BLAMING THE VICTIMS: KENNEDY FAMILY CONTROL OVER THE BETHESDA AUTOPSY

by
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1. THE ISSUE

If the Kennedy family placed restrictions or limitations on the Bethesda postmortem, they would have involved themselves in a potential obstruction of justice. Robert F. Kennedy, as an attorney and as the chief law enforcement official of the Federal government, was certainly aware of this. His legislative and executive branch experience left him equally knowledgable about the methods and procedures governing criminal proceedings, particularly the methods devised to insure the integrity of evidence. Such knowledge, of course, would not by itself stop him from interfering, or from agreeing to restrictions desired by Mrs. Kennedy. And RFK himself possessed ample motive for seeking a limited autopsy, as well as formidable resources for persuasion, pressure, and even intimidation.

Throughout his political career JFK fought off rumors that he suffered a serious adrenal deficiency, Addison's Disease. If the true nature of President Kennedy's ailment became known——as it would in a conventional autopsy——his own image would suffer some degree of damage. So too would the image and credibility of RFK, with negative ramifications for his own political future.

That JFK suffered from Addison's Disease (or some similar condition like Pott's Disease) is by itself a minor matter; we are tempted to shrug and say, "So what?" As Harold Weisberg put it: "There is no stigma attached to Addison's disease and control over it can be maintained more perfectly than, for example, over diabetes. It need never have interfered with his activity as President."

Family concern was not so much the illness, but that they had denied its existence so vehemently during the 1960 pre-convention campaign. Lyndon Johnson's forces, led by John Connally, raised the Addison's issue in their bid to keep Kennedy from the Democratic nomination. The Kennedy's managed to "stonewall" the subject, and the public accepted the image of a young, vigorous candidate in robust good health. [1]

The Kennedy's have always been known for their acute sensitivity about matters of individual or family image, and for equating any form of illness somehow with "weakness." The family has also shown that they are willing (and able) to resort to elaborate measures to protect that image. Their attempt to block publication of William Manchester's Death Of A President in 1966 was but the first of many family efforts to "write their own history." Author Nigel Hamilton recently recounted numerous instances of Kennedy hardball and harrassment over his best–seller JFK: Reckless Youth. He has postponed his plans for a complete three–volume biography.

Laurence Leamer, in The Kennedy Women, details dozens of episodes of Kennedy image–building (and "damage control"). For example, Senator Edward Kennedy, years ago, refused to allow Joan Kennedy to attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings even when she begged to do so, fearing the effect on his political career. [2]

So the Kennedy's, by their own lights, had the motive as well as means and opportunity to exert pressure on the Navy pathologists. Whether they acted on that motive and thereby entangled themselves in an ongoing obstruction of justice is the crucial question. The issue was starkly framed in the following exchange between Dr. Pierre A. Finck, who assisted at the JFK autopsy, and a member of the HSCA Medical Panel, in March, 1978:

> *Dr. Weston: At the time this examination was done there was the possibility that there was going to be a criminal prosecution. [Is it] your practice as a forensic pathologist to stop short of doing a short [he meant "full"] medical legal autopsy in face of criminal prosecution notwithstanding the wishes of anybody else?*
>
> *Dr. Finck: What you are saying, we should not have listened to the recommendations——*
>
> *Dr. Weston: No, I am not saying anything. I am asking you if it is not accepted medical legal practice when you anticipate a criminal prosecution to do a complete examination?*
>
> *Dr. Finck: Yes.*
>
> *Dr. Weston: Okay. Then the reason you did not do a complete examination was that you were ordered not to, is that correct?*
>
> *Dr. Finck: Yes, restrictions from the family as the reason*

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for limiting our actions.

Dr. Weston: But...is this not evidence that belongs to the state notwithstanding the wishes of the family when there is a suspected criminal prosecution?

Dr. Finck: Of course it is ideal. In those circumstances you are told to do certain things. There are people telling you to do certain things. It is unfortunate. [3]

The autopsy protocol's lack of any mention of adrenal glands led to a "rush to judgment," as virtually all observers assumed that the family must have been behind the omission. The conventional wisdom about the situation went something like this: "No word on adrenals means family control of the autopsy." The same idea then subtly slides along to explain other deficiencies, not only in the procedure itself but also in the preservation of the evidence. "But it's a minor thing, really: the adrenals, after all, had nothing to do with the cause of death."

