

"Others Unknown": Oklahoma City Revisited

CBN News

June 3, 1998 Dale Hurd

Terry Nichols will be sentenced Thursday for his part in the Oklahoma City bombing. But it's worth noting that the case against Nichols was so shaky that he was almost acquitted. Who might be the other suspects? Polls show that most Oklahomans believe the federal government is engaged in a coverup, and that it knows a lot more about the bombing than it's saying. Here is CBN News senior reporter Dale Hurd's investigation into what the government might be hiding.

Dale Hurd, reporter

At 9:02 on the morning of April 19th, 1995, the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building was blown up, killing 168 people.

The government still insists that Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols acted alone. But the evidence points to a conspiracy of several people. Is it possible that the federal government is not interested in catching the other suspects? That's where this tragedy takes a strange twist.

Three years ago, on April 19th, this street was a roiling mass of rescue vehicles, debris, panicked parents, dead bodies, and the bodies of the dying. Today it is a memorial to the worst terrorist act ever committed on U.S. soil. It may also be a monument to the worst law enforcement blunder in U.S. history.

Stephen Jones was the state-appointed attorney for Timothy McVeigh, and is the author of an upcoming book entitled *Others Unknown*, referring to the original grand jury indictment of McVeigh, Nichols, and "others unknown." While he's not trying to deny McVeigh's involvement, Jones says the government is hiding something.

"I had access to all the government's documents of that investigation," says Jones. "If you make a list, as I have, of everything the ATF knew on midnight, April 18th, it's hard to understand why they didn't increase security at the Murrah building."

Despite its denial, it's clear that the federal government did have prior knowledge of something. It knew that April 19th was a dangerous date: the anniversary of Waco and Patriot's Day. Although the government initially lied about it, an alert was issued, and no agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms were in the building.

Carol Howe, Confidential Informant #183 of the ATF had warned that the Murrah building was one of three under study for a bombing, and she told them that a group from Elohim city, a white supremacist community in eastern Oklahoma, had traveled to the Murrah building at least three times to case it.

Another informant, Cary Gagan, gave even more specific information, saying a bombing would occur in either Denver or Oklahoma City. On the morning of April 19th, in the hours before the explosion, several witnesses saw bomb disposal trucks and sniffer dogs already on the streets of Oklahoma City. Then, 38 minutes before the blast, the Department of Justice in Washington received a telephone call.

Stephen Jones says Justice records have the caller saying that the Murrah building had just "blown up." Jones believes the caller said that the building was "going to be blown up," and that the Justice Department changed the story because it ignored the call. But on the ground in Oklahoma City that morning, the government was looking for bombs.

"And they made sort of a superficial security check with dogs and were a little more alert," says Jones. "And then when the business day started and nothing happened, they thought it was just a false alarm and then withdrew. And then, of course, the building blew up."

The FBI decided, rather unscientifically, that the Murrah building was brought down by a single anfo bomb: a hundred pounds of ammonium nitrate and fuel oil, placed in plastic drums as a giant charge inside a Ryder truck.

But that explanation is not without problems. Only microscopic specs of ammonium nitrate were ever found, there were no noxious fumes at the bomb site, and the bomb crater, the most important piece of evidence, was filled in before McVeigh's defense team could examine it.

An initial FEMA study said it would have taken 12 thousand pounds of anfo to pulverize that much steel-reinforced concrete, and that that much explosive would have also created a much larger crater.

Whatever was in the truck, some believe it could not have been strong enough to bring down the Murrah building alone, and that cutting charges were used as well. That's why it's interesting that survivors reported feeling an earthquake for several seconds before the truck bomb went off.

"I thought it was an earthquake, because I resided in California for many years, and it was almost like slow motion," recalled one survivor. "I felt a shake, and then it began shaking more and I dove under my desk. Then the glass came in; I think that helped me."

Jane Graham, longtime government employee and Union Local president, felt the same thing.

"As soon as I sat down and turned on the computer, I felt a waving motion of the building," she says. "It felt like a rumble -- it was like the ground was rolling, and the building was swaying east to west. The young lady who was giving the class

said, 'Everybody, it's an earthquake. Get under your table, under your desk -- somewhere.' And it must have been somewhere between seven and ten seconds at the most, I believe. Then I heard the explosion, and the last thing I remember is looking up, and the roof had been blown off and was suspended in air."

Seismic readings at 9:02 a.m. show two distinct ground motion spikes at the time of the bombing: a mild spike, a ten-second delay, then a sharp spike. Do these readings help prove two blasts? Seismologists aren't sure.

