

Transcript of Tape Recording

(Excerpts)

Long John Program, NBC Radio

April 8-9, 1966

Guests: Dr. Cyril Wecht, Forensic Pathologist

Dr. Howard Miller

James Donnelly

(Sylvia Meagher, 2 June 1966)

Long John We have Dr. Howard Miller...and James Donnally...and we have Dr. Cyril H. Wecht, that's spelled W-E-C-H-T. Dr. Wecht is a medical doctor specializing in pathology, he is also an attorney, he is an expert in medical jurisprudence.

Dr. Miller From your smile, I assume you must have...(inaudible).

Dr. Wecht You must have read my paper...it hasn't been published yet... talking about the assassination of President Kennedy...you must have been psychic...

Long John It hasn't even been published yet?

Dr. Wecht No, it will be published, hopefully, in the Journal of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences...

Long John Now you see the extent of my spying system.

Dr. Wecht Yes, you were magnificent. You couldn't have been in Chicago at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences...of course the New York Times did pick up a little bit but it wasn't very extensive and you certainly couldn't have gotten all that information ...Well! What did I think about it? I criticized it in Chicago and I will criticize it in New York...(referring to the autopsy performed on the President's body)...It was a very terrible thing, it was a very stupid thing, it was indeed unfortunate...In this, one of the most complex murders of all times, and certainly the most politically significant murder of the twentieth century, that such bungling should have occurred. There is no question at all but that the forensic sciences investigation of the assassination of President Kennedy was inadequate and in some respects quite incompetent. It's unfortunate that it happened, and many of us at the American Academy of Forensic Sciences were quite critical of this. I might say that there was a very extensive panel discussion on this very subject and people from the different fields of criminology, law, psychiatry, polygraph testing, and in pathology--in which area I had the pleasure of discussing it--we all presented our papers at that time and all of these will be published in the Journal of Forensic Sciences within the next several months, I hope.

Dr. Miller ~~non-sensical~~ But isn't it absolutely incredible to you, as a pathologist, that a blood-stained suit should have been pressed and cleaned before it was given to a pathologist for examination? I'm just repeating it, because to me it is such a fantastic thing. And what do you think of the surgeon's statement at the hospital where Kennedy was examined, when they were asked about the wound in the back of his head, and they said that they didn't examine the wound in back of his head, and when asked why, the answer was, "We didn't have the heart to turn him over." Now, as a pathologist, what do you think of this examination?

Dr. Wecht Well, Dr. Miller, let me say for the benefit of the listening audience that the blood-stained suit that you were referring to was the suit that Governor Connally (wore)...and this is very important, because there still is dispute today, and the Warren Commission itself says that, although we feel that the bullet which went through Governor Connally's back exited from his chest anteriorly, reentered and exited from the right wrist, and then entered again in his left thigh, we think that this bullet is one of the bullets that went through President Kennedy, specifically, the one that ~~went through his~~ entered his back...

Dr. Miller That was very, very important.

Dr. Wecht Exactly. And if they had had his clothing, Governor Connally's clothing, then a good examination--infra-red, spectroscopy, etc.--would have revealed most likely whether or not there were powder burns, and this would have shown whether this was a virgin bullet, so to speak, or whether it was a bullet that had already entered somewhere else.

Dr. Miller Would the dry-cleaning process destroy this...?

Dr. Wecht Oh, yes, yes, the dry-cleaning process destroyed it, and Governor Connally's clothes--his shirt, his suit coat, his pants--all were cleaned as you stated correctly, and these were of no value subsequently in an examination. With regard to the other things that you mentioned, I would like to say this. I have pointed out that the surgeons certainly should not be criticized for having failed to note carefully the various penetrating wounds of the body prior to the time that President Kennedy was officially pronounced dead. All their attentions had to be directed to keeping him alive.

Dr. Miller But afterward?

Dr. Wecht Exactly, and that's just the point I make! (Either you've read my paper, you've read my mind, or its just that you feel the same way I do.)

Dr. Miller I feel the same way you do.

