

July 20, 2003, Sunday

**SECTION:** Features, News; 13

**LENGTH:** 4525 words

**HEADLINE:** Betrayed

**BYLINE:** Nicholas Rufford

**BODY:**

Dr David Kelly always wanted to do the right thing. He spoke to journalists and was not afraid to admit it. But politicians and BBC powerbrokers failed him. Nicholas Rufford reports on the tragedy of a personal friend.

The David Kelly waiting for me in the driveway of his Oxfordshire home 10 days ago was not his normal self. Gone were the usual smile and firm handshake. Worried and drawn, he stood there awkwardly.

"I have been told by the MoD (Ministry of Defence) not to say anything," he said.

I asked him why.

"I think you already know." He looked sheepish.

A few days earlier I had suggested to him that he was the "mole" who had sparked a report on the BBC that the government had "sexed up" intelligence on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction to help to sell the war to a reluctant public. He had denied it, but now his face was an open confession. He looked pale and his clothes hung baggily off his normally sprightly frame.

"It has been a very difficult time, as you can imagine," he murmured.

Difficult indeed. Honest and decent, Kelly was no peacenik or whistleblower. He knew that Saddam Hussein had for many years pursued terrible weapons and he had had a key role in compiling one of the government's dossiers about them.

However, even the meticulous scientist, he felt it had exaggerated some aspects in its presentation. When invited by the BBC's Andrew Gilligan to comment on the dossier, he had done so in confidence and soberly; he was not a man to use words like "sexed up".

When Gilligan's subsequent report had provoked open warfare between the BBC and Downing Street - a clash of behemoths that went to the heart of a greater issue - had the prime minister taken this country to war on false pretences? - Kelly had privately confessed his role to the Ministry of Defence.

As we stood there in his driveway in the evening sunshine, I asked Kelly how the MoD had treated him.

"For the record? They have been quite good about it." Then he added, "But I feel as though I have been through the wringer."

His ordeal was about to become far worse. He had just received a call from the MoD press office telling him that his name was about to be made public. He was going to be the fall guy in the most furious political row to erupt since the Blair government came to power. He had been betrayed by those he thought he could trust.

"How did they know?" I asked.

"They wouldn't say. They just said it was going to be in tomorrow's papers."

"Who do you suspect leaked your name?"

"I don't know. I was told the whole thing would be confidential."

MED 13/0004

Next day he was thrust unprepared into the full glare of media attention and public cross-examination by his masters in Whitehall - and left twisting in the wind by the mandarins of the BBC.

To them, perhaps, Kelly was merely a pawn in the cut and thrust of politics. Tony Blair had his eyes on the grand sweep of history, not the petty details of a dossier. Alastair Campbell, Blair's communications director, in his brutally pedantic way was set on vindication. The BBC was too self-obsessed to send a lifeline to an outsider.

Within days they would all have blood on their hands as far as the public was concerned - their bullying and arrogance having led to the tragic suicide of an honourable man.

Kelly was a weapons inspector, a job he relished. He saw it as a welcome escape from academia, preferring desert action to dusty books in libraries. He had been a microbiologist at Oxford University before he moved to Porton Down, Britain's main bioweapons establishment. At the end of the Gulf war in 1991 he was quickly seconded to the United Nations team of inspectors tasked with stripping Saddam of his weapons of mass destruction. He took to it with gusto. He made 37 trips to Iraq over seven years until the inspectors were recalled from Iraq after Saddam withdrew his co-operation.

Over those years Kelly combed former bioweapons manufacturing plants and interviewed dozens of Saddam's officials and military officers involved in Iraq's weapons programmes. He kept meticulous notes and detailed files.

He had access to the world of top secret intelligence. He knew and had spoken to all of Saddam's senior scientific advisers. They were clever men and women but Kelly had their measure and almost always knew when they were lying or covering up the truth.

When General Amer al-Saadi, Saddam's chief scientific adviser, dramatically surrendered to the American forces in Baghdad at the end of the second Gulf war, Kelly was called on to identify him and help to prepare his interrogation.

"He was the man who advised Saddam on what he could get away with," he said. "He knew where all the bodies were buried."

Gradually, so did Kelly. His reports for the UN detailed types and strains of micro-organisms, numbers of shells and aerial bombs filled with botulinum toxin, manufacturers of equipment used for the production of bioweapons material, gallons of growth medium acquired by Iraqi scientists and which countries had sold the material.

Although he had office 2/35 in the Proliferation and Arms Control Secretariat in London, he kept most of his papers and archive material in his study at home.

