

"I Was a Weatherman for the FBI"

On March 6, 1970, an enormous explosion rocked a quiet residential neighborhood in New York City's Greenwich Village. The blast reduced an elegant, 130-year-old townhouse at 18 West 11th Street to mere rubble. It also severely damaged the two adjoining townhouses. (2)

At first no one imagined there was any political significance to the explosion. The brownstone at 18 West 11th Street belonged to James P. Wilkerson, a wealthy advertising executive who was away vacationing with his wife in the Caribbean. Actor Dustin Hoffman lived next door to the Wilkersons, but apart from this famous neighbor and the costly antiquity of the demolished townhouses, there seemed to be nothing especially remarkable or newsworthy about this explosion.

A rumor circulated that the explosion had been caused by a defective boiler. But on Monday, March 9, firemen digging through the debris found the oil burner in one piece. Then, on Tuesday, workers uncovered the headless body of a young woman, her torso riddled with roofing nails. Buried with her in the rubble were about 60 sticks of live dynamite and some crude bombs made from pieces of plumbing pipe stuffed with roofing nails.

What had been a story of plain human tragedy became a tale of political terror. The first body found amidst the wreckage was that of Theodore Gold. Gold, 23, had been a leader of the Columbia University strike. Next, the decapitated torso found in the rubble was identified as that of Diana Oughton, age 28, also a student

radical.

The evidence pointed to one conclusion: the Wilkersons' stylish townhouse had been blown asunder while being used as a "bomb factory" by the Weathermen, a violent left-wing splinter group.

The Weatherman faction of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) had split off from the parent organization during the Summer of 1969. That Fall the Weathermen had gone on a rampage, ripping up Chicago's wealthy Gold Coast shopping district during their three-day "Days of Rage" protest.

The "Days of Rage" was the Weathermen's last public demonstration. Afterwards they went underground. For the next four years the Weathermen made news only when some bombing was attributed to them.

The idea of a Weatherman "bomb factory" operating in Greenwich Village was terrifying. Who could tell whether his neighbors' children--or perhaps even his own--were demented terrorists quietly constructing bombs in the basement?

Several months after the Greenwich Village explosion an article in the Manhattan Tribune, a New York weekly, denied that there had been a bomb factory in the Wilkerson home. The Tribune's story was that some Weatherman members had stopped by the Wilkerson house the night before the blast and had brought explosives into the basement. The Wilkerson's daughter, Cathlyn, had wanted the explosives left outside in a car, but they were brought in anyway.

Who knew the truth about what had really happened at the Wilkerson townhouse? Who could say who made the bombs and what their intended target was? Theodore Gold and Diana Oughton had been killed instantly. Two other persons had been in the townhouse when it blew up. They were not dead--just missing.

Moments after the explosion two girls had clambered out of the smoking ruins. The blast had stripped the clothes off one. She stood in front of the collapsed house and murmured that she had to go back because there were people still inside. Momentarily dazed, she responded indifferently to a neighbor who tried to get her to don a drape he had snatched off the fence outside her house. Another neighbor took the two girls to her house. There they showered and put on new clothes. Then they disappeared.

The two girls were presumed to be Cathlyn Wilkerson and Kathy Boudin. They could perhaps tell what had been going on inside the Wilkerson home. But they vanished without a trace. Three years later they had still not been found. The mysteries surrounding the "bomb factory" persisted. They would likely last as long as Wilkerson and Boudin remained in hiding. These two girls alone could tell what had happened. For there was no informer in this case.

Or so it seemed.

But, then, three years after the Greenwich Village explosion, an informer on other Weathermen activities suddenly stepped forward. The informer, Larry Grantwohl of Cincinnati, Ohio, was the subject of a long article by Seymour Hersh in the May 20, 1973 issue of

the New York Times. The lead paragraph aptly summarized the nature of Hersh's startling revelations:

WASHINGTON, May 19--One of the most militant and outspoken members of the radical Weathermen organization during its peak period of bombing and other violence in late 1969 and early 1970 was an informer and agent provocateur for the Federal Bureau of Investigation, private and Government sources said today.

The Times story gave many details about Grantwohl's life as an agent provocateur. According to the Times, "Grantwohl was said to be widely known among the Weathermen for his skill in making bombs and fuses, as well as his penchant for carrying a revolver and straight razor." Unnamed sources added that Grantwohl had obtained his bombing skills as the result of demolition and munition training which he had received during a hitch in the Army.

The Times story also recounted how Grantwohl had put his demolition talents to work for the Weathermen. The Times sources said that Grantwohl had given lessons in bomb-making and the use of delayed fuses to his Weathermen associates. These sources also stated that Grantwohl had participated in the bombing of a public school in the Cincinnati area in the Fall of 1969, using bombs which he had manufactured himself.

After the Cincinnati bombing Grantwohl apparently spent the next several months traveling around the country. During his travels he planned and participated in Weathermen bombings in several cities. The Times' sources specifically asserted that Grant-

wohl had participated in the planning of a bombing attack on a police facility in Detroit and took part in some sabotage lessons in Madison, Wisconsin.

