

WEATHER

Today, there will be increasing clouds with rain arriving late in the day. High of 48. Rain and drizzle tonight. Low of 36. See page A20.

PITTSBURGH Tribune-Review

Vol. 109 No. 303 © Tribune-Review Publishing Co. 1997 ★★ 35 Cents

WEDNESDAY,
DEC. 3, 1997
Pittsburgh Edition
Circulation: 391-2102
Office: 391-3588
Four Sections
52 Pages

Experts differ on Ron Brown head wound

By Christopher Ruddy
FOR THE TRIBUNE-REVIEW

A circular hole in the skull of Commerce Secretary Ron Brown could have been a gunshot wound and certainly should have prompted an autopsy, according to an Air Force lieutenant colonel and forensic pathologist who investigated the jet crash in which Brown died.

"Even if you safely assumed accidental plane crash, when you got something that appears to be a homicide, that should bring everything to a screeching halt," Lt. Col. Steve Cogswell, a doctor and deputy medical examiner with the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology,

told the Tribune-Review.

In several interviews, Cogswell repeatedly referred to the wound as "an apparent gunshot wound." However, he also said, "Whether it's a bullet or something else, we don't know."

On April 3, 1996, an Air Force jet carrying Brown and 34 others, including 14 business executives on a trade

mission to Croatia, crashed into a mountainside.

The Air Force, in a 22-volume report issued in June of 1996, confirmed its initial judgment that the crash resulted from pilot errors and faulty navigation equipment.

Cogswell, who has approximately 12 years' experience as a forensic pathologist, contends evidence that Ron Brown might have been murdered was ignored.

He said the main evidence of possible homicide was a hole found on the vertex, the very top of the skull.

"Essentially ... Brown had a .45-inch inwardly beveling circular

hole in the top of his head, which is essentially the description of a .45-caliber gunshot wound," Cogswell added.

The wound, which was documented and photographed in a medical examination at Dover, Del., was "as close to a perfectly circular hole as you can get" in the skull, he said. The fact that the hole was "inwardly beveling" — bigger on the inside of the skull — is also consistent with a gunshot entry wound.

Cogswell also cited as evidence of a possible gunshot an initial X-ray that suggested small metal frag-

ments inside Brown's head. The pathologist said the fragments could be what pathologists sometimes call a "lead snowstorm" pattern from a disintegrating bullet.

Cogswell has made no secret of his questions about the plane crash and Brown's death. He has laid out the evidence in the case in a slide show he calls "Mistakes and Failures in Forensic Pathology," which he has presented at professional conferences and to FBI agents enrolled in homicide training courses. Cogswell is in charge of training courses at AFIP.

The Brown crash figures promi-

nently in Cogswell's slide program, which also details some of the more than 100 military and civilian airplane crash investigations he has been involved with since he joined the Air Force in 1991.

In investigating Cogswell's claims, the Tribune-Review has obtained photographs and X-rays of Brown's body that show the head wound. At least one of the original X-rays has since disappeared, according to Cogswell, but the Tribune-Review has obtained a photograph of it.

Cogswell arrived at the crash scene after bodies were removed, so he never actually examined Brown's corpse. He bases his

PLEASE SEE **EXPERTS/A4**



Ron Brown

Experts differ on origin of Ron Brown head wound

EXPERTS FROM/A1

questions on discussions with colleagues who did examine the corpse, and on reports, records, photographs and X-rays.

After conducting an external examination of Brown's body, Air Force Col. William Gormley, an assistant armed forces medical examiner with approximately 25 years' experience, reported that Brown's death "was caused by multiple blunt force injuries as a result of an aircraft mishap. The manner of death is accidental."

Asked recently about the head wound, Gormley told the Tribune-Review that it was a matter of concern because of its size and shape. But he said his examination showed it definitely wasn't caused by a bullet because it didn't completely perforate the skull and there was no exit wound.

