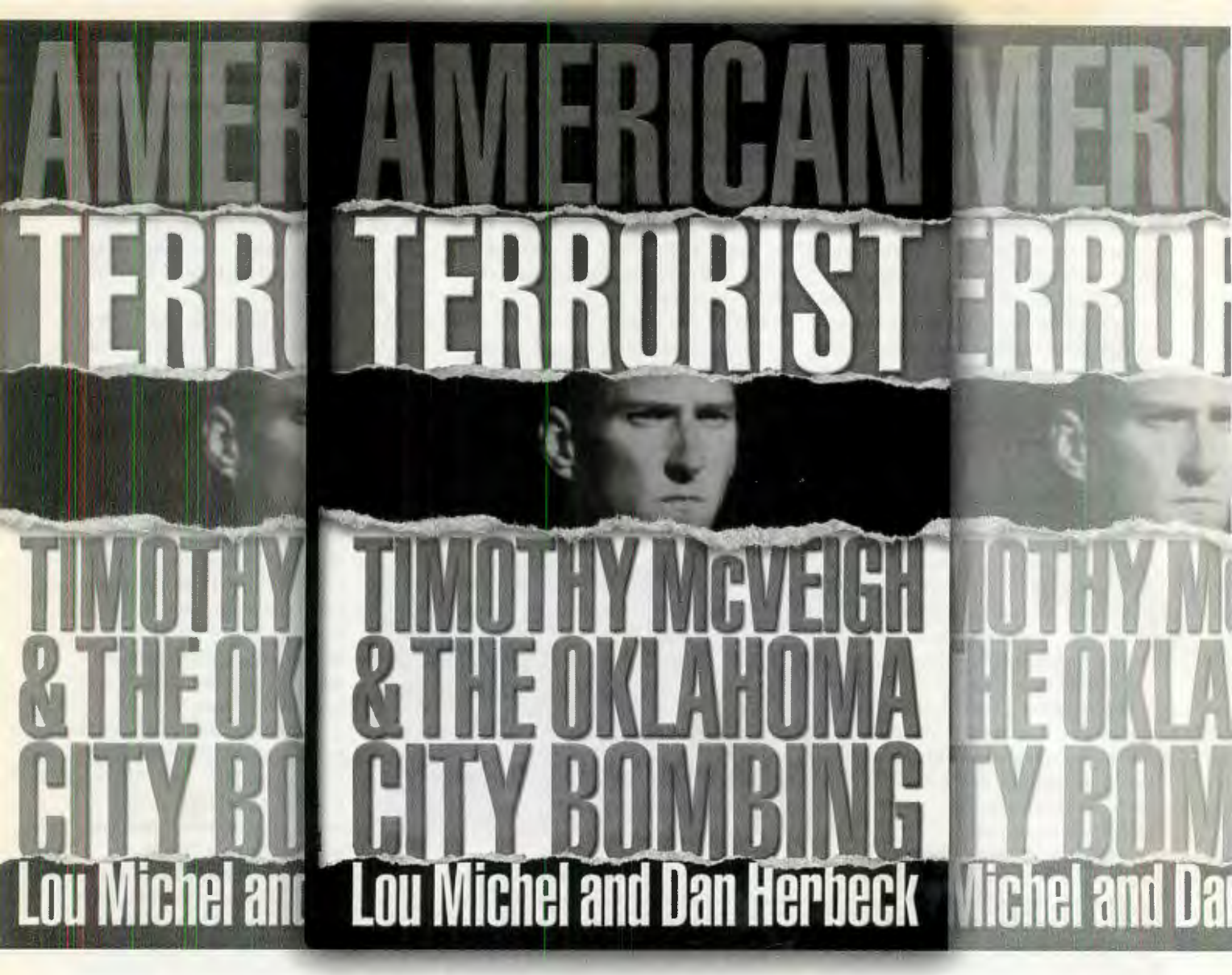


LAST WORDS — LAST LIES

American Terrorist: Timothy McVeigh & The Oklahoma City Bombing

REVIEWED BY J. D. CASH

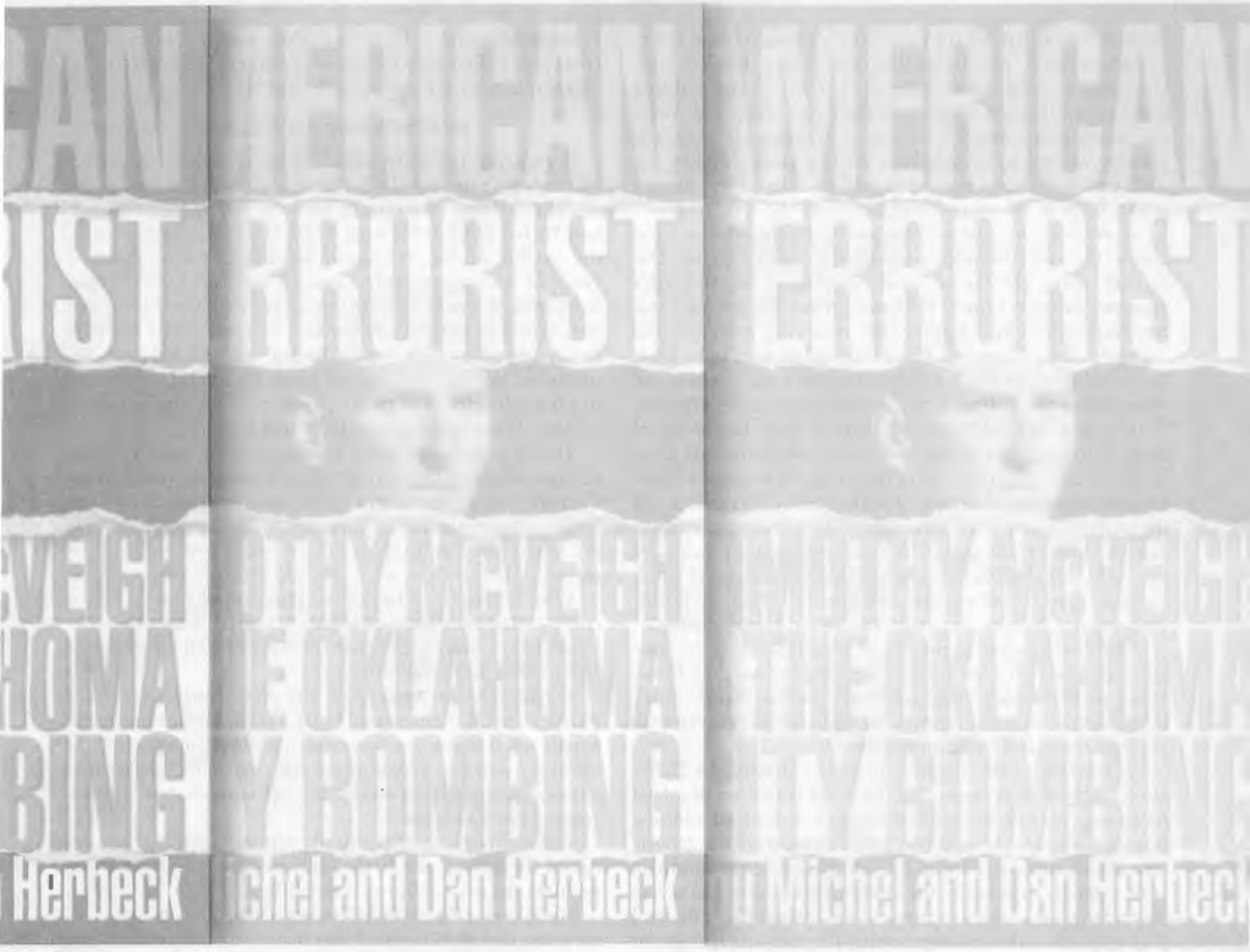
PHOTO COURTESY REGANBOOKS/HARPERCOLLINS

As the nation's focus turned to Terre Haute, Indiana for the execution of Timothy McVeigh, a new book made the stands, just in time to cash in on the "Roman Holiday" surrounding the execution of this nation's most despised death-row inmate.

American Terrorist: Timothy McVeigh & The Oklahoma City Bombing entered the marketplace in a tornado of glitzy publicity and heavy hype. Promising to be the final word on the 19 April 1995 truck bombing of the A. P. Murrah Federal Building, the Madison Avenue-types pumped the networks for unprecedented airtime to promote Lou Michel's and Dan Herbeck's 426-page work.

