
NOTE: THIS IS THE ORIGINAL COPY SUBMITTED TO EDITOR BY R.M. SCHNEIDERMAN AT NEWSWEEK.

This article was heavily gutted—redacted, like a sensitive FBI document—before publication with the final version of the story omitting all mention of Timothy McVeigh among other things that never made it to print.

THE ORIGINAL STORY AS PRESENTED HERE IS PRESERVED FOR THE HISTORICAL RECORD

Newsweek

I Was An Undercover White Supremacist

An FBI mole speaks for the first time about life in the seedy world of right-wing terror.

November 28, 2011 | Newsweek
Author: R. M. Schneiderman | Page: 38 | Section: COVER STORY

SALT LAKE CITY, Utah –On the morning that he was set to reveal his secret identity, John Matthews--a 59-year-old former Marine with a silver moustache and penchant for baseball caps emblazoned with slogans like “Hell in a Helmet,”--cruised towards downtown with his son. The streets were a maze of police barricades and parked cars, amassed for a parade. Yet rather than avoid the gridlock, Matthews feigned confusion and told his son to steer his silver SUV into traffic. He wanted to make sure they weren’t being followed.

The two men didn’t say much to each other that morning. Instead they clung to the awkward silence that characterized much of their relationship. Matthew’s son, Dan Candland, 33, knew his father was seriously ill and that they were going to meet an attorney. Beyond that, he didn’t know much of what to expect. His father had long been a shadowy presence in his life. Every six months it was a new city , a new state, a new apartment. Once, when Candland was 16, Matthews

called him from a pay phone to say he was going underground; that his face might appear on America 's Most Wanted. It never happened, and months later when they reconnected, neither brought it up.

Matthews could understand why. He knew what his son, a practicing Mormon, thought of him: That he was a troubled Vietnam veteran with post-traumatic stress disorder, a paranoid man who wandered between jobs and marriages, despised the government and always kept a camouflage backpack filled with food, water and clothing by his bedroom door, in case he needed to make a quick escape. “Danny always figured I was trash,” Matthews says. “Or a bad person.”

Finding their way out of traffic, Matthews and his son parked the car and walked towards the federal courthouse on Main Street . As they approached, they saw a grizzled man in a Stetson cowboy hat, smoking a Toscanelli cigar, on a nearby park bench. The man stood up and introduced himself as Jesse Trentadue, the attorney. After some brief pleasantries, the three went upstairs to Trentadue’s office. There, Matthews divulged the secret he had harbored for 21 years: While Candland and other family members thought he was hiding from the law, palling around with white supremacists and other anti-government activists, Matthews was actually working as an informant for the FBI and other federal agencies, infiltrating right wing extremists groups in an effort to thwart terrorist attacks.

For Candland, the revelation brought sanity to a childhood of mystery and frustration. “It all made sense,” he says. “Now I know why he was so secretive.”

*

It is rare for an informant to unmask his identity, especially one who infiltrated a violent world frequented by heavily armed bigots. But Matthews has nothing to lose. Ailing from a fatal lung condition, and a drastically weakened heart, he wanted his family to know his true identity before it was too late. His story, which was verified by NEWSWEEK through hundreds of FBI documents and hours of interviews, including conversations with current and former FBI officials, offers a rare glimpse into the murky world of domestic intelligence, and the bureau’s success and struggles to combat right-wing extremism some two decades ago.

Today, in the post-September 11th world, there has been a resurgence of some of the same types of extremism that Matthews monitored for the FBI; fears of Islamic terrorism, increased federal power, a sour economy and the nation’s first black president have provided fuel for their hatred of the government and various minority groups. The Southern Poverty Law Center, an Alabama-based civil rights group, reports that since President Obama’s election in 2008, the number of right wing extremists groups–a term that covers a broad array of dissidents ranging from neo-Nazis and white supremacists to anti-government militias—has mushroomed to 824 from just 149.

Back in 2009, the Department of Homeland Security issued a warning that veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan , and other vulnerable Americans who were displaced by the economy could be recruited by right-wing extremists and turned into lone-wolf terrorists. The report sparked political outcry and was quickly withdrawn for fear it might insult veterans.