He would gently lift one of his cats off a pile of paper and dig around for a few seconds before producing with a flourish an obscure document that would give him the precise answer he wanted.

Most of the important material was on his desktop computer, including hundreds of photographs he had taken of weapons factories, Iraqi officials and milk-churn filling machines that had been adapted by the Iraqis to load shell casings with bioweapons.

Even in the summer when his garden was in bloom, he never forgot that in the deserts around Baghdad Saddam's scientists were using their knowledge to create terrifying weapons.

"I sometimes feel locked in a battle of minds," he once said. "They are clever and I have to be cleverer."

Perhaps as a reaction - although some thought it unusual for a man so sceptical and rigorous - he had come to believe in a better world and had adopted the Baha'i religion, which seeks international understanding and reconciliation.

This was the complex man who was assigned early last year to help to prepare a government dossier on Iraq.

Downing Street asked the joint intelligence committee (JIC) for a properly researched, comprehensive analysis of Iraq's weapons capabilities. Kelly was asked to prepare a report on what weapons and what weapons-making equipment or materials Iraq could still be hiding.

"My involvement was writing a historical account of the Unscop inspections and providing input into Iraq's concealment and deception," Kelly told the Commons foreign affairs select committee last week, two days before he killed himself.

MED/3/0005

He said that he submitted his work long before the final version of the dossier was published in September and was "not involved at all" in any revisions. In fact he was on leave or working abroad when the final drafting was taking place.

That document was unique. As Blair boasted, no government had ever before published such a detailed intelligence assessment. It pushed Kelly's work into a new dimension, however. His careful, scientific contribution was in a dossier designed for propaganda. And when the propaganda was eventually exposed, Kelly would be the casualty.

ANDREW GILLIGAN, a portly, balding reporter in his thirties, is known as utterly single-minded in the pursuit of a story. Four years ago he was recruited by BBC Radio 4's Today programme, which hoped to bring an edge to its journalism by breaking news rather than just commenting on it.

Gilligan went undercover to buy anti-personnel landmines, he exposed how easy it was to use dead people's postal votes and obtained a series of leaked MoD reports about Britain's performance in the Kosovo war.

Kevin Marsh, Today's editor, gave him freedom to "cause trouble" and raise the programme's profile with controversial stories.

Like other journalists, Gilligan knew that when handling a story on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD), Kelly was the expert to turn to. Despite his duty of confidentiality to the MoD, Kelly had a mission to explain. Gilligan met him in September last year and spoke to him on several occasions subsequently by telephone.

As the question of Iraq's WMD - or lack of them - grew more intriguing after the Iraq war, Kelly was an obvious port of call in building up a story. Gilligan arranged to meet him at the Charing Cross hotel in central London on May 22.

They chatted in the hotel bar. "My conversation with him was primarily about Iraq - the consequences of the war, which was the failure to use weapons of mass destruction during the war and the failure by May 22 to find such weapons," Kelly told the foreign affairs select committee last week.

Crucially, they also discussed the claim in Blair's dossier that Iraq had possessed chemical weapons capable of being used at 45 minutes' notice. They talked, Kelly told MPs, of why that claim might have been in the dossier. The name of Campbell came into the conversation, Kelly admitted.

A few days later Donald Rumsfeld, the American secretary of defence, made the startling admission that weapons of mass destruction might never be found in Iraq.

The topic was suddenly hot again.

This triggered an on-air discussion on Today between Gilligan and John Humphrys, the presenter. It was the moment of detonation in the government-BBC row.

Gilligan claimed that a British official involved in the preparation of the WMD dossier had said that the original draft had been bland, "Downing Street" had ordered it to be "sexed up".

In the ensuing uproar, Gilligan broadened the charges against Downing Street. He wrote a newspaper article claiming that a source had told him the dossier was "transformed in the week before publication, to make it sexier". As an example of this, he cited the claims that chemical weapons could be ready at 45 minutes' notice.

Gilligan wrote that his source had named the person responsible for this transformation: Campbell.

There was apoplexy in Downing Street - and, although the charge had been made in a newspaper, Today became the target for revenge. War was declared.

John Reid, the cabinet bruiser, went on the programme, attempted to savage Humphrys and accused "rogue elements" in the security services of trying to undermine the government. Blair's spokesman at No10 attacked Today, claiming Gilligan's report was pitted with errors. MPs were agog as government yes men queued up to go on the airwaves to bludgeon the BBC.

The foreign affairs select committee summoned Gilligan to explain himself and sought to interview Blair and Campbell, too, as part of an investigation into the use of intelligence before the war.

