Timothy McVeigh Speaks, CBS

60 Minutes (CBS)
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(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE) ED BRADLEY, CBS NEWS CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): With 168 people killed in the blast, the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City three years ago was the most heinous crime in United States history.

Tonight Timothy McVeigh speaks publicly for the first time since he was convicted and sentenced to death for setting the explosion.

(on camera): What do you think is the appropriate way for a citizen of this country to express his or her displeasure with the government?

TIMOTHY MCVEIGH: There are many options.

BRADLEY: Is violence an acceptable option?

MCVEIGH: If government is the teacher, violence would be an acceptable option.

BRADLEY: What do you mean?

MCVEIGH: Well, what did we do to Sudan? What did we do to Afghanistan, Belgrade? What are we doing with the death penalty? It appears they use violence as an option all the time.

BRADLEY: So if the government uses it, it`s OK for us, as citizens, to use it.

MCVEIGH: I`ll -- I`ll let my explanation stand for itself.

MIKE WALLACE, CBS NEWS CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): Tonight for the first time, the bodyguard who survived the car crash that killed Princess Diana and Dodi Fayed tells how Dodi Fayed ignored his advice and took the princess out the back door of the Ritz hotel in Paris and into a car driven by the hotel`s drunken security man, Henri Paul.

TREVOR REES-JONES: I could have insisted, if you like, that "No way we`re going out the back of that hotel." But you can`t live your life on if-onlys. The only person who made a big mistake that night was Henri Paul to say he was fit to drive.

WALLACE: I`m Mike Wallace.

MORLEY SAFER, CBS NEWS CORRESPONDENT: I`m Morley Safer.

BRADLEY: I`m Ed Bradley.

STEVE KROFT, CBS NEWS CORRESPONDENT: I`m Steve Kroft.

LESLEY STAHL, CBS NEWS CORRESPONDENT: I`m Lesley Stahl. Those stories tonight on 60 MINUTES.

(END VIDEOTAPE) (COMMERCIAL BREAK) BRADLEY: It was the most heinous crime in United States history, the 1995 bombing of the Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City. Timothy McVeigh, at one time a sergeant in the United States Army, was convicted three years ago and sentenced to death for setting off the explosion which killed 168 people and injured more than 600 others. But this week McVeigh filed a last- ditch appeal asking a judge to grant him a new trial. He claims that his former attorney, Stephen Jones (ph), did an inadequate job representing him and that a barrage of negative publicity after he was first arrested made it impossible for the jury to be fair and impartial.

Tonight for the first time, McVeigh speaks publicly about the bombing, about his anger toward the U.S. government and about his appeal. While he does not admit his guilt, he also doesn`t proclaim his innocence.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE) (voice-over): We met him at the maximum-security U.S. penitentiary in Terra Haute, Indiana, where he now sits on death row awaiting a date for his execution. Because of his appeal, one of the conditions his lawyer laid down was that we not ask him directly "Are you the Oklahoma City bomber?" TIMOTHY MCVEIGH: Maybe one of the benefits of me talking to you today is that you`ll see that maybe not everything is true that you`ve heard about me.

BRADLEY (on-camera): For example? What`s not true?

MCVEIGH: Well, am I -- am I pure evil? Am I the face of terror sitting here in front of you? Or am I able to talk to you man to man?

BRADLEY: Most people in this country think you are the face of evil, don`t they.

MCVEIGH: They do. But sitting down here now -- and let me make clear I`m not sitting here trying to influence you, and I`m not putting on a game face. I`m not

conning anybody. I`m just being me. And maybe people will listen, as opposed to not listening at a trial.

BRADLEY (voice-over): But what people heard at his trial was a mountain of incriminating evidence detailing how Timothy McVeigh spent nine months meticulously planning the attack, amassing fuses, fuel oil, ammonium nitrate and other materials for his homemade bomb, how he rented a Ryder truck under an assumed name, loaded it with 4,800 pounds of explosives, and how he then drove the truck to the federal building, lit a fuse and walked away, leaving the nine-story structure in ruins.

