

## CONTACT PROFILE



Document's Author: Douglas Home/ARRB

Date Created: 04/08/96

### Contact Description

**Contact Name:** John T. Stringer

**Company:**

**Title:** Photographed JFK Autopsy

**Category:** Witnesses/Consultants

**Street Address:**

**Phone Number:**

**FAX Number:**

**E-mail Address:**

**HSCA Letter Sent:**

### Additional Information

001728

# CALL REPORT: PUBLIC



Document's Author: Douglas Horne/ARRB      Date Created: 04/08/96

## The Players

Who called whom?      Douglas Horne called John T. Stringer of Witnesses/Consultants

## Description of the Call

Date:                    04/08/96  
Subject:                ARRB Called John T. Stringer, Jr.

### Summary of the Call:

This call was arranged one week ago on April 1, 1996. Present at this phone call were: David Marwell, Jeremy Gunn, Tim Wray, Douglas Horne and Dave Montague; the call was conducted by speaker phone. Following introductions by Doug Horne, Jeremy Gunn conducted the questioning.

Questions and Answers are summarized below; **this is not a verbatim transcript, but a summary:**

Q: How many photos would typically be taken at an average autopsy?

A: There is no set number; it's up to the autopsy surgeon. He decides. But in the case of a homicide by, for example, two gunshot wounds, about two dozen or more photographs might be taken.

Q: What types of views would typically be taken at an autopsy?

A: Well, in this case we shot the whole body, and close-ups of the head, neck and back. The autopsy number would be written on a card which would typically be photographed in each picture.

Q: What type of camera and film would have been used?

A: A 4 X 5 View Camera; it held film holders which held two pieces of film per holder. And typically we would shoot both black-and-white and color. A tripod was mandatory, because the photographer cannot both hold and shoot the View Camera; in order to focus the image on the frosted glass in the camera before shooting the picture, the photographer must have the camera mounted on a tripod. The camera and tripod were on a dolly with wheels so it could be moved around. We used flash also--speedlights.

Q: Who normally developed the film after an autopsy was photographed?

A: Normally the photographer who took the pictures would develop both the color and black-and-white at the photo lab at Bethesda; but for the JFK autopsy the Secret Service took all my film. As soon as I shot a film holder (2 pictures each), a Secret Service agent took the film holder out of my hand and I never saw it again. Captain Stover had receipts drawn up.

Q: Who assisted you with photography during the JFK autopsy?

A: The Corpsman on duty who was a student in my photography class--his name was Riebe--handed me the film holders and I shot all the pictures. Another Corpsman (First Class) named Rittmeyer brought additional film to the door when needed and would hand it through the door to Riebe. Riebe did not take

001729

any autopsy photos; he only handed the film holders to me as I needed them. Riebe did have a "roll camera," and tried to take pictures of those present in the morgue for posterity, but after doing so the Secret Service took his camera away from him and exposed his film (120 film) to light. I think I took both color and black-and-white photos during the autopsy.

Q: Please describe how you were notified about the impending autopsy at Bethesda.

A: Dr. Humes called me early in the afternoon of November 22, 1963 while I was still at the office and told me we might be busy that night, and to stand by. I was at home eating dinner between 5:00-5:30 P.M. when Dr. Humes called me and told me to come on in.

Q: Please describe events as they occurred early in the autopsy.

A: Dr. Humes opened the casket. The body was wrapped in 2 bedsheets, one around the body and one around the head. I think that Humes and Boswell, and the two corpsmen assisting with the autopsy, and Riebe and I helped lift the body out of the casket.

Q: Can you tell us what President Kennedy's head looked like when it was first unwrapped?

A: It was covered with matted blood. There was a fist-sized hole in the right side of his head above his ear.

Q: How far did the hole extend?

A: It was the size of your fist, and it was entirely within the hair area. There was a sort of flap of skin there, and some of the underlying bone was gone.

Q: Please describe which happened first, X-Rays or photography, and describe how you went about doing the photography.

A: X-Rays were taken first. They were then developed, and read right there in the morgue before I did anything. About one hour elapsed between the time the X-Rays were taken and the time the first photos were taken.

Q: Was the hair washed or combed or rearranged in any way?