Published by ReganBooks, in conjunction with HarperCollins, this was to be a no-holes-barred tell-all — straight from the lips of Timothy McVeigh. The marketing department said it would put to rest all the conspiracy theories generated by the mass murder. This was to be *the* book on the Oklahoma City bombing.

By now you've probably read or heard excerpts of the story. McVeigh takes center-stage, declaring himself the mastermind of the crime. Convicted co-conspirator, Terry Nichols, we are told, only helped his ex-Army buddy stash his car in OKC, and mix the bomb in Kansas, because McVeigh threatened to kill him. Mike Fortier is almost totally let off the hook for his involvement. And John Doe #2? Oh, well, he never really existed. The authors would have us believe the man was a fig-



ment of scores of witnesses' imaginations.

So, can *American Terrorist* deliver the corroborating evidence to back all this up?

Before we launch into an analysis, it might help to put some important elements in perspective. First, I've investigated and reported on this case for six long years. Clearly, I am damned ready for anyone to name names. Certainly the victims' relatives are too. But as I waited for a copy of this book, I remained skeptical any of us would get our wish. After all, the book's primary source is McVeigh. And, oh, how well I know that boy's track record.

On 13 February 1996, I interviewed Mr. McVeigh at El-Reno Federal Prison, just outside Oklahoma City. I came away impressed by only one thing: Mr. McVeigh was no leader. I found him to be immature and easily manipulated. His hot buttons were fringe right-wing ideology and fantasies involving women. Push those buttons and Sergeant Mac was your boy. The perfect "patsy."

The Merry "Crankster"

Conversations over the years with witnesses, family members, friends and members of his trial team have reinforced those impressions. And there were other important reasons to carefully question McVeigh's statements: LSD and crystal-meth. His sister, Jennifer, confirmed her brother's involvement with both.

During his first weeks in jail, McVeigh exhibited all the symptoms of a "crankster" coming down from the destructive effects of the powerful stimulant. Neighbors of Michael Fortier also confirmed the pair had been on a drug-induced "roller coaster" the last months before the bombing.

Aware of this and other factors, lawyers for the prisoner came to believe their client was delusional; that McVeigh was living out a fantasy — a fantasy eerily similar to the storyline in the fictional book, *The Turner Diaries*. Also disturbing, McVeigh was captivated by Revolutionary War hero, Patrick Henry. Some wondered if McVeigh might actually believe he was the reincarnation of the patriot.

From the beginning it was up to court-appointed attorney, Stephen Jones, to challenge his client with the facts his team of defense investigators were coming up with. Jones wanted to elicit the truth from McVeigh about every element of the crime he might be familiar with.

For his money, Jones suspected Mr. McVeigh was part of a group intent on the overthrow of the federal government. Nothing his investigators came to him with proved otherwise. If this were so, evidence that he was a *minor* player was McVeigh's only real hope of escaping the death penalty. The federal death penalty statute allows evidence of a wider conspiracy to be introduced as a mitigating factor for a jury to

consider. It could mean the difference between life and death.

Shortly after accepting the case, Jones leveled with McVeigh, "Son, no one is going to believe that you and that other rube, Terry Nichols, pulled-off this thing." McVeigh chafed under the brutal assessment. Timothy McVeigh desperately wanted to be *somebody.* At this point, if being the "fall guy" for a mass murder would get him in the history books, so be it. He stonewalled Jones and the rest.

As evidence of a wider conspiracy developed, the more hostile the visits between lawyers and client became. The defense team grew ever more suspicious as McVeigh's accounts changed as new evidence proved his previous stories impossible. But despite this mounting evidence, the client remained adamant, "If the team didn't want to be fired; they would let him run the show." He didn't want to hear any more of this "conspiracy crap!" Screaming matches ensued.

It is true that McVeigh decided to wash his hands of Stephen Jones on the eve of the Denver federal trial. He came to the bizarre conclusion after one more in a string of false confessions managed to make it to the media. This time it was the *Dallas Morning News* reporting that McVeigh had told the defense team he was guilty. Insiders could not walk out and say, "Oh, yeah, but the bastard has lied about so much other stuff, we don't know whether he's nuts or telling the truth." This was not the time to parade all this out for the media.