Gerald Posner, for example, remarks that other forensic pathologists:

...do criticize the fact that Jacqueline and Robert Kennedy remained in the hospital during the proceeding and kept asking when it would finish, placing pressure on the physicians to hurry their work. The Kennedy's were willing to let the doctors determine the cause of death, but not to let them conduct an extensive autopsy. [4]

Weisberg adds another possibility:

"The silence of the autopsy on this point may be explained by the intrusion of relatives or federal officials. Regardless of inspiration, the answer belonged in the autopsy and it is not there." [5]

This chapter will show that too much has been taken for granted about why those adrenals were "not there," and about the family's involvement with the investigation. We begin to see the true nature of that involvement, and what really motivated it. This sheds needed light on the murky, eerie atmosphere that shrouded the Bethesda morgue that Friday night.

2. ASSERTIONS ABOUT RFK AND JBK AT BETHESDA

Robert Kennedy met Air Force One as soon as it landed at Andrews Air Force Base, and then accompanied Mrs. Kennedy in the ambulance to Bethesda, where they spent a torturous nine hours—— until about 4:00 AM on Saturday——in a VIP suite on the 17th floor.

Few other points about the murder are buttressed with the abundance of "eyewitness testimony" as this one: that from their 17th floor rooms, RFK and JBK strenuously sought to limit and control the autopsy.

* FBI agents James Sibert and Francis X. O'Neill attended the autopsy. In a memo to their Baltimore Field Office on November 26, they noted that, at the outset, "Admiral Berkley [sic], the President's personal physician, advised that Mrs. Kennedy had granted permission for a limited autopsy and he questioned any feasibility for a complete autopsy to obtain the bullet which had entered the President's back." [6] With the spelling of Burkley's name corrected, they repeated this in their famous report to FBI Headquarters in Washington the same day.

This is the same Admiral Burkley who, hours earlier, had told Mrs. Kennedy that they needed to find a bullet——and she assented. Now Sibert/O'Neill have him citing her as the reason for not obtaining a bullet!

The FBI team went on to note that Dr. Humes, the chief prosector, balked at Burkley's request, saying that a full autopsy would be needed to recover any bullet still in the body from the back wound. Secret Service Agents Roy Kellerman and William Greer joined Sibert and O'Neill in backing Humes: the bullet should be located. And so, according to Sibert/O'Neill, it fell to Admiral Galloway, Commanding Officer of the entire Bethesda complex, to overrule Burkley and order Humes to proceed with the full autopsy. (Some interpreters finger Galloway as the chief obstructionist.)

The Sibert/O'Neill memo and report are the only contemporaneous written accounts that suggest any Kennedy limitation on the autopsy. And of course their knowledge of it did not come first– hand, but was mediated through Burkley.

What about later eyewitness testimony and interviews? In the main, it tells the same story of Kennedy control, although it's a much more prolonged and complicated process than Sibert/O'Neill recorded in their written report. A sampling:

* Sibert, in his HSCA interview, said that he "had the impression that the Kennedy family was somehow transmitting step– by–step clearances to the pathologists." [7] (Since he was a keen observer right in the morgue, one might think that Sibert would know exactly how such transmissions were made.)

* Civilian medical photographer John Stringer had a similar impression. Burkley was a central figure in these discussions, "and seemed to be acting on behalf of the Kennedy family." [8]

* Morgue assistant Paul O'Connor painted the scene in vivid colors for author Harrison Livingstone. Burkley, he said, gave

the orders in the autopsy room:

Admiral Burkley was a maniac. I'd never seen anybody like that in this life. Scared the hell out of me, I'll tell you. He was yelling and cussin' and carrying on all night. [He] kept saying,

"Don't do this because the Kennedy family won't want that done, and don't do this and don't do that." It's just unbelievable...

Humes is real freaky. They were scared to death anyway when they got down there. And then Admiral Burkley started screaming at them. [9]

In similar style, O'Connor told researcher Roger Feinman that Burkley "...paced back and forth, paced back and forth, walked back and forth. He'd go over to the phone and call the tower."

There's more in this exchange that is worth quoting:

Feinman: "How do you know he was calling the tower?"

O'Connor: "Well, later on we found out he was calling Bobby. Y'know, word gets around the hospital. So, he'd make his phone call and get back and say: "The Kennedy family wants you to do this, that, but don't do this, that and the other. So he was talking to someone in the Kennedy family. We know that because that's what his words were..."

Feinman (exhibiting a rare and welcome persistence in "pinning down" a witness): "Did you personally overhear any of what he was saying?"

O'Connor: "Oh yeah, sure...But I, verbatim? I couldn't really..." [10]

* Dr. J. Thornton Boswell told the HSCA interviewers that Dr. Burkley was basically supervising everything that went on in the autopsy room and that the commanding officer was also responding to Burkley's wishes. He indicated that Robert McNamara seemed to have acted as liaison between the family and Dr. Burkley and that McNamara kept his head throughout. He implied that McNamara was never actually in the autopsy room but was working out of the room where the family was staying.

