

# MEMORANDUM

August 11, 1995

To: Anne Buttimer  
cc - Jeremy Gunn

From: Joe Freeman

Subject: Connally Medical Records and the HSCA

Pursuant to your E-Mail request of July 7th, and following up on my preliminary memo of July 14th, I wanted to return to the issue of the HSCA's efforts to gather medical evidence on Governor Connally's wounds and subsequent medical treatment at Parkland Hospital. As previously indicated, the bulk of the 400-plus HSCA documents which reference Gov. Connally concern his medical records. In revisiting the Warren Commission's work on the single-bullet theory, the HSCA invested a tremendous amount of time and energy in its panel of forensic experts, and it is in connection with this panel's work that the Committee made great efforts to secure records concerning Gov. Connally's wounds.

The Forensic Pathology Panel of experts convened by the HSCA was provided a great deal of information on Gov. Connally's medical records, including but not limited to:

- Admittance Summary from Parkland Hospital (Nov. 22, 1963)
- Admittance Note from Parkland Hospital (Nov. 22, 1963)
- Operation Records from Parkland Hospital (Nov. 22, 1963 -- three different doctors operated on the three separate wounds Gov. Connally sustained: Dr. Shaw, chest; Dr. Gregory, wrist; Dr. Shires, thigh), as well as the Warren Commission testimony of each of these doctors
- Reports of Diagnostic X-Ray Consultation (Nov. 22, 24, 25, 26, 27 and 29; Dec. 2 and 4, 1963), Dr. Reynolds
- Narrative Summary -- Anesthesia Care (Nov. 23, 1963)
- Surgical Pathology Report (Nov. 30, 1963)
- Body Diagrams of Wounds (from CE 326)
- Secret Service Report on Gov. Connally's Wounds (Feb. 14, 1964)
- FBI Reports on Metal Fragment from Gov. Connally's Wrist (Nov. 23 and 30, 1963)
- Suit Coat, Shirt and Trousers Worn by Gov. Connally on Nov. 23, 1963
- Original assassination-day (and immediate post-assassination) X-rays from Parkland Hospital

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- Original post-1963 X-rays
- A list of doctors and nurses who treated Gov. Connally on November 22, 1963
- 4/16/64 J. Edgar Hoover letter to Rankin, re: examination of Connally's clothing
- Paraffin blocks containing residual tissue from Connally's thigh and wrist, removed on 11/22/63

Gov. Connally testified before the Committee (during which he was asked about the long-term effects of the wounds sustained in Dallas) and also submitted to a physical examination of his scars (both Sept. 6, 1978). The examination yielded a short memorandum. The HSCA, in addition to reviewing Warren Commission testimony and exhibits, reinterviewed the doctors who worked on the Governor the day of the assassination. The HSCA also commissioned an electron scan analysis and energy dispersive X-ray analysis of tissue which had been taken from the Governor's wrist and thigh on November 22, 1963. The HSCA submitted the Governor's clothing to new tests, as well. All of these documents are in HSCA Volume 7.

In order to secure some of these materials, the Committee delivered a friendly subpoena on Parkland Hospital on 7/18/77. (Attachments 1-A and 1-B) The Committee also subpoenaed the Texas State Library for any medical records in its possession. (2)

The key HSCA staffer for Connally medical records was Donald "Andy" Purdy. Assisting Purdy was researcher Mark Flanagan. Dr. Charles Petty (214-638-1131) -- Chief Medical Examiner of Dallas County, working out of the Institute for Forensic Sciences in Dallas -- was a member of the HSCA forensics panel and the local point man for Purdy. Gov. Connally's personal physician at the time of the HSCA investigation seems to have been a Dr. Mavis Nelson (713-797-1551). See attached handwritten HSCA OCR in order to check my rendition of this name. (3)

Written documentary evidence secured from Parkland by the HSCA (operative reports, etc.) were in the form of copies, not originals. See 7/22/77 cover letter of Robert E. Clark to the HSCA. (4) Much of this same material was also provided to the Warren Commission (again, copies). Presumably the originals are still at Parkland.