ME013/0006

Blair refused to attend, but as the row grew - and the BBC seemed to be gaining the upper hand - Campbell appeared before the committee on June 25, his defiance in full flow

Gilligan had lied, he thundered. He jabbed the air and belligerently demanded a correction and an apology from the BBC. Two days later he became so agitated that he stormed unannounced on to Channel 4 News to make his point. Some observers feared for his state of mind

In the secret reaches of Whitehall, the hunt for the mole was well under way.

Within the MoD the mood was uncompromising. According to an insider, the decision was taken that if the mole was unearthed, he would be named and held up to public scrutiny. There would be no mercy.

Kelly was in Iraq, but when he returned in late June he soon became aware of the evidence that Gilligan had given to the select committee

The BBC reporter had made it clear that he had one key source for his report that the September dossier was "sexed up". Although this was not his language, Kelly became convinced that he was the figure Gilligan was talking about.

He was a senior official who had contributed to the dossier - just as Gilligan had described his source. Although Kelly felt the evidence in the dossier had been largely accurate in its wording, he did feel it had been oversold in its presentation and emphasis.

To cap it all, Kelly recognised a line in Gilligan's evidence to the committee: he said his source had told him there was a 30% chance of Iraq possessing chemical weapons in the six months before the war started. This was precisely what Kelly had told the reporter.

According to Adam Ingram, the armed forces minister, one of Kelly's colleagues also noted that he had been expressing similar views to those aired by Gilligan.

There was a problem, however while Kelly fitted the picture, he did not recall going as far as Gilligan claimed his source had gone. Nor did he recall, he later told MPs, directly blaming Campbell for sexing up the dossier.

KELLY is described by Scott Ritter, the American former weapons inspector, as "an intensely moral man". It is a description that fits Kelly's decision to clear the air.

On June 30, Kelly sent a note informing the MoD that he had spoken to Gilligan shortly before the disputed reports. He believed the matter could be resolved quietly.

Kelly "squared his conscience and said to his line manager that he may have been the source", Ingram commented last week. The news went up the food chain and by Thursday July 3 it had reached Kevin Tebbit, permanent secretary at the MoD. He promptly informed Geoff Hoon, the defence secretary.

Hoon took charge but it is inconceivable that the information did not pass swiftly on to Downing Street. Campbell, Hoon and others sensed a coup. Their eyes were not on precisely what role Kelly may have played in the affair, but on one simple objective: blowing the BBC out of the water.

The next day Kelly was hauled in and grilled by his line manager and the director of personnel at the MoD. That weekend he was due back in Iraq to work with the Iraq Survey Group in the hunt for weapons of mass destruction, the job he loved.

Instead he was ordered to stay in Britain and summoned back to the MoD on the following Monday for further interviews.

The MoD denies he was pressurised, and it specifically rebuts persistent rumours that threats were made to tamper with his pension or prosecute him under the Official Secrets Act unless he agreed to go public in demolishing Gilligan's claims.

This chimes with Kelly's own statement to me that the MoD "had been quite good about it". But the ministry was preparing to do something that would, ultimately, still be devastating for a man who had never sought the spotlight.

On Tuesday July 8 it issued a disingenuous statement revealing that a civil servant had confessed to an unauthorised

MED/3/0007

meeting with Gilligan. It did not name the man but said he was an expert in WMD.

That day, too, Hoon wrote to Gavyn Davies, the chairman of the BBC, asking him to confirm that Kelly was Gilligan's source

For the first time a specific name had been put to Gilligan's mole; but the BBC neither admitted Kelly was the source nor protected him by denying it.

Now came the most cynical betrayal of Kelly Downing Street and the MoD deny that Campbell or Hoon leaked Kelly's name to the media, having failed to force an admission from the BBC This is a fig leaf

By releasing its vague description of Kelly, the MoD had already set a hare running Information was leaked to journalists in Westminster, particularly those close to Campbell.

At a Downing Street briefing for political journalists on July 9, a spokesman gave more detailed information that pointed at Kelly.

The official note of the briefing has Blair's spokesman saying that the suspected mole "did not work for the MoD but was a technical expert who had worked for a variety of departments, including the MoD, with whom he was currently working His salary was paid by another department".

The note continues. "The nature of his work meant that he was more of a consultant than a secondee."

For journalists familiar with Kelly it was not difficult to confirm his identity by a process of elimination When they rang the MoD and suggested he was the mole, the department confirmed it It was highly unusual; normally the department would not comment on such an official

None of this would have happened, said one senior government official, without the instigation or approval of Campbell Kelly had been hung out to dry.

