

**John Allen Murphy**  
Metropolitan Police, Washington, DC

**Oral History Interview**  
**Final Edited Transcript**  
April 16, 2014

Office of the Historian  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC

“So I remember we went up, got out of the car, went to the alcove. And I remember saying to Jimmy, ‘I think I’m going to take my gun out.’ And as we came down the alcove, which is dark, I can hear somebody, see a big rush coming at us and someone hollering, ‘Get that woman, get that woman.’ There was a woman maybe in front of these people by so many steps, and I could hear somebody, ‘She’s got a German Luger.’ Somebody saying, ‘She’s got a Luger.’”

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## **Abstract**

In this interview John Allen Murphy focuses on the role he played when he responded to the shooting that transpired at the U.S. Capitol on March 1, 1954. In particular, Murphy describes how he apprehended the lone female assailant, Lolita Lebron. He explains how he and his partner searched for witnesses to the shooting and recalls the confusion in the aftermath of the violence. Murphy also provides brief biological information, including his family background and his World War II service in the U.S. Navy.

## **Biography**

John Allen Murphy was born on March 31, 1928, in Washington, DC. His father, Joseph J. Murphy, worked as a salesman and his mother Julia Lee Murphy was a housewife. Both of his parents emigrated from Ireland. John Murphy attended Sacred Heart School in Washington, DC, but went to live with relatives in Westchester, New York, at the age of 9 when his mother passed away. While in New York he enrolled at Mount Saint Michael's and Fordham Prep before returning to Washington to live with his father. In DC, Murphy attended Saint Paul's and Central High School. He enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1944 before graduating from high school. Murphy served on the USS *Oregon City*, a heavy cruiser, during World War II. After the war he graduated from Central High School and worked in the nightclub business. In 1947 he married Martha Gill—the couple had one son and three daughters.

Murphy joined the Metropolitan Police Department in 1951. On March 1, 1954, he and his uniform patrol partner responded to the call of a shooting at the U.S. Capitol. Murphy helped apprehend the assailants—Puerto Rican nationalists seeking to publicize their cause—who shot five Members of Congress. He later became a homicide detective before retiring from the force in 1963. After his time with the Metropolitan Police, Murphy returned to the nightclub business and worked for the Southern Maryland Electric Co-op. He and his wife moved to Sunset Beach, North Carolina. John Allen Murphy died on January 21, 2018, in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

## Editing Practices

In preparing interview transcripts for publication, the editors sought to balance several priorities:

- As a primary rule, the editors aimed for fidelity to the spoken word and the conversational style in accord with generally accepted oral history practices.
- The editors made minor editorial changes to the transcripts in instances where they believed such changes would make interviews more accessible to readers. For instance, excessive false starts and filler words were removed when they did not materially affect the meaning of the ideas expressed by the interviewee.
- In accord with standard oral history practices, interviewees were allowed to review their transcripts, although they were encouraged to avoid making substantial editorial revisions and deletions that would change the conversational style of the transcripts or the ideas expressed therein.
- The editors welcomed additional notes, comments, or written observations that the interviewees wished to insert into the record and noted any substantial changes or redactions to the transcript.
- Copy-editing of the transcripts was based on the standards set forth in *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

The first reference to a Member of Congress (House or Senate) is underlined in the oral history transcript. For more information about individuals who served in the House or Senate, please refer to the online *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov> and the “People Search” section of the History, Art & Archives website, <http://history.house.gov>.

For more information about the U.S. House of Representatives oral history program contact the Office of House Historian at (202) 226-1300, or via email at [history@mail.house.gov](mailto:history@mail.house.gov).

## Citation Information

When citing this oral history interview, please use the format below:

“John Allen Murphy Oral History Interview,” Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives, April 16, 2014.

## Interviewer Biography

**Kathleen Johnson** is the Manager of Oral History for the Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives. She earned a B.A. in history from Columbia University, where she also played basketball for four years, and holds two master's degrees from North Carolina State University in education and public history. In 2004, she helped to create the House's first oral history program, focusing on collecting the institutional memory of Members and staff. She co-authored two books: *Women in Congress: 1917–2006* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006) and *Black Americans in Congress: 1870–2007* (GPO, 2008). Before joining the Office of the Historian, she worked as a high school history teacher and social studies curriculum consultant.

— JOHN ALLEN MURPHY—  
INTERVIEW

**JOHNSON:** My name is Kathleen Johnson. I'm with the Office of the Historian and today is April 16, 2014. I am in the House Recording Studio of the House of Representatives. Today I'm speaking with former Metropolitan Police Officer John Allen Murphy. I wanted to thank you for speaking with me today, Mr. Murphy.

**MURPHY:** That's quite all right, ma'am. I'm ready.

**JOHNSON:** Okay. I wanted to start off with a few biographical questions before we move on to your memories of March 1, 1954. So to begin with, if you could just tell me when and where you were born?

**MURPHY:** Born in Washington, DC, Columbia Hospital.

**JOHNSON:** When were you born? In what year?

**MURPHY:** Oh, I'm sorry. March 31, 1928.

**JOHNSON:** What were the names and occupations of your parents?

**MURPHY:** My father—my parents came from Ireland. My father was Joseph J. Murphy and my mother was Julia Lee Murphy. My dad, he came from County Longford; my mom came from County Cork.

**JOHNSON:** What were the professions of your parents? What did they do for a job?

**MURPHY:** Dad was a salesman. My mom was a housewife. She died very young, when I was nine years old.

**JOHNSON:** Did you attend schools in Washington, DC?

**MURPHY:**

Yes. I attended Sacred Heart School and then after my mother died I moved to New York—Westchester—with a cousin and I went to Mount Saint Michael's in the Bronx, then Fordham Prep for a year, and then I came back to Washington when I was 14 years old. I wanted to be with my father. My father was alone. My other brothers were away at school in northern Baltimore, Mount Saint Joseph's. For first year, freshman year I went to Saint Paul's in Washington, DC, and then I transferred in my second year to Central High School in Washington, DC. And in, I think it was the 10th of April 1944 I joined the Navy illegally, a little young, but that's what I wanted to do at the time. After the service I came back and went to veteran's school at Central High School. And that's where I got my diploma and so forth.

