



Editorial Complaints Unit

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Dear Mr Mallett

The Conspiracy Files: 9/11 Ten Years On, BBC2, 29 August 2011

I am now able to let you know the outcome of my investigation into your complaint about **The Conspiracy Files: 9/11 Ten Years On**. I have watched the programme, taken account of the programme-makers' response to the points you have made and carried out additional research into the events of 9/11. I have considered your various points of complaint against the BBC's Editorial Guidelines, as set out in my letter of 24 February.

I have amended my original summary to take account of the changes you suggested in your emails of 27 February. Once again, to avoid any doubt, I have only considered issues raised by the content of this specific programme and not your broader concerns about the BBC's overall coverage of 9/11.

- 1. The explanation and analysis of the collapse of World Trade Centre Tower 7 (WTC7) failed to report that it collapsed in free fall and that this could only have occurred if the tower was brought down in a controlled demolition using explosives.**

The programme devoted a significant amount of time to considering the latest evidence, as put forward by Professor Niels Harrit, that the collapse of WTC7 was the result of a controlled demolition. The programme initially summarised his theory as follows:

Now a new theory has evolved about a third huge skyscraper that was destroyed on 9/11. But this one was not hit by a plane. World Trade Centre 7 has become the focus for conspiracy theories. The New York City command centre for civil emergencies was based here. The Secret Service, Pentagon and the CIA all had offices in the building. Some argue that's just too suspicious. The official explanation is that it collapsed

because of uncontrolled fires which burnt for seven hours. But if that is the case this is the first time a steel framed skyscraper has collapsed because of fire.

The programme then introduced Professor Harrit as follows:

Narrator: Now a retired Danish chemistry professor thinks he has discovered the smoking gun that will unlock the biggest conspiracy ever perpetrated.

Niels Harrit: There were three high rises but there are only two airliners. Now you don't have to a PhD in physics to count to three, OK? So what happened to Building 7, what was roughly a little less than half the height of the Twin Towers? It collapsed on its own seven hours after the north tower and the way it came down indicates that it was a controlled demolition. There is no way a steel framed high riser can come down due to fire.

The programme explained that the collapse of WTC7 appears similar to buildings brought down by controlled demolition, and showed footage which demonstrated the similarity; it revealed that Professor Harrit has worked with Professor Steven Jones analysing dust found in downtown Manhattan; and it said that Professor Harrit “*thinks there's evidence that tonnes of thermite were planted in the World Trade Centre buildings. And that both incendiaries and explosives were used*”.

The programme then went on to include a section of the interview conducted with Professor Harrit in which he explained his theory in more detail and explained that the paper¹ he had written had been well received by his peers:

Niels Harrit: When you heat the chips up they take off, they react, I would not call it an explosion. We do not know but they react violently and show all the characteristics of thermite reaction.

Interviewer: And what has been the reaction of scientists to your conclusions?

Niels Harrit: None. None. It is beyond doubt the best peer reviewed paper ever in my career. I would like to know how many times it had been downloaded, how many people have actually read it. Nobody has challenged its conclusions.

That seems to me to be a full and fair reflection of the theory which Professor Harrit and others have put forward; namely that the presence of thermite particles in dust samples taken from the site indicates that explosives and incendiary devices were used. Viewers would have been in no doubt that members of the truth movement believe this supports the view that the towers were brought down by controlled explosions.

I appreciate that you think it was important to explain that the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) has acknowledged in its most recent report on the collapse of WTC7² that the building fell briefly at free fall. I have understood you to say that this is relevant because it shows that “*Scientifically WTC7 had to have been brought down in a controlled demolition*”.³ I am also assuming that you believe the fact a spokesperson for NIST had

¹ <http://www.benthamscience.com/open/tocpj/articles/V002/7TOCPJ.pdf>

² http://www.nist.gov/customcf/get_pdf.cfm?pub_id=861610 (NCSTAR 1A)

³ Your letter 16 February

previously denied that WTC7 collapsed at free fall is evidence that the authorities were attempting to cover up this fact.

I take your point that the question of whether or not the building collapsed at free fall is an important element in considering whether or not it was brought down by a controlled demolition. In an ideal world where the duration of a programme was not an issue, I can see that it would have added to the audience's understanding and awareness of what various parties say happened if this aspect of debate had been included. It is also arguable that it would have lent weight to the theory expounded by Professor Harrit.

