



EXPLOSION AT FBI HEADQUARTERS!

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

POLICE, RACE & THE FOURTH ESTATE

SECRET SOVIET SNIPER AMMO

ZIMBABWE, MUGABE'S MADNESS

SHOCK COVER-UP TERROR ATTACKS

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On the Cover

Personnel of the Dayton, Ohio Police Department during SWAT (Special Weapons & Tactics Training). See story, page 48.

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Emily K. Nickerson



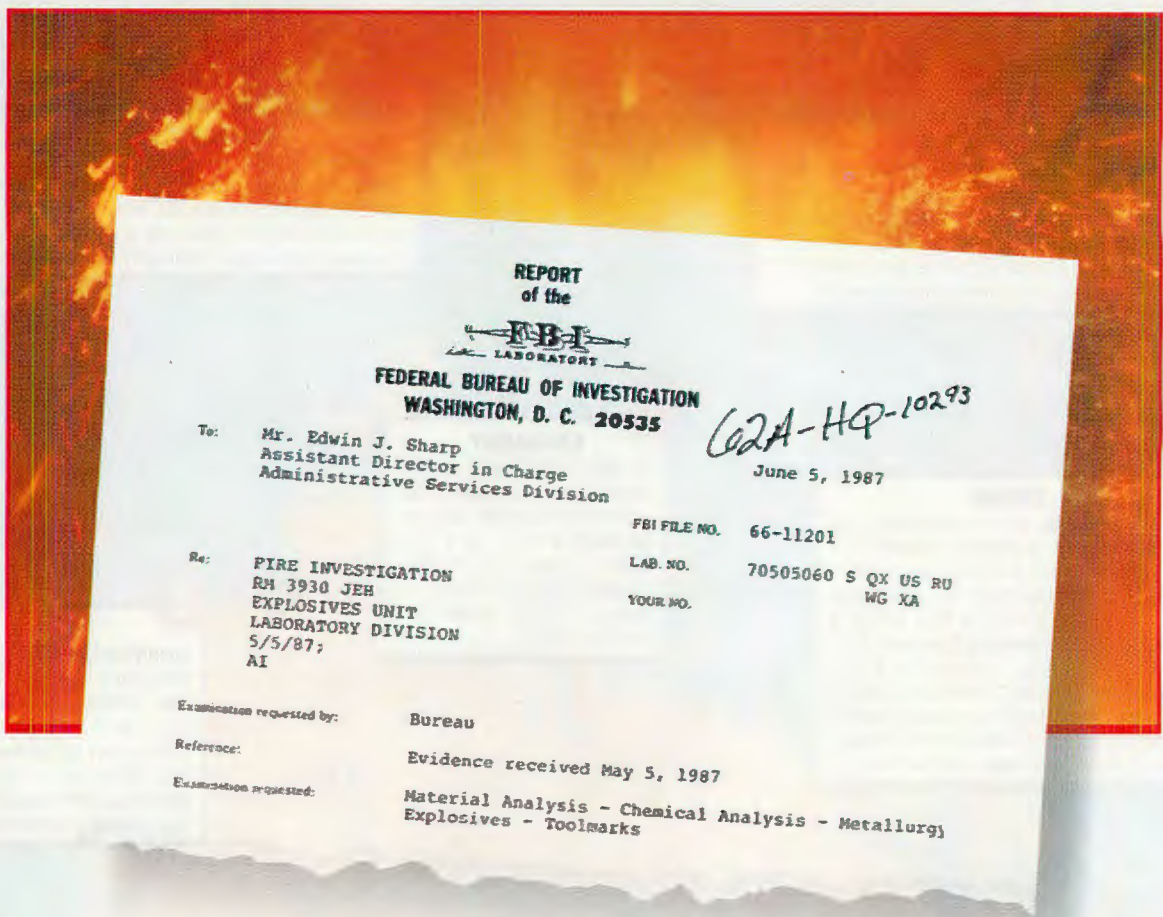
AP Photo/John Moore



courtesy Al J. Venter

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FBI Crime Lab Catastrophe

A Tale From the Dark Side

BY J.D. CASH WITH ROGER CHARLES

PHOTOS: COURTESY FBI

I

It all began with a tip. "You might find it interesting that the FBI Building in Washington, D.C. was seriously damaged when some explosives they had in there went off. ... Blew the living shit out of a good part of the crime lab... ." The source went on to add, "They've kept it under wraps for years. Passed it off as a chemical fire in a closet. Those "cowboys" had all kinds of high-performance stuff in there ... Soviet rocket fuses, C-4, blasting caps ... Damned near got some D.C. firemen killed when a Soviet RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) ripped through a wall and went streaking down a hallway. ... Real bad deal!"

