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SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

MAGAZINE

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ZUMA PICTUREDESK

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Peter G. Kokalis



J. Bartlett



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courtesy Boeing

EXPOSED! CLINTON'S OKC COVER-UP

How The Feds Strangled The First Amendment

by Roger Charles

On Friday, 17 January, the ABC news magazine 20/20 aired the first major television network story that questioned the U.S. Government's version of events in the April 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. The episode, "The Families Want to Know," identified very specific flaws in the conventional-wisdom and previously accepted accounts of the largest incident of domestic terrorism in our nation's history. The most disturbing question was whether law enforcement agencies of the federal government, specifically the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), had prior warning of threats to blow up federal buildings in Oklahoma City.

In this story, SOF examines how journalistic ethics clashed with the Clinton Administration's efforts to control and manipulate news coverage of the terrorist bombing.

At the time the 20/20 story aired, the author was a consultant with the production team on this special-assignment project. He is a retired Marine lieutenant colonel, Vietnam vet and a frequent contributor to SOF.

Editor's note: SOF congratulates Roger Charles for having the integrity to resign his position at ABC News in the wake of his 20/20 segment being shelved.

When a major media outlet like 20/20 raised serious questions about the federal government's official version of the Oklahoma City bombing, the Clinton Administration exerted intensive pressure to stop the expose or, at a minimum, to control damaging revelations.

The White House, the Department of Justice, the FBI, and the ATF were alerted to this impending public-relations disaster. They

saw the 20/20 show as highlighting credible evidence that some elements of federal and local law enforcement must have been expecting a significant threat to federal buildings in downtown Oklahoma City.

In doing so, 20/20 would threaten the Clinton Administration's artfully constructed claim that the federal government had received absolutely no prior warning of any threats to federal buildings in Oklahoma City. The ABC News presentation would buttress these explosive charges with substantive evidence that government agencies (federal, state, county and city) had told factually inaccurate stories about other key aspects of the terrorist attack.

The net result of these charges would raise serious doubts about Janet Reno's claim that the bombing crime had been solved — that two loner/loser anti-government nuts, Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, were the only perpetrators, and these two had, by their lonesome, killed 168 of their fellow citizens.

Only three days before air-date, the DOJ press rep assigned to the Oklahoma City Bombing Task Force prosecution team in Denver, Leesa Brown, changed her tune from the near-automatic response that "the judge has issued a gag order — we cannot comment on that point," to suddenly wanting to set up an off-the-record telephone conference call with a key prosecutor who had previously been off-limits.

This standard damage-control technique was very enticing to the 20/20 production team, since the Reno-ordered stonewall had been so effectively used to prevent prior requests for contact with any prosecutor.

Participating on the Tuesday conference call were Don Thrasher and myself, and representing the prosecution task force, Leesa Brown and Joseph Hartzler (the senior prosecutor for the upcoming McVeigh trial). The seniority of this prosecutor and his personal involvement clearly signaled

that the Clinton Justice Department recognized the “PR” consequences of the 20/20 report.

Hartzler’s denial was absolute: There was “no evidence of any prior warning ... of any terrorist threat to Oklahoma City.” Hartzler went on to question how anyone could even entertain the idea that he and other dedicated public servants involved in the Oklahoma City bombing investigation would be party to such a cover-up.

To 20/20’s credit, the piece that aired three days later did not back off. Hugh Downs set the tone for the piece in his introduction when he asked, “Was Oklahoma City an avoidable tragedy?” The program brought to the mass-media market for the first time, credible evidence on these points:

1. On the Friday (14 April) before the Wednesday bombing, the Oklahoma City Fire Department had received a threat warning. (Subsequent statements that denied the warning had been easily proven false.)

2. Abnormal local bomb squad activity was absolutely confirmed only four blocks from the Murrah Federal Building, less than 90 minutes prior to the bomb’s detonation, although this activity had initially been flatly denied by various officials at all levels of government.

3. More abnormal bomb squad activity was credibly reported (but not confirmed) only one block from the Murrah building less than one hour before the bomb ripped through the northern face of the federal edifice.

4. The DOJ story of two federal law enforcement officials trapped inside a “falling elevator” by the bomb’s blast was a demonstrable lie.

