

The Converging Medical Case for Conspiracy in the Death of JFK

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Convergence Toward Conspiracy

Over twenty Parkland witnesses repeated neurosurgery professor Kemp Clark's claim of a right-rearward, "occipital," skull defect. Among the Parkland witnesses who described JFK's skull defect as rearward, 8 participating physicians used the term "occipital" in documents published by the Warren Commission: Drs. Kemp Clark, Robert McClelland, Marion Thomas Jenkins, Charles J. Carrico, Malcolm Perry, Gene Aikin, Paul Peters, and Charles R. Baxter. Seven of them described having seen cerebellum, a very different-looking portion of brain only found at the rear. The autopsy photographs, which show a large blow-out wound in the front of the right ear, apparently prove them all wrong. Could so many good witnesses indeed have been in agreement, and yet so wrong?

A 1971 *Harvard Law Review* study demonstrating that in some circumstances witnesses tended to be more often right than wrong deepens the mystery. Marshall, Marquis and Oskamp found that when test subjects were asked about "salient" details of a complex, two-minute film clip they were shown, their accuracy rate was high: 78% to 98%. Even when a detail was not considered salient, as judged by the witnesses themselves, they were still accurate 60% of the time. While it is hard to imagine that the location of JFK's fatal wound would not have been a "salient" detail to the experienced medical witnesses involved in JFK's "routine" emergency resuscitation, if the autopsy photographs are right they prove that virtually all the witnesses were wrong. Yet these were highly trained, experienced witnesses who were performing a familiar procedure in familiar surroundings. And they had a 30-minute opportunity to observe JFK's wounds with little to distract them because so many people were helping with an effort that is often comfortably handled by one-fourth of the number of people who were on hand. Only a few Parkland witnesses—witnesses who played a minor role in JFK's care—gave vague descriptions. And it is only these who, while they don't reflect what is visible in the autopsy photographs, don't flatly contradict them. So even if one were to accept witness error as an explanation, one has still to

explain how so many of experienced witnesses made the exact same mistake by agreeing with the same wrong location.

The HSCA vs. the Parkland Hospital Witnesses

The controversy over Parkland witnesses' descriptions of JFK's skull wound is over twenty years old. In fact, the *House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA)*, which in 1978 reversed the Warren Commission's 1964 verdict by concluding that a conspiracy was "probable" in JFK's death, made a specific point of refuting Parkland witnesses on the appearance of JFK's skull wound. The HSCA wrote, "Critics of the Warren Commission's medical evidence findings have found (sic) on the observations recorded by the Parkland Hospital doctors. They believe it is unlikely that trained medical personnel could be so consistently in error regarding the nature of the wound, even though their recollections were not based on careful examinations of the wounds ... In disagreement with the observations of the Parkland doctors are the 26 people present at the autopsy. All of those interviewed who attended the autopsy corroborated the general location of the wounds as depicted in the photographs; none had differing accounts ... it appears more probable that the observations of the Parkland doctors are incorrect." (author's emphasis.)

The HSCA said its statement was supported by "Staff interviews with persons present at the autopsy." The HSCA's finding was devastating to skeptics who believed that Parkland witnesses proved a different wound, a different bullet trajectory, and, most importantly, a different gunman than Oswald. In *JAMA* Breo tried to put the "mistake" in perspective, explaining that Parkland witnesses were more concerned with saving JFK's life in an emergency situation than accurately observing his wounds. By contrast, the refuting autopsy witnesses, some of whom were physicians, calmly watched the pathologists explore JFK's wounds over a period of several hours. They were certainly in a better position than the emergency personnel to accurately observe JFK's wounds. But the proof—the autopsy witnesses' interviews—did not appear anywhere in the 12 volumes the HSCA published. And they were also withheld

from public inspection. Had it not been for the ARRB, access to these non-sensitive interview would have been restricted until 2028.

ARRB-released documents have revealed for the first time that the HSCA misrepresented the statements of its own Bethesda autopsy witnesses on the location of JFK's skull defect. The HSCA also misrepresented the Warren Commission statements of the autopsy witnesses as well, that is, assuming the HSCA author was aware of them. It was not true, as the HSCA reported, that it had 26 autopsy witnesses who disagreed with the Dallas doctors. The HSCA had interviewed perhaps 13 autopsy witnesses. None of them disagreed with the descriptions given by the Dallas doctors. Instead whereas over 20 witnesses at Parkland described JFK's skull defect as rearward, the HSCA's autopsy witnesses said the same thing whether in public Warren Commission documents, or in the suppressed HSCA interviews. In fact, not a single one of the autopsy witnesses described the right-front skull wound that appears in the photographs. (Table I: Observations at Parkland, and Table II: Observations at Bethesda). Assuming the photographs were accurate representations of JFK's wounds, the mystery suddenly doubled. Not only were all the witnesses' descriptions wrong, not one of them—of over 40 from two different locations—got it right!

