

Prior Knowledge

by William F. Jasper

Powerful evidence exists that federal agents were not surprised by OKC blast

One of the most persistent and vexing questions to arise in the immediate aftermath of the April 19th terrorist bombing in Oklahoma City concerns the matter of prior knowledge: Did agents and agencies of the federal government know about the bomb plot ahead of time? If so, could not this mass murder have been prevented?

Questions along these lines have been shouted down by politicians and media mavens as the perfervid rantings of dangerous militia partisans, "hate mongers," and "conspiracy kooks." Oklahoma Governor Frank Keating, himself a former FBI official and Treasury Department functionary under James Baker, has been especially quick to lead the chorus in denouncing all those who raise legitimate questions about troubling discrepancies in the federal investigation. The shock and anger Americans have felt over this abominable crime have been shamelessly directed at principled critics of Clintonista socialism and new world order internationalism. Such critics have been cast as "voices of hate" and "right-wing, anti-government forces."

Lies and Cover-up

In the ensuing months since the bombing, however, the unanswered questions have festered and multiplied as new evidence and witnesses have piled on top of old. These include:

- A conspicuous absence of ATF (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms) personnel at the Murrah Building on April 19th.
- An official ATF explanation of the whereabouts of office personnel on April 19th which contains a demonstrable lie.
- Admissions by ATF personnel at the bomb scene that they had been tipped off in advance.
- Conflicting stories by ATF officials concerning whether or not they were expecting "trouble" on April 19th.
- Admissions by sources connected to the Oklahoma City FBI office that they had

been tipped off prior to the explosion.

- Admissions by personnel of the Oklahoma City Fire Department that they had been notified by the FBI of an impending bomb attack.
- Witness accounts of police bomb squads outside the Murrah Building an hour before the blast.
- A U.S. Marshals Service memorandum warning of an impending major bomb threat.
- An informant for the U.S. Department of Justice who provided very accurate and specific advance warning of an impending bomb attack.
- A federal judge in Oklahoma City who told of heightened security concerns immediately before the bombing.
- A federal grand juror who has charged federal prosecutors with covering up the identities of additional suspects in the crime.
- Accusations by a highly decorated scientist at the FBI's vaunted crime lab that some of his colleagues -- including a major expert in the Oklahoma bombing -- tampered with evidence, fabricated evidence, and committed perjury concerning evidence in major cases.
- Taped conversations between an informant in the New York Trade Center bombing and an FBI agent indicating that the FBI may have had specific prior knowledge about that plot and may have been in a position to foil that deadly blast but for some reason failed to do so.

A Can of Worms

The "prior knowledge" can of worms spilled before the public eye on national television when bombing victim Edye Smith zeroed in on troubling rumors of an ATF tip-off. Smith, who lost her two young sons, Chase and Colton, in the explosion, told CNN reporter Gary Tuchman that she was troubled by unanswered questions, such as: "Where was ATF? All 15 or 17 of their employees survived, and they lived -- they're on the ninth floor. They were the target of this explosion, and where were they? Did they have a warning sign? And did they think it might be a bad day to go into the office? They had an option to not go to work that day, and my kids didn't get that option. Nobody else in the building got that option. And we're just asking questions, we're not making accusations. We just want to know, and they're telling us, 'Keep your mouth shut, don't talk about it.'"

The ATF responded immediately, claiming, "Rumors that employees of the

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) had evacuated the Murrah Building prior to the April 19th bombing are entirely false." Lester D. Martz, Special Agent in Charge of the Dallas ATF office, stated in a May 23rd press release: "I strongly suspect that these malicious rumors are fueled by the same sources as the negative rhetoric that has been recently circulating about law enforcement officers. The facts are that ATF's employees in Oklahoma City were carrying out their assigned duties as they would any work day, and several of them were injured in the explosion."