5. An extremely credible witness described the presence of out-of-town federal law enforcement officers at the bomb site immediately after the explosion. (The witness’s boss had also observed this presence and had initially confirmed this crucial observation in a “shadow” interview for a local television news team. After his first substantiation, this confirming witness had suddenly and inexplicably declined further comment.)

Deny, Deny, Deny

Tom Jarriel summed up the Clinton Administration’s reactions and protests in these terms: “The Justice Department, under a gag order from the courts, declines to discuss a number of questions and refused on-camera comment to 20/20. But, on background, they emphatically denied there was any forewarning the Murrah building or any other building was going to be bombed on April 19th. They say there were no warnings of any type about possible trouble or terrorist activity in Oklahoma City. They say all questions will be answered once the trials begin.”

This DOJ attempt at media manipulation and intimidation had utterly failed, but not for lack of effort by Reno and her minions. (Following the program’s airing, knowledgeable sources at ABC told me that Janet Reno had personally called a very high-level executive at ABC News to request that the program not be shown, or failing that, that her office be provided an advance video tape copy of the program. I was unable to determine if this advance copy was provided.)

But, if the Clinton spinmeisters were thwarted in their efforts on this 20/20 episode, their tenacity was rewarded three weeks later when Peter Jennings and his ABC *Nightly News* team folded like a two-dollar suitcase on an even more important story involving the Oklahoma City bombing.

This next case was marked by near desperation, if not panic, as the entire federal case on Oklahoma City threatened to collapse due to parallel investigations by both ABC News



Former ATF-paid snitch, subsequently indicted by feds after she went public with her story, Carol Howe poses here in Nazi flag with Tec-9 pistol at Elohim City, a center of neo-Nazi activity. (below) Howe and boyfriend strike pose — something tangential politicians are good at — in neo-Nazi regalia.



and NBC News. The focus of both efforts centered on a petite blonde woman, Carol Howe.

As SOF readers learned in a two-part series ("Prior Warning," November and December '97), this former debutante from Tulsa threatened to expose the federal government's stunning incompetence in failing to prevent the Oklahoma City bombing. Carol Howe operated as a paid confidential informant (CI) for the ATF from August 1994 through February, 1995. (She had been reinstated *after* the bombing on an emergency basis, and served for several more months.)

Howe functioned at the center of a federal law enforcement investigation into the "White Aryan Resistance (W.A.R.)." She focused more specifically on Tulsa leader, Dennis Mahon, and his connections to a white supremacist compound, Elohim City, in nearby eastern Oklahoma. The ATF designated this investigative project as "TERRORIST/EXTREMIST."

Carol Howe first hit the Tulsa news in December 1996 when the FBI raided the Tulsa house she shared with her neo-Nazi boyfriend, James Vieffhaus. Both were arrested and charged with possessing a nonregistered destructive device, making a telephone bomb threat, and conspiring to make both the pipe bomb and the telephone bomb threat.

The circumstances surrounding this raid require careful examination.

Timothy McVeigh's trial was due to start within a very few months and although it had not received much media attention, the government's case was known to be incredibly weak. That the government's case was riddled with holes became abundantly clear when one looked at the details of the huge investigative effort dedicated to "solving" the most lethal crime of America's first two centuries.

While Vieffhaus was held in pretrial confinement, Carol Howe was freed on bond paid for by her wealthy father, the recently retired CEO of a major Tulsa petroleum firm. (Howe also hired for his daughter's defense an extremely able Tulsa attorney, Clark Brewster.)

Journalism 101

The first journalist to contact Carol Howe was John D. ("J.D.") Cash, a former Tulsa mortgage broker who had graduated from the University of Tulsa law school but had never practiced as an attorney. Cash had broken an amazing string of stories in the *McCurtain County Gazette* on the government's flawed and transparently false claims about the bombing.

The great majority of national media outlets had waited to be spun by their favorite "highly placed sources close to the bombing investigation and prosecution task force." But, J.D. had done his journalism the old-fashioned way — he had visited Elohim City, met with high-level members of the American neo-Nazi movement, and spend hundreds of hours on the telephone interviewing key sources with first-hand knowledge of various pieces of the OKCB story.

In a 28 January 1997, article, Cash revealed that an unnamed ATF CI had provided information in the fall of 1994 to her handler, Special Agent Angela Finley, that neo-Nazis centered on the Elohim City compound had discussed bombing federal buildings in Tulsa and Oklahoma City. Cash hinted at major revelations to come that would rock the Oklahoma City bombing case to its very foundations.