Published so close to the day of the trial's start, any hope McVeigh could get a fair hearing went out the window. It was at this point, I believe, the seeds were planted that eventually produced *American Terrorist.* McVeigh would get even with his legal team, and some other folks.

As a result of the negative pretrial publicity the *Dallas Morning News* story generated, McVeigh curled up in a fetal position in his cell and refused to speak to his lead attorney. Hoping to mollify the situation, other members of the defense team would drop in to try to smooth things over. It was to no avail. Literally days before the multi-million dollar trial was to begin, McVeigh decided to contact U.S. District Judge Richard P. Matsch and left a message asking the jurist to arrange for him to have a new lawyer. Matsch refused to return the call. McVeigh would "dance with the gal that brung 'im."

Later, a member of the defense told me that every morning when the marshals brought in the *Star*, everyone at the table studied McVeigh for any hint of what he might do. Many expected "the client" to ask the judge to change his plea to *guilty* and then go off on a tirade about Jones, the government, Waco, Ruby Ridge, etc. "None of us could sleep nights," the attorney admitted. "He was the client from hell."

The rest is history. The trial turned out to be a nonevent for anyone looking for answers.

Years later, watching the case wind through the appeals process, I held out hope McVeigh would drop the *Silent Brotherhood* routine and tell it all. His pals were not going to bust him out of Super Max. That stuff only happens in *The Turner Diaries.* So, when the news broke that McVeigh had been feeding a couple of reporters at the *Buffalo News* a story about the bombing, I wondered: Would he really give it all up? Most doubted he would. And most turned out to be right.

The authors of *American Terrorist* jumped on the story, just as the world got its first glimpse of those chiseled features of Tim McVeigh being led from the Noble County jail, in Oklahoma. Lou Michel scrambled to Bill McVeigh's residence in Pendleton, a suburb of Buffalo, New York. Upon his arrival, the reporter realized the father of the alleged killer was already in the grips of the FBI. Bill McVeigh wouldn't be giving any interviews for awhile. Michel and the rest of the newshounds were held at bay while agents ransacked the home and grilled the shocked autoworker. The reporter was diligent, though. He would wait them out.

Persistence Overcomes Resistance

Eventually, the determined reporter would catch Bill McVeigh after the initial tidal wave of cops and snoops receded. After gaining an audience with the grief-stricken parent, Lou Michel and Bill McVeigh began their relationship out in the garden of the Pendleton residence, where the pair swapped growing tips. Over time, a bond between the men developed. It would be from this entrée that, years later, and after scores of letters were penned, Timothy James McVeigh finally agreed to speak "on the record" with Michel about his role in the killings. The authors admit the final straw that led to McVeigh's decision to go public was the publishing of Stephen Jones' book, *Others Unknown.*

Timothy McVeigh was determined to trump Jones' account, which left the world with the impression he was little more than a "patsy" in a wider conspiracy of major players. Now, more than ever, the convicted killer needed a book published about his exploits. Michel and fellow *Buffalo News* reporter, Dan Herbert, were only too happy to oblige.

What followed is a book that spins Timothy McVeigh as a crafty ladies man and gun-toting defender of the American Constitution, who goes toe-to-toe with an evil empire. He's also pitched as a great philosopher:

People need to understand, the New World Order is a metaphor, not just a paranoid belief. When you look around it's happening. It means one superpower, which is going to lead the world to a new age. People on the other end of the gun see it as one superpower forcing others. You will agree with us or we're going to bomb your ass.

And McVeigh can be politically astute. Regarding the murder of 19 babies, the book addresses the public relations problem the dead children created:

Had I known there was a day-care center, it might have given me pause to switch targets. That's a lot collateral damage.

And he can borrow a slick phrase:

One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter.

The writers begin McVeigh's "image makeover" with a survey of his childhood. From an orderly account emerges a picture of a somewhat typical young man, who endures adolescence in a home fraught with marital discord. Eventually, McVeigh's parents will split and the family is torn apart by divorce. His two sisters will go with their mother; Tim, though, will stay with his father — a no-nonsense blue-collar worker, who prefers bowling with his pals to campouts with his only son.

