

Militia Leaders Claim U.S. Had Role In Blast Insist One Truck Could Not Have Done It

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Spokesmen for the Michigan Militia claimed several bombs, not a single truck bomb, destroyed the federal office building in Oklahoma City on April 19 and implied the federal government may have had a hand in the mass killing.

Benton K. Partin, a retired Air Force brigadier general, told a news conference organized by the militia that one truck bomb alone could not have caused the destruction of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building that killed 168 persons.

Using what he said was a technical chart, Partin said the devastation required detonation of separate explosives attached to two pillars in the building and another bomb on one of the floors.

Partin claimed he was a weapons expert. The Air Force said he retired in 1978.

"Do we feel the government was involved in the Oklahoma City bombing?" asked Matt Krol, a self-styled colonel in the militia.

"Let me put it this way: Does the government lie?"

Partin, in a long, rambling speech, implied repeatedly that proponents of gun-control laws were somehow implicated in a series of mass shootings across the country in which assault weapons were used.

The killings drove the politics behind last year's ban on the sale of some assault weapons, he maintained.

Neither Partin nor Krol specifically accused President Clinton of a hand in the bombing, but a witness at a Senate hearing said militia members were circulating a rumor that the president was somehow implicated.

"The most recent propaganda circulating among some militia supporters is that (President Clinton) ordered the Oklahoma City bombing," said James L. Brown, deputy associate director for criminal enforcement at the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

While Partin and Krol wore business suits, several Michigan Militia members wore camouflage fatigues at the news conference and a hearing of the Senate Judiciary Committee's subcommittee on terrorism, technology and government information.

Testifying in fatigues and wearing the rank of a brigadier general, Norman Olson, former Michigan Militia commander, told the hearing militias do not need constitutional sanction. The power to create militias "resides with the people."

Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., chairman of the subcommittee, asked Olson about reports he said he could "understand" a justification for the bombing. "I understand the dynamic of retribution, sir . . . when justice is removed from the equation," Olson replied.

Specter also heard from John Trochmann, a founder of the Montana Militia, who in other Senate testimony has been tied to the Aryan Nation movement, a white supremacist group in the mountain states and on the West Coast.

Terry L. Nichols, 40 -- who with Timothy J. McVeigh, 27, a former Pendleton, N.Y., resident, has been charged with the bombing -- attended organizational meetings of the militia, but then quit and helped form a more radical, secret cell last year.

Defiantly, Trochmann said, "How can senators . . . question the loyalties of concerned Americans without first cleaning their own house?"

He denied being a racist.

Other witnesses charged the federal government is engaged in plots, including the nerve gas attack on the Tokyo subway and causing tornadoes to disorient heartland America.

Robert Fletcher, a founder of the Montana Militia, said the United Nations uses weather-tampering equipment to switch electrical charges in the ionosphere and damage American crops.

That idea seemed to strike Sen. Herbert Kohl, D-Wis., as a little farfetched.

"You're saying the government has created weather-tampering techniques so the 'New World Order' will be able to starve millions of Americans and control the rest?" Kohl asked.

"Yes, sir. That's my belief," Fletcher responded.