A: Nothing was done to clean the body or comb the hair before I started taking photographs. Some of the hair might have been slightly moved while X-Rays were taken, but nothing was washed or combed.

Q: Please continue.

A: I first took a full body photo from above the body after the wrappings were removed. I did this standing on a ladder, still using the tripod mount. The tripod is just raised higher than usual in this case. Then I moved in and started taking close-up photos as directed by Dr. Humes.

Q: Do you recall a probe being used during the autopsy?

A: Yes, a long metal probe was used to probe the neck wound.

Q: When you say that do you mean the back wound, that is to say, the wound entering from the back, or do you mean the wound in the front of the neck, in the throat?

A: The probe was inserted in the throat wound in the front of the neck.

001730

Q: Do you recall any photographs or X-Rays taken while the probe was inserted in the body?

A: No, I don't think so.

Q: Did you photograph the brain after it was removed?

A: Yes. I took photos of the brain after it was set in formalin. We went to the morgue to shoot pictures of the brain very soon after the autopsy, just a couple of days or a few days or so.

Q: Could it have been on a Sunday?

A: Well, it was pretty soon after the autopsy, but I'm pretty sure it was on a workday, in the morning, so I don't think it would have been Sunday.

Q: Please describe the photography of the brain, including who was present.

A: Well, Drs. Humes and Boswell were there, as well as a corpsman. The brain was sectioned, like a piece of meat, and the sections showed all of the damage. Each section was laid out on a light box, which provided a white background in the photos, with an autopsy tag or card next to it with the autopsy number on it.

Q: Was Dr. Finck present at the brain exam?

A: I don't think I remember him; I'm not sure.

Q: Do you remember taking photographs of the back (posterior surface) of the skull showing the entrance wound with the scalp reflected; the inside of the cranium after removal of the brain, showing the inside surface of the entrance wound; and the bruise on top of the right lung?

A: I'm not sure about those; I don't remember.

Q: When you helped conduct the inventory at the National Archives in 1966, were you of the belief then that some photos were missing (and how many)?

A: Yes, we all did, and I know we discussed that with each other. I think about 6 to 8 photos were missing, something like that. Later somebody ("they") said that some of the film holders had pieces of film missing from them, but I talked to the corpsman (presumably either Riebe or Rittmeyer) and he said "No Way."

Q: Does anything about the appearance of the photos that you saw cause you to question their authenticity?

A: No.

Q: The photographs we have viewed from the present collection at the National Archives do not show autopsy tags in the field of view. Did you use autopsy tags when you took the whole set of photographs?

A: It would have been standard practice to do this; I think we did. I don't specifically recall for sure but I think we did, particularly on the close-ups. They might have been cropped out of the prints. I do remember laying autopsy tags next to the sections of the brain when I photographed those.

Q: Were photos taken throughout the autopsy, and what time did you finish? Did you stay for the embalming?

001731

A: Yes, throughout the autopsy. We stayed for almost the entire embalming. I don't think I got home until 4 A.M. We took no photos during or after the embalming.

Q: Did you know LCDR William Bruce Pitzer? Was he at the autopsy?

A: Yes, I knew Bill. He was in charge of the T.V. studio at Bethesda, of audio-visual. But he wasn't at the autopsy. I don't remember seeing him in the morgue; I don't think he was there. I later saw an article in the National Enquirer or somewhere claiming that he was there and that he shot himself because of this. But I don't recall seeing him at the autopsy.

Q: Was an audiotape made at the autopsy?

A: They would often do that at Bethesda, but I don't think that was done at President Kennedy's autopsy.

Q: Did anyone else take pictures during the autopsy?

A: No. And I can't see how anyone could have shot any other photos.

{The following exchange took place earlier in the conversation at an undetermined point.}

Q: Did you see the photos after the 1966 Inventory?

A: Yes, one time a guy came to see me and interviewed me and showed me a book with the photos in it, and I didn't know what to say or if it was O.K. So I called Admiral...NORVA (Norfolk, Virginia? or phoenetic "Norva"--unclear) and they said we could talk, and then I spoke with Ted Kennedy, and then with Mr. Smith who worked for Kennedy, and they said it was O.K. This person only showed me prints. The only time I saw the original materials was in November, 1966.

Q: Did anyone from the Government show you the photos after 1966?

A: No.

END

001732