Moreover, claimed Martz, "Several ATF employees were actually heroes on April 19th." His press release then went on to describe this ill-devised apocryphal tale of heroism:

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 On their fourth attempt, they managed to break through the doors and escape from the elevator. The agents made their way to the stairwell and brought with them 10 or 15 people they found along the way

The McCauley elevator story was repeated again the following day on CNN by ATF director John Magaw. But the story was refuted by those who were on the scene and were in a position to know the facts. The free-falling elevator yarn was first subjected to media scrutiny by J.D. Cash of the **McCurtain Daily Gazette** in Idabel, Oklahoma. Cash interviewed members of the elevator inspection and repair crew who were at the site minutes after the explosion. Repairman Duane James told the **Gazette** that McCauley's story was "pure fantasy." James said that he and other members of his crew checked and double-checked each elevator that terrible morning to make certain that no one was trapped inside. J.D. Cash reported in the **Gazette**:

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

"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...."

Certainly it had not "free fallen," he said, nor had any of the others.

According to James, the elevators were equipped with safety switches to protect against excessive speed and acceleration. "None of those switches were tripped on any of the elevators in that building," James told Cash. "I, along with other

men with our company, checked the equipment several times. Absolutely no elevators dropped that morning." In fact, said James, it is impossible for modern elevators like those in the Murrah Building to drop "unless you cut the cables, because they are counter-balanced to protect occupants from just that sort of danger."

Oscar Johnson, the president of Midwestern Elevator, the company which employs Duane James, agrees that the falling elevator scenario may make for good drama in a Schwarzenegger action feature, but it is not something that happens in real life. "None of the elevators fell," Johnson told THE NEW AMERICAN. "All of the elevators' cables were intact." Moreover, Johnson pointed out that, even if a free-fall of five stories had occurred, those inside would have suffered severe injuries.

Johnson said that on the morning of April 19th two of his technicians were about to begin an inspection of the Murrah Building's elevators when the bomb went off. The men had met with a General Services Administration inspector at the federal courthouse across the street from the south side of the Murrah Building at nine o'clock. All three men were walking through the tunnel under 4th Street to the Murrah Building when the explosion occurred. Within just a couple minutes of the blast they were at the scene of the devastation, checking elevators, assisting survivors, searching for trapped victims, and removing bodies.

Another of Johnson's technicians was sitting in his pickup truck in front of the YMCA, across the street from the north side of the Murrah Building, just a few dozen yards from the Ryder truck. He was preparing for an inspection of the YMCA elevator when the bomb detonated. Although chunks of concrete and metal shot through the cab of his vehicle, shattering the windows and windshield, he was unharmed and was soon helping with the rescue effort.

"Within about eight to ten minutes, we had about ten people at the scene," Johnson told THE NEW AMERICAN. Getting the elevators operational again was a top priority for the rescue effort. On Thursday, April 20th, he and his crew had one passenger elevator running, and the following day had the freight elevator operating. Johnson, who had serviced the Murrah Building elevators for many years and was intimately familiar with the building, insists that the ATF account of Agent McCauley's experience is patently false.

ATF Tip-off

In the May 24th interview with ATF Director John Magaw, CNN's senior Washington correspondent Charles Bierbauer asked, "Was there some warning?" Magaw replied that "there was not any warning. We do have 15 employees there. Five of them were in the building, and three or four of those were injured. One was trapped on the ninth floor and escaped later, one was in the hospital for about two weeks. And she [Edey Smith] is right, we did not have

any fatalities."

According to Magaw, most of the ATF agents were either in court or "out working on the street." "And so," said the ATF director, "you will never find any time, unless you're having some office meeting of some kind, where all 15 or 17 people will be in that particular office." However, according to others who worked in the building and who prefer to remain unnamed, the normal contingent of ATF personnel at 9:00 a.m. in the Murrah Building was considerably more than the five who were supposedly there on April 19th.

"Was there a bomb threat to ATF in Oklahoma City the day before?" asked Bierbauer. "Were people told not to come into the offices...?" "No," answered Magaw, "there was ... no bomb threat specifically to ATF or any threat that I'm aware of. And they were not told to not come in. This is -- this is false information...."

