

### **David Kelly's closest female confidante on why he COULDN'T have killed himself**

By Sharon Churcher

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A female confidante of Dr David Kelly raised disturbing new questions last night over how the Ministry of Defence weapons inspector was able to kill himself.

After his body was discovered in woods near his Oxfordshire home in July 2003, a Government inquiry led by Lord Hutton ruled that he committed suicide by slashing his left wrist with a knife and taking an overdose of co-proxamol, a painkiller commonly used for arthritis.

He was said to be anguished about being named as the source of a BBC report, which alleged that Tony Blair 'sexed up' a dossier justifying the invasion of Iraq.



Mystery death: Professor David Kelly appearing at the House of Commons during the Iraq inquiry

But five years after his death at 59, his close friend, American military linguist Mai Pederson, has come forward to dispute this account.

The Hutton inquiry heard that he died after making several cuts to his left wrist, which severed the ulnar artery, buried deep in the tissue on the side of the hand nearest the little finger.

An earlier coroner's inquest was halted when the Government used an obscure law to turn the investigation over to Lord Hutton. His inquiry concluded that 'there was no involvement by a third party' in the scientist's death, which was said to be caused primarily by the cut artery and hastened by the painkillers.

Ms Pederson, a US Air Force officer, met Dr Kelly when she was assigned to work in 1998 as a translator for the UN weapons inspection team in Iraq.

And she revealed in an interview with The Mail on Sunday that, in the months leading to his death, the right-handed scientist was unable to use his right hand for tasks requiring strength because of a painful injury to his right elbow.

According to Ms Pederson, when she dined with Dr Kelly at a Washington restaurant in the spring of 2003, the hand's grip was so weak that he struggled to get a knife through a steak he had ordered.

The linguist, who counselled Dr Kelly during his conversion to the Baha'i religious faith that she follows, says he had begun to favour his left hand for even relatively minor tasks, a tendency she observed on numerous other occasions.



'He couldn't cut a steak': Mai pederson is unconvinced David Kelly took his own life

'David would have had to have been a contortionist to kill himself the way they claim,' she said.

'I don't know whether he was born right-handed but by the time I first met him he favoured his left hand for any task that required strength, like opening a door or carrying his briefcase.

'When he embraced friends at the beginning and end of Baha'i meetings, it was his left arm that you felt hugging you and you could tell his right arm hurt him because he rubbed the elbow a lot.

'I didn't want to pry but he finally told me the reason in the spring of 2003. It was the last time I saw him before he died. He was visiting America on business and we went out to dinner.

'He ordered steak and he was holding his knife very oddly in the palm of his right hand, with his wrist crooked, trying to cut the meat.

'He told me that some time ago he had broken his right elbow and it was never fixed properly, so he had real problems with it. It was painful and it never regained its strength.

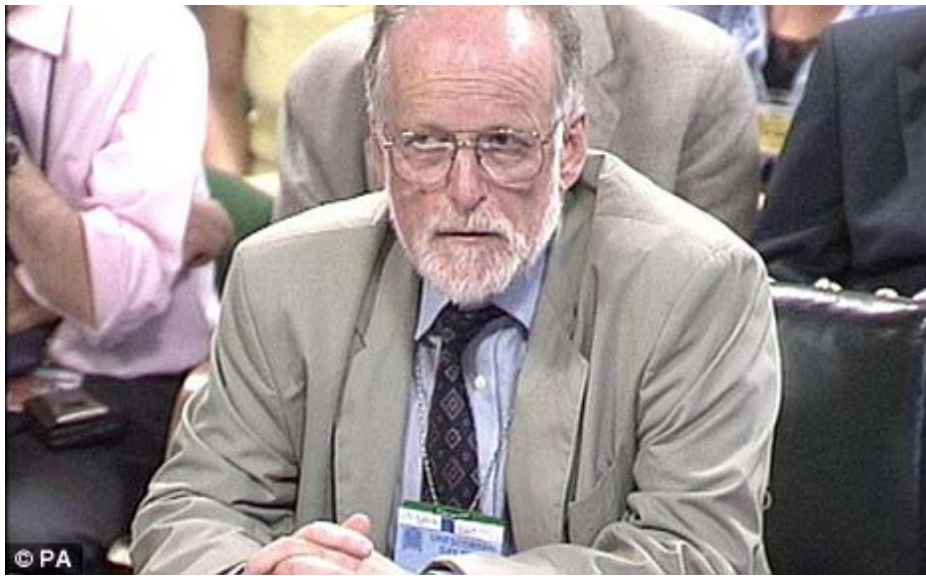
'I just don't see how he could have used his right hand to cut through the nerves and tendons of his left wrist - especially as the knife he supposedly used had a dull blade.'

