

Jerrold F. Custer Deposition: October 28, 1997

Introduction

Deposition background

Employment on November 22

Any reservations

MD 195 (Letter of Silence)

MD 196 (Letter rescinding MD 192 never received by Custer in 1978)

Preparation for depositions

Background reading on assassination

Talked to Ed Reed recently (or any other autopsy participants)?

Overview of Navy Career and Knowledge X-Ray Technology

Navy-sponsored training and formal education as of Nov 22, 1963

Length of Navy service

Subsequent training and experience with X-Ray technology

All Activities Related to Assassination

November 22-23 (pre-autopsy set-up and autopsy activities)

November 26 (letter from Captain Canada)

Ever write any articles about your participation in the autopsy or about the x-ray record?

Ever seen original autopsy photographs or X-Rays?

Ever subsequently discussed the autopsy with any of the participants who were present that night?

Interviews with assassination researchers?

Documents Directly Related to X-Rays Taken at Autopsy and Other Autopsy Events

- MD 1 Autopsy Descriptive Sheet
- MD 2 Handwritten Protocol
- MD 3 Autopsy Protocol
- MD 4 Supplementary Autopsy Report
- MD 5 Humes notes of phone call(s) with Dr. Perry
- MD 12 Draft, Unsigned Inventory of X-Rays and Photographs
- MD 13 Signed Inventory of X-Rays and Photographs
- MD 190 Receipt for X-Rays dated 11/22/63 (with handwritten changes)
- MD 191 Receipt for X-Rays dated 11/22/63 (retyped, incorporating handwritten changes)
- MD 151 Sibert-O'Neill FD-302
- MD 29, Volume II Transcript of Finck's Shaw Trial Testimony
- MD 60 Transcript of Testimony of Dr. Ebersole before the HSCA Medical Panel (March 11, 1978)
- MD 64 HSCA Interview Summary of 8/25/77 Interview of Paul O'Connor Written by Jim Kelly and Andy Purdy dated 8/29/77
- MD 181 ARRB Interview Report of John VanHoesen Interview Conducted 9/25/96
- MD 192 Letter from CAPT Canada to Edward F. Reed, Jr. dated 26 November 1963
- MD 193 Letter from Navy Surgeon General to Edward F. Reed, Jr. dated 13 March 1978 (returned undelivered) to sender
- MD 194 HSCA Interview Summary of 4/21/78 telephone interview with Ed Reed written by Mark Flanagan May 11, 1978
- MD 195 Letter from CAPT Canada to Jerrol F. Custer dated 26 November 1963
- MD 196 Letter from Navy Surgeon General to Jerrol F. Custer dated 13 March 1978 (returned to sender undelivered)
- MD 197 ARRB Letter dated September 29, 1997 forwarding Subpoena to Edward F. Reed, Jr.
- MD 198 ARRB Letter dated September 29, 1997 forwarding Subpoena to Jerrol F. Custer

Pre-Autopsy Events of November 22-23

How notified of assassination?

What was your assignment?

Who gave you your orders?

Illuminate employment by Naval Hospital vice Medical School

Was a portable X-Ray machine taken to the morgue?

Who directed this?

MD 194 (Page 1, second paragraph)

What make or model was the portable machine?

MD 60, pages 54 and 55: Ebersole testified that it was either a Piker or a General Electric, 1963 vintage.

Any identifying characteristics about it which would help us identify its performance characteristics?

Did anyone help you move it to morgue?

Did you see a casket brought into cold room or morgue?

Who brought it in? Where was it placed (cold room or morgue)?

MD 194, page 1: "he (Reed) helped carry the body into the morgue"

Describe casket

Did you see it opened? Who opened it?

Did you see body of President Kennedy removed from casket?

Who removed body and placed it on examining table?

How was body wrapped?

Sheet(s)? (Head or body or both?)

Body bag?

MD 194, page 1, last paragraph: Reed recalled the body was in a "clear plastic bag"

MD 64, page 2, middle of page: O'Connor recalled "the body was in a body bag and the head was wrapped in a sheet"

MD 181, pages 1 and 2: VanHoesen recalled the body was in a "black, zippered plastic pouch"

Autopsy Event Timeline and Creation of Autopsy Records

Time you arrived at morgue with portable machine

MD 194, page 1: Reed recalled arriving "around 6:30"

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Did you ever leave once you arrived, prior to the commencement of taking X-Rays? (i.e., could you have missed events)

Time you left morgue at conclusion of your duties that night/time you got home

Time the Consulting Radiologist Arrived

Who was he? Did you know him/had you worked together?