That night, when Kelly told me he would be named in various papers the following day, I asked if the MoD had offered him any help to cope with being thrust into the spotlight

Had the ministry advised him to stay with his family in a hotel until the hubbub died down, counselled him in how to handle media calls, offered to send someone from the press office to deal with camera crews arriving at his house? He was offered nothing, and was simply told "not to talk to the press".

"I think they expect me to deal with it myself," he told me

FOR years Kelly had stared down some of Saddam's cruellest toughs But he was now involved in a form of combat he did not fully understand.

As a man who felt it was his duty to get things right, he readily agreed to appear when the MPs of the foreign affairs select committee summoned him to explain himself The cross-examination was set for last Tuesday

Kelly was clearly a man under pressure as he walked into the House of Commons in his light-coloured suit, his eyes tired and worried behind his large glasses

He went prepared to educate and explain. But this was an inquisition, not an exposition. Kelly faced a barrage of questions rather than simply setting out in academic fashion, as he might have preferred, what he saw was the evidence. The questions darted here and there. The MPs seemed unsure of their ground or the intricacies of events

As usual, he spoke quietly. He was urged to speak up The MPs even turned the air-conditioning off so that everyone could hear him

Kelly weighed his answers and replied as best he could But it was evident there was still a gap between what he said he had told Gilligan and what the reporter had broadcast on the BBC and written in his newspaper article

On the face of it there were several possibilities: that Kelly was rowing back from what he had said; that Gilligan had exaggerated; or that another person was in fact the real source The MPs latched on to the last idea.

They asked Kelly if, on the basis of what Gilligan had said on Today, he could be the source Kelly said no It was a

ME D/3/0008

truthful, logical answer. he had not said all that Gilligan had reported.

However, the MPs never broached the possibility that Kelly was indeed the source and that his views had become exaggerated - "sexed up" even - by the time Gilligan made his broadcast

Instead the MPs branded Kelly as "chaff" and a "fall guy" He left the inquisition tired and dispirited.

There are insistent reports, again denied by the MoD, that there had been an ulterior motive behind this grilling - that Kelly was supposed to confess publicly to being the mole but accuse Gilligan and the BBC of exaggeration. The committee had been promised a victim, according to this theory and the government would get its revenge on the BBC If this was true, it certainly failed as a strategy

The power struggle raged The BBC maintained its lofty silence. Downing Street still insisted it was in the right and on the day of Kelly's evidence, Blair held a small party in the rose garden behind No10

It was a jolly affair and Campbell, who believed he was winning his battle with the BBC, appeared on the balcony brandishing a set of bagpipes If they worried about what might happen to Kelly, nobody showed it

The next day, Wednesday, Ingram implied that Kelly's career was at stake. On the Today programme, he said that the BBC should come clean if Kelly was not Gilligan's source and say so

"Hopefully that would allow Dr Kelly to carry on with his career at the MoD," he added. What could this mean other than that he risked the sack?

Whether Kelly heard that comment is not known. But by then he was already fearful of losing the job he loved

The same day he faced another grilling, in private, from the Commons intelligence and security committee. By the time he returned to his home in Southmoor, Oxfordshire, he was, his wife Janice said later, stressed, physically sick and very, very angry

He had tried to do the right thing and had been chewed up and spat out

THURSDAY July 17 was a momentous day in the life of Blair's government. In America, Congress was preparing to hear him speak at a joint session of its two houses, an honour accorded to only three other British prime ministers

In London, parliament was rising with a sense of utter relief and exhaustion after one of the most divisive and bad-tempered sessions since new Labour came to power.

In Oxfordshire, Kelly was preparing to kill himself

That morning he had much to consider Had he told the whole truth to the foreign affairs select committee? Was he a "fall guy"? Had the MoD and BBC callously abandoned him? Had the government exaggerated the threat of Iraq? What was his future?

To all appearances he was as diligent as usual. He worked, his wife said, on a report that he owed to the Foreign Office. Then he sent some e-mails. One to a journalist he knew said he was waiting "until the end of the week" before taking stock of his position. But it also referred to "many dark actors playing games"

He had lunch and at about 3pm went out for a walk "as he usually does," said his wife

A while later he was seen in a lane near his house and appeared to smile as usual at a passer-by But what was going on inside that tired, angry and brilliant mind? Nobody really knows. Guilt? Disillusion? Desperation? Or even a desire for peace?

