



### **D17 A Case Study of a Murder Staged to Look Like a Suicidal Hanging: Focusing on the Small Details That Led to the Successful Resolution of the Investigation**

*David G. Pauly, MFS\*, Methodist University, Department Applied Forensic Science, Forensic Science Concentration, Fayetteville, NC 28311; and Steven L. Downs, MFS\*, United States Army CID, 11th MP Bn (CID), Fort Hood, TX 76544*

After attending this presentation, attendees will be familiar with the key investigative steps needed to successfully detect a staged crime scene. The benefits of not making a hasty judgment while conducting a death scene examination and preliminary investigation will be discussed. Keeping the focus of the investigation broadly to verify or rule out all possibilities will be espoused. A multidisciplinary approach to investigations is the key in obtaining outstanding results in the pursuit of the truth.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by exposing participants to various key steps in solving some of the most difficult death investigations.

In late October 1992, a quiet military housing area was stunned by the apparent suicide of a 21-year-old army wife and mother of two small children. Military members represent all spectrums of our society. Military families often face extreme challenges that are unique that frequently cause stressors to build to the point of tragedy. Murder and suicide are sometimes the unfortunate outcome. The United States Army Criminal Investigation Division is chartered to investigate all unattended deaths on U.S. Army installations worldwide.

CID Special Agents responded to the scene and began documenting and processing the crime scene, processing the body, and interviewing friends, neighbors, and family members. The 23-year-old soldier reported his wife went upstairs to take a shower. After hearing the water run for an unusually long time he went to check and found her hanging in the nude from an electrical cord attached to the shower head. The soldier additionally reported his wife had made prior suicide attempts following the recent death of her mother and had a family history of depression. The body was taken to the North Carolina Medical Examiner's Office, Chapel Hill, NC, where an autopsy supported the asphyxial death of the wife. A review of her medical records supported the Soldier's allegation of the prior suicide attempt.

The soldier was allowed to take his wife to Texas to be buried and his children taken to their grandparents for long term care. Upon his return to duty nearly a month later, CID Special Agents conducted a thorough interview in which the soldier was confronted with inconsistencies between his statements, other interviews conducted and the evidence from the death scene. He subsequently confessed to getting into a fight with his wife during which she knocked herself unconscious. At that time he formed the plan to hang her from the shower to make it look like a suicide. He placed the electrical cord on the shower head and then hung his wife.

**Murder, Hanging, Suicide**