I had been in contact with Cash since October 1996 and had received copies of both Cash's articles and those by the Tulsa newspaper (which did not connect Howe to the OKCB case until after Cash exposed that connection).

Following the 17 January airing of the 20/20 piece, the ABC production team had returned to the field, visiting first Denver and then Oklahoma City.

In Denver we met with Stephen Jones, the sophisticated and canny defense attorney who headed Tim McVeigh's defense team. Although Jones' law practice was based in Enid, Oklahoma, and he enjoyed teasing the media that he was "just a county seat" lawyer, early in his career Stephen Jones had worked in prestigious positions in both Washington, D.C., and New York City. He had played in the fast lanes and won more than his share of competitions. To put it mildly, Jones was nobody's fool.

Thrasher and I laid out the Carol Howe arrest as the Tulsa newspaper had reported it to date, adding revelations that John Cash was to break in four days. Jones exploded with the apt spontaneous characterization — "This is fucking radioactive!"

On 29 January, the ABC producer and I sat with Cash in Oklahoma City, discussing the Carol Howe development. Cash agreed to contact Howe by telephone to see if she would consent to talk with the 20/20 team. Howe's home telephone answered with her recorder, and Cash left a message requesting a return call. After some gentle prodding, Cash agreed to call Howe's cell phone and she answered.

The 20/20 producer took the phone from Cash and what had begun as a short introductory call stretched into a 45-minute interview with me taking notes on Thrasher's side of the call.

Howe spoke about her role as a paid undercover informant for the ATF in its investigation of Dennis Mahon, Elohim City and the White Aryan Resistance (W.A.R.), beginning eight months before the bombing of the Murrah Building. She related detailed information on the former German army officer, Andreas "Andy" Strassmeir, who had been head of security and military training at Elohim City. And, she dropped a minibombshell when she revealed that immediately after the bombing she and her ATF handler had spent three days in an Oklahoma City motel being debriefed by FBI agents assigned to the bombing investigation.

Hot Story

Thrasher immediately realized the significance of what Carol Howe had just related, and called his Executive Producer, Victor Newfeld, at the 20/20 headquarters in



Andreas Carl Strassmeir — "Andy the German" — was a German national on an expired visa, whose father was a high official in Germany's Kohl administration. Openly promoting violent attacks against the U.S. government, conducting training sessions at Elohim City, and identified by BATF CI Carol Howe, Strassmeir nonetheless was never arrested nor detained, and quietly slipped out of the country. Here, Strassmeir wards off reporters in Germany.

Premier Broadcasting and Publishing Company

New York City.

We received the go-ahead to pursue the Carol Howe story full-time with the eye towards doing another 20/20 piece as soon as we could complete the field investigation, interviews and editing. We were looking at a minimum of two weeks to get a 12-minute piece on the air.

Once Newfeld had briefed his bosses, the word came back Thursday, 30 January, that the highest levels of ABC News well-understood the significance of the Carol Howe information. We should prepare a piece that would air the very next day, Friday, 31 January, on ABC Nightly News with Peter Jennings.

As we began to put the pieces together for the story we became aware that NBC news reporter/producer Mike Boettcher (now a national affairs reporter with CNN) was also working the Carol Howe-Dennis Mahon-Andy Strassmeir-Elohim City story.

We learned Boettcher was also developing his piece for a news magazine, NBC's *Dateline*.

Our 20/20 production team immediately began to work with Jennings' Producer for Investigative Projects, Chris Isham.

ABC news quickly realized that Carol Howe's allegations were going to be of such seriousness that more research and substantiation were going to be required. This additional work would preclude our preparing the piece in time for Jennings' Friday show.

