



Pathology & Biology Section – 2008

G58 One Entrance Wound, Three Bullets, and Four Pulls of the Trigger: An Unusual Case of a Suicidal Gunshot Wound of the Head

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The goal of this presentation is to illustrate an unusual case of suicide with a revolver and multiple squib bullets.

This presentation will impact the forensic community by illustrating the need for close collaboration between the forensic pathologist and the firearm examiner when dealing with cases of unusual gunshot wounds. Suicide is one of the most important public health issues in the United States. Suicide represents the eleventh leading cause of death in the United States. Suicides comprise approximately 12% of the caseload of the Allegheny County Medical Examiner's Office in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Suicide rates for this country have been relatively stable over the past decade averaging approximately 10 per 100,000 populations. The most common territories of Southern Italy, fifteen women aged over 70 were murdered. method of suicide in the United States is the use of a firearm.

An elderly Caucasian male with a history of prostate cancer recently learned that his prostate cancer had metastasized to his pancreas. Family members relayed that he made comments that he did not want to go through radiation and chemotherapy treatment again. On the morning of his demise, the decedent told his wife that "It just ain't worth it anymore." Later that morning his elderly wife heard a thump in the adjacent room. The decedent was found in the fetal position on top of his overturned walker. The wife called her brother-in-law to help, at which time they found blood coming from his head and a revolver in his right hand.

The external examination revealed an elderly Caucasian male with a single contact penetrating gunshot wound of entrance to the right temple region of the head. Dense soot deposits were present on the skin and within the wound track. A faint muzzle abrasion was identified surrounding the entrance wound. Gunpowder residue was grossly visible on the left index finger. Radiographs of the head revealed three separate bullets. Autopsy revealed a single entrance with internal beveling of the right temple bone. The path of the bullets was leftward through the bilateral temporal lobes of the brain. One .38 caliber slug was recovered from the left temporal lobe and the other two slugs were recovered from the subcutaneous tissue of the left temporal scalp.

The firearms report found the Colt .38 special caliber revolver to be in good working order. The six shot cylinder of the revolver contained three spent cartridges and three live cartridges. Interestingly, the three spent cartridges were in positions 1, 2, and 4. In position 3 was a live round with its primer struck. The three slugs recovered from the decedent's head were .38 caliber lead wad cutter-type bullets that were found to be fired by the above Colt revolver.

Collaboration between the pathologist and firearms examiner concluded that the decedent used his right thumb to pull the trigger four times and his left hand was used to steady the revolver. The first two cartridges were squibs that lodged in the barrel of the revolver. The third cartridge was a dud; the primer was struck with the revolver's firing pin but it did not discharge. The fourth cartridge was live and when struck by the firing pin discharged forcing itself and the two lodged squib bullets out of the barrel of the revolver and through the skull and brain of the decedent creating one classic entrance wound and bullet path. The bases of the two squib bullets confirm this scenario along with the deformation of the nose of the first squib slug and the relative pristine nature of the fourth live round.

Suicide, Handgun, Squib Bullets