

Blowing the Lid Off **Lyme**

**How America's Nazi spies have
left a deadly lasting imprint**





The other night was our forty-first wedding anniversary and I was feeling well enough to skip the wheelchair and just go for a stroll with my wife, Susan. It turned out to be an eventful evening.

It started out nicely. My home health aide dropped my wife and me off at our favorite seafood restaurant. The weather in St. Petersburg was so nice that we sat at an outdoor table. Our sneaky daughter had called ahead from New York and had cocktails and appetizers waiting. Life is tough, eh?

After dinner we strolled down the sidewalk past an old rundown hotel that had just been refurbished with several dazzling restaurants. I had read a wonderful review about the new open-air patio so we caught the elevator to the rooftop. Beautiful view, nice tent-like cabanas along the side. I liked shade so we headed there. I didn't notice the reserved sign.

As we headed back towards the inside, a pair of women about our age waived us over and invited us to sit in their cabana. Lovely. Everything was going great. What could go wrong? The women were working with a private foundation to rehab rundown housing for the poor. They were new to St. Pete, so Susan said we would show them around. We handed them our cards.

The younger woman looked at my card and a strange look came over her face. "You know, there is a famous John Loftus," she said. Susan smiled her death's head grin and said noncommittally. "Oh yeah." I know that look. I got up to move my walker or some such excuse. The woman said, "No, really. There is a very famous guy with the same name." My wife smiled and gave in graciously. "Yeah, we know. That's him."

I was trapped. The woman said, "Really, you are the famous John Loftus?" I said, "I'm afraid I am." You have to understand. Susan and I don't get to go out much, and the last thing she wanted was to have our

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lovely evening interrupted by some fan gushing about how wonderful her husband is. I am a nice guy, but I am hardly a two-cent celebrity. My wife saved lives as a psychotherapist, but no one comes rushing up to her on the street to tell her how wonderful she is. She is. She puts up with me. No easy task.

I was getting ready to make polite excuses and find another restaurant when the woman said, "I am from Cape Cod. I have Lyme disease. My mother died of it." Susan waved at me to sit down.

Later that night, Susan called our daughter Meg to describe the evening. "And there was this lovely woman, and she just wanted to thank your father for what he did for everyone who suffers from Lyme disease."

Meg said "Dad? What did Dad have to do with Lyme disease?"

Sue replied that the woman said I was a hero to people suffering with Lyme. I was the first person to expose the connection to biological weapons research.

Meg sounded a bit skeptical. "How come I didn't know about this? When did this all happen?"

Susan said "You were very young."

She was. It happened just after she was born.

The Perfect Incubator

I quit the US Department of Justice in disgust in 1981. I appeared on *60 Minutes* in May of 1982 and my book, *The Belarus Secret*, came out a few months later. Something like 25 million people had seen my interview with Mike Wallace. After I blew the

whistle on Nazis in America, it seemed that everywhere I went strangers would come up to talk to me. Some of them were spies.

Apparently I had made a good impression with the American intelligence community. Instead of leaking secrets of state, I had done the right thing and fought with the CIA Pre-Publication Censorship Board for permission to release my book. Word had gotten out that I was one of the good guys. Now everyone wanted to tell me his secrets.

This guy was different: a well-dressed businessman, serious. He said that I had missed a few things. He told me how we had accidentally dropped a nuclear warhead on US soil and were lucky that we didn't lose South Carolina. The other secret blunder was Lyme disease.

After World War II, the Army had set up an artillery range at Fort Terry on Plum Island, New York, to test some of the captured Nazi biological weapons, including insect bombs filled with poisonous vermin. The island was a perfect testing ground, an ideal home for Plum Island Animal Disease Center. Nothing could escape, and most of the time, the prevailing winds blew everything out to sea anyway.

The Army wanted to test how far these insect vectors would go. It was supposed to be a harmless test. One of the ticks the Nazis found in North Africa caused an unusual rash that looked just like a bulls-eye. It didn't hurt anybody. That's what they thought, anyway. It was just a way to measure how much damage an insect vector with real poison could inflict.

But one of the Nazi scientists was a little careless and the ticks got out at Plum Island. Somehow—maybe through a bird or a deer (deer can swim a couple of miles in the ocean)—the Nazi tick made it across the water from Plum Island and landed in the town of Lyme, Connecticut. A lot of people started getting the bull's eye rash, but no one knew what it was. Then people started to get sick by the thousands. Then people started dying.

The old spy (whose name I never knew) told me that the whole thing had been covered up. A gigantic study was done in New England under the guise of another disease—multiple sclerosis, I think he said. What they were really looking at was how many people were infected, and how could Lyme disease be contained. The answer was: It couldn't. The disease kept spreading, and the Army kept covering it up, hoping that it would not spread too fast or that someone would find a cure.

Nazis in Plum Island

Now this conversation must have taken place in 1982, because I included a short mention of it for the trade paperback edition of *The Belarus Secret*, which came out in late 1982, early 1983. It was just a brief couple of paragraphs, but it caused a bit of a controversy.

