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GLOSSY ATTACHED

UNCOMMON CONVERSATIONS  
by Philip Nobile

DR. CYRIL H. WECHT: CAN HE SOLVE THE JFK ASSASSINATION MYSTERY?

President John F. Kennedy was murdered in Dallas, Texas, nine years ago this week. The alleged killer was shot two days later. The Warren Commission officially closed the case several months later by declaring that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone and that a single bullet did the fatal damage.

Nobody really accepts the Warren Commission Report as the whole truth. Polls have shown that the majority of the American people have little faith in its verdict. But the only people who are doing anything to reopen the case are a hearty band of amateur assassination sleuths whose relentless detective work has almost entirely discredited the Commission's findings.

Cyril H. Wecht is now probably the most formidable investigator in this strange search. He is a doctor and lawyer as well as the elected coroner of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. His achievements in the field of legal medicine are too numerous to list here. Certainly no kook could have been elected President of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences.

Wecht, 41, is the only independent expert who has been allowed to examine the assassination evidence preserved in the National Archives in Washington. But a funny thing happened last summer when he looked up all the exhibits that were supposed to be there. John Kennedy's brain, perhaps the most crucial piece of assassination evidence, was missing. Wecht wasn't surprised. After interviewing him in Pittsburgh, I wasn't surprised either--although I do think his unscientific speculations about JFK's murder are pretty far out (but certainly worthy of consideration)!

I've never understood the obsession of assassination buffs. You're the coroner of Allegheny County with presumably other things on your mind. So why are you continually poking around JFK's grave?

It's not an esoteric issue with me. It's a matter of determining whether or not some people in Washington have the right to decide what will be told to me in terms of who killed my president.

When did you first smell a rat?

When I began to study the so-called single bullet theory. While one bullet can go through two people, I believe the bullet which the Warren Commission says passed through both Kennedy and Connally very definitely did not.

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Why?

The bullet which I have personally examined at the National Archives is practically unscathed and unmarked. The upper two-thirds have no deformity whatsoever and the bottom one-third only minimal flattening. A bullet that supposedly went through two people and, more particularly, broke two bones couldn't have done so without becoming somewhat marked.

Would you rule out the single bullet theory absolutely? Have you never seen a bullet which caused that kind of damage emerge in the condition of the Warren Commission bullet?

No, I never have and I know of no other forensic pathologist who has either.

You made headlines this summer by publicly declaring that John Kennedy's brain is missing. Has it been found yet?

No. At least nobody has told me where it is. However, I think it's very significant to point out that at no time has anybody stated that the brain has been disposed of either.

How do you explain the disappearance of the brain?

The brain has disappeared because it would give us hard physical evidence that the Warren Commission is inaccurate regarding (1) the number of bullets that struck the president's head and (2) the direction the bullets came from.

In other words, you think the brain is the key to solving the assassination.

Yes it is. And, I should emphasize, the brain was never fully examined. The brain was saved at the autopsy and only superficially examined two weeks later. It was not serially sectioned to look for bullet tracks. The idea of making conclusions about bullet wounds in the brain without cutting up the brain is unheard of and completely unacceptable to any forensic pathologist in any country of the world. I defy anybody to provide an explanation for the failure to examine JFK's brain.

The president's autopsy was botched then?

Even those professional people who may not fully share my views agree it was a very, very inadequate and fouled-up medical-legal autopsy.

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Who was in charge of the autopsy? Who gave the orders?

At that point in time obviously the who were military superiors. I doubt very much it was Mrs. Kennedy who said, "Now don't you dare cut up that brain."

We know that non-medical admirals and generals were present in the autopsy room. We know that military pathologists were selected deliberately so that they could be controlled.

You mean that a conspiracy existed from the very beginning not to pursue the murder investigation to the fullest? How could such a conspiracy have developed so quickly in the chaos of November 22, 1963?

Well, that day was chaotic for you and me. But was it chaotic for maybe a small handful of people who were prepared for what happened? You know, it wouldn't have taken a very large group of people to see to it that certain kinds of evidence were made known and other kinds covered up, ignored or destroyed.

However, I don't think the autopsy was as much a part of the cover-up as was the examination of the brain two weeks later.

Given your criticism of the Warren Commission results, you really don't think you're ever going to be allowed to get your hands on that brain, do you?

I can't kid myself. No, I'm very pessimistic about the brain business. It's much more likely that the truth will out because of some other evidence.

As a pathologist you'll probably never have all the answers, but you couldn't have been working on the assassination all these years without speculating on a theory of your own.

Yes, I have a theory which, I should add, wasn't arrived at scientifically. My theory is that JFK's murder was engineered by a small number of people. A small number of key people in a couple of government agencies is all that would have been required.

To be specific--the assassins might have been from the CIA, possibly the FBI, some super-militarists coupled with ultra-right-wing multi-millionaires and fascistic anti-Castro people.

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And their motive?

John Kennedy represented a force for revolutionary changes in the governmental processes of this country. Here was a man who had the ability to turn on tens of millions of Americans. He would have gone on to a second term and his powers and wealth just frightened the kinds of agencies and people I've mentioned.

Okay, then why did they pick such a weirdo hit man as Oswald?

That's easy. You see the hit man couldn't have been Wecht or Nobile because we're not the type who go around shooting presidents. It had to be a weirdo, a guy that the American public would buy as a loner or sociopath who would do this sort of thing. It was a perfect set-up.

But someone as unstable as Oswald could have spilled the beans. How could they trust him to keep quiet?

That's why Officer Tippet came along in the afternoon to take care of Mr. Oswald. Oswald, who was no fool, knew something was going on when that police car pulled up--because there he was, just walking down the street looking like five or ten thousand other men in Dallas must have looked that day. So Oswald shot first.

What do you do with Jack Ruby now? If Tippet was supposed to eliminate Oswald, how was Ruby necessary to the plot? And after the unexpected Tippet backfire, how could the conspiracy have arranged for such a perfect patsy to appear on such short notice?

From Friday afternoon to Sunday morning, I don't think it was difficult to find a guy like Ruby in a city like Dallas. Maybe a guy like Ruby had been thought of before. I'm not suggesting he had been contacted beforehand, but careful planning would have dictated several executioners for Oswald.

Getting back to the assassination, it's obvious you believe Oswald was not the only one who fired at JFK.

It is possible that a shot fired by him struck the president in the head. I can't rule that out. But in any event, I believe there was some shooting by somebody else from another direction. More likely two bullets struck the head in a crossfire pattern with military precision.

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For me, the fly in the assassination buff ointment is Bobby Kennedy. As chief legal officer of the United States he held the ultimate power of criminal pursuit. As JFK's brother, it doesn't make sense that he would acquiesce in a cover-up.

There's no telling how much Kennedy knew when he was Attorney General. But even as Attorney General and later as a Senator--with Lyndon Johnson in the White House and Hoover in charge of the FBI--Kennedy probably said to himself there's only one way to get at this fully and openly and that is through the office of the presidency. He realized that, if this was a huge plot, he would have just been spinning his wheels and driving the assassins further underground. And then there might never be a chance to complete the investigation.

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(If you would like to suggest personalities as candidates for the Philip Nobile's interview or react to the opinions of those interviewed, please write to Philip Nobile, care of this newspaper. Because of the volume of Mr. Nobile's mail, personal replies are not possible.)

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