

General, Lawmaker Call for Bombing Probe

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By Jeff Holladay and J.D. Cash

A retired Air Force brigadier general, an authoritative expert on explosives technology, asserts there is no way that the April 19 blast which destroyed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City could have been done by a single truck bomb, the McCurtain Gazette learned Tuesday.

And just days before the bomb-wracked building was to be demolished on May 23, the retired general had petitioned members of Oklahoma's congressional delegation to delay the destruction to preserve key evidence.

The Gazette had learned of the letters — never released publicly but sent on the ATF — from independent sources and had requested a copy from Oklahoma U.S. Senator Don Nickles' office, which readily complied with the request Tuesday. Meanwhile, the Daily Oklahoman reported in today's edition that State Rep. Charles Key, an Oklahoma City legislator who lost a personal friend in the bomb blast, has requested an independent state investigation by a special House committee.

It also noted that Key has scheduled a meeting at 7 p.m. tonight in the chambers of the state House for all victims and victims' families, and said an 11 a.m. press conference Friday will include experts who differ with the official FBI version of the bomb explosion.

The Oklahoma City newspaper said Key sent a memo to all House legislative members and included the letter sent to U.S. Senator Don Nickles from retired Air Force Brigadier General Benton K. Partin, who the Gazette has learned will be one of those speaking.

Partin, of Alexandria, VA., has been called "one of the world's foremost experts in both the theoretical and practical application of explosives technology" by one publication.

In the letter hand-carried to members of Congress on May 17, Gen. Partin wrote first of this concern that "vital evidence will soon be forever destroyed" with the pending demolition of the Murrah building on May 23.

Then he quickly got to the nub of his concerns:

"From all the evidence I have seen in published material, I can say, with a high level of confidence, that the damaged pattern on the reinforced concrete superstructure could not possibly have been attained from the single truck bomb without supplementing demolition charges at some of the reinforced column bases."

The thrust of Partin's comments were essentially the same as those of an ex- Army sergeant and demolitions expert from Idabel, who told the Gazette on May 5 that the pattern of damage was all wrong — and that he suspected the ATF had illegally stored explosives in the building and that they had gone off.. .a story since given credence by

on-site witnesses quoted in the June 25 edition of the Sunday McCurtain Gazette and Broken Bow News.

Said the general:

"The total incompatibility with a single truck bomb lies in the fact that either some of the column collapsed that not have collapsed or some of the columns are still standing that should have collapsed and did not.. "To produce the resulting damage pattern on the building, there would have to have been an effort with demolition charges at column bases to complement or supplement the truck bomb damage.."

Credentials Impeccable

At this juncture in his letter, General Partin sought to establish his credentials for making such observations. He noted that he had spent 25 years in the Air Force in research, design, development, test and management of weapons development. His duties included being commander of the Air Force Armament Technology Laboratory. Moreover, he was the first chairman of the Office of the Secretary of the Defense joint service Air Munitions Requirements and Development Committee.

Blast Pattern All Wrong

"When I first saw the pictures of the truck boniVs asymmetrical damage to the Federal Building in Oklahoma City, my immediate reaction was that the pattern of damage would have been technically impossible without supplementing demolition charges at some of the reinforced concrete column bases (a standard demolition technique). "First, blast through air is a very inefficient energy coupling mechanism against heavy reinforced concrete beams and columns. Second, blast damage potential initially falls off more rapidly than an inverse function of the distance cubed. That is why in conventional weapons development, one seeks accuracy over yieldfor hard targets. In an aside, the ex-general noted that columns in large buildings are not good targets for blasts, and referred to the Trade Center bombing in New York. One photo at the blast's center showed a massive concrete-and-steel column still standing while steel-reinforced concrete flooring was stripped away for several floors. Yet, there was apparent damage to columns on the backside of the blast in the Murrah building leading Partin to this assertion.

"know of no way possible to reproduce the apparent building damage without well-placed demolition charges complementing the truck bomb damage. Column Damage an Anomaly General Partin suggests that there were either high-level explosives in the Murrah building or that bombs were planted by coconspirators — not necessarily connected to the truck bombing. No other explanation will fly he said. The gross asymmetry in the Federal Building damage pattern is ipso facto evidence that there was most pmbably a demolition charge effort and a truck bomb effort.."

At this point, the general jumps fullscale into conspiracy theories saying those who planted the demolitions and set up the truck bomb "need not have known each other but it would have to be coordinated at some level."

While his credentials as an expert on explosives and armaments are impressive, the general's fervid right-wing ideology apparently caused some in Congress and the media to confuse his technical expertise with his politics.

This statement in the letter, for example, apparently caused some senators and members of the news media to dismiss his conclusions as the rantings of an extreme right-wing patriot:

"Since the Oklahoma bomb tragedy, this country has seen on of the most intense and most pervasive psycho-political campaigns against the so-called Christian Right that have ever occurred before in the country.."

The general said in his letter he feared another "cover-up" similar to the Waco incident involving the Branch Davidians, though his request for independent evaluations by demolition experts were given short shrift and the building was demolished May 23.

His final perorational question, however, still lingers long after the Murrah building cam tumbling down into rubble.

"Why the rush to destroy evidence?"