One of the leading Lyme disease experts, Michael Carroll, later recalled that "In the book, *The Belarus Secret*, author John Loftus, the Justice Department employee who exposed Kurt Waldheim



as a Nazi, states that Nazi germ warfare scientists had experimented with poison ticks dropped from planes to spread rare diseases. Loftus also states that he had received information that the United States had tested some of these poison ticks on the Plum Island artillery range off the coast of Connecticut during the early part of the 1950s.”

As the controversy began to spread, a nurse who was one of the early Lyme victims clutched my book in rage as he demanded to know about the alleged Lyme cover-up at a national scientific conference. The spokesman from the US Department of Agriculture dismissed the whole thing as some “men from Mars” conspiracy theories. The general response was that I seemed to be a rather sober and responsible attorney, but if I had fabricated this information about Lyme disease, then I should be prosecuted.

Over the years, it has now become clear that someone should be prosecuted all right, but it sure isn't me. There is some evidence suggesting that Lyme disease did not even exist in America before the Plum Island experiments. Plum Island lab director Jerry Callis confirms that there was indeed secret tick research on Plum Island, but he claims that none of the poisoned

ticks ever escaped:

“Plum Island experimented with ticks, but never outside of containment. We had a tick colony where you take them and feed them on the virus and breed ticks to see how many generations it would last, on and on, until it's diluted. Recently they reinstated the tick colony.”

It should be noted that the first “bull's eye rash” in America was not reported until *after* World War II. Before then there was not a single confirmed incident of Lyme disease, although there were some historical records that suggest a few people may have suffered from similar illnesses. Certainly the disease existed in Europe and Asia for centuries, but it was not prevalent in America, and certainly not widespread as it is now.

The Texas Tick in New England

And then there is the Texas tick that hitchhiked to Plum Island. Dr. Carroll wrote: “The focal point of experimentation on Plum Island in the 1970s, the Lone Star tick-like Lyme disease, is now spread throughout New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. How did that happen?” A long overlooked document obtained from the files of an investigation by the office of former Long Island Congressman Thomas

Downey sheds new light on the second, more damning connection to Lyme disease.

Congressman Downey had a lot of constituents dying of Lyme disease. Plum Island is off the coast of Long Island. He found a 1978 internal research document from the Department of Agriculture. Dr. Carroll explains, “In laymen's terms, Plum Island was experimenting with the Lone Star tick—feeding them on viruses and testing them on pigs—during the ground zero year of Lyme disease. They did not transmit African swine fever to pigs, said the document, but they might have transmitted Bb (Lyme disease) to researchers or to the island's vectors.”

So the ticks did get out. They might have infected lab workers or even Plum Island's mice and water fowl, “the island's vectors” or possible disease carriers. Interestingly, the Texas tick they were playing with at Plum Island had never visited New England before: “The Lone Star tick, named after the white star on the back of the female, is a hard tick; along with its cousin, the deer tick, it is a culprit in the spread of Lyme disease. Interestingly, at that time, the Lone Star tick's habitat was confined to Texas. Today, however, it is endemic throughout New York, Connecticut and New Jersey. And no one can really explain

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how it migrated all the way from Texas.”

Dr. Carroll has an explanation. The Nazis did it, just as I had written in my book back in 1982. Carroll explains: “A former employee at Plum Island in the 1950s has personal recollection of a ‘Nazi scientist’ releasing ticks outdoors on Plum Island. . . . A source who worked on Plum Island in the 1950s recalls that animal handlers and a scientist released ticks outdoors on the island. ‘They called him the Nazi scientist, when they came in, in 1951—they were inoculating these ticks,’ and a picture he once saw ‘shows the animal handler pointing to the area on Plum where they released the ticks.’”

Dr. Erich Traub was one of the Nazi scientists brought to America in 1949 as part of Operation Paperclip. When I went public in 1982, no one even knew what caused Lyme disease. That same year, scientist Willy Burgdorfer published an article in *Science* magazine for the first time linking a new bacterium as the causative agent of Lyme disease. The spirochete was later named *Borrelia burgdorferi*, or Bb, in his honor.

A Spy's Gift to America

I interviewed the stranger and started writing about Lyme disease in 1982, before the first article on ticks was even published. It wasn't until five years later that scientists found Bb spirochetes in tick saliva, confirming that Lyme disease was indeed spread by tick bites. So why did I risk my reputation in 1982 writing about an unknown scandal at Plum Island? Why was I so sure the stranger I met was telling me the truth about the Nazi tick tests that turned into Lyme disease?

Well for one thing, his story about dropping an A-bomb on South Carolina sure checked out. In 1958, a B-47 air crew on its way to England simply goofed up. The co-pilot went to get coffee while checking something, and instead of grabbing the ladder he grabbed the bomb release



mechanism. The plane just dropped it by accident on the little town of Mars Bluff, South Carolina.

