

The Kennedy Case

ANNOUNCER: Live from Washington, Crossfire. On the left, Mike Kinsley. On the right, John Sununu. Tonight, The Kennedy Case. In the crossfire, Gerald Posner, author of *Case Closed*; and pathologist Cyril Wecht, Professor at the University of Pittsburgh.

MIKE KINSLEY: Good evening. Welcome to Crossfire. It's 30 years since President John F. Kennedy was shot and killed by someone in Dallas, Texas. Suspects over the years have included the mob, the CIA, the FBI, the KGB, LBJ, or in moviemaker Oliver Stone's operatic scenario, nearly all of them. Now comes a new book to bring the argument full circle. *Case Closed*, by our guest Gerald Posner, argues that the killer was none other than Lee Harvey Oswald acting alone, no conspiracy, just as the Warren Commission said years ago. Posner's most important new evidence is a computerized enhancement of the famous Zapruder film. It confirms, or so he says, the so-called single bullet theory, that one bullet shot from the School Book Depository hit both Kennedy and John Connally, but is the case closed? The government just released 800,000 pages of previously secret documents about the Kennedy assassination, but the CIA withheld some 160,000 pages more. Fortunately for viewers of Crossfire, we're going to settle this thing once and for all right here. John?

JOHN SUNUNU: Gerald Posner, before we give you a chance to lay out how you come to your conclusions, let me ask you. Don't you feel unfashionably out of step writing a book that supports the Warren Commission? Conventional wisdom has it that you've got to have a complicated conspiracy theory to sell a JFK book.

GERALD POSNER, Author, "Case Closed": You're absolutely right, John. As a matter of fact, I remember when I went back to Random House and I said, after about a year and a half of doing this, I think that you can draw definite conclusions in this book, and they said, "Yes, and the answer is?" And I said, the answer is, Oswald alone, and there was this moment, where I could tell from my publisher, they weren't quite sure that they were happy that I'd gone off and done this work and come back with this answer. Once they realized it wasn't a rehash of the Warren Commission, that I disagreed with the commission, and there was new evidence, then they finally got enthusiastic when they saw the manuscript, but you're right. It is out of step. I can't believe 30 years later this is the most controversial position.

SUNUNU: All right, tell us quickly, but tell us exactly what the most important steps and the conclusions you drew were.

Mr. POSNER: The most important step is this overview. Half the book is just a view of Lee Harvey Oswald's life. You have to get a feeling for this social miscast, this almost psychopath to understand why Jack Kennedy died in Dallas in November of '63. I have information from the KGB file, first time ever, the first interview with Yuri

Nosenko, his KGB handler. I talked to people in Russia who added new information about his life. I found lost files from Jim Garrison, the district attorney in New Orleans' investigation that exposed the details of the scam perpetrated on the public with some of these conspiracy theories, and as mentioned by Mike just a moment ago, maybe one of the most important contributions is this new scientific look, enhancements and computer animation of this so-called home movie of the assassination, the Zapruder film, establishing once and for all the precise timing of the shots at Dealy Plaza, shows where the Warren Commission and the House Select Committee were wrong and proving with incontrovertible evidence that the single bullet was, in fact, correct.

The chart you now see on the TV is based upon some of this computer work, which will show, based on the wounds of Kennedy and Connally and the head wound shot of the President, where the assassin has to be in Dealy Plaza for those wounds to take place.

KINSLEY: OK. Mr. Posner, hold on right there. Let's get in Dr. Wecht. Dr. Wecht, as I understand it, the story is this. The Achilles heel of the Warren Commission was always this single bullet theory, that a single bullet hit Kennedy and Connally. Mr. Posner claims that he's now got this computerized enhancement of the Zapruder film. One of the things it shows is Connally's lapel, suit lapel flipping up at exactly the spot where the wound to— Connally's was wounded and at exactly the same time that Kennedy was shot, which would tend to confirm the single bullet theory. Is that wrong?