The institute's chief forensic scientist, who was present during the examination, says evidence at the crash site ruled out the possibility of a gunshot.

CROATIA

The first American military personnel arrived at the jet crash site 12 hours after the disaster occurred. Within days, investigators from the Air Force, other branches of the military and the National Transportation Safety Board were on the scene. Dr. Steve Cogswell arrived five days after the crash.

AFIP, as the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology is often called, is an interservice unit that deals with such incidents. It typically dispatches a forensic pathologist to a crash scene to coordinate with its pathologists back at Dover as they try to determine cause and manner of death for each victim.

This plane crash investigation was different. Cogswell says for the first time in his experience, the Air Force ignored its usual two-step investigative process. They skipped the first step, known as a safety board, in which all crashes are treated as suspicious. During a safety board, investigators try to determine whether the crash was an accident or the result of foul play.

Instead, the Air Force immediately began the second phase, an accident investigation, mirroring sentiments of Pentagon and White House officials who implied the crash was nothing more.

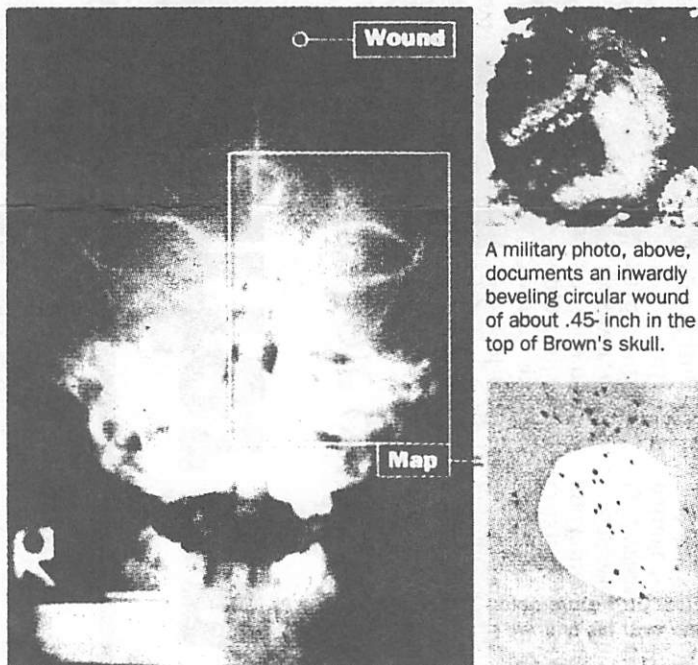
Secretary of Defense William Perry told The Associated Press a day after the crash — before any real investigation was concluded — that it was "a classic sort of accident that good instrumentation should be able to prevent."

Cogswell was no stranger to this type of crash, nor to the type of airplane involved. The model, a T-43, is the military version of the Boeing 737. Cogswell had been involved in the investigation of two previous Boeing 737 disasters, including the crash of USAir Flight 427 near Pittsburgh.

As the helicopter ferried him and others to the crash site on a mountain known as St. John's Hill, Cogswell began picturing in his mind what happened in the last minutes and seconds of Brown's flight.

Military findings

This X-ray shows a circular wound at the top of Ron Brown's skull, according to Air Force Lt. Col. Steve Cogswell of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology.



In the area behind the left eye socket are multiple small fragments of white flecks, which are metallic density on X-ray, Cogswell says.

Source: U.S. Government

Michael G. Cothran/Tribune-Review

The crash took place in the vicinity of Croatia's Dubrovnik airport, which is situated on a ledge of flat land between the Adriatic Sea on one side and a Balkan mountain range on the other.

Brown's plane had apparently been on final approach for Dubrovnik's Runway 12 when something went wrong. Clouds and fog rolling in from the Adriatic can completely blanket and hide the mountain range. Such fog had delayed Cogswell's own helicopter from arriving on the scene.

Contrary to initial press reports, however, no terrible storm was raging when the jet crashed.