It was a stunning admission from a seemingly reliable source claiming to be part of the team of investigators that played a central role in trying to determine what had actual-

ly happened at the sprawling federal complex in the early morning hours of 5 May 1987.

It was extremely puzzling that all we discovered in our research was a short mention in the 6 May 1987 edition of the *Washington Post* which announced that "Fire broke out near an explosives laboratory at FBI headquarters early yesterday, forcing the evacuation of dozens of night-shift workers, authorities said. No injuries were reported. ..."

Our interest was piqued, as similar assertions had been made concerning the Oklahoma City Bombing in 1995, including the possibility that federal law enforcement housed in the OKC federal complex might have been storing explosives in their evidence lockers the morning Timothy McVeigh, and likely other terrorists, struck.

The lingering debate concerning the Oklahoma City

Bombing revolves around possible additional perpetrators and the extensive damage to the victims and building. Skeptics question how such devastation could have resulted from an ammonium nitrate/nitro-methane truck bomb. Seismologists working at the University of Oklahoma produced readings from two seismic stations in the Oklahoma City area that supported the possibility of *multiple blasts*, as did the report from the highly respected explosives authority and retired USAF General Ben Partin, who believes, as well, that some columns of the Murrah Building were sheared by attached explosives.

One hypothesis is that explosives confiscated during raids, which were stored by federal law enforcement in one of the four evidence lockers located in the Oklahoma City structure, might have been sympathetically detonated by the truck bomb.

A serious study was launched by the authors to see if there was any evidence where federal law enforcement personnel had indeed stored prohibited explosives in federal buildings in the past.

Jousting With Wolves

Our hunt began with a call to the Public Information Officer at the FBI. Not surprisingly, no one at the Bureau seemed to



The J. Edgar Hoover Building, headquarters of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, in Washington, D.C., 20 February 2001.

recall anything about explosions at the Hoover Building. How about a fire at the Explosive Unit? "No ... no one here knows anything about that." Could an interview be conducted with anyone who was working in the unit in May of 1987? "No ... all those people have been transferred or retired."

Our next step was a formal request for information under the Freedom of Information Act. After this request languished for weeks, the FBI denied that there had ever been a report issued about any such "incident" at the Hoover Building.

Those experienced at jousting with vast government bureaucracies in the FOIA arena know that stonewalling information about government misdeeds is typical. Requests under this federal statute, normally, are "sloughed-off" with a variety of excuses. The guiding rule for FOIA filers: Never be in a hurry. One will have to file appeals, often for years, to get to the truth. In this case the truth was four years down the road.

After our appeal in the tedious appellate process was scheduled for a hearing in front of a federal judge, the FBI was notified to prepare for their day in court. Suddenly, a 2-inch file appeared in the mailbox.

Finally, 197 pages detailing one of the FBI's darkest secrets: the mysterious conflagration of the Crime Lab at the Hoover Building. In addition, the extraordinary FBI report was accompanied by a BATF cause-and-origin report which determined whether there had been arson, as well as a report from the D.C. Fire Department which extinguished the fires.

Our source had been right. A quick perusal of the bulky file made it clear that a series of explosions had rocked the federal complex in Washington, D.C. in the early morning hours of 5 May 1987. Most of the damage had occurred in room 3930, evidence storage room of the Explosives Unit, Laboratory Division, which stored evidence in high-profile "major cases."

Several photographs, of which first-generation glossies were not made available to the authors despite their requests, attached to the report told the story of the devastation resulting from the explosions. Numerous interviews with FBI personnel who admitted they had been storing a large amount of foreign-made high-explosives were included in the shocking record.