However, I am not persuaded that the omission of this aspect would have given a materially misleading impression or led to a lack of the necessary due impartiality. As I have explained above, the programme considered the theory that WTC7 was brought down by controlled explosion and allowed Professor Harrit to explain his thinking in some detail. Viewers would have been in no doubt that there are those who believe WTC7 (and the Twin Towers) were demolished by explosives. As you may recall, the programme had previously reported the theory that the Twin Towers (WTC1 and 2) were brought down in this way, using footage from Dylan Avery's Loose Change documentary:

His film sets out the central conspiracy theory that the World Trade Centre Twin Towers collapsed not because of fire - but because they were rigged with explosives.

It also reported that people said they had heard explosions going off:

Reports of loud bangs and the sudden collapse of the buildings are taken as proof of explosives.

I also think that if the programme had called into question the NIST findings in the manner you suggest, it would have been necessary to explain in more detail exactly what the NIST report said. As I am sure you are aware, the final report published in November 2008 said there were three stages to the collapse of WTC7 (pages 44-46);

- *In stage 1, the descent was slow and the acceleration was less than that of gravity*
- *In Stage 2, the north face descended at gravitational acceleration*
- *In Stage 3, the acceleration decreased somewhat*

This appears to suggest that NIST believes the building only collapsed at free fall for a proportion of the time it took to come down. Furthermore, NIST considered whether the building could have been brought down by explosives and concluded:

...there was no demolition type blast that would have been intense enough to lead to the collapse of WTC7 on September 11, 2001.

I therefore cannot conclude that the omission of any reference to the finding of the NIST report on WTC7 led to a breach of editorial standards.

- 2. The programme said “If a large passenger jet crashed into the Pentagon why was the hole in the exterior wall apparently so small?” This was designed to cast doubt on the claim and was evidence of bias.**

I take your point that some viewers might have understood the use of the word “apparently” to suggest that the hole in the Pentagon wall was not the size that it appeared to be. However, I

cannot conclude that this was evidence of bias against those who dispute the official version of events or that the audience would have been given a misleading impression by the information and contributions that followed. The sentence in question has to be considered in context. It was part of the introduction to the programme in which the voice-over established that there are numerous theories about what happened on 9/11, intercut with brief clips from various contributors:

There are a multitude of different conspiracy theories about 9/11. And the internet has given them a reach and a life as never before... Ten years on the questions keep coming... If a large passenger jet crashed into the Pentagon why was the hole in the exterior wall apparently so small? ... Could a controlled demolition have caused this building to collapse at the World Trade Centre? ... Without a photograph where's the proof that the US military killed Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan? ... So why do so many people doubt what the American government tells them about 9/11?

I think it is clear that the presenter was summarising some of the concerns voiced by those who dispute the official version of events and so I cannot conclude that this can be considered as evidence of bias.

3. The programme did not question why evidence from the Twin Towers was not preserved and why standard investigation procedure was not followed.

Programme-makers have to make an editorial judgement as to what elements to include in a documentary of this kind. I don't think it is reasonable or realistic to expect every aspect of all the various conspiracy theories about 9/11 to be included in an hour-long documentary.

As you may be aware, the Editorial Standards Committee of the BBC Trust carried out a review of the version of this programme which was broadcast in 2007 and concluded that it reflected the mainstream theories about the events leading up to 9 September 2001, what happened on the day itself and what took place in the days that followed. The Committee recognised that some viewers might not agree with the choice of theories which were included but it was satisfied that the theories covered in the programme were sufficient to provide the audience with enough relevant information for them to draw their own conclusions with regard to the activities of the US government in the incidents related to 9/11. The re-edited programme took a similar approach to the original but removed a theory about the Jewish community and extended the section on the collapse of WTC7. I therefore think it is reasonable to conclude that the approach of the revised programme to the various "conspiracy theories" was appropriate, since it broadly mirrored the original. I am therefore unable to conclude that there was a requirement to question why some evidence from the Twin Towers was not preserved or why standard investigating procedures were not, as you claim, followed.

4. The programme said the official version of events was "unequivocal" but the explanation has changed, with each version contradicting the previous one.

This is what the programme said:

The official account of what happened on that day is unequivocal. After 2 years of planning Osama Bin Laden's 19 young martyrs, armed with knives and box cutters, casually walked through airport security, and hijacked 4 planes. Then, within the space of 77 minutes they destroyed the iconic symbols of America's power, taking nearly 3,000 lives with them into the flames, 67 British people among them. Two planes hit the World Trade Centre in New York, another ploughed into the Pentagon – headquarters

of the military in Washington. The final plane crashed in a field in Pennsylvania, on its way to the capital - its likely target either Congress or the White House. The official inquiry admitted that America was caught off-guard and the response was chaotic, but found no conspiracy involving the government in Washington.

