

The Shooting Death of Paul M. Montgomery: A Case Requiring Further Investigation

On April 1, 1980, Paul M. Montgomery, a 22-year-old man, was fatally shot in his apartment in Metairie, Louisiana. Initially classified as a suicide by the Jefferson Parish Coroner's Office, the manner of death was later changed to undetermined due to inconsistencies in the evidence and investigation. The following facts outline the circumstances and raise questions about the official conclusion.

Timeline and Circumstances:

- Evening of March 31, 1980: Paul spent the evening with three friends, visiting a bar, a bookstore, and eating breakfast in the French Quarter. The friends reported Paul was in good spirits, having consumed minimal alcohol (one six-pack shared among four). They parted ways between 5:00 and 6:00 a.m. (Sunrise: 5:50 a.m.)
- Morning of April 1, 1980:
 - Paul called co-worker Bob Daniels twice, first to say he would be late, then at approximately 8:40 a.m., stating he would pick Daniels up at noon. Daniels described Paul as "aggravated" but sober.
 - Within an hour of returning home, Paul was shot with his .22 caliber revolver, found on a dresser, not near his body.
 - Dawn Ross, Paul's former girlfriend, was present and claimed Paul shot himself at 8:45 a.m. after an argument. She reported hearing two shots: one into an aquarium, then the fatal shot.
 - Dawn Ross gave conflicting accounts of how the gun came to be on the dresser. She first said she put it there, then said she did not know and that for all she knew it could have been there all night.
 - A neighbor, Mary Ann Levitan, reported hearing an angry female voice yelling, followed by at least one gunshot, but no male voices.

Autopsy and Forensic Findings:

- Wound Details:
 - The bullet entered Paul's abdomen near the umbilicus on the right side, traveling straight with a 5–10-degree downward path, lodging in his fifth lumbar vertebra.
 - The shot was fired from approximately 5–6 inches away, evidenced by powder tattooing and ball powder in Paul's left thumb, indicating his hand was near the barrel.
 - Paul was left-handed, yet the wound was on his right side, inconsistent with typical suicidal gunshot patterns.

- Additional Injuries:
 - A broken tooth and glass fragments were found in Paul's back, despite him being found leaning forward on his bed.
 - Massive, nearly unclotted blood in the abdominal cavity suggested a lacerated right common iliac artery, indicating potential survival for up to one or two hours post-injury (Forensic Medicine, Tedeschi et al., 1977, p. 525).
- Toxicology: Paul had a blood alcohol level of 0.048%, indicating minimal alcohol consumption, contradicting Ross's claim of intoxication. No drugs were found in his system.
- Stomach Contents: Corn found in Paul's stomach was not consumed with his breakfast, suggesting he ate after returning home.

Crime Scene Evidence:

- The revolver contained three spent casings and three live cartridges. Only one casing was officially accounted for (fatal shot). A projectile taken from the aquarium was too damaged for analysis, and copper fragments under a telephone suggested a prior shot.
- Two bedcovers on the floor had concealed bullet holes, possibly from the fatal shot or an earlier discharge.
- A broken beer bottle in the bathtub, an overturned wastebasket, an overturned ashtray, and the aquarium being shot indicated a struggle and disturbed scene, despite police claims of no signs of a struggle.
- A blood-stained towel, mentioned by Ross but not documented by police, was visible in crime scene photos.
- Type O blood was found on a telephone book cover, while Paul's blood type was A, confirmed by multiple sources (Sci-Con Reports, Irving C. Stone, 1980).

Witness Statements:

- Dawn Ross:
 - Claimed Paul was "loaded" and aggressive, shooting the aquarium first, then himself.
 - Described the fatal wound as on Paul's left side, contradicted by autopsy findings.
 - Stated a bullet casing went through a bedcover, an impossibility with a revolver.
 - Reported being outside during the shots, yet polygraph results suggested she was in the room (disputed by experts Stone and Besant-Matthews).
- Friends and Co-worker: Confirmed Paul's sobriety and good mood, contradicting Ross's account.

- Neighbor: Heard female yelling and a gunshot, inconsistent with Ross's narrative of Paul's yelling.

Investigation Concerns:

- Negligence Allegations:
 - No fingerprints were taken from the revolver.
 - A Neutron Activation Test for gunshot residue was ineffective due to the ammunition type.
 - Only Ross was interviewed initially; other witnesses (neighbor, friends) were ignored.
 - Clothing evidence was mishandled, with incorrect items (e.g., tennis shoes) attributed to Paul.
 - The autopsy report was delayed nearly two months, and Paul's clothing was not examined by the pathologist.
- Official Errors:
 - Sgt. Vincent J. Lamia reported an interview with Paul's mother that never occurred, misrepresenting her statements.
 - The pathologist, Dr. P. E. Besant-Matthews, relied on inaccurate police information, initially classifying the death as suicide.
 - Sheriff Harry Lee dismissed evidence of Type O blood and resisted external inquiries.

Paul's Background:

- Paul was healthy, employed, and financially stable, with no significant debts except a \$225 loan from his mother, to be repaid by a \$450 tax refund.
- He had no history of depression, was close with family, and had plans for the future, including fishing with relatives.
- Paul had ended his relationship with Ross, who had returned to her mother's home. He was reconnecting with a former girlfriend, causing tension with Ross.

Research on Suicidal Gunshot Wounds:

- Suicidal abdominal gunshot wounds are rare, typically occurring in the epigastric region with rifles or shotguns, not handguns (Medicolegal Investigation of Gunshot Wounds, Fatteh, 1976, p. 167).
- Non-contact wounds and wounds below the umbilicus are highly unusual for suicide and warrant homicide investigation (Forensic Medicine, Tedeschi et al., 1977, p. 523).

- Studies show 76.4% of suicidal gunshot wounds target the head, with only 1–4% in the abdomen (Journal of Forensic Science, Hirsch & Adelson, 1976, p. 659).

Call to Action: The physical evidence, witness contradictions, and investigative oversights suggest Paul M. Montgomery's death may not have been a suicide. The presence of Type O blood, Ross's inconsistent statements, and the scene's condition point to a possible homicide. We urge authorities to reopen this case, conduct a thorough investigation, and interview all witnesses, including Dawn Ross, her sister Debbie, and Bob Daniels. Paul's family seeks justice and answers to unresolved questions.