

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH DR. JOHN K. LATTIMER
BY JOHN NEBEL - JANUARY 10, 1972 -- WNBC-AM

Nebel: Dr. Lattimer, I understand that you have become a student of assassination by firearms, and that is why you were possibly selected to uh, investigate the X-rays?

Lattimer: Oh well (chuckle), I hate to be characterized as a student of assassinations because actually I'm a student of cancer research, and I'd like to assassinate cancer cells, but uh, uh in any case, in the matter of the two assassinations that I know something about-- I was interested in Abraham Lincoln's assassination, and was in Washington doing some research on that when President Kennedy was shot. And it was so striking that the two events were parallel in so many ways that I was interested and uh, in fact wrote a little article to that effect. And then to my amazement everyone began to criticize the Warren Report so vigorously, and in many cases it seemed to me without reason, uh that I undertook to keep an eye out to see for myself if there was some truth in these allegations. And uh, uh, you know it was very upsetting to have people accuse this body of uh, of uh saying things that were grossly untrue. And it just so happened that I had had a lot of experience with military rifle bullet wounds uh during World War II as an Army doctor with the Third and Seventh Armies, and uh, it also happened that I was invited to Dallas as a visiting professor in the matter of our cancer work shortly after the shooting of President Kennedy, so that I was able to sit on the actual box in the actual window where Oswald sat and see for myself uh that uh it appeared to be very easy, whereas the critics were saying that it was uh, you know, well nigh impossible, uh that you couldn't fire the gun that fast, that the gun wasn't that good and the ammunition wasn't reliable, and the fragments of lead that were in the Pr... uh Governor Connally's X-rays were too many to be accounted for by just the two grains of lead that were missing from the bullet, and all these things. And it immediately seemed to me that my medical research facilities uh, plus my army experience and my capability to procure some of the actual rifles like the one Oswald used, and indeed, some of the actual ammunition uh, exactly like he used, and uh, on our family farm, my two sons, John, Gary and I set up a test system uh exactly-- a mock-up you might say of the Kennedy assassination-- and were able to fire shots uh, in... in practise. We used up about 500 rounds of this ammunition whereas the FBI had used about a hundred rounds. And in doing so, uh we demonstrated one thing for sure, and that was that the ammunition was perfectly reliable, and further, that the rifle, uh fired perfectly satisfactorily, and uh, that with considerable practise, that we were able to be... to hit the target three times in the uh,,, at the same distances as Mr. Oswald had used. So that uh, uh the testing of the actual factual material still available to be tested or could still be tested uh, made it very clear to me that many of the, of the criticisms, uh were unwarranted. But I must say that I still had considerable doubts, and uh these doubts revolved about such items as the trajectory of the bullet that went through President Kennedy's neck. Uh did you... did you happen to see that picture in the Times Sunday morning?

Nebel: Yes I did, sir.

Lattimer: That was taken out of the Warren Commission Report. It was done by an artist who didn't actually see the body-- didn't even see the photographs, but was instructed as to the relative uh location of the bullet hole. And his picture makes the bullet track look as if it's much parallel with the ground. And that worried me a good deal, and uh-- I know that it's little things like this that combine to worry you about the whole massive text. So that uh, when

I was permitted to see the actual photographs, uh of the bullet hole uh, I was very interested to observe that the rear hole, which is clearly a wound of entrance, uh is quite far above the front hole which is uh, presumed to be the wound of exit.

Nebel: um hmm.

Lattimer: And this settled immediately this rather nagging doubt that I had as to the accuracy of the statement that the bullets were traveling down hill from the... from Oswald's perch up on the sixth floor. So uh, I would say that was the immediate uh finding uh that uh I observed. And then uh, the other thing that I looked for uh to try and be sure that uh that uh what I presumed to be correct was indeed correct was uh any sign that a bullet might have traveled through President Kennedy's body in a transverse direction-- in other words, as if somebody had been shooting at him from the side. And uh I can say without any doubt, there's no sign of any wound or any metal traces in the X-rays of his body or his head uh to indicate that any bullet went through him from the side as the commonly so-called grassy knoll that everybody talks about, which was off to the right side of the automobile.

Nebel: Have you examined everything?

Lattimer: Beg your pardon?

Nebel: Have you examined all of the material in the archives.