I am unaware that any aspect of the official version of events, as described by this section of the programme, has changed in any material way and so I cannot conclude that it was inaccurate or misleading to suggest that the official version of what happened was “*unequivocal*”, regardless of whether other aspects of official explanation may have been changed or amended.

5. The programme did not report that the procedure for the interception of hijacked aircraft changed just before 9/11 and was changed back again shortly afterwards.

As I have already explained, programme-makers have to make an editorial decision as to what elements to include in a documentary of this kind. In this case, they were entitled to exercise their judgement in selecting which theories to analyse and the depth of that analysis. The question I have to consider is whether the broadcast programme failed to meet the standards set out in the Editorial Guidelines for due accuracy and due impartiality. I cannot conclude that the omission of the point you have raised here was material to the audience’s understanding. The programme made it clear that the military response on 9/11 was confused and included the allegation that the Vice President at the time, Dick Cheney, ordered the US military not to intercept the planes.

6. The programme portrayed the makers of the Loose Change documentary as “*typical conspiracy theorists*” seeking commercial gain. This was an attempt to discredit their work.

I do not share your assessment of the way in which Dylan Avery and his colleagues were introduced. Loose Change was described as “*the most successful conspiracy film ever*” and “*an internet phenomenon viewed by tens of millions of people*”. The programme made the point that in the past, a documentary-maker such as Mr Avery would have needed the backing of a Hollywood studio to reach a global audience but modern-day technology means “*Now all you need is a modicum of technical knowledge and a bargain basement computer*”.

I am not persuaded that this gave the impression that Mr Avery and his colleagues were motivated by commercial gain rather than a commitment to challenging the official version of what happened on 9/11.

7. The programme did not reflect the opinion of experts who question the official version of what caused the Twin Towers to collapse or report the available evidence which support the theory of controlled explosions.

The programme clearly established that members of the 9/11 truth movement believe that the Twin Towers and WTC7 were brought down by controlled demolition. I have referred to the theory put forward about WTC7 by Professor Harrit in my response to Point 1. As you will recall, the programme also included extracts from Dylan Avery’s Loose Change documentary which set out his explanation for how the Twin Towers collapsed:

Narrator: His film sets out the central conspiracy theory that the World Trade Centre Twin Towers collapsed not because of fire but because they were rigged with explosives.

Loose Change: Do you still think that jet fuel brought down the Twin Towers? In almost all the videos of the collapses, violent ejections appear 20 to 60 storeys below the demolition wave. Here... here and here.

Narrator: Reports of loud bangs and the sudden collapse of the buildings are taken as proof of explosives.

The programme went on to consider the official version of events:

Narrator: The official report into the collapse concluded that when the planes slammed into the towers they severed and damaged support columns and dislodged fireproofing. Purdue University modelled how 10,000 gallons of jet fuel was spewed over many floors starting widespread fires. Temperatures reaching up to a thousand degrees Celsius weakened the floors and columns.

Leslie Robertson: The fires don't have to melt the steel in order to bring the building down, all they have to do is raise it high enough so that the strength of the steel is reduced to the point where failure takes place.

Narrator: Steel melts at around 1,500 degrees Celsius, but at 600 degrees it loses half its strength. Eventually the floors sagged and the perimeter columns bent, starting the collapse and creating the sounds of explosions. Suddenly the massive weight of the floors above dropped, creating a dynamic load far beyond what the columns were designed for.

Leslie Robertson: There's plenty of weight up there to bring the building down.

Narrator: And the floors below caved in, causing those puffs of smoke.

This reflects the conclusions set out in the NIST report into the collapse of WTC1 and WTC2.⁴ There was no reference to the “pancake theory” and only a fleeting use of a graphic which had previously been used to demonstrate that theory. I don't believe the graphic was misleading in this context since it was just one brief element in a simple, visual and verbal explanation of the official version of how the towers collapsed.

Once again, I can appreciate why you think the programme should have included additional contributions and evidence put forward by the truth movement to support the view that the towers were brought down by explosives. However, I am satisfied that the programme script lines and extracts from Loose Change, taken together with the longer explanation provided by Professor Harrit about WTC7, were sufficient to ensure that viewers understood the evidence which is put forward to support the theory of controlled demolition.

8. The explanation of what caused the collapse of the Twin Towers was inaccurate. It included a theory put forward by Professor Abolhassan Astaneh which is incorrect.

