

## **'DOC' SLAIN WHILE BUYING DRINKS BEHEADING-CASE FIGURE KILLED IN 'HIT,' POLICE BELIEVE**

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Known on the street as a dope pusher, a hit man and the brains behind the infamous 1979 triple beheading murder, Adolph Powell -- the man they called Doc Holliday -- died buying.

With three glasses of cognac lined up on the bar and a \$50 bill in his hand, Powell, 50, was killed by a single shotgun blast to the side of his head Saturday afternoon shortly before 2 p.m.

Because he was buying, police speculate that he knew his killers and that his death was a professional "hit."

Apparently because she saw it happen, Jeanette Askew, a 23-year-old barmaid, was also killed. The shooting started less than four hours into Askew's first day on the job at La Players Lounge, 3305 Joy Road.

SHE HAD ALREADY earned a certificate as a medical secretary from the Detroit Business Institute and had taken the job at the lounge to help pay her way through Wayne State University where she was studying computers, family members said Sunday.

Edward Marshall, 23 -- who operates a record store across the street and often uses the bar's telephone and plays its video games -- was wounded in a hail of bullets as he ran from the back of the bar to the men's room.

With gunshot wounds in his neck and back, Marshall was in serious condition under police guard in a Detroit hospital.

Police said they had no suspects in custody and had not established a motive for what police believe were gangland killings.

No narcotics and no weapons, including the .45-caliber handgun Powell was known to carry, were found at the bar, police said.

Powell and four others were charged with killing Joanne Clark, 33; William Jackson, 41, and Willie McJoy, 33, July 18, 1979, in what police said was a drug trafficking dispute over sales territory.

All three were killed by gunshot wounds. Their bodies, with heads and hands severed, were found in a van on the near east side.

Powell was accused of arranging the murders. James (Red) Freeman, 35, and Robert (Lefty) Partee, 41, were named as the gunmen Powell brought from San Diego to kill the three.

Recorder's Court Judge Justin Ravitz dismissed charges against Benjamin (Shorty) Fountain, 56, a part-time doorman and handyman at the Federated Democratic Club, where the slayings took place, saying there was insufficient evidence.

The jury at first found Powell, Freeman and Partee guilty. But the case ended in a mistrial when one juror changed her mind when the jury was polled in open court.

Partee was convicted in a second trial that found Powell not guilty.

AS HE WAS being released from the Wayne County Jail, Powell told the Free Press, "I never want to be in here again. But as long as you believe in God, you're always as free as the rain that falls."

Freeman, tried separately the second time, was acquitted in January 1981, but **is** now in prison on other convictions.

Frank (Nitti) Usher, 39, described in court testimony as a drug kingpin, was tried separately from the others and was found guilty despite testimony he did not fire any shots and was an intended victim of the assault that killed the other three.

Usher was sentenced to life in prison without parole in 1980. The state Court of Appeals upheld Usher's murder conviction in November 1982.

PRISON RECORDS show Powell's first adult contact with the law was in 1954 when, as James Powell, he was sentenced to five years in prison for first-degree grand larceny.

Two years later he was paroled. He was arrested in November 1956 for larceny from a person, a charge that was later dropped.

In 1962, he was convicted of felonious assault and was sentenced to four years' probation and \$100 court costs.

The following year, he appeared on court records for the first time as Adolph Powell when he was convicted of assault and battery in Mt. Clemens. He was sentenced to 45 days in the Macomb County Jail.

In 1966, again as James Powell, he was sentenced to two years' probation on a reduced charge of attempting to carry a concealed weapon.

THE FOLLOWING year, Powell was sentenced to three years' probation for conviction on the same charge.

In 1969, he was convicted in federal court of possessing counterfeit money and sentenced to three years in a federal penitentiary. He was released on bond pending an appeal. Records available Sunday did not indicate a disposition of that case.

His last recorded contact with police officials before the triple beheading murders was a 1971 conviction on a traffic charge. He was fined \$30.

POWELL HAD a street reputation as a "gorilla" who took what he wanted when he wanted it because people knew what he could do, police said.

"He's gone through three generations of police," one officer said Sunday.

Sandra Gassaway, who reportedly lived with Powell, identified his body at the Wayne County Morgue Sunday. She told authorities Powell was born in New Orleans and earned a living as a construction worker.

At a home on Cooper -- the last of Powell's addresses known to police -- a man said he only received Powell's mail and knew him as a friendly man who would occasionally visit and "laugh and talk with me."

"He was awfully friendly to me," Willie Graham said Sunday.

Police said they believe Powell was married and had a family of grown children but that he apparently never talked about them and kept their identities out of public view.

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