

Transcript

Excerpts of Telephone Interview of John T. Stringer
Conducted by Davis S. Lifton on August 25, 1972

EXCERPT #1:(PGS.4- 7)

Stringer: ...if I remember correctly I had one of my sailors down therewith me and I don't know whether he picked up a camera and began to shoot, or what, but all I know is that this film was seized as it is in there (i.e., in document) by the Secret Service.

Lifton: Well, did they think that he had no right to take such pictures?

Stringer: Well, I don't know when it was seized. I was busy (taking them). He might have been out, (I mean) shooting some (overall)scenes, or something., I don't know. When I shot the pictures. Each of the cassettes, or the film holders, were taken by the Secret Service and we never saw them until after they were developed and printed. I didn't see them take the film or expose it, but (seized film) it was just what was told had been happened.

Lifton: When were you told that this had happened?

Stringer: (Oh,) That night.

Lifton: That night. And was the guy pretty upset over it?

Stringer: No. (Uhuh) There was no one upset over it, as far as I know, no.

Lifton: I was just wondering -- how come they used the word 'seized' when they described it?

Stringer: I don't know. This is a -- seized or taken -- it all means the same.

Lifton: Well, the other rolls of film that they took -- they didn't expose to light.

Stringer: Well there wasn't any other rolls of film.

Lifton: I shouldn't say 'rolls' -- the other cassettes.

Stringer: They were being shot by me and I was there right at the table.

Lifton: I see and you were shooting the rolls.

Stringer: Well, the film holders.

Lifton: And then, you mean, he took film of his own?

Stringer: No, no. This was all government camera and government film.

Lifton: So even he took pictures, they weren't curiosity items. They were par of --

Stringer: No, no. In other words, somebody probably wondered why he was doing it and in the mood of situation, took the camera and took the film. I think it was just one of those things that was an accident because they had free access to the film as soon as it was taken, and they could have taken that then too.

Lifton: Sure. The film was taken for medical-legal purposes, and as a matter of fact, that 120 film apparently was of certain internal portions of the cadaver and Dr. Wecht was concerned that he had testimony --

Stringer: I don't know whether - I don't think there was any internal pictures in there --

Lifton: Well, I'll tell you, Commander Humes took pictures of the bruises at the top of the lung, for example, and the assumption -- now this is maybe an incorrect assumption -- but the assumption Dr. Wecht made was that inasmuch as there were no such pictures in the collection of the top of the lung, that this was the film that had been unwound and exposed to light. This was the film with no image.

Stringer: I don't think that's true.

Lifton: Well that's one o the things he wants to clear up. In other words, it's your impression that this 120 roll of film was taken at the same time as your pictures were being taken.

Stringer: Yes, uh-huh.

Lifton: O.K. Well then that's a different story, but then the question is --

Stringer: In other words, I don't think (remember that this,) there was anything of a (any closeup) nature.

Lifton: There as any what?

Stringer: Of any (closeup nature) of anything that would have had to do with the autopsy actually in other words, what I assume was on that was some overall scenes of the autopsy room.

Lifton: Oh, in other words, in those pictures would simply be scenes of the autopsy room?

Stringer: Right.

Lifton: They were not medical photographs of the cadaver?

Stringer: Right.

Lifton: They were not medical photographs of the cadaver?

Stringer: Not - no. The only ones of the cadaver were the ones taken by me.

Lifton: O.K. So in other words the roll of 120 film, as far as you know, is simply like a man who is there and taking pictures like journalist would take pictures.

Stringer: Right. This is the only think that I can assume.

Lifton: I see. Well let me ask you this: in Dr. Humes' testimony he does say that he did take certain pictures, you know, he specifies, like he took the lung out and took a picture of the lung. Do you remember taking a picture of the lung?

Stringer: Right.

Lifton: Was that with 4 x 5 cassette?

Stringer: Right.

Lifton: O.K. He also took certain pictures of the entry wound at the back of the head, so it could be seen from both the inner and the outer aspect. He testifies that he took those pictures. Were those with 4 x 5 cassettes?

Stringer: Right.

Lifton: You remember taking those?

Stringer: Right.

Lifton: In other words, that was not roll film used for those exposures.

Stringer: Right. Everything was done on 4 x. x 5 5 Kodachrome, well Ektachrome film. (Sounds like veleckachrome)

Lifton: What?

Stringer: I said it was all on 4 x 5 film.

