

## JFK Lecture: The JFK Autopsy

The autopsy as the one area of the investigation in which the Commission should have done everything possible to establish an unimpeachable record. JFK remains (The “Best Evidence”) provided some of the best evidence as to what happened in Dallas.

The work of compiling the medicolegal record for history of the murdered president did not require the cooperation of the FBI ~~#1~~ or the CIA. In this crucial aspect of the investigation the Commission’s efforts were not impeded or distorted by the dishonesties and cover-ups perpetuated upon it by the Hoover Bureau and the CIA.

When it came to the “Autopsy of the Century” (to borrow Henry Hurt’s apt characterization [Reasonable Doubt, 1985]) it was the Commission itself that sanctioned perjury, connived in the destruction of the medical evidence, and deliberately suppressed material medical records and legal documents.

Page two

The joyless Irony: Compare JFK's autopsy with the one Dr. Earl Rose did on Lee Harvey Oswald. No questions on Oswald; nothing but questions about Kennedy's autopsy. (Aside: It was a great tragedy that Dr. Rose did not do the Kennedy autopsy).

*(Explain here)*

For example: Results of the HSCA Medical Panel (1979):

The panel of 9 forensic pathologists disclosed

The Bethesda drs. Had the head wound 100 millimeters (4 inches) lower than the true point of entry.

The lacerated brain was not properly sectioned to determine beyond a shadow of a doubt that the fatal head wound was not made by more than one bullet.

*#2*

The prosecutors did not X-ray JFK's extremities to determine whether or not there was a bullet or frags in his hands or feet. Another bullet or frags located in JFK's lower extremities would have pointed to more than one assassin.

Page three

The back or “neck” wound (more on this later) was not dissected to determine beyond question the track of the missile and whether a shot or shots came from the rear or the front of the presidential motorcade.

Had Oswald lived to stand trial any forceful cross-examination of the official autopsy report would have embarrassed, at least, the government’s case if it did not leave its case in shreds on the courtroom floor.

\* Note here: Despite these “gross errors” the HSCA concluded that these errors still did not invalidate the official version of the crime that was the Warren Commission Report.

## II. Amateur Night at the Naval Bethesda Hosp. Morgue

### A. Why Bethesda?

Page Four

B. Bethesda a teaching hospital; not equipped for an autopsy of this importance. (mention X-ray machine).

Should have been Walter Reed.

From testimony of those who were at the morgue: it was "a three ring circus." When the prosecutors failed to find the missile that caused JFK's back wound some of the military brass considered bringing in metal detectors. *Who was there*

C. The prosecutors: Lt. Commanders James Humes,

Thornton Boswell, and Lt. Colonel Pierre Finck. These three prosecutors had two important things in common: They were

all military and therefore subject to superior orders,

Secondly, while they were all pathologists none of them had even carried out a medicolegal forensic autopsy. They were

babes in the woods. Fair to say that by this time their careers

→ *note - Sibert/O'Neill report B*

Page Five

were in administrative work and they had not seen blood in a long time.

D. The autopsy began at about 8:15 and ended about 2 hours later. The rest of the evening and early morning hours (until 5:30 when the body was released and returned to the White House) Humes worked with the funeral home people helping to put the dead president's skull back together and embalming the body).

This autopsy, because it was complicated and because it was the president of the US should have gone on for the better part of a day, or at least 8 to 10 hours.

E. Most of the controversy could have been avoided had the prosecutors been experienced forensic pathologists even if they had to work with the inadequate facilities at Bethesda. We can be sure that forensic experts across the country were

Page Six

waiting by their phones; waiting, as it turned out, in vain for a call that never came.

Cyril Wecht, Coroner of Alleghany County, Penna.

Milton Helpern, chief medical examiner of NY City

Russell Fisher, medical examiner of Maryland;

Professor of Forensic Pathology at the University of

Maryland and author of the standard textbook on

forensic medicolegal procedure.