For example, in his Warren Commission testimony Secret Service agent, Clinton J. Hill, said, "When I arrived the autopsy had been completed and ... I observed ... (a) wound on the right rear portion of the skull." Hill's recollections, as well as other, similar autopsy witness descriptions of JFK's rearward skull defect, have been available in the Warren Commission volumes since 1964. But what of the HSCA's suppressed autopsy witnesses?

Jan Gail Rudnicki, a lab assistant on the night of the autopsy, was interviewed on 5/2/78 by the HSCA. Although no verbatim transcript survives, the interviewer, Mark Flanagan, JD, reported Rudnicki told him, the "back-right quadrant of the head was missing." (author's emphasis) Philip C. Wehle, Commanding officer of the military District of Washington, D. C., was interviewed by HSCA counsel, D. Andy

Purdy, JD on 8-19-77. Purdy's recently released memo, released with no transcript, states, "(Wehle) noted that the wound was in the back of the head so he would not see it because the President was lying face up ..." (author's emphasis) Several of the autopsy witnesses, including two FBI agents, prepared diagrams for the HSCA that depicted JFK's skull defect as rearward. These diagrams were also suppressed.

I searched for the author of the HSCA's inaccurate summary, and the identity of the person who had decided to keep the interviews and diagrams from the public. I wrote HSCA counsel, Mark Flanagan, JD, who had conducted a number of the interviews. He never answered. HSCA counsel, D. Andy Purdy, JD, who conducted many of the interviews, and the former HSCA chief counsel, Robert Blakey, now a *Notre Dame* law professor, both denied any knowledge of the author of the inaccurate passage. Purdy did concede, however, that he was "not happy" with the wording of the passage.

As previously noted, the public was not the only group that was kept in the dark about the HSCA's autopsy witnesses. So too were the HSCA's own expert forensic consultants. In 1995, I showed both the head of the HSCA's forensic panel, Michael Baden, M.D., and one of the panelists, Cyril Wecht, M.D., JD, the current coroner of Pittsburgh, the suppressed autopsy interviews and diagrams. Neither had ever seen them before, despite the fact it was their responsibility to assess this evidence for the HSCA. Had this knowledge of the vast discrepancies between myriad witnesses and the photographs been shared with the HSCA's forensics consultants, it might have led the HSCA investigators toward evidence only finally unearthed by the ARRB twenty years later: the likelihood autopsy photographs are missing, and the possibility that some of those that remain have been tampered with.

The Case Against JFK's Autopsy Photographs

While the HSCA claimed the autopsy photographs were "authenticated," there are problems with the extant photographic record:

- All three of JFK's pathologists, Bethesda pathologist-witness, Robert Karnai, M.D., and both autopsy photographers recalled that specific photographs were taken during the President's autopsy that do not now exist.

- Chief White House photographer, Robert Knudsen told the HSCA (in formerly suppressed interviews conducted in 1978) that right after the assassination he developed images that do not now exist. In 1997 former government photographer Joe O'Donnell told the ARRB that in 1963 his friend, Robert Knudsen, showed him a photograph of JFK's head that revealed a large hole in the backside of the skull. No such image can now be found in the official inventory.

- Naval Photographic Center employee

Sandra Spencer told the ARRB that while developing JFK's autopsy photographs shortly after the assassination she, like Joseph O'Donnell, also saw an image revealing a hole in the back of JFK's skull. She also claimed that the film on which current autopsy photographs appear is film that was not used in the lab that is supposed to have developed the films in 1963.

- Chief autopsy photographer John Stringer disavowed the extant autopsy photographs of JFK's brain. Though Stringer was the photographer of record, he swore to the ARRB that he did not take the extant images. Moreover, he said that the current images were taken on film he is certain he did not use in 1963.

- Robert Grossman, M.D., a neurosurgeon who attended JFK at Parkland hospital in Dallas, was shown an image of the back of JFK's head taken from the autopsy. As ARRB investigator Doug Home put it in an ARRB memo, "When shown the Ida Dox drawing of the back of the head autopsy image found on page 104 of HSCA Volume 7, Dr. Grossman immediately opined, 'that's completely incorrect.'" Dr. Grossman then drew on a diagram of a human skull a defect square in the occiput that coincided with his clear recollection of the size and location of a defect in the back of JFK's skull.

- Upon being shown the autopsy photographs for the first time in 1997, the two FBI agents who witnessed the autopsy, Francis X. O'Neill and James Sibert, told the ARRB the image showing the backside of JFK's skull intact had been, as agent O'Neill put it, "doctored." Both agents claimed there was a sizable defect in the rear of JFK's skull. Sibert indicated the size and location of JFK's right-rearward skull defect on a diagram he prepared for the ARRB.

