

Memorandum

TO : Ramsey Clark
Acting Attorney General

DATE: NOV 22 1966

FROM : W. David Slawson *WDS*
Office of Legal Counsel

SUBJECT: Warren Commission, autopsy photographs and
X-rays -- Letter from Wesley J. Liebeler to
J. Lee Rankin dated November 16, 1966.

A copy of the above-referenced letter was sent to me and, according to the letter itself, also to you. Mr. Liebeler worked for the Warren Commission as an Assistant Counsel, the same position as I held, and I know him well. [He is honest and responsible but has a tendency to get overly excited on occasion.] We talked about his letter by telephone Monday afternoon, November 21, 1966. The following is the gist of our conversation. Mr. Liebeler asked that it be kept confidential within the Department.

About one week ago, Liebeler talked with Harrison Salisbury of the New York Times. Salisbury told him that the Times was planning a series of articles on the criticisms of the Warren Report, that he, Salisbury, was to be in charge of the series, that he believed the criticisms were serious enough to warrant a re-opening of the investigation and that he thought there should be such a re-opening. Salisbury wanted the Times to call for a re-opening, but of course that decision would not be made until after the series had been written and other Times' editors could judge the issue too. (The New York Times today -- November 21 -- said that Life Magazine had already editorially called for a re-opening.) Salisbury also said that the Times had asked Burke Marshall to cooperate with it or others in having some nongovernment pathologists examine the autopsy X-rays and photographs but that Marshall refused.

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Declassified: *Arnoldman*
Authority: Deputy Assistant Attorney General,
Office of Legal Counsel

File

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Liebeler feels strongly that public opinion will soon force the Department of Justice and Burke Marshall to permit some kind of unofficial access to the photographs and X-rays and that it is better that such permission be granted as soon as possible. The dangers in waiting are:

(1) It will then look like we consented only under pressure, especially if by then the New York Times has joined the chorus.

(2) There is still a reasonable chance of spiking this thing by a re-investigation limited to aspects of the autopsy, but if public opinion continues to develop as it has over the past few months we may soon be faced with a politically unstoppable demand for a free-wheeling re-investigation of all aspects.

(3) The lunatic fringe already allege, or broadly hint, the involvement of the highest echelons of the Government in the assassination, and the Government's participation in the "hiding" of the photographs and X-rays dangerously lends creditability to their hints and allegations. Such hints have been made, for example, by Mark Lane in his speeches (according to Liebeler), by Richard Popkins in his book, "The Second Oswald", and by Barbara Garson in a play already published and due to be shown in New York City, "MacBird". The play has been favorably reviewed by Dwight MacDonal in the New York Review of Books (although he disclaims any agreement with this particular aspect of it) and by Robert Brustein in the New York Times (who failed to mention this aspect).

Richard Billings of Life Magazine talked extensively with Liebeler and also with Arlen Specter, another Assistant Counsel, prior to Life's beginning its current series on the Warren Report. Liebeler argued with Billings that Life should not

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print Governor Connally's story without also asking him questions designed to elicit the other side of the issues on which he disagreed with the Commission. Liebeler argued that putting out Connally's story "as is" would have the effect of freezing him to it, whether or not it was true. But Billings refused because, he said, Connally had consented to be interviewed only on condition that he be asked only such questions as he approved and not be cross-examined. When Liebeler remonstrated that Life had a responsibility not to publish under such one-sided conditions, Billings replied in effect, "That's publishing business".

Sunday, November 20, Liebeler talked with Edward Jay Epstein, the author of the book "Inquest", which is critical of the Report. Epstein now feels satisfied on all issues raised in his book except those connected with the autopsy X-rays and photographs. He still believes that they should be examined by an independent group of pathologists. If they are so examined, and if the group contains a man acceptable to him, and if the result is to confirm the Commission's findings, Epstein will publicly state his satisfaction with the Report -- in effect, he will publicly repudiate the doubts and suspicions he himself cast in his book. And he will join with Liebeler and others in defending the Report against Lane, who Epstein now is convinced is unscrupulous and dangerous.

Liebeler, Bert Griffin and Arlen Specter, the three Assistant Counsel who have been most concerned with answering public criticisms of the Report, would be glad to talk any of this over with you if you want them to.

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129-11

September 20, 1965

D.A.K

Honorable Earle Cabell
House of Representatives
Washington, D. C. 20515

Dear Congressman Cabell:

Thank you for your letter of September 13 regarding the disposition of the casket used to transport the body of the late President Kennedy to Washington. I think your suggestion merits consideration, and we will certainly look into the matter. I appreciate your interest.