Dr. CYRIL WECHT, Pathologist, University of Pittsburgh: Yes, that definitely is wrong. The Warren Commission established that the shot occurred some time behind the— when Kennedy was behind the Stemmons Freeway sign. The House Select Committee of Assassinations, and I was a member of the Forensic Pathology Panel, concluded that Kennedy was hit at frame 189. What Mr. Posner has done is to take the work of a few people, a dentist in Mississippi, Michael West and some other and based upon a flapping of the lapel of the Governor's coat, he has concluded that that is the moment that the shot hit the President because, remember, a bullet fired almost 2800 feet per second with the distance of 25 inches between the President and the Governor, you're talking about millisecond in time.

KINSLEY: Right, but he says, as I understand it, and both of you correct me if I'm wrong, we know the time that Kennedy was shot—

Dr. WECHT: No, we don't know the time.

KINSLEY: The question is the time that Connally was shot, and this flip happens at the same time Kennedy was shot, therefore it indicates they were both hit by the same bullet.

Dr. WECHT: First of all, let me point out something. Kennedy is clearly reacting at frame 224, when he emerges from behind the Stemmons Freeway sign. He's already been hit, his hands are up to his mouth and toward his throat. Secondly, the lapel then, which they're talking about, is seen in frame 225. You can't have the lapel com-

ing up at that time. Kennedy has already been hit and is reacting—

KINSLEY: All right—

Mr. POSNER: Gentlemen—

KINSLEY: Without getting too technical, could you answer that point?

Mr. POSNER: Please—

KINSLEY: Could you answer that point, Mr. Posner?

Mr. POSNER: No, this is very important. I must say, I have a great deal of respect for Dr. Cyril Wecht, but he is wrong on this, and I'll tell you why. It's been a guessing game in the past, and he's still relying on the old information we don't know where they're hit. Absolutely false. Kennedy is not reacting to the hit at 224. His arms are coming up near his face, and they aren't coming up until 227, and Connally's lapel hit, I must tell you something, I was surprised to learn this today, I want to hear this from Dr. Wecht. I understood that a computer technician had discovered this last year in California for the first time. You go to the National Archives and you look at the Governor's suit. That's right where the hole is, right where you see his lapel flying up, but I understand that Dr. Wecht, had told the Rockefeller Commission in 1974 or '75 in a letter that he thought there might be evidence of Connally's lapel flapping forward, indicating the precise moment the Governor was hit, but I'd never heard Dr. Wecht talked about this. Is this true, Dr. Wecht?

Dr. WECHT: No, no, no. I never wrote any such letter. I just heard about the lapel business last year, and by the way, the hole through the Governor's chest for the exit wound is below the nipple, it's below the lapel level. It does not match up with the lapel. Let's get back to the computer animation. The failure—

SUNUNU: Let me—

KINSLEY: Wait a minute. Let him—

SUNUNU: But he said something— you can move a lapel from below.

Mr. POSNER: Absolutely.

Dr. WECHT: Well, you can move a lapel from below—

SUNUNU: Particularly if it's being hit by a bullet at high speed.

Dr. WECHT: Governor Sununu, but we have to deal first with the point of the lapel flipping up at a time that Kennedy has already been struck. What Mr. Posner has done, based upon no scientific evidence whatsoever, is to state that the President has been struck at frame 224.

SUNUNU: Now, wait a minute. You were giving an argument about the location of the wound and saying that was inconsistent—

Dr. WECHT: That's right.

SUNUNU: It's not inconsistent.

Dr. WECHT: Why isn't it?

SUNUNU: It can move forward.

Dr. WECHT: Yes, but, Governor Sununu, you can also have the little flip of the lapel occurring simply by the movement—

SUNUNU: Absolutely.

Dr. WECHT: —of the Governor's body.

SUNUNU: I won't disagree. Also—

Dr. WECHT: The lapel movement is absurd to dwell upon. It proves absolutely nothing.

SUNUNU: No, you are arguing that it is impossible, and it is not impossible.

Dr. WECHT: No, no, no. I didn't say that it's impossible. I said that it does not match up with the exit wound from the front of the Governor's chest.

SUNUNU: It's not inconsistent.

