

The AF1 Tapes and Subsequent Events at Andrews AFB on November 22, 1963:

What Was Supposed to Happen vs. What Did Happen

by

Douglas Horne,

author of Inside the Assassination Records Review Board

At my request, a friend of mine, psychologist Steven Kossor of Pennsylvania, recently used the sophisticated audio equipment he employs in his hobby as an audiophile to create an enhanced excerpt for me of the key passages in the Clifton version of the “Air Force One Tapes” (the GPO/NARA version released to the public in 2012, based on the Clifton version of the AF1 conversations, which is about 27 minutes longer than the version previously released by the LBJ Library), pertaining to the selection of JFK’s autopsy site (Walter Reed Hospital vs. Bethesda Naval Hospital); and the mode of transportation to be used to move JFK’s body from Andrews Air Force Base to the autopsy site (a mortuary style ambulance vs. helicopter).

Those portions of the AF1 tapes have always haunted me, since a tug-of-war was clearly going on between major actors onboard Air Force One, and major actors at the White House Situation Room (“Crown”), regarding where JFK’s autopsy would be performed, and how the body would be transported there. Many people who have studied these conversations have undoubtedly wondered the same things: “What was being planned---and why---and *how* did those plans change after AF1 landed at Andrews AFB---and *why*?” This rather lengthy and detailed essay will share with its readers my considered opinions after ruminating about this subject off and on for 32 years, since 1981---when I first became aware of the LBJ Library version of the AF1 tapes by reading David Lifton’s forensic thriller about the JFK assassination, *Best Evidence*.

CONTEXT IS EVERYTHING

Everything in this essay is grounded around one basic, undeniable fact: that the heavy, bronze, reddish-brown ceremonial casket from Dallas, in which JFK’s body was taken aboard AF1 at Love Field in Dallas, *was empty* when the public saw it unloaded from Air Force One on live television shortly after 6:04 PM on November 22, 1963, and placed into a light gray Navy ambulance. **We know this is so because President Kennedy’s body arrived at the Bethesda morgue twenty minutes BEFORE the motorcade from Andrews AFB, transporting the Dallas casket in a light gray Navy Pontiac ambulance, arrived at the front of the Navy hospital.** If the timeline that supports the above conclusion can be trusted, then *the only conclusion possible is that JFK’s body had been removed from the Dallas casket onboard the airplane*, prior to the arrival of Air Force One at Andrews, and somehow spirited to Bethesda Naval Hospital before the Andrews motorcade arrived. It is essential that the reader review the basic facts proving that the body’s chain-of-custody was broken enroute the autopsy, before we move on to the principal topic of this essay, which is *“What do the AF1 tapes reveal about what was*

intended that night; what actually transpired; and how did those events deviate from what had been planned, and why?"

The timeline can indeed be trusted, and I shall demonstrate why. Two Navy enlisted men, Dennis David and Donald Rebentisch, were part of the working party that unloaded JFK's body at 6:35 PM at the Bethesda Naval Hospital loading dock that evening. Mr. David was a First Class Navy Corpsman serving as "Chief of the Day" at Bethesda, and was instructed by the Secret Service detail (which had literally taken over Bethesda that afternoon) to assemble a working party of sailors, so that the President's casket could be unloaded, and taken into the morgue, when it arrived in a vehicle at the Bethesda morgue's loading dock. HM1 Dennis David was the supervisor of the working party, and Donald Rebentisch was a member of this working party. As reported in *Best Evidence*, both men, in the early 1980s, had independent and identical recollections of offloading a cheap aluminum shipping casket from a Hearse (a black Cadillac mortuary-style ambulance built specifically for the funeral trade) at the morgue's loading dock, and of taking the casket into the morgue, and setting it down, before being dismissed. Dennis David's best recollection when interviewed by the ARRB staff in 1997 was that this event occurred at about 6:45 PM; the precise time of the event was fixed with precision in 1997 when the ARRB staff acquired the November 26th, 1963 typed after-action report of USMC Sergeant Roger Boyajian, whose Marine Barracks security detail had provided physical security during the autopsy. (Mr. Boyajian still had an onionskin carbon copy of the report in 1997, and sent the ARRB a high-quality photocopy, which he authenticated by letter.) In his after-action report, which pertained *only* to the physical security provided for President Kennedy's autopsy, Boyajian wrote: **"At approximately 1835 the casket was received at the morgue entrance and taken inside."** This pins down much more accurately Dennis David's estimate to the ARRB staff that the shipping casket event had taken place at about 6:45 PM. **The military time of 1835 hours (6:35 PM civilian time)** in Boyajian's report, which was a *contemporaneous document typed four days after the autopsy*, trumps Dennis David's *estimate* in 1997 (very accurate, as it turns out) of 6:45 PM, **and can be authoritatively considered the true arrival time of the shipping casket.** Later on, during the night of the autopsy, after the autopsy had been concluded, in response to a question from HM1 Dennis David, Dr. J Thornton Boswell, one of the three pathologists who had conducted JFK's autopsy, confirmed to David that JFK had indeed been in the shipping casket his working party had unloaded from the Hearse at the morgue loading dock hours earlier. [David told Lifton in 1979 that both Dr. Humes and Dr. Boswell (the two Navy pathologists who participated in the autopsy) had been present on the loading dock, along with their commanding officer, Captain Stover, and what he believed to be the Surgeons General of the Army and Air Force.]

In contrast, both the local newspapers, and a Secret Service report, reported that the light gray Navy ambulance containing the Dallas casket, Jackie Kennedy, and Robert Kennedy, **had arrived at 6:55 PM in front of Bethesda Naval Hospital**, and newspapers the next day reported it had sat there for twelve minutes, before being driven away to the back of the building (its destination at that time---about 7:07 PM---per the two FBI agents who led the way in their own vehicle, was the morgue loading dock). We have a high degree of certainty, therefore, in both key aspects of this timeline---that is, in

the arrival time of both caskets at Bethesda. The shipping casket (which Boswell confirmed to Dennis David had contained JFK's body) *arrived twenty minutes prior to the Andrews motorcade and the light gray Navy ambulance*, and furthermore, the Navy ambulance had then (according to newspaper reports the next day) sat out in front of the hospital *for an additional 12 minutes* before even moving. Dennis David also recalled clearly---in 1979, long before he ever knew about the Boyajian report---that *after* his working party unloaded the shipping casket from the Hearse, he went to the forward part of the hospital and subsequently watched the Andrews motorcade arrive, *about 20 or 30 minutes minutes later*, from a second floor office window. As it turns out, his sense of time was quite accurate even many years later in 1979, for the Andrews motorcade arrived **exactly 20 minutes** after the casket arrival mentioned in the Boyajian report. This speaks highly to Dennis David's reliability as a witness.

It gets even worse, as far as the body's chain-of-custody goes. The staff of the House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA) learned in the late 1970s that the two FBI agents sent to Bethesda to obtain any bullets removed from the body, James Sibert and Francis O'Neill, helped two Secret Service agents (Roy Kellerman and William Greer) offload the Dallas casket (which had to be empty) from the light gray Navy ambulance that had just arrived at the morgue loading dock, using a wheeled conveyance (almost certainly what was known as a "church truck"). This was reconfirmed by the ARRB in 1997 when these two men were deposed; and former FBI agent James Sibert clarified for the ARRB that they set it down in the morgue anteroom. So this second casket entry was quite distinctive from the first one, in that: (1) it was a different casket than Dennis David's working party offloaded [a heavy bronze ceremonial coffin, as opposed to a cheap, unadorned, lightweight gray aluminum shipping casket]; (2) it was delivered by a different vehicle [by a light gray Navy Pontiac ambulance, as opposed to a Hearse, which was a black Cadillac mortuary-style ambulance]; and (3) different people, or "actors," unloaded the casket from the vehicle which delivered it [namely, the second casket delivery was offloaded by four Federal agents wearing suits, whereas the first casket delivery was offloaded by Navy sailors in working uniforms]. Based on inferences in an internal FBI interview report, this second casket entry by the four Federal agents occurred at approximately 7:17 PM. Unknown by the two FBI agents at the time, the Dallas casket was empty when they moved it into the morgue anteroom. (The two Secret Service agents had to know otherwise, for they had been onboard Air Force One during the flight back to Washington from Dallas.)

