

ATF'S EXPLANATION DISPUTED

By J.D. Cash with Jeff Holladay
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Three elevator repairmen for the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building dispute the escape claim made by ATF's resident agent on the day the Oklahoma City building collapsed from bomb explosion April 19.

The men, who were on the scene just minutes after the devastating blasts, told the Gazette that the ATF chief's claims were simply not possible.

Because of what it said were widespread rumors that ATF agents had evacuated the Murrah building prior to the blasts, the ATF sent out a news release from its Dallas office and agent-in-charge Lester Martz on May 23 saying the allegations were "entirely false."

That story also claimed that the head of the local ATF, officed at the Murrah building, was just departing the building in an elevator when the blasts occurred.

"ATF's Resident Agent-in-Charge Alex McCauley was with a DEA agent in the elevator when the bomb exploded. The elevator dropped in a free fall from the eighth floor to the third. The two men were trapped in the smoke-filled elevator. The emergency buttons and the phone were inoperable. On their fourth attempt they managed to break through the doors and escape from the elevator."

Pure fantasy, says repairman Duane James.

He clearly recalled checking and double-checking each elevator that terrible morning just to make certain no one was trapped in one, James told J.D. Cash.

Of the six passenger elevators, five were stopped between floors, their doors blown inward, prompting the safety mechanisms to freeze them in place, he said.

"Once that occurs, the doors cannot be opened-- period," James said. "What I and some others did was kick in the ceilings on each of those elevators and determined that no one was in them."

He said only one passenger elevator could later be repaired and operated manually, "and that one was sitting at floor level on three or four."

"And it had no one in it and was, very possibly, sitting at that floor when the power went off after the blast."

Certainly, it had not 'free fall', he said, nor had any of the others.

He also said that he and other maintenance people also checked to see if any of the emergency switches had been tripped. Those switches limit speed and cut power to the elevator if they start accelerating too fast for some reason-- such as a "free fall," he explained.

"None of those switches were tripped on any of the elevators in that building," he said. "I, along with other men with our company, checked the equipment several times."

"Absolutely no elevators dropped that morning."

In fact, James added, it is impossible for modern elevators such as those in the Murrah building to "free fall" or drop "unless you cut the cables because they are counter-balanced to protect the occupants from just that sort of danger."