How could the nation's top experts in explosives have been so reckless? In our estimation, the report established a gross disregard for the safety and security of employees who worked at the Hoover Building. A high-ranking former ATF official contacted by SOF said that undoubtedly the storage of the high-explosives violated FBI operating procedures, at the risk of safety of personnel as well as the safe-guarding of evidence in high-profile cases.

Shades Of Watergate

Zero-Dark-Thirty, 5 May 1987

A member of the Security Unit had told investigators that she had been making her regularly scheduled rounds when she thought she heard someone. As she passed through the 3900 Corridor of the massive Hoover structure, she heard a noise. At this hour, no one was assigned to this area other than her.

Curiosity piqued, the security agent made her way down the long corridors. Moments later, she heard a door close — then another. There was someone else on the floor but she caught sight of no one. Checking the doors along the way, nothing seemed out of the usual. All doors were locked.

She told investigators that in room 3930, the evidence storage room of the Explosives Unit, Laboratory Division, she found the Medico locks intact, that the temperature of the knob was normal, and that she had not smelled any smoke.

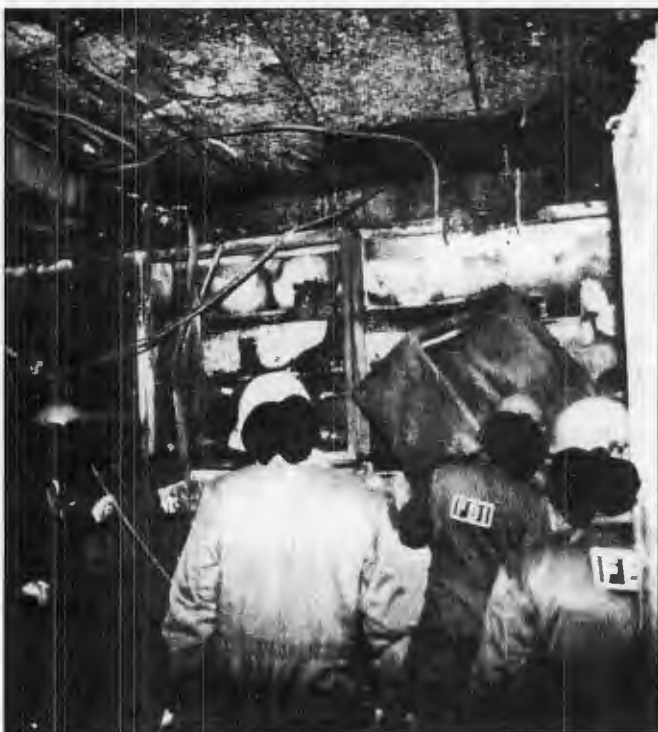
Moments later, as she entered an elevator, the guard heard



D.C. fireman inspects charred remains of world-famous crime lab.



According to investigators, cabinets containing evidence in other cases were breached by shrapnel and contaminated. (below) Investigators perform initial damage assessment.



a “muffled *bang* noise.” “It sounded like someone was dropping furniture or cabinets on the floor.”

She heard two more *bangs* as she stepped out of the elevator. Then another. Then two more. Glancing up, she saw the ceiling tiles shaking. Then a thundering explosion shook the concrete floors.

A number of other personnel working the nightshift were interviewed. Most recalled a series of small explosions, followed by at least one very substantial blast that shook the floors of the structure.

One particular interview recorded a management clerk’s recollections, “Sometime after 0330 he began hearing what sounded like some muffled *pops*, which sounded to him like someone banging on the building ... [followed by] a series of *pops* followed by one large explosion.”

In short order the entire rank-and-file of the night shift (probably several dozen people) at the building was ordered evacuated. An FBI 302 stated that, as personnel poured out onto the streets outside the headquarters, a reporter for the AP called the switchboard for information about something going on there. He said that his scanner was reporting that several fire trucks had been dispatched to the scene. The switchboard operator put the reporter on hold.

