

Controversy Over Howe's True Loyalties Become Focus of Her Trial

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The controversy over Carol Howe's true loyalties — and whether the FBI team that raided her house knew of her role in the Oklahoma City bombing case — has become the focus of the Tulsa conspiracy trial of the former informant for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (BATF). Two FBI agents testified Tuesday about facts related to the raid on the residence Howe shared with convicted conspirator James Dodson Viefhaus.

But the stories they told about their lack of knowledge about Howe's undercover work for the government were hard for many observers to swallow. Howe's attorney contends the government was trying to destroy Howe's reputation because she warned the BATF about a plot to bomb the Murrah federal building in Oklahoma — before the April 19, 1995, explosion.

That Dec. 13, 1996, raid was purportedly set in motion after a newspaper reporter called a "hotline" at the Viefhaus- Howe home and heard a message on the couple's answering machine that caused him to call the head of the FBI's domestic terrorism unit in Washington, D.C. That message said a letter had been received by a high-ranking member of the underground who warned that 15 cities could be bombed by Dec. 15 if certain actions were not taken by "white warriors."

Pete Rickel, the Tulsa FBI agent who tracks activities of suspected terrorists, said he had spoken with Howe in spring 1996 about her concerns that her "cover" had been blown when the FBI released a document to the McVeigh defense team revealing her undercover work in the radical neo-Nazi movement.

But Rickel told the court Tuesday that when the raid was planned and carried out at the residence of the BATF informant, he and others had no inkling of who Howe really was.

Rickel claimed under cross-examination that he did not learn until later that Howe was the same person he spoke with in the spring about her role in the underground investigation of the Oklahoma City bombing.

Several hours after the raid began, Rickel claimed he learned of Howe's identity.

Rickel also told Howe's attorney that he had told her earlier that the FBI would not offer her any protection and that she should seek help from the BATF.

But the BATF also refused to provide Howe any protection after her cover was compromised, figuratively throwing her to the wolves, Howe attorney Clark Brewster had said earlier.

Rickel admitted under Brewster's grilling that Howe "theoretically" could have decided to continue playing the role of a neo-Nazi after learning the government was not going to provide for her safety from those who might take revenge against her.

Howe's defense in the trial is that she was working undercover for the BATF — and that her statements and actions before the raid were simply part of her cover. As part of that undercover work, Howe says she gathered bomb-making components from the subject of one of her investigations.

Yet, she laments, it is those components in her possession — as a result of her undercover investigation — that the government is using to charge her with, a sort of Catch-22 situation.

The government contends Howe's work for BATF ended in the summer of 1995 and that she had no reason to associate with members of the radical white power movement after that.

But Howe's actual records with the BATF indicate that she was still on the books as an approved BATF informant, at the time of the raid on her house.

Moreover, a document obtained by the McCurtain Gazette shows the level of concern the government had about Howe's true identity and the highly sensitive work she was apparently still performing for the government.

Months after government officials said Howe was no longer an informant, an April 22, 1996, BATF memorandum has this to say:

This informant is involved with the Oklahoma City bomb case which is pending prosecution in Denver and was the key in identifying individuals at Elohim City, which is tied to the Oklahoma City bombing case.

During the Viefhaus trial, Howe's handler at the agency tried to explain the discrepancy this way: That Howe's still being on the books as an informant was a "procedural matter" and should be "disregarded."

Special BATF agent Angela Graham also testified last week during Viefhaus's trial that she had no idea what Howe was doing in 1996 — and was unaware a raid had been planned on her home.

But FBI special agent Chris Peters took the stand Tuesday and provided a strong suggestion that Graham may very well have known.

After explaining his role in the raid on the Howe residence, Peters was asked by defense attorney Clark Brewster during cross-examination who he was married to. "Angela Graham," Peters replied.

Peters said he had no idea of Howe's relationship with his wife when he participated in the raid. The defense is expected to begin putting its case on later this week.