Nineteen fifty I think it was, I joined the DC Police Department in the first precinct for—excuse me, at the seventh precinct in Georgetown for a couple of years. Transferred to the first precinct, did time in a relief scout car, became a regular in 13th scout. After that I became a precinct detective in the first precinct, mostly detailed to homicide and that was later on. I retired on disability I think in 1963. I had an emotional breakdown.

**JOHNSON:**

Why did you want to become a police officer?

**MURPHY:**

Well, I knew it was good retirement and I always liked police. Police were my friends. I always remember the police boys club opened up in 1937. Me and my brother we were the first to join. We went to Camp Brown—in Scotland, Maryland, I believe. That was around 1937. And it was run by police and they were friends. And I always got along with police and I guess I just always wanted to be one. That's all I can tell you there, Kathleen.

**JOHNSON:**

So you said you first became a police officer in 1950. So how would you describe Washington, DC during that decade? During the 1950s?

**MURPHY:**

Well, honey, I grew up—I actually lived there. Washington was—things were different. I don't think there was as much crime. I lived up in the neighborhood of Northwest around Oak Street, Newton Street, and all that area. It was a little segregated. The blacks mostly lived around U Street. But all the apartments had janitors and the black families lived there and they were my close friends. And we socialized a lot, even played together. But, of course, things changed later on, in my opinion.

But I played ball and all that. We had playgrounds we would go to and two or three times a week go to the boys club where I learned to box, play basketball, and things like that. And I fought later in the Silver Gloves and fought some amateur fighting.<sup>1</sup> Then when I was in the service I fought in the service, all through I was fighting. While in boot camp and then when I was aboard ship and so forth. And this all came from the police boys club. I wanted to finish my education. That's all I wanted to do is join the police department.

Now, to start out with, the Navy had me as five foot nine and at the time, to be a policeman, you had to be five foot eight. And when I went down and passed all the tests, but they told me to go home and grow a half an inch. But I could get on the fire department because that only required five foot seven. But later on they dropped it to five foot seven and I went on the police department. And there were people there before me that were shorter than I was. So that's all I can tell you there.

**JOHNSON:** What was your regular beat or patrol in 1954? So before the shooting, before we talk about that, can you describe your patrol?

**MURPHY:** Yes. Well, we patrolled on, I was a fill-in at that time in 12th scout. So when one man was off I would fill in. And I would do this mostly, say, from Ninth Street to the Capitol, from the Mall up to K Street. This was Northwest and part of the Northeast. And that was our area. Of course, there were times, there was 11th scout, 12th scout, 13th scout, and sometimes you'd have to fill in. Back in 1950, that's when the Blair House got shot up by the National Puerto Rican Party. When one policeman got shot, and one of the nationalist party got shot.

**JOHNSON:** This was the attempt—the assassination attempt against President Truman in 1950?

**MURPHY:** The assassination—of course, President [Harry S.] Truman at that time was in the Blair House. They were painting and remodeling the White House.<sup>2</sup> And then after Truman there was [Dwight D.] Eisenhower and there was [John Fitzgerald] Kennedy. And I did a lot of security work in uniform and in plainclothes with all of those three Presidents. Working, I was authorized only in Washington, DC. When the President left he was strictly with the Secret Service. And I worked a lot with the Secret Service, only in Washington, DC. I was on Eisenhower's Inauguration, [Gerald Rudolph] Ford's Inauguration, and Kennedy. Truman was inaugurated in '48 and then up to '53 or something like that. So that pretty well covers that.<sup>3</sup>

**JOHNSON:** What do you remember about the U.S. Capitol—the building and the surrounding area during this period? And, did you visit the building?

**MURPHY:**

Well, yes, because I am a kind of historian myself. I have been since a kid. I've always been interested in the Civil War era, what Washington was like. I remember the Old Post Office building down on Pennsylvania Avenue goes back to that period. And as a kid we always would go to the Smithsonian. We'd go to the Capitol, walk from up where I lived and just go through places where we could. Of course, I don't remember any security at that time.

I remember later on, I know they had the patronage jobs, as we called them. Young men that knew somebody, could get a job at the Capitol. Most of them were students going to college. I remember we used to laugh about some of them just reading books when you'd go in there. Not condemning anything, believe me, Kathleen. Not condemning. That's the way it was in those days.

I had a, I guess a cousin, an uncle by marriage, marriage to one of my mother's cousins, Dan Slattery, and he was with the DC Police Department. But he was detailed there and another group and then from Metropolitan—were detailed there. But most of them were in plainclothes. Now, what their duties were I couldn't tell you, maybe try to assist the police at that time. I do remember when it changed over and these men were training, they were excellent, they knew their job.

**JOHNSON:**

When did the changeover occur? Do you remember?

**MURPHY:**

Well, that happened after the shooting [in 1954] after the Congressmen got shot. Yes. And one of the chief's names was Captain Hill, who I used to play golf with later on. A very experienced man and very educated man. But no, it was a big changeover after that.

**JOHNSON:**

Did you know any of the Capitol . . .

**MURPHY:** We kind of figured it should have been done earlier. But there were no big problems that time. But after the shooting at the Blair House, we were, everybody was leery. And I had calls previous to the March 1st incident but nothing as serious as a shooting. Somebody might have been arguing with people or something. I can't remember. Sixty years ago is a long time ago. But I had calls as a police officer to the Capitol for minor things. But this alleged shooting, we were there in two or three minutes from our location.

**JOHNSON:** Before we get to that day I just wanted to ask you if you knew any of the Capitol Police Officers. You just talked about them generally but did you have any friends?