FBI security personnel quickly briefed the firefighters, informing them that dense smoke had engulfed a substantial portion of the third floor of the structure and that explosions were occurring in the crime lab. When asked what the source of the explosions were, FBI officials told firemen that the Explosives Unit of the lab contained, among other items, “bomb debris, explosives, ordnance, RPGs and a “LAW” [light anti-tank weapon] rocket.”

A more complete inventory would later establish far more explosives than these. Not surprising, members of the Security Unit successfully deflected the initial press inquiries with a simplistic line. The “story” put out described the unfolding disaster as a chemical fire in a closet that was being taken care of by the D.C. Fire Department.

“Nothing really is going on here,” the operator calmly assured reporters as the streets filled with fleeing FBI personnel.

It worked. The night owls at the local news bureaus went back to their crossword puzzles.

Dangerous Duty

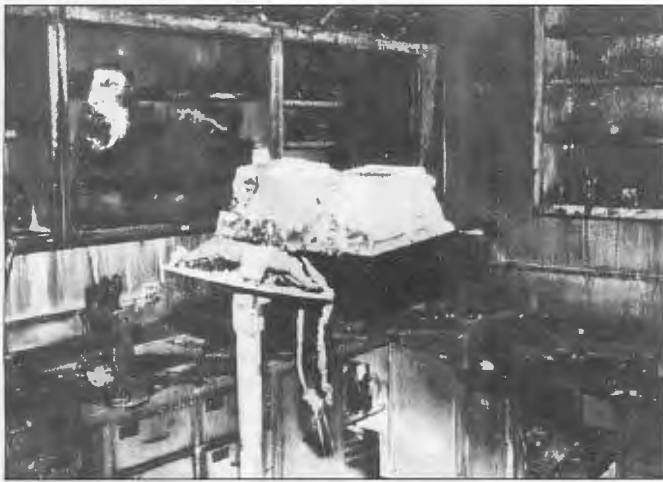
Another FBI 302 said that D.C. firemen were moving cautiously toward the door to room 3930 when a series of explosions shook the walls and ceiling around them. With smoke so thick — one later said he could barely make out the numbers on the doors — they waited in the hall for the explosions to stop.

Finally, a member of Engine Company 2 was able to enter the 600-square-foot Evidence Room with the assistance of special agents from the FBI. Next, employing water from an inch-and-one-half line, and fog spray, firemen began the 10-minute process of putting out the fires that were burning in various locations.

Eventually, the last of the fires were extinguished due to prompt and professional action by the Washington, D.C. Fire Department.

After the smoke cleared, the scene was one of devastation. The entire Explosive Unit was nothing but a charred and pitted shell. Evidence cabinets had been blown over and some had been penetrated by shrapnel. A pair of large holes in the walls provided chilling proof that one Soviet-made RPG had ignited. Miraculously, only one person required hospitalization due to an asthma attack brought on by the heavy smoke.

With the fires put down, bleary-eyed senior FBI personnel



Explosive Unit hopelessly contaminated by series of explosions and fire.



Technician's work area evidences destructive effects of blasts and fire.

began arriving inside the Hoover Building to assess the situation. Also at the scene was a senior official from D.C. Fire Department. Quick discussions took place and then the rank-and-file firemen were ushered away. A subsequent report by the fire department simply noted there were "hazardous materials" at the scene.

The proper procedure for crime labs require personnel to have on-hand only small amounts of residue from explosive devices they are examining. The remainder of the device is to be stored in bunkers, rendered inert, or photographed and then completely destroyed. The FBI maintains bunkers for the safe storage of explosives at their training facility, located in Quantico, Virginia, for just this purpose.

One FBI report lists the following explosives in boxes on the floor, next to evidence cabinets in room 3930 before the disaster.

Partial listing and conclusions from the FBI report:

One, perhaps two, cardboard boxes of foreign explosives which also included:

- 10 kilograms (approximately 22 pounds) of PBX (plastic explosive)
- 2.5 kilograms (approximately 5.5 pounds) of TNT
- 4 pounds PETN
- several 6" strips of detonating chord
- 10 to 15 rounds of 30mm anti-aircraft ammunition
- Three rocket-propelled grenades
- 45 detonating fuses

Also noted in their 5 June 1987 report:

• The floor area between rows of evidence cabinets exhibit numerous small craters which are characteristic as having been produced from the explosion of 122mm rocket fuses.

