



## Tampering

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Then, wouldn't you have seen the back of the head with the scalp reflected?

Should have. But whether it was – they had taken some of the bone away or something, I don't know.

When you saw the back of the head with the scalp reflected, was there bone missing, regardless of when that bone was taken out?

I didn't see it missing. [pp91-92]

Stringer did not seem to know what he was supposed to say and, in the following passage, he reveals that he didn't even know "how much they wanted to show."

In terms of standard autopsy procedure, would it have been standard procedure to take a close-up photograph of any wound that was identified as a possible entry wound?

Yes. But, here again, whatever they told us to take, I took.

Do you recall during the autopsy believing that a photograph should be taken, but one was not asked for you to take?

I don't – I don't know. I don't know how much they wanted to show. But they told us what to take, we took it. [p93]

When it came to the brain damage, Stringer described a more intact brain than anyone else, including the pathologists. This just calls attention to the hard edge around the superimposed image:

Do you have any mental picture of the size of the brain at the time that it was removed?

I don't think there was much more than the side of your fist that was gone. Of course, the brain is soft in there. And it's hard to see what it's lying down in. [p148]

### Missing Photos

Throughout his testimony, Stringer used the word "we" when describing who took autopsy photos. "We took pictures of the insides...we did with the brain in there... they told us what to take, we took it." We, we, we. Yet, Stringer asserts he is the only one who took autopsy photos.

Who assisted you with photography during the JFK autopsy?

The Corpsman on duty was a student in my photography class – his name was Riebe – handed me the film holders and I shot all the pictures... Riebe did not take any autopsy photos... Riebe did have a "roll camera," and tried to take pictures of those present in the morgue for posterity, but after doing so, the Secret Service took his camera away

from him and exposed his film (120 film) to light. I think I took both color and black-and-white photos during the autopsy. [4/8/96, p1]

### Floyd Riebe

The ARRB Staff Report accompanying the July 1998 release of medical documents mentions Riebe, but only his reversal of an earlier statement he made concerning photographs of the back of the head. If Riebe is considered credible, why not mention his *sworn* statement that he took over 100 photographs that are *not* among those in the archives? Why is that less important than his revised opinion on the back

Stringer:

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Riebe:

How long during the course of the autopsy did you take photographs?  
...Throughout the whole autopsy.

of the head? We already have scores of statements about the head, and from much more qualified people. Riebe, however, is abundantly qualified to say whether or not he took autopsy photos.

### 4/30/78: "Photographs from as many angles and positions as possible"

Riebe said he took photographs from as many angles and positions as possible. He used two different cameras, a Canon 35 mm single lens reflex and a Speedgraph lens 4 x 5. These cameras were in addition to the graphic view 4 x 5 camera that Mr. Stringer, director of photography, used during the autopsy. Riebe added that the FBI took the film as soon as he would use one cassette. Also, the FBI wanted him to use flash bulbs instead of artif-

cial light so that the number of photographs could be counted by the number of flashes. [p1]

### 5/7/97: Took 99 - 111 photographs

You said previously that you took 35 millimeter photos. Approximately how many rolls of film did you take?

Just part of one roll. I think it was only six or seven exposures.

Was that film in black and white or color?

I don't remember.

What was done with... that one roll of 35 millimeter film...

I took it out of the camera and gave it to one of the secret agents there.

... Approximately how many black and white four by five shots did you take.

About eight or nine film packs. That would be what 111, somewhere around there between 99 and 111.

... After the pack was used, they were given to a security officer.

... How long during the course of the autopsy did you take photographs...

Throughout the whole autopsy. [p42]

... Mr. Riebe, earlier in the deposition you estimated that you had taken yourself somewhere in the neighborhood of 100 press pack photos of the autopsy, did you within those films that you saw this morning, this afternoon, identify any films that seemed to have been taken with a press pack of the autopsy?

Just those last specimens, the gross specimen type. I don't remember taking anything like that.

So other than at the supplementary autopsy you did not see any press pack...

No, I didn't.

...Is the best of your understanding that you took those films, but they are not now included in the archives?

