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A member of the U.S. Army graves registration team showing strain of the grim task at Georgetown, Guyana

Guyana Did Autopsies on Some Victims, U.S. Reports

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DOVER AIR FORCE BASE, Del., Nov. 26 — A State Department official said today that the department had received reports that autopsies had been done by Guyanese officials on an unspecified number of victims of the mass deaths in Jonestown, but that no autopsies were planned to be done at Dover, where 912 bodies have been flown.

The statement is the first official acknowledgement that an autopsy may have been performed on any victim. Yesterday, a spokesman for the Dover Air Force Base said he had no knowledge that any autopsies were performed in Guyana.

William J. Dieterich, a spokesman for the State Department, said in a telephone interview from Washington that autopsies were performed by Guyanese officials on five victims of the mass deaths in addition to those performed on members of Representative Leo J. Ryan's delegation who were murdered in Jonestown. Mr. Dieterich said he could not disclose the names of the victims on whom the post-mortem examinations were made in Guyana.

"The Guyanans are satisfied they have determined the cause of death in Jonestown," Mr. Dieterich said. He said that the State Department could not confirm

that the autopsies had been performed, but that department officials had no reason to doubt that they had been done.

Cause of Death Could Be Hidden

Pathology experts have said that despite the circumstantial evidence of the presence of cyanide in a pot at the scene of the mass deaths, it could be impossible to determine the cause of death for each of the victims in Jonestown without an autopsy. Further, the experts said that without autopsies it might be impossible to determine which victims committed suicide and which were murdered. Such information could be essential in later actions on the validity of insurance claims.

Mr. Dieterich said that requests for autopsies to be performed in this country would have to come from Justice Department officials because "we can see no requirement for autopsies in the U.S. by U.S. authorities" under terms of American law.

The American Government's procedures in handling the medical investigation were criticized by three experts in forensic medicine.

The Guyanese tragedy was described as perhaps the largest non-military mass death catastrophe of this century by Dr. Michael Baden, New York City Medical Examiner.

"The catastrophe requires better authentication than we've heard and re-

quires documentation of each death for the sake of the families and for history," Dr. Baden said.

Dr. Baden, Dr. Lowell Levine, an expert in dental pathology at the New York Medical Examiners Office, and Dr. Cyril Wecht, Allegheny County (Pittsburgh) Coroner, expressed criticism in separate telephone interviews of the Government's handling of the medical investigation.

All three doctors question why the United States had not sent teams of experts to Guyana to conduct examinations there. They also questioned the choice of Dover Air Force Base instead of a site on the West Coast closer to most of the victims' next of kin.

Michael White, a State Department spokesman here, said Dover was chosen because its personnel handled victims of the crash of two jumbo jets in the Canary Islands last year and because it was the largest facility for mortuary purposes on the East Coast.

All three doctors said that they could see no medical reasons why small teams of pathologists, dentists, radiologists and toxicologists could not have been sent to Guyana to conduct autopsies under field conditions.

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