

June 26, 1972

Mr. Carl W. Belcher
Chief, General Crimes Section
Department of Justice
Washington, D.C.
20530

RE: HEP:CWB:JRR:maz
129-11

Dear Mr. Belcher:

Thank you for your letter of June 20, 1972.

Your referral of my request to the National Archives has resulted in a reply from Mr. James B. Rhodes. Unfortunately, Mr. Rhodes has implied that release of the name of the agent responsible for the destruction of autopsy films would "constitute a clearly un-warranted invasion of personal privacy of the family of the late President Kennedy." (xerox attached)

It is regrettable that this matter was not reviewed during the Warren Commission's ten month inquiry into the death of President Kennedy and that this subject only became known some nine years later as a result of the first non-governmental examination of these restricted films by Dr. John Lattimer of Columbia University.

The primary reason I direct my request to the Justice Department is because this information first came to light as part of a report ordered by your department, and not by the National Archives.

On November 1, 1966, at the request of the Justice Department, James J. Humes, M.D., and J. Thornton Boswell, M.D., examined, identified and inventoried these photographs and wrote a report. (1)

The note, describing the destruction of a roll of film, is part of this report, made at the request of your agency.

With all due respect to Mr. James B. Rhodes of the Archives, I feel that any legal determination as to "unwarranted invasion of personal privacy" as mentioned by Mr. Rhodes should come from the Justice Department.

(1) Report of inspection by Navy Medical Staff on November 1, 1966 at the National Archives on x-rays and photos of autopsy of President John F. Kennedy. 1968 Panel Report, page 1.

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I do not understand how the release of the name of this agent can be construed as an "unwarranted invasion of the personal privacy of the Kennedy family."

This is, more likely than not, simply another example of overclassification of documents that may prove embarrassing to one government agency or another.

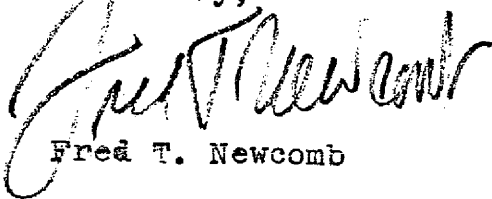
I do not wish to imply, nor do I believe, that the Justice Department is responsible for the restrictions placed on these documents.

Since two agents of the Justice Department (F.B.I.) and two agents of the Treasury Department (Secret Service) were present at this autopsy, it is reasonable to assume that one of these four agents was responsible.

Since this autopsy was not performed at a private institution by private physicians, but rather on government property at public expense, it would seem that full disclosure of this matter would be in the public interest.

I would greatly appreciate an opinion from you on this matter.

Sincerely,



Fred T. Newcomb

FTN:mkn
Enclosures

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