Dr. WECHT: But it doesn't prove anything—

SUNUNU: But it's not inconsistent.

Dr. WECHT: But they have the burden, to say that something is not inconsistent means nothing.

KINSLEY: Mr. Posner, take one more crack at this lapel business, then we're moving on.

Mr. POSNER: Thank you.

Dr. WECHT: Yeah, let's move onto other things.

Mr. POSNER: Dr. Wecht, I only suggest this, that I think that if you go the National Archives and if you look at Governor Connally's suit and you see where the hole is on the lapel you will be quite surprised — you haven't examined it maybe since 1978 when you were on the Select Committee — to find out that, in fact, this is the most important timing confirmation in the case, and when you said a moment ago that I have no scientific evidence to back this up, there is an entire in the book where I go through this in detail with forensics pathologists who are colleagues of yours like Dr. Michael Bodin [sp?] and others and ballistics experts. This is not just hoopla or computer animation or somebody making it up at a screen. I asked individuals, what can you do with the Zapruder film that you couldn't do two or three years ago? And I think that you have to update the argument to answer this new animation because this advances the case far beyond what we had.

SUNUNU: We'll be back in a second. We'll give you a chance to answer, then we'll talk a little bit more about Lee Harvey Oswald's background.

[Commercial break]

SUNUNU: Welcome back to Crossfire. Tonight we've been revisiting the Kennedy assassination with the author of a new book that comes to the surprise conclusion that the Warren Commission was right. Gerald Posner, in a very detailed and in-depth book, comes to the conclusion that the "Lee Harvey Oswald alone" scenario was the correct one. Disagreeing with him is Dr. Cyril Wecht, a pathologist from the University of Pittsburgh, who still believes that the medical evidence points to two shooters.

Dr. Wecht, you wanted a quick chance to respond.

Dr. WECHT: Yes, I wanted to say with regard to the reference to Dr. Bodin. Dr. Bodin was the chairman of our Forensic Pathology Panel, which concluded that Kennedy was shot at frame 189, which Mr. Posner has conveniently ignored. Let's talk about the computer simulation analysis, Failure Analysis Associates. You know the old adage—

KINSLEY: That's the company.

Dr. WECHT: Yeah, GIGO, garbage in, garbage out. If you look at Mr. Posner's book, what he has done is, he has elevated the back wound and lowered the front wound. The fact of the matter is that our panel, again, nine forensic pathologists all agreeing that bullet, do you know, through

the President's neck had an upward trajectory of 11 degrees? The hole diagramed by the pathologist on the night of the autopsy with the unclad body of the President in front of him was six inches below the crest of the shoulder. Mr. Posner, based upon what evidence I do not know, has moved the hole up in the back, has moved the hole down, and if you look in his book, sir, which you referred to, you thought it was so meticulous and accurate, you will see a diagram, a cartoonish figure in which you have the trajectory going downward. I suggest that Mr. Posner go back to the forensic pathologists—

SUNUNU: So you say the medical evidence—

Dr. WECHT: —including his colleague and friend Dr. Bodin.

SUNUNU: Are you saying the medical evidence is what gives you the conclusion that there was not a single shooter and a single bullet?

Dr. WECHT: Oh, the hard scientific medical evidence, absolutely.

SUNUNU: Let me ask this. Weren't you the coroner in 1973 in Allegheny County?

Dr. WECHT: Yes, I was.

SUNUNU: Didn't you write a letter or an opinion to the *Forensic Science Gazette* in which you drew the conclusion that the medical evidence indicated that the President was only hit with a single shot to the head and that all that evidence concluded that there was no way there could be a gunman to the front or right front of the President's car?

Dr. WECHT: In 1973, based upon the evidence extant, that was correct. In later years, we came to have color photographs. We came to have more detailed analysis based upon new techniques that were not available. We also came to have a lot of other new fresh evidence, absolutely, and at this time—

SUNUNU: What was the difference that led you to change your mind from concluding in 1973, consistent with Mr. Posner, to your conclusion now?

