



D34 A Case Study of a Suicide in the Mountains of Cyprus - Focusing on Postmortem Changes

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be familiar with the difficulties of working a death scene in the extreme conditions of the

Cypriot Mountains and the unique postmortem changes that occur in the harsh environment

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by exposing attendees to postmortem changes and activities, including putrefaction, mummification, adipocere, antemortem, and postmortem injuries, as well as insect activity, and animal activity.

In July 2007, a decorated U.S. Army Colonel, serving as the Defense Attaché at the United States Embassy in Cyprus was reported missing. It was believed by the Associated Press and the U.S. Ambassador that the Colonel may have been abducted by one of a several organizations hostile to the U.S. Mission in the Middle East. An extensive search by the Cypriot police and the Cypriot Military was initiated. The U.S. Ambassador requested assistance from the U.S. military. A joint Department of Defense team of Special Agents was formed through the U.S. Army European Command, consisting of Special Agents from the U.S. Army Criminal Investigative Command, the U.S. Air Force Office of Special Investigations, and the U.S. Naval Criminal Investigative Service. This team gathered in Nicosia, Cyprus and assisted the Cypriot Police and the Foreign Service Office Investigator of the U.S. Embassy during their investigation. The formal investigation showed the Colonel was not abducted, but had taken his own life in the austere conditions of the Cypriot Mountain Range.

The Colonel committed suicide by slicing his neck with a sharp paint scraper extending from just below the left ear to about midline of the neck. The carotid artery was nicked as a result of the slice, as well as damage to the jugular vein, and the Colonel slowly bled to death. Evidence from the scene and the autopsy confirmed that the cause of death was exanguination as a result of the damaged artery and vein. Suicide as the manner of death was confirmed through normal investigative measures such as interviews, scene analysis of multiple scenes, and computer forensics.

In the time after death, the severe conditions of the mountain range caused several postmortem changes that are rarely seen together. The putrefaction caused severe blotching of the skin. This led several newspapers to report the Colonel was severely beaten and that the cause of death was a murder. These reports were incorrect and were due to leaks of pictures and information from within the police force. The extreme heat and dry air caused mummification to occur on the Colonel's hands. Additionally, sweat from his bout of shock became trapped when the Colonel laid down in the shade and created a small area of adipocere on the Colonel's back. The injury to the Colonel's neck provided an area of antemortem injury. However, animals and insects were drawn to the area of injury after death and caused several postmortem injuries. There were also several areas of animal activity on the Colonel's right leg. Taken together, the areas of postmortem activity and changes provides an excellent opportunity to refresh one's knowledge in these areas.

Suicide, Cyprus, Postmortem