Ms Pederson said she believed she was familiar with the knife Dr Kelly is said to have used.

'He always wore a Barbour jacket and he kept a knife in his pocket,' she said. 'It had a folding blade and I remember him telling me he couldn't sharpen it because his right hand didn't have the strength to hold a sharpener.

'It would have taken him a long time to reach the artery that was severed and it would have been very painful.

'As a scientist, David had no need to kill himself that way. I don't understand why the British Government isn't thoroughly investigating this. Logically, he cannot have committed suicide.'



David Kelly gave evidence during an inquiry into whether the Government had 'sexed up' the reasons for going to war with Iraq

Ms Pederson, 48, whose military duties have included intelligence assignments, has avoided the spotlight since Dr Kelly's death. But she says she is perturbed by mounting evidence that he may have been murdered.

The Mail on Sunday revealed last week that after his disappearance, a heat-seeking search helicopter flew over the exact spot where his corpse was later discovered. Yet the thermal-imaging equipment picked up no sign of a body – which some experts say suggests he was killed elsewhere.

Moreover, a group of doctors, surgeons and anaesthetists has called for a new inquiry into his death, contending that a cut to the ulnar artery would not cause catastrophic bleeding. Little blood was found at the scene.

They also maintain that the 29 or so painkillers Dr Kelly supposedly swallowed were only one-third of the dosage normally considered as lethal.

Even more mysteriously, there were no fingerprints on the knife he allegedly wielded nor on the bottle from which he supposedly drank water to wash down the tablets.

But perhaps most key is the information that Ms Pederson provided to Thames Valley Police, who were assisting the Hutton inquiry.

When officers flew to meet her in America in August 2003, she says she told them during two days of interviews that she was baffled about how Dr Kelly could have killed himself.

'The facts just don't add up,' said Ms Pederson. 'The more I have heard about this, the more I have thought about the significance of his weak right hand. I told the police about it when they interviewed me. I said, "How could David have cut his left wrist using a dull knife with his weak right hand?"'

'They said, "It wasn't a straight cut. It was jagged."

'When I heard nothing more about it, I assumed they had come to an informed decision - that it was suicide. But now, knowing all that we do, I feel it is time for a disinterested public inquiry.'



### Copies of the Hutton report into the events surrounding Dr Kelly's death

Ms Pederson has been one of the more elusive figures in the mystery of Dr Kelly's death. There have been rumours that she might have been romantically involved with the married scientist.

However, the vivacious brunette strongly denied this in a previous interview with *The Mail on Sunday*, pointing out that both her religion and military rules prohibit adultery.

Ms Pederson, who is fluent in Arabic, German and French, met Dr Kelly when she was seconded to the UN team in Iraq as a translator. In the tense atmosphere, she developed a close bond with him. They had long conversations about her devout beliefs in the ecumenical teachings of the Baha'i faith, to which he converted a year later.

She recalled: 'He was like my big brother. I was the only linguist on the team and I would work until 11 or 11.30 at night and then go for a walk to get rid of the stress and the pressure. Other team members would walk with me but eventually it was mostly David because of his British passion for his daily constitutional.

'The only time it was safe to talk about anything important was when we were walking. At our hotel, the Iraqis monitored us. The only place to change our underwear and not be filmed by their surveillance equipment was behind the shower curtains in our rooms.

'The desk clerk at the hotel constantly called me, saying he was enamoured by me. I later discovered he was a lieutenant in the Iraqi military and I think it was a clumsy effort to elicit information from me.

'One night, a group of us were out walking and suddenly a red laser shone out. It went from David's heart to his head and it pretty much stayed on the middle of his forehead.

'The inspectors said it happened all the time. The idea was to intimidate David, showing they could pick him out as a target even in the dark.'



The family of David Kelly were 'deeply disappointed' at the findings of the Hutton Inquiry and its failure to criticise the Government

Enraged, Ms Pederson insisted that the Russian inspector heading the team complain to General Amer Al-Saadi, Saddam Hussein's British-educated weapons adviser.

'The general said it was children playing,' she said derisively. 'The other thing that bothered me was that key people on the team were constantly getting sick.

'The symptoms were very similar to anthrax. We joked that they were poisoning us so we couldn't finish our job. David pretty much lived on Vegemite and bread.'