The programme interviewed Leslie Robertson, the original structural engineer on the building of the towers, who put forward his view as to why the towers came down and offered an alternative explanation to the one put forward by Mr Avery.

⁴ http://www.nist.gov/customcf/get_pdf.cfm?pub_id=909017 (NCSTAR 1)

The programme then included a further contribution, this time from Professor Astaneh, a structural engineer who takes issues with Mr Robertson's explanation for the collapse of the towers. He believes that the use of thin load-bearing walls around the perimeter of the tower structure, rather than more conventional columns and beams, was the reason for the towers collapsing in a particular manner. This theory was then rebutted by Mr Robertson:

It's preposterous. Those walls were stronger and more air tight than the walls that were used in the past. I know of no case in the World Trade Centre where the structural design did not exceed the requirements of the building code of the city of New York. There's a lot of misinformation out there and not only that, these are extremely complex issues.

As you can see, the programme did, therefore, include a contributor who challenged Professor Astaneh's theory and so I am satisfied that the programme was appropriately balanced and viewers would not have been materially misled.

9. The programme did not question why the authorities have failed to release all the video of the attack on the Pentagon.

The programme did refer to the lack of available video footage. It said:

The FBI has released some video of the attack on the Pentagon. It comes from two low quality security cameras... There are calls for the FBI to release more video. Critics have focused instead on pictures which don't show wreckage.

The programme also established that the footage which has been released is inconclusive in establishing what hit the Pentagon. I therefore cannot agree that there was a requirement for the programme to question why other footage has not been released (or indeed, include the FBI's explanation why it has not done so); it seems to me that viewers would have been well aware that the footage that has been released is of poor quality and the FBI has resisted calls to release further material. The audience would have been able to draw its own conclusions on that basis.

10. The programme did not question how a plane hit the Pentagon without damaging walls and windows surrounding the initial 5m diameter hole in the front wall.

The programme featured a sequence on the damage to the Pentagon which included a number of theories and contributions from a range of people. This included footage from the Loose Change documentary and a contribution from Professor Jim Fetzer, one of the leading members of the truth movement who set up Scholars for 9/11 Truth. Professor Fetzer made a number of points in which he questioned the official explanation that American Airlines Flight 77 was flown into the building by hijackers. For example:

- 1) *The evidence that's very clear is that no Boeing 757 hit the Pentagon. There's no debris, there's no damage to the lawn. I expect Tiger to show up with his caddy and practise his putting ok.*
- 2) *We have photographs of the hit-point. You do not find there a massive pile of aluminium debris, you don't find the wings, you don't find the bodies, you don't find seats, you don't find luggage, you don't even find the tail, all of which should have been present.*

- 3) *It's very strange that this debris, which was not present after the crash, you've got this clean lawn, starts showing up later. Now you can't have enlisted men and officers rushing out the Pentagon to plant the debris. If it's trickling down from the air however, from the sky, then it might seem like a natural phenomenon, and I believe was actually in all probability put out from the C130. I believe that was its role. Now whether the officer in charge was aware that that was what he was doing is another question.*

It seems to me that this would have ensured that viewers were aware that the truth movement does not believe a passenger plane was responsible for the damage to the Pentagon. In addition, the programme gave due weight to the video and photographic evidence available. As I mentioned previously, the programme showed two sequences of video and concluded that the limited footage which has been released was inconclusive in establishing what caused the damage to the building. It also reflected the fact that “*Some argue it [whatever caused the damage] was something much smaller - like this pilotless drone or a missile*”. In particular, the programme analysed the video evidence as follows:

The FBI has released some video of the attack on the Pentagon. It comes from two low quality security cameras. Slowed down, something can be seen entering on the far right of this frame just before the explosion. But it's not conclusive. The second camera, analysed in detail by computer animator, appears to show a plane and smoke in slightly more detail... here. But again, it's not definitive. There are calls for the FBI to release more video. Critics have focused instead on pictures which don't show wreckage.

The programme also showed numerous photographs which were taken shortly after the explosion, including one which appears to show windows still in place and another which the programme said was taken “*minutes after the crash*” which also showed unbroken windows.

11. The programme edited Professor Niels Harrit's interview to present a biased view and then tried further to discredit his work using testimony from experts who freely admit they had not even looked at his work.