The "French Farce" continued that evening, for there was a second entry of the Dallas casket at 8:00 PM. The Honor Guard, or Joint Service Casket Team, after chasing a "decoy ambulance" into the darkness and getting lost, finally found the Dallas casket sitting out front in a light gray Navy ambulance (which one of the two present that night is unclear), and performed their intended ceremonial function by following it to the back of the hospital, manhandling the heavy bronze casket up the narrow steps leading to the morgue loading dock platform, and by then taking it into the morgue proper. The time of this third casket entry (and the second entry for the Dallas casket that night) was recorded in the after-action report of the Military District of Washington (MDW). So the time of this final casket entry---8:00 PM---is also unassailable. And its actors are startlingly

different from the other two casket entries that preceded it: the Joint Service Casket Team, hastily assembled at Andrews AFB, consisted of members of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard---all wearing the dress uniform of their respective services, and white gloves. [Unlike the Marine Barracks security detail supervised by USMC Sergeant Boyajian, they carried no weapons.] Furthermore, after setting the heavy bronze casket down next to one of the morgue examining tables, they witnessed the casket being opened, and saw JFK's body removed from the heavy, reddish-brown ceremonial coffin. Those who were playing a "shell game" with President Kennedy's body that night understood that the mortified and embarrassed Casket Team had to be allowed to perform its ceremonial function---that is, to "find" the casket that they had lost in the darkness; to take it into the morgue; and to see it opened and to be reassured that all was well, and that the slain Commander-in-Chief's body was inside. The *illusion* of an intact chain-of-custody had to be created for this most important audience, and for those supervising its performance, General Phillip Wehle (Commandant, MDW), and his aide, Lt. Richard Lipsey. The first two casket entries that night---the shipping casket at 6:35 PM and the first Dallas casket entry at about 7:17 PM---remained unknown to the Joint Service Casket Team, and to Wehle and Lipsey. [Lipsey later freely admitted knowledge of a "decoy ambulance" to the HSCA staff in an interview in the late 1970s, but seemed completely unaware of its implications; presumably, he and General Wehle were given a benign explanation for the "wild goose chase" conducted in the dark by both of them, and by their honor guard that night. Many of the enlisted Navy personnel on duty the night of the autopsy at Bethesda were aware of a "decoy" Navy ambulance, and its existence was even admitted to them by some of the Secret Service agents at the Naval Hospital.]

So---now that the reader understands the *context* within which we will be evaluating the Air Force One tapes and other critical data---we can proceed to our examination of the initial tug-of-war over the autopsy site, and the mode of transportation for JFK's body enroute the autopsy. *Something was very much amiss that day.* It behooves us to try to understand just what was going on: (1) Why would anyone want to remove JFK's body from the Dallas casket onboard Air Force One? (2) How did JFK's body arrive at Bethesda Naval Hospital prior to the Andrews AFB motorcade? (3) What plan for the autopsy and the body's movement was hatched while AF1 was in flight, and how was that plan altered in its execution? and (4) What happened to JFK's body at Bethesda in-between its early arrival at 6:35 PM, and the official commencement of the autopsy at 8:00 PM before a large audience of at least 35 people at the Bethesda morgue?

WHY WAS JFK'S BODY REMOVED FROM THE DALLAS CASKET ONBOARD AIR FORCE ONE, AND WHEN?

Author William Manchester makes quite clear in his 1967 book, *The Death of a President*, that there was a prolonged, serious, intense, and acrimonious struggle for custody of President Kennedy's body at Parkland hospital on November 22, 1963 after he was pronounced dead. The Dallas County Medical Examiner, forensic pathologist Dr. Earl Rose, was adamant that he perform a Texas autopsy in accordance with Texas law; and the Secret Service was equally adamant that they would not permit a Texas autopsy,

and insisted on taking President Kennedy's body back to Washington *without* an autopsy being performed in Texas. His vivid description of this battle can be found on pages 297-305. Another account can be found in the DVD video of the documentary "The Men Who Killed Kennedy," in which Oneal funeral home ambulance driver Aubrey Rike and Dr. Paul Peters of Parkland Hospital describe, in front of the motion picture camera, the intense (and at times, profane) altercation as they witnessed it.

Never mind that William Manchester sides with the Secret Service and the desires of the emotionally overwrought Kennedy entourage, and viciously criticizes Earl Rose for bad judgment. For what it's worth, Dr. Rose had the law behind him, and the Secret Service did not. There was no Federal jurisdiction over an assassinated President at the time, and Texas law prevailed. We know now, in hindsight, that the autopsy performed at Bethesda Naval Hospital that night was badly flawed at the very least (that is the most charitable thing we can say about it today). In view of the improper and substandard procedures followed at the Bethesda autopsy; in view of the fact that many autopsy photos known to have been taken are now missing; in view of the fact that the three surviving skull x-rays (at least two are missing) are not originals, but are *altered copy films*; in view of the fact that some autopsy notes were burned and other notes are missing, that the first draft of the autopsy report was burned, that one signed copy is now missing, and the extant copy in the National Archives is the third written version of the autopsy protocol; in view of the fact that the brain photos in the JFK autopsy collection at the National Archives *cannot be photos of JFK's brain*; and in view of the fact that President Kennedy's brain is now missing---in view of all these facts, all Americans who want to know what really happened to President Kennedy in 1963 surely wish that an honest and honorable professional like Dr. Rose had been allowed to do his job and perform an honest and competent autopsy on John F. Kennedy's body. If Dr. Rose had been allowed to do his job, I do not think we would now be faced with the massive cover-up that surrounds the medical evidence in JFK's assassination.

The point here is to emphasize that for about 30 minutes, the Dallas County Medical Examiner courageously stood his ground and attempted to prevent the theft of President Kennedy's body from Parkland Hospital by the Secret Service. Ultimately, the Secret Service agents with the Dallas casket (which was on a wheeled conveyance called a "church truck") pulled aside their coats and showed their weapons, and literally threatened to run Dr. Rose over with the casket (per Dr. Peters, who witnessed the altercation) if he did not get out of the way. Dr. Rose was pushed aside by Secret Agents and other members of the Kennedy entourage, and the Dallas casket, with JFK's body inside, was spirited away to Love Field in an Oneal Funeral Home ambulance.

The casket was taken onboard Air Force One via the port aft passenger door (the Presidential door) at 2:14 PM local time (CST). It was placed on the port side (left-hand side) of the aircraft in the aft compartment, after several seats had been removed to make room for the coffin, prior to its arrival. Jacqueline Kennedy boarded the aircraft at 2:18 PM. The swearing-in of the new President, Lyndon Baines Johnson, took place at 2:38 PM. Air Force One (SAM 26000) took off at 2:47 local time, and its wheels touched

down at Andrews AFB two hours and thirteen minutes later, at 6:00 PM EST. At time 6:04 PM, the wheels were “on the blocks” (i.e., the chocks were in place).

As previously discussed above, we know that President Kennedy’s body arrived at the Bethesda Naval Hospital morgue loading dock, in an **aluminum shipping casket, at 6:35 PM**; and we know that the **bronze Dallas ceremonial casket** (in which JFK’s body left Dallas) was not driven up in front of the Bethesda complex **until 20 minutes later**, that it remained stationary for twelve minutes in its Navy ambulance, and was not set down in the morgue anteroom by the four Federal agents who offloaded it **until about 7:17 PM, over 40 minutes later**. **Therefore, we know that the bronze Dallas casket must have been empty when it was offloaded from AF1 on national television shortly after 6:05 PM on November 22, 1963.**

So when was JFK’s body removed from the Dallas casket, and why?

The “why” seems obvious to me. The Secret Service was intent upon preventing a Texas autopsy---anyone who has read my book, *Inside the Assassination Records Review Board*, will understand that the Secret Service could not under any circumstances allow an honest autopsy of President Kennedy’s remains. An honest autopsy would have revealed that he was shot from both the front and from behind, and was a victim of crossfire, and therefore of a conspiracy. The goal of the “dirty” Secret Service agents in the immediate aftermath of the assassination---those involved in the coup---was to spirit the body to a designated site where the “crime scene” (i.e., the body) could be “sanitized”---that is, where all evidence of frontal shots [both frontal entrance wounds and bullet fragments] could be removed from the body---hence, the extended altercation at Parkland Hospital with Dr. Rose and law enforcement officers over the custody of the body. [It was necessary to remove all evidence of frontal shots prior to autopsy so that the autopsy results would conform with the official cover story or “legend,” namely, that JFK had been shot by a lone gunman, firing from above and behind him, in the Texas School Book Depository.] Given the intense and prolonged nature of the altercation between Dr. Earl Rose and Roy Kellerman and his men at Parkland, **I conclude that JFK’s body was removed from the Dallas casket immediately after it was taken onboard Air Force One as a “security precaution” by the coup plotters, in case Dr. Rose and local law enforcement arrived, unannounced, to take custody of President Kennedy’s remains.**

This possibility must have seemed very real to Roy Kellerman and his Secret Service compatriots---the altercation at Parkland Hospital had been intense and had nearly required physical violence for its resolution. There is no other logical or rational reason I can think of for removing JFK’s body from the Dallas casket after it was taken onboard Air Force One. This is the only reasonable explanation. This was the beginning of the medical cover-up in the JFK assassination.