Dr. WECHT: Oh, well, first of all, you're now jumping to the head wound, which is OK. I have no problem, in fact, I love to discuss the head wound. I just want to point out that we are now jumping from the back throat wound of the President to the entire single bullet theory and also then to the head wound.

SUNUNU: But you don't disagree that there could be an issue in which additional information causes you to understand that things may be different than the conclusion you had at one time.

Dr. WECHT: Oh, new information comes in—

SUNUNU: Including computer enhancement.

Dr. WECHT: The computer enhancement, though, Governor, you miss my point, is based upon an inaccurate positionings of the bullet holes in the back and the front.

KINSLEY: All right. Mr. Posner—

SUNUNU: It's computer enhancement developed.

Dr. WECHT: No, no, sir—

KINSLEY: Mr. Posner—

Dr. WECHT: Computer enhancement is based upon what you give them.

KINSLEY: Mr. Posner, go ahead and reply, but then I

want to broaden the discussion.

Mr. POSNER: I want to say— we'll go beyond the medical issues. I have been sitting here very patiently listening to Dr. Wecht—

KINSLEY: Go ahead.

Mr. POSNER: He is absolutely, and I must say, 100 percent wrong, saying that the wound placement is incorrect. I relied, and so did Failure Analysis, upon his work together with the Forensics Panel and the House Select Committee on placing the wounds exactly and he must look at those diagrams again.

Dr. WECHT: It can't be, it can't be.

Mr. POSNER: In addition, if I could summarize, and I'm sure Dr. Wecht will correct me. Governor Sununu asked, why does he believe there's a conspiracy based on the medical evidence? I asked him this when I interviewed him a year ago, and he said, "I think the President was struck by two shots from behind, but I also believe that when this matter blew out the side of the President's head on the fatal head shot that simultaneously another shot came in from the front." And I asked Dr. Wecht, well, where's the exit wound on the other side of the head? And he said, "Well, it could have been a frangible bullet." I asked him, well, shouldn't there be large fragments from the frangible bullet on the x-rays, those fragments aren't there, and he said, "Well, you wouldn't expect larger fragments, but it might have been a plastic bullet." Well, plastic bullets weren't really manufactured until five years ago.

KINSLEY: Well, let me—

Dr. WECHT: In your book you say, "rarely available," Mr. Posner, OK? And if anybody would have had them if they were rarely, it would have been our CIA.

SUNUNU: Are you depending on a plastic bullet to draw this conclusion?

Dr. WECHT: No, not at all. I discussed with Mr. Posner several possibilities. The fact is, you don't need any defects on the left side of the head. You've got—

KINSLEY: OK, wait a minute.

Dr. WECHT: —the President facing toward his right. The shot comes in tangentially from the Grassy Knoll area behind the stockade fence, strikes him in the head.

KINSLEY: OK, hold on, hold on. I'm going to broaden this discussion by fiat here. Mr. Posner, I've always been very skeptical of these conspiracy theories myself, but the one thing, just as a lay person, who's not a buff, does not follow this closely, struck me as implausible was the notion that Jack Ruby came out of nowhere and shot Lee Harvey Oswald, having nothing to do with the assassination of Kennedy himself. Isn't that just implausible?

Mr. POSNER: That's— when I started this work, if I leaned toward any theory, it was only toward the mob theory because of Ruby. Ruby makes all of us suspicious. That Sunday murder did a great disservice to history because without his day in court we all thought there's something here to hide, especially with Ruby's mob connections, but, Mike, I'll just give you an overview on this. I spent a lot of time on Ruby in the book.

If there was an conspiracy in this case to kill the President of the United States, Lee Harvey Oswald would never

have walked out of this Texas School Book Depository alive. A crooked cop or a crooked FBI agent or Secret Service agent would have shot the "alleged assassin" as he tried to flee the building, and that man would have been given a medal. There would never have been any talk about Ruby. In addition, let's assume the conspirators planned this great assassination coup and they forgot to cover the front door of the depository, there's where Oswald walked out of three minutes after he shot Kennedy, and they give the contract to Ruby. On Friday night at police headquarters, we have photographs, Oswald walks a couple of feet in front of Ruby. Ruby doesn't shoot him. Now some conspiracy theorists say maybe Ruby forgot his gun. Now, is this the gang that couldn't shoot straight? Jack Ruby's supposed to kill the presidential assassin, he's got a contract from organized crime, he goes there on Friday and he says, "Oh, my God, I forgot my gun."