#### **Issues Regarding Gov. Connally's Medical/Forensic Records:**

**Clothing** - The Warren Commission and FBI got possession of Gov. Connally's suit, shirt and tie shortly after the assassination, but not before these items had been dry-cleaned and their evidentiary value materially reduced. The FBI and WC passed the clothing back and forth several times

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between April and June of 1964 (there is a paper trail). Sometime after the Warren Commission completed its work the clothes were placed at the Texas State Library/Archives in Austin. This is where they were when they were loaned to the HSCA on 7/18/77 in response to the Committee's subpoena. The transfer document is attached. (5) While in the HSCA's possession, the clothes were kept in the Committee's "Security Room". Almost a year after the Committee first got the clothes (6/21/78), the Director of the Texas State Archives, David Gracy, wrote to HSCA's Purdy wondering when they might be returned. (6) Subsequently, Purdy responded, indicating that the Committee needed the clothes for a while longer. While I failed to uncover a paper trail confirming the return of the clothes to the Texas State Library, I presume that is where they are today. They are not part of the JFK collection. The collection does presently contain glossy photos of these items from both the WC and HSCA eras.

**X-Rays** - Nine original X-rays of Gov. Connally taken at Parkland Hospital in the aftermath of the assassination were subpoenaed by the HSCA and turned over to staffer Mark Flanagan by the Associate Administrator of the Dallas County Hospital District (encompassing both Parkland and Woodlawn Hospitals) on 9/17/77. The receipt is attached. (7) Apparently, the Warren Commission had only secured copies of the originals -- see the 5/29/64 letter from C.J. Price of Parkland to Arlen Specter. (8) While in the possession of the HSCA, Parkland's original X-rays were kept in the Committee's Security Room. The 9/17/77 receipt specifically stated the Hospital District's understanding that the X-rays would be returned. Thus, it is likely that that is where they are today. The collection does contain glossy photo reproductions of a number of the Connally X-rays (both WC and HSCA). Some additional number of post-1963 X-rays of the Governor were apparently provided to the Committee by Gov. Connally's office. See attached Purdy OCR of 8/29/78 phone call with Dr. Petty. (9) It is likely these were returned to Gov. Connally.

**Paraffin Blocks Containing Residual Tissue from Wrist and Thigh** - I found no paper trail on their disposition, but I imagine they -- like the original X-rays -- wound up back at Parkland. See "Bone Fragments" section.

**Bullet Fragments** - The number and disposition of bullet fragments extracted from Gov. Connally while at Parkland has been a matter of some controversy over the years. **Three fragments taken from Connally's wrist by Dr. Gregory during surgery are at Archives II.** They are in the Warren Commission Exhibit files (CE 842). I have seen them. These have been controversial because of differing recollections as to how many fragments were removed and how big they were. Dr. Gregory's operative report suggests that there were multiple fragments: "Small bits of metal were encountered at various levels throughout the wound and these were, wherever they were identified and