Among the writings of the Baha'i religion is the view that "the wise man does not attach himself to this mortal life and does not depend upon it; even at some moments he eagerly wishes death that he may thereby be freed from these sorrows and afflictions".

By midnight he had not returned home and his family had contacted the police At about 9 20am the next day a police searcher found his lifeless body lying face down in a field near some woodland

He had taken some painkillers and had slit his left wrist before lying down to die in the peace of the English

MED 3/0009

countryside.

The war had claimed a tragic casualty: after years of jousting with Saddam and his officials, Kelly was a victim of warring parties who were British

His family were devastated I learnt the news in a telephone call and felt numb that such a decent man, such a helpful friend, had felt that he had no other way out

The shockwaves spread rapidly. Campbell was on his way back to Britain from America. When he heard of Kelly's death, his friends claim that he "felt sick" but he made no statement or apology. Instead he disappeared inside his home.

Blair, on a jet flying towards Japan on the next leg of his international tour, was told the news by satellite phone.

He was instantly aware of the political embarrassment a man pursued by Campbell, his close aide, had committed suicide. He immediately rang close advisers, including Hoon and Lord Falconer, his old friend and now Lord Chancellor. As the plane landed in Tokyo, his spokesman announced that there would be a judicial inquiry - since downgraded into a less far-reaching "inquiry by a judge" - and expressed Blair's distress and sorrow at the death.

On Friday morning Greg Dyke, director-general of the BBC, was winding down after a busy week and looking forward to attending the first night of the Proms at the Albert Hall in London.

When he learnt that Kelly was missing, Dyke called Richard Sambrook, head of BBC News and apparently the only person other than Gilligan to know the name of his "sexed up" source. After Kelly was confirmed dead, Dyke held a meeting with Sambrook and then called Gavyn Davies, chairman of the BBC governors.

In the row with Downing Street the public had been largely supportive of the BBC.

Now it looked as if the corporation's refusal to own up to Gilligan's source, even when Kelly was identified, had contributed to the scientist's death. Had they sacrificed an innocent man for the sake of "a story" and the BBC's reputation for accurate reporting?

The BBC issued a brief statement of sympathy, then ordered a blanket ban on its staff discussing the Kelly affair. Gilligan was first closeted inside BBC Television Centre and then whisked home without a word in a chauffeur-driven Mercedes accompanied by a minder.

Dyke had to ponder several questions, including whether the BBC should own up and admit the name of Gilligan's source. He arrived late that evening for a party he had been due to host at the Proms, where the BBC had two rows of seats in the stalls. Insiders say he was in a bullish mood and the music was largely ignored as everyone discussed "the Kelly affair".

The BBC, they felt, had acted properly. It had rightly held a debate about the causes of the war. They talked about whether to name Kelly if he was Gilligan's source.

Yesterday the corporation's governors were still giving Dyke, Sambrook and Gilligan their full support. "We don't think the BBC should name its source," said one governor.

However, not all BBC listeners and viewers - or indeed its staff - were so sanguine. Andrew Marr, its political editor, conceded that it had some tricky questions to answer. In the letters and e-mails slot of the Today programme yesterday, listeners made their feelings known.

One accused the BBC of being "biased and defensive in its own propaganda in defence of Gilligan". One was far more blunt. It said "Gilligan, Sambrook and the BBC governors now have blood on their hands."

THE speed with which Blair announced an inquiry into Kelly's death left his officials running to catch up. Initial indications are that it will focus narrowly on whether any decisions within the MoD may have played a part in Kelly's death.

The inquiry is to be headed by Lord Hutton, 72, the sixth most senior law lord, reflecting the seriousness with which the government views the affair.

The intention is for a swift investigation, perhaps lasting no more than six weeks. But yesterday Iain Duncan Smith,

MED/3/0010

the Tory leader, called for a far wider inquiry into how the government had presented its case for war against Iraq

These are important questions. But for the friends and family of Kelly there are other matters. Was Kelly pursued and used unjustly by Downing Street and the MoD? Did Gilligan and the BBC treat him fairly? Will any of those people ever be as honourable as a man who saw no way out but death?

Editorial, page 18

Day that changed everything David Cracknell, page 18

Additional reporting: David Cracknell, Jonathon Carr-Brown, and Gareth Walsh

**LOAD-DATE:** July 21, 2003

Your use of this service is governed by [Terms and Conditions](#) Please review them.  
[Copyright](#) ©2003 [LexisNexis Group](#) a division of Reed Elsevier (UK) Ltd All rights reserved.

MED | 3 | 00 | 11