KINSLEY: OK, but—

Mr. POSNER: On Sunday—

Dr. WECHT: You're taking a point in time when Ruby was supposed to have killed him. You ignored in your book and you're ignoring now, Mr. Posner, how did Jack Ruby get into the Dallas Public Safety Building on Sunday morning? Let's say you, sir, had been visiting Dallas that morning, would you have been able to walk past 200 uniformed and non-uniformed detectives? You would have had your head shot off. How did Jack Ruby—

Mr. POSNER: I'm not—

Dr. WECHT: You've ignored the fact that it is now proven—

Mr. POSNER: Dr. Wecht—

Dr. WECHT: —a matter of record — just a moment — that a high-ranking police official let Jack Ruby into the building.

Mr. POSNER: No, no, no.

Dr. WECHT: OK, yes, and you're ignoring—

Mr. POSNER: That's the conclusion of the House Select Committee, which I disagree with—

Dr. WECHT: —the totally contrived scenario by which Jack Ruby came to be in that area, sending money by Western Union to a former stripper of his on Sunday morning. After he had eaten some bagels and lox at home, he decided to go down there, right?

Mr. POSNER: It's a matter of the record—

Dr. WECHT: Come on. You've ignored so many things—

Mr. POSNER: It's a matter of public record.

Dr. WECHT: —in your book, Mr. Posner. It's a shame, because you are an intelligent, experienced writer. You could have done a job instead of preparing a prosecutor's brief. That's what you have done. Your book is a prosecutor's brief. It is the best such brief thus far presented, but it is not complete, and therefore, sir, it is intellectually dishonest.

SUNUNU: Now that you've been damned with faint praise, Mr. Posner, let me ask you a question. Can you tell us what you found out about Lee Harvey Oswald that you said was probably the most important thing.

Dr. WECHT: Absolutely, the most important thing to me, Governor, was the discovery from the KGB files. The KGB

had surveillance on Oswald around the clock for nearly two years while he was in Minsk. They were afraid he was an American sleeper agent. You know, he had tried to kill himself when he was in Moscow. Then two Soviet psychiatrists interviewed him and their reports are in the KGB file. They conclude he's mentally unstable, but the KGB said, "You know, maybe he's just pretending to be crazy and he's really an agent." So they kept watching him all the time. You know what they conclude in the end? This fellow didn't even know the fundamentals of how to repair his radio when it broke at home. He had no intelligence contacts whatsoever, and they viewed him as so unstable that no intelligence agency in any country would use him. That's—

SUNUNU: Well, how does that—

Dr. WECHT: He got smarter, he got a lot smarter as the years went by.

SUNUNU: Mr. Posner, when—

Dr. WECHT: And he was able to effectuate the assassination of the President, despite the fact that he was in Russia he was a total dunce, and by the way, according to KGB agent Nosenko, one of Mr. Posner's reliable persons, as of last week on another television program, "Lee Harvey Oswald could not hit a rabbit with a shotgun." He became also an expert marksman, Mr. Posner, in that couple of years' time, right?

SUNUNU: But, Mr. Posner, when and why did he decide to kill the President?

Mr. POSNER: He had a mixture of politics, Governor, half communism and half anarchism. He hated authority. He wanted to throw a cog into the machinery of government, and his mark for history was going to be the death of General Edwin Walker, the man who was removed from his NATO command by President Kennedy for distributing right-wing literature to his troops. He had shot—

KINSLEY: OK.

Mr. POSNER: He had shot at him—

Dr. WECHT: Whom he missed, whom he missed as a stationary target in his backyard.

Mr. POSNER: He got President Kennedy as a target of opportunity.

KINSLEY: But, Mr. Posner, the stuff you've been saying for the past few minutes does not carry with it the same kind of scientific, "We've got the fix in, this is definite" authority that you've been positing for your—

Mr. POSNER: Right. No, but, Mike—

KINSLEY: —film analysis.