As I explained in my response to Point 1, the programme included an explanation of the theory which has been put forward by Professor Harrit and featured a number of different contributions from him on this aspect of 9/11. The programme went on to include balancing contributions from Professor Richard Fruehan and Professor Chris Pistorius in which they offered an alternative explanation for Professor Harrit's results. That seems to me to be a reasonable approach to take and consistent with the approach taken to other theories explored in this programme. I note as well that Professor Harrit was given the last word on the matter, as follows:

There's something wrong here. If you had seen Building 7, there's no way back. So you can try to cheat on yourself or you can speak up and live with dignity.

I therefore cannot agree that the programme discredited Professor Harrit or failed to give him an appropriate opportunity to put forward his views.

12. The programme did not report that mobile phone calls were said to have been made from Flight 93 but it was impossible to make such a call in 2001.

The programme did not refer to any phone calls which may, or may not, have been made on mobile phones by passengers aboard Flight 93. I therefore cannot conclude that there was any requirement to address the question of whether such calls were possible in 2001.

13. The programme included contributions, such as from Frank Spotnitz, which were designed to discredit and undermine those who support alternative theories as to what happened on 9/11.

The programme included numerous contributions from people who reject the official version of events of 9/11 and have put forward other explanations for what happened. However, despite the concerns which have been raised by organisations such as Pilots for 9/11 Truth, Architects and Engineers for 9/11 Truth and the like, there are others who accept the version put forward by the 9/11 Commission and other bodies. It seems to me to be perfectly reasonable to explore why some groups and individuals choose to question the official version of events, just as it was reasonable to include a contribution from Alex Jones in which he gave his explanation:

I love my country. I fear my Government, so I'm one of those guys that follow with the founding Fathers, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson said, and I think I'm in good company, not trusting a Government and questioning, especially with the long history of Governments lying, even when the truth would suit them.

I therefore do not have grounds to uphold this point of complaint.

14. The programme did not include facts about terrorist funding such as the \$100k supplied by the Pakistan Secret Intelligence Service and documented in the 9/11 Commission Report.

As I explained in my response to Point 3, programme-makers have to exercise their editorial judgement when deciding which elements to include in a documentary of this kind. It is not reasonable to expect every aspect of all the various conspiracy theories about 9/11 to be included in an hour-long documentary. The programme reflected the mainstream theories about the events leading up to 9 September 2001, what happened on the day itself and what took place in the days that followed. This was sufficient to ensure the necessary due accuracy and due impartiality.

15. The conclusion of the programme was intentionally designed to make members of the truth movement look like “heartless individuals”.

The programme ended as follows:

Narrator: The evidence points to intelligence mistakes before 9/11. The 9/11 conspiracy theories are just that – theories. The evidence doesn't support them. But their authors insist they will fight on against what they see as a dangerous and ruthless government conspiracy.

Alex Jones: If they kill me, that will turn me into a martyr. So the system attempts to assassinate my character and to edit and misrepresent what I've said and done as an attempt to assassinate the ideas that I put out. But that doesn't work because ideas are bullet proof.

Professor Niels Harrit: I have no way back. If you fight you might lose but if you don't fight you have lost. There is no way that our civilisation can continue without facing these unsolved questions of 9/11.

Frank Spotnitz: Conspiracy theories by and large are just that - theories with very little substance behind them. It's very upsetting to the people who cling to these beliefs because you're taking away from them a comfort. It's like you're attacking someone's faith and offering nothing in exchange except uncertainty.

Narrator: The 9/11 Conspiracy File seems certain to remain open for a long time to come however distressing and painful that will be for the families of those who died that day.

I cannot conclude that this presented those who question the official version of events as "heartless individuals". Both Mr Jones and Professor Harrit explained why they continue to put forward their theories. The programme ended by suggesting that any continued uncertainty would be distressing to the victims' families and that seems to me to be a reasonable conclusion regardless of what version of events one might regard as the truth.

Although I do not feel able to uphold your complaint on this occasion I hope I have been able to go at least some way to addressing your concerns. Nevertheless, if you are not satisfied with my decision I would be happy to consider any points you might wish to make on my finding. I would be grateful if you could let me have any comments within ten working days of this letter.

You can also ask the Editorial Standards Committee of the BBC Trust to review my finding. Correspondence for the Committee should be addressed to Lucy Tristram, Complaints Advisor, BBC Trust Unit, 180 Great Portland Street, London W1W 5QZ or you can send an email to trust.editorial@bbc.co.uk. The Trust normally expects to receive an appeal within four weeks of the date of this letter, or of any further substantive correspondence between us, and expects complainants to limit the details of their appeal to no more than one thousand words.

Yours sincerely



Colin Tregear
Complaints Director