These days, however, the report seems more prescient. Over the past two years, there have been a series of harrowing and high profile plots and attacks. In the summer of 2009, an 88-year old gunman opened fire on visitors at the Holocaust museum in Washington , D.C. Last year, nine members of the Hutaree, a Christian militia, were arrested in a plot to kill police officers in Michigan . In January, Jared Lee Loughner, an Army reject, went on a shooting rampage in Tucson , Ariz. , killing a federal judge, among others, and severely wounding Arizona congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, a Jewish Democrat. Most recently, earlier this month, the FBI arrested four elderly men in Georgia , who were allegedly plotting to attack federal buildings and release biological toxins on government employees.

For Matthews, the news was just another reminder that the threat from the extreme right, which appeared to recede in the 1990s, has not gone away. As he puts it: “This ain’t over.”

*

Matthews entered the world of right-wing extremism in September 1990. It was roughly five years before Timothy McVeigh set off a truck-bomb in Oklahoma City , killing 168 people, and before many Americans imagined that terror could come from within.

He had traveled to Las Vegas , to work as a security guard for a convention honoring Soldier of Fortune, a gun magazine popular with mercenaries and weapons enthusiasts. He spent the mornings listening to seminars about surviving a government collapse; in the afternoons he shot automatic weapons at a local firing range, and at night, he gathered with friends to play blackjack and talk politics.

Tensions were particularly high that fall. The American economy was sputtering, the U.S. was on the brink of war in Iraq , and President George H.W. Bush had called for a “New World Order” to emerge in the war’s wake.

Like many of his cohorts, Matthews had spent years fighting in Vietnam . He arrived home to a country that he felt no longer wanted him, labeled him a baby killer and showed no respect for what he sacrificed. As he took a series of odd jobs, working at a recycling plant in Piqua , Ohio and as a tour guide in the Grand Canyon , Matthews noticed that his lungs didn’t seem to work right. He later learned that he had been exposed to Agent Orange, the chemical the military used to defoliate forests as they fought the Vietcong. It was supposed to be safe, but

clearly wasn't. And as his health declined, Matthews began to distrust those in power.

Many at the convention shared a similar worldview: They loved their country, but hated their government; and with George H.W. Bush as president, they feared that he was relinquishing American sovereignty, and empowering the United Nations to take over the country. One such man: Tom Posey, the head of Civilian Material Assistance (CMA), an American paramilitary group, once thousands strong, that in the mid 1980s, conducted border patrols in the Southwest to prevent illegal immigration, and with support from the White House and the CIA, trained and armed anti-communist rebels in Nicaragua.

Toward the end of the Contra War, Matthews had been one of Posey's lieutenants, traveling with him around the U.S., helping him raise money, and later, joining him in Nicaragua, where Posey and his fellow soldiers of fortune offered aid, weapons and training to the Contras. Matthews admired the former Marine and what he was doing to help defeat communism. "During the Contra War, I thought the world of Posey," Matthews tells NEWSWEEK. "He was a great man doing what he could to help the freedom fighters."

Yet as they spent time together in Vegas, Matthews could tell that Posey hadn't taken well to civilian life. In 1987, as news spread that the White House and CIA had defied Congress and used networks of private soldiers to arm the Contras, Posey was indicted for illicit weapons smuggling. President Ronald Reagan had long defended Posey, calling him a "national treasure," according to congressional testimony, and Posey managed to beat the indictment on a technicality. Yet in the process, Posey's reputation was tarnished, as witnesses testified to Congress that he was part of a plot to kill the U.S. ambassador to Nicaragua , and that he was consorting with cocaine traffickers. In the end, Posey was stuck with considerable legal fees, and a feeling, according to friends, that he had followed orders, but that his government had hung him out to dry.

On their last night on the Vegas Strip, Posey and Matthews, both dressed in CMA fatigues, were sitting in a large, banquet auditorium and sipping on Miller Lite when Posey leaned over and asked Matthews something that he could hardly believe: Would he help him steal a cache of automatic weapons from the Brown's Ferry nuclear plant in Alabama? Posey explained that he wanted to sell the guns to make a profit. To make their getaway, he planned to set off a bomb in the plant's control room.

As Posey spoke, Matthews nodded and smiled. But internally he was horrified. "I don't like radiation and I don't like chemicals," he tells Newsweek. "Sorry, learned about that in the service."

When he returned home to Arizona , Matthews called the local office of the FBI. The next day, an agent arrived at his house, and Matthews told him about Posey's

plot, about his own experience in Vietnam and Nicaragua and all the people he had met in Vegas.

