

Warren Staffers Want Lid Lifted From Autopsy Photos

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Many staff members of the disbanded Warren Commission have refused to publicly answer the critics, or to defend the commission's report.

At least two, though, Joseph A. Ball of Long Beach

Ninth in a Series

and Wesley J. Liebeler of Los Angeles, have said they felt from the beginning that the X-rays and photographs from the autopsy of President John F. Kennedy should have been introduced in evidence.

In interviews with 11 of the 15 counsel and four of the 10 staff members, the writers have learned that a majority now feel the secret label should be removed because of the doubt created by the critics. None thinks that the commission need be re-established. One suggestion was that some nongovernmental body, such as a group of university presidents or a law society, should select forensic pathologists to view and analyze the evidence.

SEVERAL agreed with the idea expressed by one former assistant counsel:

"I think they should be open to any qualified expert who wants to see them whether he is chosen by a



WESLEY J. LIEBELER Opposes Secrecy

college president or Mark Lane himself."

While the autopsy X-rays and photographs were not introduced formally, it does not mean that they were not seen — and that they did not show the wounds as described in the autopsy report. The critics make the point that the photographs were handed undeveloped to the Secret Service and that they were transmitted that way eventually to the care of Robert Kennedy.

ALBERT Jenner, an assistant counsel now in Chicago, says he saw some of the autopsy photographs. Arlen Specter, currently district attorney in Philadelphia, has stated having

seen at least one purported color photograph.

They also were examined and authenticated last Nov. 1 by four men intimately connected with the autopsy:

Cmdr. James J. Humes, senior pathologist at Bethesda Naval Hospital; Cmdr. J. Thornton Boswell, chief pathologist at Bethesda; Capt. John Ebersole, the radiologist who took the X-rays, and John T. Stringer Jr., a medical photographer at the National Naval Medical Center, who took the photographs.

"WE AUTHENTICATED each item," says Boswell, who is now in private practice. "As Dr. Humes looked over my shoulder, I initialed each of the color and black-and-white photographs. Capt. Ebersole initialed each of the X-rays. There are various views of all the wounds, as we described them, and some of the photographs were taken so that the President's face is visible."

The National Archives says there are 26 color and 25 black-and-white photographs and 14 X-rays.

Mark Lane surrounds the episode regarding the X-rays and photographs with language unsupported by testimony. He says, on Page 60 of the hardcover edition of his book:

"The X-rays and photographs were taken from Dr. Humes and given to the Se-

cret Service; indeed, the photographs were seized before they were developed. Humes testified that not even he had seen the photographs ostensibly taken to assist him and the other doctors."

THEN ON Page 62, he refers to them again, saying "... federal police agents confiscated the crucial photographs and X-rays. ..." Confiscated? Seized?

Humes testified they were "turned over" to the Secret Service, but nowhere does he say they were demanded or that he objected to releasing them.

Lane need not have been so evasive or uncertain as to why the photographs were made — "ostensibly to assist him (Dr. Humes) and the other doctors," as he puts it. By his construction, it would seem the photos were taken to help the doctors that night of the autopsy.

BUT HUMES is clear about it in his testimony on Page 373, Vol. II:

"The X-rays were developed in our X-ray department on the spot that evening, because we had to see those right then as part of our examination, but the photographs were made for the record and for other purposes."

Lane, Edward Jay Epstein and Harold Weisberg see something highly suspicious in the statement of Humes that there was an autopsy "draft I personally burned in the fireplace of my recreation room."

In two of three references to this, Lane drops the word "draft." On Page 66, it becomes "his admission that he destroyed original notes relating to the autopsy." On Page 385, Lane says: "Destroyed evidence included the original notes prepared and then burned by Commander Humes after the autopsy."

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ESPSTEIN says Humes "destroyed by burning certain preliminary notes relating to" the autopsy. "Draft" was dropped.

Epstein then later raises a question about the original autopsy report.

Weisberg writes: "If the commission had any questions about the burning of any kind of historic papers, especially undescribed 'preliminary draft notes,' the transcript does not reveal it."

No one seems to wonder why Humes need have told anyone about it since he did it while he was alone in the privacy of his home. If he wanted to conceal something, would he raise suspicion by certifying that he burned a preliminary draft he had written of the autopsy report?

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THE CRITICS make this draft seem part of the autopsy notes themselves. Those notes are identified as part of commission's Exhibit 397. And if the commission wanted to hide any revisions in the autopsy report which it published, why then would it have published the autopsy report in Humes' handwriting which shows those revisions?

There apparently was one corroborating piece of evidence which was inexplicably left out of the autopsy report, the writers learned. That was the result of a microscopic examination of tissue removed from the rear neck wound.

"We conducted microscopic examination of tissue removed from the neck wound area and found foreign substances such as fiber particles," says Boswell.

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THIS WOULD further show that the bullet which made the holes in Kennedy's jacket and shirt carried some material with it into the neck.

Why wasn't this in the autopsy report?

"It was an unfortunate oversight. It was not intentional," Boswell says. "I would say that three years ago we didn't presume that it would have been necessary to substantiate our findings."

Next: The case of the errant dot.