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## SUICIDE IN A MOVING AUTOMOBILE ON A HIGHLY TRAVELED HIGHWAY

Herman M. Gunn

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A collision between an automobile and a truck occurred near Ashland, Ohio, on March 21, 1952, at 8:50 A.M. The weather was clear, and the road was dry and straight, with no obstruction of the view.

The automobile was a 1948 Hudson Sedan which swerved to the left side of the midline of the road, knocking the left rear dual wheels from a trailer loaded with 22,000 pounds of freight. The Hudson then veered off to the right, coming to rest on the south side of the road 125 feet from the point of impact. The tractor and trailer careened down the road and finally jack-knifed against a pole on the south side of the road, 425 feet from the point of impact.

The truck driver had suffered only minor injuries. The driver of the automobile was found lying on the front seat with his throat cut on both sides. In the emergency room of the hospital, his gaping right jugular vein was ligated and supportive measures instituted. This man died an hour and twenty minutes after the accident.

This writer viewed the body shortly thereafter and was immediately impressed by the clean-cut incisions on his throat. On the left side there was an incision measuring 1 inch long and ending  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inches to the left of the mid-line. It was shallow and appeared to be a "hesitation" cut. One quarter inch below this was a deep incision 5 inches long which ended  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch to the left of the mid-line. On the right side of the neck, there was a Y-shaped incision, the upper limb measuring  $5\frac{3}{4}$  inches in greatest length. The general direction of the incision on the right side of the neck was forward and downward, and it was fully  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch below the lower incision on the left side of the neck. The incision on the right side of the neck was deep, and the right jugular vein had been severed. The only other marks on the body were two small contusions and abrasions on the right knee, and about 2 inches below the right knee was a small "brush burn."

Examination of the interior of the car revealed that there was nothing that could have produced the clean cut incisions on both sides of the throat. The glass was cracked and shattered in the wind-shield and the left door, but there were no sharp fragments. There was a sharp point of metal extending from the left door window frame next to the instrument panel, but it would have been impossible for the throat to have been

cut on both sides by it. There was blood on the right lower quadrant of the plastic steering wheel.

The incisions had obviously been made with a sharp cutting instrument. The car was examined several times, but the instrument was not found. The roadside was searched without results, and on the third morning following this accident, while the writer was trying to locate a mine detector to sweep the roadside for the cutting instrument, the sheriff and an insurance investigator again examined the car. They raised the floor mat under the driver's side and found a pocket knife bearing the name "Barlow" on both sides of the forward end of the handles. The large blade was open and was  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches long and very sharp. The knife was stuck to the underside of the mat by dried blood that was smeared on the knife handle.

Pieces of the front seat cover, where the victim's head had lain, were removed and together with the knife were then taken to the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation Laboratory at London, Ohio. It was first determined that the blood stains on the knife and the seat cover were of human origin. Then the blood from both the knife handle and the seat cover were typed and both were type "O." As no one else was in the car with this man at the time of the accident, it is quite evident that this knife was the sharp instrument that was used in making the incisions on the neck.

The event can be reconstructed from the evidence that was obtained. The driver of the automobile, while going down a highly traveled road, slashed the left side of his throat. On the left side was the "hesitation" cut and then a trifle lower was a real slash. His right hand was covered with blood, so that in handling the steering wheel subsequently the blood was smeared on the right lower quadrant of the wheel. The incisions on the left were not sufficiently deep to cut the large vessels of the throat on the left side, and they were followed by slashing of the right side of the neck, where there was division of the right jugular vein. He was losing blood rapidly and slowed down and veered to the left and went into the truck. It is believed that the collision with the truck was incidental, and if the truck had not been at the particular spot at that moment, the automobile would have been found over in the ditch on the left side of the road.

The large insurance carriers of the trucking concern state that this is the first time in their experience they have had such an accident. This case is reported as a suicide in a fast traveling automobile with the accident only an incidental occurrence as the driver was dying of hemorrhage.