Days later, the same agent called Matthews back—with a job offer. Would Matthews consider being an informant? The money wasn't great—just $500 a week plus expenses—and the work could be dangerous, the travel grueling. But Matthews felt like he would be doing the right thing. For the first time since the end of the Contra War, he had a sense of purpose.

"Being around crazy people, I guess I just felt normal," Matthews says of the work. "I felt at home. It was something that I brought home from Vietnam ."

*

Not long after he began working for the bureau, Matthews learned that Posey had tentatively called off his plans to rob Brown's Ferry; the buyer had gotten cold feet. Yet Posey had plenty of other illegal money-making schemes, and the proper connections to make them work.

And so beginning in the spring of 1991 and continuing for close to a decade, Matthews, who had never had any formal intelligence training, infiltrated this burgeoning right-wing extremist movement. At the behest of his FBI handlers in Phoenix, in conjunction with other intelligence agencies, Matthews—a wire often down his pants and a pistol in his shoulder holster—traveled across the country with Posey and others, attending dance parties with the Ku Klux Klan, selling weapons at truck stops and gas stations, sitting in church pews with would-be abortion clinic bombers and becoming a regular at gun shows and paramilitary compounds. "I'd been in two wars," Matthews said, "But they was never like the war on domestic terrorism."

In his early years, Matthews spent most of his time on the road. When he was home for a few days at a time, he would rendezvous with his main handler for the bureau, a former Army intelligence officer named Donald Jarrett. A tall, well-built, dark-skinned African-American man with closely cropped hair and a penchant for nice suits, and large, boat-like American cars, Jarrett would frequently meet Matthews in abandoned parking lots or greasy spoons, to talk strategy and to give Matthews his pay.

Matthews' relationship with Jarrett was always close. The two frequently shared hotel rooms together, and went out for drinks. Sometimes they shot guns in the desert in Arizona , once Jarrett even brought along his children. About the only thing they never talked about, according to Matthews: the ribald and racially charged jokes he learned at Klan rallies and other extremist events. "We didn't talk about those," Matthews says laughing.

When it was time to go on the road again, Matthews would receive a phone call or a page late at night, and then he'd quickly hop on a plane, returning sometimes

months later. The next morning, his wife at the time, Tracene Janda, 44, would pack the kids' lunch and send them off to school like nothing happened. And while he was gone, she would meet Jarrett to collect his pay. All she knew was that her husband worked for the government and nothing more. And Matthews' children—both the two that lived with him at the time, and the two who lived with some of his ex-wives, remained in the dark. "That way," says Janda, "the bad guys couldn't put two and two together."

Many of those bad guys—skinheads, militia leaders, white supremacists—were frequent guests at the various apartments Matthews and Janda shared in Mesa , Arizona . "I'd be sitting there with my Ghostbusters or Batman toys and I'd see a guy come in," says Jason, Matthews' 19-year old son, who is a now a soldier stationed in Afghanistan . "My mom was real into riding horses, so I just assumed they were part of 4-H," the youth development program.

Jason was too young to think any of this was odd or out of place. But his step-sister, Linda Campbell, 25, always had questions. Matthews spent the first two Christmases that he worked for the bureau in dingy motels, while his wife and his children traveled to Nevada to be with Janda's mother. "There were times that you want your dad and dad wasn't there," Campbell told Newsweek. "I asked him, 'Why can't you just call in sick like all the other days." When she persisted, Matthews punished her, taking away her video games, revoking her allowance.

Matthews could be strict with his children, but he is friendly and affable. He can talk to anyone, at length, without seeming prying, which in many ways made him a natural informant. He also has an indeterminate accent—a slight twang mixed with a hint of his Rhode Island roots. And though his time in the military, where he worked as a squad leader, along with his work with Jarrett, had slowly convinced him that racism is wrong, from an early age he'd been steeped in the language of bigotry. Even today, Matthews will occasionally lapse into epithets, though out of habit, not hatred.

"If you don't like blacks, you don't like gooks, you don't like Mexicans, you don't like Asians or whatever else, where does it stop?" he said. "I don't like you 'cause you got black hair and I got red?"

