

CONTACT PROFILE

Document's Author: Douglas Home/ARRB

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Contact Description

Contact Name: Richard L. Davis
Company: U. C., San Francisco School of Medicine
Title:
Category: Witnesses/Consultants
Street Address:

Phone Number:**FAX Number:****E-mail Address:**

HSCA Letter Sent:

Additional Information

Dr. Richard Davis, MC, USN was the Acting Neuropathologist of the AFIP in 1963 when President Kennedy was assassinated. Dr. Boswell testified to the ARRB in 1996 that Dr. Davis was present at the supplementary examination of President Kennedy's brain on Monday, November 25, 1963 at Bethesda Naval Hospital.

001479

CALL REPORT: PUBLIC



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The Players

Who called whom? Douglas Home called Dr. Richard L. Davis of Witnesses/Consultants, David Marwell called Dr. Richard L. Davis of Witnesses/Consultants, Jeremy Gunn called Dr. Richard L. Davis of Witnesses/Consultants, Dave Montague called Dr. Richard L. Davis of Witnesses/Consultants, Phil Golrick called Dr. Richard L. Davis of Witnesses/Consultants, Tom Samoluk called Dr. Richard L. Davis of Witnesses/Consultants

Description of the Call

Date: 03/05/97

Subject: ARRB Interviewed Dr. Richard L. Davis

Summary of the Call:

As previously agreed, ARRB staff called Dr. Richard Davis and interviewed him by telephone; Doug Home conducted the interview. The interview was audiotaped, and lasted about 15 minutes.

Professional Background

Dr. Davis is currently a Professor of Pathology, and Director of Neuropathology, at the University of California, San Francisco medical school; he said he has been at U.C. San Francisco for the past 17 years. He said he graduated from the University of Minnesota medical school in 1956, then interned at Bellevue in New York, and following that returned to the University of Minnesota from 1957-60 to study pathology and neuropathology. Afterwards he said he went to the AFIP (Armed Forces Institute of Pathology) under an NIH (National Institutes of Health) Fellowship. He said he served on active duty in the U.S. Navy Medical Corps from 1961-1965. In 1963, he said he was a LCDR, MC, USN, and was Assistant Chief of Neuropathology at AFIP.

Involvement in Events of November 22-23, 1963

Dr. Davis said he learned about the assassination about "12 noon" or so while in the office of Dr. Ed Smith (Chief of Hematopathology at AFIP), after which he went to the office of the Chief of Pathology at Walter Reed Hospital, since this was the location of one of the few T.V. sets in the AFIP/Walter Reed complex. He and others listened to news reports and watched film clips from Dallas on the T.V. set in the Chief of Pathology's office.

He said he was not involved in any events related to the autopsy on President Kennedy which took place on November 22-23, 1963. He did say, however, that they were "prepared to be," in the event they had been called upon. Specifically, he said that he, Brigadier General Joe Blumberg (Head of AFIP), and Ken Earl had "consulted" with each other, and had then prepared to be available if called upon, once they found out from T.V. that President Kennedy had been shot in the head. Assuming that the autopsy would be at either Walter Reed or Bethesda, they set up a "kit," i.e., camera and flash equipment, and dissection equipment, but were never called upon to assist with the President's autopsy.

001480

Supplemental Brain Examination

When asked if he was present at any medical or pathological procedures related to President Kennedy's body tissue or organs subsequent to the autopsy on November 22-23, 1963, Dr. Davis said that he was not.

When directly asked whether he witnessed, or participated in, a supplemental examination of President Kennedy's brain, he said that he did not. I informed him that during Dr. Boswell's February 1996 deposition, Dr. Boswell had stated with some degree of certainty that he thought Dr. Davis was present at the supplemental brain examination, and I explained to Dr. Davis that we felt obligated to ask if he thought Dr. Boswell was incorrect. His response was a firm: "I never saw President Kennedy's brain."

