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Burns could not hide the bullet - A case of gunshot wound followed by burns

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ABSTRACT

A case report is presented where an attempt was made by the criminals to conceal a homicide by firearm by putting the dead body on fire. However a clever and systematic forensic investigation revealed the true cause of death. The paper stresses on the need of a detailed and thorough post-mortem examination in cases which appear pretty straightforward initially.

Keywords: Concealed homicide, postmortem burning, firearms

Case Report



Figure 1. Partially burnt body lying in the partially burnt husk in the field.

Strange are the ways of the criminals. They think they can get away by trying to dispose of bodies after murder. Seldom do they succeed however.



Figure 2. Body, on the mortuary table on reconstruction.

Tandoor murder case was one the examples highlighted recently in the media of this kind where the victim was first shot & then put in tandoor (N.B. Tandoor is an Indian style burner which develops high temperature. It is used to cook Indian style bread, which requires high temperature to cook) to burn.

The present instance was a similar one. A dead body was referred to us on 3.3.97 for expert opinion (Deptt. of Forensic Medicine, PGIMS, Rohtak). The naked burnt body of a male was found in suspicious circumstances in the fields. Picture 1 tells the story all by itself. Examination of partially burnt body revealed the following injuries (Photo No. 2,3,4,5 & 6).

(i) There was a rifled firearm entrance wound 3x2 cms over the back of neck at the level of 6th cervical spine, fracturing 6th & 7th cervical vertebrae. A yellow metallic deformed bullet was recovered (Photo 6). Ecchymosis in the area indicated that it was an ante mortem injury (ii) There was another rifled firearm entrance wound 3.5x2.5 cms over the left side of neck, about 2 cms. away from midline and 4 cms. below the angle of mandible. It was fracturing the 2nd thoracic vertebrae from where the bullet was recovered. Ecchymosis was present in the surrounding area.

Oozing of blood from wound sites kept the area somewhat wet. This was one of the reasons that the entrance wounds remained somewhat protected even after burns.



Figure 3 (above). wound of entrance, and figure 4 (below) Bullet seen embedded in tissue on dissection.

That the death could not have occurred due to ante mortem burns could be proved by the fact that no carbon particles were found in the respiratory passages. The blood was not cherry red in color. This indicated that the person was first shot and then burnt to hide the criminal activity. However, one tattoo mark was identified, which helped in identification of the deceased. The burns were post mortem in nature.



Figure 5 (above) and 6 (below). Bullets recovered from the body.

Thus the burns could not bite the bullet and cold blooded murder was discovered in a partially burnt dead body. The body could be identified too because of the tattoo.