As Cogswell's helicopter got close to the site, the wreckage of the plane became apparent. The jet had literally run into the mountain. Apparently, the pilots had been making an instrument approach through dense cloud cover when the mountain's terrain suddenly appeared.

The Air Force later concluded the plane was 10 degrees off course as a result of its pilots using improper navigation aids and ground beacons.

Questions about the ground beacons were never fully resolved. According to the Air Force report, within days of the crash the maintenance chief for Dubrovnik's airport, Niko Junik, was found dead by gunshot, an apparent suicide.

The plane had not slammed nose-first into the mountain. Instead, the right wing and right engine hit first, followed quickly by the fuselage. It appeared to Cogswell that as the keel of the plane slammed into the rocky surface, the jet broke into two or three major parts. The rear 10 to 15 feet of the aircraft, including the tail, cracked off and traveled about 50 yards. It remained almost completely intact.

"The remainder of the plane, which hit at approximately 150

knots, continued hurtling forward, breaking into smaller and smaller parts.

By the time Cogswell arrived, all bodies had been removed and transported back to Dover Air Force Base. Cogswell had a set of pictures showing the bodies as they were found, but investigators failed to draw a "body map" pinpointing the precise location of each corpse.

As the on-scene pathologist, Cogswell examined the photos and crash debris, and developed a fairly good idea of the last moments of the T-43. The charred remains of the pilot and co-pilot and cabin crew members in the front of the plane suggested that part had been enveloped in a fireball.

The rest of the plane showed little or no fire damage. As the passenger compartment came apart, passengers were thrown helter-skelter, some breaking loose of their seats belts, others flying through the air still buckled in.

Most of the bodies were found intact. The pictures, reviewed by the Tribune-Review, show that many of the victims were left partially clothed; Garments had been shorn away as they were raked across the dense brush and rocky ground.

Brown's body, as one photograph shows, was found amid plane wreckage. Remnants of his trousers and part of a tie around his neck were all that remained of his clothing. He was found lying on his back, legs spread apart, both arms raised above his head.

Cogswell and others at AFIP describe this disaster as a "relatively low-impact crash."

Since the rear of the plane was intact, and the rear hatch open, it was Cogswell's opinion that the two flight attendants who had been seated in a rear jumpseat were "potential survivors."

He said there was more than enough occupiable space for the

two — Air Force Sgts. Shelley Kelly and Cheryl Turnage — to have lived. Items in the plane would have been thrown forward and should not have hit them, and the G-forces of deceleration were relatively low.

In fact, Kelly did survive for several hours and was found alive by Croatian rescuers. "Depending on who you talked to, Kelly was found near her seat, on the floor of the plane or outside the plane," Cogswell recalled. Croatian rescuers said she died while being transported for medical assistance.

Autopsies conducted at Dover indicate Kelly died of a broken neck, and Turnage of "multiple blunt force injuries."

Upon arriving at the crash site the Monday after it occurred, Cogswell received a call from Gormley, the pathologist who had examined Brown's body and several others at Dover the day before.

"I talked to Col. Gormley and he told me there is a .45(-inch) inwardly beveling, perfectly circular hole in the top of (Brown's) head," Cogswell said.

Gormley asked Cogswell, as AFIP man at the scene, to figure out what type of cylindrical object could punch through the skull creating such a wound.

Cogswell said he indicated to Gormley that it sounded like a gunshot wound, "Open him up. This man needs an autopsy," Cogswell said he told Gormley. "This whole thing stinks."

Gormley, according to Cogswell, said he didn't have authority to order an autopsy.

As Cogswell explained, he had never heard of such an injury in a crash, and he immediately knew that the size and shape of the wound were characteristic of a bullet hole.

Cogswell, sifting through the wreckage, found various cylindrical rods, bolts and seat brackets. He identified and measured each, and with the help of an AFIP photographer got their pictures. Cogswell believed each was either slightly too big or too small to explain the hole in Brown's head.