**MURPHY:** No, I knew none of them personally, no. Later on I say, one of the officers became the captain. His name is Hill. And I knew him as—playing golf with him over the years. But nothing real close or anything about working the job. Just mostly golfers. {laughter} But no, that's it, I guess in about a year or so after that that's when I became a precinct detective.

Now, I spent two years as a regular man in 13th scout and then I was brought back to—my partner and I were brought back as, we got to be—detectives and we were sworn in as detectives. We worked in the precinct, first precinct, and then I was detailed to homicide. I think Captain Hartnett was the captain of homicide and there was a George Donoghue that later on became a deputy chief who we called him “Mr. Homicide.” He was very good, but always told me never raise my voice. {laughter} So maybe that's why I still speak softly. Should we go forward?

**JOHNSON:** Sure. When did you learn that a shooting had occurred at the Capitol on March 1st, 1954?

**MURPHY:**

I was coming out of Herman's Deli. We always ate in the car. We wouldn't have time to go and sit somewhere and eat. I'd gone in and got a corned beef sandwich and a coke, which was at Sixth and Pennsylvania Avenue. And I'm coming out the door and my partner, Jimmy Johnson, said, "Murph, we got an alleged shooting at the Capitol." And I jumped in the car, opened up the glove compartment, put my sandwich and the coke there. And Jimmy had me there and we were there in two or three minutes.

And then we were coming up on the south side where the steps are, facing towards the northeast, and I'm trying to get the dispatcher, "Are we at the House side or the Senate side?" And, meantime, a young policeman ran out of the alcove underneath the steps right where we were and he came running up to the car. And I said, "What's going on?" Now, honey, I'm not trying to harm anybody, do any damage. I said, "What's going on?" He says, "There's shooting in there," and he ran around the other side. And I do remember distinctly Jimmy saying, "Well, where you going?" And he said, "I'm getting the hell out of here."

So I remember we went up, got out of the car, went to the alcove. And I remember saying to Jimmy, "I think I'm going to take my gun out." And as we came down the alcove, which is dark, I can hear somebody, see a big rush coming at us and someone hollering, "Get that woman, get that woman." There was a woman maybe in front of these people by so many steps, and I could hear somebody, "She's got a German Luger." Somebody saying, "She's got a Luger." And then she came towards me, she was just a little thing. And I grabbed her by the wrist but there was no Luger in her hands or anything. Of course, later on I hear somebody caught her up in the gallery and

somebody else got her. But all this time she was running at me. We came outside. Of course, the House has its own press and they were all out there.

Then somebody came to us, one of the other—I think [Officer Benjamin] Jason, one of the guys in 12th scout had one of the fellows. And I remember all the picture taking. Now, the priority was to find out who was hurt and get some ambulances. I remember hollering at Jimmy, “Get some ambulances out here because they say a lot of them have been shot,” not knowing how many at the time. But, of course, that’s when all the pictures were going. And this woman was Lolita Lebron. She couldn’t have been 100, 105 pounds. And I got her from the back holding her wrist and her arm—not her wrist, her elbows. And she’s trying to kick me in all this time and cussing me out, I guess in Spanish. And when the wagons come I just threw her into the wagon. Not the nicest way. And I guess I have to answer for that later on.

Then we had, I think there were five different ambulances. Jimmy went inside trying to get some witnesses, which he couldn’t find nobody. I remember I went back in later on and I remember others carrying the Representative from Michigan [Alvin Morell Bentley] down the steps and putting him in an ambulance. Now, we had to try to get all the information, who was shot, where they were going, and what hospitals they’re in.

Later on I was told that one of them got away and heard later on that he was picked up at the Greyhound bus station at 12th and New York Avenue. At the Capitol . . . this was a two-hour period, I guess, up there. Went back inside the [House] Chamber and I could see where bullet holes were in one of the tables. And then I’m looking up at the gallery, I think you could see some holes in the ceiling. And then we’re trying to, Jimmy and I trying to find any witness, anybody who can tell us, and we could find no one. But I

understand a lot of people found the press and I found, I've seen a lot of articles that I don't agree with but I would never hesitate about anything.

**JOHNSON:**

When you first heard the call that there had been a shooting, did the thought cross your mind that this could be a hoax? Were you surprised?

**MURPHY:**

Well, you don't take anything too serious. An alleged shooting is an alleged shooting and you go out on that like any other shooting. You're cautious, be careful. And you don't dive into anything. You're liable to get yourself shot.

I remember one time coming out of a store, trying to tell a guy to—well, that's another thing later on. And the first time a shot was taken at me I was too cautious. I wasn't hit but a shot was taken at us. And then the guy jumped in the car and the car took off. We later got him and so forth. But, no, you learn, even then don't be too cautious—be cautious, I should say.

So when we didn't know what side to go to, the Senate side, the House side, and when that young officer came out, because he was young like I was, and he just told us there was a shooting. So that's when I said, "Jimmy, I'm taking my gun out." Then when I could see this crowd coming at me, they're saying, "Grab that woman," and I'm just seeing the little thing running towards me. I did put my gun in my holster and I grabbed her by . . . I didn't want to hurt her because I really didn't know who she was at the time. And I think that somebody just saying, "Get that woman," which I grabbed her. And she's speaking in Spanish and she's trying to kick me and so forth. But it was just so many feet to take her outside.

Then there was another crowd behind that and I guess they had the other two. I remember the plainclothesman . . . I don't know who that was. Somebody said maybe Captain [Carl] Schamp, or something like that, it's

Schamp. And the photographers are all out there. That was one confusing mess and a lot of people trying to squeeze in and getting their pictures in the paper or something, I don't know. And I'm just trying to avoid this woman, kept trying to kick me from behind. But we were all calm and the main thing, I'm trying to get the ambulance there. We called our dispatcher. Get paddy wagons there, and that took time.

And then we had to go make the report and it was Jimmy's turn to make the report. But we went back in the chamber to see what we could find and talking to anybody that could tell us exactly what happened, which we didn't get much knowledge. Then from this it was turned over to homicide. And, the next day was just another day. Of course, the papers were loaded and we were writing reports for quite some time. So what can I go on from there, dear?