Perhaps. Or perhaps not. On September 12th, television station KFOR Channel 4, Oklahoma City's NBC affiliate, broadcast interviews with three witnesses who attested that ATF agents admitted to them to being tipped in advance of the bombing. The witnesses, whose identities were shielded in "shadow" interviews, arrived at the bomb scene shortly after the blast. The first witness works just a few blocks from the Murrah Building and rushed to the explosion site to find his wife who worked inside the Murrah Building. Spotting an ATF agent, he asked him to contact other ATF agents to see if his wife had been found. The witness told KFOR's Brad Edwards that the ATF agent "started getting a little bit nervous. He tried reaching someone on a two-way radio, [but] couldn't get anybody. I told him I wanted an answer right then. He said they were in debriefing, that none of the agents had been in there. They'd been tipped by their pagers not to come in to work that day. Plain as day out of his mouth. Those were the words he said."

The second witness interviewed by KFOR was the first witness' boss, and had accompanied him to the Murrah Building. He was standing with the first witness when the ATF agent made the comments, and he confirmed to KFOR the accuracy of the first witness's testimony. The third witness was a female rescue worker. When she asked an ATF agent on the scene if any of his fellow agents were still in the building, she was told that the agents "weren't here" at the office that morning.

In his May 24th interview, CNN correspondent Bierbauer asked the ATF's Magaw about the relationship of the April 19th bombing to the second anniversary of the Branch Davidian holocaust, an issue over which there has been some marked inconsistencies. "Was there any sense that you needed to be more alert because of that?" Bierbauer queried.

"Clearly there was an interest all over the country to do that," replied Magaw. "And I was very concerned about that. We did some things here in headquarters

and *in all of our field offices throughout the country* to try to be more observant. But ... we didn't anticipate something like this. We were thinking about, you know, demonstrations and things like that that might cause problems." (Emphasis added.)

However, at the very time Magaw was claiming on national television that his agency in Washington and *all* his field offices throughout the country had been on heightened alert for the Waco anniversary, ATF representatives in Oklahoma City were telling the families of bombing victims an entirely different story. On the morning of May 24th, ATF agents Luke Franey and Chris Cuyler visited Edye Smith at the home of her parents, Glenn and Kathy Wilburn. Glenn Wilburn recalls:

They told us that they didn't have the slightest hint that April 19th had any significance, that they weren't anticipating anything, and that they had treated it like any other day -- nothing special. I said, "You mean to tell me that you're not aware that April 19th is a real red letter day for many militia radicals... You mean you weren't aware of this and didn't anticipate any activity?" They assured me they hadn't known about the significance of the date and they hadn't had any clue that anything might happen. They basically had me convinced and had allayed my concerns about the rumors of their prior knowledge. But a couple hours later, when I turned on CNN, I saw John Magaw saying exactly the opposite, that ATF had been on a "Waco alert" nationwide. Somebody wasn't telling the truth.

Bomb Squad on the Scene

Okay, but there is a difference between being on a general alert because of a *possible* generalized threat, and more precise knowledge of a specific threat at a specific time and place. Federal agencies and facilities receive many bomb threats, most of which turn out to be hoaxes. The burning question is whether or not federal authorities had specific knowledge of a plot to bomb the Murrah Building or other facilities in Oklahoma City around the time of the actual crime. There is compelling evidence that this is the case.

On April 23rd, the Sunday after the bombing, the ***Panola Watchman*** of Carthage, Texas reported on the story of a local Carthage businesswoman whose sister was involved in the explosion. The sister, who was identified only as "Norma," works in the federal courthouse building across the street from the south side of the Murrah Building and was there on the morning of April 19th. That same fateful morning, Norma's son Eddy was stopped at a red light three blocks from the blast site when the explosion occurred. Neither Norma or her son were harmed by the bomb even though they were very near to ground zero. But Norma had been in a position to witness a significant occurrence that tends to support claims of official prior knowledge of the plot. Shortly after the bombing, Norma recounted to ***Panola Watchman*** reporter Sherry Koonce what she had

seen prior to the explosion:

The day was fine, everything was normal when I arrived at 7:45 to begin my day at 8 a.m., but as I walked through my building's parking lot, I remember seeing a bomb squad. I really did not think about it -- especially when we did not hear more about it

There was some talk about the bomb squad among employees in our office. We did wonder what it was doing in our parking lot. Jokingly, I said, "Well I guess we'll find out soon enough"....