Bullied by classmates, ignored by girls, Sigmund Freud would fly into cartwheels after learning Timmy turns to guns for his pleasure. Over time, this firearms fetish will be followed by the stockpiling of water and other survivalist gear. Here, apparently, is the stuff of which mass-murderers are made.

Following McVeigh's graduation from high school, he will make a fateful decision. After only a short stint in college, McVeigh decides he knows more than his teachers and drops out. He will try the Army. In the Army, they have lots of big guns, the writers point out. At Fort Benning, Timmy will stay in his barracks, studying books about those big guns, while the rest of the recruits are out chasing women.

Is the psychobabble seeping in yet?

Also at Benning, two characters emerge who will cast dark shadows across McVeigh's remaining days on earth. Enter the freewheeling, dope-smoking, acid-dropping Mike Fortier and

his polar opposite, Terry Nichols, a tax-protester and serial loser with a fanatic dislike for all things government.

Eventually, the military careers of Fortier and Nichols fall by the wayside. Fortier takes a medical "early out" for a sore back. Terry Nichols goes home with a family hardship discharge.

Top Gun

On the Bradley IFV, McVeigh will set records for marksmanship. His ability to handle the fighting vehicle's 25-mm cannon astonishes his superiors. During one live-fire competition, he will score a near-perfect, 998 out of 1,000 points. McVeigh earns the Top Gun trophy. A star was born. In a two-year period, Timothy McVeigh will soar from private to sergeant. His future seemed blessed. All McVeigh needs now is a war to prove just how good, or bad, he really is. The stars were aligned. And Saddam gives him his dream-shot.

Operation Desert Storm was a made-to-order combat environment for the Bradley and a man like Tim McVeigh. He excels in the 100-hour campaign, earning a Bronze Star. But there was more to come. At last, he will get a shot at that most coveted legion — the U. S. Army Special Forces. But at this cruel juncture, fate deals McVeigh a bad hand. Only 48 hours into the rigorous training, he calls it quits. "Sore feet," he claims.

Discharged and back in economically depressed upstate New York, Citizen McVeigh finds himself living with his aloof father and party-animal sister, Jennifer, who has moved back home and taken over his old room. Bunking on the sofa is not what the war hero expected.

From here the book correctly records McVeigh experimenting with serious drugs and joining the Ku Klux Klan. Next, hoping to further escape the reality of a security guard job that can't provide the "playboy lifestyle" that McVeigh yearns for, he turns to a sports bookie for more adventure. He quickly finds it. McVeigh gambles away every dime he can muster, and more. Heavily in debt, he packs up and hits the road.

Today, we know McVeigh's life will dramatically impact a nation, only a couple of years after leaving New York. Once on the road, he will write his sister about a "network of friends" that he describes as "ex-military-types." He will also write about robbing banks and about a coming revolution in which he will play a part. This is the big story. However, the authors are unable to get McVeigh to discuss this in a substantive way. Instead, we get a disjointed story that ignores the evidence and defies common sense.

McVeigh is portrayed as a "lone wolf," enraged by the government's actions at Waco and Ruby Ridge. Bouncing coast-to-coast, we get a picture of a malcontent searching endlessly for evidence of government-sponsored concentration camps, UN troops and UFO landing sites. But no names are mentioned other than Mike Fortier and Terry Nichols.

Follow The Money?

If one accepts Michel and Herbeck's account, our vagabond survives off the sale of bumper stickers and copies of *The Turner Diaries*. The most obvious question is avoided: How? How does someone with nothing on the asset side of his balance sheet but a trashed car, survive on the road for over two years with no evidence of income beyond a couple of minimum wage jobs that last only a few weeks?

As an example of McVeigh's frantic travels, just take a look at a 100-day period, beginning in January 1993. Admittedly broke and heavily in debt, McVeigh quits his job and travels from upstate New York to Florida. Next he will go to New Orleans for Mardi Gras. After soaking that up, Mr. McVeigh will head to Waco, Texas, to see, first-hand, what all the trouble is there. After a brief stay, he's off to Kingman, Arizona, where he provides a sitrep to his pal, Mike Fortier. Next stop, "The Tulsa Gun and Knife Show." Here, McVeigh will meet with the infamous Andreas "The German" Strassmeir. After that experience, he's off to Hot Springs, Arkansas, for a few days with a couple he met at the Tulsa show. From Arkansas, our vagabond heads back to Florida. After a quick turnaround, Mr. McVeigh's right back in Hot Springs. Tires sizzling, McVeigh will then launch for Decker, Michigan, and a visit with the Nichols clan for a few days. After catching up with those folks, he's on the road back to Kingman, where he rents a residence to serve as his temporary base camp.

