

CONTACT PROFILE



Document's Author: Douglas Home/ARRB

Date Created: 10/07/96

Contact Description

Contact Name: Carl Belcher
Company: Former Justice Department Official
Title: In 1966, was Head, General Crimes Section, Criminal Division, DOJ
Category: Witnesses/Consultants
Street Address:

Phone Number: Office: [REDACTED]
FAX Number:
E-mail Address:
HSCA Letter Sent:

Additional Information

Carl Belcher was involved in the inventory process of the JFK autopsy photographs and X-Rays in November, 1966, to wit:

-was present on 11/1/66 when he, NARA officials, and Humes, Boswell, Ebersole and Stringer met at the Archives to inventory subject materials and make a descriptive inventory listing following the implementation of the Kennedy family deed-of-gift on October 31, 1966;

-a draft catalogue of items was typed subsequent to this November 1, 1966 meeting (date typed is not indicated on the document, but the listing was drawn up on November 1, 1966). The individuals listed in writing on this draft inventory who jointly considered (i.e., sighted) the JFK autopsy materials were Dr. Humes, Dr. Boswell, Dr. Ebersole, John Stringer, James B. Rhoads (Deputy Archivist of the United States), Marion Johnson (NARA), and Carl Belcher;

-he met with Dr. Humes on 11/4/66 in Dr. Humes' office at Bethesda and asked several questions about the chain-of-custody of autopsy photos and X-Rays;

-he met with Dr. Humes, Dr. Boswell, Dr. Ebersole, and Mr. Stringer at the Naval Hospital in Bethesda on 11/10/66 and presented the smooth version of the inventory (with many emendations implemented) for their signatures. His own typed name and those of the NARA officials had been removed, and various other phraesology had been added to the text;

-he wrote a long memo dated 11/22/66 recording his involvement in the above-mentioned deed-of-gift events that month.

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CALL REPORT: PUBLIC



Document's Author: Douglas Horne/ARRB Date Created: 10/07/96

The Players

Who called whom? Douglas Horne called Carl Belcher of Witnesses/Consultants

Description of the Call

Date: 10/07/96

Subject: Dave Montague and Doug Horne Called Carl Belcher

Summary of the Call:

Following up on a basic ARRB/JFK Act information package sent to Mr. Belcher late in July, 1996, Mr. Montague and I called him to attempt to set up an interview for the purposes of clarifying the record of the crucial events (re: autopsy material deed-of-gift) in which he was involved in November, 1966. We were hoping to arrange a date for an in-person ARRB interview with him sometime during October, 1996, and were willing to schedule the interview at a site of his choosing, namely, either at his home, or at ARRB offices.

Initially we called his home. His wife did not seem to remember her previous contact with Mr. Montague last July. After reexplaining ARRB's mission and our purpose, she stated her husband was "at the office," and suggested we call him at his office number. (What type of employment was never explained.)

We next called his office, at approximately 10:45 A.M. this date. He was initially hostile and uncooperative with Mr. Montague, saying at first that he wasn't sure of who we were, and that he didn't have anything to say; later in his conversation with Mr. Montague, he admitted that he knew very well what our agency was, and wanted to know what our areas of interest were "right now," and indicated his desire to hear what our inquiries were on-the-spot. At this point, Mr. Montague passed the telephone to me so that I could discuss the general subject matter in which we were interested with Mr. Belcher.

From the very beginning Mr. Belcher was defensive, hostile, and disrespectful with me as well.

Highlights of our conversation follow:

-When he asked what we wanted with him, I explained that as part of our attempts to clarify the record, we wanted to ask him about his involvement with the inventory of the JFK autopsy materials in November 1966. He burst into loud and uproarious laughter, and stated that I was asking about an event that happened 30 years ago, and then stated that he didn't even know what we were talking about.

-I attempted to jog his memory by reminding him that he was present on 11/1/66 at the National Archives when Dr. Humes, Dr. Boswell, Dr. Ebersole and Mr. Stringer inventoried the JFK autopsy materials. He then did admit that he had met with Dr. Humes at the Archives, but made remarks indicating that he had nothing to talk about, saying that he did not remember anything about the event.

-I explained that often times, when people involved in events years ago are able to sit down and review documents which they wrote, or with which they were involved, the documents serve as a memory aide, and people are often able to remember much more than they had originally thought they would. For example, I told him that he had written a memorandum on 11/22/66 recording various details of his involvement with the deed-of-gift inventory of the autopsy materials, and that not only would it probably refresh his memory to review that memo he wrote, but that there were certain aspects about events of that month which we would like to clarify, and that he was indispensable to this process.

-He repeatedly and loudly insisted that he had nothing to say to us, and demanded that if we had any questions, that we ask them immediately, "right now." I made clear to him that we desired a one-time, face-to-face interview at a time and place of his choosing, and that we were under instructions to only arrange an interview for a future date, and were not empowered to conduct any interview today. I

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suggested the date of October 22, 1996, at ARRB's offices, at which point he seemed to become even more hostile and defensive. He repeatedly demanded that I ask our questions immediately.

-I explained at one point that some people prefer to receive a subpoena, and that if he would prefer, this could be arranged; during this point of our conversation he was interrupting repeatedly with objections to being questioned for any reason, and I am not sure that the message I was relaying about the possibility of ARRB issuing a subpoena even registered with him.

-After I again explained that our task today was to arrange for a mutually agreeable interview date for an in-person interview, he stated, "I don't give a damn who your boss is, who you are, or what your agency is," and hung up the phone in the middle of our conversation with our business unresolved.