But Graham witnessed something equally important: on two separate occasions in the days before the bombing, Graham and others saw suspicious men in the Murrah building. On the Friday before the bombing, Graham saw three men in the underground parking garage looking at plans of the building, and none of them fit Timothy McVeigh's description.

"When I first saw them, I thought they were phone people, because they had some wiring," she remembers. "Of course, the more I watched them, then they started watching me. They had a paper sack, and they put back into that sack the wiring. They had a block -- I don't know what it was -- putty-colored. Upon the man in charge's direction, the second man put it back into the car."

Does she think the putty was plastic explosives?

"I do now," replies Graham.

Kathy Wilburn and her daughter saw the same three men. "You didn't see many people in the parking garage, but these guys, when we pulled up, I mean their demeanor changed, they stopped talking -- they didn't say another word, and one of them kind of looked over his shoulder like this to see what we were doing. When we got into the building, we commented to each other, 'Well, they're up to no good.'"

What were they up to? Were charges placed on the structure of the Murrah building? Photos not only show that there was smoke on the columns, but that some of the cross beams were cleanly sheared off, something demolition experts say only a contact charge could do.

Experts also say the way the Murrah building fell may also indicate that charges on floor beams began a building collapse just before the truck bomb went off.

But the government has never been interested in Graham's or Wilburn's testimony. In fact, from almost the very beginning of the case, the federal government has engaged in what could be called a bizarre pattern of behavior. It launched the largest manhunt in U.S. history, but after apprehending McVeigh and Nichols, the investigation abruptly shut down. Although the FBI spent a lot of time trailing a mysterious "Robert Juaquez," officials no longer seem interested in finding anyone else.

"I think it basically boiled down to this," says Jones. "They had two men. They couldn't find the others, so they declared victory and said, 'We've solved the crime.'"

The second explanation is less benign. The explanation -- and it's a theory supported by the government's behavior -- is that Washington knows who the other suspects are, but who one or more of them are poses a big problem.

"The most reasonable explanation is that there was someone in this group of people that helped carry this out," says Oklahoma state representative Charles Key. "If they would have traveled this path to discover and prosecute these other John Does, one of those persons, I believe, was either an informant for the government -- maybe even a government agent. They don't want that to be discovered, because that, like other information, will point toward specific prior knowledge."

Key was responsible for convening a special county grand jury for the purpose of finding out the whole truth about the bombing and what the government might be hiding.

"We believe they had specific prior knowledge, and that they were in the process of actually trying to stop these people from carrying out this crime," says Key.

"What do you do if you're the government in charge of this?" questions Jones. "If you admit that yes, we thought something might happen and we did check it out, then you open yourself up to negligence, which means, of course, hundreds of millions of dollars recovered by victims of the bombing."

Then maybe it's not so surprising that in the trial of Timothy McVeigh, the government did not call a single witness who could place him in Oklahoma City on the day of the bombing, because those same witnesses, under cross-examination, would also testify that they saw a number of other men too.

Carol Howe was not allowed to testify, either. Instead, the government tried to prosecute her but lost. She's now in hiding and has changed her identity.

And the over one thousand fingerprints recovered by investigators have been checked against fewer than 20 suspects.

Who could have been the other suspects? One man connected to the bombing by Carol Howe was Andreas Strassmeir, a German national. Strassmeir was questioned by the FBI and, incredibly, allowed to leave the country. British investigative reporter Ambrose Evans-Pritchard says flatly that Strassmeir, the son of a prominent German politician and a veteran of German counterintelligence, was an agent sent in to infiltrate anti-government hate groups. Strassmeir even suggested to Evans-Pritchard in a book that the bombing

was a sting operation that spun out of control because different branches of the FBI and ATF were not cooperating with each other.

Carol Howe also names white supremacist Dennis Mahon as part of the plot, but Washington has not sought his prosecution. And there remains strong evidence of a Middle East connection. Jones insists that the know-how to build and execute such an operation does not exist among American terrorists.

"This was clearly a conspiracy of more than two people, fairly sophisticated, well organized and developed, and deadly," says Jones.

Key's group counts eight suspect sightings -- including Arabs -- but all during the McVeigh trial, the government worked strenuously to keep the defense from uncovering anything about the other suspects. What does Washington know? 475 family members of the victims are preparing to file suit against the federal government, saying it "knew or should have known" about the bombing.

Jones, for his part, does not think the government will ever allow the whole truth to be known.

"I'm not a prophet," says Jones. "I do not think the truth will come out. I think instead, you will see continued efforts to keep the truth from coming out. Those people who suffered and perished there in Oklahoma City died. And they received in return the gift of grace. What they did not receive was justice. They still wait for it."