The “when” is also fairly obvious. After the swearing-in of LBJ, at 2:38 PM, the Kennedy entourage maintained a vigil, an “Irish wake,” beside the casket in the aft compartment of the aircraft, throughout the entire flight. So the body could not have

been removed from the Dallas casket at any time after the swearing-in. In fact, Manchester writes that even *during* the swearing-in, JFK's loyal and distraught Air Force Aide, General Godfrey McHugh (who had refused to attend the swearing-in of LBJ), was standing at attention beside the casket of the fallen Commander-in-Chief. So the only opportunity for Secret Service agents to remove JFK's body from the Dallas casket would have been immediately after it was taken onboard at 2:14 PM, and prior to the swearing-in at 2:38 PM. Jacqueline Kennedy boarded at 2:18 PM, and Manchester tells us in *The Death of a President* that she immediately went to the bedroom on the airplane to compose herself. Manchester also writes about a state of pandemonium shortly after the casket came onboard during which Godfrey McHugh went forward to the cockpit more than once to demand that the aircraft take off immediately. **It is apparent to me, therefore, that the most likely opportunity for the Secret Service to remove JFK's body from the Dallas casket was between 2:18 PM (when Jackie Kennedy boarded) and 2:38 PM (the time of LBJ's swearing-in).** [In telephone conversations with me, David Lifton made clear that he believed JFK's body had been removed from the Dallas casket *immediately*, between 2:14 PM when it was taken onboard, and before Jackie Kennedy boarded, 4 minutes later, at 2:18 PM. To me, this is a distinction without a difference. The operative point here is that JFK's body had to be removed from the ceremonial bronze Dallas casket *before the swearing in of LBJ.*] This might have rather handily been accomplished under cover of some excuse like: "Please clear the compartment, while we secure the casket to the deck." The body would presumably have been spirited out of the aft starboard galley door, which was in the same aft compartment of the airplane where the casket was located. (See the diagram titled "Plan of Air Force One" at the end of Manchester's book.) JFK researcher and Air Force One expert James Sawa agrees with me that the body was almost certainly taken out of the starboard aft galley door. As documented by Manchester, there was an ongoing luggage transfer at Love Field of LBJ's luggage from Air Force Two (SAM 86970) to Air Force One (SAM 26000), which would have provided the opportunity to place JFK's body (which had been wrapped in two sheets at Parkland Hospital, one around his head and one around his body) in either the forward or aft luggage compartment of Air Force One. The aft luggage compartment seems more likely to me than the forward luggage compartment, based upon the photographs of the two luggage compartments taken by Sawa and displayed during his 2003 presentation at the Cyril Wecht Conference at Duquesne University. The forward luggage compartment, per Sawa's photographs, was very crowded and contained large electronics cabinets, filled with radio equipment, that left minimal space for cargo; the aft luggage compartment, per Sawa's photos, was an unobstructed space with a very long longitudinal bench, devoted solely to cargo stowage. There was plenty of space for a human body lying in a horizontal position in the aft luggage compartment, based on Sawa's photograph, taken at the Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio.

In summary, David Lifton's conclusion in his 1981 book *Best Evidence*, that JFK's body must have been spirited away in an Air Force One luggage compartment prior to takeoff, still stands up today, since we know unequivocally that it was taken onboard in the bronze Dallas casket (per ambulance driver Aubrey Rike, who saw the lid closed at Parkland and who stated that the casket was never opened before going onboard the

aircraft at Love Field)---and since it could no longer have been inside the Dallas casket when it was offloaded at Andrews (per Dennis David and Sergeant Roger Boyajian).

And guess what? There is a reference in the new Clifton version of the Air Force One tapes ***to something going on with the body prior to takeoff.*** I will quote below from the verbatim transcript I made in 2012, from a radio conversation between Roy Kellerman (code name “Digest”) and his boss at the White House Situation Room, the Head of the White House Secret Service Detail, Gerald Behn (code name “Duplex”), at time 32:21 on the GPO/NARA MP3 sound file:

Digest: ...we’re at the airport, 26000, **everybody aboard.**

Duplex: OK, go ahead.

Digest: We’re waiting for the swearing-in at the plane before takeoff.

Duplex: Of the---that’s of Volunteer [LBJ’s code name]?

Digest: Roger.

Duplex: Say again, Roy, say again.

Digest: We are waiting for judge to appear for swearing-in.

Duplex: That is for Volunteer, is that right?

Digest: Yes, we are having one, ah [garbled] to have it done here before we take off, Jerry.

Duplex: That’s affirmative. Do you have any idea yet what, ah, Lace (Jackie Kennedy) wants to do and what Volunteer wants to do on their arrival here?

Digest: No. I will call you back. Suggest---we have a 2 hour 15 flight into Andrews. We have a full plane of at least 40.

Duplex: OK, go ahead.

Digest: ***I’ll have to call you again after---after the, ah, body.*** Ah, however, I’m sure the, ah, Volunteer boys will go over his car and so forth. We will need [garbled] and several others.

Shortly after this exchange Kellerman terminated the conversation. The quote speaks for itself, I think: ***“I’ll have to call you again after the, ah, body.”*** Something that was happening with “the body”---after it had been taken onboard---caused Kellerman to have to sign off. This is consistent with my conclusion that JFK’s body must have been removed from the Dallas casket *shortly after it was taken onboard, and before the*

swearing-in of LBJ. Remember, the Dallas casket was taken onboard at 2:14 PM, *four minutes before Jackie Kennedy boarded at 2:18 PM.* Kellerman told Behn that *everyone was onboard* (which means it was past 2:18 PM when he commenced this conversation), and said twice that everyone was *waiting for the swearing-in*, which means the swearing-in had not yet happened. And during this period, between 2:18 and 2:38 PM, something was taking place with “the, ah, body.” Something that caused Kellerman to say he would have to call Behn back.

HOW DID JFK’S BODY ARRIVE AT BETHESDA NAVAL HOSPITAL BEFORE THE MOTORCADE FROM ANDREWS AFB?

The short answer is, “by helicopter.” Specifically, by a helicopter that landed at the Bethesda Naval Hospital complex’s Officer’s Club parking lot. JFK’s body was transferred from that helicopter to a Hearse (a black Cadillac mortuary ambulance), placed inside a shipping casket, and delivered to the morgue loading dock less than five minutes later, at 6:35 PM, when USMC Sergeant Boyajian dutifully recorded the time of arrival of the casket in his notes. He committed his notes to a typed report three and one half days later, a copy of which he provided to the ARRB staff in 1997 after I established contact with him. How I reached these conclusions, and the crucial role of the AF1 tapes (and other evidence) played in reaching these conclusions, is detailed below.

The Clifton version of the AF1 tapes (between time 40:51 on side 1, and about 1 hour and ten minutes---that is, through the end of side 1 of the GPO/NARA release; and continuing from time 3:52 to time 6:05 of side 2 of the GPO/NARA release) reveals an interesting tug-of-war between one group of actors on AF1---namely, Secret Service agent Roy Kellerman, George Burkley [Military Physician to the President], and U.S. Army General Ted Clifton [Military Aide to the President]---and other actors at “Crown” [the White House Situation Room], whose spokesman on the tapes is Head of the White House Secret Service Detail, Gerald Behn. [President Kennedy’s National Security Advisor, McGeorge Bundy, was also at Crown that day.]

All three actors onboard Air Force One---Kellerman, Burkley, and Clifton---made repeated attempts to establish ground transportation from Andrews AFB to the U.S. Army’s Walter Reed Hospital, in Washington D.C., where they wanted the autopsy conducted. As the conversations continued, General Clifton specified on two occasions that he wanted a “mortuary-type ambulance” (in other words, a Hearse) at Andrews AFB to pick up President Kennedy’s casket. At one point a “ground return” or limousine was also requested to accompany the mortuary-type ambulance.