Among the dead were 19 children, most of them playing at a day care center inside, 8 federal law enforcement agents, 35 employees of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, 16 employees of the Social Security Administration, and more than 80 other people who just happened to be in the building that Wednesday morning.

(on camera): Everyone in America saw the pictures on television, heard the news on the radio. What was your reaction when you saw those pictures?

MCVEIGH: I think, like everyone else, I thought it was -- it was a tragic event, and that`s all I really want to say.

BRADLEY: And the children?

MCVEIGH: I thought it was -- it was terrible that there were children in the building.

BRADLEY: A jury convicted you of killing 168 people. The American public, by and large, generally believes that you are the Oklahoma City bomber. Is there anything that you can say or is there anything you want to say about what happened then? Is there anything you would say to the families, for example?

MCVEIGH: There are things that I want to say, but the timing is not right.

BRADLEY: What do you mean?

MCVEIGH: I -- at the time, right now, where I`m at in my appeals, where I`m at in my life, there are -- there are some issues that I just don`t feel that it`s the right time to discuss in depth.

BRADLEY (voice-over): McVeigh was stopped just 75 minutes after the explosion for driving a car without license plates and arrested for carrying a concealed weapon. The FBI quickly linked him to the Ryder truck used in the bombing. And on April 21st, 1995, McVeigh was formally charged, and America got its first look at the man the government believed was the Oklahoma City bomber.

(on camera): What was that like for you that day? People were shouting at you. Some -- I remember somebody had shouted out "Baby killer." MCVEIGH: You go into a mode where you -- you try to block external stimuli out. You`re gearing up for anything to happen mentally, but at the same time, you`re -- you`re putting on your poker face because you`re aware of how the media nit-picks at every little emotion that comes across on a face. You don`t want to give them anything to feed off of.

BRADLEY (voice-over): How did Timothy McVeigh, a 31-year-old man with no previous criminal record, end up convicted of the worst act of domestic terrorism in American history? His childhood offers few clues. He grew up in Pendleton (ph), New York, a small town near Buffalo. His mother, Mildred, left the family when he was just a boy, and he was raised mostly by his father, Bill, a factory worker. Overall, McVeigh says, he was a happy kid.

(on camera): In your high school yearbook, you -- under "Future plans, " you wrote -- and I`m quoting here...

MCVEIGH: OK.

BRADLEY: ... "Take it as it comes. Buy a Lamborghini. California girls." MCVEIGH: Right. Well, I`m dreaming. I`m putting down my dreams, you know? If I had -- if I could rub a genie in a bottle, that`s what I`d wish for, right? So...

BRADLEY (voice-over): After graduating high school, he worked briefly as a security guard. Unable to find steady employment, McVeigh joined the Army in 1988. Three years later, he was promoted to sergeant and sent to fight in the Persian Gulf war, where he was awarded several medals for heroism.

(on camera): In the Gulf, you saw combat?

MCVEIGH: I did.

BRADLEY: You fired a weapon at the Iraqis.

MCVEIGH: Yes.

BRADLEY: And killed soldiers?

MCVEIGH: Yes.

BRADLEY: Was it a hurdle for you, or was it something that you just - - "Well, this is the way it is"?

MCVEIGH: Well, I`ve -- I`ve broken that question down over the years and analyzed it every way -- you know, trying to come to peace with it myself. In some ways, I can see the right and wrong of it. The right, I thought, well, it was self-

defense. The reason I fired is because I saw a muzzle flash, and I instinctively fired around in that direction. But then I thought, well, at the same time, I`m in this person`s country. What right did I have to come over to his country and kill him? What -- how did he ever transgress against me?

BRADLEY (voice-over): That experience, according to Timothy McVeigh, was the beginning of his transformation from loyal soldier to alienated critic of his government.

MCVEIGH: I went over there hyped up, just like everyone else. Not only is Saddam evil, all Iraqis are evil. What I experienced, though, was an entirely different ballgame, and being face to face, close with these people in personal contact, you realize they`re just people like you.

