

Tracking J.F.K.'s Body

Your discussion of David Lifton's "Two Casket" theory [Jan. 19] recalled some very vivid memories. In 1963 I was a pharmacologist at the Naval Medical Research Institute, a component of the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md. One of my collateral duties was to stand watch for the center. On Nov. 22, 1963, because of the unusual circumstances, I was recruited to serve with the duty officer.

In Lifton's book, the description of events relayed by a member of the Army honor guard does not coincide with my recollection. As I remember, we did not lose track of the ambulance containing the bronze casket after it arrived at the medical center. On that night there were a large number of spectators around, and our intention was to get the ambulance to the morgue before the crowd gathered. The honor guard, along with a Navy enlisted-man driver, the other duty officer and me, rode to the morgue on the guard truck at a high speed, believing that the ambulance was following. When we got there, the ambulance was not to be seen.

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Since the Secret Service driver was unfamiliar with the grounds, we decided he was lost. Retracing our path, we found the ambulance still at the front of the hospital amid many onlookers. In our haste we had left without confirming that the ambulance was behind us. On the second try we did it right.

At no time was the ambulance out of sight of at least several hundred people, from its arrival at the center until the bronze coffin was unloaded at the morgue.

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Your story of a bizarre new Kennedy assassination conspiracy theory is, as you say, "all but impossible to accept as reality."

From the moment we wheeled the casket out of Parkland Hospital in Dallas and pushed it into the ambulance, I, who was Air Force aide to the President, never left the coffin except for a few minutes. I did so only to talk to the pilot of Air Force One, and this was at Mrs. Kennedy's request. She wanted to expedite our departure. During this time Mrs. Kennedy, along with Larry O'Brien and Dave Powers, remained at the side of the casket. To suggest that anyone could have taken the body of the President out of the coffin with Mrs. Kennedy and two of his closest and most loyal friends a few feet away is illogical. Aboard Air Force One it would have been impossible!

Further, the statement that the ambulance sent to Andrews Air Force Base by the Bethesda Naval Hospital was left unattended at the front entrance of the hospital is false. I remained with the ambulance at all times. After a short while, I entered the ambulance. It was then driven to the emergency entrance, and the casket was immediately wheeled into the operating room.

The President was placed on an operating stand, and several doctors worked on him from about 7 p.m. to 3 a.m. The body remained on the table at all times. I never left the room even for an instant. The part of your story stating that everyone was ordered out of the room is incorrect. No one ever told me to leave, or had the authority to do so. After the mortician finished his work, we placed the President's body in the new casket that had been sent to us.

Upon completion of the procedures, I called Dave Powers, who advised Robert Kennedy and Mrs. Kennedy that we were prepared to leave. The ambulance, carrying the casket, Mrs. Kennedy, the Attorney General and me, returned to the White House, where the coffin was placed in the East Room.

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