*

In January 1992, Matthews and Posey traveled to Austin Texas to meet with Neal Payne, a member of the Texas Reserve Militia, an Austin-based paramilitary group. Years earlier, Payne, a chiropractor who had been married in a church in which swastikas were frequently displayed, had been arrested for harboring Louis Beam, then a fugitive former Klan leader, who was indicted on charges of trying to overthrow the government. (He was later acquitted). Now, the FBI was investigating Payne, Beam and the TRM for allegedly laundering money through a Texas gun shop, paying off local law enforcement, purchasing stolen weapons from a Texas military base, smuggling arms from Central America, attempting to

blow up a National Guard convoy in Alabama and threatening to kill two FBI agents in response to Beam's arrest.

It was evening when they met at a small hotel room, on the outskirts of the city. The weather was cold and the sky was darkening. It had rained earlier that day, and inside the hotel room, the smell of must lingered in the air. Portraits of cowboys hung on the walls, as did old photos of the Alamo . Payne had wanted Matthews and Posey to meet a friend of his, an Austin-based Vietnam veteran named Dave Rossi. Rossi was about average height and build. He sported a shock of silver hair, a gray moustache and a green bomber jacket, which was fashionable among skinheads at the time.

For the next few hours, they kicked back on the beds and in the chairs and talked about the movement, how if they were ever going to stop the Jewish-led New World Order, they would have to band together, trading knowledge and weapons and making sure the government didn't infiltrate them in the process. Fashioning his group after the Order, an infamous white supremacist gang of bank robbers from the 1980s, Rossi told Matthews and Posey that he and his cohorts were robbing armored cars, and using the proceeds to fund the movement. "He let us know that there was money available," says Matthews. "We were feeling each other out."

Posey, on his part, touted his access to weapons, and his history with the Contras. And as they left the hotel and drove to a local restaurant for dinner, Posey said could supply Rossi with C-4, a military grade explosive, as well as Stinger missiles, deadly heat-seeking devices, which when strapped to your shoulder, can bring down an aircraft with one shot.

Matthews recalls Posey leaving the meeting and feeling good about the future of the movement. "We really didn't know where we were going with it at the time," Matthews says. "But if they showed up with money then we could believe what they were telling us."

*

In September of 1992, on a brisk morning in Benton , Tennessee , Matthews met Rossi and Posey at the annual convention of the American Pistol and Rifle Association, a gun rights group to the right of the NRA. Guards dressed in a camouflage uniforms, and armed with semi-automatic pistols patrolled the compound. Children and adults fired pistols and rifles at targets shaped like police cars a nearby range, and later, the group's head of security, a police officer, taught a class on how to disarm law enforcement officials and kill them with their own guns.

As the day progressed, Matthews did his best to keep his distance from the undercover agent. For months, he and Posey had been travelling across the country, meeting a who's who in the movement—from the Klan to the Aryan

Nations--and linking them up with Rossi. Each time, Rossi introduced himself as a leader of a gang of armored car robbers with lots of money on his hands and a desire to fund the movement.

Eventually, however, Matthews began to wonder: If this guy has all this cash at his disposal, and he's robbing all these banks, why haven't I heard about the robberies? Matthews asked Jarrett and several of his other handlers at the bureau and they demurred. But eventually, after Matthews continued harping on the issue, Jarrett admitted what Matthews had begun to suspect: That Rossi was an undercover agent, posing as the leader of a white supremacist group. And the hotel they had initially met at in Texas had been bugged.

At first, Matthews felt betrayed; it was as if the bureau didn't trust him. But then the knowledge that Rossi had been with him along the way was validating; Jarrett told him that he had earned their trust, and so Matthews continued his work, knowing that his handlers were behind him. Now, when they arrived on a scene, they often split up and had separate targets.

Matthews' job for the weekend was to film. And that evening, as roughly 150 men and women—many of them in flannel shirts and baseball caps--gathered into an old barn to listen various speakers, Matthews sat in the back with the video camera rolling, while Posey and Rossi sat nearby, chatting amicably.

One speaker, a burly man with silver hair and a commanding Southern drawl drew considerable applause as he excoriated then President George H.W. Bush, and his opponent, Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton.

"It is no longer the lesser of two evils, but the evil of two lesser that threatens the United States of America today!" the man said. "We have more of a good reason for a second American revolution than ever before."

The speaker, James Gordon "Bo" Gritz, was the leading candidate for the extreme right wing Populist Party in the 1992 election. Four years earlier he had been on the party's ticket as the running mate of former Klan leader David Duke. In recent months, Gritz had been in the headlines for his role in trying to negotiate an 18-month standoff between federal agents and Randy Weaver, a right-wing Christian fundamentalist and former ATF informant, who had links to the Aryan Nation. The standoff ended after an FBI sniper, who was authorized to use lethal force, shot and kicked Weaver's wife Vicki, who was holding her new-born child.