BRADLEY: It`s hard for some people to come to grips with -- with you as the same person who was commended by the Army, who received a Bronze Star, who received a combat medal, as being the same person who was convicted in the Oklahoma City bombing. They can`t put the two together.

You understand that?

MCVEIGH: I do understand. They perceive -- and many people have thrown this at me. They say, "Well, Tim, if we think you`re guilty, imagine the paradox. In the Gulf war, you were given medals for killing people." So I`ve faced that -- that issue quite a few times with people that bring it up to me.

BRADLEY: And how do you explain it?

MCVEIGH: At that point, usually I just leave it at that and say that it is an interesting paradox.

BRADLEY (voice-over): After serving in the Gulf war, McVeigh returned to his post at Fort Riley (ph) in Kansas. He tried out for the Army`s elite Green Beret unit, hoping to make a career in the military. But McVeigh performed poorly on the rigorous physical tests, and eight months later he chose not to reenlist and was honorably discharged from the Army.

(on camera): Was that disappointing for you to not make it?

MCVEIGH: It was. But at the same time, I was losing motivation.

This was during a period when I was coming to grips with my role in the Gulf war.

BRADLEY: So is it fair to say that you were disillusioned when you came back? I mean, is that why you left the Army?

MCVEIGH: It`s part of it. I`m sure something didn`t feel right in me, but I couldn`t quantify it. I couldn`t say what it was.

BRADLEY (voice-over): Whatever it was, Timothy McVeigh was becoming resentful and increasingly disillusioned with his government. He returned to upstate New York and wrote a letter to his local newspaper saying, in part, that democracy was on the verge of failure and that, quote, "America is in serious decline." (on camera): You ended that letter with the words, "Do we have to shed blood to reform the current system? I hope it doesn`t come to that, but it might."
MCVEIGH: Right.

BRADLEY: Sounds like you were pretty angry when you came back.

MCVEIGH: I believe I had anger welling in me, yes.

BRADLEY (voice-over): McVeigh says that anger at the government intensified in 1992 over the conduct of federal law enforcement authorities during a stand-off with white supremacist Randy Weaver at his home in Ruby Ridge, Idaho. FBI sharp-shooters killed Weaver`s wife and young son. One of the agents involved in the shooting was charged with manslaughter, but the FBI insisted it was an accident and a federal judge dismissed the charges.

(on camera): Tell me what it is about that shoot-out at Ruby Ridge that concerned you.

MCVEIGH: I can say the use of what is no more or less snipers in a domestic, non-wartime situation, federal agents taking on the role of judge, jury and executioner. And then to further add insult to injury, you have these people, these federal agents, not held accountable. They`ve become immune from the law.

BRADLEY (voice-over): McVeigh says his hostility toward the U.S.

government solidified eight months later during another stand-off, this one at Waco, Texas. There more than 70 members of the Branch Davidian sect, including 24 children, died in a fire after a bloody clash with federal agents. At one point during the 51-day siege, McVeigh traveled to Waco to witness events first-hand, and he happened to be videotaped there by a local news crew.

(on camera): What impact did it have on you, actually being there and looking at it?

MCVEIGH: Shaken, disillusioned, angered that that could happen in this country, where our core beliefs are freedom and liberty. And what did you do to these people? You deprived them of life, liberty and property.

You didn`t guarantee those rights, you deprived them of them.

BRADLEY (voice-over): What also disturbs McVeigh about Waco was the government`s use of tear gas against the men, women and children inside the Branch Davidian compound.

MCVEIGH: The thing that hits me the hardest about that is the CS gas, just knowing what it does and knowing, as some adults can barely breathe because of it. When I saw it introduced into a building full of kids like that, it just -- the emotions it brings up make me speechless.

BRADLEY (on-camera): There are a lot of people who were upset by that who would say, "Yeah, what happened there is wrong, but those are isolated incidents. There was just Ruby Ridge and Waco." What would you say to that?

MCVEIGH: Well, I would say I don`t necessarily believe that to be true. I think for people that follow the news and follow events, there are patterns of abuse evident.

BRADLEY (voice-over): And according to Timothy McVeigh, it is up to the citizens of the United States to keep their government in check.