At the beginning Dr. Burkley gave instructions and said very early on that the police had "...captured the guy who did this, all we need is the bullet." Dr. Boswell said "...we argued with him at that point...saying that the autopsy must be complete and thorough." [11]

Defense secretary McNamara was in fact present on the 17th floor from about 7:30 until after midnight. He emerges here as another "mediating layer" between the Kennedy's and the morgue. To assign him this role makes sense; his position gave him authority to issue orders to the military brass, an authority that, technically, neither RFK nor JBK enjoyed.

But if he were acting from such authority, there would be little room for the disputes and delays which actually took place in the morgue. Humes, as we've seen, resisted Burkley's injunctions, which justifies our inferring that they were not expressed as direct military orders.

* The firmest statement on this point is probably that of Dr. Robert Karnei, who assisted at the autopsy. From an interview with Harrison Livingstone, August 27, 1991:

All I can say is that Jim [Humes] and Jay [Boswell] were really handicapped that night with regards to performing the autopsy.

Livingstone: Was that Burkley?

Karnei: No. Robert [Kennedy].

Dr. Karnei recalled that the Y-incision took place a long time— as much as two hours! —after the autopsy began: "We had to get permission all the time from Mrs. Kennedy to proceed with the autopsy." [12]

* Lieutenant Colonel Pierre Finck was an Army pathologist called to assist at the JFK autopsy at about 8:00, after the procedure was underway. He plays a leading role in other parts of our story.

In February, 1965, Finck wrote a report about his part in the autopsy for his commanding officer, General J.M. Blumberg, then Director of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology (AFIP). Among other defects in the procedure, he recounted how "The organs of the neck were not removed. The President's family insisted to have only the head examined. Later, the permission was extended to the chest." This is quite a firm, definite statement, with the ring of direct, first-hand knowledge of the restriction.

Thirteen years later, Dr. Finck repeated the same basic story in his HSCA testimony, but with a significant modifier: "There were restrictions coming from the family and we were told at the time of the autopsy that the autopsy should be limited to certain parts of the body." As we have seen, when pushed by Weston of the HSCA medical panel on the issue, he repeated the point: "Yes, restrictions from the family as the reason for limiting our actions."

Dr. Finck makes an ideal "bureaucratic witness." His cloudy syntax, as in this answer, avoids both clear declara-

tions of fact and outright falsehoods. He often reveals the truth while at the same time obscuring it. Here Finck omits a term before "limiting our actions," and we are left wondering: precisely who transmitted those "restrictions from the family" to limit the autopsists? The Kennedy's, or someone else?

Finck has always implied it was "someone else," and he has always evaded naming who that someone else might be. Dr. Weston, for example, helpfully put words in his witness' mouth, suggesting Admiral Galloway might have been the source for the restrictions, not Burkley. Finck gladly went along, but in his typically convoluted way, raising more questions then he answered:

Dr. Weston: Those restrictions you mentioned were, as you remember now, Admiral Galloway?

Dr. Finck: Who passed them on to us as I remember so he should be consulted and asked who asked to have those restrictions.

Finck here grabs an opportunity to get on record that he is actually not sure that the family was the real cause of the interference, and invites the panel to probe further. [13]

There's confusion and inconsistency everywhere in that record. Recall that Sibert and O'Neill had Galloway overruling Burkley, ordering Humes to go ahead with a complete autopsy. Was a full autopsy done, or only a partial one?

Similarly, we're faced with a classic shell game of "who's in charge here?" Burkley? Galloway? Some unknown Army general?— Finck had testified to that effect at the New Orleans Clay Shaw trial in 1969. When Humes testified before the Warren Commission, he listed the "brass" present in the morgue—and omitted Burkley's name altogether! [14]

We can become so thoroughly entangled in trying to sort all this out that we lose sight of the one feature common to all this testimony: it contains no direct, first-hand evidence that Jacqueline or Robert Kennedy, or McNamara as their agent, said anything at all about how the autopsy should proceed. People consistently report that they "had the impression," or that "it seemed..." or that "they were told..." or even that "it was all over the hospital..." In a courtroom all of this would be ruled inadmissable because it assumes facts not in evidence.

One glimmer of documented certainty appears in Finck's 1965 Blumberg Report. It may explain Finck's uncharacteristic certitude earlier in the Report about family insistence that only the head be examined: "The prosectors complied with the autopsy permit and its restrictions."