The news quickly galvanized the radical right like never before. Men like Posey—who already worried that their right to bear arms was eroding--suddenly feared that the government would soon come for them, too. And while months prior, various white supremacists, Neo-Nazis and anti-government groups had talked about joining forces, after the Weaver shooting, that talk quickly turned to action.

The audience stood and applauded as Gritz decried the bureau's handling of the Weaver standoff. And after Gritz's speech ended, Matthews, Rossi and Posey slipped out of the back of the barn and walked through the grass over to where Posey had parked his blue Ford Bronco. For months they had been trying to hash out a weapons deal. Posey had told Rossi that he could get him as many as six Stinger missiles, priced at $40,000 a piece. The FBI had allocated the money for the purchase, apparently not to bust Posey, but to further embed the undercover into the world of hate and extremism. Days before the sale was to take place, however, Posey said he had sold the missiles to a group in Minnesota for $45,000 a piece, though it's not clear if he was telling the truth.

That evening in Tennessee , however, Posey had several pairs of military night-vision goggles in his SUV. All were in green canvas cases and the serial numbers had been removed. Rossi tried out several pairs of goggles, and they worked. He then pulled out $7,500 in cash and handed it to Posey. Before they parted that evening, Rossi asked Posey when he could get more goggles, and where they came from. Posey said he'd have them in about a week along with some TNT and C-4 explosives. The goggles, he said, came from "the black market."

*

Traveling in heavily armed circles was unnerving for Matthews, especially when he was working with the Klan. During his years recruiting for the CMA, he attended his fair share of Klan meetings. Yet he had never agreed with their ideology, and attending rallies with them, whether it was inveighing against Martin Luther King Day, or protesting abortion, always sent chills down his spine. "A lot of those old, hardcore Klan boys," Matthews says, "They'd hang you in a tree and not think twice about it. Around those people you sleep with one eye open and your hand on the goddamn gun."

Fortunately, Posey had such a strong reputation on the radical right, that Matthews' friendship with him was the best form of protection. There was, however, one time in the spring of 1993 when he was deathly afraid—and it was of Posey himself. By that time, Posey had found a buyer for the weapons at Brown's Ferry and resumed plans for the robbery.

On a Saturday morning in April, Matthews, Posey and one of their cohorts were sitting in a McDonalds discussing the plot over breakfast. Suddenly, Posey noticed two men sitting in a familiar car with the lights off, watching the restaurant. He appeared to be slumped down in his seat, a sign Posey felt, they someone was spying on them. Infuriated, Posey and his friends piled into his car and started driving towards it.

"They were locked and loaded," Matthews said. Looking to avoid suspicion, he cocked his gun as well, but tried to dissuade them from an attack. He knew Jarrett, his main handler, was in the car, and that if he couldn't dissuade them from firing, he would have to kill Posey and his other friend.

Fortunately, Matthews didn't have to. As Posey's car rumbled over the road and approached, Jarrett sped away. Matthews breathed a sigh of relief. Afterwards, he and Jarrett laughed about the incident over the phone.

"That was one of the stories we talked about for years," Matthews said. "He couldn't believe I was fixin' to shoot someone to save his ass."

Later that afternoon, while camping out in the woods on Posey's property in Pulaski , Tenn. —the birthplace of the Klan— Posey told Matthews and his cohorts about a premonition he'd been having: God had chosen him to overthrow the U.S. government. And once the revolution began, Posey said he would emerge as the leader. A bevy of children would come to him for help, and he would take care of them on a patch of land he owned in Tennessee , regardless of race, religion or creed.

Two of Posey's alleged co-conspirators in the Brown's Ferry plot, didn't take well to Posey's messianic reveries or his sudden burst of tolerance. "I ain't letting no niggers in here," one said, according to FBI documents that Matthews provided to Newsweek.

His brother agreed. "Master Lee may have good stuff," he said referring to their Korean martial arts instructor, "but we ain't going to keep him either, just take his stuff."

Matthews listened silently, but internally he shuddered at the thought of such an outcome.
"People like Tom Posey think that if they overthrew the government they'd make a better world," Matthews said. "[But] their world would be a total nightmare."