The recipients of these radioed requests from AF1 were both General Heaton (the U.S. Army Surgeon General, apparently speaking on the phone from Walter Reed), and Gerald Behn at “Crown.” Heaton seemed compliant and willing to do whatever was requested of him. But Behn, from the very beginning, insisted that the autopsy would be conducted at Bethesda Naval Hospital, and that the mode of transportation would be by helicopter.

Eventually, General Ted Clifton onboard Air Force One finally comes to accept what Gerald Behn at “Crown” insisted on, which was a Bethesda autopsy, and asks Behn if it is correct that a mortuary-type ambulance will take the body to Bethesda. Behn quickly corrected him, telling Clifton that helicopter transportation would take the body to Bethesda Naval Hospital. Clifton expressed his concern that the bronze Dallas casket may have been too heavy for a helicopter, and so continued to insist on a “mortuary-type ambulance” as a backup.

A Gawler’s Funeral Home Hearse Was Initially Assigned to Proceed to Andrews:

In 1996 the ARRB interviewed Mr. Joseph Hagan (President of Gawler’s in 1996, and the same man who was in charge of the embalming team at Bethesda on 11/22/63). He told us that Colonel Miller of the MDW initially ordered Gawler’s to send a Hearse to Andrews AFB, *but that this order was rescinded at the last minute.* This begs another question, though: if the Gawler’s Hearse to Andrews was rescinded, was it assigned to go somewhere else instead? *Somewhere like the Bethesda Naval Hospital complex?*

A Stolen Conversation from the White House Situation Room:

There is a snippet of “hot mike” back chatter coming from “Crown” on the Clifton version of the Air Force One tapes, which begins at time 1:02:20 and terminates at 1:03:13 of side 1; it occurs during a period when no one on AF1 is speaking, and it is clear from context that we are listening to a Situation Room background conversation picked up by an open microphone. Only certain words or short phrases can be heard---not any complete sentences---and the words and phrases quoted below are interspersed between static, garbled conversation, and some voids and silence in between, as well:

Crown: “...black car...**black Cadillac** is the...**black Cadillac**...I’d get him out there anyway, regardless! ...get him out there anyway, regardless!...then maybe...then maybe...[long pause, including communications chatter, followed by one more, quite distinct] **black Cadillac.**”

My audiophile friend in Pennsylvania who created an enhanced AF1 excerpt for me, Steven Kossor, has not only detected a loud audio “pop” indicative of crude splicing in this segment, but has also detected (using wave form analysis) strange “voids” between segments of the conversation which also reveal alteration of this segment of the Clifton voice recording. He also insists that the first two “black Cadillac” phrases above, and the repeated phrases “get him out there anyway, regardless” and “then maybe” are *identical duplications that prove the Clifton tape has been edited.* As Steven Kossor has written me:

“...these are duplicate audio signals, not separate transmissions, created mechanically as a result of audio tape storage (print through) and/or editing. Each unique vocal “set” represents an original transmission that is duplicated one or more times. The wave forms are virtually identical (there is no change in emphasis from one to the other), and they occur at approximately equal distances in time after the first occurrence of the sound that they

duplicate. The wave form and presentation of the last “Black Cadillac” utterance is different from the earlier ones and probably represents a separate utterance of that phrase in a recording that has apparently been edited multiple times between the first “Black Cadillac” utterance and the last one.”

[Aside from this forensic evidence of editing during the “black Cadillac sequence,” we also know, based upon the well-documented, missing conversations about the capture and identity of the accused assassin in Dallas---recalled by others in their memoirs, oral history interviews, and books---and from studying other segments of conversation on the tape which appear out of order or incomplete, that the Clifton version of the AF1 tapes, while some 27 minutes longer than the older LBJ Library version, is not complete, and has been edited. There may still be as much as three hours of conversation missing, based on the fact that there were three frequencies in full use for the entire 2 hour and 13 minute flight, according to the report filed by the radio operator on the aircraft.]

The speakers here (apparently two persons) are unknown, but in the portions of the Clifton recording that have not been excised, they are clearly talking about a “black Cadillac.” That is very interesting, given that the shipping casket containing the President’s body arrived in a Hearse---a **black Cadillac** mortuary-type ambulance---at 6:35 PM. The additional phrases “I’d get him out there anyway regardless” and “then maybe” are *consistent with* someone deeply concerned about moving JFK’s body and with the time pressure to do so, and some hopeful, or expected outcome. [They are NOT phrases that would seem to apply to the only other black Cadillac I know of that day, the “Queen Mary” follow-up car on Elm Street. It had its own Secret Service numerical designation, 679-X, and was not ever referred to as a “black Cadillac” in any writings I have ever come across.] And this conversation was picked up from the White House Situation Room, where the radio spokesman that day was the Head of the Secret Service White House Detail, Gerald Behn. [Gerald Behn would have referred to the “Queen Mary” as 679-X, or by its code name designation, “Halfback.”] It was Gerald Behn who insisted, from the get-go, on helicopter transportation to move the body of JFK to an autopsy at Bethesda. The reader should also be aware that when Dennis David met the Hearse at the morgue loading dock, that several “men in suits” (civilians) whom he presumed to be Federal agents got out of the car when it arrived. Were they Secret Service agents? Under the circumstances, there is no reason to believe they were anything else. The Secret Service sent about 40 agents to Bethesda Naval Hospital that afternoon to take over preparations for the autopsy; and it was a Secret Service agent who informed Dennis David that his visitor was about to arrive, and urged him to get his working party to the loading dock. Moving that body from Andrews AFB to the Bethesda morgue, via a helicopter and Hearse, would have been a Secret Service operation, all the way, so it is telling that we hear the phrases “black Cadillac” and “get him out there anyway, regardless” from “Crown,” where Jerry Behn (Head of the White House detail) appears to have been running the show.

A Helicopter Was Definitely Sent to Andrews AFB to Pick Up President Kennedy's Body:

In November of 1996, David Lifton gave a remarkable presentation at the JFK Lancer conference in Dallas, in which he played a video interview he had just conducted *with the former Marine Corps pilot of a military helicopter sent to Andrews AFB to pick up President Kennedy's body and transport it to Bethesda Naval Hospital*. Anyone interested can watch and listen to the video of this interview by obtaining the DVD disc from the 1996 Lancer conference titled: "Medical Evidence."

Summarizing, the former Marine pilot was a member of the "HMX" helicopter squadron based in Quantico, VA and Anacostia, Maryland. This squadron provided 24-hour, seven days per week "hot team" standby service for the President and high level, VIP Federal officials. Normally they were on duty for 48 hours at a time, and then off duty for the next 48 hours. Lifton's witness (whose identity he protected) stated in the videotaped interview that he was about to go home and enjoy a rare day off on November 22, 1963 when he was called into a special, surreptitious briefing at the Anacostia base where he was working that day. He was ordered to take a helicopter to Andrews AFB, and to be as unobtrusive as possible (including not using the lights on his helo), to await the arrival of Air Force One, and to take President Kennedy's body to Bethesda Naval Hospital. He was ordered to use a VIP helicopter, and was told that others would load the body onto his helicopter. His call sign for this mission was to be "Nighthawk One." He was told to stay out of public view; to taxi up to the tail of Air Force One after it had landed; and to stay out of the lights as much as possible.

The pilot of "Nighthawk One" landed on the west taxiway at Andrews just prior to sunset (he remembered the orange sky) and parked his helicopter behind some trees near the passenger terminal. He kept the engines running, but turned the rotors off. As soon as he saw Air Force One land, he spun his rotors up again.

He then taxied out to Air Force One in the darkness, and stopped about 100 feet from AF1 on the right rear side of SAM 26000---on the starboard aft quarter of the airplane. He could see "Army 1" (the helicopter LBJ used that night to go to the White House) parked in the lighted area of the tarmac "where the action was," and noted that the entire port side of Air Force One was illuminated by the television lights. He saw a large casket coming down on the scissors lift from the port aft door, then saw the casket loaded into the Navy ambulance and saw Jackie Kennedy get into the ambulance. At this point he realized that either the plans had changed since he was given his mission, or he had merely been a backup, and no one had told him about the ambulance. As soon as he saw the Dallas casket put into the Navy ambulance, he taxied away into the darkness, requested clearance, and flew his helicopter to Quantico, Virginia.

Undoubtedly, "Nighthawk One's" mission had been requested by Gerald Behn at "Crown," the one official who had insisted throughout the Air Force One conversations on the Clifton tapes that JFK's autopsy be conducted at Bethesda, and that his body be moved by helicopter.