At last we have some indication that the doctors acted in conformity to a standard, written autopsy authorization executed by the required family members. That should close the case—or so we think.

3. THE AUTOPSY PERMIT

The official "Authorization For Post-Mortem Examination" states that the U.S. Naval Hospital, Bethesda, Maryland, is authorized "to perform a complete post-mortem examination on the remains of John F. Kennedy [name typed in]. Authority is also granted for the preservation and study of any and all tissues which may be removed. This authority shall be limited only by the conditions expressly stated below:"

[Room for about four typed lines follows. The space is completely blank.]

Mrs. Kennedy's name is typed—not signed—on the line provided for the authorizing person's signature. (We will return to the possible significance of this later.) Robert F. Kennedy's handwritten signature appears on the line provided for a witness. [15]

There are no restrictions listed. How then was Pierre Finck able to cite "the autopsy permit and its restrictions"?

He may have been simply lying. His report to General Blumberg was confidential, and Finck could have assumed that it would never surface; and that Blumberg, who was not privy to unpublished materials about the case, would accept this explanation at face value.

A FABRICATED DOCUMENT?

Or there may have been two autopsy authorizations, the first constituting the "real" permit, containing the family restriction that only the head area be examined to recover bullets and determine the number and direction of the shots, and signed by Mrs. Kennedy. Later, a second, "amended" authorization would have been prepared for the record, indicating a complete postmortem. This would square with the final autopsy report, which states that a full postmortem had in fact been done. It would serve as "evidence" absolving the Kennedy's from any future charges of interference. This deception would be concealed from Mrs. Kennedy, with only RFK "in on it." This would account for the presence of his signature and the absence of hers. Also, perhaps, for the fact that in the space for an approval signature, the name of the Hospital Commanding Officer, R.O. Canada, is typed, not signed.

Such a scenario may seem bizarre and farfetched to people accustomed to relying on the legitimacy of official records. But "bizarre and farfetched" serve as fitting adjectives for all aspects of the Kennedy case, and "two of everything" looks

like the rule and not the exception where evidence is concerned. As H.E. Livingstone notes, "In this case we are given many different and conflicting facts for each issue, and told to take our pick."

For starters we are confronted with two (or more) Lee Harvey Oswalds; two (or more) descriptions of rifles found at the Book Depository; at least two Mannlicher–Carcano rifles presented as evidence; two (or more) sets of autopsy photos and X–rays; and possibly two different versions of the final autopsy protocol itself. The consequence: unparalled conflict and confusion about what we would expect to be one–of–a–kind, easily identified items of physical evidence. [16]

To find causes——or motives——we look at consequences. When we "investigate the investigation," we cannot help but notice a consistent pattern of duplicate, discordant items of evidence, consistent disregard for basic methods of preserving the integrity of evidence, and consistent "gaps" in the all–important chain of evidentiary possession. There is only one explanation adequate to embrace this entire pattern, in keeping with the principle of "total evidence:" the conflict and confusion was deliberately contrived. The consequence? Investigators, researchers and historians have been tied in knots for three decades trying to resolve them.

So the possibility of two discrepant autopsy permits doesn't look quite so bizarre; it must be admitted for consideration. To do so demands that we confront an unavoidable corollary: by signing a bogus permit, RFK may have felt he was doing nothing more than protecting his brother's image——and his own. Nevertheless, it required that he knowingly perjure himself. And, wittingly or not, he would have become part of a cover–up.

Robert Kennedy was neither naive nor gullible; that he would sign such a document seems awfully dubious. But he was no neophyte at Machiavellian "hardball" either. So the possibility cannot be dismissed, as many would wish, simply because he was——Robert Kennedy.

I've indulged in this speculative discussion purposely——to show how easy it is to get tangled up in hypothetical possibilities based on conflicts in the basic evidence. Let's analyze step–by– step how we fell into this quicksand:

A. It begins with an assumption, rooted in extensive "eyewitness" testimony: JBK and RFK interfered with the autopsy.

B. Dr. Finck cites a legal document ("hard evidence") to support the assumption.

C. We find the document. It contradicts Finck and the other eyewitnesses.

D. Subconsciously we have become wedded to that seductive thirty–year–old with the maiden name "Assumption." In marriage, its name changes to "Fact." And (to mix our metaphors while we're at it) we tend to take thirty–year relationships for granted, which is precisely what we do to "Mrs. Fact."

E. So we attempt to explain our contradictory piece of evidence by adding fresh layers of intrigue and conspiracy, complicating what until now has been a simple, straight–forward line of investigation.