(on camera): What do you think is the appropriate way for a citizen of this country to express his or her displeasure with the government?

MCVEIGH: There are many options.

BRADLEY: Is violence an acceptable option?

MCVEIGH: If government is the teacher, violence would be an acceptable option.

BRADLEY: What do you mean?

MCVEIGH: Well, what did we do to Sudan? What did we do to Afghanistan, Belgrade? What are we doing with the death penalty? It appears they use violence as an option all the time.

BRADLEY: So if the government uses it, it`s OK for us, as citizens, to use it.

MCVEIGH: I`ll -- I`ll let my explanation stand for itself.

(END VIDEOTAPE) BRADLEY: When we come back, Timothy McVeigh tells us why he doesn`t think he got a fair trial, and we`ll hear from the jurors who convicted him and sentenced him to death. McVeigh also talks about his live on death row and his remarkable jailhouse conversations with another notorious criminal, the Unabomer, Ted Kaczynski.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK) BRADLEY: Just a few days ago, Timothy McVeigh appealed his conviction to a federal judge, who will now decide if he deserves a

new trial. If his appeal is denied, a date will then be set for his execution. The judge`s decision will hinge on whether or not the jury that convicted McVeigh of killing 168 people in the Oklahoma City bombing was biased against him even before the start of his trial.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE) (voice-over): McVeigh believes these images of him, taken two days after his arrest in 1995, in leg irons and handcuffs, surrounded by federal agents and broadcast repeatedly around the country, tainted the perceptions of the jurors at his trial. And that is the primary basis for his appeal.

MCVEIGH: When I was marched out of the Perry (ph) County courthouse in the orange jumpsuit, that was the beginning of a propaganda campaign.

There would not be any denying that there -- they do engage in propaganda campaigns to demonize defendants and...

BRADLEY (on-camera): So you think when you were marched out, that that was intentional to demonize you?

MCVEIGH: I believe it was. And let`s say as a layman sitting back watching TV, you see a defendant in an orange jumpsuit and you think, "Well, that`s the person they`ve caught. That person must be guilty." It`s just -- it`s natural.

BRADLEY (voice-over): Timothy McVeigh`s trial was held in Denver, moved from Oklahoma City because a judge ruled that McVeigh had been demonized there. We spoke with seven of the twelve jurors who convicted McVeigh.

(on camera): Just a few days after the bombing, Timothy McVeigh is arrested, and there`s that picture of him in the orange jumpsuit. Just by show of hands, how many of you saw -- remember seeing that picture?

(voice-over): Six of the seven jurors told us they did see the picture of McVeigh in the orange jumpsuit.

(on camera): Do you recall what you thought at the time when you saw it?

JUROR: I remember seeing it and -- and thinking that, you know, there was -- hew as the suspect. That was really one of my last memories of anything about Tim McVeigh was that picture.

BRADLEY (voice-over): Juror Diane Faircloth (ph) told us when she saw that picture of McVeigh, she felt the Oklahoma City bomber was no longer at large. Tanya Steadman (ph) says the sight of McVeigh in court spooked her and made the hair on the back of her neck stand up. And John Candelaria (ph) recalled being shocked at that image of McVeigh in the orange jumpsuit.

JOHN CANDELARIA: When you see, you know, an American bomb his own people, it`s just -- it blew me away. I -- I -- you know, I said he was only a suspect, at that point, but it still -- I was, like, "Wow," you know? "That`s the guy who did it." BRADLEY: Despite feelings like that, all the jurors we spoke to insisted they were able to put aside any preconceived notions and that they judged McVeigh based on the evidence, fairly and impartially.

CANDELARIA: He`s the Oklahoma City bomber, and there`s no doubt about it in my mind.

JUROR: I was sure that there would be someone who would step forward with an alibi. I just -- I was waiting for the day that someone said, "Hey, wait a minute. I saw him here, there or wherever." And it never happened.

JUROR: I didn`t see anybody that came into that room on day one with their mind made up.

MCVEIGH: I believe that they came in with preconceived notions and that in the back of their minds, well, their minds were made up.