The obvious questions, in view of “Nighthawk One’s” departure *without* President Kennedy’s body onboard, are: (1) Who changed the plan? How did this happen? and (2) How did JFK’s body get to Bethesda Naval Hospital, if “Nighthawk One” did not take it there?

Orders Were Given by “Crown” to Separate Jacqueline Kennedy from the Dallas Casket, and to Send the Casket to Bethesda by Helicopter:

The AF1 tapes reveal unambiguously that Gerald Behn in the White House situation room wanted to separate Mrs. Kennedy (hereafter referred to by her initials, JBK), and all other VIP passengers who were not Secret Service agents, from the Dallas casket. Although JFK’s Military Aide, General Ted Clifton (code name “Watchman”), initially insisted on an autopsy at Walter Reed Hospital and the use of a mortuary-type ambulance for transportation, he eventually fell into line with “Crown’s” demands and then actively supported Behn’s orders. Here are some telling quotes from the Clifton tapes:

Digest: Walter Reed ambulance for body that will go to Walter Reed, over?

Duplex: Say again, say again.

Digest (Kellerman): ...[we need] an ambulance from Walter Reed to transport body, over?

Duplex (Behn): Arrangements have been made for a helicopter for the Bethesda Naval Medical Center, over.

Digest: Standby, jerry---ah, I’ll have to get Burkley here.

A short time later Behn clarified his intentions:

Duplex: The, everybody aboard Air Force One, everybody aboard Air Force One, with the exception of the body, will be choppered into the South Grounds [of the White House]. The body will be choppered to the Navy Medical Center at Bethesda, over.

Burkley: The body will be choppered or will go by ambulance to the Navy Medical Center?

Duplex: Will be choppered, will be choppered.

Somewhat later, General Clifton on AF1 (apparently unaware that the Secret Service is running the show in Washington) “reads the riot act” to General Heaton, the Surgeon General of the Army:

Clifton: [material appears to be missing here from both the LBJ Library and Clifton version of the AF1 tapes---there is no “point one” on the tape] “...**two:** we do *not* want a

helicopter for Bethesda Naval Medical Center. We do want a [sic] ambulance and a ground return from Andrews to Walter Reed, and we want the regular, ah, post mortem that has to be done by law, under guard, performed at Walter Reed. Is that clear, over?

Heaton: That is clear, General Clifton. You want an ambulance, and another, ah, limousine, at Andrews, and you want the, ah, regular post mortem by law done at Walter Reed.

Clifton: That is correct.

These instructions, given to the Army Surgeon General (who was at Walter Reed, and not at “Crown”), were undoubtedly why the Gawler’s Hearse was originally ordered to go to Andrews AFB by Colonel Miller of the Army’s Military District of Washington. This conversation, apparently, also stimulated Dr. Dick Davis, the acting Head of Neurosurgery at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology (the AFIP was co-located with Walter Reed in Washington D.C.), to assemble a team and set up to perform a **craniotomy** (the surgical skull cap removal performed at autopsies) at Walter Reed. He told me, when I interviewed him in 1997 while on the ARRB staff, that his team was set up and ready to go, but President Kennedy’s body never arrived at Walter Reed.

Then, after the “black Cadillac” conversations overheard at Crown on the Clifton tapes, General Clifton (who now began using his code name, “Watchman”) begins to defer to Behn’s plans for a Bethesda autopsy:

Watchman: Ah, Duplex, this is Watchman. I understand that [you] have arranged [fadeout]...[mort]uary-type of ambulance [garbled] take President Kennedy to Bethesda. Is this correct, over?

Duplex: Watchman, ah, there’s been [sic] arranged to helicopter, helicopter, the body to Bethesda, over.

After some discussion about whether it is safe to use a helicopter, this ensued:

Watchman: This is Watchman. Ah, don’t take a chance on that. Also, have a mortuary-type ambulance stand by in case the helicopter doesn’t work.

Duplex: That’s affirmative [garbled] That’s affirmative, I received.

Watchman: Now, some other instructions. Listen carefully. Ah, we need a ramp, a normal ramp put at, put at the front of the aircraft, on the right-hand side, just behind the pilot’s cabin, in the galley. We are going to take the First Lady off by that route, over. Do you understand?

Duplex: I receive, affirmative.

Clifton then asked for a large forklift for the casket at the port side rear door, and a normal ramp for passengers at the port forward door. He then summarized:

Watchman: Duplex, this is Watchman, I say again: at the right front, a ramp for Mrs. Ken[nedy]; at the left rear, if possible, a forklift for the casket; and on the left front, near the pilot, [a] normal ramp, [a] normal press arrangement [garbled], over?

Clearly, at this point General Clifton was implementing Jerry Behn's stated intention to separate JBK from the Dallas casket. Behn had earlier said all passengers were to be choppered to the South Grounds of the White House; and now Ted Clifton was attempting to ensure that this would happen by arranging for her to exit the aircraft secretly, in the darkness, using the forward starboard galley door---*a different door than was going to be used for the Dallas casket.*

The question is, WHY? I have inferred that among the many conversations that must have been deleted from the AF1 tapes, were undoubtedly conversations between Kellerman and Behn about the body switch---about the removal of JFK's body from the bronze Dallas casket prior to takeoff, as a "security measure" to keep it out of the hands of the Dallas County Medical Examiner, Earl Rose. This is the context in which the "black Cadillac" discussions overheard at "Crown," and the blatant attempts by Behn and Clifton to separate JBK from the Dallas casket, best make sense.

Now, just because "Nighthawk One" took off from Andrews AFB without JFK's body onboard, that does *not* mean that there weren't other helicopters available. Please read below this crucial exchange between Kellerman (Digest) and Behn (Duplex), which occurred between time 3:52 and time 6:05 on side 2 of the Clifton tapes (after the Clifton plan to remove JBK from the aircraft in secret was discussed):

Duplex: [after many communications problems]...Go ahead Digest, this is Duplex.

Digest: Again, I repeat, three helicopters [to] transport people to the White House lawn, OK?

Duplex: That is affirmative.

Digest: Roger, OK, White House 102 and 405-X for transportation to, ah, Navy Hospital, OK?

Duplex: That is affirmative.

This is significant. Kellerman is confirming that three helicopters at Andrews were assigned to take AF1's passengers (largely, the Kennedy entourage, including JBK) to the White House, *and that two additional helicopters were assigned to transport JFK's body to Bethesda.* These are designated by Kellerman as White House assets, and are therefore ***not*** HMX "hot team" assets. Getting the body of JFK to Bethesda was so important that redundancy was laid in: both "Nighthawk One" had been arranged to perform that

function, as well as two other assets controlled by the Secret Service (White House 102 and 405-X). Presumably, one of these two White House assets would be used to take the heavy, ceremonial bronze Dallas casket to Bethesda---an event which was highly likely (indeed, almost certain) to be televised on live TV. The second helicopter mentioned by Kellerman would have been needed to surreptitiously transport *the actual body of JFK* from the luggage compartment on AF1 where it had been hidden during the flight, to Bethesda, *where it could have been reunited with the bronze Dallas casket. If this had taken place as planned---a two helicopter rendezvous on the grounds of Bethesda in the darkness---JFK's body could have been placed back into the Dallas casket and no one at the morgue would have known otherwise.* Once the very public loading of the Dallas casket onto helo # 1 had taken place, the klieg lights would have been turned off, and the Andrews TV coverage would have ceased. (This is exactly what happened once LBJ's helo, "Army 1," departed. The TV coverage abruptly ended.) Then, in the ensuing darkness, it would have been easy to offload JFK's body from its hiding place in an AF1 luggage compartment and place it on helo # 2.

The most significant quote on the Clifton tapes then takes place almost immediately after Kellerman tells Behn about the two helicopters to be used for the Navy Hospital.

Duplex: **Digest, this is Duplex. You accompany the body aboard the helicopter.**

Digest: Roger...

After all that had gone before in the AF1 conversations, the reader will understand that this is the proof that the light gray Navy Pontiac ambulance was never intended to take JFK's Dallas casket to Bethesda. In fact, William Manchester makes clear, in two places in his book *The Death of a President*, that this was a *cardiac ambulance* (not a hearse), and that it was sent to Andrews by Captain Canada, the commanding officer of the treatment hospital at Bethesda, in case LBJ had experienced any heart trouble. [Rear Admiral Galloway commanded the entire complex; Captain Stover was the C.O. of the medical school at Bethesda; and Captain Canada was the C.O. of the treatment hospital.]