It didn't get much press attention at the time because the government said that the hydrogen bomb was empty; its plutonium core had not even been loaded. That, my source said, was a lie. The conventional explosives detonated, leaving a 35-foot crater. Five of the seven nuclear fail-safe devices failed in the explosion, but the bomb did not go off. Only two little links were all that stood between a harmless accident and the nuclear vaporization of an entire American county. Yeah, my source knew what he was talking about. Like me, he had once held a Q clearance for nuclear weapons.

There was another reason I trusted his information about Nazi experiments at

Plum Island. I had seen many, many similar reports in other secrets archives back in the day. There is a Top Secret vault underneath the US War College at Carlisle Barracks in Pennsylvania. Inside is a military study on how to plunge communist Russia into starvation by floating balloons filled with “wheat rust” virus over the grain fields of the Ukraine.

There were other Top Secret reports on “clandestine attacks on crops and animals,” but the file folders are empty. Their contents have been destroyed without authorization or documentation. I can guess why. The British had actually used the insect bombs tested at Plum Island. There is a record in the UN where the North Korean delegate screamed about overhead bombs exploding and scattering insects

The Russian bug bombs were designed by the same guy who later conducted the tick experiments at Plum Island—Erich Traub.

crawling all over the snow.

Other records show that the Nazis may have tested similar bug bombs on the Russians. The Russian bug bombs were designed by the same guy who later conducted the tick experiments at Plum Island—Erich Traub. In fact, the Army even offered Traub command of Plum Island, but he turned the job down.

After the war, the US had agreed that America would get the Nazi rocket scientists but the British would get the Nazi germ warfare experts. The British scientific liaison to the US at the time of the Plum Island tests was Donald Maclean, Kim Philby's associate in MI6 and fellow communist double-agent. Traub was in Soviet hands after World War II, but somehow managed to escape into the custody of British Intelligence.

Communist spies Philby and MacLean then peddled Traub (and even worse people) to Army Intelligence. The reason was that America had to prepare defenses against bug bombs, and the British could not afford to pay for the research. But it seems they would share their Nazi scientists for some tests at Plum Island. Wasn't Kim Philby nice to us? Thank you, Nelson Rockefeller, for covering it all up.

Let It Be Known

Technically, Plum Island was under the command of Nelson Rockefeller, President Eisenhower's Secretary of the Department of Agriculture. But the USDA always loaned the island for whatever the US military wanted to test. Now the funny thing is that Traub studied at Rockefeller's university before World War II. Later on, as Gerald Ford's vice president, Nelson Rockefeller headed up a special commission headed by the late Senator Ted Kennedy to try to block Congressional investigations of intelligence abuses, which seems to have targeted Plum Island.

One of the things that Senator Kennedy specifically wanted to investigate was biological weapons tests that may

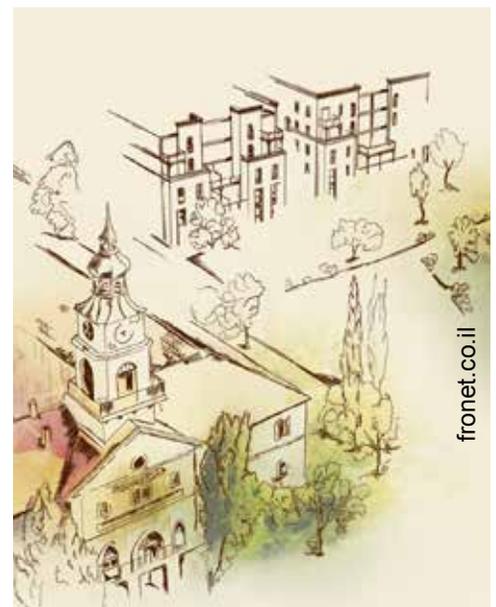
have harmed American health. Funny that Rockefeller owned a huge chicken breeding farm not far from Lyme, Connecticut. Funny that Traub published a paper on how chickens get infected with viruses.

Now, these conclusions and the tips I got from my anonymous friend are not supported by everyone, including those who head national organizations dealing with Lyme disease research. Infections and syndromes similar to Lyme disease were found in early America, but scientists think that deforestation killed off the carriers. Why did it suddenly appear again? Scientists aren't quite sure. Why were the first modern cases of Lyme disease concentrated on Long Island and in Connecticut, the closest areas to Plum Island? Some people still aren't quite sure.

It's all probably just a coincidence, but my friend Rachel Vernon says you see hundreds of bunches of coincidences when you start researching Lyme disease. She will be furious when the British start opening up their files in 2022. Talk about coincidences. The British actually dropped "bug bombs" on Nazi Germany during World War II. Churchill himself authorized it, according to the secret files I read. I interviewed Germans who described how they were called out of school to pick potato bugs off their potato crop.

My new friend, the lady whose mom died from Lyme disease, wants you to know that if you ever go to the state park at Truro on Cape Cod, please stay on the marked trails. Don't go into the bushes. That's where the ticks are. The poison ticks are still there. There are signs warning people, she told me, "but they are not very big. It's as if they don't want people to know." ●

Attorney John Loftus, author of *America's Nazi Secret*, is a retired Army officer, intelligence analyst and federal prosecutor. He previously held a Q clearance for nuclear top secrets while working for the US government.



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