F. ...When in actuality the marriage was invalid from the start: "Mrs. Fact" is really still "Miss Assumption."

To repeat an earlier observation, none of that "eyewitness" testimony is firsthand; no one yet has come forward with direct knowledge that Jacqueline or Robert Kennedy directed or controlled the autopsy. There is no reason, therefore, to treat the autopsy permit as anything but authentic. That said, we are left with plenty of conflicts in the evidence——Finck's statement stands front and center. Our next step, then, is to look for ways to corroborate or refute the document.

4. INTERLUDE: THE BETHESDA WITNESSES

As we might expect, quite a crowd gathered in the Bethesda morgue that evening, including a glittering array of Navy brass. It's a confusing group, so the following list may help introduce the reader to some of the key figures in attendance, and to where they stood in the chain of command:

Admiral Edward Kenney, Surgeon General, US Navy, and superior to all Navy medical personnel.

Admiral Calvin Galloway (whom we've encountered), Commanding Officer, National Naval Medical Center, which embraced all components of the Bethesda complex, including the hospital and the medical school.

Captain Robert Canada, Commanding Officer, Bethesda Naval Hospital. As such, he reported to Galloway.

Captain John H. ("Smokey") Stover, Jr., Commanding Officer, US Navy Medical School, Bethesda. Stover was Canada's counterpart, and also reported to Galloway.

Commander James J. Humes, the chief autopsy surgeon. Humes headed the Medical School laboratory, and Stover was his immediate superior.

Lieutenant Commander J. Thornton ("Jay") Boswell, a familiar figure by now, assisted at the autopsy as Humes' immediate subordinate.

Lt. Colonel Pierre Finck served in the US Army Medical Corps, and at the time worked at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology. He was called to assist at the autopsy after the procedure was under way, not arriving at Bethesda until 8:30 PM. Humes and Boswell had very little experience in forensic pathology— assembling and analyzing evidence in cases of violent death. Hence they wanted the expertise of someone like Finck. Admiral Galloway would later claim that Finck assumed direction of the autopsy, and FBI Agent Francis O'Neill agreed, saying he felt that "Finck seemed to take over the autopsy when he arrived." [17]

White House Physician Admiral Burkley was not part of the Bethesda hierarchy, and had no official role at the postmortem. By rank he was clearly subordinate to Admiral Kenney, superior to everyone from Captain Canada on down. His personal and official relationship to Admiral Galloway is unclear, although FBI Agents Sibert and O'Neill, as we've seen, describe Galloway overruling Burkley and ordering a complete autopsy.

Several other officers, enlisted men and civilians were also in the morgue, either as observers or as assistants. We have already met Dr. Karnei, lab technicians O'Connor and Jenkins, and of course Sibert and O'Neill. Secret Service Agents William Greer (who drove the presidential limousine in Dallas) and Roy Kellerman (who rode with Greer) witnessed the autopsy, while Agent Clint Hill remained with the Kennedy group on the 17th floor. Others played important parts as participants, witnesses, or both, and they will be brought into the story in later writings on this subject.

5. ATTEMPTS TO RESOLVE THE CONFLICT

Who, then, was in charge of that autopsy? Admiral Galloway, in his 1978 HSCA interview with committee staffer Mark Flanagan, insisted that no orders came from outside the morgue, either in person or by phone. This seems to rule out Kennedy interference from the 17th floor. But a week earlier Captain Stover told Flanagan that he recalled "Bobby Kennedy periodically visiting the autopsy room during the autopsy, and certainly after the body was prepared." [18]

Both could be right: Galloway carefully limited his remark to orders from outside the room, while Stover has RFK actually coming down to the morgue. But Stover stands alone on this point; no one else has recalled any RFK visitation. Stover may have experienced "memory merge" here, as Robert Kennedy might have come down after the autopsy was over, while preparations were being made to move the body to the White House. By then many of the other witnesses had left.

After the official close of the autopsy, it took several mo hours to obtain a new casket, and for employees of Gawle funeral home to prepare the body for burial. The distinctic between the autopsy and the burial preparations (or, to u approximate time frames, between pre–midnight and pos midnight activity) is an important one, and easily blurred memory merge. Manchester, for example, wrote that Burk and Air Force General Godfrey McHugh (JFK's military aid who was in the morgue at least part of the time) were constant touch with the 17th floor suite by phone.

This statement is often cited as explaining how Burkley g his instructions about the autopsy. But the full context Manchester's account, including the time and the subject matter, clearly indicates that he is writing about the earl morning burial preparations, not the autopsy. There wa much back–and– forth discussion at that time about th cosmetic work to be done, and whether JFK's body could b made presentable for open–casket viewing.