The Photographic Inventory

But as with so much else in the Kennedy case, the photographic record of the autopsy is hopelessly conflicted. There is, in fact, some evidence that the photographic file is complete. That evidence consists of an inventory signed by pathologists James H. Humes, M.D. and J. Thornton Boswell, M.D., radiologist John Ebersole, and autopsy photographer, John Stringer. Signed on 11/1/66 after they had examined the autopsy photographs for the first time, the inventory includes a sentence which reads, "The X-rays and photographs described and listed above include all the X-rays and photographs taken by us during the autopsy, and we have no reason to believe that any other photographs or X-rays were made during the autopsy."

This attestation is not truthful, and it was not written by the men who signed it. Instead, it is likely that someone at the U. S. Justice Department—the agency under whose authority the FBI investigated the JFK murder for the

Warren Commission in 1964—prepared this document for them to sign. This was shown by a recently declassified document that was signed by Carl W. Belcher of the U.S. Justice Department. The document reads, "On the afternoon of November 10, 1966, I took the original and one carbon copy of the document entitled 'Report of Inspection by Naval Medical Staff on November 1, 1966 at National Archives of X-Rays and Photographs of Autopsy of President John F. Kennedy' to the Naval Medical Center, Bethesda, M.D., where it was read and signed by Captain Humes, Dr. Boswell, Captain Ebersole and Mr. John T. Stringer. Certain ink corrections were made in the document before they signed it ..."

This memo probably reflects the importance LBJ's Attorney General Ramsey Clark attached to getting additional corroboration for the Warren Commission's autopsy findings, even if only self-affirmations from JFK's original pathologists. For after LBJ spoke with Ramsey Clark on January 26, 1967, the President wrote a once-secret memo which includes the comment: "On the other matter, I think we have the three pathologists and the photographer signed up now on the autopsy review and their conclusion is that the autopsy photos and x-rays [sic] conclusively support the autopsy report rendered by them to the Warren Commission *though we were not able to tie down the question of the missing photo entirely but we feel much better about it and we have three of the four sign an affidavit that says these are all the photos that they took and they do not believe anybody else took any others. There is this unfortunate reference in the Warren Commission report by Dr. Hinn [sic—almost certainly "Dr. Humes," for the name "Dr. Hinn" or "Mr. Hinn" appears nowhere else in the Kennedy saga.] to a picture that just does not exist as far as we know.*" (author's emphasis.)

[This self-affirmation appears to have been judged insufficient. For afterward—and at least as far as the public was concerned—JFK pathologist J. Thornton Boswell took it upon himself to write the Justice Department to request an independent reexamination of JFK's autopsy evidence. In response, Ramsey Clark convened a civilian panel to do just that: the so-called "Clark Panel." Though Boswell wrote up the request, behind him, again, one finds the Justice Department at play. Under oath, Boswell told the ARRB, "I was asked by ... (o)ne of the attorneys for the Justice Department that I write them a letter and request a civilian group be appointed by the Justice Department. I believe, or the President or somebody. And I did write a letter to him, Carl Eardley."]

While LBJ's memo is the first document that revealed some officials were aware that there might have been a missing autopsy photograph, even Johnson's memo isn't quite accurate. Be-

cause before the Warren Commission Humes did not describe just one image that is nowhere to be found in the current inventory; he described two: a photograph of the interior of JFK's chest, and another showing the entrance wound in skull bone. Thus although they affixed their signatures attesting to the completeness of the photo file in 1966, powerful evidence suggests that Humes, Boswell and Stringer were then fully aware the declaration was not true.

Missing Chest Photographs

During Humes's testimony before the Warren Commission, he said that in order to document the path of the nonfatal bullet through a bruised area at the top of JFK's lung cavity, "Kodachrome photographs were made ... in the interior of the President's chest." No such images are known to exist. Humes nevertheless continued to remember that he had taken these images. In 1978, the HSCA's Andy Purdy reported, "(Humes) specifically recalled (photographs)...were taken of the President's chest...(these photographs) do not exist." Eighteen years later Humes again said much the same thing. In 1996, Humes told the ARRB under oath, "We took one of the interior of the right side of the thorax ... and I never saw it. It never—whether it was under-exposed or over-exposed or what happened to it, I don't know." Humes was not the only signatory to recall internal, chest photographs.

Another signatory to the 11/1/66 affidavit, J. Thornton Boswell, M.D., was interviewed by the HSCA in the late 70s. The HSCA reported that Boswell "thought they photographed '...the exposed thoracic cavity and lung...' but doesn't remember ever seeing those photographs." In 1996, he told the same story. ARRB general counsel T. Jeremy Gunn asked Boswell, "(A)re there any other photographs that you remember having been taken during the time of the autopsy that you don't see here?" Boswell answered, "The only one that I have a faint memory of was the anterior of the right thorax. I don't see it, and haven't (sic) when we tried to find it on previous occasions, because that was very important because it did show the extra-pleural blood clot and was very important to our positioning that wound."