Yes. [p76]

### Missing Photo: Remains of Brain, "less than half"

Were any photograph taken of the brain?

I think I did some when they were putting it in that stainless steel pail.

When you say that there was not much left, what do you mean by that?

Well, it was less than half of a brain there. [pp43-44]

### ARRB Staff Report

According to the ARRB Staff Report, Riebe "had earlier told several researchers that the autopsy photographs had been altered basec

upon his examination of photographs... [then] re-evaluated his earlier opinion when shown actual photographs in the National Archives." (Emphasis added.) This use of the word "actual" is misleading in the extreme. It suggests great differences between the duplicate photographs and the actual, that is, the original photographs. But even bad Xeroxes of duplicates show the back of the head intact, and that was the problem. The contrast was not between two sets of photographs; it was between the photographs — and the actual back of the head.

#### 5/12/78: Large wound in back of head

Riebe recalled seeing... one very large wound located around the rear of the head near the top. [p2]

#### 5/7/97: Large wound in back of head

The right side of the back was gone... Just a big gaping hole with fragments of scalp and bone hanging in it.

When you said that, you put your hand on the back of the head.

The occipital. [pp44-45]

#### 5/7/97: Revises memory of the wound based on suspect photographs

Mr. Riebe, previously you described a wound in the occipital region of the head whereas in these photographs it appears that there is no wound there. What would be your explanation for that?

I just didn't remember it properly. [p71]

... it was chaos in that room that night, and I just misjudged where the wounds were. [p77]

#### Edward F. Reed, Jr.

In 1963, Edward Reed was a student in the x-ray department at Bethesda who operated the portable x-ray machine on the night of the autopsy. During his deposition before the ARRB, Reed seemed unusually receptive to several superimposed images.

#### 4/21/78: Large head wound "occipital"

According to a summary of his interview by the HSCA, he said the large head wound was located "in the right hemisphere in the occipital region." [Summary of HSCA interview]

#### 10/21/97: Large head wound "anteriorly forward"

Could you describe where those wounds were?

It was in the temporal parietal region, right side.

... And anterior. Slightly anterior. Slightly forward. As we say in the medical field, anteriorly forward.

... Did you see any wounds on the back of his head?

No. [pp27-28]

#### Authenticates Films

Without being asked, Reed authenticates the x-rays:

And this is the right side of the patient here... and these are the metallic fragments I saw originally. These are the real original films. [pp83-84]

When Dr. John Ebersole, the radiologist on call that night, was presented with the skull x-rays, he was puzzled.

You know, my recollection is more of a gaping occipital wound than this... I would have put the gaping wound here rather than more forward." [3/11/78 HSCA Interview. pp62-63]

Reed also seems to be the only one to recall the 6.5mm diameter metal fragment showing in the frontal x-ray. This x-ray image that magically appeared in 1967 when the Clark Panel first described it, was not described by any of the pathologists or the radiologist on call — even though they described two smaller ones.

... There is a semi-circular white dot there. Do you see that?

Yes, I do.

Do you recall seeing that on the night of the autopsy.

Yes, I did. [p85]

#### Enjoying the Spotlight

##### Excerpts from RT Image 1992; 5(11):

Over the years, when I meet people in radiology, I always tell them that they can say that they've met the person who x-rayed President Kennedy. They usually ask me a lot of questions.

Then, when I lifted him up... I found a large 1 1/2 inch wound that looked like an exit wound...

When I saw Kennedy... he had a large, gaping wound about the size of my fist in his right carotid temple and frontal areas... Because his head went back, a lot of people think he was shot from the front. But that wound could have been from the back because it could have been what we call an implosion.

#### Floyd Boring

Secret Service Agent Floyd Boring reversed his testimony as to which car contained a skull bone fragment.