Whether during or after the autopsy—or both—is un clear, but Manchester also records that "From a telephone o the nurse's desk outside the suite Clint Hill periodicall checked with Kellerman" in the morgue. No one has reporte that Kellerman returned from the phone to huddle wit Burkley or anyone else. Manchester says that Hill was simpl trying to find out how long things would take. This conform to a general picture of RFK, portrayed as always anxious fo instant action and immediate results. [19]

But none of these anecdotes supports any firm judgment; we must search further.

STATEMENTS OF BOSWELL AND HUMES

In the course of an interview with HSCA staff investigators, Dr. Boswell, who assisted Dr. Humes at the autopsy, recalled how he "had been concerned that they began the autopsy without any written authorization which is something they never do. Such authorization has to come from the next of kin. He said that JACKIE [sic] finally signed the authorization which arrived in the morgue near the end of the autopsy." [20] This is a very significant statement. Unfortunately it can be interpreted in at least two ways.

First, Boswell can be taken literally; JBK actually signed a permit. This would discredit the document we have, since her name appears there typed.

Alternatively, Boswell, after the passage of fourteen years, was assuming that the permit that finally got sent down to the

morgue was signed. (Note that he does not say that he actually saw the document, only that it arrived.)

Boswell's primary memory here was his concern over the violation of procedure. Our recall of factual detail (such as whether a name was signed or typed) can become dim and faulty with the passage of time. But our memory of feelings about an event remain much more vivid and firm, especially feelings of anger, fear or anxiety over unusual, unfamiliar situations. Boswell found himself commencing an autopsy on a President of the United States, no less—with an annoying procedural lapse right off the bat. As both doctor and a naval officer, he had good cause for worry. So his memory on this point looks highly trustworthy. (In later writings we will examine some Boswell testimony about JFK's brain under this same light.)

Jacqueline and Robert Kennedy arrived at Bethesda just before 7:00 PM. This left plenty of time for them to execute an autopsy permit—even one containing detailed restrictions—well before the procedure began. This happened no earlier than 7:30.

We have seen how quite a to–do broke out between Admiral Burkley and the pathologists over Burkley's demands for a limited autopsy. If a signed autopsy permit containing the restrictions Burkley was fighting for actually existed, he most certainly would have presented it or cited it, slamming the door on any further objections from Boswell and Humes.

This is "merely inference," to be sure. But good investigation demands sound deduction every bit as much as it requires diligent collection of evidence. If this inference is not the safest one that can be drawn about the entire case, it clearly ranks near the top.

Burkley argued strenuously for a limited autopsy, yet the only available documentary evidence is an authorization for a complete one. Although less safe than the previous one, another inference is clearly warranted:

Jacqueline and Robert Kennedy authorized a complete autopsy. This authorization was withheld from the doctors so that Burkley, in front of some two dozen witnesses, could appeal to "family wishes" as the reason why only a partial postmortem should be done.

Dr. James J. Humes has been a paragon of reticence about this issue in his public testimony, and in discussions with researchers and the media—with at least one exception.

During the mid–sixties, Humes attended the same church as Jim Snyder, who was assigned to the Washington Bureau of CBS News. They became friends, and Humes began to speak to Snyder about the Kennedy autopsy.

Snyder related some of these conversations to Robert Richter of CBS. Richter in turn summarized them in a confidential memorandum to Executive Producer Leslie Midgley on January 10, 1967. According to the memo, Snyder gleaned some remarkable revelations from Humes. Among other things, the veteran doctor confided that "...he had orders from someone he refused to disclose—other than stating it was not Robert Kennedy—to not do a complete autopsy. Thus the autopsy did not go into JFK's kidney disease, etc." [21]

This memo, and the credence to be attached to several Humes statements it contains, is a story in itself. If the orders did not come from RFK, then from whom? JBK? It would be quite out of character for the gentlemanly Humes to describe Mrs. Kennedy as giving him "orders." When military personnel speak of "orders," they are generally referring to directions from military superiors. This is an admittedly weak inference, compared to the others, and Humes' statement must be given a subordinate place. Nevertheless it does lend support to the view that the Kennedy's placed no limits on the autopsy.

6. THE ADRENALS REVISITED

Was the postmortem on President Kennedy a complete or a partial one? That the record should be so inconsistent and murky on such a basic point indicates how difficult it is to unravel anything about the JFK investigation.

On Sunday, November 24, Humes, Boswell and Finck assembled at Bethesda to complete the autopsy report. In his subsequent report to General Blumberg, Finck wrote: "In my discussion with Cdr. Humes, I stated that we should not check the block 'complete Autopsy' in the Autopsy Report Form." Once again he explained that "In compliance with the wishes of the Kennedy family, the prosectors had confined their examination to the head and chest."