**JOHNSON:** I'd noticed a lot of the photographs, when we were going through our research files we saw many different photographs that were taken.

**MURPHY:** Yes.

**JOHNSON:** And you're in many of them and you're holding . . .

**MURPHY:** I'm the one holding Lolita [Lebron].

**JOHNSON:** Right. So did someone ask you to stop and pose for photos? Because it seemed like it would have been such a chaotic scene, but there's a lot of different photographs. Do you remember how that all worked out?

**MURPHY:** We're holding her until we got the paddy wagon. As soon as the paddy wagon came up, which could have been 10, 15 minutes later . . . No, I went over, because I say, I'm getting tired of trying to be kicked at. And I kind of

put my knee in her rear end a little bit and put her in the paddy wagon. Somebody took a picture of that. I had a friend tell me they saw it in Japan. I think I had to write a letter for doing that explaining why I did it. We weren't allowed hands on anybody at that time any more than was necessary. And I didn't hurt her. I mean, I just helped her. I'm holding by the wrist and her feet are still going up in the air. So I figured it was the easiest way to get her in there, in the wagon.

Then we came back and that's when they're loading up the ambulances and we're trying to find out, "Well, what hospital are you going to?" And we eventually had to go back after we went around to the chamber and trying to find witnesses and that's one of the main jobs, get people that saw something, that know something. And we couldn't really get anybody to talk to us. They just, "I don't know nothing." But then when I see the papers the next day and read all the articles what all these different people did. Some of them might have been true, but I think a lot of them were false. And I guess they were there but they didn't . . . Well, anyway, I don't want to bad mouth anybody, you understand.

**JOHNSON:** You mentioned that you helped carry one of the injured Members?

**MURPHY:** No, I didn't. Others were bringing them down the steps. He was on a gurney and I think one of the policemen, some, I guess, ambulance people or paramedics, whoever it was, down. And I remember I asked, "Who is he?" I remember he was from Michigan.

**JOHNSON:** That would have been Mr. Bentley.

**MURPHY:** Bentley. Bentley. That's right. And he was from Michigan, right, dear?

**JOHNSON:**

Yes.

**MURPHY:**

So I got that information. Then we went upstairs into the chamber and Jimmy was already in there when I got in there. And he's trying to talk to them as people are coming out of the halls or down from the galleries. "What did you see?" And, "Well, I didn't see nothing." "Anything you can tell us?" We were getting nowhere. There was something about, "One got away . . ." [the] homicide [unit] took over the police department. But we had to go back to the station. It was our job to find out who was shot, and what hospital they were taken to, and what injury they had. That had to go in our written report, which Jimmy agreed to write. Together we worked, but it was Jimmy's turn to fill it out. When you're in the scout car, one man drives, one man does the report and vice versa. That was our way of doing things.

**JOHNSON:**

But you and your partner both went to the House Chamber, correct?

**MURPHY:**

Yes, yes. Yes.

**JOHNSON:**

So what do you remember of the scene?

**MURPHY:**

The only thing I remember, there was a hole in the big table there, that was in front of the . . . they were seated up there but there's a table there in front. And to my knowledge, I guess it's still there because I heard years later—I think—I don't know whether they fixed up one of the holes but that space all we could tell and then looking—I remember looking up at the ceiling, which was kind of high. It looked like there were like little marks, like a little bullet hole. It was by the gallery. Somebody might have just shot their gun off up in the air or something to get attention. Of course, I understand they had the flag, the Puerto Rican flag, and they were waving it around. *Viva* something Puerto Rico. I did hear that mentioned, from whom I don't know.

**JOHNSON:**

Were there a lot of people in the chamber at that time?

**MURPHY:**

Well, by the time I got to it everybody was running. People were coming out of different doors and so forth and what we were trying to do, “What can you tell me? What did you see?” Well, they just kept running. It was nothing. It was just another incident with us. It was nothing special. We’d been on a call similar to that and sometimes it was a good shooting, some people killed. And then, of course, we would just call the homicide squad and they would take over.

Later on I learned that when I did—I was working with George Donoghue, detailed to the homicide—that homicide had authority over anybody and if a deputy chief came up, the homicide man, even though his rank might only have been a sergeant or a lieutenant, he was in charge. But, of course, that’s why we turned it over to homicide. We didn’t turn it over to homicide, homicide takes it. But we still had to make the report, the original report. And then the witnesses they got, and what they ever got these people to say, that was their report to make. Which in those days, we have a form to fill out, but if anything with homicide, which I had to do when I was detailed, we had to type everything ourselves from witnesses or anything we saw. We had to do that all ourselves, turn it into the captain. If he didn’t like it he’d give it back to you. If one word was misspelled wrong, do it over, a little more strict in those days. Anyway, what else can we go with?

**JOHNSON:**

You mentioned that this all took place quickly. It was just a couple of hours and there were a lot of different people involved because there was the Metropolitan Police, there was some Capitol Police Officers, there were plainclothes officers. Who was coordinating all this?

**MURPHY:** I have one of the pictures on my wall here; my son made in a glazed type thing. I'm being shown, and other DC policemen are being shown, and they're calling us Capitol policemen. That's the only thing we kind of resented because we weren't Capitol policemen, we were Metropolitan policemen. Yes. That's what my daughter's looking at. Her name is Kathleen, by the way, and she says out of the *Daily Mirror*. Yes. Oh, that was a New York paper.

**KATHLEEN:** Tuesday, March 2, 1954.<sup>4</sup>

**MURPHY:** Yes. That was front page on the second [of March] and it had us as Capitol policemen. It says Capitol policemen? [Mr. Murphy asks his daughter, Kathleen.]

**KATHLEEN:** Capitol Police.

**MURPHY:** Yes. See, that's the only thing I remember. All the papers had us as Capitol Police. Now, if you have a picture, there's some guy kind of sticking his head out in between me and somebody else and he is a Capitol policeman but he's behind us. And now that I think of it he's the guy that originally came to tell us there was a shooting going on.

