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MEMORANDUM

TO: Ken Klein  
FROM: Jim Kelly and Andy Purdy  
DATE: August 29, 1977  
RE: Interview with Dr. Robert F. Karnei, Jr.,  
Naval Hospital, Bethesda, Maryland, 10:30 A.M., August 23, 1977

Dr. Karnei was interviewed because of his participation in the autopsy of President Kennedy. Dr. Karnei resides at 1605 Arbor View Road, Wheaton, Maryland 20902 (home phone: 942-8479).

Dr. Karnei was called to the Admiral's office at approximately 5:30 P.M. on November 22, 1963 and told to report to the Admiral's office. There Admiral Galloway told him that Dr. Humes and Dr. Boswell would be performing the autopsy on the President. Dr. Karnei said he would normally have been the one to do the autopsy. Instead, his role became that of liaison for various people involved with the autopsy. He stationed Marine guards at the door near the elevator, at the back door, in the passageway, and at the door by the staircase. He was told by Admiral Kinney, the Surgeon General of the Navy, to station the guards and keep everyone out. Dr. Karnei recalls newsmen coming from the old to the new morgue and his efforts to stop them. The newsmen said they got permission from the C.O. to be in the area and Dr. Karnei told them that the

Surgeon General said they couldn't come any closer. Dr. Karnei recalls telling the Marine guards to "...draw your 45s if you have to." Dr. Karnei indicated that in addition to the Marine guards the Naval Hospital normally has its own civilian force of security personnel.

Dr. Karnei recalls a great number of individuals present at the autopsy, including the doctors (Humes and Boswell) who were later joined by Dr. Finck. Dr. Karnei knows that a "...bunch of people got in that I don't remember... It was 14 years ago." He does recall Admirals Kinney and Galloway,...possibly the Army Surgeon General, the C.O. of the Washington, D.C. Military District (for which Dr. Karnei arranged a command post in the O.B.GYN Clinic), as well as a lot of Secret Service and F.B.I. people who had identification. He also recalls a Captain or Major in charge of the Marine detail which had come back from Dallas (he thought). These individuals helped guard the access to the autopsy.

Dr. Karnei said he had to help Dr. Humes and Dr. Boswell find where everything was because "...he was the head of the laboratory, but was not so familiar with the morgue." Later, Dr. Karnei opened the kitchen for the Secret Service men and the Honor Guard. Dr. Karnei recalls Jackie going to the morgue in time to leave with the body. He recalls a lieutenant who was in blue uniform being present at that time.

Dr. Karnei said he observed some of the autopsy but had no recollection of any metal fragments or any sectioning being done. He said such sectioning normally occurs the following day. He did recall a Chief Mason being around and "...thinks Benson actually cut the slides... that day or the day after."

Dr. Karnei doesn't "...know if any limitations were placed on how the autopsy was to be done." He said he didn't know who was running things.

Dr. Karnei recalls the body having been placed on the table which he said was normally followed by the residents checking for scars, etc. before the doctors start. He recalls a "...Secret Service man assigned to watch the tissue processor...all night." He said they were "...always present during the processing." They apparently wanted to prevent the taking of artifacts.

Dr. Karnei does not recall any note-taking around the table (he was standing against the wall near the table at the time). He remembers a phone being present on the wall about 3 1/2 - 4 feet away from the table but doesn't remember anyone using it. He also said there was a phone in the ante room.

Dr. Karnei said he thought "...Dr. Boswell was actually taking notes. ... thinks they were both working on the diagrams."

Dr. Karnei does not recall how late into the autopsy Dr. Finck arrived, but recalls the other doctors wanted someone with ballistics experience. He believes he came in around 8:00 o'clock "...a while after they were into the autopsy."

Dr. Karnei recalls very little conversation during the autopsy, but does "...remember them saying they couldn't find the bullet." He said Dr. Burkley may have been present but he doesn't recall. He said he "...probably would have utilized someone from AFIP." Dr. Karnei indicated he had very little conversation with the doctors after the autopsy but did "...talk with Dr. Boswell that night." They agreed that things were "...sort of dragging on... ."

Dr. Karnei believes the brain transfer was handled by Dr. Humes and Dr. Boswell. He said he "...has a feeling Dr. Humes locked it in his office."

Regarding the tissue slides, Dr. Karnei "... doesn't know if AFIP got any of the material." He said there is a tri-service agreement regarding the transfer of such materials to AFIP. He said these provisions could be stopped by the Surgeon General or the family. He added, however,

that he has no information regarding where the materials are or who might know where they are.

Dr. Karnei said there are normally people assigned to clean the body after the autopsy and added that he "...keeps thinking Chief Mason was there."

Dr. Karnei said he was present when probing of the wound was attempted. ("...when they were putting the probes through the body".) Dr. Karnei said he was "...not exactly sure..." how successful they were with the probing. He recalls them putting the probe in and taking pictures (the body was on the side at the time). He said they felt the hole in the back was a wound of entrance and they were "...trying to figure out where the bullet came out."

Dr. Karnei said the wound of the throat "...looked like a tracheotomy elipse" but said there was no discussion of that fact. He said he thought it was assumed. He said he recalled no talk about there being a wound of entrance in the front of the neck. He gathered from his conversation with Dr. Boswell that the doctors didn't come to a "...full conclusion..." that night.

Dr. Karnei said the morgue is equipped with a supply of "loose" blank face sheets for use during the autopsy.

Dr. Karnei saw the chest cavity opened and watched the removal of the organs. When asked if any photographs were taken at that time, Dr. Karnei said "...they took a lot of photographs at various times." He recalled the photographer handing the film holders to "...a guy in a suit." Dr. Karnei recalls that there were "at least" a half a dozen agents present.

Dr. Karnei recalls that Dr. Finck came in wearing military pants and a green scrub suit on top. He doesn't remember whether Dr. Finck did any cutting or just examined the body. He said he does "...remember him working with a probe and arranging for photographs."

Dr. Karnei could supply no information concerning the names of technicians who may have been present during the autopsy. He does recall that a number of people left during the autopsy when the X-raying was conducted. He recalls that at any one time there was a maximum of a dozen people in the room. He said he personally was not present for the sectioning of the brain, but said it normally occurs about two weeks after the autopsy. He added that he has no information regarding a subsequent brain examination. Dr. Karnei said that normally a neuro-pathologist is present for the examination of abnormal brains. He said this brain

would be "...considered such because of the extensive damage." He said the brain in such a case would "... normally be taken over..." to AFIP. He repeated that the disposition of such materials is governed by the tri-service agreement. He said the agreement has been changed a number of times in the ensuing years, and said he could get us a copy of the present one.

Dr. Karnei recalls that two days after the autopsy he signed a statement in which he pledged he would remain silent about what he saw and heard for ten years. He said that just prior to the expiration of that ten-year period, the time limit was extended fifteen more years. He got the "impression" that the instructions came from the Surgeon General. He believes that the Kennedy family said that the pledge of silence had to be extended. Dr. Karnei said he has no information about the existence of any diary or any notes taken during the autopsy. He added that he had not been questioned by the Warren Commission or any government agency about the assassination. He said he once told the press about the layout of the autopsy room, but said he was given permission to do so.

Dr. Karnei is presently a captain and plans to retire when he completes 20 years of service in 1979. At the time of the autopsy, Dr. Karnei was O.D. for the Medical School that night.