Despite this admonition, "Humes declared that the block 'complete Autopsy' should be checked." [22]

The autopsy protocol was thus labeled. Predictably, it contained no mention whatsoever of JFK's adrenals. Logic seemed to demand one conclusion: The Kennedy's had succeeded in pressuring the Navy to avoid an exploration or discussion of JFK's disease.

But this only adds to our annoying confusion: The permit contained no restrictions! Galloway ordered Humes to do a complete postmortem! And now we can add the very firm recollection of lab assistant James Curtis Jenkins:

We did a full scale autopsy on JFK. We tested for everything. We examined the testes (they were sectioned), the adrenals, etc. There were sections of the heart and other organs taken. [23]

In the light of everything else, this seems stunningly inconsistent, and we are tempted to place a heavy discount on Jenkins' credibility. He was, as some are quick to point out, "only an enlisted man," and a student at that, hardly "qualified" to make such judgments. Here, as in many other areas, credentialism serves as a handy device for discrediting witness testimony.

It is fitting, then, that an even more stunning revelation came from one of the qualified doctors assisting at Bethesda, Robert Karnei. While interviewing Karnei on August 27, 1991, Harrison E. Livingstone casually recalled how the autopsy report made no mention of adrenals:

Karnei: Mainly because they couldn't find them.

Livingstone: (apparently startled): They couldn't find his adrenals?

Karnei: Right, there was nothing there...Jim [Humes] and Jay [Boswell] worked long and hard in that fatty tissue in the renal–adrenal area looking for them, and didn't find anything that looked like adrenals...There was total atrophy as far as we can see at the autopsy. I mean they cut that fat to a fare–thee–well trying to find anything that looked like adrenals, and there just wasn't. [24]

Unbelievable! Again we feel moved to discredit such a story. But after Dr. Karnei's account was published in High Treason 2, it was confirmed by none other than Boswell himself, to Dr. George Lundberg of the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA). [25]

Where was Admiral Burkley, defender of Kennedy family interests and advocate for their wishes, while all this was going on?

Years earlier, Boswell pointed to the true state of affairs in his interview with HSCA investigators Purdy and Kelly. (This was among the many interviews and staff reports that were suppressed until 1993.):

Dr. Humes insisted there be a complete autopsy, saying, for example, the adrenals were extremely important. Dr. Burkley said it would be okay to examine the adrenals if they could reach them through the upper opening [incision in the chest]. Dr. Boswell reached down and tried to reach the adrenals but could not and Dr. Burkley agreed they could do a full autopsy.

The safe harbor of clarity at last! But we are at once thrown back into the chaotic ocean: the next sentences read:

Dr. Boswell indicated that they didn't do a "Y" incision, rather they did an incision from the axilla down below the nipples and the area was opened up. The organs were removed from the chest.

If Burkley had relented and agreed to a full autopsy, why wouldn't the doctors make the normal Y–incision? I think the confusion here is simply syntactical; the clause "they didn't do a 'Y' incision" should have been written "they had not yet done a 'Y' incision."

At any rate, "Dr. Burkley made clear that he didn't want a report on the adrenal glands, wanting instead that the information be reported informally." [26]

7. SUMMARY AND QUESTIONS

1. There is no probative evidence that either JBK, RFK, or both together sought to restrict or limit the autopsy. The witness testimony, even that of the doctors themselves, proves on examination to be indirect hearsay, reflecting what they heard, or what they were told, or their impressions.

Feinman makes a telling point here concerning Finck's objection to marking the autopsy as "complete": "...if the Kennedy's had really limited the autopsy, Galloway and Humes should have no objection...I conclude that the whole business of assigning responsibility to the family is a lie." [27]

2. The one document available that speaks directly to the point—the postmortem permit—flatly contradicts the thesis. There is no direct evidence available to challenge the authenticity of this document, although such a challenge is not implausible.

3. On the other hand, we have substantial first–hand evidence from those who were in the morgue with him that Admiral Burkley energetically sought to limit the autopsy by appealing to the wishes of the family. Among the few exceptions to this consensus are Finck, who is consistently vague on the point, and Humes, who is silent. Significantly, none of the other Navy "brass" present are reported as backing up Burkley in his efforts, with the possible exception of Galloway (and even he is reported on both sides of the issue).

Whether he acted on his own initiative or at the direction of others is uncertain (for now), but it is compellingly clear that Admiral Burkley was not acting as the Kennedy family agent in this regard.