**JOHNSON:** But with all of the different officers and everything especially that was going on in the chamber after the shooting had occurred, could you tell if anyone was in charge or coordinating?

**MURPHY:** Well, there was one plainclothesman that had one of the shooters by the seat of his pants. And there's one guy, he's having his pants lifted up from the back by a plainclothesman with a hat on. No, no names in it. But he's in it. I thought he was from the fifth precinct, honey, which was also nearby the

Capitol. And he had one of the men. But it might have been the captain somebody told me they thought it was the—I don't know who was captain at that time, in charge of the Capitol Police, but it might have been him.

**JOHNSON:** Okay. You mentioned Captain Schamp, and he comes up in a lot of the newspaper articles.

**MURPHY:** Yes. It might have been him. I don't know. But at the time I thought it was the policeman from the fifth precinct, a plainclothesman from the fifth precinct. And I thought the name Peters seems to ring a bell. So, if I saw it now I couldn't tell you. And there are no names or it probably might have been the captain because I know I saw his name mentioned quite a bit. I did not know him. I did not know what he looked like. And I don't know whether anybody did. But usually at that time they would bring somebody from the Metropolitan Police over there. Now, there was a regular detail of men from the Metropolitan Police in plainclothes assigned to the Capitol. Now, it might have been after this incident or before this incident. I'm not sure. So let's go on.

**JOHNSON:** Okay. I know that you mentioned the story about Lolita Lebron and you obviously got a good look at her. Do you have any memories of the other shooters that were there?

**MURPHY:** Yes, I can almost picture them in my face. One of them had a mustache and . . . what I'm remembering, I've had that picture. Whoever has him, got him by the back of the belt, which we were trained to do, and lift him up so he can't move too good. Now, I could see that in the picture and I remember that picture. I don't remember any photographers. I remember all's I wanted was to get that wagon and get this woman off my hands and then get inside

and see what we can find out. That's one of the most important things, getting witnesses. But we never really got any there and then when they took them away, the wagons, I guess they took them to the cell block and then the homicide took over. I don't know who else was involved. I don't even know whether the FBI got involved; they might have got involved also. I know she was sent away for 27 years.<sup>5</sup> And when she came back into Puerto Rico she had gained maybe 70, 80 pounds and she was still their national hero.

My son, who is also a policeman, was in Puerto Rico or somewhere and there was a big painting of her and me holding her, a painting made from the copy of the photographs. And the guards couldn't tell—they knew who she was but they had no idea who I was. And my son said, "Oh, that's my father." And I think it was when he went to Puerto Rico. Maybe that's where he saw this picture. And I know he was down in the Alamo down in Texas. And he saw it somewhere when he was on this trip anyway. That's just another story.

**JOHNSON:** No, that's fine. While you were waiting for the wagon to arrive and the press were taking photos, was anyone asking, were the press asking questions?

**MURPHY:** No, I saw nobody asking questions, just taking photos. And you know they—I guess it still is. They have the . . . the press is right there in the Capitol. Well, they all came flying out and I guess other reporters came from all over the place just because there was a lot of them.

**JOHNSON:** Were you surprised by the number of press there at the time?

**MURPHY:** Oh, honey, it was just right down the line. And, there are a lot of people. And, all I want to do is get her in the wagon, because I'm picking her up off the ground. She just kept trying to kick me all the time. Are you still there? I'm getting a beep. I was just wondering.

**JOHNSON:** Yes, I'm here.

**MURPHY:** Yes, that's probably somebody trying to call. My wife's in the hospital, by the way, Kathleen.

**JOHNSON:** Oh, I'm sorry.

**MURPHY:** They took her from the hospital to a universal healthcare and I'm laid up. What else have we got, honey? You were asking me something about after the shooting, about the training and so forth?

**JOHNSON:** Before we get to that, can I ask just a couple of other questions?

**MURPHY:** Sure, sure, honey. Go ahead.

**JOHNSON:** On a more personal level, what was your reaction to the attack?

**MURPHY:** Well, like most of us, and I think people in Washington, DC, and in the area, remember what happened at the Capitol. So it was a feeling of "When is it going to happen again?" And we always were leery. So if we had to go to the Capitol or we patrolled the Capitol after this, we were a little more cautious and looking for a little more, we just did a better job of looking around. And, see, because when we first got up, there was nothing there until this young man came running out of the alcove. So, no, we were much more cautious after that.

And then news came out later, I don't remember when, that they're going to train these men more, which was very good. And from what I understand from these—all these—58 years or so on, they've done well, you know. But no, we had to go up when we were working. All three shifts would have to drive by the Capitol and make sure everything was going well. I would say, if

I'm working an eight-hour shift, we'd probably go by at least four times or five times if we had the time to do it, if we weren't on another call. Because I say, we went all the way over to Ninth Street, down to the Mall, and up to K Street in the 12th scout at the time. And then I'd say about a year or so later I became a regular in the 13th scout, which covered all the lower area, which was also like from the Capitol to the White House and to the Mall, I think up to F Street.

**JOHNSON:** Was this something that you think that the Metropolitan Police Force was concerned about because of what had happened in 1950 with the attempted assassination of President Truman?

**MURPHY:** Well, the thing was now who made the decision to train these men instead of being patronage—and they were called patronage jobs. And that is actually what they were. Because sometimes we would get out of the car, even at nighttime, and walk in [the Capitol] to see if everything's all right and talk to one of these policemen and most of them were sitting there studying their books. Again, I'm not knocking it but that's the way it was in those times. And then when they changed it over. I don't know whether it was a year after or right after they started training them and so forth. But I would say 90 percent of these young men were patronage jobs. They were going to college and they had somebody that got them the job or something.

**JOHNSON:** But you saw—

**MURPHY:** I knew a few of the Congressmen and when I was studying for promotion I got a set of the law books from one of the Congressmen, I guess one of the local [Members]. I lived in Maryland, I guess, in that time in Fort Washington and I guess it was Maryland's Senator or Congressman that gave

me a set of law books to study. And we had to study those books, know what was in those books to get any promotion. But I can't remember. I have trouble remembering what happened last week.