Dr. Wecht After he was ^{pronounced} dead, and I made this point, there can be no question but that two minutes--and that's all it would have taken--just two minutes for an examination of the body at that time, would have saved unbelievable misconception, unbelievable fear and anxiety, not only on the part of the people in the Presidential party, but on the part of the whole nation--on the part of the whole world. Because at that time and subsequently and still today many people don't know what was involved, many people--particularly then--it could have been entirely a revolution--so that it was very important to determine all these things. Whether more than one man fired the bullets, and specifically, whether the bullets were fired from more than one direction--in other words, was he hit from the front, and was he also hit from the back. Now an examination at that time would have revealed these things. It should be pointed out that the doctors, and there were about 23 of them down at the hospital...Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas...missed two out of four penetrating wounds. They missed the penetrating wound in the back, the upper right shoulder blade of President Kennedy, and they also missed the wound of entrance in the skull, which was the wound that really killed him, the wound in the neck probably would have been compatible with life. And then for the pathologist to begin to do the autopsy, without calling Texas! or without having a couple of the surgeons fly in, better yet...After all, this was a very important case!..And talk with them about what they did, was an unforgivable thing, and a totally unpardonable thing from the standpoint of a pathologist.

Dr. Miller And how about no ex-rays and no (inaudible) being used?

Dr. Wecht Well, what happened with the ex-rays was this, Dr. Miller, the pathologist did take some camera shots at the time of the autopsy performed at Bethesda Naval Hospital, just outside of Washington, D.C. and they also had some ex-rays taken--these were taken but they were then given to, or confiscated by, might be a more correct term, the Secret Service people...and

these...now I can't say whether they've been destroyed or not because ~~inasmuch as~~ ~~now~~ I don't know, but I can tell you this: that they were never seen again, they were not produced to the Warren Commission, nobody, ostensibly, in an official public way has ever said that they did see them, the pathologists didn't see them--that is, they took these shots but so far as we know they didn't see them--and if you ask the Secret Service or the FBI what happened to them, you get no answer. There are many, many things that are not perfect, are not ~~inasmuch as~~ kosher--in fact the entire examination....

(inaudible simultaneous talking)
(dealing with failure to call in)
(an outside pathologist)

Dr. Wecht This was absolutely a case for an outside pathologist to be called in, and more specifically--and I made this point so strongly in my paper--an independent forensic pathologist, a civilian. Now: can you picture ~~this~~ this--Let's just say, now here, let's get back into the area of diagnosis and surgeons and internists. When President Eisenhower had his heart attack (and he had one recently down in Georgia, since he's no longer President) and when he had his acute abdominal situation--they called in the best physicians around, right? Or some of them, not all of them, but they called in many of them. But they went into civilian ranks, didn't they? They called in Paul Dudley White, and they called in, I think, Rabin from Philadelphia...and so on. Okay. Now, here's a case that takes on fantastic international political significance, that's strictly a medical/legal autopsy, and this a very highly skilled thing, when you get into multiple penetrating wounds--which is exit, which is entrance--etc. etc.--this is the area of forensic pathology. And of the three pathologists that are used, only one man had any experience in forensic pathology--that's Lt. Col. Pierre Finck from the Armed Forces (inaudible)...The other two pathologists, naval men, are not forensic pathologists. And within one hour's flying distance from Washington D.C. are some of the greatest forensic pathologists in the country and in the world, including one right here in New York City--Dr. Milton Helpert, the chief medical examiner. And these are men, incidentally, to show you the unbelievable irony of the situation, these are men that the military has called upon many times! these are men that lecture down at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology! on forensic pathology! These are men that the military uses to teach, and yet on this autopsy, they didn't call upon them, they called on the three military pathologists.

Dr. Miller In other words, they had only military pathologists.

Dr. Wecht Only, those three; no one else; and they can't talk, they won't talk, and this gets into the area of independence, because these men are of course completely under the jurisdiction of the Government, because they are military men. Whether they'll talk when they retire, I don't know. We'll just have to live and see. But thus far they've been sworn, obligated, to secrecy. And this, I'm sure, is one of the reasons why a civilian forensic pathologist was not called in, because the Government felt that they would rather have it this way--and when I say the Government, I don't mean that there was any high-level conference, because time didn't permit--but somebody, whether it was Admiral Burkley, the President's physician, whether it was J. Edgar Hoover, whether it was two, or three people, I don't know--but somebody, or some small group, decided that this is the way it was going to be, and it's unfortunate that it happened that way, because many of the questions that still today remain unanswered--many of the fears and the doubts on the part of well-motivated, sincere people who are not kooks, who are not leftists, who are not right-wing

nuts, many of these doubts and fears remain, and will remain for the rest of our lives, and perhaps for always, because of the fact that the entire investigation was bungled.