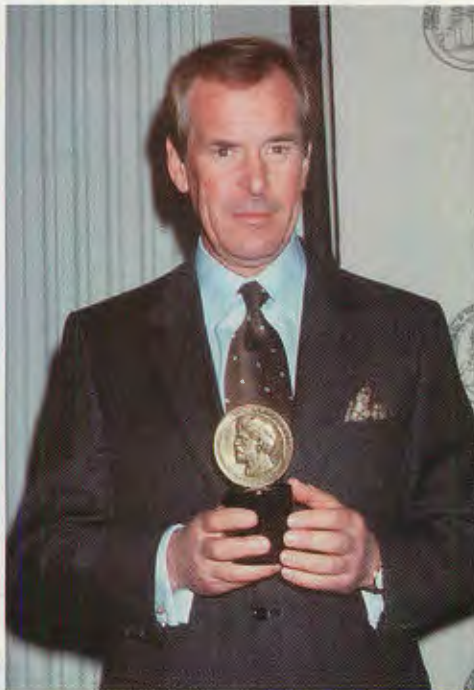
About this time, NBC learned of our ABC production team's success and the NBC news executives made a similar decision — don't wait a couple of weeks to get this story on the news magazine. Get it on the soonest possible nightly news show with Tom Brokaw.

ABC news and NBC news were now engaged in a race to get this huge story on the air first, and to get it right.

The week of 3-7 February found our ABC production team based in Oklahoma City, but spending most of our time in Tulsa. We discovered that a member of the Alabama militia and true patriot, Mike Van derBoegh, had a copy of a Brazilian television documentary on American neo-Nazis which included some sensational footage of Carol Howe and other white supremacists conducting tactics and weapons training at a farm in Missouri. ABC news made arrangements to copy the tape and obtain the requisite legal release from the Brazilian filmmaker.

(As it turned out, NBC had located some German television video on American neo-Nazis that featured Carol Howe and Dennis Mahon. It was more than mildly ironic that two years after the Oklahoma City bombing, both ABC and NBC had to rely on foreign TV documentaries for video on two people who had played key roles in the wider conspiracy connected to the OKBOMB case.)

By Tuesday, 4 February, we had largely completed our research, done interviews and shot the background video of the two federal buildings in Tulsa that Carol Howe had identified as having also been mentioned as possible targets for the neo-Nazi bombers. It was time to call the federal govern-



Online USA/Robin Platzer

Peter Jennings, host of ABC Nightly News, here receiving a Peabody award for excellence in journalism, was only TV network anchor with mettle to introduce segment dealing with the possibility the Feds had prior warning of the OKC tragedy.

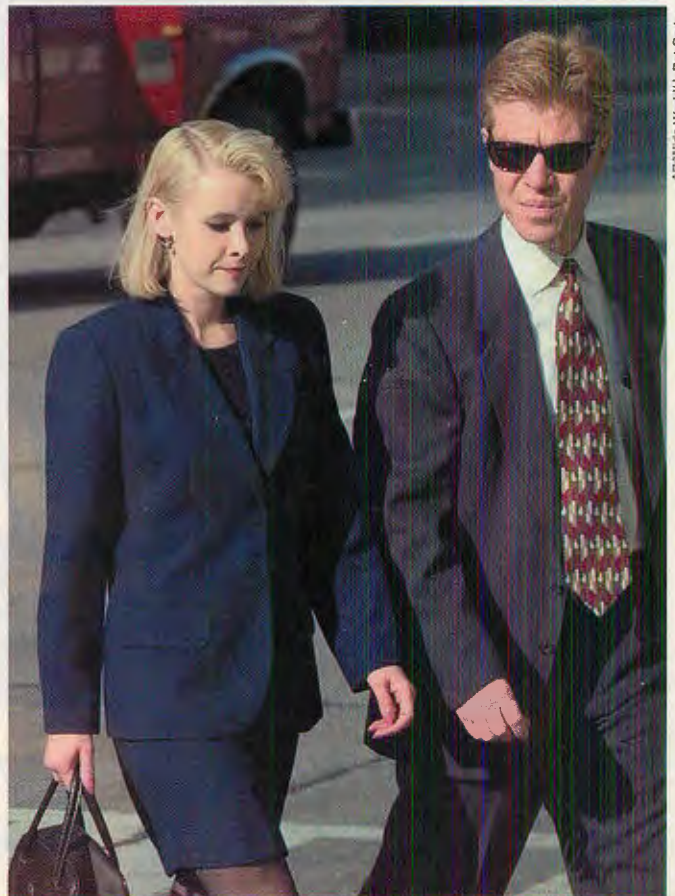
ment for official comment on what ABC Nightly News was going to broadcast the next day.

