

Accidental Shooting — or Murder?

by S/Sgt. P.M. Omilon and Kevin Fowler

Background, case notes and summary provided by S/Sgt. P.M. Omilon. Ed.

On the morning of January 11, 1985, at approximately 11:00 a.m., a call was received by Fort Smith, N.W.T. Detachment, about trouble at a private residence. Officers arriving at the scene discovered a male person, wrapped in a sleeping bag, at the bottom of the stairs leading to the second storey. He had a wound to his anterior and posterior upper chest area, which seemed to indicate that a gunshot had passed through his body. He was very weak and appeared to be in shock. A subsequent search of the remainder of the residence revealed the dead body of a female in the upstairs master bedroom.

The conversation with the male subject was limited; however, he said that he and his wife had had an argument and she shot him in the chest, and in the ensuing struggle, the gun had discharged and struck her in the face, killing her.

The initial results of the autopsy and investigation concurred with the male's story that the deceased was accidentally shot at close range, in the facial area. Firearms examiner, S/Sgt. Paul Michael Omilon, Forensic Laboratories, Winnipeg, was not convinced, however, and decided to dig a little deeper.

Using photographs and radiographs, S/Sgt. Omilon gathered enough evidence to suggest that the victim had been shot twice — one shot to the face at considerable range and another, closer shot to the back of the head and neck. S/Sgt. Omilon

had uncovered crucial evidence in that some of the wounds, along with the configuration of some pellets in the deceased, were consistent with posterior entrance wounds, signifying that the victim had indeed been shot twice, once from the front, and again from behind.

Working with investigators from Fort Smith and the Hay River Ident. Unit, and aided by numerous photographs taken during the initial investigation, the weeks old, disturbed crime scene was reconstructed. S/Sgt. Omilon formulated the following conclusions:

- The female victim had been standing in the corner of the master bedroom away from the door, presumably packing a suitcase, when she was shot in the facial area from a distance of approximately 5 m.
- She then walked across the room to where a telephone, night table and dresser were situated, fell to her knees and was shot at close range (approx. 1.6 to 2.0 m) in the back of the skull/neck region.
- The male collected the two expended shot shells and burned them in a wood furnace on the first floor. He went back upstairs to the bedroom, shot himself in the chest, turned the woman's body over and then returned it to its original position. He then went downstairs to the sleeping bag.

All of S/Sgt. Omilon's conclusions were verified by trace evidence — bloodstain patterns, calculations of trajectory, burnt shot shells, lead deposits, etc. — as well as evidence obtained during a second autopsy performed on the exhumed