*

As the months passed, Matthews says he increasingly tried to talk Posey and his friends out of the Brown's Ferry attack. "I tried doing everything I could to defuse that situation without blowing my cover," he said.

Yet by October of 1993, Posey had allegedly finalized his plans. A five man team would break into the nuclear plant's armory using bolt cutters and steal the cache, and divide it up between them. They had already befriended several of the guards, who were in on the take, and performed reconnaissance.

According to unredacted documents provided by Matthews and confirmed by the FBI, the group planned to make their getaway by detonating a bomb on electrical panels in the control room, which would have shut down the nuclear reactors, sewing confusion and forcing an evacuation.

"That could have hurt a lot of people," says Matthews.

In a telephone interview, George Prosser, then the deputy inspector general of the Tennessee Valley Authority, dismissed Posey and company as “just a bunch of redneck idiots.”

“Attacking a nuclear plant is basically an invention to get yourself killed,” he said. “You’re not going to be able to take over the plant.”

Perhaps, but David Lochbaum, the director of the nuclear safety project for the Union of Concerned Scientists, an independent research group said that although safeguards did exist at the time, a Fukushima-like disaster could have occurred—especially considering where they planned to place the bomb.

“These plants aren’t a house of cards,” he said. “But bad things can occur, particularly when people try.”

On October 9, while Matthews was back in Arizona , the bureau decided to act. Hoping to avoid a repeat of a disastrously heavy-handed raid on a white separatist compound in Waco , Texas earlier that year, a team of FBI agents surrounded Posey while he was at the post office in Decatur , Alabama . They had done so at Matthews’ behest; weeks before the raid, Jarrett had called him, asking for his advice on when Posey would most likely be unarmed. And Matthews knew that Posey always left his pistol in his glove box when he went to mail a package. True to form, Posey did not have a weapon on him, and surrendered immediately. The bust was successful, and the plot had been thwarted.

*

After Posey’s arrest, the FBI had Matthews Social Security number changed, and paid for him and his family to move to Stockton , California . Yet the trial in Alabama proved frustrating for him. Despite hundreds of hours of recorded conversations, as well as video and personal surveillance, the Justice Department only chose to prosecute Posey and his cohorts for buying and selling the stolen night vision goggles. And in the end, Posey was sentenced to just two years in prison.

A spokeswoman for the Justice Department in Birmingham said there simply wasn’t enough evidence to prosecute Posey for the Brown’s Ferry plot. Yet curiously, the TVA denied that the plot or the weapons cache even existed. Meanwhile, several of the men involved in the planned robbery were never arrested. At the time, two of the men, Matthews says, were planning to blow up a federal building in Birmingham .

“They were gonna take a truck filled with fertilizer,” says Matthews. “You look at what Timothy McVeigh done, it’s basically the same thing. “What happened in Oklahoma could have happened a couple of years earlier.”

One possible explanation for how Posey's trial played out: In 1996, the year he was released from prison, Posey appears to have been issued a new Social Security number, according to a Lexis-Nexus search conducted by Newsweek. Tony Gooch, a friend and Posey's and a former CMA member, said that Posey was innocent of any wrongdoing, and that the whole Brown's Ferry plot had been cooked up by Matthews. "Tom was a good man," he says. "John did not endear himself to us with that story." Yet Gooch said that Posey may have felt forced to cut a deal with the Justice Department, and provide them with information on other groups in the movement, or agreed not to reveal what he knew about Iran Contra.

"It wouldn't surprise me," Gooch said. "Tom knew some people who were real hardcore."

Either way, Matthews imagines that the fall was hard for Posey, but he knows he did the right thing. "When he was leading the CMA, Posey was somebody," Matthews says. "But when the war was over, he had lost all his fame and all his glory. He was grasping for something."

Though he passed away last summer, Posey apparently did find another career with influence. In 2004, he worked along side former Texas congressman Dick Armey at the lobbyist group Citizens for a Sound Economy. That same year, the group morphed into Freedomworks, a political action group, which eventually helped create the Tea Party.

*

In the spring of 1995, Matthews was sitting on the couch with his father at his house in Stockton California when he heard the news: A truck bomb had exploded in front of a federal building in Oklahoma . Dozens had been killed, hundreds had been injured and the face of the building looked like it had been chewed off by an animal with a giant maw.