Mr. POSNER: —I must tell you that I personally believe that the most important part of the book is not the chapter on the single bullet, but is the first half of the book which deals with Oswald's life, because—

KINSLEY: Yeah, but just listening to you, it's not as convincing.

Mr. POSNER: No, no, but it is more convincing in this sense, it incrementally builds over 300 pages, a portrait of Oswald and a psychological portrait—

KINSLEY: All right, if you're going to sell your book, I think we ought to give Dr. Wecht a chance.

Dr. WECHT: And it builds and it builds Lee Harvey Os-

wald's anarchism and pro-socialism, communism, whatever it is, and this man sets it all up, and guess what, he kills the President after planning this all this time, and then he stands up and says, "I didn't do it, not me, somebody else did it." Come on now, what, are you kidding? You don't have to be—

Mr. POSNER: Dr. Wecht—

Dr. WECHT: You don't have to be a Freudian psychoanalyst to understand the absurdity of your theory.

Mr. POSNER: All you have to do—

Dr. WECHT: My God, a guy like that stands up and says, "Mea culpa, I did it, I did it. I'm a hero. I saved the world. I killed this terrible man."

Mr. POSNER: Dr. Wecht, all I suggest you do is go back and talk to Marina Oswald and—

Dr. WECHT: I've talked to Marina personally several times, and I know what Marina thinks of your book and about you, OK. So I have talked with Marina.

Mr. POSNER: Please go back and talk to Marina Oswald and his friends Ruth and Michael Paine [sp?] who knew Lee Oswald better than anybody else, and what will they say? He looked like the cat who had swallowed the canary. He was bursting with pride and he knew now that he was going to have the fun of being able to make everybody sweat about who killed JFK.

Dr. WECHT: You're going now by facial expressions, which, of course, which is what the *U.S. News and World Report* did, too.

KINSLEY: I've got to cut you off.

Dr. WECHT: The smirk on Oswald proved to that magazine—

KINSLEY: All right. Dr. Wecht, thank you very much. Mr. Posner, thank you very much. Was John Sununu on the Grassy Knoll? We'll deal with that important question in just a moment.

[Commercial break]

KINSLEY: John, we're not all buffs like these two gentlemen, but we do all have a little bit of a theory. What is your theory?

SUNUNU: I still believe in the single gunman, single bullet theory. I think the computer enhancements are a step forward. I think the psychological analysis of Lee Harvey Oswald fills in a lot of the questions. I'm still not convinced that there's any conspiracy.

KINSLEY: I'm not either, but as I said before, I do think the Jack Ruby thing does puzzle me. I don't think that proves he's necessarily a mobster or anything like that, but there's something unexplained there, I think.

SUNUNU: I think it's amazing that people would rather believe a conspiracy theory than believe a theory that at least stands on the basis of the hard facts that are there.

KINSLEY: Well, you know, the government has just released these 800,000 pages, but they're withholding 160,000. Now, that does make you a little suspicious, doesn't it? I mean, if they were releasing a million pages and withholding five, you'd sort of think, those five are probably the ones you really want to read, don't you think?

SUNUNU: Michael, even if they didn't withhold any, people would suspect they were withholding them.

KINSLEY: Well, that's true. From the left, I'm Mike Kinsley. Happy Labor Day, and good night for Crossfire.

SUNUNU: From the right, I'm John Sununu. Join us again next week for another edition of Crossfire.

KINSLEY: And *PrimeNews* is next. Here's Bernard Shaw to fill us in on what's coming up. Bernie?

BERNARD SHAW, *PrimeNews*: Thank you, Michael. Coming up on *PrimeNews*, President Clinton reaches into Republican ranks for help in the battle over the North American Free Trade Agreement. And as officials from Israel and the PLO, talk of peace, Palestinians and Israelis clash in the Gaza Strip. And a TV reporter describes his bird's eye of view of the beating of Los Angeles truck driver Reginald Denny. Those stories and more just a head.

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