

CONTACT PROFILE**Document's Author:** Douglas Horne/ARRB**Date Created:** 11/13/96**Contact Description**

Contact Name: Ken Vrtacnik
Title: Medical Photographer
Division:
Agency Name: AFIP
Street Address:

Phone Number: (202) 782-2183

FAX Number:

E-mail Address:

Compliance contact: YES

Additional Information

This person was interviewed as a result of a somewhat vague lead received that various persons at AFIP may have been involved in some way with JFK autopsy photography; Mr. Vrtacnik's name was one of those provided as a lead by an outside source.

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CALL REPORT



Document's Author: Douglas Home/ARRB

Date Created: 11/13/96

The Players

Who called whom? Douglas Home called Ken Vrtacnik of AFIP

Description of the Call

Date: 11/12/96

Subject: ARRB Interviewed Ken Vrtacnik of AFIP

Summary of the Call:

Late in the afternoon of November 12, 1996, Dave Montague asked me to join an interview in progress which had just begun with Mr. Ken Vrtacnik, a medical photographer at AFIP. Mr. Vrtacnik told us that he was stationed at AFIP from February 28, 1964-December 3, 1965 as an Army (active duty) photographer. Following his active duty tour at AFIP during 1964-65, and after about a year-and-a-half break, Mr. Vrtacnik said he returned to AFIP as an Army civilian medical photographer. He is still employed in this capacity today, and said he will retire in the near future.

Mr. Vrtacnik said he had no specific recollection of seeing any autopsy photos from President Kennedy's autopsy. He said that it was certainly possible, because he had seen thousands of autopsy and medical photographs while at AFIP, and that depending upon how they were labeled, he may well have seen President Kennedy's autopsy photos without knowing it, since such photos are labeled only by number. But he reiterated that he had no recollection of anyone showing him autopsy photographs represented to be those of President Kennedy.

At this point he volunteered that he had seen President Kennedy's brain during the 1964-65 period, which he stated had been kept in a locked room at the AFIP's National Museum of Health and Medicine, which at that time was located in downtown Washington at 7th and Independence. He said that access to this display item was limited to either AFIP medical staff, or to bonafide medical students at medical schools. He recalled with a fair amount of certainty that the Museum's director at the time was a Navy Commander, a Dr. Johnson.

At this point ARRB's interviewers asked several clarification questions regarding President Kennedy's brain. When asked whether it was the entire brain or not, he responded that the item on display was one long section, tan in color, immersed in liquid, laying in a stainless steel tray inside a glass case. He repeatedly stated that it had wooden pegs (or arrows) through it which were routinely used in gunshot wound cases to show the trajectory of bullets. When asked how many pegs there were, he said he could not be sure this many years later. When asked whether there was one peg, or more than one peg, he said he was unsure, but later in the interview he again used the word "pegs" (i.e., the plural of the word "peg") to describe the condition in which the section was displayed. When asked what percentage of the brain the section on display represented, he said he could not be sure and declined to give an estimate. When asked whether the section on display was less than one half, or more than one half, of President Kennedy's brain, he said he could not be sure. When asked how he knew it was President Kennedy's brain, i.e., whether it was hearsay, rumor, or word-of-mouth, he responded that he was positive for two reasons: it was labeled, in writing, as "President Kennedy's brain," or words to that effect; and it made a big impression on him at the time because of his interest in the assassination, and because of the tight control placed on viewing of the specimen.

He said that an employee at AFIP named Joyce Manus, Chief, Pathology Data Division, may be able to produce paperwork which would show when the specimen was received and from whom, as well as its current disposition. He described her as being in charge of all accessioned records.

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We asked him about the following names (other leads) and he provided the following responses:

- Joan Schilling: he said she was presently his supervisor at AFIP, at (202) 782-2190;
- John Garvin: now deceased, previously worked in the Television Studio at AFIP during 64-65, and later worked in the still photo lab;
- Joe Scovitch: was a secretary at AFIP--couldn't remember how long ago.

Mr. Vrtacnik appeared to be a very credible witness. END

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