



Decedent: Barnett, John Mitchell

Case: 2024-0841 Suicide

Race: White

Sex: Male

Age: 62 years

Date of Death: 03/09/2024

Time of Death: Unknown

County: Charleston, SC

Investigator: Ella Butler

Coroner's Report

On March 9, 2024, the Charleston County Coroner's Office was notified by Charleston County EMS of a death of an unidentified male as a result of an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Per reports from EMS and the Charleston Police Department, the decedent, later identified as John Barnett, a 62-year-old white male, was discovered unresponsive in his vehicle in the parking lot of the round Holiday Inn by hotel staff during a welfare check. Hotel staff called 9-1-1 at 1013 hours. Upon EMS arrival, the Charleston Fire Department forced entry into the locked vehicle. Charleston Police Department personnel removed the weapon from his right hand, disarmed it, and placed it securely on the console for further evaluation. The death was verified at 1033 hours by EMS.

Deputy Coroner Butler responded to the incident location and met with law enforcement, hotel staff, and the decedent's attorneys who had requested a welfare check. The decedent was in a seated position in the driver's seat of an orange in color Dodge Ram truck with Louisiana license tag # Z103854. The cab of the vehicle was warm, and the truck was out of fuel. The decedent was clad in a multicolored sleeveless shirt, denim pants, and black belt. A pair of blue denim slip-on shoes were noted on the floor of the driver's seat adjacent to the gas pedal. The body was warm, rigor had not yet set in, lividity blanched with light pressure and was consistent with the body positioning. An external exam of the body revealed two correlating defects that appeared to be from a single, perforating gunshot wound. The hard-contact entrance wound was to the right temple and an exit wound was located to the parietooccipital region. There were no other signs of injury. Black powder/discoloration, which appeared to be gunshot residue, was noted on the decedent's right hand. A semi-automatic Smith & Wesson pistol, a loaded magazine, and unfired 9mm Luger cartridges were located on the vehicle console. A defect in the truck's headliner, directly above the driver's seat, was noted and documented. A search of the vehicle revealed a single-fired shell casing. A notebook containing writing resembling a suicide note was located on the passenger seat.

After the decedent and vehicle were photographed and examined, the body was placed in a body bag and locked with tag number 0005227. The body was transported by Charleston County Rescue 4 to the Charleston County Coroner's Office to await an autopsy. The forensic pathologist was provided pertinent information. The autopsy was scheduled for March 11, 2024.

The decedent's hotel room was photographed, searched, and documented. Mr. Barnett's attorneys remained on scene and were interviewed.

Notification to Mr. Barnett's next of kin was made in person with assistance from the Avoyelles Parish Sheriff's Office in Louisiana. Deputy Coroner Butler spoke with the decedent's mother and brother, gathered relevant social and medical information, answered questions, and discussed the next steps.

After the autopsy, the body was released to Hixon Brothers Funeral Home, per the family's request.

The decedent's vehicle was examined further by the Charleston Police Department resulting in the recovery of a projectile that caused the defect in the headliner. The recovered weapon, projectile, and fired cartridge case were forensically evaluated by the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division Firearms Department. Examinations concluded the recovered projectile was discharged from the Smith & Wesson which was registered to Mr. Barnett. Furthermore, during the autopsy, the trajectory of the wound path was documented. All findings were consistent with a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

A review of body-worn camera footage from the first responding officers verified the firearm was initially discovered in the decedent's right hand. Charleston Police Department personnel disarmed the weapon and placed it securely on the console for further evaluation.

Per reports from family and colleagues, Mr. Barnett traveled to Charleston on February 26, 2024, from his residence in Louisiana to participate in a deposition pertaining to a lawsuit with the Boeing Corporation. Mr. Barnett was deposed by Boeing attorneys on March 7, 2024, and was deposed by his attorneys on March 8, 2024. Per reports, the deposition on the 8th was paused early to give participants a rest period with plans to reconvene the following morning on March 9, 2024, at 1000 hours.

At approximately 0900 hours on March 9, 2024 a courtesy phone call was made to the decedent by his attorneys; however, he did not answer. As a result, his attorneys called the hotel to request a welfare check. Hotel staff searched the hotel and parking lot and discovered Mr. Barnett in his vehicle as described above.

The Charleston County Coroner's Office retrieved original surveillance video recordings from inside the hotel as well as of the hotel parking lot. A thorough review of the footage revealed Mr. Barnett entered the hotel lobby on March 8, 2024, at 1926 hours. He exited the hotel at 2037 hours. At 2045 hours, his truck was observed backing into the parking space where it was later discovered. Video surveillance recordings continuously record his vehicle. Throughout the review of surveillance video spanning the evening of March 8th through the morning of March 9th, from the time the vehicle was backed into the parking space until the Charleston Fire Department gained entry to the vehicle, no other individuals were seen entering or exiting Mr. Barnett's vehicle. At no time did anyone engage or try to make contact with Mr. Barnett. The vehicle brake lights were captured blinking on and off at 0720 hours on March 9, 2024.

A review of medical records and interviews with Mr. Barnett's family, attorneys, and healthcare professionals, revealed Mr. Barnett was under chronic stress in the context of the lawsuit, suffered from anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder, and grieved the death of his wife. During his time in Charleston, his attorneys reported Mr. Barnett discussed increasing the dose of his anti-anxiety medication. The writings found in the vehicle were examined by the Charleston Police Department and found only Mr. Barnett's fingerprints on the notebook. The writings contained information known only to his family.

The cause of death was determined to be: Gunshot Wound of the Head. The manner of death is best deemed, "Suicide."

Bobbi Jo O'Neal, Charleston County Coroner
Ella Butler, Deputy Coroner

Electronically Signed by **Bobbi Jo O'Neal** on 05/16/2024 at 17:25

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bobbi Jo O'Neal". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.