Did Dr. Ebersole work for the Medical School or Naval Hospital?

See MD 60, pages 2 (lines 23-25) and 3 (line 1), and page 13 (line 21)

Who was Chief of X-Ray Department at Naval Hospital?

Who was Chief of X-Ray Department at the Medical School?

Sequence in which events occurred

casket arrival

body on table

x-rays prior to incisions

photographs prior to incisions (photos prior to, or after initial X-Rays?)

various autopsy procedures

additional x-rays and photographs during autopsy (following first incision)

conclusion of autopsy (pathologists relinquish body to Gawler's technicians)

embalming and reconstruction

body placed in Gawler's mahogany casket/departure from Bethesda

How well do you remember events

Vivid or faded memories?

Time of casket entry/casket opening

Do you remember others being asked to leave the room while X-Rays and photographs taken?

Did you witness any pre-incision photographs?

Were photographers present while you took X-Rays?

Duration of pre-incision X-Rays

Taking them

Developing them

Where?

How many separate trips upstairs for developing?/Duration of each trip

Did anyone go with you to get them developed?

Your co-worker that night?

Federal agents?

Total elapsed time between the commencement of taking pre-incision X-Rays and photos, and the first incision

Did you see the first incision? (Head or chest?)

Were x-rays taken following the first incision (after formal commencement of dissection)?

How many separate series of X-Rays taken subsequent to first incision?

What parts of body were x-rayed at each event subsequent to first incision?

Head?

Chest (after Y-incision)

Arms and legs

Were photographs taken following the first incision (following initial set)?

Subject matter/posture of body

When was large fragment of skull bone brought into morgue?

MD 60, page 5 (lines 6-8): Ebersole said about 12:30 A.M.

What records were created during autopsy?

X-Rays and photos

Notes and drawings

Who made notes and drawings, or recorded weights of organs?

Collecting tissue samples/ making paraffin blocks of tissue samples/using tissue processing machine:

Who was doing this? (Existing record says Petty Officer Rudnicki and Chief Boyers)

Any other records (audiotape, motion picture or video)?

Did you record any immediate, contemporaneous recollections shortly after the autopsy in a diary or journal, or in letters to friends/relatives?

Photography

Pre-incision

Who took?

Types of cameras?

Approximate number

Views shot/posture of body

Full body photographed from ladder or oblique angle or side?

Supine or sitting up or both? On stomach?

Was hair combed or washed prior to being photographed?

Did you see film removed from a camera and exposed to light?

After first incision

Were you there? Did you witness photos after dissection commenced?

Views shot/posture of body? (Supine, sitting, on stomach?)

Who took?

How many?

After embalming started, or during/after reconstruction of head

Were you there or had you left? When you left the morgue for the last time that evening, what activity was taking place?

X-Rays

Pre-incision

Of what parts of the body?

MD 60, page 8 (lines 14-16): skull, chest, trunk

How many pre-incision X-Rays of the head?

How many pre-incision X-Rays of the body?

How many *series* of head and body prior to first incision (one or two series)?

MD 60, pages 4 (lines 13-14) and 8 (lines 17-25): unclear whether second series taken prior to, or after first incision.

Who directed *what* should be taken?

Humes or Ebersole?

Who directed *how* they should be taken?

Ebersole or Custer or Reed?

Who performed what role during the *taking* of X-Rays?

What did Reed do?

What did Custer do?

What did Dr. Ebersole do?

Describe procedures for taking X-Rays with a portable machine in the morgue during President Kennedy's autopsy:

Who placed cassettes under body?

Who operated the portable machine each time an x-Ray exposed?

How were exposure times determined? Did they change from X-Ray to

X-Ray for any reason? Were exposure times different using portable machine and main X-Ray laboratory machine?

Who lifted or held head while head x-rays exposed? Did anyone?

If so, should their fingers/hands appear on x-ray images of head?

MD 60, page 10 (lines 23-24): Ebersole testified "I personally held the head

or the scalp.”

Were identifying metal tags or markers of any kind placed on the X-Ray cassette so as to mark each X-Ray with any unique identifying marks?

If so, were they generic (i.e., Bethesda UIC code) or individual markers (i.e., initials of X-Ray techs)?

Where were they taken for developing?

Who took them to the developing site?