Similarly, chief autopsy photographer John Stringer, told both the HSCA and the ARRB that chest photographs were missing. The HSCA reported, "(John) Stringer remembers taking 'at least two exposures of the body cavity.' He swore to the ARRB that, 'There were some views that we—that were taken that were missing ... I remember (photographing) some things inside the body that weren't there.' Stringer also took exception to the fact that the record reflects he submitted 11 duplex film holders of undeveloped film to authorities, which should

have yielded 22 images; and yet only 16 duplex images made it to the current inventory. (To the authors' knowledge, the 11/1/66 last signatory, radiologist John Ebersole, who died in September 1993, was never asked about the autopsy photographs.)

The taking interior body photographs was also recalled by another central witness, albeit one who had not signed the 11/1/66 affidavit. The HSCA reported that assistant autopsy photographer Floyd Reibe "thought he took about six pictures—I think it was three film packs"—of internal portions of the body." Reibe also gave the HSCA additional, new evidence pertaining to missing autopsy photographs. "(Floyd) Reibe said he took photographs (using a Canon 35-mm single lens reflex and a Speedgraph (sic) lens 4 x 5." There is no 35-mm film in the current inventory. Reibe repeated his claim about 35-mm film under oath to the ARRB, asserting that he'd taken six or seven 35-mm photographs with a Canon camera. So besides the missing chest images Stringer took with his large format camera, there may also be 35-mm images missing.

One question naturally comes to mind: Why would witnesses who repeatedly testified the inventory of autopsy photographs was incomplete have signed the Justice Department's affidavit affirming the inventory's completeness? While it is unlikely an indisputable explanation will be found to account for the actions of all the signatories, the autopsy photographers gave the ARRB an illuminating explanation for their having signed another false affidavit about the total number of photographs taken at the autopsy. Dated 11/22/63, the ARRB excavated a second false affidavit—ARRB Exhibit #78—that specified the number of photographs that were taken on the night of the autopsy and surrendered by the photographers to the custody of Secret Service agent, Roy H. Kellerman. The affidavit was signed by John Stringer and Floyd Reibe.

ARRB counsel Gunn asked Stringer: "Do you see the phrase, next to last sentence, of the document—that I'll read it to you: 'To my personal knowledge, this is the total amount of film exposed on this occasion.' Do you see that?"

Stringer: "Yes."

Gunn: "Is it your understanding that that statement is incorrect?"

Stringer: "Well, yes ..."

Gunn: "When you signed this document, Exhibit 78, were you intending to either agree or disagree with the conclusion reached in the second to last—next to last sentence?"

Stringer: "I told him that I disagreed with him, but they said, 'Sign it.'"

Gunn: "And who is 'they' who said, 'Sign it.'"

Stringer: "Captain Stover." (Stringer's superior, and the Commanding Officer of U.S. Naval Medical School.)

Similarly, assistant autopsy photographer Floyd Reibe, testified that this same affidavit which also bore his signature, "would be incorrect, yes," for it did not list the 35-mm image he said he had taken.

ARRB counsel Gunn asked him: "If that statement had been given to you to sign to authenticate rather than (Captain) Stover, would you have signed this statement?"

Reibe: "If I was ordered to, yes ... We was shown this and told to sign it and that was it."

Jeremy Gunn did not expound more fully on this issue with Reibe. And, alas, though he had the opportunity to ask Drs. Humes and Boswell, and John Stringer, why they had signed affirming the autopsy inventory was complete he did not do so. This, despite the fact the Board was already aware of the fact that Humes' prior testimony had not been entirely truthful.

On August 2, 1998, the *Associated Press* quoted an ARRB finding: "Under oath, [Humes], finally acknowledged under persistent questioning—in testimony that differs from what he told the Warren Commission—that he had destroyed both his notes taken at the autopsy and the first draft of the autopsy report. Thus the Review Board extracted Humes' admission that he had burned both a preliminary draft of the autopsy report, which he had admitted before, as well as original autopsy notes prepared on the night of the autopsy, a fact that was inconsistent with what he had told the Warren Commission. Besides his ARRB admission conflicting with his 1964 testimony, it also contradicted two affidavits he had signed shortly after the assassination. On November 24, 1963 Humes "certified" over his signature that he had "destroyed by burning certain preliminary draft notes relating to" JFK's autopsy but that otherwise, "all working papers associated with (JFK's autopsy) have remained in my personal custody at all times. Autopsy notes and the holograph draft of the final report were handed to Commanding Officer, U.S. Naval Medical School, at 1700, 24 November 1963."