For The Record

Thrasher paged the DOJ press rep with the OKBOMB Prosecution Task Force in Denver, Leesa Brown. She returned the page and Thrasher asked her the following 10 questions, on the record:

1. Was Carol Howe a confidential informant?
2. Was her control agent Angela Finley?
3. Was she providing information as a CI from late summer/early fall of 1994 through February/March 1995?
4. Did she provide information specifically on Dennis Mahon, Andy Strassmeir and Elohim City?
5. Immediately after the bombing was she used in the Tulsa office to try to contact Dennis Mahon and was she then taken by Angela Finley and Jim Blanchard [FBI Special Agent] to Oklahoma City for debriefing?

Continued on page 88



AP/Wide World/J. Pat Carter

Looking more subdued, and more like a debutante and less like a revolutionary wannabe, Carol Howe and attorney Clark Brewster go into federal court in July 1997 to answer charges she made bomb threats and illegally conspired and possessed explosive materials. She was subsequently acquitted on all counts.

6. At that debriefing did she claim to have given information on threats to blow up federal buildings in Tulsa and Oklahoma City?

7. Did she report to Angela Finley in late November/early December 1994 that Strassmeir said they should stop talking and start blowing-up [federal building]?

8. Was she polygraphed during her time as an informant?

9. Did ATF wire — for sound and pictures — her apartment in Tulsa?

10. After her debriefing at Oklahoma City was she sent back to Elohim City, about a week after the bombing, for two days?

After some give-and-take, including some discussion of the 17 January piece that *20/20* aired and whether Andy Strassmeir was ever a subject of investigation or a suspect in the OKBOMB case, Leesa Brown concluded her talk with Thrasher by saying, "This is not an official response, but we're not going to be able to deny it." She said she would have to get back to us.

My contemporaneous notes show that at 3:36 pm (local, Tulsa time), Thrasher returned Brown's page, using a pay phone in a west Tulsa barbecue joint.

Brown did not beat around the bush. After asking Thrasher if our piece would air that night, she said, "your information is accurate."

We had our confirmation! Carol Howe's information had now been officially blessed by the U.S. Department of Justice. Thrasher called New York to report to Jennings' producer that Leesa Brown had just confirmed that our facts were solid.

The production team went to the ABC affiliate in Tulsa to watch Jennings put our piece on the air.

At 5:30 p.m. Thrasher, the cameraman, the soundman and myself sat in the KTUL lobby watching the opening of Jennings' program. Three stories were promoted in his opening comment. First, the verdict in O.J. Simpson's civil court case that had been announced the night before in California. Second, the President's State of the Union speech, delivered Tuesday night. Third, an update on the hostage situation at the Japanese Embassy in Lima, Peru.

Neither Carol Howe nor the OKBOMB case was even mentioned.

At this point, Thrasher and I looked

at each other and realized that "shit had happened." Then the lobby telephone rang. It was a call from one of our ABC contacts in Washington. The Clinton Administration had succeeded — Jennings and his producers had spiked the Carol Howe piece.

What The Flack, Over?

We were dumbfounded. How could they spike this story? Only two hours earlier the official spokeswoman for the Justice Department had stated, on the record, that our "information is accurate."

Thrasher then related that the ATF lackeys had called ABC News, at the last minute, after the DOJ media rep had confirmed our information. The



Hours after the bombing, Timothy McVeigh was arrested, and thus far is the only one convicted for the OKC bombing.

ATF had claimed that Carol Howe's information was not true. For the liberal, nervous nellys in New York and Washington that populate the higher levels of ABC News, this ATF call must have been the escape hatch they had most likely been hoping for.

It was a longer than normal drive back to Oklahoma City that evening. Thrasher and I were getting angrier as each mile passed. To have this story cold, to have the information confirmed, on the record, by a government official, and to have it spiked by Jennings and his crew was damn near unbelievable, yet this was the sequence we had just witnessed firsthand.

Early the next morning Thrasher called my hotel room to relate the essence of a phone call that he and Isham had completed. ABC evening news now wanted us to add a couple interviews and feed the video to

Washington for editing. The expanded Carol Howe piece would run that day, Thursday evening.

From a well-placed ABC source Thrasher and I learned that the head flack at ATF, Pat Hinds, had overplayed his hand the previous day when he claimed that the only warnings [of threats of bombings against federal buildings in Oklahoma] Carol Howe had given the ATF were *after* the bombing. The ABC newscaster had replied to Hinds that ABC News had a "dated, sworn statement" by Howe that proved otherwise. And at this point, Hinds had "quit trying to use that line" with this particular journalist.

