

# MEMORANDUM

October 17, 1995

To: Jeremy Gunn

cc: David Marwell  
Joan Zimmerman  
Anne Buttimer  
Dennis Quinn

From: Doug Horne

Subject: Air Force One Audiotapes from November 22, 1963

1. As directed, Joan Zimmerman and I visited Archives II to listen to audio recordings of the November 22, 1963 Air Force One tapes. Our initial effort lasted two working days, October 10-11, 1995.

2. The Air Force One tapes presently held by NARA are 3 edited cassette copies provided by the LBJ library, and are identified as follows:

|       | <u>LBJ Library Cassette No.</u> | <u>Identifiers</u> |
|-------|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| 969-1 | NLJ 3                           | SRT                |
| 969-2 | NLJ 4                           | SRT                |
| 969-3 | NLJ 5                           | SRT                |

An unidentified voice informs the listener at the outset of the first cassette (NLJ 3) that the recording is "edited and condensed." The agency or organization which performed the editing is not identified either. Total length of the recorded material on these edited tapes is *estimated* at about 2 hours; without running a stopwatch a more precise estimate is not possible, since the 3 cassettes used for the transfer by the LBJ library are not uniformly filled with material. For example, the second side of tapes NLJ 4 and NLJ 5 are almost 100% blank, and the first side of tape NLJ 3 is not completely filled.

3. Procedures: The audiotapes at NARA must be listened to in Suite 4000 at Archives II. The tapes are requested in suite 4000; they are not held by Steve Tilley. An imperfect,

Horne e:\wp-docs\AF1.wpd  
File: 4.0.4

incomplete "transcript" of the edited audiotapes can be found in LBJ library box # 19. It is highly recommended that anyone listening to the tapes first check out this item from Steve Tilley on the sixth floor, and run off a photocopy of the transcript.

4. Joan Zimmerman and I took voluminous notes, noting the many occasions when spoken word on the tapes is not accounted for on the LBJ transcript. We also took notes in an attempt to expand on areas of the "transcript" which are only summations of conversations (vice verbatim accounts), and attempted to correct occasional inaccuracies found in the LBJ "transcript." We both feel that it would be premature, at this time, for the ARRB to attempt to create a true, verbatim transcript of the edited Air Force One tapes, since the Review Board is engaged in a search to locate the unedited tapes from which the LBJ variant is condensed. If-and-when a complete audio record of these conversations is located, it may be considered worthwhile for the ARRB to expend the resources necessary to create a complete and precise transcript for inclusion in the JFK Collection at NARA.

5. The Air Force One tapes commence when the Presidential aircraft (Special Air Mission, or "SAM" 26000) is still on the ground at Carswell AFB near Fort Worth, Texas on the morning of November 22, 1963; as the tape begins, President Kennedy has not yet boarded the aircraft following the Fort Worth breakfast event, so the aircraft is not yet referred to as "Air Force One." The LBJ tapes include the flight from Carswell AFB to Love Field outside Dallas before the assassination, and the flight from Love Field to Andrews AFB outside Washington DC after the assassination. The various parties (or "patches," to use military communications jargon) include the following, listed exactly as spoken on the tapes:

| <u>Name/Call Sign</u>                     | <u>Remarks</u>                                |
|---|---|
| SAM 26000<br>President is not<br>onboard. | The Presidential aircraft, when the           |
| Air Force One<br>is<br>embarked.          | The Presidential aircraft, when the President |

SAM 86972 The State Department

aircraft carrying Press Secretary  
 Salinger, Secretary of State Rusk, Secretary of  
Agriculture Freeman and other Cabinet  
 members and  
 Administration officials. When the assassination  
occurred, this aircraft was enroute from Hawaii to  
Japan; subsequent to the  
 assassination, the aircraft  
returned to Hawaii to refuel, and then flew directly  
from Hickam AFB in Hawaii to Andrews AFB near  
Washington DC.

“Andrews” An “Airman Gilmore” answers for  
 Andrews AFB  
 throughout the tape and appears to be the central  
player attempting to facilitate all “patches.”

“Liberty” Precise definition unknown, but through  
 context,  
 “Liberty” appears to be the party controlling radio  
frequency assignments among 26000, 86972, and the  
various parties in Washington  
 DC who are talking with  
 Government officials on Air Force One while it is  
enroute Andrews AFB.

“Command Post” Command Post’s location is never specified.

“Air Force Command Post” Air Force Command Post’s location is never specified.

“SAM Command Post” SAM Command Post’s location is never specified.

“Crown” White House Situation Room.