Humes' latter statement, repeated to the Warren Commission, was not precisely true. All "working papers" and "autopsy notes" had not remained with him until he turned them over to his superior. He destroyed some of them including original notes he'd taken himself. But this was not an entirely new story. For despite his Commission testimony and this affidavit averring otherwise, Humes had previously acknowledged destroying original autopsy notes in *JAMA*. The explanation Humes gave—that he destroyed the bloodstained notes so they

would never become an object of morbid curiosity—is unconvincing. Boswell's "face sheet," which he chose not to destroy, is also stained with JFK's blood. Besides having destroyed his own autopsy notes, Humes apparently also destroyed those of his forensic consultant, Pierre Finck, M.D.

In 1998 the *Associated Press's* Mike Feinsilber, reported that, "In an affidavit, Leonard D. Saslaw (Ph.D.), a biochemist who worked at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology in Bethesda, M.D., said that at lunch in the week following the assassination he overheard one of the autopsy doctors, Pierre Finck, 'complain that he had been unable to locate the handwritten notes that he had taken during the autopsy... Dr. Finck elaborated to his companions, with considerable irritation, that immediately after washing up following the autopsy, he looked for his notes, and could not find them anywhere.'" The ARRB added that, "Dr. Saslaw's main concern with what he heard Dr. Finck say is that as a scientist, he is well aware that any observations which are not written down contemporaneously, but reconstructed from memory after the fact, are not likely to be as accurate or complete as the original observations were." Feinsilber also reported that, "Finck told the board he couldn't recall the lunchroom conversation." Regarding the wrongly destroyed original autopsy notes and the false affidavits from JFK's pathologists, there is one question worth pondering: Would this have been a problem if JFK had been examined by civilian autopsists, that is, by men not under military command?

Missing Cranial Photographs

The other, now missing, photographs Humes referred to in his Warren Commission testimony are at least as interesting as the missing chest photographs: images showing the entrance wound in JFK's skull bone. As Humes described them to the Warren Commission, these photographs had been taken in such a way as to demonstrate the direction of the bullet's path. He said, "This (JFK's skull) wound then had the characteristics of wound of entrance from this direction through the two tables of the skull ... and incidentally photographs illustrating this ("coning" or "beveling") phenomenon (that show the bullet's direction) from both the external surface of the skull and from the internal surface were prepared."

In 1978 Humes' claim was independently corroborated by the only forensics-trained pathologist to attend JFK's autopsy, Pierre Finck, M.D.. While testifying before the HSCA, he referred to some old notes he had brought along on the JFK case. In these notes, which Finck apparently prepared contemporaneously and submitted to the HSCA, he had written: "I help the Navy photographer to take photographs of

the occipital wound (external and internal aspects) (sic)." The purpose of such photographs, of course, was to show a forensically important feature of a bullet entrance wound: "beveling," or "coning." As with a B-B hitting a pane of glass, when a bullet goes through bone a small hole is usually left on the outside, and a larger, "beveled," crater is left on the inside. This "beveling phenomenon" is used by pathologists, though not infallibly, as an aid in determining the direction of the bullet.

Since proving the cause of death with images of the fatal wound would have been the central purpose to photographing the autopsy, capturing the "beveling" in JFK's skull bone would have been a routine, even elemental, kind of documentation. Suitable images would only have been taken of bone, and not soft tissue such as scalp. For "soft tissue" such as scalp will not demonstrate beveling, just as a bullet "wound" through a carpet will not show the "beveling" one would see in a "wound" through a pane of glass.

Before the HSCA in 1977, Finck described how he had directed the taking of images to specifically demonstrate how the beveling in the bone proved the bullet had entered low in JFK's skull, in occipital bone. His testimony, only released, finally, by the ARRB in 1993, shows him under siege before the HSCA's forensic consultants who were convinced there was no wound where Finck said it was in occipital bone. Under oath Finck insisted he directed the taking of photographs of the low wound, photographs that do not now exist.

In the following exchange, Finck was being shown the autopsy photographs before the forensics panel and asked to comment on them:

(HSCA counsel Andy) Purdy: "We have here a black and white blow up of that same spot (a spot on the rear of JFK's scalp he claimed was the location of the bullet's entrance—see figure 1). You previously mentioned that your attempt here was to photograph the crater, I think was the word that you used."

Finck: "In the bone, not in the scalp, because to determine the direction of the projectile the bone is a very good source of information, so I emphasize the photographs of the crater seen from the inside the skull. What you are showing me is soft tissue wound (sic) in the scalp."

A few moments later, the following exchange occurred:

(Charles) Petty, M.D.: "If I understand you correctly, Dr. Finck, you wanted particularly to have a photograph made of the external aspect of the skull from the back to show that there was no cratering to the outside of the skull."

