



Pathology/Biology Section - 2013

G85 Suicide by Double Gunshot Wounds From a Pen Gun: A Case Report

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be able to recognize a pen or a homemade gun as a firearm, to identify entrance wounds as a 0.22 long rifle bullet, and will understand how a low-energy bullet can be lethal.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by exploring how an unusual firearm was used in a double-gunshot wound suicide.

In firearm museums, you can find ingenious systems like “pen guns” or “cane guns” that are known to be used for espionage. They are single-shot firearms.

Pen guns were primarily designed for the purpose of self defense or giving a signal. It is actually a homemade gun, adapted from an old-style cartridge pen or made by any competent machinist. But, harmless as it may seem, this is a device with deadly firepower. It is made for a personal use like self defense or criminal activity. It could be a surprising weapon with many accidents described in literature.

The design of the pen gun consisted of a housing looking like a writing pen, containing a spring-loaded firing mechanism. The ammunition used is a 0.22 long rifle manufactured cartridge.

Reported is a case of lethal injuries inflicted with a pen gun. This case represents an unusual firearm fatality reported to a weapon made to look innocuous.

A 49-year-old-man was found dead lying on his back on a mattress. To the right side of the body there was a pen on the floor. Inside the pen was a metallic cylinder, housing a spring-loaded metal rod; the chamber contained an empty 0.22 long rifle cartridge. Another empty 0.22 long rifle cartridge was found in the house, far from the body, on the stairs, with blood spatters on the walls. A letter was found close to the corpse. Standard X-rays showed two bullets in the left side of the chest. The external examination revealed the beginning state of decay. Upper extremities presented desiccation. There were two entrance wounds of 4mm in diameter surrounded by soot deposit. They were located on the chest 5cm to 6cm medial to the left nipple.

At autopsy, the first wound tract stopped in the abdominal musculature. It was a short tract, without bone, vascular, or visceral lesion. A non-deformed 0.22 long rifle bullet was found in the muscle. The second wound tract passed through the sixth left rib, through the pericardia and left ventricle, the trough inferior lobe of the left lung, and through the eighth intercostal space at the back. Autopsy found a hemopneumothorax, a hemopericardium, a left ventricle wound. A non-deformed 0.22 long rifle bullet was found in the musculature. The cause of death was massive bleeding. The manner of death was ruled as suicidal.

Primarily designed for self-defense, pen guns can be converted to weapons by simple means. Pen guns were not designed as assassination weapons. They would fail miserably in this role. They were conceived as clandestine escape weapons, not likely to be found during an initial search. It is surprising to observe fatal firearm injuries caused by pen guns. A 0.22 long rifle bullet is known to have low velocity and energy and their wounding capacity is consequently low. Generally, the projectile does not exit the body and the entrance wound is surrounded by a large amount of soot. The lethal potential of pen guns is real when fired at close range.

Pen Gun, Suicide, Chest