

Archive Photos Not of JFK's Brain, Says Assassinations Board Report

Staff Member Concludes 2 Different Specimens Were Examined

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Doctors who conducted the autopsy on President John F. Kennedy may have performed two brain examinations in the days following his assassination, possibly of two different brains, a staff report for the Assassinations Records Review Board said.

The report, summarizing perplexing discrepancies in the medical evidence, was among more than 400,000 pages of internal records that the now-defunct board compiled in its effort to make public as much information about the assassination as it could find. The papers were released yesterday at the National Archives.

The five-member panel, which closed down Sept. 30, was not set up to make findings about the assassination and did not take a position on the hypothesis set out in the 32-page report by Douglas Horne, the board's chief analyst for military records.

The central contention of the report is that brain photographs in the Kennedy records are not of Kennedy's brain and show much less damage than Kennedy sustained when he was shot in Dallas and brought to Parkland Hospital there on Nov. 22, 1963. The doctors at Parkland told reporters then that they thought Kennedy was shot from the front and not from behind as the Warren Commission later concluded.

"I am 90 to 95 percent certain that the photographs in the Archives are not of President Kennedy's brain," Horne, a former naval officer, said in an interview. "If they aren't, that can mean only one thing—that there has been a cover-up of the medical evidence. . . . The second brain was consistent with a shot from behind.

The first one was not."

The report points to, for instance, the testimonies of former FBI agent Francis X. O'Neill Jr., who was present at the Nov. 22, 1963, autopsy at Bethesda Naval Hospital, and of former Navy photographer John T. Stringer, who said he took photos at a supplementary brain examination two or three days later, probably on the morning of Nov. 25.

O'Neill told the board in a 1997 deposition that at the Nov. 22 autopsy "there was not too much of the

brain left" when it was taken out of Kennedy's skull and "put in a white jar." He said "more than half of the brain was missing."

Shown the brain photographs deeded to the Archives by the Kennedy family, which were taken sometime after the autopsy, O'Neill said they did not square with what he saw. The "only section of the brain which is missing is this small section over here," O'Neill said of one photograph. "This looks almost like a complete brain."

Stringer said the photos he took at the "supplementary examination" conducted by J. Thornton Boswell and James Humes did not resemble those at the Archives. He said they seemed to be on "a different type of film" from the one he used. He said he also took photographs of "cross sections of the brain" that had been cut out to show the damage. No such photos are in the Archives collection.

Stringer has also said that some photos he took at the autopsy itself were missing. He said he "gave everything" from the brain examination to Humes, who gave the film to Kennedy's personal physician, the late Adm. George Burkley.

Now ill and unavailable for comment, Humes testified in a 1996 deposition that Kennedy's brain was not serially sectioned in the way Stringer described "because the next thing you know George Burkley wanted it." He said Burkley told him "flat out" that the Kennedy family wanted to inter the brain with the president's body and that Burkley said he was going to deliver it to Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy.

The president's casket was buried on the afternoon of Nov. 25.

However, a third autopsy physician, Pierre Finck, said in a 1965 report, based on earlier notes, that Humes called him on Nov. 29, 1963, to "examine the brain" at Bethesda.

"Humes, Boswell and myself examined the formalin fixed brain," Finck wrote. "A U.S. Navy photographer was present." He said the photographer took pictures of the brain from below. Stringer, by contrast, said he did not shoot such "basilar, or inferior, views."

Horne said in his memo that this "second hypothesized examination" may have taken place as late as Dec.

2, 1963, in light of the recollections of Chief Petty Officer Chester H. Boyers. The officer in charge of the pathology department at Bethesda, Boyers told the House Assassinations Committee in 1978 that he processed brain tissue and prepared paraffin blocks "of eight or 12 sections of the brain" on Dec. 2.

Boswell told a reporter yesterday that the brain was "examined in detail" at the Nov. 22 autopsy and once more "a few days later" after it had been "put in form and fixation."

"It was the same brain," he said of the Nov. 25 examination. "We decided it was destroyed enough that we didn't need to take sections." Asked about Stringer's recollection of photographing sections, Boswell said, "He's full of [expletive]."

Jeremy Gunn, former executive director and general counsel of the review board, said he thought it "highly plausible" that there were two different brain examinations.

Gunn took the testimony of Parkland doctors in August but could not show them the photographs. Steve Tilley, custodian of the JFK collection at the Archives, said there wasn't enough time to provide security for the photographs to be taken to Dallas.

CORRECTIONS

A caption with yesterday's Chronicles column incorrectly described Turkey's national day celebration. It was the first in Washington for Turkish Ambassador Baki Ilkin, not the first for the embassy.

In Saturday's Style story about Thomas Jefferson, Peter Carr's relationship to Jefferson was stated incorrectly. He was Jefferson's nephew. Also, Edward L. Ayers is one of two authors of "The Strange Case of Thomas Jefferson: Race and Slavery in American Memory." His co-author is Scot A. French.