

CONTACT PROFILE



Document's Author: Douglas Home/ARRB

Date Created: 05/07/96

Contact Description

Contact Name: Gloria Knudsen

Company:

Title:

Category: Witnesses/Consultants

Street Address:

Phone Number:

FAX Number:

E-mail Address:

HSCA Letter Sent: 12/31/96

Additional Information

Ms. Knudsen is the wife of deceased White House Photographer Robert L. Knudsen, located by Dave Montague on Monday, May 6, 1996.

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CALL REPORT: PUBLIC



Document's Author: Douglas Horne/ARRB

Date Created: 05/07/96

The Players

Who called whom? Gloria Knudsen of Witnesses/Consultants called Douglas Horne

Description of the Call

Date: 05/07/96

Subject: Gloria Knudsen Called ARRB

Summary of the Call:

As she promised Dave Montague on Monday, May 6, 1996, Gloria Knudsen called Dave Montague on May 7, 1996 to discuss her husband's role as White House Photographer in the events surrounding the Kennedy Assassination. I was invited to sit in on the call by Dave Montague.

She began by saying that she and two of her four children (Yvonne Becker and Robert Knudsen) have important things they want to say (about their father's recollections), but that they would all rather do it in person. She preferred meeting with us this week to the middle of next week (which we initially suggested), so Dave Montague and I agreed to a 10:00 appointment this Friday, at ARRB.

She did offer up the following statements about her husband--these are summaries and not a verbatim transcript:

-He worked for 5 Presidents (Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, LBJ, and Nixon) as White House photographer;

-She said her husband felt extremely close to President Kennedy, and was emotionally broken by the assassination;

-She said her husband would never lie, was a deep thinker, and was an extremely intelligent person who always carefully measured his words.

Prior to the assassination: Her husband, she says, would have been the President's photographer on the Dallas trip, but injured himself earlier that week when he got a metal splinter in his eye while restoring an antique piece of furniture. As a result, he had the splinter removed a couple of days or so prior to the Texas trip, and had to recuperate, so the "other" photographer (presumably Cecil Stoughton) got to make the trip instead.

Day of the Assassination: While eating lunch at home on the day of the assassination, she and her husband heard about the shooting of the President on the radio. About 3:00 that afternoon, her husband got a telephone call, from the Secret Service she believes, and was ordered to go to Andrews AFB, meet the airplane, and accompany the body to Bethesda. At this point she said that this was all she was going to tell us on the phone, and that the rest would have to wait until Friday, May 10, 1996.

I told her that I had read the transcript of her husband's testimony before the HSCA, and that I was very interested in what she had to say. She then stated that she was still very angry about the fact that the HSCA had promised her husband a copy of the transcript, but that they had never received it. I told her that this document about her husband, and a few others (OCRs), were all open documents which were releasable to the public, and that we would be happy to provide her with copies after she talked with us; this made her very happy. (I briefed David Marwell on this subsequently and received his approval to provide these documents to the Knudsen family after the interview was over.)

She stated her husband had participated in another investigation into the assassination which she

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thought the public knew nothing about, and said she would bring the letter which invited him to appear in this forum with her on Friday to ARRB. She thought that the letter was received in September, 1988. (Her husband died in 1989.)

I asked if her husband kept any diary or journal, and she said that she thought that he did, and said she would have to look for them. We asked her to do so, and she said she would try.

When briefed subsequently, David Marwell asked that we audiotape the meeting with the Knudsen family members. END

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MEETING REPORT



Document's Author: Douglas Home/ARRB Date Created: 05/13/96

Meeting Logistics

Date: 05/10/96
Agency Name: Witnesses/Consultants
Attendees: Gloria Knudsen and Children Terri and Bob, Jeremy Gunn, Tim Wray, Dave Montague, and Doug Home
Topic: JFK Autopsy Photography

Summary of the Meeting

The surviving wife and two of the four children of official White House photographer Robert L. Knudsen (part-time from 1946-1953, and full-time from 1958-1974) met with ARRB staff at their own request to inform us of recollections passed to them by their father before he died in January 1989. The meeting was audiotaped--duration of recording is one 90-minute cassette, and about 10-15 minutes of cassette number 2.