Matthews watched the coverage of the bombing with rapt attention. After all, this was the same sort of attack he had spent years trying to prevent. Days later, when McVeigh became the prime suspect and his photo flashed across the screen, Matthews realized he had seen him before. His mind drifted back to a weekend several years prior at a ranch in San Saba , Texas , where once a month, the TRM held paramilitary training.

It was a relatively warm Saturday morning. Matthews, who had spent the night on the ranch, was walking back from the woods where he had been setting up the evening's exercise, when he spotted a group of men in fatigues hanging around a shed where the TRM stored explosives. Some of them, Matthews could tell by their haircuts and bearing, were ex-military.

Matthews and a few of his cohorts walked over to the men and introduced themselves. One man had dark hair, slightly buck teeth and a foreign accent. His name was “Andy,” and Matthews later learned that he was from Germany . Another man was tall and lanky, with short, buzzed hair. He said his name was “Tim.”

“He [Tim] was a nobody,” Matthews says. “Just another ex-soldier, but I remember his face. He was at one of the meetings, where a bunch of [stolen] ammunition was brought in from Fort Hood .”

Sitting in father’s living room in California , watching the television, Matthews decided he should call Jarrett. He told them about “Tim” and “Andy the German.” Yet Jarrett seemed blasé about the matter. “He said, ‘We know, John. Don’t worry about it. We got it covered.”

Instead, he was more interested in whether Matthews had seen McVeigh in Arizona . At the time, Matthews was working for the bureau there, infiltrating militias and separatists, along with meth-cooking gangs of bikers. Apparently, Jarrett said, McVeigh had spent time with similar groups. But Matthews never ran across him in Arizona , he said. Only in Texas . Jarrett thanked him and said he’d keep him updated. But as Matthews recalls it, that was the last time they ever spoke about the bombing.

When the FBI and the Justice Department eventually determined that McVeigh had largely acted alone in the bombing, with minimal assistance from two men who eventually back out of the attack, Matthews was skeptical. He began to wonder if it wasn’t a repeat of the Brown’s Ferry incident all over again.

“I felt Don knew more about this, but he could never say something to me,” Matthews says.

Jarrett passed away in 2009 (ck).

*

One afternoon earlier this year, not long after he returned from the emergency room due to complications related to his lungs, Matthews was sitting on the couch in his two bedroom apartment in Reno , thinking back on his life. Nearby in the kitchen hung a plaque given to him by the FBI: “John W. Matthews: In appreciation and recognition for your outstanding efforts in assisting the FBI to combat domestic terrorism throughout the United States : March 28, 1991 – May 30, 1998.”

More than 10 years prior, Matthews had left the FBI after helping the bureau bust two crooked police officers in Nevada . Working with a different team of handlers, Matthews helped prove that they were making and selling automatic

weapons. At the trial, however, he had clashed with the prosecution and his handlers. The bureau had changed, he said. A new generation of agents had taken over, and they had little tolerance for Matthews' lack of political correctness. "They didn't like that I called Janet Reno a lesbian [in court]," he told NEWSWEEK. Their differences extended to the trial itself; Matthews felt the prosecutor made him look like an agent provocateur, while the FBI alleged that he hurt their case and refused to pay him a bonus. In the end, both police officers went to jail, but for fewer years than the Justice Department had hoped.

Around the same time, Matthews' son Kern began suffering severe complications related to cerebral palsy. He took it as a sign. Matthews worked one more case for Don Jarrett then quit for good. "I wanted to be home with my son," he says.

In 2001, Kern passed away at the age of eight. Afterwards, Matthews saw his 20-year marriage to Janda fall apart as they coped with their son's death. "I still miss her every day," he says.

Matthews' own health took a drastic turn for the worse, too. Three years ago, Matthews went into the hospital for a colonoscopy. Several weeks later, he noticed he was bleeding uncontrollably. When he went back to the doctor, his heart stopped. They revived him briefly, but then his heart stopped again. Miraculously, the doctors brought him back to life another time, this time stabilizing his condition.

"They said I had greater odds at winning the lottery [than surviving]," Matthews said. "But my heart hasn't been the same since."

After his latest stint in the emergency room this year, Matthews says he kept thinking more and more about what his family knew about him and what he sacrificed over the years. Wondering if anyone had ever tied his name to the FBI, at a whim that morning this past summer, he began searching around online.