Who did the developing?

Reed or Custer or others?

How long did developing take for each X-Ray?

Developed in sequence, or several at once?

What make/brand of X-Ray film used at JFK's autopsy?

What size(s) of X-Ray film(s) used at JFK's autopsy?

Who loaded the X-Ray film into each cassette, and took it out in the developing room?

Should the fingerprints of the person who loaded the film into the cassette appear on the developed X-Ray (as emulsion damage)?

Always?

Sometimes?

How many trips were made upstairs at Bethesda to get X-Rays developed prior to the first incision?

Who took them upstairs?

Reed or Custer or Ebersole?

MD 60, page 3 (lines 7-9) and page 4 (lines 6-10): Ebersole says *he* took the cassettes upstairs to the 4th floor for developing. (True?)

MD 194, page 2: Reed told Flanagan *he* did.

Trips upstairs made together or separately?

Did Federal Agents accompany?

FBI or Secret Service?

Did you ever see any member of the Kennedy family or any recognizable VIPs inside the Bethesda complex after taking X-Rays? (Jackie, Bobby, McNamara)

When? Where? Any other witnesses?

X-Rays *After* the First Incision

Did you remain in the morgue during the autopsy proper (during dissection)?

Were X-Rays taken after the first incision?

Who directed that this be done? (Humes? Finck? Ebersole?)

Why were they taken subsequent to first incision? Was the reason explained?

What locations on the body were these post-incision X-Rays:

Head?

Or just Body?

How many?

Head

Body

X-Rays of Bone Fragment(s) Presumably from Skull

Do you recall a fragment (or fragments) of skull bone brought into the morgue late in the autopsy?

How many?

MD 29, Volume II, page 193 (lines 3-6): Finck testified to 3 fragments;

MD 3, page 4, mid-page: Humes wrote that the quantity was 3.

Size?

MD 151, page 5: 10 X 6.5 cm

What time?

MD 60, page 5 (lines 6-11): Ebersole said 12:30 A.M.; one fragment; it was X-Rayed;

MD 60, page 20 (lines 8-9): Ebersole later testified that the approximate time was between midnight and one o'clock.

Do you recall it being X-Rayed? How many fragments X-Rayed together?

By whom?

Using what machine?

Summary of X-Ray Recollections:

How many *series* of X-Rays of

Head? (1 or 2)

MD 60, page 19, lines 12-15: Ebersole's answer inconclusive.

Body? (1 or 2 or 3)

MD 60, page 4 (lines 13-14) and page 8 (lines 17-25): Ebersole testified some X-Rays were repeated, but it is unclear whether repeated films were just body X-Rays, or head X-Rays also.

How many *total* X-Rays of

Head

Body

Was Body (chest) X-Rayed after Y-Incision?

Was Head X-Rayed after Brain removed?

Was a Brain X-Rayed after removal from the body?

MD 29, Volume II, page 196 (lines 14-17): *Finck testified at Shaw Trial that the Brain was X-Rayed.*

Was the brain X-Rayed separately after removal from the cranium, or was it only X-Rayed inside the cranium?

If X-Rayed separately, how many X-Rays were taken of the brain?

Who directed this?

How was the fresh brain suspended or supported during this X-Raying process?

Did you take any X-Rays on which there were no images seen after developing?

Were any X-Rays destroyed or discarded in your presence on the evening of November 22-23 during the autopsy on President Kennedy?

MD 60, page 8 (lines 3-6): Ebersole testified that one film contained no image and was destroyed.

Did you take any X-Rays of loose bone fragments on *Saturday, November 23, 1963*?

[Custer has been quoted as saying this in a researcher's book.]

If so, who asked you to?

What reasons were given?

What machine was used/in what location?

Portable machine or main X-Ray department laboratory machine?

MD 60, page 21 (lines 6-23): Ebersole testified that all 3 X-Rays of fragments were taken on a stationary machine in the main X-Ray department.

When did your official duties as an X-Ray technologist in regard to President Kennedy's autopsy come to an end? (i.e., what was the last task you performed in relation to the autopsy, and at about what time and on what date was it performed?)

MD 60, page 20 (lines 6-12): Ebersole testified that the autopsy was still going on between midnight and one o'clock during the period he was X-Raying the 3 loose fragments.

MD 60, page 52 (lines 19-23): Ebersole testified he left the morgue about 3 A.M.

Who directed you to cease work and gave you permission to go home? When?

