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Subject: Interview of John VanHoesen
MEETING REPORT DOCUMENTS AUTHOR: DOUGLAS HORNE/ARRB Date Created: 09/20/2001 Meeting Logistics Date: 09/25/96 Agency Name: Witnesses/Consultants Attendees: Jeremy Gunn, Doug Horne, John VanHoesen Topic: Interview of John VanHoesen Summary of the Meeting Jeremy Gunn and Doug Horne traveled to Cobb Island, Maryland on 9/25/96 to interview John VanHoesen at his home. Although Mr. VanHoesen was most cordial, his memory of the events of November, 1963 was generally not sharp and was perhaps the least firm, and least detailed, of any of the medical witnesses ARRB has interviewed. Mr. VanHoesen (who pronounces his own name "VanHeusen") stated that he worked for Gawler's Funeral Home from June 1950-1987, when he retired at the age of 62 to care for his ailing wife. He described his duties at Gawler's in 1963 as those of a "service man," meaning that although he would assist with embalming when required, his primary duties were to ensure that the bodies of the deceased were properly dressed prior to funerals, and that details of each funeral service were arranged as desired by the customer. He first heard about the assassination of President Kennedy on television, and went home to eat his dinner. At the time he went home to eat he suspected he would be involved with the President's funeral preparations, but he was not sure. He said that only when he came back to work at about 6 P.M. on November 22, 1963, did he realize that Gawler's had been officially tasked to prepare President Kennedy for burial. He said that he went to Bethesda Naval Hospital in a vehicle with Joe Gawler, and that they carried part of the portable embalming equipment with them in their vehicle. When asked whether Tom Robinson was in his vehicle, he said he did not think so. He verified that part of the portable equipment was in another vehicle. He said that he would estimate he and Joe Gawler arrived at Bethesda about 7:30 P.M. on November 22nd. He described a scene of confusion in and around the morgue with many people running around, and likened it to a "Chinese fire drill." He said that there were too many people in the morgue during the autopsy, and that access to the morgue seemed to him to be virtually unrestricted; he repeated this observation twice more during the interview, and each time stated that in this respect (overcrowding, and easy access) it was unlike any other autopsy he ever attended. Initially, upon arrival, he said that he and Mr. Gawler waited in the anteroom where the cold boxes were, but that after a wait they were admitted into the morgue proper. He assumed that the reason he and Mr. Gawler had to wait in the anteroom (where the chill boxes were) was because initially, no one knew who they were, or why they were there. He said that there were three tiers of benches in the morgue gallery, and that he sat on the back bench in the gallery. When asked whether he sat with Tom Robinson, he said that he did not think so. Mr. VanHoesen said that he and Joe Gawler went into the morgue proper around 8:00, before any of the normal

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