On page 381, Manchester writes:

"Captain R.O. Canada, Jr., Bethesda's commanding officer, wasn't informed of the role his hospital would play. And Godfrey McHugh's tart order for an ambulance had been ignored. Captain Canada did send one to Andrews, but that was sheer chance. Because Lyndon Johnson had served in the Navy, he had been Canada's patient after his massive heart attack on July 2, 1955; the ambulance was dispatched against the possibility that the new President might be stricken again during the flight."

Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy, On Impulse, Changes the Secret Service/Military Plan to Separate Her from the Dallas Casket:

We know from Manchester's book that Robert F. Kennedy, the slain President's brother and the U.S. Attorney General, was the first person to board AF1 after touchdown. In

fact, he appears to have done so in the darkness, just when the bright television klieg lights were briefly switched off as the aircraft approached its designated parking spot. Air Force One had touched down at 6:00 PM local time, and had been taxiing toward its normal waiting area for about three minutes. Manchester writes on page 387:

“The crowd waiting by the chain fence had realized that arrival was imminent because they heard the whining jets. They couldn’t see its silhouette, however; the klieg lights blinded them. At 6:03 PM these were abruptly cut off. The reason was commonplace. The pilot had to see his way...Closer and closer the huge ghost crawled until Swindal [the pilot], looking down, could identify two of the waiting men. Robert McNamara was facing him, looking peculiarly tall. Robert Kennedy had just left the sanctuary of his [pickup] truck [where he had secreted himself] and was posed in a tense half-crouch, ready to spring aboard. Swindal paused momentarily for the croucher. [Did AF1 actually pause momentarily in the darkness to let RFK onboard before any others, as David Lifton has posited to me in telephone conversations? The meaning of Manchester’s writing here is unclear.] The eyes of the crowd were on the rear hatch, the President’s. A ramp had been readied for the front entrance, and the Attorney General vaulted on it, unseen; he was pumping up the steps while it was still being rolled into place...the aircraft glided forward once again and parked.” The time “on the blocks” was reported by AF1 as 6:04 PM. [This writing implies, to me, that RFK did not board until AF1 came to a complete stop.]

RFK raced to the rear of the aircraft to be with JBK. Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy had already displayed a gritty, stubborn frame of mind during the flight back. On page 348, Manchester writes that when Rear Admiral Burkley, JFK’s Military Physician, asked her if she wanted to change her blood-spattered pink Chanel suit:

“No,” she whispered fiercely. “Let them see what they’ve done.”

A similar exchange took place with Malcolm Kilduff, the acting Press Secretary for JFK’s trip to Texas. Manchester, who did not have access to the AF1 tapes, and therefore did not understand the true intent of taking JBK out the forward starboard door, continued on page 348:

The last man to realize that she really meant it was Kilduff. He thought long about how they could offload the coffin at Andrews without pictures being taken. His solution was to open the galley door on the starboard side, opposite the usual exit. That way the great mass of the fuselage would mask both the coffin and the widow; photographers and television cameramen would see nothing. He proposed the plan. She vetoed it. “We’ll go out the regular way [using the Presidential exit on the port aft side of the aircraft],” she said. “I want them to see what they have done.”

Ask yourself what was more likely: was General Clifton taking orders from an assistant Press Secretary, or was the assistant Press Secretary taking orders from the Commander-in-Chief’s Military Aide? It seems obvious to me that Clifton tried to use Kilduff to get Jackie to leave the aircraft in the darkness, via the secret exit ramp previously arranged by Clifton, on the radio circuit to “Crown.” And it was naive for Manchester to fall for

this specious after-the-fact explanation for a purported plan to remove both the casket and Jackie Kennedy from the forward starboard galley door, since there was *no forklift* at the forward starboard galley door to take the casket off. The forklift was at the Presidential door, on the aft port side. Air Force One itself (Clifton) had initiated that arrangement.

On page 390, Manchester writes:

Bob Kennedy explained the transportation choices to his sister-in-law. *“There’s a helicopter here to take you to the White House. Don’t you want to do that?”*

“No, no, I just want to go to Bethesda.” She saw the gray ambulance, assumed it was the one she had requested, and said, “We’ll go in that.”

And thus, were all the devious plans of the coup plotters to separate the widow (and all other witnesses) from the Dallas casket torn asunder, and rendered moot. In this instant, while looking out the Presidential exit door at the left rear of the aircraft, the determination of President Kennedy’s widow to remain with her husband---she had no idea the Dallas casket was empty, and therefore equated staying with the casket to *staying with JFK’s body*---threw a giant monkey-wrench into the plans of the Secret Service to surreptitiously reunite his body with the Dallas casket. The failure of this plan led directly to the absurd “French Farce” of the three casket entries discussed earlier; and it was through this discovery of the body’s broken chain-of-custody---by investigating what it meant---that we have uncovered the clandestine post-mortem surgery that was performed on JFK’s body, *at Bethesda Naval Hospital*, to remove all evidence of frontal shots from his cadaver before the autopsy officially began. No coup plotter in his right mind would have *planned* the three Bethesda casket entries that actually occurred that night, for the different entries left undeniable evidence of a serious break in the body’s chain-of-custody, and of “missing time” prior to the beginning of the autopsy shortly after 8:00 PM. The investigation of what transpired during that “missing time” (between 6:35 PM and 8:00 PM), and of what the three casket entries implied, has led to a true understanding of why the Parkland Hospital wound observations and the Bethesda Naval Hospital wound observations are so markedly different. (See Chapter 13 of *Inside the ARRB*, pages 998-1013.)

Manchester’s confirmation that RFK and JBK, with an *ad hoc* decision, commandeered a *cardiac ambulance* sent to provide aid to LBJ (and that that vehicle was not the intended mode of transportation for the body) is found on page 391 of *The Death of a President*, where he writes: “Beside the driver, gaping, were the heart specialist and nurse who had been sent to attend Lyndon Johnson. At Roy Kellerman’s request all three slid out wordlessly and Greer, Kellerman, Landis, and Burkley scrambled in, Burkley on Landis’ lap. The Attorney General entered the back, sitting opposite his sister-in-law; Godfrey perched beside her.”

This is the precise moment when the pilot of “Nighthawk One” took off, without the Dallas Casket, and flew to Quantico to put his bird to bed. Kellerman and Greer had no choice but to modify their plan immediately, and to stay with the Dallas casket, which Kellerman surely knew was empty. (He was in charge of all security for the Dallas trip,

and as the reader will recall, blurted out a revealing oral utterance on the radio to Gerald Behn prior to takeoff from Love Field, about something happening with “the, ah, body.”) As soon as the AF1 personnel failed to separate Jackie Kennedy from the Dallas casket, Kellerman’s main task changed from “accompanying the body on the helicopter” to *preventing anyone from opening the bronze Dallas casket it while it was still empty*. It was for this reason that he stayed with JBK, RFK, and the empty Dallas casket.

Was There Enough Time to Fly JFK’s Body to Bethesda to Support a 6:35 PM Arrival at the Morgue Loading Dock? Do the Facts Fit the Hypothesis?

The answer is YES.

I closely studied the events on the ground at Andrews by watching my DVD of the A&E network’s rebroadcast of the NBC live TV coverage on November 22, 1963, called “As It Happened.”

Using that broadcast and a stopwatch; and the AF1 tapes; and the Chuck Holmes logbook of Andrews AFB activity on 11/22/63; and Manchester’s book, I was able to construct the following timeline:

6:00 PM AF1 Touchdown. [From the AF1 tapes and the Chuck Holmes Andrews AFB logbook]

6:04 PM: AF1 “on the blocks.” [From the AF1 tapes]

6:14 PM: LBJ makes brief televised remarks before microphones. [From the DVD of TV coverage, and Manchester’s book] The Navy ambulance has already departed with the Dallas casket, with RFK and JBK onboard.

6:20 PM: LBJ’s helo, “Army 1,” takes off and the television lights are turned off and the coverage abruptly ends. [From the DVD of TV coverage]

6:26 PM: LBJ and “Army 1” arrives at the South Lawn of the White House [from Manchester’s book]

6:30 PM: Air Force Two (more correctly, SAM 86970, since there was no Vice President onboard) lands at Andrews. It would have taxied for three to four minutes before parking, based on the time required for AF1 to taxi to its resting spot. [from the Chuck Holmes special Andrews logbook for 11/22/63]

The time required for a helicopter flight from Andrews to the White House (6:20 to 6:26 PM) was **just 6 minutes**, and you can be sure that the pilot of “Army 1” was being very careful that night, and was not trying to set any speed records.

