

**CONTACT PROFILE**

Document's Author: Douglas Home/ARRB

Date Created: 02/06/97

**Contact Description**

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**Contact Name:** Dennis David  
**Company:** Retired Navy--Self-Employed  
**Title:**  
**Category:** Witnesses/Consultants  
**Street Address:** \_\_\_\_\_ )

**Phone Number:** [REDACTED]**FAX Number:** [REDACTED]**E-mail Address:**

HSCA Letter Sent: 12/31/96

**Additional Information**

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Mr. Dennis David, a U.S. Navy E-6 at the time, was "Chief of the Day" at Bethesda's Medical School. He has passed on recollections regarding a casket entry at the loading dock of the Bethesda morgue, and of seeing film of the autopsy in the possession of LCDR William Pitzer, to assassination researchers.

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# CALL REPORT: PUBLIC



Document's Author: Douglas Home/ARRB

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## The Players

**Who called whom?** Douglas Home called Dennis David of Witnesses/Consultants, Tim Wray called Dennis David of Witnesses/Consultants, Joan Zimmerman called Dennis David of Witnesses/Consultants

## Description of the Call

**Date:** 02/14/97

**Subject:** ARRB Interviewed Dennis David (Revised 2/19/97)

### **Summary of the Call:**

Doug Home interviewed former Navy man Dennis David today, with Tim Wray and Joan Zimmerman serving as witnesses. As this was an initial assessment interview, it was not tape-recorded.

I began by asking Mr. David to give us an overview of his Navy career; highlights are listed below:

- Graduated High School in 1955;
- After attending one semester of a college pre-med curriculum, he realized he could not afford college, and joined the Navy;
- Completed Hospital Corpsman School in 1956;
- Achieved E-4 status in 1956; E-5 in 1959; and E-6 in 1961;
- Transferred to Bethesda NNMC;
- In 1963, his job involved reading medical textbooks and transforming them into Navy Correspondence Courses designed primarily for the training of Reservists;
- Joined Medical Service Corps as a Limited Duty Officer (LDO) Ensign (0-1) in 1965;
- Served in numerous assignments as a medical administrator while in the Medical Service Corps in various locations, including Memphis Tennessee, Vietnam, and Great Lakes;
- Highest rank achieved in MSC was LCDR (0-4), in 1974;
- Retired from active duty in 1976, after 11 years' service in the Medical Service Corps as an officer.

### **Events of Friday Afternoon, November 22, 1963**

He said that on 11/22/63, his rank was E-6 (First Class Petty Officer), but that he had the duty, and was serving as Chief of the Day for the Bethesda medical school. During lunchtime, at about noon, he and others heard the President's assassination announced on the radio. At 2:30-3:00 P.M., the word was passed to "set the watch," which meant that all unessential personnel were told to go home, and all duty personnel were to commence standing their duty shifts. At about 5:00 P.M., he said he was with Dr. Boswell and they both heard on the radio that the President's body ~~was~~ being taken from Parkland Hospital in Texas to Bethesda NNMC for an autopsy. Realizing that all laboratory, morgue and x-ray facilities were part of the medical school where he was standing duty, he remembers saying to Dr. Boswell, "It's going to be one hell of a night." About 30 minutes later, at about 5:30 P.M., he said he was called to the office of the Chief of the Day for the National Naval Medical Center (NNMC--the entire Bethesda complex, including the medical school and the hospital), a Chief Ledbetter, who had 3 or 4 Secret Service agents in his office. The Secret Service agents told the Bethesda duty officers that the autopsy would be at NNMC Bethesda, and directed them to secure all entrances and exits to the Bethesda complex which would lead to the morgue and laboratory area. Mr. David rounded up Navy

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personnel from various barracks, and assigned them to security duties.

### **Casket Entry Into Morgue**

At about 6:30 P.M., Mr. David said he received a telephone call in which someone said, "Your visitor is on his way; you will need some people to offload." He then got his own duty sailors together, borrowed some more from the dental school, and assembled them outside the morgue at the loading dock by about 6:40 P.M. Five or six minutes later, at about 6:45, he said a black hearse drove up at the morgue loading dock. He said the driver and the "person riding shotgun" (i.e., front seat passenger) were wearing OR (operating room) smocks. Four or five men in blue suits, whom he assumed were Federal agents, exited the back of the hearse, and supervised and observed while the Navy sailors (approximately 7 or 8 people) working for him offloaded the casket which was in the hearse. He said it was a simple, gray shipping casket such as he frequently saw used later during the Vietnam war. His group of sailors took the casket into the anteroom directly adjacent to the morgue. He then dismissed them and went back upstairs to an administrative office on the second floor of the tower building, "out front" toward the lobby.