Why then, would he engage in such a needless and risky endeavor? Why, especially, would he work so hard to keep

JFK's adrenals hidden? And then relent, to stand by, abashed, watching the doctors work "long and hard" to find them?

Finally, why would he want the results of this search "reported informally," instead of seeking to have the information totally suppressed——as it was from the autopsy protocol?

[TO BE CONTINUED]

Notes

1. JFK's medical history is well–summarized in Harrison E. Livingstone, High Treason 2 (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1992), pp. 52–68. Hereafter, HT2.
2. On concern for Kennedy family image, see: John Corry, The Manchester Affair (NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1967); Nigel Hamilton, JFK: Reckless Youth (NY: Random House, 1992), pp. 801–802; Hamilton, "A Plea To The Kennedys," New York Times [NYT], January 22, 1993; Jean Kennedy Smith, et al., "A Grotesque Portrait Of Our Parents," NYT, December 3, 1992; Laurence Leamer, The Kennedy Women (NY: Villard, 1994), p. 678 and passim.
3. HC Finck: Medical Panel Testimony, 3/11/78, pp. 128–129. (In these studies, "HC," followed by a name, refers to previously– unpublished House Committee testimony, interviews, or memoranda released since 1993. "HSCA" refers to the published Hearings and Staff Reports, 12 Vols., Washington: GPO, 1979).
4. Gerald Posner, Case Closed (NY: Random House, 1993), p. 303.
5. Harold Weisberg, Post Mortem (Frederick, MD: Harold Weisberg, 1975), p. 107.
6. Sibert/O'Neill Baltimore memo: David Lifton, Best Evidence (Dell 1982 edition), pp. 614–615; Report: p. 828.
7. 7 HSCA 9.
8. 7 HSCA 9.
9. HT2, pp. 260–261.
10. Roger Feinman, Between The Signal And The Noise (Manuscript, 1992), p. 49.
11. HC Boswell, pp. 2–4.
12. HT2, 180, 182.
13. HC Finck: Blumberg Report (2/1/65), pp. 3, 20; HC Finck: Testimony, pp. 72–73, 129.
14. 2 WCH 349.
15. The autopsy permit is reprinted in Weisberg, Post Mortem, p, 507.
16. HT2, p, 167. Oswald doubles are dicussed virtually everywhere in the literature. Rifles: George Michael Evica, And We Are All Mortal (West Hartford: Univ. of Hartford Press, 1978), pp. 1–61; Jack White, "Was Jack White Wrong To Tell The HSCA That These Guns Are Not All The Same? The Fourth Decade, I (January, 1994), 34. In general: J.R. Folliard, "My Evidence Is The Lack Of Evidence," The Fourth Decade, I (March, 1994), 27–29.
17. HC Galloway, May 17, 1978, p. 2; HC O'Neill, January 10, 1978, p. 6.
18. HC Stover, May 11, 1978; HC Galloway, loc. cit.
19. Manchester, Death of a President (NY: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 420, 433.
20. HC Boswell (Memorandum), p. 2.
21. CBS Memorandum, Bob Richter to Les Midgley, Jan. 10, 1967; reprinted in U.S., House of Representatives, Hearing Before The Legislation And National Security Subcommittee, Commmittee on Government Operations [on the JFK Assassination Records Act], November 17, 1993 (Washington: GPO, 1994), p. 233. The memo in introduced and analyzed in an excellent letter by Roger Bruce Feinman, pp. 222–232.
22. HR Finck (Blumberg Report), p. 4.
23. Letter to H.E. Livingstone, 6–16–91, cited in Harrison E. Livingstone and Kathlee Fitzgerald, "Encyclopedia Of Medical Events And Witnesses' Testimony," Appendix J in Livingstone's Killing The Truth (NY: Carroll & Graf, 1993), p. 716.

    Feinman, for example, continually refers to "minor players" in a disparaging way, and chides Lifton for seizing upon "the minor details that he has gleaned from the minor players in the drama of that tragic weekend." Feinman, Between the Signal and the Noise, p. 65. It is precisely those minor details that can prove crucial to an investigation. Chess players call it "the accumulation of small advantages." Minor players——ordinary people——are quite expert in the use of their five senses as well as that important sixth one, common sense.
24. HT2, pp. 179–180.
25. JAMA, October 7, 1992, p. 1737; Lawrence K. Allman, "President Kennedy Hid Adrenal Illness; Doctors Break Silence," Providence Journal, October 6, 1992, p. A–1, from a NYT report.
26. HC Boswell, p. 4.
27. Feinman, Between the Signal and the Noise, pp. 35–36.