Around nine or maybe a little after I heard and felt it. It was a huge explosion and our building was shaking with vibrations....

Norma explained that when she and her co-workers fled the building, "There was smoke and dust everywhere -- and bodies." The newspaper continued Norma's account of that harrowing experience:

We were walking fast and everyone seemed to be in a daze. We were simply shocked and confused about what had happened.

Then someone said, "It had to be a bomb" ... and then we all knew, I remember the bomb squad in our parking lot and knew what had happened.

According to the *Watchman*, Norma does not wish to give any further interviews, so THE NEW AMERICAN has been unable to confirm her story. However, another woman who works in the federal courthouse and whose child was killed in the Murrah Building day care center has confirmed Norma's story of the bomb squad. Insisting on anonymity, this grieving mother recounts that she was late for work that tragic day, and remembered seeing the bomb squad as she hurried into the building shortly after eight o'clock. An attorney who works in the area has also attested to seeing the bomb squad in the same area.

Denial, Confirmation

The Oklahoma City Fire Department, it appears, was also given advance warning of the terrorist attack. Glenn Wilburn had heard several reports concerning FBI tip-offs to the fire department before the blast, and decided to check them out himself. When he asked Assistant Chief Charles Gaines about the matter, he was met with denial. Walking out of the chief's office, he went down the hall to Chief Dispatcher Harvey Weathers' office and asked the same question. "Harvey said yes, they had received a message from the FBI on the Friday before the bombing that they should be on alert," Wilburn told THE NEW AMERICAN. He said he then told Weathers, "Well, you're going to be surprised to learn that Chief Gaines' memory is failing. He says it never happened." According to Wilburn, Weathers then responded, "Well, you asked me and I told you. I'm not going to

lie for anybody. A lot of people don't want to get involved in this." According to Wilburn, two other dispatchers corroborated Weathers' story. All members of the Oklahoma City police and fire departments have since been ordered not to speak to anyone concerning events surrounding the bombing unless it has first been cleared through official channels.

Judge Recalls Blast

On April 20th, the day after the explosion, the **Oregonian**, Oregon's largest daily newspaper, interviewed Judge Wayne Alley, who was born and raised in Portland, Oregon and who was soon to become a central figure in the bombing case. In light of other revelations that have surfaced in the ensuing months, Judge Alley's remarks in the immediate aftermath of the bombing take on an added significance. Reporter Dave Hogan wrote in the **Oregonian**:

As a federal judge whose office faces the Alfred P. Murrah Building across the street in Oklahoma City, Wayne Alley felt lucky that he didn't go to his office Wednesday

The judge said the bombing came just a few weeks after security officials had warned him to take extra precautions.

"Let me just say that within the past two or three weeks, information has been disseminated ... that indicated concerns on the part of people who ought to know that we ought to be a little bit more careful," he said.

Alley, who started his law career in Portland, said he was cautioned to be on the lookout for "people casing homes or wandering about in the courthouse who aren't supposed to be there, [and] letter bombs. There has been an increased vigilance."

He said he was not given an explanation for the concern.

Asked if this might have just been a periodic security reminder, he said, "My subjective impression was there was a reason for the dissemination of those concerns."

Alley has since been appointed as the judge who will preside over the trial of chief bombing suspects Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols.

Islamic Threat

Still another hint of federal prior knowledge comes from the U.S. Marshals Service. On March 22nd, a little more than three weeks before the Oklahoma bombing, the Newark, New Jersey **Star-Ledger** reported that "U.S. law enforcement authorities have obtained information that Islamic terrorists may be

planning suicide attacks against federal courthouses and government installations in the United States. The attacks, it is feared, would be designed to attract worldwide press attention through the murder of innocent victims."