BRADLEY (on-camera): I mean, you realize that most people in this country think you`re responsible for the bombing, correct?

MCVEIGH: Correct.

BRADLEY: So if you -- your perception is that you didn`t get a fair trial, they`re saying "So what?" MCVEIGH: It`s because I believe in the principle of the matter.

There is a presumption of innocence followed by an open and honest jury that`s fair and impartial.

BRADLEY: So you tell me if I`m right or wrong. Your concern is not guilt or innocence, but the right to a fair trial.

MCVEIGH: It`s the integrity of the process.

BRADLEY (voice-over): Timothy McVeigh`s trial included hours of wrenching testimony from victims describing the carnage after the explosion. Through it all, McVeigh sat impassively. How does he explain that?

MCVEIGH: I was raised in an environment where men don`t cry. You hold it back. Obviously, there`s a different cultural phenomenon in America now, with President Clinton and his whole tear act all the time.

But for me, through coming into adulthood, it`s one of the things that a guy learns is how to hold back tears and not let it be shown.

BRADLEY: In 1997, Timothy McVeigh was sentenced to death. He now lives on death row at a federal prison in Indiana, where he spends nearly all of his time -- 23 hours a day -- in a jail cell with virtually no contact with other inmates. Until last summer, he was incarcerated at this penitentiary in Colorado, and one of his neighbors on the cell block was another notorious criminal, Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomer.

(on camera): Did you ever talk to Kaczynski?

MCVEIGH: I did.

BRADLEY: Do you think that you and he share similar concerns about how the government operates these days?

MCVEIGH: We have somewhat different views, but there is some common ground there. I found that, in a way that I didn`t realize, that we were much alike in that all we ever wanted or all we wanted out of life was the freedom to live our own lives however we chose to. And he expressed that one day, and it hit me that, well, you know, this labeling -- he`s far left, I`m far right -- that`s all out the window. There`s a lot more commonality there.

BRADLEY: You both think you had lost the freedom to live your life the way you wanted to, and you think that the government took those freedoms from you.

MCVEIGH: From my perspective, I believe that it`s a problem with government. From Ted`s perspective, he believes it`s a problem with technology.

BRADLEY: Let me ask you your opinion, just a snapshot opinion of some of the institutions in this country and some officials in this country.

ATF, for example, Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms bureau.

MCVEIGH: Should not have law enforcement jurisdiction. Should be a taxation agency.

BRADLEY: The IRS?

MCVEIGH: I believe they`re an out-of-control agency.

BRADLEY: FBI?

MCVEIGH: Should be reined in.

BRADLEY: What do you think of the attorney general, Janet Reno?

MCVEIGH: They say if you don`t have anything good to say about somebody, you don`t say it, so we`ll go on to the next person.

BRADLEY: President Clinton.

MCVEIGH: I don`t hold him in high regard.

BRADLEY (voice-over): Timothy McVeigh says he has little faith that the judicial system will grant him a new trial. The judge is expected to reach a decision on his appeal by the end of the year. If McVeigh loses, he will likely be executed in this room by lethal injection.

(on camera): Are you prepared for death?

MCVEIGH: I am. It`s -- I came to terms with my mortality in the Gulf war. After that, it`s not that hard to be, quote, "prepared for death." BRADLEY: But this is a little different experience being in a war and having yourself exposed to danger, as opposed to being in prison on death row, knowing that at some date down the line, there will be a lethal injection that`ll take your life.

MCVEIGH: In truth, from my psychological perspective, it`s a little easier being on death row because you know how you`re going to die. You can narrow down where you`re going to die. And you can pretty much narrow down the time.

BRADLEY: I know you`ve had -- you have a lot of time to sit here and think.

MCVEIGH: Yes.

BRADLEY: If you had your life to live over, is there anything you`d do differently?

MCVEIGH: I`ve thought about that quite a few times, and I think anybody in life says "I wish I could have gone back and done this differently, done that differently." There are moments, but no one that stands out.

(END VIDEOTAPE) END

Ed Bradley