**JOHNSON:** Oh, you're doing great.

**MURPHY:** This was years ago but these little incidents hold out. And, of course, we were afraid of another incident. But they clamped down, I guess, pretty good on that party. But they're still active, I understand, in Puerto Rico. Go from there, Kathleen.

**JOHNSON:** Do you remember if there was any kind of training in between what happened in 1950 and then before the '54 shooting, if there ever had been an emergency at the Capitol, anything that you might have participated in?

**MURPHY:** No, nothing. The only thing I really remember, anything that would stay in my mind is the shooting. I don't remember anywhere else because I enjoyed walking in the [Capitol] Rotunda and all those places with the statues and all that. And sometimes I did it as a kid. That area always impressed me and my love for the Capitol.

During the Civil War there was a prison. I guess at the First, Second, Third Street toward the Northeast. Anything to do with old-time things. I know there was a stable back in the Civil War period off of where the Raleigh Hotel used to be in the—what's the big hotel at 14th, the famous hotel at 14th and . . .

**JOHNSON:** Oh, the Willard?

**MURPHY:** The Willard Hotel, yes. Then, of course, the Occidental. But that was a smaller thing. And then there was a hotel also at Third and Pennsylvania

Avenue where John Wilkes Booth stayed. And at 614 H Street Northwest in Chinatown, that was where Mary's Surratt's boarding house was, where Booth and all them would have their meetings. And he had a home down in Surrattsville, which is now called Clinton, Maryland. Back in my day they called it Surrattsville and there's a museum down there, where she used to have a home. And that's the area that John Wilkes Booth took out on when he went down to the south, in southern Maryland.

I've known all that history since I was a kid and I was always fascinated by it. I know the Capitol was being built during the Civil War. It wasn't finished until after, same with the Washington Monument and the ground up there. Before Washington, DC's territory came from Virginia and Maryland . . . The Potomac River is actually on the DC side. Now, for fires happening in Alexandria, it's in Alexandria, Virginia.

Out on the pier where the water was, I remember a plane crash disaster, I think 52 people lost their lives, a plane coming in to National Airport in those days, now Reagan National Airport. And, landed in the Potomac and a lot of DC Police cars were called on the Virginia side looking for bodies. We were out on boats looking for bodies in the water. Now, I don't know when that was. That could have been previous to the shooting or right after the shooting because I was still in uniform.<sup>6</sup> I guess a lot of people don't realize that the DC area runs over to the other side of Alexandria, Arlington, Virginia.

**JOHNSON:**

The perimeter of the Capitol, in the months after the shooting—did you notice any sort of security changes just when you were doing your patrol?

**MURPHY:** Well, yes. They definitely had been more cautious. I think they might have sent more DC policemen over there in plainclothes because I said this where my uncle or cousin by marriage was. His name was Dan Slattery. He was older than I was. He had been the policeman for maybe 20 years at that time. And I know a lot of them were detailed during this. Some people in the first precinct were detailed over there until they trained these men or got these men to go. Now whether they're still there, I don't know. But no, they took a lot more security, believe me. And, they were—still had a lot of security over at the Blair House and the Secret Service, over there and I don't know when the President moved back into the White House, President Truman.

**JOHNSON:** Did the shooting change your job at all? Did you have to go to the Capitol more often?

**MURPHY:** Yes. I'd say yes. We were told to patrol more often, yes, when we were able to. And that would be all three shifts which we did maybe, previous to the shooting maybe once we patrolled up around in both sides of the Capitol, up and down Independence Avenue and coming up Pennsylvania Avenue. And we'd show the spotlight around, things like that. But after that we had to do it more and even go inside and check around, which one of us would stay in the patrol car. If anything looked suspicious we would check and see if everything's all right, which we did. They had these young men patrolling by that time, even before the training, because they'd be walking around, I guess. We'd only stay maybe 10 or 15 minutes and talk to them. "Is everything all right?" And they were checking people coming in and out then. Well, I think, then, anybody could just walk in the Capitol at any time. And I guess they still train—don't they still check them as they go in now?

**JOHNSON:** Oh, definitely.

**MURPHY:**

Yes. Well, see, I don't think they were doing that previous to the shooting. They might have but I don't remember. As a kid—when I say a kid, 10, 12, 13 years old, I can just remember walking right in there, in the Rotunda and walk around. We were allowed. Of course, you couldn't go where any of the offices were or anything. It's just there were certain areas you're going to go to. We always—kids always spend their time in the Smithsonian, and just all of Washington. Washington had . . . there was a fort out in Washington, this was all during the Civil War where one of the generals, [Jubal] Early was coming to attack D.C. and that's where Lincoln stood and supposed to have gotten his hat shot off or something. Anyway, so I know a lot of history, honey. Georgia Avenue back in those days was called the Old 7th Street Road, going out towards Maryland. Okay, let me see, any—I'm looking at this paper you gave me.

**JOHNSON:**

When you mentioned about the Capitol Police Officers, that they were more active in patrolling after the shooting, did you or anyone else that worked on the force that you know of, did they offer them any advice or mentor them or work with them at all?

**MURPHY:**

No, this wasn't our job, honey. They were going to be trained. We had DC police detectives detailed to the Capitol. And I think they brought somebody over, like a deputy chief, to be in charge of the Capitol until the training. I still to this day believe that the head of the Capitol Police . . . these patronage jobs, was a DC policeman at one time—just like the White House policemen, the uniformed policemen. Most of them were DC policemen. Like Earl Dressler, who was in charge of the White House Police years later on. I broke him in on this scout car when he came on the police department. And he lives down here near me somewhere now. But he became a deputy

chief and then he took the job as chief of police of the uniformed force at the White House. And how they're doing things now? I'd imagine they're still the same way. But basically all those policemen, besides the, when I say uniformed police, also the Secret Service did have some uniformed police now. I have friends, I have another friend who lives down here who was Secret Service but he was a uniformed police. Later on, if they had to send him out of the district or to another country with a first responder, you might say, he would do that. But he worked both as uniform and as a plainclothes Secret Service man. And what they're doing now, I don't know.

