

# CASE REPORT

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## A Suicide by Self-Decapitation

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**REFERENCE:** Prichard, P. D., "A Suicide by Self-Decapitation," *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, JFSCA, Vol. 38, No. 4, July 1993, pp. 981-984.

**ABSTRACT:** A young male obtained some polyethylene rope, drove to a secluded spot in the nearby woods and used it, a tree stump and his vehicle to decapitate himself.

**KEYWORDS:** pathology and biology, suicide, self-decapitation

### Case History

The deceased was a 28-year-old male who was known to be depressed over pending criminal charges against him. He also was separated from his wife.

The victim was found by two mushroom hunters on a logging road. The head, observed first, was found on the ground approximately 24 feet behind the rear of the deceased's vehicle. The head had been severed at the base of the skull. The torso of the victim was in the driver's seat of the car which had crashed into a tree (Fig. 2). Lying a few feet away was a  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch yellow nylon rope, approximately 25 feet long. One end of the rope was tied to a tree stump just off the roadway. The other end was lying loose and had been tied with a slip knot (Fig. 1). A receipt from a building supply company dated earlier in the day was found in his trouser pocket. The receipt read "25 feet of HB Poly Rope Yellow." The price was 35 cents per foot for a total of \$9.00 including tax. The bill had been paid with a \$20 bill. Two \$5 bills were found with the receipt.

Investigation disclosed that the decedent had purchased the rope at the store that was indicated on the receipt, earlier that same day. The clerk said he did recall the transaction, but noted there was nothing unusual about the sale. He stated that the person was very quiet. The victim then drove to the scene, tied the rope to a tree stump at the side of the road and fastened the other end around his neck. He then got into his truck, buckled the seat belt, accelerated and was decapitated.

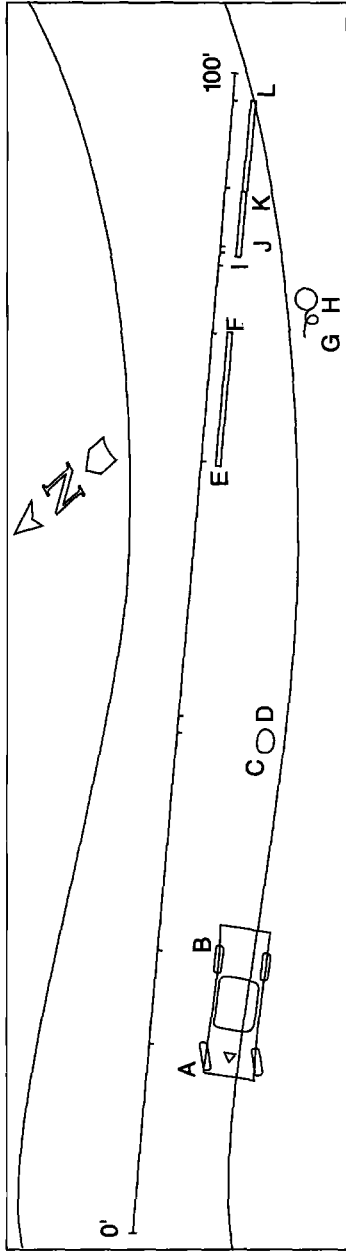
Observation of the remains at the mortuary disclosed a sharply defined wound. The appearance was similar to a decapitation wound that had been administered by a guillotine. (Figs. 3a, 3b) The blood tested negative for alcohol. The urine drug screen also was negative.

The death was officially certified as suicide by decapitation.

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REF POINT	REFERENCE DESCRIPTION	FEET / INCHES SOUTHEAST OF POINT ZERO	FEET / INCHES SOUTHWEST OF BASE LINE
A	Hub Right Front Axle	16 <sup>3</sup>	6 <sup>11</sup>
B	Hub Right Rear Axle	24 <sup>6</sup>	7 <sup>0</sup>
C	Chin of Head	43 <sup>3</sup>	9 <sup>4</sup>
D	Top Center of Head	44 <sup>6</sup>	9 <sup>8</sup>
E	End Second Tire Mark	66 <sup>7</sup>	2 <sup>1</sup>
F	Beginning Second Tire Mark	77 <sup>5</sup>	2 <sup>2</sup>
G	Knot at Free End of Rope	79 <sup>3</sup>	15 <sup>4</sup>
H	Knot at Base of Tree	83 <sup>6</sup>	14 <sup>11</sup>
I	End of First Tire Mark	84 <sup>8</sup>	2 <sup>4</sup>
J	Cigarette Butt	84 <sup>11</sup>	5 <sup>7</sup>
K	Tire Scuff Mark	91 <sup>4</sup>	2 <sup>7</sup>
L	Beginning of First Tire Mark	97 <sup>11</sup>	2 <sup>8</sup>

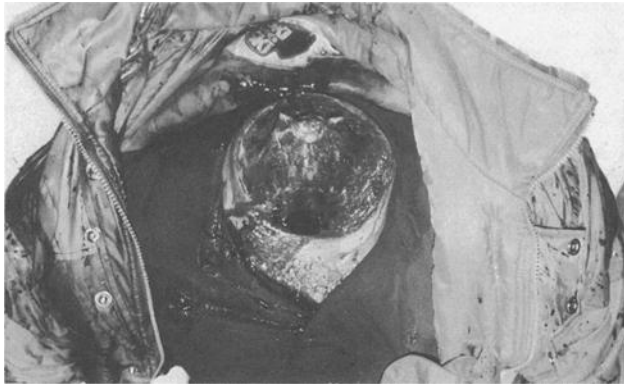


Wheel Width 5<sup>10</sup>  
 Overall Vehicle Length 13<sup>9</sup>  
 Top of Head 16<sup>9</sup> Southeast  
 from Center Rear Bumper  
 Point Zero 14 Northeast of Base

FIG. 1--The sketch and the key.



**FIG. 2** — *The torso as found at the scene.*



**FIG. 3a**— *The torso at the postmortem examination.*



**FIG. 3b**— *The head at the postmortem examination.*

### **Discussion**

After researching the coroner's files for as far back as records were kept in this county, the author was unable to locate any similar type of suicide.

The Grays Harbor County Coroner, John Bebich, a long-time law enforcement officer, stated, "In 20 years as an Aberdeen police officer and 14 years as coroner, I've never run into this type of case before. It is very, very bizarre. . ."

### *Acknowledgments*

I thank Coroner John Bebich and Sheriff Dennis Morrisette of Grays Harbor County, Washington, for making the files available.

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