Lattimer: Yes. They let me examine everything I wanted to examine without any restrictions. And uh, as I say, the bullet fragments are all arranged in a direction as if the bullet entered from the rear and exited from the front of the body. And the one bullet went through the neck, and the second one went through the right side of the head.

Nebel: I would just like to ask you this, Dr. Lattimer. Your specialty is urology. You're chairman of the Department of Urology at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons.

Lattimer: Right.

Nebel: Now, would you consider yourself to be an expert also in the field of forensic pathology?

Lattimer: Oh by no means, uh by no means. I am, I am, my uh capabilities here uh stem only from the series of coincidences that I was on the spot and that I'm able to fire the rifle uh in, you know, demonstrations. Uh but I do have available to me as the director of a big research unit uh, experts in pathology, and experts in uh X-ray materials. Uh we have a big laboratory full of all manner of equipment uh instantly available to me...

Nebel: um hmm

Lattimer: So that I have a better capability than the ordinary citizen; let's say, plus the fact that I happen to own a lot of Os... of the exhibit material from the Warren Commission Report, including the, the rifle scorebook of Mr. Oswald which demonstrates that he was a thoroughly competent marksman. Uh he was able to score 48, 49 of a, out of a possible 50 points at twice the distance of uh the Kennedy shooting, and uh with no telescope, and with a much more difficult rifle. So that uh, there's a combination of things uh that uh make me able to make some contribution. But let me speak to this point about the forensic medicine experts. Uh the three, three of the leading forensic medicine experts of the country have examined this material uh, already.

Nebel: Who are they, sir?

Lattimer: And uh, this was the blue-ribbon panel, you know, uh that Ramsey Clark appointed when he was Attorney General.

Nebel: Could you tell me...

Lattimer: And uh there's been no neglect to this material, on the, on the part of uh representatives of the American societies of forensic

medicine, and uh the Americ... the American pathologists groups. Uh, this is by no means just a statement of myself. My contribution, as I say, stems from these uh, this combination of circumstances which uh, as I say, make me able to add a little bit to the uh sum total of information.

Nebel: Well, doctor, let me ask you this question. Who were the forensic pathologists that Ramsey Clark appointed?

Lattimer: Well, I'm sorry I do not have the uh list in front of me, but I can get it for you.

Nebel: No, that would be unnecessary. The only...

Lattimer: Uh you can find this in the... in the... in the New York Times of uh 1968 and 69.

Nebel: Um hmm.

Lattimer: Uh... and as I said, this is a matter of record. But one of them was from Utah... the University of Utah; one of em was from Keith's Western Reserve; and one of them, I think the leading one, was the medical examiner of the State of Maryland.

Nebel: Um hmm.

Lattimer: And uhm along with them was the uh, I think the chief of X-ray, radiology from uh John Hopkins.

Nebel: Um hmm.

Lattimer: And uh those four men examined this material three or four years ago and came to much the same conclusions I did. But in their report they stated it, and properly so, in very technical language. And as a consequence uh, for instance when I refer to the fact that I was surprised and uh interested to see air in the tissues of President Kennedy's neck along the track of the bullet, uh what they stated was that ~~there~~ was subcutaneous emphysema. Now, to experts, that's perfectly clear, but when your, you know, explaining this uh... uh type of report, you've got to, if you're... if you're going to persuade the uh lay reader, you've got to explain it in terms of air in the tissues along the path of the bullet. As I say, this is, the fact that I am not by any means a forensic pathologist by training uh, does not mean that the material has not been subjected to their beady-eye expert scrutiny.

Nebel: Well, let me ask you this, sir. Is there any possibility that he had Addison's Disease from the material that you have seen?

Lattimer: Uh yes, I would judge that he... well, let me say that he had a... a uh thickening, slight thickening of the tissues over the shoulders uh, which is typical of people taking cortisone.

Nebel: Um hmm

Lattimer: Uh, on the other hand, there was no calcification of the adrenal glands visible in the X-ray as often is so with people who have Addison's Disease. But I would judge uh from uh various uh scientific uh publications that he had adrenal insufficiency for some reason, and was taking some type of cortisone without uh, without much doubt.

Nebel: Then you are satisfied at the present moment, Dr. Lattimer, that the uh assassin was Oswald and only Oswald?