In order for JFK's body to show up at the Bethesda morgue loading dock at 6:35 PM (per the seminal Boyajian report) ***I stipulate that it would have had to arrive by helicopter on the grounds of Bethesda five minutes prior to that, by 6:30 PM.***

Was there enough time to fly JFK's body from Air Force One's parking spot at Andrews to the grounds of Bethesda, and arrive by 6:30 PM? YES. If JFK's body (wrapped in the two sheets in which it left Parkland) had been loaded onto a helicopter by 6:23 PM---three minutes after LBJ's helo departed and the TV broadcast was discontinued---it would have had ***seven minutes*** to get to Bethesda Naval Hospital. If JFK's body had been put on a helicopter at 6:21 instead of 6:23, then ***nine minutes*** would have been available for the flight to Bethesda. Washington D.C. is a small town, not very large in land area, and Bethesda is immediately northwest of the city limits, not that far from the White House.

My estimated "necessary" arrival time for the helicopter surreptitiously transporting JFK's body to the Bethesda Naval Hospital complex Officer's Club parking lot---6:30 PM---is indirectly corroborated by an entry in an Army log from MDW's funeral operations center. In a footnote on page 689 of *Best Evidence* (cloth edition), Lifton wrote that the log indicates that at 5:30 PM word was passed that Kennedy's body was going to Bethesda. A log entry then notes that one Army official notified Admiral Galloway "advising them to provide a security cordon around the heliport at the Bethesda Naval Center, expecting arrival of the remains at approximately 1830 hours [6:30 PM]." This confirms my own estimate of the possible arrival time of the surreptitious flight with the body from Andrews calculated above, and proves my own calculations of the feasibility of getting there on time (to support a 6:35 PM offload at the morgue loading dock) were "spot on."

Is there evidence of a helicopter landing on the Bethesda grounds near the morgue?

The answer is YES. On page 35 of William Law's 2005 book *In the Eye of History*, from his interview of Paul K. O'Connor (a Navy corpsman who assisted the Navy pathologists with the autopsy on JFK), he quotes O'Connor as follows:

"Right after we heard the helicopters come over, I distinctly heard one land in the back of the hospital, which was the Officer's Club parking lot. There was a big parking lot. I heard one helicopter land there. I heard another helicopter land at the north side of the hospital where there was a normal helicopter-landing pad. Several minutes later, I can't give you a definite time---maybe five minutes---the back of the morgue opened up and a crew of hospital corpsmen and a higher ranking corpsman brought in a plain, pinkish-gray, what I call a shipping casket. It was not ornate. It was not damaged...They brought it up front where we were. At that time we opened up the coffin. Inside was the body bag."

Dennis David had first told his story about delivering a plain gray metal casket (from a black Cadillac) to a small town midwestern newspaper in May of 1975. Paul O'Connor corroborated this story about a "pinkish gray" casket to the HSCA staff in 1977, and also

told the HSCA staff that the President's body had been removed nude, *from inside a zippered body bag*, with a sheet wrapped only around the head. (JFK did not leave Parkland Hospital in a body bag; and his body, when it departed Parkland, was not nude; it was wrapped in a sheet. His head was wrapped in a separate sheet, also.) A third witness to the shipping casket was Navy corpsman Floyd Riebe, who assisted the official photographer at the autopsy that night; he has recalled that the crude shipping casket had ugly turnbuckles on it to seal the lid, and had no prominent side rails for the pallbearers, like the bronze Dallas casket.

Paul O'Connor was interviewed extensively by David Lifton on film in 1980 for his short documentary *Best Evidence*, and subsequently again by Lifton, a few years later, on video for a TV journalism news show. He was also interviewed extensively by Nigel Turner for his multi-part documentary, *The Men Who Killed Kennedy*. Although he is now deceased, the reader has ample opportunities to assess Paul O'Connor's credibility. I find him very credible. His story about the shipping casket never wavered, and his account of a group of Navy corpsmen bringing in the shipping casket dovetails perfectly with Dennis David's account. His memory of one helicopter landing on the north side of the Bethesda Hospital, at the helipad, concurs with Manchester, who records in his book that the H-21 helicopter carrying the Joint Service Casket Team from Andrews landed at that site, out in front of the main building. His account of a second helo landing at the Officer's Club parking lot, behind the morgue, is indirectly corroborated by Dennis David. David told Lifton in 1979 that he believed the black Cadillac ambulance (the Hearse) that delivered the shipping casket to the morgue loading dock had come in through "the back gate." When Lifton asked David to explain why he said that, he explained that the road which brought the black Cadillac to the morgue loading dock wound its way from the back gate, *past the Officer's Club*, to the morgue entrance. (See page 573 of *Best Evidence*, cloth edition.) So the route used by the black Cadillac ambulance met by Dennis David passed directly by the Officer's Club parking lot, where O'Connor was certain a helicopter had landed, only about five minutes before the shipping casket was delivered to the morgue where O'Connor worked that night, by a working party of Navy corpsmen.

Everything fits.

Including the Hearse. Dennis David has consistently recalled that the two people in the front of the black Cadillac were wearing white operating room smocks, and that it was definitely not a military vehicle. It *had to have been* the Gawler's funeral home Hearse that was originally assigned to go to Andrews AFB, but which was recalled by Colonel Miller "at the last minute." *Apparently it was sent to Bethesda instead.* Tom Robinson, who in 1963 was a twenty-year-old Gawler's embalming assistant (whose specialty was applying restorative art to cadavers to prepare them for open-casket funerals), said he was present all night long inside the morgue and had a "50-yardline seat" in the gallery. He witnessed things that were NOT WITNESSED by the large audience to the official autopsy that began at 8:00 PM. [Two examples were: (1) him witnessing JFK's skull sawed open to remove the brain---something Humes did not have to do before his large audience at 8:00 PM; and (2) he saw about ten metal fragments removed from JFK's

cranium and placed in a vial---this contradicts the official account that there were only two small metal fragments removed from the cranium.] In order to see these events, Robinson must have arrived early, with the body. Therefore, I conclude that he was one of the occupants of the black Cadillac's front seat (wearing a white smock as one would expect an embalmer to wear), and that the black Cadillac met by Dennis David and his working party at 6:35 PM *was the Gawler's Hearse*.

ONE BIG LOOSE END

On page 690 of *Best Evidence* (cloth edition), David Lifton writes that in her handwritten notes, recorded two minutes prior to Air Force One's touchdown at 6:00 PM, LBJ's secretary, Marie Fehmer, recorded the following entry: "5:58 Arr Andrews---Body w/Mrs. K to Walter Reed."

What is of extreme interest to me is that she made this entry just prior to landing, not one hour or more earlier, when the selection of the autopsy site was apparently undecided, and in fact was a subject of controversy between AF1 and "Crown."

Furthermore, author Craig Roberts, in his book *Kill Zone*, quoted an official Andrews AFB history that stated JFK's autopsy had been performed *at Walter Reed Hospital* after the body's arrival at Andrews AFB.

Of course we certainly know today that JFK's autopsy was performed at Bethesda Naval Hospital, and that his body first arrived there at the morgue loading dock at 6:35 PM (per Dennis David and the Boyajian report). We also know that while there was sufficient time to get JFK's body to Bethesda by 6:30 PM, using a helicopter, there was no time to spare, either---no time for a diversion.

But in view of all the early talk on AF1 about an autopsy at Walter Reed (begun by Roy Kellerman, and continued for a time by both Dr. Burkley and General Clifton), and in view of the fact that Dr. Dick Davis (the acting head of Neuropathology at AFIP) was set up at Walter Reed and ready to perform a craniotomy on JFK's skull, I have to wonder whether *at some point that day*, there might have been a plan to alter and sanitize JFK's head wounds surreptitiously at Walter Reed, and *then* take the altered body to Bethesda, where the damage seen at Bethesda would then be [falsely] represented as "damage done by the assassin's bullet?"

We might never know the answer to this question. All we know today is that the timeline shows that as events actually unfolded, *there was no diversion* enroute Bethesda from Andrews---in fact, there was "just enough time" to land at the Officer's Club parking lot at about 6:30 PM and to get the body to the morgue in the black Cadillac (the Gawler's Hearse) by 6:35 PM.