Finck: "Absolutely."

Petty: "Did you ever see such a photograph?"

Finck: "I don't think so and I brought with me memo-

randum referring to the examination of photographs in 1967... and as I can recall I never saw pictures of the outer aspect of the wound of entry in the back of the head and inner aspect in the skull in order to show a crater although I was there asking for (the photographer to take) these photographs. I don't remember seeing those photographs."

Petty: "All right. Let me ask you one other question. In order to expose that area where the wound was present in the bone, did you have to or did someone have to dissect the scalp off of the bone in order to show this?"

Finck: "Yes."

Petty: "Was this a difficult dissection and did it go very low into the head so as to expose the external aspect of the posterior cranial fascia (sic—He probably meant to say "fossa")?"

Finck: "I don't remember the difficulty involved in separating the scalp from the skull but this was done in order to have a clear view of the outside and inside to show the crater from the inside... the skull had to be separated from it in order to show in the back of the head the wound in the bone." (Author's emphasis.)

While no images survive in which JFK's scalp is shown reflected from the skull so as to demonstrate the skull wound, Finck wasn't the only who remembered taking those pictures. Both autopsy photographers did, too. For example, to Jeremy Gunn's question, "Did you take any photographs of the head after scalp had been pulled down or reflected," Stringer answered, "Yes."

Tampered Photographs?

The ARRB interviewed the two FBI agents who were present during JFK's autopsy, Special Agents Francis X. O'Neill and James Sibert. Both had previously prepared diagrams of JFK's skull for the HSCA—only declassified by the ARRB—which depicted a rearward defect in JFK's skull. (Figure 8) Interviewed by the ARRB and shown the autopsy images for the first time, both agents provided what is perhaps the most direct indictment of the extant autopsy images of JFK's skull.

ARRB counsel Gunn asked agent O'Neill: "I'd like to ask you whether that photograph (Figure 1) resembles what you saw from the back of the head at the time of the autopsy?" O'Neill: "This looks like it's been doctored in some way... I specifically do not recall those—I mean, being that clean or that fixed up. To me, it looks like these pictures have been... It would appear to me that there was a—more of a massive wound...." (author's emphasis) Similarly, Gunn asked agent Sibert, "Mr. Sibert, does that photograph correspond to your recollection of the back of President Kennedy's head?" Sibert: "Well, I don't have a recollection of it being that intact, as compared with these other pictures. I don't remember seeing anything that was like this photo (126)... I don't recall any-

thing like this at all during the autopsy. There was much—Well, the wound was more pronounced. And it looks like it could have been reconstructed or something, as compared with what my recollection was ...” The ARRB produced an anatomical drawing that Sibert had marked denoting the right rearward location of JFK’s skull wound.

Have Photographs that Once Existed Disappeared Since 1963?

With so many reports of images having been taken that do not now exist, the question naturally arises: Did anyone ever see autopsy images that have since disappeared? The answer apparently is yes.

In another previously suppressed HSCA interview, former White House photographer, Robert Knudsen, who has since died, reported that he developed some negatives from JFK’s autopsy, examining them in the course of his work on November 23, 1963. During the HSCA’s investigation, he was shown the complete photographic inventory. Repeatedly resisting pressure to back down, Knudsen insisted that in 1963 he saw at least one image not in the inventory he was shown in 1978: an image with a metal probe (or probes) through JFK’s body that entered the back at a lower position than it exited through the throat wound. [Robert Karnei, M.D., a pathologist who attended the President’s autopsy, gave the HSCA a similar account. The HSCA reported that, “He (Karnei) recalls them putting the probe in and taking pictures (the body was on the side at the time) (sic).”] Inasmuch as Oswald is supposed to have fired from above and behind JFK, who was not leaning forward, if the back wound was indeed lower than its supposed exit mate in the throat, Oswald simply didn’t do it.

There are two other witnesses who testified they saw now nonexistent photographs of JFK’s head in 1963: The first was a government photographer with the United States Information Agency, Mr. Joseph O’Donnell, who was frequently detailed to the White House during the Kennedy era. Interviewed by ARRB counsel T. Jeremy Gunn, O’Donnell claimed that within a month of the assassination he was shown JFK’s autopsy photographs on two occasions by his friend, White House photographer Robert Knudsen. Gunn reported that on the first occasion O’Donnell “remember(ed) a photograph of a gaping wound in the back of the head which was big enough to put a fist through, in which the image clearly showed a total absence of hair and bone, and a cavity which was the result of a lot of interior matter missing from inside the cranium.” On the second viewing, Knudsen showed him a photograph “in which the back of the head now looked completely intact. He (O’Donnell) said that the appearance of the hair in the “intact

back of the head’ photographs was wet, clean, and freshly combed. His interpretation of the differences in the photographs of the President’s head was to attribute the differences to the restorative work of the embalmers.”