Geoffrey T. Main in Virginia and Joseph Spelman in

Philadelphia.

All of these guys combined had done thousands of

medicolegal autopsies of death by homicide. The

government even called on some of them to instruct at

the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology.



Page Seven

Why weren't they called. They all had one thing in common: None of them were military and therefore subject to superior orders.

III. Transition here.

If we stopped here: All of the above could be dismissed as regrettable, but innocent errors. Learn from past mistakes and if another president is assassinated, God help us, make sure he/she is not posted at Bethesda Naval Hospital.

Of course all of this happened before there was a Warren Commission.

IV. Destruction of autopsy records

March 1964 all three prosecutors testified before the Warren Commission. (coached by Arlen Specter. Later in 1990s Humes/Boswell told their ARRB questioners that Specter spent

about 10 hours w/ them going over their testimony before they went before the Commission)

A. Humes made a startling confession. He said that he destroyed by burning "certain preliminary draft notes," (autopsy notes).

[2H372-2373] This was lawyer-language for destruction of the first autopsy draft. Not an eye was batted by the assembled Commissioners. This first draft was destroyed sometime after news of Oswald's own assassination on Sunday (11/24), according to Humes, ~~in Admiral Galloway's office~~. With the admiral assisting in writing the new autopsy protocol. (more of this in a moment)

*Humes' Study or  
Bio  
Rec.  
Room*

The meaning: With Oswald's death, no trial; no cross-examination of the autopsy record (the autopsy notes, and the destroyed first draft).

C Humes reasons for destroying "certain preliminary notes/ the "blood stain" story. How it varied in the telling over the subsequent years.



B. The Unsourced Autopsy “facts” in the official autopsy report that appears in the Warren Commission Report.

Explain: The official autopsy report as it appears in the Commission’s Report is identified as Appendix IX or Commission Exhibit No. 387 is a 6-page document, single-spaced type set.

This report (some of the best evidence in the case) theoretically had to be based on the contemporaneous notes taken by the three prosecutors during the autopsy plus, one would expect, access to the X-rays and photos (colored and B& W) of the dead president.

Presumably this is the report Humes testified that was the replacement for the first autopsy draft that he burned in his recreation room on Sunday (after Oswald’s assassination) and that the prosecutors wrote at Bethesda Sunday afternoon with Admiral Galloways assistance. (Incidentally, Galloway was a medical man but he was not a forensic pathologist).

Page Ten

According to Humes this report was based on the notes taken in the morgue while he and the other doctors were carrying out the autopsy.

We are to believe that Commission Exhibit 397 (historic record) represents the documentary basis for this 6-page autopsy report.

Exhibit 397 consists of four (4) brief notations and five (5) measurements on Boswell's autopsy descriptive sheet (or body sheet or diagram) and a single sheet of paper with a few brief notes Humes made containing one measurement, Dr. Perry (more on him later) description of the hole in JFK's anterior neck wound, estimated at 3-5 mm in diameter.

Aside (Finck also made notes but they are missing).

---

See Separate sheet

Addendum to Page 10

(This is where it gets hairy)

The 88 “facts” found in the official autopsy report.

Explain: Some are pretty self-evident in that they are not discreet measurements, eg. JFK’s height, weight, color of eyes, more commonplace physical features were counted as autopsy “facts.”

Of these “facts,” the most important data, involve numbers and figures, measurements referring directly to the wounds, their size, and their respective distance from other parts of the body.

Some examples: (Just a few to make my point);

See attached sheets . . . . . *Remember - Docs. had no access to X-rep or photos. →*

Add Galloway’s characterization of JFK’s nonfatal wound. See

Note #2 with adverb “presumably” on p. 541 of the Report.

The difference here to borrow from Mark Twain is the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.