The story, by ***Star-Ledger*** correspondent Robert Rudolph, continued:

The Star-Ledger has learned that U.S. law enforcement officials have received a warning that a "fatwa," a religious ruling similar to the death sentence targeting author Salmon Rushdie, has been issued against federal authorities as a result of an incident during the trial last year of four persons in the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York.

The disclosure was made in the confidential memorandum issued by the U.S. Marshals Service in Washington calling for stepped-up security at federal facilities throughout the nation

According to the memo, the information about the threat was obtained from an unidentified "informed source" who said the death sentence was specifically directed against U.S. Marshals Service personnel....

The Marshals Service memo said the agency believes that "there is sufficient threat potential to request that a heightened level of security awareness and caution be implemented at all Marshals Service-protected facilities nationwide."

The memo, issued by U.S. Marshals Service Director Eduardo Gonzalez, warned that attacks may be designed to "target as many victims as possible and draw as much media coverage as possible" to the fundamentalist cause. "The terrorists, possible suicide bombers, will not engage in negotiations," the memo warned, and "once the press is on the scene, the new plans call for blowing everyone up."

Early Informant

While no "Islamic fundamentalists" have taken credit for the Oklahoma City bombing, many details of the warning and the timing of the Oklahoma blast seem to indicate that the memo certainly may have pertained to the mass murder at the Murrah Building.

An even more intriguing and compelling piece of evidence comes in the form of a warning allegedly delivered to the U.S. Justice Department offices in Denver less than two weeks before the Oklahoma bombing. U.S. Attorney Henry Solano confirmed that his Denver office granted immunity last September to an informant who claimed to have information about a plot to bomb a federal building.

This same informant reportedly delivered a letter to the Justice Department on April 6th claiming to have "specific information that within two weeks" a federal

building was to be bombed. The informant's hand-written letter stated:

After leaving Denver for what I thought would be a long time, I returned here last night because I have specific information that within two weeks a federal building(s) is to be bombed in this area or nearby

I would not ignore this specific request for you personally to contact me immediately regarding a plot to blow up a federal bldg. If the information is false request Mr. Allison to charge me accordingly. If you and/or your office does not contact me as I so request herein, I will never again contact any law enforcement agency, federal or state, regarding those matters [indecipherable word] in the letter of immunity.

After the April 19th bombing, spokesmen for the Justice Department stated that they had not -- and still do not -- deem the informant to be credible. However, last September they had apparently deemed him credible enough to grant him immunity. That is not a prize which federal prosecutors dispense frivolously to every "informant" who walks through the door. The informant's immunity letter of September 14, 1994 on U.S. Justice Department stationery reads:

This letter is to memorialize the agreement between you and the United States of America, by the undersigned Assistant United States Attorney. The terms of this agreement are as follows:

1. You have contacted the U.S. Marshals Service on today's date indicating that you have information concerning a conspiracy and/or attempt to destroy United States court facilities in [redacted] and possibly other cities.
2. The United States agrees that any statement and/or information that you provide relevant to this conspiracy/conspiracies or attempts will not be used against you in any criminal proceeding. Further, the United States agrees that no evidence derived from the information or statements provided by you will be used in any way against you....

The informant claims that he was acting as a courier transporting illegal drugs from Kingman, Arizona to Las Vegas and Denver when he discovered C-4 explosives in a delivery envelope. He also says he overheard discussions about a plot to blow up a federal building, or buildings, in the Midwest sometime in mid-April 1995. The alleged conspirators were Latin American or Middle Eastern with Arabic names. Kingman, Arizona, of course, was home to Timothy McVeigh and Michael Fortier, both of whom are charged in the bombing of the Murrah Building. According to our information the informant did not report seeing McVeigh or Fortier or hearing their names in connection with the bomb plot. However, as we have reported previously in THE NEW AMERICAN (September 4th, "[Searching for John Doe No. 2](#)" and October 16th, "[Startling OKC Developments](#)"), reliable witnesses have identified apparent Middle Eastern accomplices in the company

of McVeigh in the days prior to April 19th and on that fateful morning with McVeigh in and near the Ryder truck.