When asked to identify names of the sailors in the detail who unloaded the shipping casket, he said the one name he could remember was Donald Rebentisch, with whom he was stationed later in El Toro, and whom he believes was from Detroit.

About 30 minutes later, he said, he saw a motor cavalcade, including a gray Navy ambulance, drive up outside of the front of the Bethesda Tower. He went out on the curved, open second story balcony above the Bethesda Tower lobby and observed Jacqueline Kennedy, Robert McNamara, and several others immediately enter the Bethesda lobby from the motorcade, and go directly up to the 17th floor suite on the elevator (without stopping or pausing for anything). Mr. David said he knew what their destination was by watching the number indicators on the elevator. He was firm in his recollection that the motorcade out front with the gray ambulance arrived well after the gray shipping casket at the rear loading dock.

About 2:30-3:00 A.M. the next morning (November 23), he saw several corpsmen in the snack bar at Bethesda, and said that there was much discussion of two caskets coming into the complex that night, and even rumors about a brain being brought into the hospital.

The next day (during daylight hours on November 23), Mr. David asked Dr. Boswell which casket the President had been in, and Dr. Boswell said "You ought to know; you were there." He emphasized that he had no direct knowledge, by observation, that President Kennedy was in the gray shipping casket, but the implied sense of Boswell's remarks seemed to him to mean that President Kennedy was in the gray shipping casket which arrived in the black hearse about 6:40 P.M.

### **Preparation of Receipt for Bullet Fragments**

Late on the evening of November 22, Mr. David said he was in the vicinity of the morgue, when the administrative watch officer for the Bethesda Naval Hospital asked him if he knew anyone with a clearance who could type. He answered, "I have a Secret clearance, and I can type." He said he was asked to type a Memorandum for the Record for a Federal agent wearing a suit, whom he assumed was Secret Service. (When asked to recall the name of the agent, i.e., the signature block on the memo, he said the name might have been "Sibert," but he wasn't sure.) He said the agent dictated a receipt describing in some detail the gross physical characteristics of four bullet fragments which had been removed from the President's body at the post mortem examination. He said that in his estimation there was more metal than would be contained in one bullet, but probably less than would be contained in two bullets. He said the fragments were contained in a round pill vial with a plastic top (a snap-on cap). After typing the memo, he said the agent allowed him to handle the fragments, but then admonished him about security concerns and said that this was all to be treated as if it were classified information. He said the agent (who was wearing a blue suit, but otherwise seemed non-descript in appearance) then confiscated

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all copies of the memo, including the pieces of carbon paper, and even took the ribbon from the IBM Selectric typewriter with him.

### **LCDR Pitzer's Film(s) of President Kennedy's Autopsy**

Mr. David said that 3 or 4 days after the autopsy, a good friend of his, LCDR William Bruce Pitzer, who was in charge of Bethesda audio-visual services, showed him photographic images of the autopsy inside Pitzer's office. He said he was shown the following:

-A portion of a B & W 16 mm movie film, displayed using a viewer with two reels on it and a hand-crank (i.e., an editing machine); he estimated the size of the reel of film was probably about 10" in diameter, and that the reel was about half full of film. He said he witnessed only a short section of the film, which appeared to show the President's body during initial examinations, and before any incisions. He said the film was clearly shot in the morgue at Bethesda, but not from immediately adjacent to the autopsy table; instead, it was shot from a distance--either from the gallery, or from well back in the room. He said that other persons' torsos, from the waist down, and some gloved hands examining the body, could be seen in the film. He said that the motion picture film, although somewhat grainy, clearly showed a gaping wound in the back of the President's head, and that the top of the head looked intact.

-Six or seven 35 mm color slides of post mortem images of the President; like the movie film, these were also pre-incision post mortem images of the President. He said the slides were viewed by holding them up by hand in front of a lamp. (See below for description of contents of both slide and print images.)