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could be picked up, were picked up and submitted to the Pathology Department for identification and examination.” (CE 392) In his Warren Commission testimony Dr. Gregory usually referenced *three* fragments (though on at least one occasion he referred to two). The chief nurse in the Connally operating room was Audrey Bell; she retrieved the fragments and, in accordance with standard hospital procedure, placed them in a manila “foreign body evidence envelope”. She remembers *four or five* fragments and told the HSCA that each of the three fragments in CE 842 are smaller than the ones she remembers putting in the envelope. See 3/18/77 memo to Tanenbaum from Gilbert and Moriarty. (10) Under instructions from the Governor’s staff, she gave the envelope with the fragments to State Trooper Bobby Nolan who subsequently handed it over to Captain Fritz of the Dallas Police Department on the evening of the 22nd. Curiously, at this point the envelope and fragments (plural) start getting referred to as *a* fragment (singular). There is a contemporaneous (11/23/63) FBI memo of an interview with Ms. Bell in which the agent reports that “she obtained custody of *the metal fragment* which had been placed in a small receptacle and which had been removed from the right arm of the Governor by Dr. Gregory.” [emphasis added] (11). State Trooper Nolan refers to a “fragment” when interviewed by Special Agent Williams of the FBI on 11/23/63 (Nolan also refers to the fragment as having come from the Governor’s *thigh*, rather than his wrist -- this created confusion which the FBI was still trying to sort out as late as 11/28/63); the Dallas Police Department’s property clerk also describes it as a single fragment in his inventory sheet before the envelope is handed over to the FBI; the FBI’s receipt to the Dallas PD (11/23) for evidence being turned over also refers to the “fragment” (designated Q-9). Both these inventories are attached. (12 and 13) Even Dr. Gregory himself, according to an 11/30 FBI report by SA Williams, refers to “*a small fragment*”. Since the number of fragments was not listed on the manila evidence envelope, and since two of the three fragments are especially minute and easy to miss, this confusion was conceivably innocent, but it generated skepticism later on. In HSCA Volume 7, some of this confusion is noted, but Audrey Bell’s testimony is not referenced: it’s unclear to me how the HSCA ultimately resolved and/or dismissed it. HSCA counsel Howard Gilbert followed up the 3/18/77 Audrey Bell interview with a letter in which he lays out the importance of the discrepancy between her recollections and the official record. The letter is attached (14). There is occasional, but not universal, reference to a fragment *left* in the Governor’s wrist, as well. ***Location of thigh fragment:*** the other ‘fragment’ issue has to do with a fragment left in the Governor’s thigh. Dr. Shires performed the surgery required by the Governor’s relatively minor left thigh wound. He read the X-rays as showing a very small metallic fragment located next to or even in the femur bone. Having no medical reason to take it out, he left it in. Shires continued to cite the location of this fragment as being in or near the femur bone for years to come. As early as 11/29/63, however, an FBI airtel from SAC Shanklin references a report from the radiologist at Parkland, Dr. Jack Reynolds, which says this fragment is actually located close to the skin in the subcutaneous fat (8 mm from the surface of the skin), and *not* in or close to the femur. FBI document attached. (15) Reynolds reiterated this

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judgment on 11/09/77. (16) The HSCA forensics panel agreed with Reynolds (see Vol. 7, p. 162, attached). (17) It appears that Shires was simply mistaken. In an attached interview on 1/9/78, Shires -- after seeing enhanced versions of the November 1963 X-Rays prepared by the HSCA -- conceded that he might have been wrong, though he also claimed that he might still be correct. (18)

**Bone Fragments** - As opposed to *bullet* fragments. The HSCA approached Parkland Hospital in order to determine whether the Hospital still possessed any bone fragments taken from Governor Connally in 1963. On 3/31/78, Robert Clark of Parkland indicated to the HSCA's Mark Flanagan over the phone that there were three such fragments (all from the wrist, none from Connally's ribs). (19) On 4/11/78, HSCA medical consultant Dr. Michael Baden talked to Andy Purdy, expressing his interest in the alleged fragment(s). (20) On 5/9/78, Baden talked to Flanagan and told him that he (Baden) had spoken to Dr. Vernie Stembridge -- Chief of Surgical Pathology at Parkland and the original examining surgical pathologist -- and Stembridge said Parkland had no bone fragments from Gov. Connally. (21) Baden suggested to the HSCA that it send a letter to Parkland Administrator Clark on this matter, which Blakey did the next day (5/10/78). (22) There is a 5/30/78 OCR of Purdy's which references a phone call with Baden in which Baden informed Purdy that Parkland says that they have no bone fragments. (23) Finally, there is a 7/31/78 Purdy OCR of another phone call with Baden in which Purdy records Baden as being pleased that "Connally material found - but need bone removed from rib...". (24) It isn't clear to me what this reference means. The very next day, 7/31/78, Purdy talks to Dr. Petty who reports that he has picked up the slides and paraffin blocks of Connally tissue from Parkland. (25) On the same OCR, later that day, Purdy reports a subsequent call with Petty and notes that "Dr. Petty is convinced to a moral certainty that the piece of Connally bone has been destroyed or at least is not at Parkland." This last OCR suggests that the sought-after Connally bone fragment(s) were something different and separate from the material later referred to in HSCA Volume 7 as "paraffin blocks containing residual tissue from the wrist and thigh" of Gov. Connally which Dr. Petty obtained from Dr. Stembridge. No doubt Purdy, Petty or Stembridge could confirm or deny.