Grand Juror Speaks Out

In the November 27th issue of THE NEW AMERICAN ("New Charges of OKC Cover-up"), we reported on the serious charges leveled against federal prosecutors in the case by grand juror Hoppy Heidelberg. Heidelberg had attempted to expose improper interference with the grand jury's duties by federal prosecutors. Specifically, he accused the government of covering up the identity of the still missing John Doe No. 2, arguably the most sought after fugitive in history. For his civic-minded efforts he was dismissed from the jury and threatened with possible fines and imprisonment.

Fortunately, Heidelberg has continued to speak out. And, amazingly, he has even received some positive coverage from certain vehicles of the controlled Establishment media which have otherwise performed deplorably with virtually all of their reporting on Oklahoma City. A prime example of this rare and responsible journalism could be found on CNN's **Burden of Proof** program on November 11th. In an amazing turn of events, the program's co-hosts, Greta Van Susteran and Roger Cossack, as well as the panel of three legal experts, all came down on the side of Heidelberg. Cossack even exclaimed ardently, "I think Hoppy's a hero." Plainly, the government's credibility in this case is in tatters.

Adding to this credibility crisis are the recent revelations of FBI scientist Dr. Frederic Whitehurst. Special Agent Whitehurst, a top chemist in the FBI's celebrated crime lab, has shaken the Bureau and the Justice Department with accusations of perjury, evidence tampering, and evidence fabrication in hundreds of high-profile cases stretching back several years. Moreover, he charges that his superiors have refused to correct these criminal malpractices and have covered up for the guilty parties. Although we have not yet been able to satisfactorily verify Whitehurst's charges, many of them appear to have merit. If even a fraction of them prove to be true, they should serve to topple Janet Reno, Louis Freeh, and others leading the government's effort in the Oklahoma City case.

However, the Whitehurst accusations, serious as they are, pale into relative insignificance next to the explosive allegations of Emad E. Salem, an FBI informant in the World Trade Center bombing. Salem, a 43-year-old former Egyptian army officer, was used by the U.S. government to infiltrate the group of Muslims convicted of the New York City bombing which left six dead and more than 1,000 injured. According to Salem, he was originally supposed to substitute "phony powder" for the explosive ingredients used in the bomb, but was foiled by an FBI supervisor who "came and messed it up."

Although hardly a paragon of virtue, Salem has brought forth taped conversations with FBI agents that seem to lend credibility to his fantastic claim.

Did the FBI fail to prevent the Trade Center bombing when it was well within its power to do so? If so, why? Who was responsible? If federal officials -- due to incompetence, negligence, or other reasons -- did indeed fail to stop the New York bombing (or even contributed to its perpetration), is it not appropriate to ask if some similar "foul-up" may have occurred in Oklahoma?

Is dismissed grand juror Hoppy Heidelberg correct in claiming that the federal investigators are covering up the identity of John Doe No. 2? Why were some of the most important witnesses in the Oklahoma City case not called before the grand jury? Why was the Denver informant granted immunity and then not listened to? Why is he still considered "not credible" after providing details in advance of the event which would require either the inside knowledge he claims or special clairvoyant skills? Why did the ATF lie about the events of April 19th? Why have the Oklahoma City fire, police, and sheriffs departments been placed under gag orders?

Clearly, there are many pieces of this puzzle that point toward foreknowledge of the bombing plot by federal officials prior to the terrible moment at 9:02 a.m. on April 19th, when the murderers' bomb (or bombs) ended the lives of 169 people. These witnesses and pieces of evidence cannot be ignored or summarily dismissed. They deserve a thorough and fair investigation. And Americans must demand one, or face the certain prospect of additional -- and perhaps more heinous -- terrorist acts.