Lattimer: Uh yes. I would say that, that I am satisfied with that. The bullet that was recovered from the Parkland Hospital area where the two victims lay was undoubtedly fired from the rifle of Oswald. Uh, the rifle had Oswald's handprint on it. Uh the empty cartridge cased uh and the layout of the perch from which he fired all fitted... uh I see no possible way that anybody could have fired a bullet into a bale of cotton, let's say ten feet thick, uh recovered the bullet-- you know it takes you hours to find a bullet like that when you're digging it out--run around to where they anticipated that Kennedy and Connally might be, broken through the security guards, and

deposited the bullet where it might be found. That... this is just foolish to think that this could be done. Therefore I think that there's no doubt at all that Oswald uh, uh fired that bullet. Uh I guess that that's pretty conclusive to me. And plus the fact, you know that Oswald shot a policeman, Officer Tippett, uh without any doubt. And again the (illegible) bullet that he fired into Officer Tippett undoubtedly came from the gun that was found on Oswald when they captured him. And these uh... these things all fit together without any doubt at all.

Nebel: Well, Dr. Lattimer, one other question that comes to my mind. Isn't it true that the pathologists that allegedly examined the body at the time of the assassination, that they were not forensic pathologists?

Lattimer: That's correct.

Nebel: And isn't it true that some of the evidence was destroyed? I think that one of the pathologists, if my memory serves me correctly, destroyed his sketches?

Lattimer: Uh it, uh, I remember reading something to that effect. But uh, uh I don't think... I... I have no idea whether that was uh a breach of anything and, or not. But it is quite true that the, one of the world's most expert forensic pathologists was a man named Rose, who was the forensic pathologist at the Parkland Hospital in Dallas, and who was... he just couldn't believe that they were going to take the body away. But I think probably there was such a, a panic on, remembering the precedence that we had with Lincoln where they did indeed try to kill the Vice-President and the Secretary of State simultaneously with the President...

Nebel: Um hmm.

Lattimer: That uh, for them to rush out uh, in this moment of horror was uh, was probably understandable. But I think it did lead to the fact that the forensic details were indeed uh, uh obscured, because, you know, if you take the body thousands of miles away you don't have immediate contact even with the doctors who did the resuscitation. And it did lead to the confusion over whether the wound in the front of the neck was a wound of exit or entry because the tracheotomy uh hole they made to put the tracheotomy tube in at Bethesda--that was made, naturally right through the hole that he already had, namely the bullet hole. And that did indeed uh, uh make it difficult to interpret exactly what type of wound that had been. Now, as... as time went on and in th... in this review of the... of the photographs, uh sort of by second sight, you can see the, this uh halo-like bruise around the wound of entry on the back, which clearly indicates that it's a wound of entry. So that uh, uh, uh I think there were circumstances that uh would have been a little clearer uh the forensic pathologist at Dallas done the autopsy right on the spot as every... all of the operating surgeons uh, expected him to do.

Nebel: I think that was very, very unfortunate.

Lattimer: Well uh, yes I... I'm sure it was. And I'm sure that it is one of the reasons why the European forensic community has always uh, looked rather askance at us about this--you know, thinking we were a bit uh, uh, you know, less than sharp in the way we handled this.

Nebel: Do you think there would be any value for Dr. Halpern or Dr. Wecht or Dr. Nichols to come in?

Lattimer: Oh, Milton Halpern is the world's finest forensic pathologist. Of course, I say that with effemal(sp?) pride, but he's the man that I learned what little I know about it from.

Nebel: Um hmm.

Lattimer: And he would have been great. And as you imply, the... the forensic pathologists have a... an artistry all their own. And uh, uh it would have been wonderful if they... if either of them had done it.

Nebel: Well, thank you very much, Dr. Lattimer. I understand you're going to take a well-earned vacation for a week or so.

Lattimer: I wish it was. I'm uh, chairman of several committees, and I've got to work with them now, and uh, our research has to keep on apace.

Nebel: I'd like to have you on some night, if it's possible, to talk about urology.

Lattimer: Well, I'd be delighted, because uh, you know, urological cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths in men over 60....

Nebel: Thank you very much, Dr. Lattimer.

Lattimer: Thank you. Bye.

Nebel: Bye-bye, sir.