

Kirk Swauger Interview
Somerset Bureau Chief
The Tribune-Democrat

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KS: Hello.

DK: Hi.

KS: How can I help you?

(I requested back issues of The Tribune-Democrat from September 12 - 16, 2001. Once we discussed that, the pertinent conversation took place.)

KS: You guys from around here, or...

DK: I'm from California and...

KS: Oh, really?

DK:and he's (Dane) from D.C.

KS: Oh wow. What brings you into the area?

DK: I'm an investigative journalist and I'm obviously working on a column, a story and I need that piece.

KS: Oh, Okay. Flight 93, so obviously.

DK: Thank you. Um, did you notice, did you draw some conflicting reports from the eye witnesses about the crash site or anything, you know, about what they saw? Because I've read so many conflicting reports and...

KS: Initially?

DK: ...yeah.

KS: Uh, there were all kinds of stuff, you know, rumors.

DK: That's what I'm trying to....dispel rumors, prove what is or isn't true.

KS: But that's why the wicker the whole time was that the plane was shot down.

DK: Yeah, that, I've heard that too, and there are claims out there about this particular pilot who was the one that, you know, was given the order to do it. But amazingly, this pilot just seems not to be available for any comment. Which, of course, is you know...

KS: Right.

DK: ..how do you verify something if you don't have some body there to say yes, I was ordered to do this or no I wasn't...

KS: Now, did you go up there, yet? Have you been to the site?

DK: I've been to the site already, yeah. Very pleasant lady out there from the uh, Park Service.

KS: Do you have any theories on this?

DK: On this one? No....

KS: Yes.

DK: ...I'm just trying to go into it with an open mind...who have given statements, and I just want to ask them, you know, do you still believe this? Is this, is this what you saw? Particularly the lady at the scrap yard (Nena Lensbouer).

KS: Right.

DK: Nena, where she said, you know, she apparently, she's been quoted, uh, she said that she was, she ran to the site. It was within fifteen feet of the crater. And, uh, she...

KS: I know, I know her.

DK: ...she had a problem with the size of the crater.

KS: I think we all had a problem with the size of the crater, because I went there soon after....In fact, yesterday was the first time that I've ever actually walked the crash itself.

Dane: Yesterday?

KS: Uh, yesterday, that's always been, I mean, other than, uh, September 11...

Dane: Yeah.

KS: Just when it happened, then they immediately closed it off. You couldn't get close. I mean, they were arresting reporters who went inside. Um, yesterday was the last day that the coroner here had jurisdiction over it and considered it still a death scene. So, he gave us a nice private little tour before he took it over.

DK: Oh, I wish I would have known.

Dane: What, what time was that?

KS: Uh, the time I met him...at like 10:00 in the morning.

Dane: You went inside the fence?

KS: Went inside the fence, walked around and picked up pieces of the plane.

DK: Pieces of the plane?

KS: Uh-huh.

Dane: It's still there?

KS: Not inside the fence, just right outside the fence.

Dane: Oh, yeah?

KS: But....

DK: Still sitting there after these years?

KS: It comes...

DK: You think it...

KS: ...back up.

DK: They didn't take a...oh, the ground regurgitates it back up?

KS: Yes.

Dane: Uh, I'd love to...Let me ask you, was there something about one of the engines was found about 8 miles away near the lake?

KS: Yeah, uh, it was found near, in a lake...

Dane: Uh-huh.

KS: ...but not 8 miles away.

Dane: Oh?

KS: It was maybe...

DK: Indian Lake?

KS: ...500 yards away. No, that's not true. The furthest away was in a farm pond.

DK: A farm pond?

KS: Probably about maybe 400 feet away.

Dane: Okay.

KS: That was the largest piece of debris that they found was one of the engines.

DK: So the coroner, his jurisdiction last night, or yesterday was his final day where he would have access to the site, and, and then you said....

Dane: Did they require you to turn over any pieces you might have found? Or, could you just hang on to them?

KS: Uh, he said, the coroner said...he goes, well....He's a real, real nice guy (coroner). Real laid back.

DK: Hmmm. I'm sure it must have been very difficult for this community when that happened.

KS: Oh, yeah, and then the...

DK: And, especially for search and rescue. Those roads up there are so narrow you know and rural.

KS: Right.

DK: Now, did the coroner, because that was going to be one of my next stops, I have obtained, you know, from other coroners offices...do you know if I can purchase the autopsies of any bodies that were found, or....

KS: I don't know if they actually did any.

DK: Or, uh, copies of his reports that describe remains or, I hate to be, you know, so macabre, but, it's important.

KS: Uh, huh. (calls coroner while Dane and I are present). Hey, Bollen, Kirk, how are you? Good, how did things work out? The story. Oh, my God, you're lame (giggle). Drum, drum, up business. Hey, I'm with a lady here from California who is an investigative journalist from out that way. Do you have any, um, Flight 93, any autopsies

records or anything that she'd able able to...I didn't there were. What about Coroner's Reports? Did you do anything along those lines? That's it. Okay.

Dane: How about DNA matching?

KS: Yeah, DNA stuff, do have anything there? Oh, okay, okay. I don't know exactly. What I, what I'll do is I'll give her your name and number...

DK: I'll be right back, hang on. (I exit the office to get an item out of my rental SUV)

Dane: Okay.

KS: (Still on the phone with the coroner) I don't think so. No, I, nor would I. I mean, you know, that's not good. So, but I'll give her your name and number and you can kind of decipher it from there. Okay. Yeah, that's be good, thanks. Bye- Bye. He doesn't have any of those uh, autopsy records, DNA matches, he said he has them, but probably be impossible for you guys to decipher.

Dane: OH, no, we would just...would be his conclusion, how many, how many people was he able to match.

KS: Yeah, I'll give, let me give you his name and number here..His name is uh, Wallace Miller, the coroner here.

DK: And what did, did he say that he might have some kind of Coroner's Reports or anything like that?

KS: No. He does not have Coroner's Reports on this. Uh, no autopsies were done.

DK: So there were not enough...

KS: He does have...

DK: ...remains to do anything?

KS: ...right, they only recovered like 8% of the remains. Um, but they are going to uh, he does have some DNA stuff, but as far as deciphering that might be hard for a lay person. But, I would suggest calling him, and or in fact, he said he doesn't have any photos or anything like that, that he can really share. He doesn't want to get into the grisly scene of it.

This represents the bare bones parts of the interview with Mr. Swauger. Non relevant chit chat and discussion about acquiring back issues of their newspaper was not included for brevity.