ANOTHER POSSIBILITY IS PROVED IMPOSSIBLE

Various researchers, at one time or another, have speculated that JFK's body might really have come back to Washington on Air Force Two. **This can now be definitively ruled out**, because of the firm time of arrival of JFK's body provided by the Boyajian report, dated November 26, 1963. Sergeant Boyajian wrote that the casket arrived at the Bethesda morgue at 1835 hours, which equates to 6:35 PM, civilian time. (He was surely talking about the President's body; no other reasonable interpretation is possible. And of course Dr. Boswell, who was present on the loading dock when the shipping casket arrived, confirmed to Dennis David later that night, that it had indeed been President Kennedy in the shipping casket.) We know from a transmission on the new Clifton AF1 tapes that SAM 86970 (otherwise known as AF2) took off from Dallas at 3:15 PM CST (thus confirming the takeoff time listed in the reports of two Secret Service agents), and we know from the Chuck Holmes logbook provided to the ARRB (the special operations log for 11/22/63 made by the 1254th ATW [Air Transport Wing] Command Post), that SAM 86970 landed at precisely 1830 hours, or **6:30 PM** civilian time.

Presumably, the taxi time for AF2 to get to its designated spot on the Andrews tarmac would be similar or identical to that for AF1---namely, three or four minutes. This would have AF2 rolling to a complete stop and "on the blocks" at about 6:33 PM *at the earliest*. Secret Service agent Emory Roberts wrote in his after action report that the landing time for AF2 was 6:35 PM---this was probably the actual time "on the blocks." **This allows insufficient time for a helicopter trip from Andrews AFB to Bethesda Naval Hospital.** *And that's an understatement; in fact, the landing time recorded by Emory Roberts allows no time at all for a trip from Andrews AFB to Bethesda Naval Hospital.* **The numbers don't lie.**

So, not only did the pilot and flight engineer on AF2 deny to David Lifton that they ever had JFK's body (or any other body) onboard their aircraft (as reported in the cloth edition of *Best Evidence* on page 679), but more importantly, the facts on the ground (the landing time of 86970---6:30 PM), combined with *the known time for a helicopter flight from Andrews to Bethesda* (7 to 9 minutes), make it **impossible** for Air Force Two (86970) to have delivered JFK's body to Andrews in time for it to arrive at the Bethesda morgue loading dock at 6:35 PM.

Consider these additional facts. The actual flight time for AF1 from Love Field to Andrews was 2 hours and 13 minutes. The actual flight time for AF2 from Love Field to Andrews was 2 hours and 15 minutes. The "Great Circle Mapper" software which I consulted when writing my book revealed that, at the cruising speed of **535 mph** for the military version of the Boeing 707 aircraft reported by William Manchester (who after all, did interview the pilot of AF1), *the trip from Love Field to Andrews should have taken 2 hours and 14 minutes.* **This is only one minute off of the actual flight times for AF1 and AF2!** Everything fits, and is consistent with the arrival time for SAM 86970 in the Chuck Holmes logbook---6:30 PM---being accurate. (See pages 1790-1792 of *Inside the ARRB* for a thorough discussion of the capabilities of the two aircraft.) Therefore, there is every reason to have full confidence in the Chuck Holmes logbook.

In the world of great uncertainty that characterizes much of the JFK assassination evidence, it is comforting and satisfying to be able to rule out one distracting possibility, for this allows us to focus with confidence on what really happened, instead of wasting our time on idle and unfounded speculation.

SUMMATION

This essay, I believe, provides a good lesson in historiography. When one studies a problem, one needs to use as many sources of evidence as are available, and take a holistic approach to the problem; that is, to study it with an open mind, and without making any assumptions or preconceptions, while keeping the “big picture” in mind at all times. In this case the problem was defined by this series of questions: “What can the Air Force One tapes tell us about the autopsy planning while AF1 was enroute Washington, D.C. from Dallas? Was there anything amiss? Did the plans evolve? Was the final plan executed as planned? If not, why not?”

We now know that there was a vehement disagreement within the Federal bureaucracy over whether the autopsy would be at the U.S. Army’s Walter Reed Hospital, or the Navy’s Bethesda National Naval Medical Center. The Secret Service won the argument. We know that the AF1 personnel (especially General Clifton) wanted initially to use a mortuary-type ambulance to move the body, whereas the Secret Service at the White House Situation Room wanted to use a helicopter. The Secret Service won the argument: while the empty Dallas casket was moved in a light gray Navy cardiac ambulance, the actual body of JFK was transported to the grounds of Bethesda Naval Hospital in a White House VIP helicopter. We now know that this helicopter from Andrews (with unnamed escorts onboard---presumably Secret Service agents) arrived at about 6:30 PM in the Officer’s Club parking lot, and that the body of the assassinated Commander-in-Chief was then encased inside a body bag, and that the body bag was then placed inside a plain, unadorned, lightweight aluminum shipping casket, and taken to the morgue loading dock, where it arrived at 6:35 PM and was offloaded by HM1 Dennis David’s working party. The Hearse (the black Cadillac mortuary ambulance) and the shipping casket were undoubtedly provided by the Gawler’s Funeral Home. [Something not mentioned above was how “radioactive” any and all questions about the President’s casket, or the time of his arrival at Bethesda, seemed to Joseph Hagan of Gawler’s when he was interviewed by the ARRB in 1996. He would not speak to us voluntarily without a subpoena, and so he received one. He was evasive and non-credible about all questions related to the Gawler’s hearse, his arrival time that night at Bethesda, and the types of caskets he saw at the morgue. However, he did verify that it *was his handwriting* on the Gawler’s business document called the “First Call Sheet,” in which he wrote the following words: **“Body removed from metal shipping casket at USNH at Bethesda.”**]

We now know, from the new evidence revealed in *Inside the ARRB*, that two witnesses, Tom Robinson of Gawler’s funeral home, and Navy enlisted x-ray technologist Ed Reed, both witnessed the illicit, clandestine, post-mortem surgery to President Kennedy’s cranium---surgery whose goal was to “sanitize the crime scene” by removing all evidence

of frontal shots from the body---*well before the official autopsy began at 8:00 PM*. We now know that the series of skull x-rays and photographs taken of President Kennedy's cranium prior to 8:00 PM (when the autopsy began) represent damage caused by this post-mortem surgery, *not by any assassin's bullet*. Based on what we know about the autopsy report today, it would not be admitted in evidence at a trial (since the first two written versions, as well as original autopsy notes, have been destroyed), and each individual autopsy photograph and skull x-ray would be subjected to significant challenges before they could be admitted into evidence. The three surviving skull x-rays would *not* be admitted into evidence at any trial today, for we now know (thanks to the pioneering work of Dr. David Mantik, MD, PhD) that the three skull x-rays in the Archives are not originals, but are *altered copy films*. We know today that the brain photographs in the National Archives that reside with the JFK autopsy photographs ***cannot be photographs of President Kennedy's brain***: they have been disowned by the official photographer, John Stringer (because they are recorded on the wrong types of film), and by one of the FBI agents present at the autopsy, Francis O'Neill (because there is too much mass present, and in the wrong locations). Furthermore, the large amount of mass present in these brain photos is grossly inconsistent *not only* with the skull x-rays (which show much brain tissue missing in the forebrain, and in the right cerebral hemisphere), but *also* with the amount of missing mass noted at Parkland Hospital (at least one third of the brain was observed to be missing by Dr. McClelland), where President Kennedy received emergency treatment in an attempt to save his life.

For all these reasons, it is important to study the Air Force One tapes, and how (and when) President Kennedy's body really arrived at Bethesda Naval Hospital---for this is when the medical cover-up began: on the trip back to Washington onboard Air Force One, and on the ground at Andrews AFB.

As libertarian scholar and activist Jacob Hornberger has recently pointed out, there are two general types of people that one observes when studying how Americans react to the JFK assassination evidence. One category is those who have open and inquiring and even critical minds---people who demand logical and rational answers when they encounter things in the evidence, and in the "official explanation," that do not make sense. Another category of people one encounters are what he calls *deferentials*, those who tend to blindly ***defer to authority*** when they encounter things that don't make sense. These are the people who want simplistic explanations to mysteries and conflicting evidence, so that they can sleep well at night. These are the people who don't want to believe that a coup happened in America in 1963, or that there was a massive cover-up by the U.S. government of the medical and forensic evidence in JFK's assassination. These *deferentials* include the minority of the U.S. population who still profess to believe in the Warren Report. It is to the first category of people---at least 70 per cent of all Americans today---those who are "empiricists," who follow evidence wherever it leads them, and who have open and inquiring minds, that this essay is dedicated. END