

Did ATF Expect Bomb Blast Earlier, Let Down Its Guard?

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By J.D. Cash with Jeff Holladay

Third in a series

The source: A guilt-ridden, high-level government official.

The event: April 19, 1995, bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, Oklahoma City.

Recipient of information: Glenn Wilburn, and Oklahoma City CPA who lost two young grandchildren in the daycare center of the Murrah building and launched his own investigation.

What he was told: Local ATF agents, augmented by those from other locations, were expecting the bombing attempt around 3:30 a.m. April 19, 1995, 5 1/2 hours before it happened. When nothing happened, they let their guard down.

Of all the compelling evidence uncovered by the McCurtain Gazette that there was prior knowledge of the bombing attempt, none is more chilling than the ATF telling its own agents not to go to work at the Murrah building that day but failing to warn other building workers of the danger.

The bombing killed 168 men, women and children. It injured hundreds of others. To Wilburn and his stepdaughter Edye Smith, it was not simply a massacre of innocent victims. It was murder.

Having lost faith in the Justice Department's investigation, and being convinced there was a coverup that reached to the highest levels of the federal government, Edye Smith filed a wrongful death civil suit against Timothy McVeigh "and unidentified others."

It was a venue, they felt, that would bring to bear the broad powers of civil lawsuit discovery and allow them to subpoena witnesses and documents that they felt had heretofore remained hidden.

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) has doggedly sought to discredit those who questioned the official version of bombing events as "conspiracy mongers" and "nuts" — and, surprisingly, found a number of takers among the Oklahoma and national media. Yet, the inconsistencies, the oversights and even the outright lies failed, for inexplicable reasons, to raise the expected questions from state and local media that begged for answers.

The Gazette investigation, for example, provided compelling evidence that Oklahoma City police, fireman and the sheriffs department were alerted in advance to a possible bombing by the FBI.

The ATF hurt its own credibility with changing stories.

But confronted last December by investigative reporter J.D. Cash, Lester Martz of the Dallas regional office of the ATF made what may have been an inadvertent admission:

He said there were an additional five or six agents assigned to Oklahoma City and that they were not in the building because they were involved in an all-night "surveillance operation."

Pointedly asked if that all-night surveillance was at the Murrah building, the Dallas regional head of the ATF balked: "I absolutely will not comment," he said.

Were local ATF agents told not to go into the Murrah building on the day of the explosion?

And did they hold a special meeting after the explosion to get their stories straight?

The story of at least on eye-witness suggests that.

Bruce Shaw arrived at the building after the explosions, frantically seeking word of his wife, Terry, who worked in the federal credit union.

He could see that the area of the building where his wife worked was completely devastated. He wanted to go inside and search for her. He was turned back.

Spotting a man in an ATF outfit at Sixth and Harvey, Shaw figured the man would help him.

After all, he and his wife had come to know most of the ATF agents who, worked upstairs.

Shaw was surprised to find the man was a stranger. He was definitely not a member of the ATF staff he knew who worked in the building.

"Hey, I need some help!" Shaw said. "My wife is on the third and I've got to find some of the local ATF agents to help me find her...They know me, I promise — they'll help..."

"Sure," responded the ATF agent. "Let me see what I can do."

Using his two-way radio after walking out of earshot, he talked briefly, then turned back to Shaw and his supervisor, Tony Brazier.

"Sorry, those guys are in a debriefing right now...I can't get a message to them."

The statement shattered Shaw's aplomb, suddenly, he started to question the whole situation.

"What the hell! Where were they this morning? Weren't they in their offices upstairs?"

The ATF agent's response stunned him: "Naw...They were paged this morning and told not to go inside."

Bruce Shaw's wife was among the fortunate ones — she narrowly survived after being rescued from the basement, three floors below where she worked. But Bruce Shaw and his wife did not go public with what they knew until they were tracked down by Glenn Wilburn and his wife, Kathy.

Like so many others, they had a hard time accepting the idea of a coverup. It took some coaxing by the Wilburns, but Bruce Shaw eventually agreed to tell his story.

Predictably, the ATF went "ballistic" when asked why the ATF agent Shaw had seen was on the scene fully one hour before Tulsa agents of the ATF arrived and hours before others from all around the country descended.

But Shaw's account, in conjunction with the observations of J. Pat Carter and others, clearly give credence to what Glenn Wilburn had been told earlier by a government official in confidentiality:

That the ATF had brought in agents from out of state, expecting the bombing to occur at 3:30 a.m. But when the "had guys" didn't show up by then, the ATF let its guard down.