**JOHNSON:** Do you know if there was any study or any report done about the response of the Metropolitan Police and the Capitol Police?

**MURPHY:** Well, they couldn't complain about the response because we were there in two or three minutes from the time we got the call. Any call you get, we responded as fast as we could. There was no hesitation. And that's when we were told, not to hesitate. That's what we were told, not to put on the siren or not told to put on the light. That's what we did. Otherwise, no matter what it was, a shooting, a burglary, somebody being mugged, or a break-in, we responded fast. Usually on a break-in, we wouldn't use the siren because if we see somebody running we didn't want to warn, scare him off. No, we were trained well, honey. And response was always very good. And I know I didn't have a time to take a bite of my sandwich. I put it down in the glove compartment. And the funny part is when we got off a couple hours later and Jimmy took off and I got all the papers in hand, my coke, the sandwich went all over my lap. That's just this amazing part of it when it was all over with.

**JOHNSON:** A memorable day.

**MURPHY:** No. But no, we responded very good. And I think everybody else did.

**JOHNSON:** Were you called or was anyone that you knew of called to testify at the trial of the shooters?

**MURPHY:** No, I know nothing about the trial. We weren't involved in it. I'd say the—I don't know if the FBI took over from homicide or homicide handled it. But no, we were not called as a witness or anything to do as a responder. Everything went on a written form report at that time and we just filled it out. We had to get all the information as far as who was shot, where they went, and how they were treated and so forth. And then somebody else would kind of take up as far as the progress of this person. Of course, I saw one of them. But so that's the way it was done. Actually, we made a report and other than being told to survey the area more and check on things at the Capitol, that was it. It was over with and just went on from there.

But we all always had things in mind about it happening again. But sometimes on a 4:00 to 12:00 shift you would take something like 25 and 30 calls, one scout car. That's how it was in those days. They worked. It was almost all due to traffic, taking reports of places broken into. But we didn't have much time to loaf around. Of course, there were so many—things went down on midnight—died down between 3:00 in the morning to maybe 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning. But otherwise it was a busy precinct, very busy. And a lot of guys wanted no part of a scout car because it was report making. What we would do if you had a long report and it was nothing that important, drop a man off, make a report, pick up a patrolman, put him in the car, and the scout car would take off again and the other guy would finish making the reports. So that's the way it was done.

**JOHNSON:** So not much downtime?

**MURPHY:** Pardon me?

**JOHNSON:** Not much downtime for you then?

**MURPHY:** No, we didn't know and we were never—and if we got something to eat we'd get it to take out in the car. You know, just get a sandwich. I got so I learned to bring sandwiches with me. {laughter} I think after that incident I think we would bring a sandwich and eat it. In some precincts, and I was in number seven for a while beforehand, you had time to go in and maybe have a meal and you're lucky if you got a call the rest of the night. But one guy would only go in. You couldn't go out of service. Only one man could ever go in. So if you wanted to eat, you'd take a sandwich out. Got the other man out there to answer the phone.

But I know they call them not precincts anymore. They're districts. And my son, I said he was a policeman in Charles County [Maryland] and he became a chief of police out in Berwyn Heights in Prince George County and he did 37 years as a cop, so he just retired a couple of years ago as chief. Details for the inaugurations, they would bring him and his men in to Washington, DC. So he had a lot of friends on the DC Police Department.

**JOHNSON:** I just had one more question for you today.

**MURPHY:** All right, dear.

**JOHNSON:** If you had to choose one memory, if you have one lasting memory from the events that took place on March 1, 1954, what do you think that would be? What stands out in your mind most?

**MURPHY:** Her trying to kick me. Lebron trying to kick me {laughter} and when can I get her in this wagon. And that was the truth. And I guess it took, I don't know how long it took for the wagon but it seemed like it was a long time. And you're getting aggravated . . . I mean, a woman's kicking her heel up into your groin. I didn't have cuffs. For a policeman to have his own cuffs then was something different. You know, you couldn't afford a pair of cuffs. You'd save money to get a pair of handcuffs. They weren't issued to us. I don't know whether they're issued to the policemen now. I would say maybe one out of five or one out of six policemen had handcuffs. And so you held them. And because some people even had claws. You know what a claw was in those days? And they were even more expensive. When you're raising a family every dime counts. Your hands were more important than the handcuffs. So you can see by the picture—I don't know whether anybody's in handcuffs or not. But the other two fellows, they had . . .

**JOHNSON:** It doesn't look like it from the ones that I'm looking at.

**MURPHY:** What photo are you referring to?

**JOHNSON:** It doesn't look like anyone's in handcuffs.

**MURPHY:** No, that's what I say, honey, they weren't issued. I think now they're probably issued to them. Of course, when my son became a chief I remember he issued them. We didn't have a—what do you call them—a bulletproof vest—we didn't have anything like that. I know my son and all his men had them and I think a lot of them even have them now. But no, we didn't have anything like that. We had a stick, wooden stick, and we had a flashlight. We could carry a big flashlight, too, when we went into a place because you didn't want to carry the baton. But anyway, we'd always have a big flashlight

in your hands because you couldn't—I am trying to think. We didn't have the vest and we didn't have the handcuffs. I would say in the precinct, I only know of maybe two or three guys. I know some of the detectives had handcuffs and when I became a detective I didn't have a set of handcuffs. Things have changed, honey. And we always relied on our hands. And I think we did a good enough job.

But, so my first really impression was to get her in the wagon. And, I saw the pictures the next day in the paper, and I didn't realize I was going to be in the paper or anything like that. Then I understand that. Then I saw it was on television a day or so later. And I had friends come back, military friends came back from overseas, and, "Yes, we saw your picture in the paper." But the main thing was, for me, just to get her in that wagon.