After Ms Pederson returned to America, she was stationed at the Defence Language Institute in California. It has been described as a spy school but she says she worked as a personnel officer. The US Air Force often sent her on assignments that required a linguist, which she is not permitted to discuss.

She met Dr Kelly again after she was transferred to the Pentagon. 'It was October 2002 and he was visiting Washington,' she said. 'He told me that the Iraqis had drawn up a hit list of people to be killed.

'He said, "I am number three and you also are on it." At the time, it didn't really bother either of us. We understood there was a danger because of our jobs.

'He also told me that if we invaded Iraq, he would be found dead in the woods. He loved to walk in the woods near his home. But he knew that walking alone made him vulnerable. The Iraqis wanted him dead.'

In May 2003, journalist Andrew Gilligan reported on BBC Radio 4's Today programme that a source had disclosed that the Blair administration had 'sexed up' the dossier, accusing Saddam of harbouring weapons of mass destruction.



Opinion: David Kelly spoke in a BBC interview about the cause for war against Iraq

Dr Kelly was subsequently named as the source and the Hutton inquiry concluded that this plunged him into depression

Ms Pederson concedes that he was 'upset' by the episode but says that he brushed it off, insisting he had been misquoted.

And far from being opposed to the Government's dossier, she says he was convinced that Saddam lied when he told the UN that he was no longer developing WMDs.

She said: 'David believed the Iraqis were not being forthcoming during our inspections about their potential for making weapons. If they weren't up to anything, why did we have to be accompanied by minders? And why were people scared to talk to us?'

'David's position on the invasion was that it was regrettable but necessary because UN sanctions had failed. He said he was misquoted and his words were twisted and taken out of context.'

'He wasn't depressed. He was upset. I have taken courses on suicide prevention and he exhibited none of the signs.'

'He was planning for his retirement. He wanted to make more money to provide for his family and he'd had job offers in the States as well as Europe. Also, he was excited that one of his daughters was getting married. He said, "The controversy will blow over." '

Ms Pederson claims that at the time of his death, Dr Kelly was looking forward to returning to Iraq. 'Had he been alive, he finally would have been free to look for evidence of WMDs,' she said. 'If anyone could have found them, it would have been David.'

'I am not saying that the Iraqis killed him. But that is one possibility that should be investigated. All the facts suggest that David did not kill himself. It is against our Baha'i faith.'

‘But for David there were also personal reasons - he believed his mother’s death was suicide. Research shows that suicide runs in families and I asked him if he would ever do that. I said, “Hypothetically, if you are ever at your wit’s end, promise me that you will seek help.”

‘He said, “I don’t see the relevance. I would never take any life, let alone my own.” He finally did say that if he was ever desperate, he would get help. That’s important because he was a man of his word. He could never hurt his wife and daughters the way that he was hurt by his mother’s death.’

Ms Pederson’s Washington DC lawyer, Mark Zaid, has made available to The Mail on Sunday parts of her final statement to Thames Valley Police, given on September 1, 2003.



A red rose lies on the David Kelly's grave. But the story behind his death is not yet ready to rest in peace

Its ten pages would appear critical, since they describe Iraqi death threats and the incident with the laser. She also stated that she was bewildered about how Dr Kelly could have taken an overdose, as he suffered from a disorder that made it difficult for him to swallow pills.

‘I was so confused when I heard he had swallowed a load of painkillers,’ she told the officers.

She also emphasised in the statement that he suffered from pain and problems ‘grabbing things with his right hand, which he attributed to breaking his elbow’.

Police have implied that she did not give them permission to give her statement to the Hutton inquiry. But in fact she stipulated: ‘If specific information [in the statement] is deemed relevant to the coroner’s inquiry into the death of David Kelly, I am willing for Thames Valley to reveal the information in a non-attributable way.’

However, her statement was never given to the inquiry. The then Assistant Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police, Michael Page, testified that it ‘contained nothing of relevance’.

After the inquiry, Ms Pederson started to get death threats. ‘Some were from nuts,’ she said. But others, she believes, may have been related to her sensitive work with Dr Kelly in Iraq. And she spoke on condition that we do not reveal her whereabouts.


‘I can’t say for sure that David was murdered,’ she said. ‘But his life had been threatened because he strived to do what was best for humanity.’

‘He deserved more from his country than an investigation that overlooked the fact that his right hand was so weak that he had problems cutting a piece of steak.’

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