Cogswell also felt it would be very difficult for any rod or similar item to pierce the skull then exit, leaving a perfect hole as it did.

His suspicions grew upon his return to the United States when he spoke to AFIP colleagues who had stayed at Dover. He also reviewed the photographic and X-ray evidence.

"I talked to a few people who were there from our office and asked them ... if they thought this wound looked like a gunshot wound, or, 'What do you think the hole looked like?' And the uniform response was, 'Yeah, it looked like a gunshot wound.'" he said.

DOVER

It was Easter weekend, and military personnel began arriving on the Saturday night after the crash to prepare the base mortuary that is used especially for mass disasters.

Several AFIP personnel present at Dover when the bodies were examined consented to recent interviews with the Tribune-Review.

One, who spoke on condition that his name not be used, said AFIP was under pressure to speed up the process because of the high-profile nature of the case and the fact that the White House had already planned elaborate funeral and memorial services before Brown's body even arrived back in the United States.

AFIP has jurisdiction to conduct autopsies on all military personnel, and did so on all military victims of this crash.

According to Cogswell, it's good practice to conduct autopsies on all victims in a plane crash. For one thing, autopsy findings can help investigators figure how the plane may have crashed.

Cogswell also said an autopsy should have been conducted on Commerce aide Naomi Warbasse because, he contended, the external examination and X-rays showed no discernible cause of death.

While AFIP can't order autopsies of civilian victims, it usually seeks authorization from families to do so.

In this case, "people were very reluctant to go ask the families" to conduct autopsies, Gormley told the Tribune-Review.

He said Brown's status as a Cabinet member did not mean AFIP could order an autopsy. Others disagree, considering what investigators at Dover discovered.

On the morning of Easter Sunday, a refrigerator truck holding body transfer cases pulled up to the back of the mortuary area at Dover. The second case pulled off the truck was tagged "CR0-002-01" — the identifying number of the body, which translates, "Croatia, second body off the truck."

When CR0-002-01 was opened, it revealed a green body bag bearing

a tag that read "BTB Brown" — "believed to be" Ron Brown. That identification would be confirmed by fingerprints.

All bodies passed through several stations, including the FBI's fingerprint station, while at Dover. First, an X-ray machine checked for explosives that might be attached to or hidden in the body. Second was the fingerprint station. Another station took dental X-rays for identification and comparison. Finally, full-body X-rays were taken before the body underwent external examination or an autopsy.

PLEASE SEE **EXPERTS/A5**

Experts disagree on Ron Brown's head wound

EXPERTS FROM/A4

During external examination, Gormley described Brown's body as the "intact but partially burned body of a middle-aged black male with curly black hair, brown eyes, a black mustache and natural dentition." Gormley noted flash and chemical burns had spotted Brown's body. An X-ray noted a break in the pelvic bone.

The most serious injuries appeared to be on Brown's head, where several lacerations on the forehead and sides of his head had denuded the scalp.

At the very top of the cranium, Gormley observed a wide area of denuded scalp, in the middle of which was a "depressed skull fracture" he described as a "round, punched-out defect in the outer table of the skull approximately 0.5 inches in diameter." He also noted that the hole got wider as it got deeper.

Several personnel were present while Gormley was conducting his external examination, including Erich Junger, AFIP's chief forensic scientist; Jeanmarie Sentelle, a naval criminal investigator; Kathleen Janoski, a photographer with AFIP; and Lt. Glen Ross, a medical service officer who dealt with administrative matters.