I didn't know where Jimmy was. I knew he went inside. And my job was to get in there and help him. I didn't know what happened to him for, let's say, 15, 20 minutes. But he went inside and then my next thing is to get some witnesses. See if we can find anybody who can tell us what went on, which we weren't able to do. When we got to the chamber it was clearing out. People are still trying to get out of the gallery and so forth. How many were there, how full it was, I don't remember.

**JOHNSON:** Were you surprised that more witnesses didn't have memories to share with you?

**MURPHY:** No. And what really made us really surprised, how many showed up in the press the next day and some of them might have been legitimate. But somebody told me that they knocked her down or something or guy had her. But this woman, if he had her, she got away because she was probably, oh, 15

or 20 feet in front of a crowd. Somebody must have seen me or could see me. It was a dark alcove. "Grab that woman. Grab that woman. She's got a Luger." But when I grabbed her, the Luger had apparently fallen down and was empty. Now, I could have said she had a Luger but she didn't have a Luger. And when they did find it somewhere, they did find two Lugers, I believe, German Lugers. That's an old German, like our .45s. But that's my biggest memory. I guess, is just to get her in that wagon.

Now I got to go in to help Jimmy get the report, see if we can find any witnesses. And we spent maybe another hour in there and then back to the precinct to make the report. And we started calling the hospitals. "Do you have one of the Congressmen or Senators brought in from the Capitol?" Of course we had Casualty Hospital and we had Emergency Hospital. And I don't remember all the hospitals. We called all them. And that was our job to get that report and then turn it over.

**JOHNSON:** One other question I just wanted to ask you about Lolita Lebron since you brought it up. Was she running towards you?

**MURPHY:** Yes, she was running towards me and I could see. At that time I was probably 185 pounds, stocky, well-built, and looked like a little child almost running at me. And now I'm a little child myself now. I only weigh about 150 pounds now. And then right as I grabbed her wrist and I want to spin around to get her from behind, somebody says, "Luger." And I said, "My God." I'm thinking, "Does she have a Luger in her hand?" And I went down her arms. I went right down to her wrist and I could see that she didn't have anything in her hand. And she must have dropped it.

Because, later on, trying to find out if anybody saw anything. But there were a lot of things happening, honey, and I don't want to badmouth anybody because I think everybody did the best they can. But I think there were a few things. Let me put the name in it. And I don't remember the names. I don't remember any names. I remember Jimmy and I discussing it days later.

**JOHNSON:** Was there anything else that you wanted to add? Anything I didn't ask you today?

**MURPHY:** No, honey, but I think we did learn a lesson. From what I'm hearing, they have really good security at the Capitol now and I've heard this over the years. I've been retired almost 50 years. And I've heard nothing but good things about the Capitol. I remember we had a one—you had a fellow by the name, I think, [Jacob] Chestnut, a black officer that was shot up there.

**JOHNSON:** Oh, in 1998, yes.<sup>7</sup>

**MURPHY:** Yes. He's from this area down here so the papers made a big issue down here when he got shot. And I didn't know his family but I know some of the name of Chestnut. You there, Kathleen, you there?

**JOHNSON:** Yes, I'm still here.

**MURPHY:** Yes, okay. I don't know whether the phone is being cut off or not.

**JOHNSON:** No, I'm still here.

**MURPHY:** Yes. Were you around when he got shot?

**JOHNSON:** No, that was before I was here.

**MURPHY:** Yes, but you know about that one?

**JOHNSON:** Yes, yes. Definitely know about that.

**MURPHY:** Yes. The papers play it big down here in North Carolina because he was a North Carolina boy. And that was a tragic thing. I thank you, hon. Now, you are going to send me something to sign, right?

**JOHNSON:** I am. I'm going to send you a copy of the deed of gift.

**MURPHY:** Yes, I think you sent me a copy of what it looks like. Yes. But I'll be glad to sign. But look, I didn't want to badmouth anybody or anything. I think everybody did what they were told at the time, except for the one young man. But there's a shooting, I don't blame him. I might have done the same thing, you know what I mean?

**JOHNSON:** Well, this is your perspective.

**MURPHY:** Yes, that's how I want you to put it.

**JOHNSON:** It's been very valuable.

**MURPHY:** Like I say, I don't want to badmouth anybody. Maybe he didn't know what to do, maybe. That's probably the way I looked at it. He probably just didn't know what to do and like everyone he says, "I'm going to get the hell out of here." And I say I might have done the same thing if I was in his position. You know what I mean?

**JOHNSON:** Right. Well, it must have been chaotic. I can't even imagine.

**MURPHY:** Sure, it was chaotic. Sure. All right, sweetie, if you need me anymore I will be around.

**JOHNSON:** I'll be in touch. Thank you again very, very much for speaking with me today.

**MURPHY:** Thank you. Bye-bye now.

**JOHNSON:** I hope you feel better.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Silver Gloves is a U.S. amateur boxing competition.

<sup>2</sup> During the restoration of the White House after World War II, President Truman and his family resided in the Blair House, the President's official residence for guests of state. The assassination attempt occurred on November 1, 1950, outside Blair House.

<sup>3</sup> Harry S. Truman's presidential inaugurations took place in 1945 and 1949.

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Murphy's daughter Kathleen was present during the phone interview and spoke briefly about some newspaper captions of photographs taken after the 1954 shooting. She is listed as "Kathleen" to distinguish her comments from those made by the interviewee and interviewer.

<sup>5</sup> Lolita Lebron served 25 years in prison for her role in the shooting in the House Chamber.

<sup>6</sup> On November 1, 1949, an American fighter jet collided with a commercial airliner at National Airport. Fifty-five people died in the accident, including Representative George Joseph Bates of Massachusetts.

<sup>7</sup> On July 24, 1998, two Capitol Police officers, Officer Jacob Chestnut and Detective John Gibson, died in the line of duty when an armed assailant opened fire in the U.S. Capitol.