Dr. Miller May I just lead you on a little further. Would you please tell us why you feel it was necessary for typing to be done on Kennedy's blood, at such a moment. As far as I know, no one had Kennedy's blood type available!

Dr. Wecht That's right, exactly...that's the criticism that I made...the point I made was...

Dr. Miller The President of the United States! An ordinary GI going into the Army, every one has his blood type on his dogtag!

Dr. Wecht Exactly. For the Presidential party not to have had on hand immediately available the President's blood type is INCONCEIVABLE, it's unforgivable.

Long John Were you happy with the Warren Report?

Dr. Wecht John, I would say this: that the conclusions, in terms of the angle and direction of the fire, and the fact that these shots were fired by Oswald, and that he was the only person firing the bullets, I concur.

Note I spoke to Dr. Wecht on the night of May 30, 1966, by long-distance telephone, and asked if I had heard correctly on the tape that he agreed that Oswald was the lone assassin. Dr. Wecht said, "Yes, but I am beginning to wonder."
(Not for attribution.) S. Meagher

There are people who do not concur, I know, and I must say that these people have valid arguments, and when I say I concur, I make this statement with full knowledge, as I've already pointed out, that there are many things that I myself am unable to explain. But based upon the evidence that we do have, I'm unable to arrive at any other conclusion.

Long John Why is it that certain material will not be made available to the public for 75 years?

Dr. Wecht I don't know, it's a puzzle...You see, I don't really what-all they're saving. I'll tell you one thing, that hasn't been too much publicized, President Kennedy's brain has been saved, and where it is, or when they're going to make this public, I don't know. Something else that wasn't mentioned in the autopsy report that has been criticized, no mention of the adrenal glands was made. And of course as you know there had been comments made during the Presidential campaign of 1960 that President Kennedy was suffering from Addison's disease, which is a form of insufficiency of certain hormones produced by the adrenal glands. Now, this is unfortunate, because, number one, if he did have Addison's disease, then there was no reason to hide it...So what? I think this would have been a wonderful thing, to let the public know that a serious disease like this can be handled medically, that a person can go on to fulfill the toughest role in the world, the Presidency of the U.S., even though he has the disease process, even though he has a physical ailment--this would be a great lift to people who are traumatically handicapped or who have disease processes, because there are many prejudices in society today on the part of employers and the part of the public

and so on...So it's unfortunate, and I'm sure that the pathologist definitely found the adrenal glands, and I'm sure that they described them, and I'm sure that this was deleted from the report, and they can do nothing about it, because they are military pathologists.

Long John That is really shocking, because some day, as you say, I don't know the men, but they are going to retire, and I can just hear the (?) burning ice --Boy! that would be a book!

Dr. Miller It would be very interesting.

Voice It certainly would be!

Voice Dallas is one of the big money spots...

Voice And so therefore they'd be very experienced men in this particular area.

Dr. Miller Now, is it true...that the original description of these experienced surgeons of Kennedy's wounds was that the entrance wound was from the front? and later, days later, which I cannot visualize or conceive of, changing their opinion, and then saying the entrance wound was from the back. Is that correct? I wonder if you can expound on that.

Dr. Wecht I don't know whether it is correct. Here is all I know about it. The news media--papers, television, newscasters--reported immediately following that news conference with the surgeons at Parkland Memorial Hospital that one or more of them had said that the wound in the neck was an entrance wound. Today, the surgeons state that they made no such unequivocal comment. Today, the surgeons say that they were asked a question, Doctor, could that wound in the neck have been a wound of entrance, and they said....

(First side of tape ends here)

and they said, possibly.* Now, of course, I don't know, I wasn't there and I don't know. But here's the amazing thing: that all of this stuff, all of these news conferences -- except for some comments which were recorded unofficially by some of the TV newscasters and so on -- there is no official recording of any of this. And if I may just jump for one second -- in the subsequent interrogation of Lee Harvey Oswald, the man suspected of murdering the President, interrogated by the chief of homicide, for a couple of hours--Do you know that there was NO RECORDING OF THAT two-three-hour period, that nobody knows what ~~was~~ went on?