Hinds and his fellow federal *apparatchniks* had succeeded in delaying the Howe piece, but as of late Thursday morning it appeared that ABC news was ready to blow the roof off the government's most basic claim concerning the OKBOMB case.

Yet, after Wednesday's spiking Thrasher and I were not naive enough to think that getting the Carol Howe piece on air was a done deal. The word from ABC contacts in both New York City and in Washington, D.C. was that the federal flacks and White House weasels had mounted "an all-out assault on our story."

While the damage-control campaign intensified on the East Coast, in the nation's heartland the ABC field team did as instructed. We interviewed a survivor of the bombing (a federal employee, V.Z. Lawton) and an outspoken local critic (state representative Charles Key), and leased a satellite (at \$7,000 for one hour) to feed the video back to the ABC editing rooms.

I returned to the Thrasher's hotel room shortly after 4 p.m. with the acknowledgement from the ABC news editor in Washington that the video had arrived in fine form.

Things were looking good, or so I thought until Thrasher, who was on the telephone with some ABC office, gave me the thumbs-down sign. This was not the sign I was expecting.

As soon as he finished the call, Thrasher told me that Jennings and his producers had again killed the Carol Howe piece.

Uncomfortable Truths

After a short swearing session, I cooled down enough to call Isham to inquire what had happened this time. His response was that neither he, nor Jennings, nor the executive producer for evening news, were "comfortable"

with the information in the Carol Howe piece. When I pushed for him to identify specific information with which the New York City team was not comfortable, he refused. When I asked why they were uncomfortable with information confirmed on the record by the appropriate official of the Justice Department, he refused to give a direct answer.

Trying to figure out later what had happened was like trying to put together a jigsaw puzzle that has lost some pieces. We never found all the pieces but we got enough to allow us to identify the picture.

The entire executive branch coterie involved in the OKBOMB case had panicked over what proved later to have been an unfounded rumor that Carol Howe was to give an imminent press conference in Denver.

The Clinton White House faced what has to be seen in hindsight as its most serious domestic political threat until another rich young woman named Monica exploded onto the front pages almost exactly one year later.

The reaction of Reno's lackeys to the rumored press conference was indeed bizarre. Larry Mackey (who later became lead prosecutor in Terry Nichols' trial) called Stephen Jones to plead that Jones and the Department of Justice prosecution task force issue a joint press release "that there was no prior knowledge on the part of any U.S. Government agency" relative to the OKBOMB case. Mackey pleaded with Jones that the defense attorney agree to sign a statement in which both prosecution and defense teams denounced the expected claim of Carol Howe "that the government, thanks to her, had prior knowledge of the bombing."

Mackey went on to say that if it came out that the federal government and the ATF had prior knowledge [of threats to blow up federal buildings in Tulsa or Oklahoma City], it would bring the country down! (Emphasis added.) Jones declined.

In his book, *Others Unknown: The Oklahoma City Bombing Case and Conspiracy*, Jones described his reaction as having been "dumbfounded." After some discussion he replied to Mackey, "how could I possibly agree with your side when I don't know what information Carol Howe gave the government in the first place?"

Mackey then responded, "The FBI will be in your office in two hours. They'll have all her statements. You can see for yourself."

The degree of panic among the federal agencies was now fully exposed. Records whose very existence had been actively (and perhaps illegally) concealed for nearly two years were now miraculously and immediately available to McVeigh's lead defense attorney!

Although Jones was only allowed to read what is now known to have been a heavily sanitized form of Howe's file, he saw enough to understand the Clintonistas' panic.

Carol Howe did not claim to have provided precise *tactical threat warning* to her ATF handlers (whose reports had been closely monitored at ATF HQ in Washington) that the Murrah Building was going to be bombed at 9:02 a.m. on 19 April 1995. The clearly



Reuters Photo Archive

*Defense attorney Stephen Jones and his wife leave the Federal Court House in Denver at a noon recess during the August 1999 trial of Timothy McVeigh. Jones subsequently published a book *Others Unknown: The Oklahoma City Bombing Case and Conspiracy*, which noted the many loose ends in the investigation of the case.*

censored file did show that her *strategic threat warning* certainly provided the post-bombing investigators what should have been their most important lead to apprehending those involved in killing 168 Americans.