#### 9/18/96: Bone found in follow-up car

...In about the middle of the interview, Mr. Boring remembered that he and Mr. Paterni had inspected the President's limousine and the Secret Service follow-up car... Mr. Boring said that he (Boring) had discovered a piece of skull bone with brain attached in the rear of the follow-up car... in the footwell just in front of the back seat bench. He said... the dimensions... were approximately 1" x 2". He said he never picked it up or touched it him-

self, but that he simply pointed it out to Mr. Paterni... He said he did not write a report about this, and he did not know whether Mr. Paterni had written a report or not. He said he did not know what the disposition was of this debris/medical evidence. Mr. Boring made very clear during the interview that this fragment was in the rear of the follow-up car, not in the rear seat of the Presidential limousine. Initially, ARRB staff members Zimmerman and Horne had misunderstood Mr. Boring to mean that the bone-brain fragment was in the rear seat of the President's limousine, and Mr. Boring took specific pains to correct our misunderstanding during follow-up discussions on this matter

#### 9/19/96: Bone was in JFK car; "Stroke" may explain "error"

Mr. Boring called me [Douglas Horne] at about 9:30 A.M. this date, and said he wished to make a correction of, and retract, something he said yesterday during his interview. He said that upon further consideration, it could simply "not be" that the skull bone-and-brain fragment he told us about had come from the back of the follow-up car, and that therefore it must have been seen in the back seat of the President's limousine, and not the follow-up car. He said that his stroke may perhaps have had something to do with his error...

#### Kenneth Vrtacnik

Kenneth Vrtacnik, a medical photographer at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, told Douglas Horne (reluctantly?) that he had seen Kennedy's brain in a locked room at the AFIP's National Museum of Health and Medicine, immersed in liquid in a steel tray inside a glass case. Most people were forbidden access to it. Highlights of the 11/13/96 interview:

#### Number of Bullet Paths? Unsure

He described it as "one long section, tan in color" with "wooden pegs (or arrows) showing bullet trajectories running through it. Asked if there was one peg, or more than one peg, he said he was unsure, but later in the interview again used the word "pegs."

#### Size? Unsure

Asked what percentage of the brain it was, he said he could not be sure and declined to give an estimation. He would not even say whether it was less than one-half, or more than one-half, said he "could not be sure."

I have seen brains displayed in nearly duplicate circumstances, and visibility is not a problem. I find it hard to believe that because he was unsure he could not express a range of possibilities with all appropriate caveats, especially after some 30 years in medical photography. His description of "one long piece" sounds very much like less than half a brain. Few would describe an intact brain as "one piece." (The brain looks something like a walnut, with two

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separate halves joined in the middle.) And whether it was perforated by one peg or two would have been obvious to a child. How could he have been unsure about this? I doubt if a failing memory explains it. He had a keen interest in the assassination. He went to the trouble to get a look at this forbidden item. How could he forget what he saw, especially if it so dramatically contradicted the government?

In this case, what seems superimposed is not an image, but amnesia, a blank with a distinct outline that has become very familiar to those of us who research this crime. But it may be that Kenneth Vrtacnik was so meticulous he would rather say nothing than be wrong in the slightest way.

### George Burkley, M.D.

George Burkley is another witness who, instead of accepting a superimposed image, drew a blank with a distinct outline. And in his case, there is no question that he had a lot to say. Burkley, Kennedy's own physician, was with the President in the trauma room in Dallas, and in the morgue at Bethesda. Yet, he was never asked to testify before the Warren Commission. Even in the testimony of the Parkland doctors, his very presence seemed to be a blank cut-out. He was "some gentleman with Mrs. Kennedy." In his affidavit (excerpted below) he described checking and re-checking Kennedy's condition, something no Parkland doctor ever reported, though each mentioned more trivial events. Burkley would not have been Arlen Specter's first choice of a witness: in the Death Certificate, he said the back wound was at the third thoracic level, and he refused to comment when asked if he agreed with the Warren Commission on how many bullets struck Kennedy. [10/17/67, Oral History interview with William McHugh, p18] Ten years later, we almost learned why he did not confirm the Commission's findings.

#### 3/18/77: "More than one shooter"

Burkley told his lawyer, William Illig, to quietly contact the HSCA and tell them he would go to Washington and explain why he thought there must have been more than one shooter. [HSCA file # 000988, record # 180-10086-10295]

#### 11/28/78: The Empty Affidavit

One of the most confounding documents I have ever read – because of what it does not say – was Burkley's summary of the interview generated by his dangerous comments to his lawyer. In an affidavit sent to Andy Purdy of the HSCA, Burkley swore to the following:

I was Personal Physician to President John F.

