

Earl Rose

Pathologist prevented from performing autopsy on US President John F Kennedy

Earl Rose, forensic pathologist (b 1926; q 1953, University of Nebraska), died on 1 May 2012 from complications of Parkinson's disease.

On 22 November 1963 Earl Rose was in his office at Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas, Texas when the bad news came. Across the corridor in trauma room 1, doctors (see *BMJ* 2010;340:c922) had lost the short battle to save the life of US President John F Kennedy, who less than an hour before had suffered severe head wounds from gunfire. Rose, Dallas County's medical examiner, walked into the corridor, which was full of scurrying medical staff, presidential aides, and secret service agents. He had a legal duty to fulfil. Years later he wrote, "A murder had been committed and . . . an accurate and thorough autopsy was critical for . . . the credibility of the investigation."¹

Last rites

Jacqueline Kennedy, the president's wife, remained in trauma room 1 with the body. A priest was summoned to give the last rites. Rose was met by the chief secret service agent, Roy Kellerman, and George Burkley, Kennedy's personal physician. They told him that Mrs Kennedy would not leave Dallas without her husband's body and there was therefore no time for an autopsy. The body was to be promptly delivered to the Dallas airport, where Air Force One was waiting for the sad flight to Washington.

Rose responded that under Texas law he was required to perform a medicolegal autopsy, stating firmly that the body would not leave the hospital until he had examined it. Not all agree on the details of what happened in the following tense minutes—for example, did Kellerman truly brandish his firearm to threaten Rose or did he simply open his suit jacket to reveal the gun? But all accounts agree that the confrontation was heated and loud.

The corridor confrontation was first immortalised in William Manchester's 1967 bestseller, *The Death of a President*. In Manchester's account, Rose is portrayed almost comically as a small time official trying to act important; a portrayal most now see as unjustified. Indeed, in 1963 Rose was a highly trained forensic pathologist and later a respected faculty member of the University of Iowa law and medical schools.

In an interview in 1992 in *JAMA*, the 188 cm tall Rose said that growing up on the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation in South Dakota influenced his actions. "People raised in western South Dakota may lose a fight," he said, "But they don't get bullied or intimidated."²



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Merrill Overturf, professor of cardiology at the University of Texas Medical School at Houston, who first met Rose at Iowa, describes Rose as a "sterling role model," adding, "He performed every autopsy with the precision of a watchmaker."

Rose was born on 23 September 1926 in Eagle Butte, South Dakota. In the second world war he served on a US Navy submarine in the Pacific theatre. After earning his medical degree in 1953 at the University of Nebraska he entered private practice, but in 1956 he began a two year surgical pathology residency at Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas. He then trained in clinical pathology in St Louis, Missouri, followed by a forensic pathology fellowship at the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond, where he was deputy chief medical examiner.

In early 1963 he moved to Dallas to oversee the establishment of a medical examiner system. In his spare time he studied law at Southern Methodist University, earning a law degree in 1968. In the 1992 *JAMA* interview, Rose said that in the corridor confrontation Kellerman used three tactics: his status as a secret service agent, an appeal for sympathy for Mrs Kennedy, and intimidating body language. The crucial moment in the drama came after the casket holding the president's body had been placed on a gurney and was being rolled though the emergency room corridor towards the exit, with Mrs Kennedy by its side.

Robert Caro, in his book published in May 2012, *The Passage of Power: The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, writes that Rose and a policeman were blocking the exit. Caro asserts that Kennedy aides, "had literally shoved the examiner and the policeman aside to get out of the building."

Rose, in the *JAMA* interview, said, "Finally, without saying any more, I simply stood aside. I felt that it was unwise to do anything more to accelerate or exacerbate the tension. There was nothing more I could do to keep the body in Dallas. I had no minions, no armies to enforce the will of the medical examiner."²

Conspiracy theories

Late that same evening, an autopsy on Kennedy was performed by military pathologists at Bethesda National Naval Medical Center near Washington. In subsequent years the autopsy was reviewed several times and found to be lacking. In his unpublished memoir, *Dallas: My View of History, 1963-1968*, Rose describes the Bethesda autopsy as "incomplete and unsatisfactory," adding that "it contributed significantly to the conspiracy theories" about Kennedy's assassination.¹

Rose performed autopsies on three key players in the Kennedy assassination: Lee Harvey Oswald, the lone accused presidential assassin; the Dallas police officer J D Tippit, thought to have been gunned down by Oswald; and Jack Ruby, who gunned down Oswald live on national television.

After the unflattering portrayal in Manchester's book, Rose felt like a pariah among his colleagues and received hate mail.¹ In 1968 he moved to Iowa, becoming popular with students, and remained silent on the events in Dallas for many years. He leaves his wife of 60 years, Marilyn, and five daughters. His son died before him.

Ned Stafford, freelance journalist, Hamburg

References are in the version on bmj.com.

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Mary Frances Busby



Former associate specialist in breast screening Reading (b 1947; q Belfast 1972; DRCOG, MRCGP), died from lung cancer on 23 October 2011.

