

Report: JFK's family ordered the dumping of his coffin in ocean

WASHINGTON (AP) - Loaded with 240 pounds of sand and drilled with holes so it would stay on the ocean floor, the coffin that carried John F. Kennedy's body from Dallas to Washington was dumped at sea in 1966 under orders of the Kennedy family.

Documents released yesterday by the National Archives showed that despite concerns over whether the casket should be destroyed, the government honored the Kennedy family wishes and took pains to ensure that the casket would remain in a watery grave.

The Defense Department even sought the advice of a submarine officer with special training in hydraulics to devise a way to airdrop the coffin at sea.

Kennedy, assassinated in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, was buried at Arlington National Cemetery in a mahogany coffin obtained in Washington. The first coffin, made of bronze and lined with brushed satin, had been purchased from Dallas undertaker Vernon Oneal to

take the body to Washington. It was replaced because it was damaged.

Its whereabouts had long been a mystery. And Kennedy assassination researchers consider the coffin evidence that should not have been destroyed.

Documents show that the casket was in the basement of the National Archives building in downtown Washington in February, 1966, when Robert Kennedy, then a U.S. senator from New York, called the General Services Administration, which oversees government property, and asked for it to be released to the military for destruction.

"I think it belongs to the family and we can get rid of it any way we want to," he told Lawson Knott, GSA administrator, according to a memo recounting the conversation.

"What I would like to have done is take it to sea," he added. "I don't think anybody will be upset about the fact that we disposed of it."

Kennedy family spokeswoman Melody Miller said that destroying the casket was appropriate and "in keeping with the tradition of President Kennedy's naval service and his love of the sea."

To ensure that the coffin would sink, three 80 pound bags of sand were put inside, metal banding tape was wrapped around it, and it was placed inside a pine box that was wrapped in metal tape, documents said.

Numerous holes were drilled in the casket and the box "to ensure that no air pockets would develop," according to a memo written by John Steadman, special assistant in the office of the Secretary of Defense.