Kennedy in November 1963 and accompanied President Kennedy on the Texas trip. I was at Parkland Hospital and later at Bethesda Naval Hospital on the evening of November 22, 1963. I saw President Kennedy's wounds at Parkland Hospital and during the autopsy at Bethesda Naval Hospital. There was no difference in the nature of the wounds I saw at Parkland Hospital and those I observed at the autopsy at Bethesda Naval Hospital.

1. I was with President Kennedy in Dallas. I arrived at Parkland Hospital within five minutes of the President's arrival. I checked the President's physical condition, gave the doctor's working with the President the blood type and some adrenal medication (Sol U Cortel) to place in the intravenous blood and fluids which were being administered. My findings clearly indicated that death was certain and imminent.

2. One of the doctors reported to me vital signs of life no longer could be elicited. I rechecked the vi-

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tal signs of President Kennedy and there was no sign of life. I reported to Mrs. Kennedy who was nearby in the treatment room that President Kennedy was dead.

3. I remained with the President's body in the treatment room until the body was placed in the coffin and I saw it closed. There was no movement or manipulation of the body other than removal of the intravenous equipment during that time.

4. In Dallas I traveled from the hospital to the [sic] Air Force One in the ambulance with the President's body in the casket and also in the plane; the casket was neither opened or [sic] disturbed in any way.

5. I had ordered the United States Naval Hospital to be prepared for performing an autopsy on the body of John F. Kennedy, President of the United States, the permission having been granted by Mrs. Kennedy while en route. It was to be a complete autopsy with no limitations and curtailment in the time necessary for completion.

6. I traveled from Andrew's Air Force Base in the ambulance with the President's body to the Bethesda Naval Hospital and accompanied the coffin to the autopsy laboratory and saw the body removed from the coffin and placed on the autopsy table.

7. I directed the autopsy surgeons to do a complete autopsy and take the time necessary for completion. I supervised the autopsy and directed the fixation and retention of the brain for future study of the course of the bullet or bullets.

8. The autopsy material was retained in a secure area and subsequently turned over by Captain [sic] Stover LINS to me and a member of the Secret Service. We took this material immediately to the EOB Building where it was placed in a locked file cabinet by the Secret Service.

9. Senator Robert Kennedy, representing Mrs. Kennedy and the Kennedy family, directed that the autopsy material be transferred to the National Archives. This was done on April 26, 1965. See attached letter of transmittal with listing of individual items.

Not one word about the number and nature of the wounds, other than to say they were the same in both Parkland and Bethesda. No explanation for Burkley's earlier remarks, either recanting or elaborating upon them. Burkley may have been trying to placate the HSCA, while not really saying anything. (Apparently, he was also indirectly refuting claims of body alteration published in the early 70's.) Accompanying the affidavit was this handwritten message to Andy Purdy:

The affidavit covers all essential points.

Had the Warren Commission deemed to call me, I would have stated why I retained the brain and the possibility of two bullets having wounded President Kennedy's brain would have been eliminated.

Why did he feel compelled to rescue the brain in the first place? Why did he not explain in the affidavit what he would have told the Commission about the brain? Why did he write, in item #7, that the brain was retained "for future study of the course of the bullet or bullets?" Bullet or bullets? One peg or two?

Finally, why did Burkley say there had to have been more than one shooter—long after the brain had been studied?

#### Postscript

Douglas Horne, in pursuit of Burkley's beguiling comments to his lawyer, spoke to Burkley's daughter, Nancy B. Denlea, and persuaded her to sign a waiver indicating "she had no objection to release of attorney-client information from Mr. Illig's files relating to this subject." Then something happened. At the bottom of his summary of their 1/13/97 conversation is this handwritten note:

She changed her mind and decided not to sign the proposed waiver form drafted by ARRB counsel. As a result, the ARRB never obtained access to Mr. Illig's files. 7/16/98.

So the blank was not filled in. We should guard this space very carefully, and preserve its outline. ✦