Sandra Kay Spencer, a woman who developed and printed JFK autopsy images at the Naval Photographic Center (NPC) in November 1963, told the ARRB that she saw an image that revealed a hole 1 to 2 inches in diameter in the backside of JFK’s skull. She located the spot on a diagram of a human skull, marking a defect that is considerably larger than, and well below, the small spot interpreted by the HSCA as the true wound of entrance. Moreover, she said that the images she developed looked nothing like those in the current inventory, but showed JFK’s wounds ‘cleaned up’: “(N)one of the heavy damage that shows in these (the National Archives) photographs were visible in the photographs that we did.” Moreover, the paper on which the current photographs are printed is *not* the paper that was used by her lab in 1963, a point on which she expressed confidence because she had kept in her personal possession, and produced for the ARRB, some paper that was used at the NPC at the time she printed JFK’s autopsy images.

Similarly, assistant photographer Floyd Riebe told the ARRB that, in addition to now missing 35-mm images, he also took about one hundred black and white, “press pack” photographs using a large format (4 x 5) camera. Shown the extant black and white images that are on thick, notched film, Riebe claimed the current images are not on the kind of film he used, which was thinner and unnotched. None of the current images are on the kind of film Riebe said he had used.

The persuasive witness evidence that the ARRB compiled undermining the HSCA’s autopsy conclusions is not the only reason the ARRB found to mistrust the HSCA on the autopsy evidence. It also found that the HSCA had not been entirely frank when it reported that it had authenticated JFK’s autopsy photographs.

The HSCA “Authenticates” JFK’s Autopsy Photographs

Bolstering its case that the autopsy evidence was consistent with Oswald’s guilt, the HSCA announced that it had authenticated JFK’s autopsy photographs. However, the HSCA publicly admitted that its authentication was not quite complete. It wrote, “Because the Department of Defense was unable to locate the camera and lens that were used to take these [autopsy] photographs, the [photographic] panel was unable to engage in an analysis similar to the one undertaken with the Oswald backyard pictures that was designed to determine whether a particular camera in issue had been

used to take the photographs that were the subject of inquiry.”

In effect, the HSCA was saying that it was unhappy the original camera was unavailable to totally close the loop. Nevertheless, it expressed satisfaction the loop had been closed enough for confidence in the images because had found features in the extant images that showed a kind of internal consistency or consistency that would only find in authentic images. The consistencies, in essence, comprised the HSCA’s entire case for authentication. But that was an important part of the story the HSCA didn’t tell.

Luckily, the JFK Review Board’s Doug Horne did tell it, after a little excavation of once-suppressed HSCA files. It is a rather different story than the one implied by the HSCA’s comment: “Because the Department of Defense was unable to locate the camera and lens that were used to take these [autopsy] photographs regarding that sentence, Horne wrote, “By late 1997, enough related documents had been located and assembled by the authors to bring into serious doubt the accuracy of the HSCA [statement].” It was not precisely true the Department of Defense had been unable to locate the camera used to take JFK’s autopsy photographs.

Apparently, the DoD *had* found the camera. The DoD had written the HSCA a letter declaring that “the only [camera] in use at the National Naval Medical Center in 1963” had been sent to the HSCA for study. The HSCA, however, wasn’t happy with the autopsy camera the DoD had sent. In a letter asking the Secretary of Defense to look for another one, Robert Blakey explained the problem: “[O]ur photographic experts have determined that this camera, or at least the particular lens and shutter attached to it, could not have been used to take [JFK’s] autopsy pictures.” Whereas the HSCA publicly declared the original autopsy camera could not be located, the suppressed record suggests that in fact the correct camera had been found, but that it couldn’t be matched to JFK images.

Horne reported that Kodak, which did work for the Review Board, found no evidence that current autopsy images had been falsified. As Horne emphasized in his memo, the HSCA misstatement, as misleading as it is, may not be as sinister as it seems at first blush. The type of camera used was a “view” camera. It had flat, square back that houses the film pack and an attached bellows. Attached to the front of the bellows are an interchangeable lens and a shutter mechanism, which may be switched out for different tasks. The lens and shutter used in 1963 may have been replaced by the time the DoD fetched the camera for the HSCA in 1977. And so a different lens or shutter might explain

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why the camera didn't match JFK's photographs. But unfortunately there is no certainty that a different lens and shutter *do* explain the mismatch. Horne searched through the files for the tests the HSCA had conducted that proved a mismatch, but could find none. He also searched for the camera, and reported it has been lost.