• The large holes through the evidence cabinets are characteristic as having been produced from the explosion of 122mm rocket fuses.

• The hole through the wall is characteristic of having been produced by the explosion of a rocket-propelled grenade without the initiation of the base detonating fuse element. In essence, (the report concludes) when the rocket hit the wall, the explosive in the warhead exploded from the force of impact and not from the base fuse. The blast and fragment damage to the surrounding area and the wall were produced from this exploding rocket.

• Evidence of high-speed missile damage is evident in some areas in the evidence room, from the ceiling to floors and the surrounding walls.

• This damage is characteristic of having been produced by metal fragments from the exploding military ordnance.

The former head of the Explosive Unit in a recorded interview admitted that before he left the unit — some five months prior to the incident — he had deposited a substantial amount of explosives with the new chief. Referring to the box of foreign explosives that played a role in the 5 May explosion, the report notes:

"At that time the box contained two five-kilo packages and two two-and-one-half-kilo packages of a foreign plastic high-explosive and foreign TNT. The box also contained several six-inch strips of detonating cord and three or four cartridges of PETN totaling approximately three pounds. There was also a separate box of approximately 15 foreign blasting caps."

According to the reports, this box was placed on the floor of the EU where it sat for months. In reference to the presence of the Soviet 122mm rocket fuses and RPGs which adorned the office, the head of the unit at the time of the incident told investigators that "He did not believe the storage of these devices presented a safety hazard."

SOF interviewed an explosives expert and former military EOD authority for his opinions regarding the slipshod storage practices of the FBI. He stated it was fortunate that an event of "horrendous devastation" did not occur and that the storage procedures involved "gross negligence." Furthermore, he emphatically stated that "anyone outside of the government would be prosecuted to the fullest extent of federal law if they operated in this manner." He continued, "It is illegal by law to keep detonators and explosives together. You never have them in the same room. The FBI was in violation of all ATF rules and regulations concerning storage of explosives."

Image Before Justice

The FBI's image of invincibility was largely developed over the years because of a reputation for having the finest crime lab in the world. At one time that may have been true. Prosecutors and defense attorneys know how testimony from the FBI's Forensic Lab personnel mystifies and impresses jurors. Their testimony may make the difference between conviction and acquittal.

The importance of full information is highlighted in the OKBOMB case. Stephen Jones, Timothy McVeigh's court-appointed lawyer, followed through on allegations of problems at the FBI Crime Lab. Jones learned that a whistle-blower at the lab, Dr. Frederic Whitehurst, had repeatedly complained about the shoddy work there. Jones lit the fire under

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Practical Competition

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day. I fussed out and made multiple mistakes that up to that point in time, I had not made. It was an indoor stage in that it represented the interior of a building, but in reality it was an uncovered, open-shoot house scenario that with the bright Mississippi sun became an oven in terms of heat and lack of ventilation — a perfect breeding ground for mental mistakes by tired old men.

In any event, the scene surrounding the controversy quickly deteriorated into a “he said, she said” circumstance with the range officers on one side and the board member on the other. Right or wrong, the powers that be backed up the board member with a decision that ended the matter and the end of the match hangover was a taint of lingering bitterness among many who had literally busted their butts to make the match succeed and run smoothly. The bad part of the whole affair was the way it was handled and the fact that some of the leaders of this organization were competing against the troops they were supposed to be leading in a new direction.

Next year, it would be better for everyone if a new rule was invoked that allowed board members to shoot the match if they wanted, but their score would not be counted for match results or placing. Officers lead and troops follow for reasons pertaining more to high moral authority and good leadership than just simple authority. Leaders must always be held to a higher standard than the troops below, the leadership of our country for the past eight years being a case in point. It may not be fair, but it is the price of leadership.

There is little question that IDPA is an organization whose main theme has struck a cord among a core group of defensive pistol shooters. The surprising thing for many is that core group is larger than anyone believed. Its popularity is continuing to demonstrate there is a need for this sport and the benefit for all is a more reality-oriented sport even with all the warts and blemishes that accompany any human endeavor.