Sincerely,

John Edgar Hoover
Attorney General

JFF:cjc

129-11

WASHINGTON OFFICE
198 Cannon House Office Building

TELEPHONE
400 FIFTH ST., N.W., WASHINGTON
D.C. 20515-3521

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

September 13, 1965

WASHINGTON OFFICE, UNITED STATES

RECOMMENDATION
INTERNATIONAL TRADE
SMALL BUSINESS

HARRY CHURCHER, III
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

MRS. JO HYAL GUMMELT
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

The Honorable Nicholas deH. Katzenbach
The Attorney General of the United States
Department of Justice
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Attorney General:

With the passage of H. R. 9545, and the anticipated subsequent passage of a similar measure by the Senate, a matter presents itself to which I would draw your attention.

Among the articles involved in the incident of November 22, 1963, and which has previously not received too much attention, is the casket in which the body of the late President was transported to Washington. Inasmuch as the family of the late President (President Kennedy) did not see fit to use this particular casket in the ultimate interment of the body, this casket has subsequently become surplus.

It is an extremely handsome, expensive, all bronze, silk-lined casket and, fortunately, and properly, was paid for by the General Services Administration, and presently is in the possession of GSA.

This item has absolutely no more historical significance than does the plastic mattress cover in which the body was encased for shipment from Dallas to Washington, but does have a value for the morbidly curious. And I believe that I am correct in stating that this morbid curiosity is that which we all seek to stop.

I, therefore, would like to recommend to you that this casket, now in the possession of the GSA, be declared the proper property of the USA and, as such and in keeping with the best interest of the country, be destroyed.

I believe that the Administrator of GSA and others involved will concur in this recommendation.

Thanking you for your earnest consideration of this matter, I am

Respectfully yours,

EARLE CABELL, M.C.

EC:KC

129-11

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

27 SEP 14 1965

R.A.J.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

F.W.W.

DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL



Exhibit -

Copy of wire 11/16/41

letter to Mr. [unclear]

re thought coffin

from [unclear] was

thought in [unclear]

to be [unclear]

GSA has coffin

Special letter to [unclear]

Howard M. [unclear]

9/13

I understand from Harold
Reis that this was discussed
by A.G., Schlie & Barfoot
& decision was made to
make no further response
to letter & that destruction
of coffin was not advisable

I suggest it be kept
with Oswald gun &
other Reis evidence
in secret library

Files notes
JRT
2/7/65

JRT

November 19, 1964

Mr. Gordon Chase in Mr. Bundy's office questioned me this morning in my office concerning the relative position of the Physician to the President in the movements of the President. This inquiry was part of a background investigation for Mr. Bundy who is a member of the committee checking on the findings of the Warren Commission with Mr. Dillon. The relative position of the Physician to the President in my estimation should be in closest proximity as feasible. Theoretically, possibly riding the Presidential vehicle would be best. The only feasible place for this would be in the front seat between the driver and the Secret Service man. The medical bags would have to be carried in that immediate vicinity and could not be put in the trunk due to the fact of the difficulty of getting into the trunk due to the fact of the difficulty of getting into the trunk at the time of emergency. The second area to be considered would be riding permanently in the follow-up car. However, there again the only logical seating position would be in the front seat between the driver and the Secret Service man. However, the rear seat middle position could be used. Positioning in the follow-up car results in over-crowding as there are an average of 8 to 9 Secret Service people in this car on most movements. The most logical positioning would be a car specifically designated for this purpose to be a part of the motorcade which travels with the President on all movements and all emergency movements. This should be immediately behind the follow-up car. This should have a White House Secret Service driver who would know and fully understand the necessity for the movement with the President in case of any emergency. It should be clearly understood by all people concerned including the local police coverage that the first three cars in the motorcade are to be considered as one in case of any emergency movement and should move without any interference. Also, that any local police car should follow the physician's car. The President's Physician should not be in a car with the local police unless this is absolutely unavoidable as many times they are under the direction of the local police and not under the direction of the Secret Service who are running the motorcade and the car might be diverted or might be held up as it has been on occasion. On some occasions I, as Physician to the President, have ridden the lead car which is usually from 50 to 60 feet in advance of the President's car. This is not as advantageous as immediately following the Secret Service car because of the danger of people intervening between his car and the Presidential motorcade.

During the recent campaign activity I was able to maintain this position in the motorcade only by forceful action on my part. On numerous occasions I had to demand a place in the car immediately following the Secret Service car which was that of the local police enforcement agency.

George G. Burkley
G. G. Burkley, M. D.

----- car, after the processing the search from there will be resumed. I expect any notations added in these offices to be significant, particularly as they relate to -----