

Letter Shows Ex-Informant Feared for Life, Lawyer Says - Jurors Hear ATF Agent's Report of Threats by McVeigh Sympathizers

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TULSA, Okla. - Jurors took a look Tuesday at a government agent's 1996 letter expressing concern that militia associates or others sympathetic to Timothy McVeigh might try to harm former informant Carol Howe.

The defense attorney for Ms. Howe introduced the document to help prove that his client feared for her life once she was revealed as a "snitch" in the Oklahoma City bombing case.

Ms. Howe, 26, is on trial on federal charges of conspiracy and threat-making that her defense attorney contends were tied to her undercover work for the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. Prosecutors accuse her of crimes unrelated to her informant duties.

Defense attorney Clark O. Brewster says his client was trying to look more credible to the white supremacists she was monitoring for the ATF.

Mr. Brewster also says Ms. Howe was indicted to keep her quiet about the government's alleged prior knowledge of the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. Federal officials have denied knowing that the building was going to be attacked.

The April 22, 1996, letter that surfaced Tuesday was written by ATF Agent Angela Graham, who oversaw Ms. Howe. FBI Special Agent Pete Rickel was asked to read excerpts from the witness stand.

In the letter, Agent Graham wrote that Ms. Howe was complaining of receiving suspicious phone calls and being followed, Agent Rickel testified.

Agent Graham wrote that danger was posed by sympathizers to Mr. McVeigh, who was charged with setting off the April 19, 1995, bomb that killed 168 people at the federal building in Oklahoma City.

Mr. McVeigh has since been convicted and condemned to die for the crime.

Agent Graham also wrote that danger was posed to Ms. Howe by residents of the white separatist compound Elohim City in eastern Oklahoma and by White Aryan Resistance leader Dennis Mahon of Tulsa, the target of her ATF investigation.

Ms. Howe was "the key to identifying individuals at Elohim City, which is tied to the Oklahoma City bomb case," the letter says.

Agent Rickel acknowledged under cross-examination that he knew of nothing the government did to protect Ms. Howe once her name was leaked to Mr. McVeigh's defense attorneys.

Agent Rickel said he talked with Ms. Howe in the spring of 1996 about her concerns. He said he referred her to the ATF for help.

"My memory may be vague on this," he testified at one point.

Under cross-examination, the FBI special agent said it would be "reasonable" for a confidential informant to continue making contacts with white supremacists if she feared that her cover was blown.

Prosecutors accuse Ms. Howe and her former fiance, James Dodson Viefhaus Jr., of collecting pipe bomb components and leaving a threatening message on an answering machine in their Tulsa home last year. Mr. Viefhaus, 28, was convicted Friday in a separate trial.

"We are the voice of white revolution," a female voice said on a cassette tape played for the jury Tuesday.

That cassette and others - some recorded with a man's voice - contained rhetoric against blacks, immigrants, Jews, homosexuals and a government overrun with "greed, inefficiency and incompetence." Many of the tapes advocated violence.

Prosecutors say Ms. Howe and Mr. Viefhaus formed the National Socialist Alliance of Oklahoma to promote the alleged superiority of the white race.

Ms. Howe and Mr. Viefhaus were charged with conspiracy, willfully making a bomb threat and possession of an unregistered destructive device.

Agent Rickel testified Tuesday about a search of the couple's home in which agents reportedly turned up components for a pipe bomb and what prosecutors describe as a "target list" of law enforcement buildings. A message on their answering machine referred to 15 unnamed U.S. cities that would be bombed Dec. 15, 1996, if demands of a "high-ranking revolutionary commander" were not met.

Attorneys have indicated that the trial might last into next week. It started Monday.