But rather than following this lead, Reno's Justice Department and the Freeh's FBI actively intervened to shut down any investigative efforts that tried to exploit Howe's information.

Once the bomb had shattered the peaceful Oklahoma morning, both the White House and federal law enforce-

ment evinced no interest in a full and honest investigation. Their shared objective was to deflect attention from the most obvious question, "How did this happen?" The operative mode was damage-control, spin and outright lies. That mode continues to this day.

After Thrasher finished a few phone calls he related what he had learned of the details of this second spiking of the Howe story by Peter Jennings and his crew.

The feds had put on a full-court press. Calls had come into all levels of ABC News management from the Justice Department, the FBI, the ATF, and the White House. The message pressed on the ABC news executives was very simple — airing the Carol Howe story could bring the country down (at least the Clinton Administration), and lead to the abolishment of the ATF.

After I had heard Thrasher's description of the intense pressures being applied to ABC News, I could see how the liberal-leaning executives rationalized their gutless roll-over. If the ATF was abolished as a result of ABC's airing the Carol Howe story, then they would be responsible for the inevitable result of this abolishment — machine guns on every street corner!

The Warning Unheeded

And just what was the explosive revelation that Reno and Freeh so feared? Here are the two key paragraphs from my notes on the script:

Howe told ABC News that in late '94 at a meeting in Elohim City, a participant, who has since fled to Germany, urged blowing up federal buildings instead of just talking about it. She says she passed this on to her ATF handler. The Murrah Building was blown up four months later.

A spokesperson for the Justice Department late today confirmed to ABC News that she gave them information about people who had discussed blowing up the building and they sent her back under cover to get more information, which they say led nowhere.

The Clintonistas had dodged this ABC "bullet" twice, but they were not to find Tom Brokaw and NBC the pushovers that Peter Jennings and cronies had proven to be, at least on this story.

On the next evening, Friday, 7 February, Mike Boettcher's piece ran on

the NBC Nightly News as one of its "In Depth" featured stories.

Brokaw set the piece with these introductory questions:

"Did federal officials have any sort of advance knowledge, a warning, that someone might be plotting to blow up the federal building in Oklahoma City? NBC News has learned an undercover informer for the FBI, a woman who was part of a white supremacist group, provided information about bomb threats, but was it enough to prevent this tragedy?"

On-air reporter Mike Boettcher first set the backgrounds of Carol Howe and Elohim City, and then got to the nub of the story:

"Starting in June of 1994, Howe began telling the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, and later the FBI, that Dennis Mahon, leader in the neo-Nazi movement, often spoke with others at the compound about building bombs and often about specific targets. Two days after the Oklahoma City bombing, according to FBI documents, Howe reported that Mahon had talked of "targeting federal installations for destruction through bombings, such as the IRS building, the Tulsa federal building, and the Oklahoma City federal building.

"Federal officials say these specific threats were never relayed to them before the bombing on April 19th, and Dennis Mahon, who now lives in Tulsa, denies any connection to any threats or bombings."

Boettcher then introduced the viewing audience to Andy "The German" Strassmeir and explained that Carol Howe,

"gave the government information before the bombing on alleged threats by others in Elohim city, including this man, Andres Strassmeier(sic). According to federal documents, Strassmeier was the military training officer for Mahon's organization, called the White Aryan Resistance. The FBI summary of informant Carol Howe's report states, "Strassmeier has talked frequently about direct action against the US government. He is trained in weaponry and has discussed assassination, bombings, and mass shootings. Strassmeier and Mahon have taken three trips to



Toby Thompson, who lost a brother in the OKC bombing, presents President Clinton with a sapling from an elm tree planted at memorial site of the destroyed Murrah Building.

Oklahoma City."

Hide This

NBC News had now put into public play the facts that prove the lie to claims by federal law enforcement agencies that they had not received any warning, of any type, relative to the bombing in Oklahoma City.

In ending his piece, Boettcher rightly drew the distinction between strategic and tactical warning.

"While Carol Howe reported on white supremacists, their talk about bombings and anti-government threats, there is no evidence that she reported a specific threat to the Murrah Federal Building before the bombing."