6. The LBJ transcript from LBJ box # 19 has appended to it many of the USSS-WHCA code names used by personnel onboard SAM 26000, SAM 86972, and at the White House situation room; additional code names found on the tapes can be found on pages xxi and xxii of Death of a President,

by William Manchester. Nevertheless, there are still some code names used in the tape which Ms. Zimmerman and I could not decipher using the research tools mentioned above. Two of these unidentified *dramatis personae* on the tapes are “Stranger” and “Dagger”. It was interesting to note that on November 22, 1963 following the assassination, presumably due to the great stress induced by the day’s events, use of the USSS-WHCA code names was sloppy and inconsistent, with many speakers interchanging their code names and real names during the same conversation (thus compromising the purpose of the code names).

**7. As a result of our review of the LBJ library’s edited and condensed version of the Air Force One tapes, many noteworthy observations were made which clearly justify ARRB’s pursuit of the unedited versions of these audiotapes, or of other records which could shed light on the ambiguities inherent in the incomplete and intriguing record constituted by these taped conversations. These “investigative leads” are summarized below in no particular order or priority, and regardless of how they are eventually resolved or clarified, any assassination records which could shed light on these sometimes confusing and controversial passages belong in the JFK Collection at NARA:**

A. Four radio frequencies were identified as the means of communications between parties onboard aircraft SAM 26000, SAM 86972, and the White House Communications Agency in Washington, namely:

11176 MHZ (Upper sideband)  
 15011 MHZ (Upper Sideband)  
 13247 MHZ (Upper sideband)  
 18027 MHZ (Lower sideband)

Part of the LBJ library collection donated to the JFK Collection at NARA includes a typed summary prepared by Master Sergeant John C. Trimble, USAF (the WHCA technician who was the radio operator onboard Air Force One during the flight from Dallas to Washington on November 22, 1963). In his statement, he says: “I...had three phone patches going simultaneously most of the time.” Since total flight time, from takeoff from Love Field, until “on the blocks” at Andrews AFB was 2 hours and 17 minutes, the unedited audiotapes could conceivably be as long as 7-9 hours in total duration, although how much of this time would be “dead time” is unknown. One serious problem with the edited Air Force One tape is that the listener does not know which frequency (i.e., “patch”) he is listening to at any one time, or whether or not the various conversations which are condensed onto the tape are recorded in the proper time sequence.

B. Onboard Air Force One on the return flight to Washington, Secret Service Agent Kellerman, and later General Ted Clifton (Military Aide to the President) make it clear that their

desire is for an ambulance and limousine to take President Kennedy's body to Walter Reed General Hospital for autopsy "...under guard..." as specified by General Clifton. Gerald Behn, Head of the White House Secret Service Detail, counters that a helicopter has been arranged to take the President's body to the National Naval Medical Center at Bethesda for autopsy, and that all other personnel will be choppered to the South Grounds of the White House. Ultimately, the President's physician, Admiral George Burkley (on Air Force One), sides with Gerald Behn (at the White House) in support of a Bethesda autopsy and persuades the Surgeon General of the Army, General Heaton (in Washington) to cancel arrangements for a Walter Reed autopsy. Once it becomes clear that Bethesda is to be the site, two things happen: first, both Admiral Burkley and General Clifton insist that the President's body be transported to Bethesda by ambulance (vice helicopter), even though Gerald Behn at the White House

informs General Clifton that President Kennedy's Naval Aide, CAPT Shepard, has assured him that it will be no problem for the helicopter to carry the heavy casket; second, even though Admiral Burkley and General Clifton insist on ambulance transport of JFK's body to Bethesda, Gerald Behn at the White House subsequently orders Roy Kellerman: "You accompany the body aboard the helicopter." Finally, General Clifton insists and then repeats, in great detail, orders for a forklift and platform at the left rear of the aircraft for the casket, a personnel ramp at the left front of the aircraft for President Johnson and other passengers' debarkation, and another personnel ramp at the right front of the airplane (the dark, unlit side of the aircraft where there is a galley door) for the departure of Jacqueline Kennedy. These concerns are mirrored at flight's end in a conversation from Colonel Swindal (Air Force One pilot) to Colonel Cross (USAF also) on the ground. (Editorial notes: (1) The fact that Jacqueline Kennedy never used the ramp at the right front of the aircraft has caused at least one researcher to question the real motivation for its placement; (2) An Air Force document titled: "Historical Highlights of Andrews Air Force Base, 1942-1989" states that "...the body of the slain President was removed to Walter Reed General Hospital..." which further fuels the controversy over the movements of the President's body after Air Force One landed at Andrews.<sup>1</sup>)

C. On one occasion on the tape, Admiral Burkley states to Gerald Behn at the White House, "I have called General Heaton and asked him..." but on the LBJ edited audiotape, there is no previous conversation recorded with General Heaton, leading one to the conclusion that a conversation took place which is not present on the edited tape. The first conversation between Burkley and Heaton on the tape comes *after* this remark.

