

JFK assassination: — Why 2 caskets for his body?

COOPERSVILLE, Mich. (UPI) — Military officials used two caskets — one of them empty — to slip the body of slain President John F. Kennedy into Bethesda Naval Hospital, said a former Navy veteran who took part in the charade.

Donald Rebentisch, a former petty officer stationed at Bethesda, said his commanding officers told him the secrecy was planned to avoid the media and other onlookers.

But assassination researcher David S. Lifton, who later this month will release a book entitled "Best Evidence," claims the two-casket ploy was part of a scheme to alter Kennedy's wounds and perpetuate official reports that Kennedy was shot by Lee Harvey Oswald.

Rebentisch said he didn't realize the importance of the casket-shuffling incident.

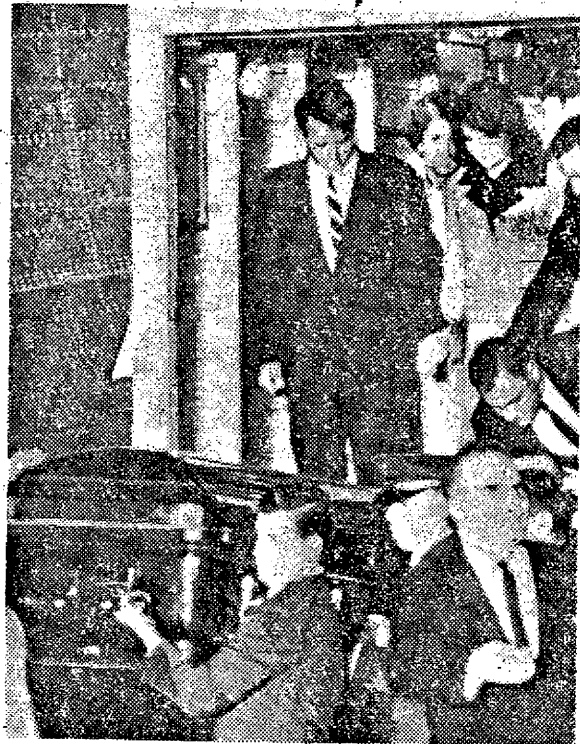
"For 17 years, I've known something that I thought everybody knew," said Rebentisch, 43, now a mechanic living just outside Grand Rapids. "I just assumed all along that the Warren Commission knew about all of this."

"I couldn't believe with all the thousands of dollars they spent they wouldn't have known that we took the casket in the back door."

Rebentisch said two ambulances carrying two caskets — one empty and one with the body of Kennedy — were brought to Bethesda. The empty casket was brought in the front door, he said, while the casket carrying Kennedy's body was wheeled in the back, where medical officials were to perform an autopsy.

Rebentisch said Kennedy's body was brought to the back of the hospital in a black 1958 Chevrolet hearse.

"We took the casket out and pushed it down a long, illuminated hall. Now this is a service area, not the main part of the hospital."



JFK COFFIN ON WAY TO BETHESDA HOSPITAL
One casket held body, other was only for show

Rebentisch said he recalled the incident when he saw a recent article detailing the two-casket conspiracy argument promoted by author Lifton.

The article said the Warren Commission made no mention of the casket trade in all of its 26 volumes of research.

Two of Rebentisch's former colleagues in the Navy — Richard Muma and Paul Neigler — both corroborated the former petty officer's story.

"It was common knowledge that there were two caskets," Muma said.

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FEDERAL TAX agents have uncovered evidence of a massive tax fraud operation involving as many as 2,500 commercial airline pilots. Page A11

MILITARY OFFICIALS used two caskets to slip the body of slain President John F. Kennedy into Bethesda Naval Hospital, a Navy veteran says. Page A14

PRESIDENT REAGAN filled five more top administration posts. Page A14

PRESIDENT REAGAN wasted no time establishing one of his administration's major themes when he ordered a freeze on federal hiring the day after he assumed office — whether this portends the future remains to be seen. Page A15