-Four or five black-and-white prints, approximately 3" X 5" in size, of post-mortem, "pre-incision" images of President Kennedy. Like the color slides, he said these prints "made it very clear that President Kennedy was hit from the front as well as from the rear." When I asked him what it was about the B & W prints, and color slides, which made him say this, he said that first, in both the B & W prints and color slides, he could see a round or oval wound, about one quarter to three-eighths of an inch in diameter, in the right front temporal area of the President's head, just below the hairline, which he immediately interpreted as a bullet entry wound; he also said that, just as in the movie film, there was a gaping hole in the back of the head. When asked, Mr. David clarified that the top of the head looked intact in these photographs. He specified that the print and color slide images were straight on, profile, and oblique images of the upper torso and head of the President, and was quite certain that there was no evidence of any "Y-Incision" in the photographs he viewed. When asked to specify to the best of his ability, on the telephone, where this entry wound was located, he estimated it was "about 3 inches forward of the right ear, and just below the hairline near the top of the forehead." He also said that the images of the tracheotomy in the anterior neck depicted what in his opinion was much larger, and sloppier, than most trachs he has seen throughout his career. When asked, he replied that he did not see any photographs of the back of the President's body, so could not answer any of our questions about the upper right posterior thorax wound.

In response to follow-up questions, Mr. David said that he only viewed these films on this one occasion with LCDR Pitzer, and never discussed the images with Pitzer after this viewing. He said that by the time he viewed the images, he and others were aware that various people directly involved in the autopsy had received "Letters of Silence" directing them not to talk about the events the night of the autopsy, under threat of court-martial. The resulting sense of fear and sadness, he said, kept him from discussing the events of November 22-23, 1963 with anyone else at Bethesda after he viewed the autopsy film in LCDR Pitzer's office. Mr. David verified that he had never received one of these Letters of Silence himself, but the knowledge that others had received them made him very reluctant to talk about the subject for many years; he said he did not speak about the events he was involved in publicly until he granted an interview to a newspaper reporter in 1975. He clarified that LCDR Pitzer never actually said he was at the autopsy, but that while viewing the films in Pitzer's office, he assumed that Pitzer had been there, based on his possession of the film, and the context of their conversation. He said the last time he saw Bill Pitzer was on approximately 3 or 4 December 1965, when Pitzer attended his swearing-in as an LDO Ensign in CAPT Stover's office. Subsequently, in early 1967, a female occupational therapist named Murray at Great Lakes Naval Station told him of Pitzer's death after he arrived at that duty station, and indicated to him that the death had been ruled a suicide. Mr. David said that for some months prior to

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transferring away from Bethesda, he had worked in CAPT Stover's office providing administrative support, and had seen Dr. Humes many times in the course of the normal conduct of business; he said that if Dr. Humes had ever denied knowing him (as he has indeed heard), that he could not understand this response, since he and Dr. Humes had spoken many times, and in the Navy everyone on shore duty wears a name tag on the front of the uniform shirt.

Mr. David was asked whether he was familiar with the autopsy photographs published in the various assassination books, and he said that he was, specifically citing Lifton's book *Best Evidence*. I then asked him what differences there were between the images he saw, and the unofficially released, but widely published JFK autopsy photos which have appeared in several books now. He said that in general, the photographs he saw were sharper and clearer than those in the assassination books; further attempts to discuss his recollections of what LCDR Pitzer showed him, and to compare what he saw with what has been published, proved fruitless during this interview, since he did not have the published autopsy photographs in front of him while we were speaking.

### **Records Created by GNC Communications**

Mr. David volunteered that in 1992 he went to Pittsburgh and participated in a group meeting/interview of Navy personnel who had participated in President Kennedy's autopsy or events related to the autopsy, set up by GNC Communications (a company based out of Connecticut); participants in this group meeting, which was videotaped, were himself, James C. Jenkins (JFK autopsy technologist), Paul K. O'Connor (JFK autopsy technologist), Floyd Riebe (John Stringer's photography assistant), and Jerrol Custer (X-ray technician). Another participant was Dr. Cyril Wecht, forensic pathologist. Subsequently, in 1994, he said that someone at GNC Communications had arranged for (and paid for) the videotaping of a hypnosis session in which he (Dennis David) was hypnotized (in New York state) and his memories of events related to the assassination were probed under hypnosis. Mr. David volunteered that what he thought was about 10-15 minutes under hypnosis, actually turned out to be about 1.5 hours, and that on a scale of 1 to 10, the hypnotist/interviewer had characterized his veracity as "an 11," meaning that he considered Mr. David to be very credible. Mr. David said he had personal VHS videotape copies of both the 1992 group interview/meeting, as well as of the 1994 hypnosis session. When I asked whether we might have access to these videotaped records, he seemed uncertain as to whether this would violate GNC's copyright of these materials, and suggested that it would be preferable if we contacted GNC ourselves to pursue these records.

In conclusion, I told Mr. David that we may wish to contact him again, if we felt there was a need to clarify, or to tape record, any of the topics covered in this interview. He said that would be fine. END