Lifton: 4 x 5 Kodachrome or Ektachrome.

Stringer: Extochrome film.

Lifton: I see, and you did the x-rays too, I guess.

Stringer: No, the x-rays were done by Dr. Ebersole.

Lifton: In other words, you had nothing to do with the x-rays?

Stringer: No, that's right.

Lifton: In other words, you remember taking the pictures of the top of the lung, and you remember taking the pictures of the entry wound, inner and outer table, whatever the doctors call that. (Uh huh) This is the thing where they actually peel back the -- well they try to make the picture of the bone itself -- not just the skull case or -- you know, the close-ups.

Stringer: Yes, we took the close-ups, yes.

Lifton: In other words, the idea that this roll of film had something to do with the special pictures of the internal parts of the cadaver like the lung photos, is an incorrect --

Stringer: Yes, that's what I would say.

EXCERPT #2:(PGS. 9 - 12)

Lifton: Were any bullets taken out of the body in your presence?

Stringer: No.

Lifton: That's what I was wondering. Because they were pretty puzzled that they couldn't find any.

Stringer: I think there were some portions, or slivers, or something.

Lifton: (Yea) O.K. When you lifted him out, was the main damage to the skull on the top or in the back?

Stringer: In the back.

Lifton: In the back? In the back. High in the back or lower in the ack.

Stringer: (Oh,) the occipital part, in the (back) there (GARBLED) up above the neck.

Lifton: In other words, the main part of his head that was blasted away was in the occipital part of the skull?

Stringer: Yes, in the back part.

:Lifton: The back portion. OK. In other words, there as no five-inch hole in the top of his head.

Stringer: (Oh it was ...) Some of it was blown off - yes, I mean - towards out of the top. (In) the back, yes.

Lifton: Top in the back. But the top in the front was pretty intact.

Stringer: Yes, sure.

Lifton. The top front was intact.

Stringer: Right.

Lifton: (I see) Well, I just don't know. Sometimes having assisted in all this research. I am sometimes ready to throw my hands up in confusion. I really am because well, I just don't know. I'm flabbergasted in a way. I don't even know what to ask you next. You know they have photographs of all of this stuff, In other words, when you went into the Archives, that little document what you signed - in other words, when you inventoried it in, it's really not a -- how do I put this subtlety or tactfully - it's really - you really didn't do - what would you call - a questioned document examination. You did a kind of a quick logging in. Am I correct, or did you swear under oath that every single picture you saw there was exactly the way you had seen it that night?

Stringer No, I didn't take any oath.

Lifton: What did you guys check for when you logged it into the Archives in 1966? () In other words, what test did you apply to make darn sure that the stuff that you were logging in was the stuff you exposed the night at the morgue?

Stringer: Well. (I can't tall, I can't), since I didn't use it after it was

developed. I can't actually say that everything was there, or I mean -- all I had was the film holder and shot this, and put in the slide and gave it to somebody, so I mean I didn't -- I don't know just what was the after-effects of it.

Lifton: Did you keep some kind of records of batch numbers of film you used?

Stringer: No, no.

Lifton: You didn't. In other words, you kept no working papers?

Stringer: No, we didn't have any (working) -- I mean this thing came up all of a sudden and we took in the film. We had to get some more film, and they took all the holders.

Lifton: So, it was necessary, you could not provide things like the batch number of the manufacturer, or anything like that?

Stringer: Oh, no, no.

Lifton: In other words, you didn't end up with a file holder full of working papers of any sort?

Lifton: In other words, you didn't end up with a file folder full of working papers of any sort?

Stringer: No. The only thing we got is a copy of a letter from -- saying that they received so many film holders from us, which I think is a part of that - the papers (?).

Lifton: Let me ask you - another way of stating it - this is a god way of stating what I asked you before. [If you lie back in a bath tub, just in a totally prone position and your head rests against the bath tub, is that the part of the head (you know, is that the part of the head) that was damaged?]

Stringer: (Yea.)

Lifton: That part.

Stringer: M-m-m.

Lifton: Back - the part that would be against the tile of the bath tub?

Stringer: (Mm - h-m-m-m)

Lifton: Whereas the part that would be straight up ahead - vertically in that position- was undamaged?

Stringer: (Oh,) I wouldn't say - undamaged - no. There was - some of it was gone - I mean - (out of) some of the bone..

Lifton: (Yeah) I see.