

Howe Says Tulsa Bombing Sensed

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By David Harper

Former federal informant Carol Howe testified Thursday that she sensed a "powerful murmur" within the white separatist community late in 1995 that suggested that Tulsa could be targeted for a bombing similar to the one that killed 168 people in Oklahoma City.

Howe testified as the only witness called by the defense in the federal trial of Tulsa James Dodson Viefhaus, Jr. Viefhaus is accused of conspiracy, willfully making a bomb threat and possession of a nonregistered destructive device.

Howe was named in the same March indictment as Viefhaus. Her trial, also in the Tulsa courtroom of U. S. District Judge Michael Burrage, is scheduled to begin after a verdict is reached in the Viefhaus case.

Howe admitted that she personally wrote down 18 sites in the Tulsa metropolitan area that she feared might be targeted by bombers in 1996, probably in the spring. Howe said she did so out of concern for family, friends and neighbors whose lives might be jeopardized if the "murmur" turned into something more. However, under cross-examination by Assistant U. S. Attorney Neal Kirkpatrick, Howe said she never turned over the list to authorities despite having conversations in 1996 with Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agent Angela Graham and FBI agent Pete Rickel.

"I forgot," Howe said. Howe did say she left messages in 1995 intending to talk about the list but the calls weren't returned. That list is one of the items that federal agents found when they executed a search warrant Dec. 13 at the residence Howe shared with Viefhaus. The government also believes it found items which could have been converted into a pipe bomb if properly assembled and "initiated."

Viefhaus and Howe fell under suspicion after the FBI was tipped to an answering machine message emanating from the east Tulsa home the couple shared.

The Dec. 8 message threatened that bombs would be activated in 15 U. S. Cities on Dec. 15, 1996, unless action was taken by "white warriors" against the federal government by that date. Viefhaus' attorney, Craig Bryant, admitted to the jury during opening arguments that Viefhaus' voice was the one on the tape.

Rickel testified Tuesday that he believes a "communication" from convicted bomb conspirator Willie Ray Lampley served as the basis for the alleged threat. But Rickel said the Viefhaus message differs sharply from what Lampley relayed, which apparently involved the Russians.

The prosecution maintains the message voiced by Viefhaus is a bomb threat and that Howe should also be held culpable for it under an "aiding and abetting" theory. Howe

testified Thursday that the threat was from Lampley and that she first heard it when she and Viefhaus visited Tulsa white separatist Dennis Mahon. Howe said Mahon was paraphrasing it from a letter written by Lampley.

Howe said she no longer holds racist beliefs, but was serious about such views for "about six weeks" in 1994. Serious enough, in fact, to get a swastika tattoo. This despite the fact that Howe later Thursday testified that she has a "great deal" of Jewish friends.

Howe said her prejudice was the product of an incident in Chandler Park in March 1994. Howe said her (then) husband and a friend of his left her alone in the park. Howe claimed she was approached by "some black people" who made sexually explicit comments and suggestions and then, after she rebuffed them, she was pushed off a ledge and "broke both my heels."

Howe has occasionally used crutches in getting to court dates and her lack of mobility was cited by the prosecution in justifying why she was allowed to be out on bond at her father's house while waiting for trial. Viefhaus has been jailed since Dec. 13.

On a Nov. 3, 1996, hot line message, Viefhaus had blasted a caller who criticized Howe's involvement with the National Socialist Alliance of Oklahoma, the organization the couple had cofounded. "She got an IQ of 165 and tolerates more pain than any man I've ever known," Viefhaus said.

Howe claimed she met Viefhaus while on an alleged ATF assignment in early 1995 in which she was supposed to associate with skinheads. She acknowledged that she and Viefhaus were romantically involved and said they were engaged for more than a year before his arrest. She denied ever being romantically linked with Mahon.

Howe said Viefhaus knew that at one time she was supposed to be monitoring Viefhaus for the government. Howe said she believes that Viefhaus viewed her as a "double agent" and that he didn't realize the "extent" or "degree" of her involvement with federal authorities.

The level of Howe's involvement with the FBI and ATF is hotly disputed. The government claims that Howe was never used as an informant after the middle of 1995 and was only contacted by Graham in March 1996 so that Graham could tell Howe that Howe's informant status had been accidentally leaked to the defense team of now convicted Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh.

Graham said she and Howe reached a mutual agreement in June 1995 that Howe would do no more informant work for the government. Howe testified that she did not remember any such agreement. She also testified she was never informed of any "deactivation" in March 1995 which the government says was briefly lifted so Howe could go to Elohim City in May 1995 in a failed attempt to look for "John Doe No. 2."

Graham acknowledged that ATF records may show Howe was an informant through 1996, but said that's because her superiors would not allow her to officially "close out"

Howe because there was a desire in the agency not to destroy any records that related to the Oklahoma City investigation. Kirkpatrick told the court that he thinks it "tragic" that the government's decision to meticulously preserve its records of the Oklahoma City investigation is now being used by Howe in her effort to justify her conduct with Viehhaus in 1996.

Howe insisted however, that she thought' she was acting as an informant in 1996. She said when the ATF and FBI supposedly refused to provide for her safety after her name had been leaked as an informant that she had no choice but to go deeper underground within the white separatist movement.

Howe testified that during her ATF duties before the Oklahoma City blast, some residents of the far eastern Oklahoma "religious, racial community" known as Elohim City regarded her as suspicious. Thus, she said in 1996 after her cover was blown, she was determined to pass herself off convincingly as a bonafide member of the "movement."

Howe, too, has had problems with depression. Under cross-examination by Kirkpatrick, Howe admitted that she called police in February 1995 and that she was taken to a local mental health facility where she said she stayed for four hours. Howe denied that cuts she had on her body were self-inflicted (as a Tulsa Police report indicates.) Howe said she subsequently got therapy for depression she said was brought on by pressure from the ATF and the death of a child she knew in a house fire.

The prosecution also introduced evidence of a bizarre incident in March 1995 in which Howe allegedly reported that she was "pistol-whipped" by a black man, According to a law enforcement report cited by prosecutors, this apparently happened while Howe was decked out in camouflage (apparently complete with face paint) in a "night reconnaissance" mission with unspecified others in north Tulsa. Howe was vague about the incident when asked about it during cross examination Thursday.

Graham had testified earlier Thursday that the above two incidents, a disturbing report from Howe's landlord, and a suspicion that Howe was starting to associate with Skinheads led to her emergency request to deactivate Howe for instability.

"I felt like she was no longer loyal or competent enough to serve as an informant," he said.

Graham said Howe's reactivation right after the Oklahoma City bombing merely reflected how desperately the government wanted to catch those responsible for the bombing.

Graham said the government would have used anybody to "solve that crime." Graham said Howe's reactivation was the only time during her career with the ATF that someone "so unstable" had been pressed back into duty.

Howe apparently was not able to bring back any credible evidence about who the supposed John Doe No. 2 is. Howe said, based on sketches released right after the bombing, she thought it might be either Michael Brescia or two brothers named Ward who reportedly frequented Elohim City.

As promised, Bryant did not get into Howe's warnings of threats against federal buildings coming from German national Andreas Strassmeir or her trip to Oklahoma City with Elohim City residents in February 1995.