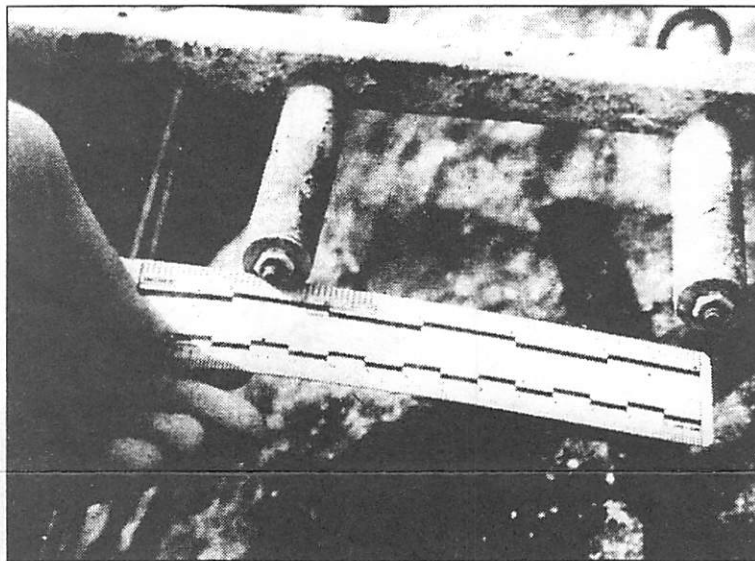
According to one source who requested anonymity, when the photographer noticed the head wound she exclaimed, "Wow! Look at the hole in Brown's head. It looks like a bullet hole."

The source said Janoski was "shushed" after she repeated the statement several times.

Janoski, contacted at AFIP, declined to comment. She referred all questions to AFIP's press office.

Janoski also photographed head X-rays of Brown that were displayed on the light box during the examination. Her photos would later become part of Cogswell's slide program.

He tells his audiences that the frontal head X-ray shows the defect at the top of the head, and something perhaps more sinister. Inside the left side of Brown's head, in the area behind his eye socket, "there are multiple small fragments of white flecks, which are metallic density on X-ray. That's what we might describe as a 'lead snow-



Investigator measures one of the metal rods protruding from a seat bracket during the search for an explanation of the circular hole in Brown's head.

storm' from a high-velocity gunshot wound."

Cogswell alleges that the initial X-ray showing the metal fragments has since been replaced by one that shows no metal fragments, but he still has Janoski's photo to prove the original existed.

The hole "got our attention at first," Junger told the Tribune-Review.

The now-retired chief forensic scientist said concern about the wound quickly dissipated because "we figured out what it was. Again, it was nothing earth-shattering." Junger said that a "very reasonable explanation" for the hole was found "when we looked around the aircraft area itself," indicating that some piece of the aircraft or its contents had hit Brown's head and created the wound.

THE WOUND

Cogswell, AFIP's man at the crash scene, disputes the idea that any item found among the debris could explain the hole.

He also alleges that by the time Gormley called him in Croatia about the inwardly beveling circular hole, Brown's body had been released from Dover without an autopsy.

Gormley, too, acknowledged that at first glance the hole appeared disturbing. "A perfectly round, nearly round .5-inch hole makes

one think, 'Tell me more about this gunshot wound,' right?" he said.

He also acknowledged that no piece of the aircraft was found to explain the hole, but argued that a metal fastener or rivet probably struck Brown's head. He said it probably was not a metal rod because the hole "didn't go all the way through the skull."

Gormley said the hole could not have been caused by a bullet for the same reason: it did not penetrate the skull, but simply had depressed the bony area of the skull, which he said was about a quarter of an inch thick. The hole "didn't go anywhere," he said. "It turned out it didn't have a track."

Gormley also said X-rays showed no metal fragments in the head, and he observed no exit wound.

Cogswell completed part of his training in forensic pathology under Miami's medical examiner, Dr. Joe Davis, a renowned expert in gunshot wounds.

Davis, now semi-retired, vouched for his former pupil. "I always found him to be competent," he said, noting that during his training in Miami Cogswell saw "an awful lot of gunshot wounds."

Cogswell, after reviewing photos and X-rays, came to dispute Gormley's analysis. Cogswell contends brain matter was visible in the wound. He also said a side X-ray of Brown's head showed the "bone

plug" that dropped in the head as a cylindrical object penetrated the skull. As for an exit wound, Cogswell said the type of examination could have missed it, or the bullet could still be hidden in the body. He noted, for instance, an anomalous object in the pelvic area of the body observable on one X-ray.