Results of Autopsy

Davis said that although Humes and Boswell were both good friends of his, that they had never spoken of President Kennedy's autopsy, and neither had Dr. Finck; he explained that he was under the impression that they were forbidden to discuss it. As a consequence, he said he eagerly awaited the publication of the Warren Report. He said that he read about the autopsy in the Warren Report, and then told Dr. Boswell that based upon what he had read, he agreed with their published conclusions.

He said that sometime during the week after the autopsy, he was at Bethesda Naval Hospital (where he would regularly supervise the cutting, and study, of fixed brains with the residents), and he was shown the autopsy log which recorded President Kennedy's autopsy as having taken place at the Bethesda morgue. The only thing he could specifically recall about the log entry during our interview was that he saw the letters "CIC" in the logbook; I asked him if this meant "Commander-in-Chief," and he said yes. I asked if he recalled any other entries in the log for November 22, 1963, such as other autopsies performed, other names, etc. and he said that he did not. He did recall that to the best of his recollection, the logbook was a 12" X 15" bound logbook with plain sheets of paper in it. He thought that there was one entry (i.e., one case) per page, and that the standard entry would have listed name, autopsy #, and other identifying data.

Standard Procedures at a Bethesda Supplementary Brain Examination

I asked Dr. Davis to describe standard procedures at a supplementary brain examination which he would have conducted in 1963 at Bethesda. He said the following (using a gunshot wound to the brain as a given):

-He would have extensively documented with photography, at autopsy, the head and adjacent structures at each stage of the dissection;

-When the cranium was opened at autopsy, the removal of the brain would also be thoroughly documented photographically;

-The brain would be weighed twice: first, immediately after removal, and second, at the supplemental examination (after fixation), before any procedures were performed. He said that at Bethesda in 1963, brains were being fixed by a process called **perfusion**, which was a variation of arterial embalming. He said that perfusion involved injecting formalin solution by gravity into the major arteries of the brain, at the same time that the brain was immersed in a bucket of formalin solution. He said that perfusion speeded up the fixation process so that a brain could be cut at supplemental exam "in less than a week." I asked him to attempt to quantify what he meant by "in less than a week," and he said that if there were no major arterial damage to the blood vessels in a brain, that following perfusion, you might be able to cut a brain in only 2 or 3 days. He said that utilizing the more widely used procedure of immersion fixation only, that normally 10-14 days were required to properly fix a brain before it could be dissected. He also said that there could be two causes for variation in brain weight between initial weighing at autopsy, and subsequent weighing at the brain cutting: (1) Dura Mater is often still attached to the brain when it is removed at autopsy, but is always removed prior to weighing the brain the second time prior to a brain cutting; and (2) blood products (which are absent from a properly fixed brain at a supplemental brain exam) often add to a brain's weight upon removal at autopsy.

001481

I asked Dr. Davis if he could think of any circumstances in which he would NOT section a brain which was damaged by gunshot, and he said he could think of **no** circumstances in which he would not section such a brain after fixation. He said that not sectioning such a brain was "inconceivable" to him--sectioning, he said, was the only way to determine primary and secondary damage to the brain in a death by gunshot wound to the head. After selecting the various sections which best showed the damage incurred, he would then photograph the appropriate sections (which revealed the most significant abnormalities).

Follow-On Questions About Dr. Finck

Because Dr. Davis had worked at AFIP, the same command where Dr. Finck worked, I revisited with him the issue of whether or not he had ever discussed the autopsy on President Kennedy with Dr. Finck, and he again said no--that Dr. Finck was a very formal individual, and that Dr. Finck never brought it up on his own accord, and it therefore would have been inappropriate to ask.

I asked him whether he had ever heard Dr. Finck complain about his autopsy notes disappearing following the conclusion of the autopsy at Bethesda (since ARRB has spoken to a witness who remembers such an event), and he said he had not.

I concluded the interview by asking Dr. Davis whether he had ever been interviewed by anyone (either independent researchers, or by the government) prior to this interview about the Kennedy assassination, and he said that he had not. **END**