You do the math. In just one hundred days since quitting his security job in New York, McVeigh has put over 10,000 miles on his car. This pattern repeats itself for the following two-year period, leading up to the bombing of the federal building. By any reasonable estimate, this lifestyle would cost over $50,000.00 — regardless of the evidence that Timothy McVeigh sometimes stayed at friends' homes. Compare those expense dollars with an estimate of McVeigh's income for this same 27-month period and you would find he made less than $5,000.00 from a couple of part-time jobs — jobs that lasted only a few weeks. It would take a world-class salesman to make up the difference selling copies of *The Turner Diaries*.

We already know that in the aftermath of the bombing, McVeigh's sister admitted to the FBI she got involved laundering some $100 bills from a bank robbery her brother had been involved in. Nichols' ex-wife admitted to the FBI that she, too, suspected something illegal was going on after she discovered her chronically unemployed ex-husband had salted away $60,000 in cash and silver in her home and a storage locker, that also contained wigs, masks and a make-up kit.

You would think this evidence might pique the authors' imaginations, especially when at one point in *American Terrorist* they relate an account of Tim McVeigh giving his father $4,000 in $100 bills. But here, once again, we are left in wonderland. Michel and Herbeck never offer an explanation for these $100 bills that keep raining down on McVeigh.

Another serious omission to taint the credibility of this book is the authors' lack of research into McVeigh's links to Elohim City and the group of bank robbers that frequented the sprawling Christian Identity compound. *American Terrorist* ignores overwhelming evidence contained in BATF reports detailing work by undercover informant, Carol Howe, outlining a bombing conspiracy involving persons at Elohim City.

Also passed over are his well-established connections to the compound, such as a traffic ticket McVeigh was given a few minutes from the compound in the fall of 1993 — only months after his sudden departure from New York. This is also the very time McVeigh begins writing letters to sister, Jennifer, extolling the virtues of bank robbers. And most astonishing, there is no mention in the book that, on the day the grand jury says the plot to bomb the Murrah Building was hatched, McVeigh was registered in a motel room a short drive from Elohim City.

And then there is the incredible fact that the patriot synod of Elohim City, twice-convicted murderer Richard Wayne Snell, is executed by the state of Arkansas, exactly 12 hours after the bomb explodes at the Oklahoma City

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Timothy McVeigh

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federal building. 19 April 1995 is also the 10-year anniversary of the FBI siege at a northern Arkansas terrorist training camp, called the CSA, where Snell and fellow CSA members planned the first bombing of the Murrah Building, and other serious crimes. Regarding this obvious motive for the crime in OKC, the authors dismiss the Snell connection, calling it a "red herring." McVeigh, the book says, never met Snell.

When the authors try to explain the 5 April 1995 phone call to Elohim City, from McVeigh's motel room in Kingman — some 25 seconds after he calls a Ryder truck rental — we are informed McVeigh was calling to inquire about using Elohim City as a hideout after the bombing. However, a few pages later, we are told Mr. McVeigh took the license plate off his car before leaving Oklahoma City because, he figured, he would be caught anyway. But when the bomb goes off, McVeigh heads north, toward Kansas, not east toward Elohim City.

And then there's Timmy's bomb story. But first, a little more background. The record at the McVeigh and Nichols' trials makes clear that before April 1995, no evidence was introduced either man built any kind of successful explosive device. Unfazed by this detail, the authors of *American Terrorist* regurgitate a story from McVeigh that is somewhat similar to what he fed his defense team. When asked how he became the world's greatest bomb-builder, we are told, "I went to the library and checked out a book on improvised explosives."