Cogswell and another AFIP staff member allege that Brown's case file no longer contains any full-head X-rays. They have disappeared. All that remain are photographs taken of the original X-rays at Dover.

The Tribune-Review obtained copies of those images as well as detailed photos of Brown's body and the circular wound. All were shown to Dr. Martin Fackler, former director of the Army's Wound Ballistics Laboratory in San Francisco.

While acknowledging he is not a pathologist, Fackler said he thought it "very difficult to see" how something like a rivet could have produced the head wound. He also said brain matter was visible.

"It's round as hell. That is extremely round," Fackler said with a chuckle. "I'm impressed by how very, very round that hole is. That's unusual except for a gunshot wound. It's unusual for anything else."

Fackler said he could not rule it a gunshot without a full autopsy and better X-rays. He said the supposed metal fragments on the first X-ray were not conclusive because they were very small, an autopsy had not been conducted to locate them, and a side X-ray was overexposed, giving little detail of the head.

"They didn't do an autopsy. My God. It's astounding," he said.

He also was surprised that the hole was described on Gormley's report as "approximately .5 inches." Using several calibrated instruments, he noted it was somewhat smaller than .5 inches, "and a little bit small for a .45-caliber bullet hole."

Fackler explained that the skull can be slightly "elastic" and bullet holes can be slightly larger or smaller than the actual bullet caliber. He said the hole was more consistent with a .40-caliber or 10 mm bullet, like those widely used by law enforcement agencies.

Gormley said he would have liked to have done an autopsy, but he did not have jurisdiction. If foul play were suspected, the FBI could

PLEASE SEE **EXPERTS/A9**

EXPERTS FROM/A5

be called in under the Presidential Assassination Statute, which gives it the power to investigate murders of the president or members of the Cabinet.

Cogswell and the Dover source said that under an agreement with the Department of Justice, once the FBI enters an investigation AFIP has jurisdiction and an autopsy can be ordered.

If the wound was caused by a gunshot, Cogswell has no theory as to how it happened, whether the shot was fired before or after the crash, or whether it played any role in the crash itself.

Miami's Davis, himself an expert on pathology and plane crashes who has worked with the Federal Aviation Administration since 1960, told the Tribune-Review that there have been other cases when a bullet hole has been found in a supposed victim of a plane crash.

In one instance several years ago, he

said, a deranged flight attendant smuggled a gun aboard a civilian plane and killed the crew, causing the crash.

Davis said anytime a possible gunshot wound is found on a crash victim "that in itself raises all sorts of alarms."

"No way can you say it's a simple accident. It's considered very suspicious," Davis said.

Cogswell said suspicion should have been aroused in this case.

"You can't ignore who this person is," he added. "You can't ignore the controversy surrounding him."

"To stack up the coincidences: one of 36 people has got a hole; the hole is in their head; the hole is dead center in the top of their head; and it just happens to be the most important person on that airplane from a political point of view."

"That's a whole of reason to investigate it."

At the time of Brown's death, Independent Counsel Daniel Pearson was seeking to determine whether Brown had engaged in several sham financial transactions with longtime business partner Nolanda Hill shortly before he became secretary of commerce.

On March 19, just weeks before Brown's sudden death, Pearson obtained subpoenas that showed his probe had widened to include Brown's ties to possibly illicit fund-raising activities involving the Democratic National Committee and a DNC-affiliated group called the Asian Pacific Advisory Council.

Pearson's investigation was closed soon after Brown's plane crashed.

Unfinished matters, including the investigation of Hill and Brown's son Michael, were turned over to the Justice Department.



U.S. Government photos

Investigators comb the area surrounding the downed plane



Military photo shows the inside rear cabin, including the jump seat where Kelly and Turnage were seated.