Next year's IDPA Nationals will again be held at John Shaw's range in the latter portion of the month of September 2001. For further information, contact:

IDPA, Dept SOF, P.O. Box 639, Berryville, AR 72616; email: info@idpa.com; website: www.idpa.com; phone: 870-545-3886; fax: 870-545-3894. ☒

Battle Blades

Continued from page 20

or Abrams tank. The sheath is well-made and thought-out, and like the better Kydex carry rigs we have examined, this one is also equipped with a drain hole for water on the reverse side near the tip. The only negative about the sheath is the same criticism that has been voiced about every other Kydex rig that we have seen. Kydex is noisy, and this one is no exception. You simply cannot withdraw the knife from the sheath without making a raspy, rattling noise that can easily be heard from 20 feet if you have average hearing. A tactical tool or weapon, edged or otherwise, should be capable of silent deployment. Perhaps at some point the problem of noise that is associated with Kydex sheaths in general can be solved.

As far as cutting performance is concerned, the BK5 does and it doesn't. What it does do extremely well is slice and dice. It will whittle and carve, and it will hold an edge extremely well and is easy to sharpen. On the other hand, the BK5 does not hack and chop with a great deal of authority. This is not the knife of choice to use to build a shelter. If you intend to cut limbs with the Magnum Camp Knife, they need to be small ones. The BK5 simply doesn't have enough swing-weight and length or the appropriate blade geometry to make heavy chopping cuts.

It is my belief that the BK5 meets its design criteria. It is not a true fighting knife or a focused battle blade. My conversations with designer Jerry Fisk and with Ethan Becker concerning the BK5 revealed that they were interested in bringing to market a high-quality broad-spectrum application knife to be used primarily in a campsite environment. Chores such as food preparation and skinning large game and cleaning fish were of primary concern. In that vein, this knife is an absolute whiz at cleaning large catfish and cutting them into steaks. We don't have salmon in this part of the country, but the knife would be an ideal accessory for those who fish in the Northwest. It would also be the ideal tool for breaking down an elk carcass.

The BK5 is a knife that was designed to function best in a camp environment after camp is set up. It was not designed to be the tool to use to clear the campsite or to cut the firewood. It is tough, well-made and functional. Used for its intended purpose, it will give years of outstanding service. ☒

FBI Crime Lab

Continued from page 35

the press. A firestorm of stories in the media erupted. Lawyers for Terry Nichols followed suit in demanding prosecutors turn over any evidence concerning problems at the lab that might prove important in the bombing trials which took place in Denver, Colorado.

Judge Matsch ordered a report by the Office of Inspector General to be made available to both defense teams. The IG report confirmed much of Dr. Whitehurst's allegations. The report assailed FBI Crime Lab employees for consistently failing to follow procedures set by peer-review panels who establish protocols for crime labs nationwide. *Investigators found that a pattern of abuses was institutionalized in the department.*

Hoover's demands for image for his FBI over all else, reigned supreme. Protection of that image appears to have masked other facts when the books were closed on the 5 May Hoover Building explosions and fires.

The FBI's final report concerning the explosions and fire at the Hoover Building concluded that the most likely cause of destruction was a soldering iron that may have been left on. The BATF made a different conclusion — that cleaning chemicals stored in a closet with a mop had possibly burst into flames. There had been no arson.

The FBI did make an effort to study the locks at the EU office, to preclude tampering by an outsider. Nothing was found. The investigation failed to turn-up any authorized or unauthorized personnel inside the EU when the incident occurred.

What about the explosives left laying about the floor of the unit? The report recommended smaller quantities be kept on-hand. The rest, the report stated, belonged in a bunker, somewhere else. No disciplinary action was recommended.

The report also noted that the world's foremost crime lab that handles explosives did not have smoke alarms nor did it have a fire-suppression system. (e.g. a sprinkler system.)

J.D. Cash, a longtime investigative journalist from Oklahoma, has broken several major stories on the OKC Bombing. Roger Charles, a U.S. Naval Academy grad and former consultant on ABC's 20/20, is, likewise, an authority on the tragedy and a frequent contributor to SOF. ☒