. When the volume of the fallen blood drop is known, it is possible to draw conclusions concerning the falling height, when studying the stains diameter. Blood drops falling onto writing paper indicate their approximate falling height by the number of spines around their stains.

A drop from 5cm falling height produced a stain of 8mm diameter. From the stain the falling height can be concluded, provided the size of the blood drop is known. At 50cm falling distance an average of 22 spines. It is possible to draw conclusion concerning the falling height from the number of spines.

As we are now well aware, the texture of the target surface will determine the extent of "spines", not the distance fallen prior to impact. Also, while both Dr. Göhringer and I conducted the same experiments on the relationship between the falling height of a drop of blood and the resulting diameter of the bloodstain it produced, as did Balthazard<sup>2</sup> and others, there is no practical application for this information at scenes where bloodstains are observed. Nevertheless, all of our graphs were congruent.

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<sup>2</sup> Balthazard, V., R. Piedelievre, H. Desoille, and L. Dero-  
bert, "Etude des Sang Projete, *Annales Medecine legale De  
Criminologie Police Scientifique, Medecene Sociale, et Toxi-  
cologie*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 1938, pp. 265-323.

4660 White Road Circle #4  
Boulder, Col. 80301  
March 12, 1986

Dear Prof. MacDonell -

I enjoyed our telephone conversation very much. Helen Göhringer who gave you my number is a Mt. Holyoke graduate where you [she?] spent some time teaching. She has been retired for some years.

That 10 year old boy you knew [this reference is unclear] has been a real good service to you. Along the way, you have apparently pulled all the levers the right way to keep you going in the right direction toward your goal.

Your book<sup>3</sup> is most interesting and informative from cover to cover. Being a Pioneer (thank you) I could visualize many of your experiments - sort of watching over your shoulder. To get consistent satisfactory readings with firearms must have been interesting and difficult.

I admire your tenacity and self confidence, which had to be deeply ingrained to begin giving birth to an art which has not been developed to any degree. You must have enjoyed a great sense of satisfaction and achievement to have produced such an in depth study of bloodstains. The impression I have is that you lead an active, interesting, exciting life and enjoy every minute of it.

Never in my wildest dreams, did it even occur to me that some material I had penned 45 years ago would be resurrected out of the Heidelberg files.

The direction the world was taking more or less determined the Bloodstains would be the topic of my dissertation.

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<sup>3</sup> I sent Dr. Göhringer a copy of *BLOODSTAIN PATTERN INTERPRETATION*, 1982 and autographed it to a "Pioneer" in this discipline.

In 1941, Germany was bombing England and England was bombing Germany. I was in the process of finishing my exams and writing my thesis, which was required to get a diploma. Time was an important factor. I planned to limit the number of tests and results should not be too time consuming.

Any other subject would have required numerous references to go through and be considered.

I took my last exam on December 7, 1941. That same day I heard Hitler's speech declaring war on U.S. The following morning police picked me up and I was transported to an old castle near Salzberg. U.S. citizens from all the European countries were held there as internees. After 7 months we were discharged. I went to Vienna to wait for the end of the war.

I left U.S. 1937 and returned 1947 with my wife, Herta and 2 sons, 3 and 4 years of age. I graduated from Hobart 1932, my oldest son, Fred graduated 1964. Peter, the youngest son graduated from Northland College, Wis. and has a MPA degree from Ohio University.

After returning, I joined the Staff of Marty State Hospital. Later I moved to Rochester, N.Y. and went into private practice for 6 years. We wanted to go West. At the time the V.A. was looking for physicians. I found a vacancy at the Fort Lyas V.A. in south east Colorado. Since 1976 I have been retired.

I wonder if other countries have made any advances in the bloodstain area of research. Is your book available in other countries?

Boulder has an average of 1 - 3 homicides on a weekly basis.

Should you ever have to come this way for any reason I would very much like to meet you.

Sincere best wishes for continued success -

John H. Göhringer

I shall conclude by stating that it was my good fortune to have met and become a good friend of Dr. John H. Göhringer and his lovely wife, Herta. John was one of the last pioneers in the discipline of bloodstain pattern interpretation.

John was a scientist as well as a practitioner of the healing arts. He lived at a time when the world was in a great war and, because he was in Germany on December 7th 1941, he became one of the first American prisoners of war. He knew first, and first-hand, what it would be like for our Japanese American citizens who were living in California at the beginning of World War II when they were incarcerated for no reason other than the fact they were Japanese. Many citizens, such as the family of Dr. Thomas T. Noguchi, were taken to "camps" far inland away from the West coast for what was termed "security reasons".

Herta M. Göhringer sent me a letter on August 8th 1999 and informed me of John's passing. He died peacefully in Syracuse, New York, on Sunday July 11th 1999. He and Herta had been living there for the past few years.

Mrs. Göhringer wrote:

*"We will always have John in our hearts and mind as: Loving Husband-- Cherished Father-- and Grandfather-- and Best Friend."*

Our association lost a bit of its history on July 11th 1999.

Herbert Leon MacDonell,  
Founder and Former Historian,  
International Association of  
Bloodstain Pattern Analysts, and  
Unofficial Archivist for the same



## Dr. John H. Gohringer

Dr. John H. Gohringer, 89, of 417 Churchill Ave., **Syracuse**, died Sunday at Crouse Hospital.

He was born in Utica. He graduated from Hobart College and received his medical degree from Heidelberg University. He practiced medicine in Rochester and Colorado. He was a member of Our Savior Lutheran Church in Utica.

**Survivors:** His wife, Herta M. Gohringer; two sons, Peter of Rochester and Fred of Milldale, Conn.; five grandchildren.

**Services:** 2 p.m. Wednesday at the Chapel of Forest Hill Cemetery, Utica. No calling hours. Friedel, Williams, Coriale & Edmunds Funeral Home, New Hartford, has arrangements.

Date of death:

7-11-1999