McVeigh told the authors that he used 13 plastic 55-gallon barrels filled with a mixture of fertilizer and racing fuel. He says he placed these 13 barrels in a T-shape in the cargo hold of the truck. After connecting nonelectric blasting caps, via two lines of shock tube, he connects the whole thing to several packages of Tovex that he has placed in a bucket near the barrels of amfo.

Next, McVeigh hauls the whole mess, 250 miles, over bumpy highways and delivers it the front of the Murrah Building, without incident.

And just when you think it can't get any more ludicrous, we are told our "action hero" drives through downtown OKC traffic, with the fuses lit to his bomb.

"Keeping his eyes peeled for onlookers, McVeigh pulled the truck briefly over to the side of the road, just long enough to pull out a disposable lighter and ignite the 5-minute fuse to his bomb. The sizzling fuse began to fill the truck cab with smoke and the acrid smell of burning gunpowder. As he continued down N.W. 5th Street, McVeigh had to roll down both windows to let some of the smoke out. Just past the Regency Towers apartment complex, a block from the intended target building, McVeigh had to stop for a traffic light. Now he lit the shorter bomb fuse — the one he had measured at approximately two minutes. For the longest 30 seconds of his life, McVeigh sat watching the red light, with both fuses burning."

And so it goes. Presumably, with seconds ticking toward detonation and smoke pouring out both windows of the truck, McVeigh will happen upon the only empty parking spot large enough to handle the truck. This crucial vacancy just happens to be the indented parking area for delivery trucks, located exactly dead-center to the front doors of the federal building. Only steps from being underneath the building's glass and concrete facade — this is the most vulnerable location to detonate a truck bomb.

Capitalizing on this extremely good fortune, McVeigh pulls up, calmly jumps down and takes a path that he later draws for his authors — a sidewalk in front of the YMCA. McVeigh claims he walked for at least 200 feet along this sidewalk, before disappearing up an alleyway to find his reliable getaway car he has only just purchased for a couple hundred bucks and stashed days earlier. McVeigh admits having trouble getting the "junker" to start, but once again, his luck holds a bit longer and he makes his short-lived getaway.

At this point, if common sense hasn't overwhelmed the reader, maybe a little evidence will. After the bombing, a videotape was turned over to the FBI. Later, McVeigh's defense team received a copy. It turns out a camera mounted on the south side of the *Journal Record* Building was pointed directly at the sidewalk that McVeigh says he used to make his solo escape. I am familiar with this film because I reviewed a short piece of the tape to determine if it showed the front of the Murrah Building and the truck pulling up in front. It did not. The camera angle precluded it. But with the publication of *American Terrorist* this film footage has taken on new importance.

Stephen Jones and one of his investigators, who spent hours looking for any evidence that might be reflected on the film, confirmed for this article that there was, you guessed it, no McVeigh!

"Think about it, J. D.," Jones surmised, "if Tim had been walking down that sidewalk the government would have introduced that film at trial and the whole world would have seen it."

Also for the record, witnesses at the scene said McVeigh and another man sped away from the area in the same yellow Mercury the Desert Storm veteran was arrested in 70 minutes after the blast. A second vehicle, a dark pickup truck, with three men inside, also left the scene at a high rate of speed — only seconds after a man exited the Ryder truck's passenger door. In all, some two dozen witnesses reported seeing Mr. McVeigh in downtown Oklahoma City that fateful morning — and each reported that he was with others. After a six-year investigation, the overwhelming evidence I've reviewed suggests that at least four men were with McVeigh that morning.

McVeigh's answer:

"The truth is, I blew up the Murrah Building. Isn't it kind of scary that one man could reap this kind of hell?"

Even scarier is what two creative writers and a lunatic can do with a good marketing department behind them. *American Terrorist* — the end-product of the partnership that created this self-serving aggrandizement of a delusional meth-addict and psychotic killer — has proven to be an outrage to the survivors and relatives of the victims of the crime. As well, I believe the authors' failure to corroborate McVeigh's exploits is an affront to the intelligence of the American people. But most irresponsible, is that giving someone like McVeigh an unfiltered medium to sell this twisted tale guarantees others will follow in his bloody footsteps. We are not well-served by the publication of these outlandish accounts.

What we want is the truth!

J. D. Cash, a well-known investigative reporter from Oklahoma, has researched the Oklahoma City bombing since Day One — 19 April 1995.