

Man in the news

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# Celebrity in their midst

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The quiet, close-knit community of Lancaster, Pa., awoke yesterday morning to the news that Dr. John H. Ebersole, chief of radiation therapy at Lancaster General Hospital, had broken a 15-year silence on his role in the John Kennedy autopsy.

"The papers got that wrong," Dr. Ebersole protested in a phone interview yesterday.

"When my son, Richard (a legislative aide to a Tennessee congresswoman), read it in the paper, he called from Washington and said, 'I've never known you to remain silent for 15 minutes.'"

In fact, says Dr. Ebersole, 53, he never maintained a silence on his findings as the radiologist who assisted on the Bethesda Naval Hospital autopsy on the assassinated President — it's just that he was never asked.

He said that he had received requests from what he termed "sensationalists" — authors and "even one pathologist" — but that he had not been involved in any official inquiries.

Now he has been asked to appear before the House Select Committee on Assassinations and he will travel to Washington tomorrow to meet with committee members at the National Archives Building, where his X-rays from the autopsy are stored.

So he hasn't been keeping a secret, it's just that "this is the first time I've been asked by any official agency to make comment on my findings."

Nor is there anything startling in  
(See CELEBRITY on 3-D)



# FACTS & CELEBRITY in their midst now

CELEBRITY, From 1-D

his findings — he says they support the Warren Commission's major contentions, i.e., Kennedy was shot from the rear. Dr. Ebersole plays down the importance of his part in the autopsy.

"The X-rays that were taken that night and interpreted by me were for one purpose and one purpose only," he said. "Prior to the start of the autopsy, because of the lack of finding of an exit wound (where the bullet or bullets left the body), it was felt that a bullet might be still in the body.

"Later, we found a wound of exit in the neck that had been neatly sutured by a surgeon in Dallas. That caused some confusion early on because we thought that it was from a tracheotomy. But it was the exit wound. We found no bullet in the body."

On that grim November night in 1963, Dr. Ebersole, a Navy commander, had been serving as assistant chief of radiology at Bethesda for only four months.

"At the time, the chief of radiology was absent on official orders and I was acting chief of radiology," Dr. Ebersole said. "At 4:30 that afternoon I asked the planning officer if he wanted me to stay aboard. He said he did. As acting chief of radiology I was asked to assist in the autopsy in case X-rays were required."

Kennedy's body arrived from Dallas at about 8 p.m., said Dr. Ebersole. What were his feelings at the time?

"The first one, when they opened the casket, was of the horrible waste," he recalled.

When Kennedy's body was wheeled into the autopsy room, Dr. Ebersole and two technicians were on hand with a portable X-ray machine.

"I was present in the autopsy room from the time the casket arrived from Dallas until the autopsy was concluded, about 4 or 4:30 the next morning. Roughly 15 X-rays were taken."

Dr. Ebersole, of course, could have had no idea that the X-rays would be used for anything more than the location of a bullet possibly lodged somewhere in the body; that the angle and direction of the shots, as described by the Warren Commission findings, would much later be called into question. In retrospect, he would like to have made the X-rays on other than portable equipment.

"I wish now that we could have taken the X-rays in the X-ray department to get more detail," he said. Still, he says he feels that "the findings of the Warren Commission were consistent with what I had seen both

in the X-rays and in the autopsy room."

That, no doubt, is what he will tell the House committee tomorrow, although he says he is not certain what the committee wants from him.

He says he has not seen the X-rays since 1964. He was called to the White House Annex a few weeks after the autopsy to re-examine them "for purposes of measurement of the skull for possible use by a sculptor. I saw them again a few months later when we officially placed them in the National Archives."

Now he will view them again tomorrow, and that fact has caused a bit of a stir among his colleagues at Lancaster General, few if any of whom knew of his connection with the Kennedy assassination investigation. Dr. Ebersole describes their reaction as "one of surprise."

Indeed, most people knew him as the chief of radiation therapy, dealing in the radiation treatment of cancer.

Dr. Ebersole, his wife, Marian, and their six children arrived in Lancaster in the summer of 1970, shortly after he retired from the Navy (as a captain).

He was born and reared in Sterling, Ill., and got his M.D. from Indiana University Medical School in 1948. He interned in Indianapolis and, in 1949, joined the Navy.

After special radiation training at Duke University and the nuclear facilities at Oak Ridge, Tenn., Dr. Ebersole became the first medical officer aboard America's first nuclear submarine, the Nautilus, in 1954. Three years later, he became the medical officer on the atomic sub Seawolf, thus becoming the first naval officer to serve aboard two nuclear submarines.

In 1958, Wyeth Laboratories here presented Lt. Cmdr. Ebersole with the Gorgas Medal for his work in the field of radiobiology in connection with the atomic submarine program.

The following year, Dr. Ebersole began his residency in radiology at Bethesda, completing it in July 1963, when he became acting chief of radiology at the hospital. Four months later, he became a witness/participant in history.

His role in the Kennedy autopsy — other than making him the subject of news stories this week — has really had little effect on Dr. Ebersole and his family. Nor does he feel tomorrow's session in Washington will have any dramatic impact on his life.

"There's really going to be nothing new revealed," he says, underscoring for a final time the fact that he hasn't been hiding anything for the past 15 years. As he said, it's just that he was never asked.