So while Horne was unable to confirm an innocent explanation for the mismatch, he was unable to exclude the obvious, sinister explanation: photo tampering. The Kodak finding that the extant images reveal no tampering proves that the extant images themselves have no internal inconsistencies that would prove tampering. It cannot, however, prove that no images are missing, which in fact appears to be the case. Nor can it disprove another possibility: that the current inventory is an entirely separate set of internally consistent images, but a different set than the one that may have originally existed. So speculation there was some kind of photographic "doctoring" is not merely the lunacy of Parkland Dr. Charles Crenshaw, it has significant support in the record. In fact, the word "doctored" was precisely the word FBI agent Francis O'Neill used under oath when he was first shown JFK's autopsy photographs by the JFK Review Board.

Conclusions

While the medical and autopsy evidence that proves or disproves Oswald's guilt should be straightforward, it is anything but. A huge chasm exists between the credible accounts of myriad, solid witnesses and the "hard" evidence, between the examining physicians at two different locations and the autopsy photographs and X-rays. That so-called "hard evidence" has been challenged not only by work published elsewhere—for example, in the chapter by David W. Mantik, M.D., Ph.D., found in *Assassination Science* (1998)—it has also been challenged by the very autopsy witnesses one would

have expected to have endorsed the evidence, by the technicians who processed that evidence, and by authorities experienced with the kinds of mortal injuries JFK sustained.

Thus the hypothesis that there was tampering with JFK's autopsy evidence is not one that the responsible skeptic grabs; it is one that grabs the responsible skeptic who searches for a reasonable explanation. Because it is the simplest, and perhaps the only, way to explain why witnesses who saw the dead president overwhelmingly described an Oswald-exculpating wound in the rear of JFK's skull; why other, credible witnesses who were shown the images rejected them, even calling them "doctored"—precisely because they don't show JFK's rearward skull damage; why the record reflects that more negatives were submitted by the autopsy photographers than can now be accounted for; why doctors and photographers under military command signed false affidavits and swore untruthfully; why witnesses who developed the photographs rejected the supposed authentic images as well as the film on which the current images are printed; why both of JFK's autopsy photographers and all three of his pathologists have sworn that specific autopsy photographs are missing; and perhaps also why attempts to match the current batch of autopsy photographs to the camera that supposedly took them failed, as well as why neither JFK's autopsy camera nor the tests that prove it didn't match current images can be located today.

Looked at another way, assuming that JFK's death was merely what the Warren Commission said it was—a deranged act by a disgruntled loner, are there not some fantastic improbabili-

ties that smack of a cover-up? In an innocent scenario, how likely is it that records that never threatened national security would have been suppressed from the public for over thirty years? How likely that the once-suppressed records would disclose that respected, high-ranking, military physicians had knowingly signed false affidavits and given misleading testimony supporting the official verdict? That overwhelming witness testimony, some of it falsified and suppressed by the HSCA, would contradict the "hard" X-ray and photographic autopsy evidence? That ample evidence would emerge that important autopsy images are missing? That the photographs that have survived don't match the credible accounts of so many witnesses, and that there is much else in the record pointing to tampering with the surviving photographs? And, finally, in the absence of a cover-up, how likely is it that the very medical and autopsy evidence that was suppressed and falsified would so often, upon release, turn out later to have supported Oswald's innocence?

Still incomplete, though continually unfolding, the JFK medical/autopsy evidence is nothing if not fascinating and disturbing. Most of it was available in 1992 when *JAMA* set out to correct the record in the aftermath of the public outrage provoked by Oliver Stone's film *JFK*. With its legendary research capabilities, *JAMA* could have begun to unravel some of the mysteries that were only solved six years later by the efforts of the *JFK Review Board*. Unfortunately, *JAMA's* editor Lundberg (who has since been fired) squandered this historic opportunity to pursue instead the goal of punishing Oliver Stone, Charles Crenshaw and anyone else who dared travel with them.

The above is a slightly edited and abridged essay from *Murder in Dealey Plaza: What We Know Now That We Didn't Know Then About the Death of JFK* edited by James H. Fetzer. The volume is published by Catfeet/Open Court and is priced at \$19.95 and is now available at most major bookstores and on Amazon.com. The published version is heavily footnoted. Footnotes have been removed from this section for space considerations. Readers are encouraged to obtain the book for sourcing informa-

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11/8/2000

Dear Hal,

Good to talk to
you again.

I thought this article
would be of interest.

Rumor has it that
Fensterwald Paul Gore's
law and Gore has said
he believed there was
a conspiracy.

Stay well.

Sincerely,
Ed Williams

This argument is shown to be proven fact in
the disclosed original FBI/DOJ evidence, albeit
not with argument and not as argument
but as fact, which I published. Gary,
like most of those who argue their
beliefs, lacks knowledge of the published,
initial official evidence so they argue
and in their arguments they resort to the
weakest verbal accounts.