Voice No written records?

Dr. Wecht No written record, no tape record. It's unbelievable.

Long John Well, in other words, to our knowledge.

Dr. Wecht Yes, to our knowledge, that's true. It's quite possible that there is something, I don't know. They have stated that there isn't anything. It does make you wonder.

Long John Melvin Belli and Percy Foreman have from time to time been on the program and they have never said this, you know, in six or eight or ten words

*See attached excerpt from NBC-TV log.

but there has been an indication that both of them feel that possibly somebody has mislaid something, and possibly if somebody would look on the right shelf or the right drawer, it might be located, but you know, they haven't repainted the place for a long time--you know how things get "lost." (Laughter)

* * *

Dr. Wecht (The President) was shot at about 12:35 pm, he was pronounced dead at approximately 1 pm. Now this means, doesn't it, that he was alive for 25 minutes. Was he alive for 25 minutes? Well, he was, in one sense, but in another sense, he was totally dead. If this is confusing to the lay public I can best try to answer it this way--that using these fantastic ~~mechanisms~~ things, the Hartman preparation, the Bennett respirator, and so on, you can get a pulse beat, you can get a ^{heart} heart beat (with external cardiac massage, with internal cardiac massage) but does that mean that the person is alive? Well, in the very strict sense, yes, but in another sense, no. So the question is, when is the person dead...?

Long John You made the outright statement that you knew that they were saving the President's brain. Is that a rumor in pathological circles, or is it that you feel that this would have been the practical approach...?

Dr. Wecht No, I have seen this in definite writing, and I will be happy to Xerox it and send it to you, but now its in Pittsburgh, but President Kennedy's brain has been saved. It is not conjecture on my part nor am I repeating a rumor.

Long John Can you tell me, what is your source of reference on this?

Dr. Wecht Yes, it was in an article in one of the medical periodicals--the Medical Tribune, or the AMA News...It's not a very simple thing to exhume a body, not a very pleasant thing, I assure you, and sometimes not very helpful. So, when you ask about President Kennedy's^s brain--I don't know, whether Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy gave specific permission or not, for the brain to be retained....

(Extended inaudible section)
(Discussion of terminology)
("Forensic pathology" etc.)

Long John We have a couple of telegrams, one from William Frantz. He says, "The implication your guest left is that (a) President Kennedy probably did have Addison's disease, and (b) that his brain has been saved and ~~was~~ kept somewhere for future examination. Do you consider that your guest can make this kind of statement and that you have no responsibility to caution the listener? that the doctor may be in error?" Mr. Frantz, I am in the fortunate position, with NBC, and also the same was true on WOR, at no time have they told me how to use the microphone....

Dr. Miller I have participated in a number of programs concerning the Kennedy trial (sic) almost from the beginning of the incident, and I've been challenged on all occasions, because I've gotten together many other...material, medically and from eyewitness things--which even medically led to the conclusion that something obviously was so far out, from the viewpoint of medical procedure --for example, the surgeon saying we didn't turn him over because we didn't have the heart to--It just leaves you speechless, you see.

(Discussion of legal medicine)
(and Dr Wecht's role in organizing practitioners in
(Pittsburgh)

Excerpt from Seventy Hours and Thirty Minutes, page 11

Friday, Nov. 22, 1963

Between 2:32 and 2:40 pm Dallas time

MacNeil (on phone from Dallas): We will have a picture in about 15 minutes...Dr. Malcolm Perry reported that the President arrived at Parkland Hospital in critical condition with neck and head injuries. Dr. William Kemp Clark, chief of Neurosurgery, said the President was near death on arrival. A tracheotomy was performed, and the President was given blood transfusions, oxygen and, after his heart failed, external massage. The President died at 1:00 pm Dallas time--about twenty minutes after arrival at Parkland Hospital. He was wounded in the back of the head and on the right side of the head; there was a loss of blood and brain tissue. A bullet struck him in front as he faced the assailant. He never regained consciousness...(italics added)