D. On 4 different occasions on the edited tape, "Crown" (the White House Situation Room) attempts to put "Witness" (CAPT Tazewell Shepard, President Kennedy's Naval Aide) in communication with Air Force One (and the Air Force One patch with General Heaton) in order to

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<sup>1</sup>See Best Evidence, by David Lifton.

resolve the confusion over the arrangements for the President's autopsy. There are so many crude edits and breaks on this edited and compressed audio recording that it is unclear whether CAPT Shepard "never got through" to Air Force One at all, or whether he perhaps did on one or more occasions, but those conversations have simply been omitted from the present version of the recording.

E. Concerning the President's limousine, SS-100X, two remarks of interest can be heard on the tape. In the first, Secret Service Agent Roy Kellerman says to Gerald Behn (at the White House), "I'm sure the Volunteer boys will go over his car and so forth." (Note: "Volunteer" was the USSS-WHCA code name for Vice-President Johnson.) Second, apparently late in the flight to Andrews, someone onboard Air Force one is informed about the status of the plane carrying the two cars from Dallas (SS-100X and the Secret Service follow-up car), namely that "...373 (a tail number) departed at 2141 Zulu...the one with the Presidential cars onboard." Near the end of the flight Air Force One can be heard inquiring if there is an ETA for "the C-130 with the vehicles."

F. Background chatter can be heard at one point, discussing a "limousine and ambulance at Andrews," and later in the same background conversation, something about a "black Cadillac". This is probably an indication of simultaneous conversations taking place onboard Air Force One on different frequencies, which only highlights the importance of obtaining unedited tapes of all of the conversations.

G. During the flight from Dallas to Washington, "SAM Command Post" calls Air Force One and a "Colonel Arnback (phonetic) from OPS" expresses a concern from the Chief of Staff (General LeMay?) as to whether President Johnson and Mr. Kennedy's body is onboard the aircraft. This question is followed immediately on the tape by the confusing tug-of-war over who will control autopsy arrangements, etc.

H. On more than one occasion during the flight, personnel in Washington specifically ask whether Mrs. Kennedy is onboard. "A.F. Command Post" first asks this question, immediately before the "Chief of Staff's Office" inquires about the whereabouts of President Johnson and Mr. Kennedy's body. Subsequently, "Air Force Command Post" asks who the top people onboard are. "Winner" (a Mr. Hatcher at "Crown") later asks if Mrs. Kennedy is onboard. During the flight Admiral Burkley assumes that Mrs. Kennedy will accompany the body, General Clifton very carefully arranges separate debarkation arrangements from the aircraft for Mrs. Kennedy, and Gerald Behn (Head of White House Secret Service Detail) attempts on two occasions to separate *all* passengers on Air Force One from JFK's body after arrival (desiring to send the body alone to Bethesda on a helicopter, and all other personnel to the South Grounds of the White House). The significance of this repeated

concern about Mrs. Kennedy's whereabouts and her plans upon landing is a source of controversy among some researchers and is another reason to pursue unedited audiotapes of these flight conversations.

I. Immediately after Behn orders Kellerman to "...accompany the body aboard the helicopter", the following exchange takes place:

Kellerman: "I was unable to get ahold of Payne and Bob Burke (names are phonetic approximations)." After a break, the words "...Payne and Burke at the ranch..." are heard; it is unclear whether the speaker is Kellerman or Behn. Finally, an unidentified speaker says, "...Payne and Burke were not notified...". The meaning or possible significance of this exchange, if any, is not known.

J. Immediately after the above exchanges, an unidentified voice twice says, "...is on 6970...". (Note: Aircraft #86970 was the Vice-Presidential aircraft, which also flew back to Andrews AFB from Love Field on November 22, 1963.)

K. One last noticeable exchange worth reporting is from "Wing" (Brigadier General Godfrey McHugh, USAF, President Kennedy's Air Force Aide) to "Slugger" (Capt. Cecil Stoughton, USAF, White House photographer who photographed both the swearing-in of LBJ onboard Air Force One in Dallas, *and* the unloading of JFK's casket at Love Field): Wing asks that Crown relay to Slugger that he must meet the aircraft as soon as possible after arrival Andrews, and that if he cannot do this, he is to see Wing as soon as possible after arrival, or contact him in any way feasible. The urgency and importance of this matter to Wing is very clear from his tone of voice. Later, Crown informs Wing that Slugger remained on the ground in Dallas. One of the many conversations not on the LBJ transcript which *is* on the edited tape reads as follows:

Andrews(?): "Air Force One, this is very important."

Slugger: "This is Capt. Stoughton in Dallas."

Air Force One: "Warrior advises he is unable to speak with you at the present time and asks would you please call the White House in about 30 minutes." (Note: It is unclear what this is all about, and additionally unclear why Warrior is the party unable to speak with Slugger, when it was Wing who asked to speak with him in the first place.)

END.