

Author of Phoenix Memo Also Involved in OKBOMB Case

6/22/2002

by J.D. Cash, Copyright McCurtain Daily Gazette

Counter-terrorism expert, Special Agent Kenneth J. Williams has suddenly found himself at the center of a political firestorm with the belated discovery of his remarkable pre-September 11 memoranda, warning FBI superiors that middle-eastern men connected to Osama bin Laden terrorist group, might be planning to use commercial jets in acts of terrorism.

Yesterday, in a most unusual setting for a field agent, SA Williams joined his boss, FBI Director Robert Mueller, in a closed-door briefing with Senate lawmakers attempting to learn if there was indeed an intelligence breakdown prior to the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington D.C.

Portions of the so-called, Phoenix Memo, authored by Williams, have created a stir on Capitol Hill that has fanned across the country since excerpts of the five-page document were leaked to the media, days ago.

On July 10th of last year, SA Williams transmitted the document to FBI Headquarters. In the memo, Williams outlined his suspicions that area flight schools might be training middle-east terrorists.

Specifically, Williams asked the Bureau to open an investigation into whether or not international terrorist Osama bin Laden was linked to Arab students enrolling in flight schools in the Phoenix area, or the rest of the United States.

Sixty days later, four jet liners were hijacked by middle eastern men, with U.S. flight training, and three of those planes made it to targets in Washington D.C. and New York, killing thousands.

The recent discovery of this memo has led many to question what FBI supervisors did or should have done with this information and why senior Bush administration officials sat on this information.

Since the release of portions of the memo, victims of the bin Laden plot have openly questioned why the FBI did not take positive actions that might have prevented the September 11 attacks.

The incendiary statements - combined with requests from lawmakers for establishment of a wide ranging investigation into the Phoenix memo, and other clues - has the FBI and Bush administration reeling.

Administration officials now claim they did not learn of the Williams' request for assistance in the investigation of the flight schools, until after the attack but no one seems to be able to answer why the document was kept secret since.

At the center of the controversy is a little known 41 year-old FBI agent, whose career with the Bureau began only ten years ago.

Documents obtained by The McCurtain Daily Gazette reveal that SA Williams played a very important role in the OKBOMB investigation, not long after graduating from the FBI Academy.

A former San Diego police officer with intelligence training, SA Williams was brought into the investigation of April 19, 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma, immediately.

On April 23, Williams along with SA's Kevin J. Mooney and Bradford Petrie conducted the first in-depth interview of Michael Fortier in Kingman, Arizona.

Records of this and other interviews Special Agent Williams had with Fortier and wife, Lori, reflect the young agent's strong belief from the very outset of the investigation, that the Fortier's were deeply involved in the crime that left 168 persons dead and over 500 injured.

During these initial interviews, Williams was able to get McVeigh's ex-Army pal to admit he'd lied to the FBI about going to Florida in December of 1994. Fortier conceded that he had really gone to central Kansas in December, where he picked up a stash of firearms with McVeigh and then transported them back to Kingman. A crucial early break in the government's case.

Suddenly Fortier was in a very difficult predicament - he'd lied to the FBI and now was admitting to acts that furthered the bombing conspiracy, itself. The savvy agent was about to break the case.

As it turned out, the firearms Fortier hauled across the country, then helped liquidate at gun shows and private sales, were traced to a robbery of an Arkansas gun dealer. The government alleged the proceeds from the sales of those stolen guns, helped finance the bomb plot. Mr. Fortier was in a lot of trouble. SA Williams made it clear, Fortier, and possibly even his wife, could face first-degree murder charges if they didn't cooperate.

An example of the difficult negotiations between Williams and Fortier, during an April 24 meeting with Williams, "Fortier became very upset about statements he was reading in the Arizona Republic, linking him to the bombing in Oklahoma City. Fortier accused the FBI of leaking that information to the press."

Responding to the accusations, Williams turned up the pressure, "The FBI was not leaking anything, but did believe that, Fortier possessed knowledge or was possibly involved in the Oklahoma City bombing incident."

At another early interview, Williams reached out to the frightened suspect, offering to get officials at the Justice Department in Washington D.C. on the phone, "To answer questions concerning what the government could do for him if he talked."

Fortier responded, "What's the difference between being sentenced to thirty-years to life, and being "shived"- and getting the death penalty? Snitches get shived." Fortier left the interview shaken.

Shortly afterward, Fortier received a phone call from Williams, who told Fortier to exit his residence and leave their door unlocked. Williams advised that agents were on their way to search the Fortier's mobile home and he might want to come see him.

After the search was completed, Williams went back to the Fortier's with more bad news. Blasting caps located in a storage shed linked to Fortier, might lead back to those used in the bombing in Oklahoma City.

The case against Michael Fortier was now insurmountable and the suspect knew it.

As soon as Fortier began to show signs he was willing to cooperate and had important information about the case, Williams was joined Danny Coulson the SAC of the Dallas FBI office and former head of the FBI's Hostage Rescue Team.

Coulson would later receive much of the credit for solving the bombing case and getting Fortier to confess his role in it.

The give and take that began in Kingman in late-April culminated on May 17th, at a Motel 6 in Oklahoma City.

On the eve of giving testimony to a federal grand jury, Mike Fortier called and told FBI agents that he and his wife wanted to "Amend their earlier statements." When agents arrived at the motel, the couple said they also wanted to consider entering into plea bargains with the government in return for their testimony against Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols.

Appearing in Denver in 1997, the couple's testimony about the bomb plot, proved decisive.

Jurors gave the death penalty to Timothy McVeigh and levied a life sentence against Terry Nichols.

Today, Michael Fortier is serving the balance of a 12-year sentence in a federal prison. His wife was allowed to go free for her participation in the crime.

Since then, SA Williams has been promoted to head the counter-terrorism unit of the Phoenix, FBI office. He is expected to testify in front of a House panel, today, looking into why his warnings about Arab flight students were not followed-up on.

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