All 3 family members recounted that Mr. Knudsen had told them he photographed the autopsy of President Kennedy, and was the only one to do so. All statements henceforth recorded in this meeting report represent summaries of what family members attributed to their father. After dressing in a civilian business suit (normal procedure even though he was a Navy Chief Petty Officer), he reported to the White House for duty on November 22, 1963, and was subsequently directed to meet Air Force One at Andrews AFB and accompany the body of the President to Bethesda. His daughter Terri said her father called in to the White House to ask for instructions before going in; his wife, Gloria, said that he received a call at home from the Secret Service telling him to go in to work. All family members agreed that he had met Air Force One at Andrews, accompanied the official motorcade to Bethesda, and had photographed the autopsy of President Kennedy. He had told them it was the hardest thing he had ever had to do in his life, in the emotional sense, since he reportedly had a brotherly relationship with President Kennedy. All 3 family members said that they did not see their father for 3 days after he left the house (i.e., until after the funeral on November 25, 1963), with the exception of Saturday, November 23, 1963 when they were allowed to view the casket lying in state in the East Room of the White House, where Mr. Knudsen was working that day.

His son, Bob, said he thought his father had ridden in the last car in the motorcade with some Secret Service agents from Andrews to Bethesda, and had entered Bethesda through the back door at the loading dock; he was present and began working at "set up" for the autopsy.

Mr. Knudsen had recounted to family members the following substantive remarks:

- he witnessed and photographed probes inserted in the President's body which left no doubt of the number and direction of bullet trajectories; son Bob thought that his father had described 3 probes in the body (2 in the thorax/neck, and one in the head);

- although none of the family remembers any discussion of type of camera, film, format of film, or number of pictures taken, they all claimed their father told them that he was the only one in the morgue with a camera, and believed he was the only person to photograph the autopsy;

- the Secret Service took his film from him as soon as he had exposed the various pieces of film, which he thought strange, since he was personally acquainted with the agent and thought that the agent trusted him;

- the only family member who remembered Mr. Knudsen talk about having developed autopsy film was son Bob, with whom he had been a business partner in the family photography business for approximately 10 years before his death;

- they believed that he had been questioned by Warren Commission staff, but could recall no

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names or details;

-after he appeared before the HSCA in 1978, he told his family (at different times) that 4 or 5 of the pictures he was shown by the HSCA did not represent what he saw or took that night, and that one of the photographs he viewed had been altered. His son Bob said that his father told him that "hair had been drawn in" on one photo to conceal a missing portion of the top-back of President Kennedy's head;

-Mrs. Gloria Knudsen said that her husband Robert had told her that the whole top of the President's head was gone, and that the President's brain(s) were largely missing (blown out);

-all 3 family members said that although the HSCA had promised a smooth copy of the deposition transcript, they were all (including Robert Knudsen) disturbed by the fact that no smooth copy had ever been received. Subsequent attempts by Robert Knudsen to obtain a copy of the smooth transcript from Congress were unsuccessful, causing him extreme frustration when he was told (at a time not clearly identified) that there was no record of him or his testimony;

-although none of the family members recalled seeing the draft copy of the deposition transcript, when shown Mr. Knudsen's signature on the original copy, they agreed it was his signature, thus substantiating that Mr. Knudsen did at least see the draft;

- all 3 family members agreed that Mr. Knudsen appeared before an official government body again sometime in 1988, about 6 months before he died in January 1989. They all had the impression that it was "on Capitol Hill," and that it may have been a Congressional inquiry of some kind. They were unanimous that Mr. Knudsen came away from this experience very disturbed, saying that 4 photographs were "missing," and that one was "badly altered;" Mrs. Gloria Knudsen used the phrase "severely altered" regarding the one altered photograph when recounting her husband's statements afterwards. She further elaborated that the wounds he saw in the photos shown him in 1988 did not represent what he saw or took. He also told them that some of the details in the room in the background of the photos were "wrong." He had recounted that this experience was a waste of time for him because as soon as he would answer a question consistent with what he remembered, he would immediately be challenged and contradicted by people whom he felt already had their minds made up;

-Mr. Knudsen expressed skepticism with his daughter Terri over the years about the conclusions of the Warren Report in regard to the President's wounds and the manner in which he was shot, because of the observations he had made the night of the autopsy;

-when asked by ARRB staff, all 3 members of the Knudsen family said that their father never spoke with any assassination researchers, and never read any assassination books (with the exception of looking at the pictures in one in 1988 with his son, Bob).

Mrs. Knudsen allowed ARRB staff to peruse Mr. Knudsen's "wheel book," his miniature appointments calendar for 1963, and to copy selected pages from it. Entries on various pages confirmed that Mr. Knudsen was originally scheduled to go to Texas on 21-22 November, 1963 prior to his eye injury the week of the assassination, and also indicated that he was at least aware of who John Stringer was, since Mr. Stringer's name and telephone number were in his wheel book under the "Bethesda" listing.

