

Lawyer Tells Jury U.S. Betrayed Ex-Informant Woman on Trial in Bomb Plot Described as Keeping Eye on White Supremacists

Dallas Morning News, The (TX)
August 1, 1997 | Page: 34A | Section: NEWS

TULSA, Okla. - Carol Howe was a dutiful, hard-working federal informant whom the government turned against after blowing her confidentiality and exposing her to danger, her attorney said Thursday.

Clark Brewster told jurors that Ms. Howe has been charged with crimes linked to her stint with the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

Ms. Howe, who is accused in federal court of making a bomb threat and possessing the parts for a pipe bomb, says she was trying to fit in with the white supremacists she earlier was asked to watch for the ATF.

Prosecutors contend that Ms. Howe's paid and contracted informant duties ended long before the alleged crimes took place in December. Prosecutors rested their case Thursday.

They charged Ms. Howe, 26, and James Dodson Viefhaus Jr., 28, with conspiracy, willfully making a bomb threat and possession of an unregistered destructive device. Mr. Viefhaus was Ms. Howe's fiance and roommate.

He was convicted last week in a separate trial.

Mr. Brewster told the jury Thursday that Ms. Howe became frightened when she learned from the ATF that her informant status had been disclosed to attorneys for Oklahoma City bombing suspect Timothy McVeigh.

"They say, 'Do whatever you need to do to protect yourself,'" Mr. Brewster said, quoting an instruction to his client.

So, Ms. Howe decided to continue activities with white supremacists so they wouldn't grow suspicious, Mr. Brewster said.

She recorded racist tapes, collected racist literature and lived with Mr. Viefhaus as part of the act, he said.

FBI agents who searched the defendants' home testified they found various items - including a piece of galvanized pipe, cannon fuse and pistol powder - inside a metal box. Mr. Brewster said Ms. Howe collected those alleged pipe-bomb components as part of her work for the ATF.

Mr. Brewster said Ms. Howe gave some of those items to her ATF overseer, who gave them back.

"She has it in her house, and they indict her for it, try to use it against her," he said.

Ms. Howe previously said she had warned agents of a bomb conspiracy in advance of the April 19, 1995, explosion set off at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. Mr. McVeigh was convicted and condemned to die for the crime, which killed 168 people.

Federal officials have denied having prior knowledge of the bombing.

ATF Agent Angela Graham testified Thursday that Ms. Howe was sent to Elohim City, a white separatist community in eastern Oklahoma. A report Agent Graham wrote described Elohim City as neo-Nazi, anti-government and violent.

Agent Graham testified that Ms. Howe told her Elohim City residents made a trip to Oklahoma City and harbored a great deal of hatred over the April 19, 1993, fire at the Branch Davidian compound near Waco.

"They had discussed taking action against the government, yes," Agent Graham told the jury.

The ATF deactivated Ms. Howe in March 1995 because of concerns about her mental stability, the agent testified. They renewed her service - even sending her back to Elohim City - two months later in hopes she could identify "John Doe No. 2" as a suspect in the Oklahoma City bombing, Agent Graham said.