With NBC News broadcasting this kind of explosive information, one might question why the story died a quiet death, with almost no follow-up. In subsequent conversation, an NBC employee who was intimately involved in the matter said that as a result of this story, NBC news took Boettcher off the OKBOMB story.

And at least one senior member of the NBC news field team that produced the Carol Howe piece had not been convinced the story would see the light of day until it had actually run.

Recall Assistant U.S. Attorney Joe Hartzler's adamant and absolute statement of 14 January 1995, quoted above, that there was "no evidence of any prior warning ... of any terrorist

threat to Oklahoma City," and that he said this to a network TV news producer to influence a soon-to-be-aired story.

A little more than three months later, in the middle of the McVeigh trial in Denver, a preliminary hearing on charges against Carol Howe took place in the Tulsa Federal Courthouse. ATF Special Agent Angela Finley [then Graham] testified, under oath and under the threat of perjury.

Howe's attorney, Clark Brewster questioned Finley, "And Ms. Howe told you about Mr. Strassmeir's threats to blow up Federal buildings, didn't she?"

Graham replied, "In general, yes."

Brewster followed up, "And that was before the Oklahoma City bombing?"

Graham responded, "Yes."

So, who are we to believe — the Assistant U.S. Attorney eager to convey his sincerity (but on a damage-control mission), or a reluctant Special Agent of the ATF (testifying under the penalty of perjury)?

Carol Howe was found not guilty by unanimous vote of the Tulsa federal jury. She sold her story to a major Hollywood movie company and lives under a new identity. ABC News magazine *Prime Time Live* did a major piece about Howe's amazing story on 10 December 1997. In a promotional statement, *Prime Time Live* gave the federal government's latest response to ABC News queries about Howe claims: "The government now calls the bomb threats that Howe reported, 'general militia rhetoric.'" ❧

A Letter From Tim McVeigh

The Militarization Of Law Enforcement

To the Editor:

In this post-Cold War era, *SOF* has periodically struggled to find relevant content for its pages. To fill this void, Bob Brown has of late adopted the subtle promotion of militarized civilian law enforcement as his bread and butter. The nation has seen this police-state mentality come to fruition before, at places like Ruby Ridge and Waco, and it is disturbing to see your magazine once again drifting in this direction.

A sometimes overlooked or underestimated danger of a standing army is the "filter-down" effect: the unabated outpouring of military personnel into civilian law enforcement jobs. This, in turn, has the effect of slowly (but predictably) devolving the concept of "protect and serve" into one of "assault and conquer." (This mindset is further promoted and encouraged by such rhetoric as "the war on drugs," and by "law and order Republicans" who, consciously or not, while claiming to be staunchly anti-Communist, are simply totalitarians of a different color.)

While law enforcement recruitment efforts pitch military adventure as a way to lure applicants, these efforts ultimately leave recruits believing that it is their job to be militaristic. While it may be gung-ho macho to strap on an assault rig and kick in a door, is this really the America you want to live in? Should *SOF* be encouraging this "war at home" mentality? Such fare may sell magazines (or reservations at Thunder Ranch) but at what ultimate cost?

Sincerely,

Tim McVeigh
Terre Haute, IN



AP/Wide World

Reply:

It was not — and never will be — the intent of *SOF*'s editorial policy to advocate the misuse, overuse or abuse of law enforcement powers by anyone, either civilian or military. We believe that serious constitutional questions come into play when the fine line between civilian and military overlap into what we're seeing today: the virtual militarization of law enforcement and federal takeovers of civilian police departments. Our editorial stance is readily apparent to anyone who will peruse back issues of *SOF*, particularly "The Thin Blurry Line," Mar '99 and "Good-Bye, Columbus," Feb '01.

We at *SOF*, however, fully support those members of our military and civilian law enforcement communities who have exhibited lawful discharge of their legally assigned duties in concert with the U.S. Constitution and who have accomplished frequent acts of selfless heroism in the line of duty.

But we also recognize the threat spoken of by Mr. McVeigh: ... devolving the concept of "protect and serve" into one of "assault and conquer."

We do not want to see America devolve into a police state, for whatever reason: the war against drugs, the war against terrorism, the war against street crime, take your pick.

SOF totally supports and defends the United States Constitution and the rights of each individual against all enemies, whether they be foreign — or domestic.

— Robert K. Brown
Editor/Publisher ✕