*→ Satisfies the need (positive) for Oswald, the only suspect, was in the frame. He was allegedly in the Sniper’s nest - 6th floor to the rear of above the motorcade*

## ADDENDUM to Page 10

According to the Warren Commission the final official autopsy, a six-page, single-spaced typewritten document, is based on the above mentioned notes, represented by Specter, with Humes's confirmation, said to be all the notes found in Commission Exhibit 397.<sup>23</sup> Isolating every single fact in the official typed copy of the autopsy against the notes found in Warren Commission Exhibit 397 reveal enough serious and blatant discrepancies to discredit the entire report.

In comparing the autopsy report with the contemporaneous autopsy notes, data like JFK's height, weight, hair color and other more commonplace physical features were counted as autopsy facts. The more important data included physical characteristics like parts of the body and their condition. Of these facts, the most important involve numbers and figures, measurements referring directly to the wounds, their size, and their distance from other parts of the body. A few select examples illustrate the point:

The official autopsy report (hereafter cited as AR) notes on p. 2 "There is edema and ecchymosis of the inner canthus region of the left eyelid measuring approximately 1.5 cm in greatest diameter. The notes make no reference to this damage not to mention the measurement.

AR notes on p. 3 "There is an old well healed 8 cm. McBurney abdominal incision." There is an apparent mark on the descriptive sheet indicating this scar but no measurement indicated in the notes.

AR notes on p. 3 "Situated on the upper antero-lateral aspect of the right thigh is an old, well healed 8 cm. scar." There is no mark of any nature on the thighs. Likewise, the 8 cm. appears nowhere on Boswell's descriptive sheet.

AR notes on p. 2 "There is edema and ecchymosis diffusely over the right supra-orbital ridge with abnormal mobility of the underlying bone. There is no mention of this in the notes.

AR locates on p. 3 JFK's back wound "Situated on the upper right posterior thorax just above the upper border of the scapula. . . ." Nowhere in the notes is it stated or implied that the rear wound was about the scapula.



AR on p. 4 speaks of a beveling in a large fragment of JFK's skull retrieved from the assassination scene and records that the beveling "... is estimated to measure approximately 2.5 to 3.0 cm. in diameter." There is no mention of these measurements in the notes.

AP p. 4 describes two irregularly shaped fragments of metal found in the right cerebral cortex. "These measure 7 x 2 mm. and 3 x 1 mm. These are placed in the custody of Agents Francis X. O'Neill and James W. Sibert of the (FBI), who executed a receipt therefore attached." The notes contain no mention of these missile fragments, their number, or the location of discovery.

There are, give or take, about 88 autopsy "facts" in the official prosecutors' report. About 64 of these "facts" or pieces of medicolegal information (almost 75%) cannot be found in either the published notes or Warren Commission Exhibit 397. Some 15 of these pieces of information involve measurements and numbers that are not found in the published record.

NOTES Return to Galloway + "presumably"

It is not possible that Humes, even with the help of the other autopsists, could have drawn from memory those minute measurements referring to bullet wounds, their dimensions and distance from one another, and other medicolegal details with unerring exactitude expected in the forensic investigation of an assassinated president. Relying on soundness of memory would have been made even more complicated by the fact that the autopsy doctors did not have access to the autopsy X-rays and photographs when drafting the official autopsy report. All these photos and X-rays were loaded into a cardboard box and handed over to Secret Service agent Roy H. Kellerman the night of the autopsy. Remarkably, it was not until November 1966 when Humes and Boswell first saw the autopsy photos when the Justice Department requested that they identify and inventory them for the National Archives.<sup>25</sup>

The real mystery of the autopsy notes begins when an attempt is made to trace their chain of possession. In a November 24, 1963, letter of transfer to Humes's

Page Eleven

E. Point: These omissions and discrepancies in the JFK autopsy that were passed over by the Commission continued to be ignored in all of the subsequent government-sponsored re-examinations of the autopsies:

The Clark Panel in 1967/8

The Medical Panel of the HSCA in 1978

The ARRB re-examination of the prosectors in the 1990s.