At the conclusion of the meeting ARRB staff gave each family member a copy of Mr. Knudsen's 1978 HSCA Deposition Transcript, as well as OCRs recorded at the time by HSCA staff after talking to Mr. Knudsen on the phone. Prior to the meeting with ARRB, the family said they had not seen the transcript, and furthermore showed no familiarity with its contents.

The Knudsen family members who met with ARRB staff were very proud of their father's career and his service to the White House, and vouched repeatedly for his trustworthiness, candor and honesty.
END

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CALL REPORT: PUBLIC



Document's Author: Douglas Home/ARRB

Date Created: 09/27/96

The Players

Who called whom? Dr. Randy Robertson of Witnesses/Consultants called Douglas Home

Description of the Call

Date: 09/27/96

Subject: Randy Robertson Called Doug Horne

Summary of the Call:

Dr. Randy Robertson called me today to tell me that he is very interested in the HSCA deposition of Robert Knudsen, which is now a public document. He wanted to know if we were aware of that document, and what we were doing in regard to Knudsen's allegations that he was involved in developing autopsy photographs.

I told him that we were well aware of the HSCA Knudsen deposition, but that as a policy we were not permitted to comment in regard to our ongoing efforts at ARRB.

He then proceeded to give me a lead regarding the Knudsen matter which I believe ARRB has not yet received. Dr. Robertson said that a physician friend of his knows a resident of Nashville, Tennessee named Joe O'Donnell who was a White House photographer in 1963. Although Dr. Robertson has not yet spoken himself with Joe O'Donnell, the hearsay from his friend which he relayed to me is that:

-Joe O'Donnell has reportedly said that Robert Knudsen showed him some autopsy photographs of President Kennedy, and that one showed a photograph of the President's head with a hole evident, and another showed a photograph of the President's head without a hole evident. Reportedly, Joe O'Donnell has specific recollections of what some of the autopsy photographs portrayed. (In light of allegations of missing autopsy photographs, Dr. Robertson felt these recollections may be of interest to the ARRB.) O'Donnell has reportedly vouched for the credibility of Robert Knudsen.

-Joe O'Donnell has reportedly said that he was the person who showed the Zapruder film to Jacqueline Kennedy; reportedly, he has said that she told him she was not trying to escape from the car, but rather was trying to retrieve part of the President's head from the trunk of the limousine. Further hearsay reportedly recounted by Mr. O'Donnell is that JBK did not want people to see the President's head explode, and as a result O'Donnell has reportedly stated that he removed part of the film. (This part of the hearsay is particularly vague, and I emphasize that it is hearsay.) Dr. Robertson indicated it is unclear whether O'Donnell claims he removed frames only from the copy she was watching, or from all versions of the Zapruder film.

The critical point Dr. Robertson was making about Joe O'Donnell was that he personally spoke with Robert Knudsen about autopsy photos (and viewed same), and he personally projected the Zapruder film for Jacqueline Kennedy, and spoke with her about that piece of film. If desired, ARRB could interview him regarding his interactions with these two people regarding film issues.

Dr. Robertson does not know Joe O'Donnell's phone number or address, only that he lives in Nashville (and is currently travelling in Japan). Dr. Robertson said that Joe O'Donnell photographed atomic bomb victims in Hiroshima shortly after the bomb was dropped in August, 1945.

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CALL REPORT: PUBLIC



Document's Author: Douglas Home/ARRB

Date Created: 10/08/96

The Players

Who called whom? Douglas Home called Gloria Knudsen of Witnesses/Consultants

Description of the Call

Date: 10/08/96

Subject: Doug Home Called Gloria Knudsen

Summary of the Call:

Following up on a lead from researcher Randy Robertson that Gloria Knudsen may know people who could verify that her husband was present at President Kennedy's autopsy, I called Gloria Knudsen today, as directed by the Head of R & A, in an attempt to pursue Dr. Robertson's possible lead.

Gloria Knudsen said that Dr. Robertson had called to discuss her husband's HSCA deposition transcript, which is now an open-in-full document, and that she had briefly discussed her husband's involvement with events related to the assassination of the President the weekend of November 22-25, 1963, as he had relayed those events to his family. She said that she had become upset after hearing Dr. Robertson cast some doubt on her husband's account that he had been present at, and photographed, JFK's autopsy. As a result, she verified to me that last week she called several former Navy associates of her husband's, in an attempt to find out if anyone he formerly worked with could verify that he photographed the President's autopsy.