Summarizing, throughout his conversations with Mr. Montague and myself, Mr. Belcher continually interrupted, sprinkled his conversation with profanity, spoke in a loud, derisive and aggressive manner, and demeaned our efforts as unimportant or trivial. When we attempted to explain exactly what topics we were interested in discussing with him and why, he countered by demanding an immediate, on-the-spot telephonic interview. When it became clear to him that his tactic of attempting to find out exactly what our questions were was not going to work, he terminated the telephone call. END

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MEETING REPORT



Document's Author: Douglas Horne/ARRB

Date Created: 10/23/96

Meeting Logistics

Date: 10/22/96
Agency Name: Witnesses/Consultants
Attendees: Carl Belcher, Jeremy Gunn, Phil Golrick, Doug Horne, Dave Montague
Topic: ARRB Interviewed Carl Belcher

Summary of the Meeting

Carl Belcher, former Head, General Crimes Section, Criminal Division of the Justice Department, visited ARRB October 22, 1996 and was interviewed. The interview was audiotaped, and was approximately 70 or 80 minutes in length.

A summary of major findings of the interview follows:

-He does remember being present at the inventory and cataloging of JFK autopsy photographs and x-rays which took place on November 1, 1966 at the National Archives; he said he received only short notice, about 30 min or one hour prior to the event, that his attendance was desired.

-He said he does not remember who told him to go, or any specific tasking given to him, except that he had a recollection that he was supposed to witness the "validation" of the photographs by persons who had been at the autopsy.

-He remembers approximately 3-5 medical persons ("doctors") present, and also remembered that the Deputy Archivist of the United States had been present, but said he could not remember a stenographer having been present.

-He remembers general discussions about each photograph by the Bethesda medical personnel, which in some cases included confusion and uncertainty about how to orient certain photos. He remembered remarks by the doctors indicating that they had not seen the photos previously, and them feeling that they should have. He said he did NOT remember any discussion by those viewing the photographs about any photographs being missing from the collection (i.e., photos which they believed to have been taken not being in the collection).

-He remembers some kind of labeling of photographs going on, but said he had no recollection of any list or draft report or inventory being written down by anyone in the room.

-He said the meeting lasted more than one hour, but probably less than two hours.

-At the conclusion of the meeting, he remembered that the Deputy Archivist said someone would have to make a list of everything, and he vaguely remembered a feeling of relief that it would not have to be him, and feeling relieved that his participation was ended.

-He said his recollection now is that he only saw Dr. Humes one time, and that this one time was at the inventory (which was held on November 1, 1966).

-When shown the draft (unsigned) version of the inventory (MD 12), he said he did not recognize it.

-When shown the signed version of the inventory (MD 13), on which 4 signatures dated November 10, 1996 appear, he said he did not recognize it.

-When shown the memo for file dated November 22, 1966 which he supposedly wrote (MD 49), he said he did not recognize it and had no memory of writing it. He volunteered that writing such a four-page, single-spaced memo would have required a considerable amount of effort, and he thought he would have remembered if he had written such a document. He did not state, however, that he did not write it; he simply expressed great puzzlement that if he had written it (which its header indicates he did), that his memory would be so bad that he would have no recollection of having done so.

-Furthermore, upon perusing its contents and reading the text wherein it indicates that he visited Dr.

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Humes at Bethesda Naval Hospital on 11/04/66 to ask about various and sundry chain-of-custody matters, and went back to Bethesda again on 11/10/66 to meet collectively with Humes, Boswell, Ebersole and Stringer to obtain their signatures on the final, reworked version of the inventory (which eventually became our MD 13), he said he had no memory of any such meetings or visits, and categorically stated that he had never visited anyone in their offices at Bethesda, ever. He exhibited some agitation that what is purported to be his own memo for file (which he does not remember writing) states that he made two visits to Bethesda (which he does not remember making).

-When Mr. Belcher was asked to review the final textual statement on page 11 of MD 13, he exhibited a bit of a startle reaction after reading the disclaimer about all autopsy x-rays and photos taken by them (the participants) being present, and no other autopsy photos or x-rays having been taken, which appears above the names of the four signatories. He understood the import of this statement, but reiterated that he had no recollection of any discussion of missing photos by the inventory participants, nor did he have any knowledge of how or why this statement was added to the text of the earlier draft of the inventory catalog. He further reiterated that he did not recall taking this version (MD 13) of the inventory to anyone to sign.

-Previously during the interview, even after reading excerpts from the ARRB depositions of Dr. Humes, and photographer John Stringer, that testimony (which discussed missing photos noted and discussed at the time of inventory) failed to refresh his memory in regard to the subject of missing photographs, or discussion of same by those at the inventory.

-He stated he may have 5 or 6 boxes of records in his attic which he took home from Justice when he retired in 1976, and although he declined to look through them himself, he offered free access and full availability to those records to ARRB staff. He vaguely recalled that he may have had one folder of information on the inventory process.

LEADS TO PURSUE: ARRB consensus was to examine his documents in the attic of his home; to pursue the original of his 11/22/66 memo at DOJ; and to attempt to locate and interview Dr. Rhoads, Marion Johnson, Harold Reis, Frank Wozencraft, and Mrs. Walking in an attempt to clarify the record regarding how the inventory was conducted, what the role of the Justice Department was in the inventory process, and how the changes were implemented in the inventory itself between the rough draft (MD 12) and the signed product (MD 13). Mr. Home suggested that ultimately Dr. Humes and Dr. Boswell could be recontacted and asked about their involvement with Mr. Belcher, and about the mechanics of the inventory process. END

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