Review of different totals in the existing documents re: number of X-Rays taken--

Show the witness, and ask for comment:

MD 151, page 5: S & O wrote "11 X-Rays"

MD 190: First version of 11/22/63 receipt indicated "8 plus 3" [11 total] before handwritten change modified "three" 10 X 12 inch X-Rays to "six" [new total of 14];

MD 191: "eight plus six" [total of 14];

MD 13: November 10, 1966 document shows a total of 14 X-Rays.

Wounds as observed at Autopsy (prior to incisions or manipulations):

Head:

How many wounds to head?

Location?

MD 194, page 2 at top of page: Reed recalled "the first was very large and located in the right hemisphere *in the occipital region.*"

Please draw on anatomical diagram. [Mark as exhibit.]

Was any scalp missing entirely, or just torn?

General appearance of head/hair: generally clean, or matted blood (messy)?

Brain:

Could you see brain in the cranium through the head wound when you first observed the wound?

Did you see the pathologists remove a brain?

How much, percentage wise, of the brain was missing? What portion of the brain was missing (back, front, one side or the other)?

Did you see the brain weighed?

Skull:

Did the pathologists attempt to locate the large skull fragment (brought into the morgue late in the autopsy) into the skull?

MD 60, page 5 (lines 6-9): Ebersole testified that the large fragment was occipital bone.

Do you agree with his recollection? Why?

Body:

Did you see any other wounds aside from the head wound?

Anterior throat? Describe

Was it sutured?

MD 60, pages 3 (lines 16-17) and 9 (lines 20-23): Ebersole testified to neatly sutured transverse surgical wound on the anterior neck.

Posterior thorax? Describe location with as much precision as possible.

MD 1: Do you agree with location?

Probed with fingers or metal instruments?

Was angle of entry discussed?

Did the pathologists at the autopsy believe the bullet which entered the thorax from the rear transited the body or not?

When was this wound first noticed? (Early or late?)

Comments/Conclusions of Pathologists

Do you recall any comments made by pathologists immediately after the body was unwrapped/placed on table?

Do you recall any speculations or conclusions of the pathologists?

Number of bullets which hit the body

Path of bullets (from front or rear)

Do you recall any discussions on the telephone during the autopsy between Dr. Humes and anyone in Dallas about a wound in the throat, or anything in general about "information received from Dallas"?

If so, was there any subsequent discussion of a bullet wound in the anterior throat (as opposed to a simple tracheotomy)?

Was it described as an entry or exit?

MD 60, pages 4-5, 20 (lines 13-19), and pages 51-52: Ebersole testified repeatedly that information about an exit wound in the anterior neck was received from Dallas, and that Dr. Humes had assimilated this information.

Do you recall what Dr. Ebersole recalled in his testimony?

What did you conclude yourself at the time about what had caused the President's wounds?

Did you discuss your views with anyone?

Did you ever read the official autopsy report or portions of the Warren Report?

Did you agree with the conclusions in these documents?

Examination of Autopsy X-Rays

Examine for authentication purposes

Head (#s 1-3):

A-P: was this the only A-P taken?

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File: 4.0.5 (Jerrol F. Custer)

Large radio-opaque object: do you recall this from the night of the autopsy?

Did doctors discuss or look for this fragment of metal on the body?

#2 (Right Lateral)

Pencil-lines: did you see these the night of the autopsy? If so, who drew them and what was discussed about them? What did they represent?

Do numerous metal fragments in X-Rays 2 and 3 appear to be in the same area on the X-Ray as they were when you saw these X-Rays at autopsy?

Do these 3 X-Rays represent the total number of head X-Rays taken at the autopsy?

Are there any missing?

Do they look the same (i.e., the damage pattern and the dark void in the anterior portion)?

Is this the type of X-Ray film you used? How can you tell (regardless of answer)?

Body (#s 7-14):

Does this number seem to represent the total number of body X-Rays taken at the autopsy?

Do the various views seem consistent with what you remember being taken, and with what you remember seeing after developing?

Can you identify which views are taken before, and after, the Y-incision?

X-Rays of Skull Fragments:

Did you see these the night of the autopsy?

If not, did you see any *different* X-Rays of skull fragments that night?

Who took them? Where? On what machine?

Autopsy Photographs

Examine all views (including brain) for authentication purposes, and discuss in detail any perceived inconsistencies with what the witness remembers.

Closing Remarks

Anything else you would like to say?