If we are looking at a conspiracy then the conspiracy of silence has continued well beyond the Warren Commission Report.

F. Humes and the “blood stain” story

When questioned by the HSCA Medical Panel in 1979

Humes said that he burned the notes that had JFK’s blood stains on them so they would not fall into the hands of ghouls or sensation seekers who might sell them or tack them up on a barn in Kansas (Boswell’s explanation, etc.). Humes and the stain on the Lincoln



Page Twelve

chair at Ford's Theatre in WDC, displayed at the Ford Museum story. But Humes told Gary Cornwell that before he incinerated them he copied them clean paper. So the notes existed. The notes that were the database for the 6-page official autopsy report.

In 1996 when Humes appeared before the ARRB he could not use the "blood stain" story to explain what happened to the contemporaneous autopsy notes. When mildly pressed by the Board's Executive Director, Humes spills the beans when Gunn asks what happened to the unsoiled and rewritten notes sans JFK's blood stains and bodily fluids.

Humes has no answer. "I absolutely can't recall why and I apologize for that," he flundered along, "but that's the way the cookie crumbles."

Humes' last desperate fallback defense was, "it was my material" to destroy and he did not want "anything to remain that some

Page Thirteen

squirrel would grab and make whatever they might.” (The barn in Kansas?) So he tells Gunn, so he turned over to Dr. Burkley the final report and “burned everything else.” (Humes’ 1996 ARRB deposition, found at NARA).

So we are left with Humes’ lie that the final type-written 6-page autopsy report was based on the <sup>h</sup>tree <sub>u</sub>pages of notes and Boswell’s body chart that make up Commission Exhibit 397.

What is clear is that Humes did destroy the first autopsy draft (those so-called preliminary notes [under Specter’s coaching] ) but we do not know what happened to the autopsy notes that were made during the autopsy and before Oswald was assassinated.

**CONCLUSION:** (As far as we have come)

Since most of the contemporaneous autopsy working papers have inexplicably vanished there is no way of recreating a fully documented medicolegal accounting of JFK’s wounds or even a precise understanding of the cause of death!!!!

Page Fourteen

The official autopsy simply reports that death was do to a gun shot wound to the head.

---

Other established unarguable autopsy facts from the government's own documents. (In the interest of time I am just going to list these with minimal explanation but will try to answer any questions during the Q and A).

**ALL RELATED TO THE SO-CALLED JFK NECK WOUND**

@ The Malcolm Perry Press 11/22/ conference. Perry states on three occasions during this press conference that JFK's anterior neck wound was a wound of entrance. How this was handled by the government.

Humes's 2<sup>nd</sup> call to Parkland on Saturday (11/23) in which he told Perry that the autopsy report would say that JFK's neck wound

Page Fifteen

was a wound of exit. Perry does not show up for the press conference. He leaves town w/family. Later he is visited by FBI and SS. Dr. Kemp Clark confirms the Humes' 2<sup>nd</sup> phone call and message.

@ Finck's testimony during the Garrison's Clay Shaw trial in New Orleans (March 1969). Why JFK's back wound was not dissected.

Finck explained that JFK's "neck" wound was not dissected because the Kennedy family had instructed Admiral Galloway not to dissect the wound. (Removed the brain; Y-cut to remove all the internal organs. What could have been so sacrosanct about the so-called "neck" wound. Answer: nothing. See Authorization document for PM.

This authorization form was suppressed from the official record; not in the Warren Report of the 26 volumes of Hearings and Exhibits.

Page Sixteen

After two days of strenuous questioning from (Oser), and a threat from the judge that if he did not respond to the question, Finck finally admitted that it was Admirals Kinney and Galloway who ordered that the back wound not be dissected.

@ The Warren Commission's holding back on the autopsy X-rays, photos, and film of the autopsy. Blaming the Kennedy's. A lie. Kennedy's never placed any restrictions on the use of this material except to say that it could be used but with circumspection.

