

# Oklahoma Bombing Theorists Look to Debutante Informant



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DENVER - Two men have been tried and convicted of bombing the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, yet theories about what really happened continue to nag at public subconscious like wisps of smoke rising over a grassy knoll.

The theories range from the bizarre to the plausible, but nearly all of them involve Carol Elizabeth Howe, a petite Tulsa debutante with a rash of neo-Nazi tattoos and a story as hard to swallow as it is to dismiss.

Miss Howe, 26, infiltrated Oklahoma's violent subculture of white separatism in the crucial months before the April 19, 1995, explosion. As an informant for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, she warned of plans to bomb a federal installation.

She insists there's more to the plot than just Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, and she's hardly alone. On Wednesday, U.S. District Judge Richard Matsch offered Terry Nichols a lighter sentence in exchange for information about the conspiracy.

Miss Howe's detractors dismiss her as a flaky rich girl out to win attention. Her supporters on the political right call her a heroine, one who risked her life only to be betrayed by the government for telling the truth.

"I think the government's trying to hide something. What they're trying to hide, I don't know," said Gary Benoit, editor of the New American, a publication of the John Birch Society that has championed Miss Howe. "When it comes to who's lying, the U.S. government looks very bad, and Carol Howe looks very good."

A Justice Department spokeswoman said the federal government will not comment on Miss Howe's case until all appeals in the bombing trials are resolved. McVeigh, 29, is appealing his conviction on murder and conspiracy charges, while Nichols, 42,

awaits sentencing on conspiracy and manslaughter for his role in the bombing of the Murrah Building.

Miss Howe was among the most-anticipated witnesses, but the judge refused to allow her testimony in the McVeigh trial, citing relevance. She testified only briefly for the defense in the Nichols trial in December.

Since then, Miss Howe has gone into hiding. Citing death threats, she is living under an assumed name in an undisclosed region while considering book and movie offers, said her attorney, Clark O. Brewster.

"This is a fascinating story," said Mr. Brewster, a top Tulsa lawyer. "You've got multiple angles: One is, how did a nice girl like her get in a position like this? Another is how she was double-crossed by the government.

"You couldn't write a script like this as fiction. No one would believe it," he said.

Indeed, Miss Howe has been described as Tulsa's version of Patty Hearst. The adopted daughter of a wealthy oilman and his philanthropist wife, Miss Howe attended private school and debuted in Tulsa society at the 1989 opera gala.

But she went through a rebellious period in high school and picked up a cocaine habit. In March 1994, she says, she was pushed off a 15-foot ledge at Chandler Park in Tulsa by "some black people," crushing her heels and leaving her in chronic pain.

The incident prompted her to embrace the white-supremacy movement. Calling herself "Freya," she got a swastika tattoo on her shoulder and an Iron Cross on her leg.

In May 1994, she called the Dial-a-Racist hot-line and met White Aryan Resistance leader Dennis Mahon. He says they were romantically linked, but Miss Howe claims he raped her, leading her to file a police complaint in August 1994.

The filing caught the attention of ATF agent Angela Finley-Graham, who asked Miss Howe to go undercover. Citing a "personal vendetta" against Mr. Mahon, Miss Howe agreed to drop the complaint and take notes on his movements and contacts.

For the next six months, she took notes and taped conversations on how to build grenades and mix napalm. She went with Mr. Mahon to Elohim City, a white-supremacist enclave run by the Rev. Robert Millar, who advocated armed resistance against the federal government.

Here her story gets murky. According to Miss Howe, Mr. Mahon and Andreas

Strassmeir, a German in charge of security at Elohim City, discussed blowing up federal buildings in Oklahoma City, Tulsa and Texas. She even wrote "Morrow building" in her notes in an apparent reference to the Murrah building, Mr. Brewster said.

She also says she saw a man who looked like Timothy McVeigh with Mr. Strassmeir at Elohim City in July 1994. Mr. Mahon called the man "Tim Tuttle," she said, which she later found was a common McVeigh alias. Phone records later showed that McVeigh called Elohim City just weeks before the bombing.