Mary Frances Busby was brought up in Nuneaton but studied medicine at Queen's University, Belfast. After house jobs she joined the GP training scheme in Leamington Spa and Warwick before accepting a partnership in a practice in Crawley, Sussex, in 1976. She married Peter Torrie, who had been in her year at Queen's. In 1984 they moved to Reading when he was appointed consultant radiologist, and Mary worked part time in the breast screening unit, part of the newly established national screening programme, until her retirement in 2007. Mary underwent surgery and chemotherapy without complaint and was able to die at home with her family around her. She leaves her husband; a son; and a daughter.

Mary Crone

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John "Derrick" Holdsworth



Former consultant anaesthetist (b 1922, q Leeds 1944; FFARCS), died from old age and a fractured hip on 4 May 2012.

John "Derrick" Holdsworth served in Africa in the Royal Army Medical Corps from 1945 to 1947. He worked as a general practitioner in Mirfield in 1949-56 and then qualified in anaesthetics and moved to Gateshead as a consultant from 1956 to 1963. After a spell at McGill University in Montreal he became senior consultant anaesthetist in Dewsbury. He was a pioneer in obstetric anaesthetics

and set up one of the first epidural services in a peripheral hospital. He served as president of the Yorkshire Society of Anaesthetists from 1978-9. After retirement he volunteered to the Ministry of Overseas Development and worked in Africa and the Seychelles. Predeceased by Emmie in 2006, he leaves four children.

Judy Shakespeare

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Nasnananpattiyage Don George Leslie



Former consultant psychiatrist South Bedfordshire (b 1928; q Sri Lanka 1953), d 1 May 2012.

Nasnananpattiyage Don George Leslie worked in various government hospitals and in general practice in Sri Lanka before moving in 1968 to the UK to train in psychiatry. At the age of 42 he obtained the diploma in psychological medicine and membership of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. He was appointed consultant psychiatrist in South Bedfordshire in 1980. He developed a progressive neurological disorder of uncertain aetiology just before his retirement. He leaves his wife, Sheila, and three children.

Gunaseelan Kanakaratham

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Jacque Gai Mar

Former surgeon and anaesthetist (b 1912; q Winnipeg 1935), d 11 March 2012.

Jacque Gai Mar was born the youngest of four sons in Cumberland Chinatown on Vancouver Island, where his father was a Presbyterian minister. In 1917 the family transferred to Winnipeg. When Jacque graduated in medicine from Manitoba University, his parents and brothers returned to China. Jacque went to England for further medical training, working as a surgeon for many years and later training in anaesthetics. With both England and China involved

in world wars the family were kept apart but reunited in Canada after the hostilities. Jacque returned to Vancouver Island in 1968, settling in Nanaimo, not far from his birthplace, and joined the staff of the Nanaimo regional general hospital, the same hospital where he died. He leaves his wife, Pamela.

Pamela Mar

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Ian Oswald



Former professor of psychiatry Edinburgh University (b 1929; q Caius College, Cambridge, 1950, Bristol 1953; MD, DSc), d 25 April 2012.

Ian Oswald was one of the few civilians who were given penicillin to combat life threatening septicaemia, which prompted his decision to study medicine. After national service he studied at Oxford and gained an MD from Cambridge. Honoured with various scholarships and prizes, he worked at Edinburgh University and the University of Western Australia. On returning to Edinburgh he became one of the world's authorities on the sleeping state; his contributions to drug effects on sleep were of international importance. He received an Edinburgh University personal chair in psychiatry in 1978 and was president of the European Sleep Research Society in 1980-4. After retiring at 60 he became involved in medicolegal work. He leaves his second wife, Kirstine; four children from his previous marriage; and seven grandchildren.

Kirstine Oswald

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Rosemary Anne Smith

Senior clinical medical officer (b 1922; q Edinburgh 1951; DPH), died from biliary cancer on 22 May 2012.

Rosemary Anne Smith (née Kemp) enlisted in the Women's Royal Air Force



in 1939 as a ranker; commissioned after 18 months she spent the war in Gibraltar, where she contracted typhoid. In convalescence she studied for her MB; with the help of a services grant and despite parental opposition she won a place at Edinburgh. She worked as a general practitioner in the Scottish Lowlands but then moved to Kent, where she spent the next 20 years as a clinical medical officer, working for county and local authorities. In 1972 she returned to Edinburgh, where she worked until retirement as a medical officer with the Scottish Office. She was predeceased by both her husbands and her son.

Peter Sims

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Yvonne Florence Stedman



Former consultant in family planning and reproductive health Worcester (b 1952; q Newcastle 1975; FFSRH, Dip GUM), died from bowel cancer on 2 January 2012.

Yvonne Florence Stedman developed an interest in sexual health after a spell in general practice. Appointed consultant in contraception in 1994 in Worcestershire, she worked to make the service countywide and integrated. Yvonne was a pioneer of integrated sexual health and published an editorial in the *BMJ* in 1995 (Stedman Y, Elstein M. Rethinking sexual health clinics. *BMJ* 1995;310:342), which informed national debate. She was diagnosed with bowel cancer in 2000, but was still doing medical assessments for a local foster care service up to a week before her death. She leaves her husband, Michael, and their sons.

Sumit Bhaduri, Melanie Mann

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