@ The true location of JFK's back wound. Witnesses at Bethesda morgue all place it in the back not the neck.

Mention some names: Hill, Kellerman, Boyer and Rudnicki, and FBI agent O'Neill.

Read from O'Neill's affidavit w/ body sketch



Page Seventeen

@ The suppression of JFK's official death certificate.

Read from Burkley's death certificate. This was written on 11/23 before the official solution to the crime was settled upon.

It does not appear in the WCR of 914 pages with its more than 7000 footnotes and the bodyguard of 26 volumes of more than 10,000,000 words.

Burkley is never called as a witness to testify before the Commission. He is airbrushed out of the whole sorry business like the Old Bolsheviks who were "disappeared" from Soviet History books after they were purged by Generalissimo Stalin.

Burkely told LBJ's aide Walter Jenkins after JFK's burial he wanted to retire. LBJ summons to Oval Office for a chat. When the meeting was over Rear Admiral Burkley left as Vice Admiral Burkely and stayed on in the White House as LBJ's personal physician.



Page Eighteen

Burkley reports to Henry Hurt that JFK was a victim of a conspiracy.

## Chapter 7

### Endnotes

1. See phone interviews with Nicholas Katzenbach (5/31/1978) and J. Lee Rankin (5/31/1978 by House Select Committee on Assassinations interviewers, JFK Collection, HSCA, RG (Record Group) 233, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland (hereafter cited as NARA). Katzenbach sneered at the idea of FBI "cooperation" in the investigation, noting it was "unbelievable some of the stuff they concealed." He described FBI Director Hoover as a crafty tyrant whose "real talent was running over people and covering up in the process." Dulles, he volunteered, was carrying water for his old agency. Katzenbach charged that Dulles "was the CIA's spy on the Commission." Rankin found the FBI's performance "quite disturbing in hindsight. We would have found their conduct," alluding to the Hosty note destruction, "nearly unbelievable if we had known about it at the time." The Commission's former chief counsel even went so far as to conjecture that if the Commission had been aware of this "unconscionable" act it would have regarded the FBI as "suspect" and hired its own investigators. For the Hosty note destruction see Chapter 10.
2. Henry Hurt aptly described JFK's autopsy as "The Autopsy of the Century." See Henry Hurt, Reasonable Doubt: An Investigation into the Assassination of John F. Kennedy (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1985).
3. A copy of the Oswald autopsy is on file with NARA, as Commission Exhibit (CE) 1981. The Warren Commission filed it as Commission Document 305. The original Oswald autopsy is held by the National Archives at College Park.
4. Some of the more noteworthy critics of the JFK autopsy are Hurt, Reasonable Doubt; Sylvia Meagher, Accessories After the Fact: The Warren Commission, the Authorities, and the Report (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967); David Lifton, Best Evidence: Disguise and Deception in the Assassination of John F. Kennedy (New York: MacMillan, 1981); and Harold Weisberg, Post-Mortem: JFK Assassination Cover-Up Smashed (Frederick, MD: Harold Weisberg, 1975). Weisberg's powerful work still remains the most forcefully argued critique of the official autopsy. The official autopsy has its defenders. They usually argue that while the autopsy had its startling deficiencies it still arrived at the correct and valid conclusions. For example, see Gerald Posner, Case Closed: Lee Harvey Oswald and the Assassination of JFK (New York: Random House, 1993); David W. Belin, November 22, 1963: You Are the Jury (New York: Quadrangle/New York Times Books, 1973); David W. Belin, Final Disclosure (New York: Scribners, 1988); Denis L. Breo, "JFK's Death," (Parts I-III), The Journal of the American Medical Association (Vol. 267, No. 20 and Vol. 268, No. 13); John K. Lattimer, Kennedy and Lincoln: Medical & Ballistic Comparisons of Their Assassinations (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich, 1980).