Without naming names, or telling me the precise number of her husband's former associates that she called, she said that she spoke last week with some former Navy people who in one case (along with her husband, Robert Knudsen) saw, and in another case helped Robert Knudsen print, photos of President Kennedy's autopsy. She said that these former Navy people said they never directly asked Bob Knudsen whether he had been present at the autopsy, and he never volunteered such information either, but that from certain remarks he had made, and by evaluating the quality of the photographs, these people were of the belief that he may well have been present at the autopsy. When I asked her for the names of these former Navy people, she said that she had promised these people last week not to divulge their names, and consequently would not do so under any circumstances. When I made a second attempt later in the conversation to impress upon her the importance of the ARRB's pursuit of photographic leads pertaining to the autopsy, she again politely but very firmly refused to divulge names, and said that her word of honor was the most important principle at stake here.

She elaborated that one of the former Navy people she called said that he did recall one particular photo which showed the back of the President's head "blown out." I asked her to recall as precisely as she could whether this person said "back of the head" or "top of the head," and she said the person to whom she spoke last week definitely said the "back" of the head was blown out in the photograph he sighted.

She told me that her husband told her on one occasion that he knew who had previously had custody of the autopsy photographs, and that he therefore could deduce who had been responsible for some of them disappearing, but that he was not going to stick his neck out on something this big, because he had a family to protect. She also reiterated her husband's firm belief that the photographs of the back of the head which show it to be intact were forgeries.

She told me that her 3 children had reviewed the transcript of Robert Knudsen's 1978 HSCA testimony, and that one of them, in particular, thought that the first 6 pages of the transcript "did not sound like her father." By this she explained that her husband was a perfectionist about everything, including spelling, and he would not have misspelled the word Annandale, nor would he have misspelled the last

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name "Stoughton," a man who was his co-worker (Cecil Stoughton, USAF Major) at the White House for years, nor would he have signed a transcript which had these items misspelled without correcting same. She said it was her opinion, and that of her family, that *after* the first 6 pages, the transcript did sound like her husband. She said that Dr. Robertson had mentioned that there was supposed to be an audiotape of her husband's testimony; she told me that if this were true, that she would be very interested in hearing it in order to evaluate (1) whether he said everything on the transcript, and (2) whether he was being totally forthcoming, or withholding information--she said that she would be able to determine a lot by the timber and tone of his voice, if she could hear the tape. I told her I would be glad to look into this matter for her.

She also reiterated that to her knowledge "we never received that transcript from the House Committee"--meaning the deposition transcript dated August 11, 1978, to which her husband's signature (but not a notary public's) is affixed, which was provided to her by the ARRB.

Gloria Knudsen told me that their house was burglarized shortly after the HSCA deposed her husband, and that she had always wondered if there were any connection between the two events.

She somewhat cryptically reminded me that her husband was a man who did not talk much, and who very reliably could keep secrets, and told me that sometimes people in the military are required to "take secrets to the grave" with them, when ordered to do so by competent authority, regardless of what attempts are later made to get them to talk. She told me her husband had impressed upon her that his loyalty was to the Presidency as an office and institution, not to any particular office-holder (without elaborating on what this meant).

I asked Gloria Knudsen if she knew how Dr. Robertson found her, and she said that he told her he got the information from the Review Board. I told her that this was patently *untrue*--that we were forbidden from violating privacy in this manner and that we had not shared her address or telephone number with anyone, nor had we shared the contents of her ARRB interview with anyone. She said Dr. Robertson also represented himself as the only person with access to the JFK autopsy materials in the Archives, but that she did not believe that. I told her that in reality, the Kennedy family's legal representative had authorized several researchers (of varying beliefs regarding what happened during the assassination) access to the autopsy photographs and X-Rays.

Our conversation ended on a friendly note, but with Gloria Knudsen saying that she thought she had told me enough, and still unwilling to divulge the names of the people who claim to have sighted or developed autopsy photographs of President Kennedy with Robert Knudsen. I closed by asking her to please contact the Review Board if she or her children could remember anything at all about which government agency, entity, or body it was that interviewed or deposed her husband again circa 1988.
END

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CALL REPORT: PUBLIC



Document's Author: Jeremy Gunn/ARRB

Date Created: 01/29/97

The Players

Who called whom? Jeremy Gunn called Gloria Knudsen of Witnesses/Consultants

Description of the Call

Date: 01/29/97

Subject: Follow-up

Summary of the Call:

I called and asked whether she had any more leads. She promised to call back, saying this was not a good time for her.

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