What he found was an article about Trentadue, the Salt Lake City attorney. For the past 15 years, the West Virginia-born lawyer has been shuffling across the street from his office in downtown Salt Lake City , and filing profanity-laced letters and Freedom of Information Act Requests to various federal agencies.

His goal? To prove that the agency killed his brother, Kenney, during a botched interrogation at the Oklahoma City Federal Transfer Center in 1995, shortly after McVeigh's attack. The bureau claims Kenney hung himself in his cell, but Trentadue says--and provided pictures indicating—that Kenney's throat was slit and his body was covered in bruises.

Trentadue and his family were awarded $1.1 million for emotional distress after a federal judge found that the FBI and Bureau of Prisons had lied in court and destroyed evidence during the investigation. But Trentadue wasn't satisfied. And not long after, he received an anonymous phone call from someone who said that

his brother had been killed in a case of mistaken identity. The FBI, the caller said, believed that Kenney was actually a member of the Aryan Republican Army, a notorious gang of white supremacist bandits who robbed 22 banks across the Midwest in the early to mid '90s.

For years the FBI has insisted that McVeigh was essentially a lone wolf terrorist. Yet through his FOIA requests, Trentadue learned that the bureau had long possessed evidence linking McVeigh to the ARA, and several of the gang's members to the bombing in Oklahoma City .

As Matthews read on he ran across a name that stopped him cold: Andy Strassmeir. A mysterious German national, a member of the country's army and son of an advisor to Helmut Kohl, the former German chancellor, Strassmeir moved to the U.S. in the late 1980s. Over the next few years, he began palling around with ARA members and other white supremacists in Oklahoma . But according to the FBI files released by Trentadue, Strassmeir also conducted paramilitary training with the TRM in Texas . And Matthews believes he is the same man that he encountered, along with McVeigh, in San Saba.

In an interview with Newsweek, Strassmeir said he had indeed trained with the TRM, but he did not recall training with McVeigh. Instead, he said that he and McVeigh had only met once at a gun show in Tulsa , Oklahoma in the spring of 1993—a meeting that McVeigh confirmed before he was put to death roughly a decade ago.

In an interview with Newsweek, Strassmeir said that he and McVeigh had never been friends. Phone records discovered by the FBI show that McVeigh called Strassmeir two weeks before the bombing. The German-native says he wasn't home, and has no idea why McVeigh was calling. Roughly a year later, he slipped out of the country through Mexico , after a private investigator working for McVeigh's defense attorney attempted to have him summoned to court. He had never been interviewed by the FBI until he was already safe and sound in Germany .

Speaking by way of phone from Berlin , Strassmeir told Newsweek that he was neither an informant nor a conspirator in the Oklahoma City bombing. A FOIA by Trentadue sent to the CIA about Strassmeir came up with 26 documents. Yet the National Geospatial Agency, part of the Department of Defense, would not allow Langley to release the documents, citing national security concerns.

Matthews was shocked to learn all of these details. But as he read on, he discovered something worse: Some of the documents that Trentadue had put online contained his name, and in a few places, the FBI had failed to redact it. As he read the files, he felt his stomach drop. "All those years I've been a good boy and kept my mouth shut," Matthews says. "Then you release my name? What kind of shit is that?"

Matthews immediately contacted Trentadue. Angry about his name being released by the FBI, and feeling that he might be able to help Trentadue solve his brother's murder, he asked for a meeting. Considering the state of his health, he no longer cared about the repercussions—whether from the FBI or the bad guys. And his kids, he believed from years of working with right wing extremists, were off limits.

*

On the morning in July when he first met Trentadue, Matthews and his son, Candland, sat at a large wooden table in a sparsely decorated conference room in the attorney's office. For several hours they spoke about Trentadue's various suits against the FBI, and Matthews reminisced about his time in the bureau, explaining to his son the various plots and villains that he encountered, and why he was never around.

Eventually, as they got up to leave, Trentadue told Matthews to keep in touch, and to consider telling his story to the press. It was something Jarrett had once told him he should do. But at the time, it didn't seem right. Now, he told Trentadue, if a reporter called him, and seemed trustworthy, he would consider it. He shook Trentadue's hand and said goodbye.

Outside the sun was bright and the air was warm. Yet as Matthews and Candland climbed into the silver SUV, this time avoiding the traffic leaving downtown, they noticed snow on the peaks of the mountains in the distance. Once again, the two said little as they cruised along the road. Only this time, the silence was full, and finally, each felt content.