In April, 1970, Grantwohl is said to have set up the arrest of Linda Evans and Dianne Donghi, two Weathermen members living underground in New York City. Grantwohl himself was arraigned but then let off on low bail. Thereafter the Weathermen suspected his role as an informer.

In June, 1970, Grantwohl was indicted in Detroit along with 14 other Weathermen. They were charged with having conspired to bomb police and military installations in Cleveland, Detroit, Milwaukee, and Los Angeles. Later the government dropped the original indictment and then proceeded to re-indict the Detroit Weathermen. This time Grantwohl's name was not on the list of those charged.

By then it was clear that Grantwohl was an informer. Living under FBI protection, he soon began touring the country again, this time to testify against the Weathermen before grand juries all across the land.

Fear of retaliation by his former Weathermen colleagues did not keep Grantwohl from trying to cash in on his adventures. The Times reported that he was collaborating with a publisher on a book, to be entitled: "The Bombers: I Was a Weatherman for the F.B.I."

The Times did not say whether Grantwohl's book will have a chapter on the Greenwich Village bombing. However, it did refer

to that explosion and quoted his father-in-law, Donald Riestenberg, as saying: "He went to those communes, he went underground. He was even in New York when that house blew up there."

Mr. Riestenberg's remarks may be portentous. Grantwohl was not just an informer. He seems to have been, above all else, an agent provocateur, urging his fellow Weathermen to commit acts of violence even when they were reluctant to do so. Robert Burlingham, a former Weatherman, provided the Times with an example of this:

I can remember one meeting in Cincinnati where there was a discussion going on about the question of armed political resistance and the various bombings that had occurred. Grantwohl took the initiative as was his wont and began castigating people for talking about the destruction of bombings. "True revolutionaries," he said, "had to be ready and anxious to kill people."

If Grantwohl was in New York when the Wilkersons' townhouse blew up, as his father-in-law says he was, what role, if any, did he have in that explosion? Did he know the Weathermen who assembled at the Wilkerson residence? Did he inform on them? Did he urge them to commit bombings? Did he teach them how to construct bombs?

The Times provided one piece of information which may have a bearing on these questions when it noted that its sources said that Grantwohl had supplied a tip in April, 1970, which led to the arrest of two Weathermen in New York, Linda Evans and Dianne Donghi. Since the Grantwohl tip apparently followed the Greenwich Village bombing by only a month, it is quite likely that it was in some way related to that explosion.

But information bearing on these questions is also available from another source. This information is potentially very explosive because it suggests that Grantwohl may have had a direct and sinister hand in the Greenwich Village explosion; that Grantwohl may have tricked the Weathermen into blowing themselves up. This information also suggests that at the same time Grantwohl was spying on the Weathermen for the FBI, he was also working for another political organization--the Minutemen!

The source of this information is On Target! On Target! is published by the ultra-right Minutemen. It bears the cross-hairs of a rifle-sight, the symbol of the Minutemen, and it is intended to be circulated among Minutemen members only. However, one of the authors obtained some copies of it.

The January, 1971, issue of On Target! reprinted names, addresses and phone numbers found in some notebooks belonging to Cathlyn Wilkerson. On Target! claimed that these notebooks were obtained by several Minutemen who surreptitiously entered a Weathermen "safe house" at which Miss Wilkerson stayed during the Days of Rage demonstrations in Chicago.

The same issue also claimed that several Minutemen had successfully infiltrated the Weathermen. In fact, On Target! went much further: it bragged that a member of the Minutemen organization had deliberately tricked the Weathermen into blowing themselves up!

On Target! traced the evolutionary history of the Weathermen in some detail and gave a rundown on the political background and fate of the Greenwich Village 4--Gold, Oughton, Boudin, and Wilkerson. Then On Target! launched into its version of how the Greenwich Village explosion occurred:

One Minuteman, who worked independently as an infiltrator among New-Left groups in the New York area for almost six years was invited to participate in the bomb making activities of the group who had set up shop at the Wilkerson residence. Possessing technical skill and knowledge which the academicly (sic) inclined leftists lacked, he offered to provide them with the practical mechanics involved in using mercury switches for setting off high explosive charges.

Shortly after the would-be-terrorists accepted his generous offer, several of them received detailed instruction in the use of such mechanisms. Apparently preoccupied with romantic images of themselves, the students obviously failed to be attentive. The results of which are chronicled at the begining (sic) of this article.

Many reading this might at first be inclined to feel the actions of this Minuteman to have been (sic) callous or reprehensible. Others might consider them to be an extension of the "practical joke" carried to an extreme; however the motivations underlying his actions are to be found in the situation which he faced. Here was an individual confronted with making one of three difficult and (illegible) . . . moves to resolve the situation. (1.) He could go along with the groups (sic) plans and face both the moral and legal responsibilities of being a party to their illegal and deathly activities, (2.) inform authorities of what he knew, or (3.) misinform members of the group in the use of the mercury switches and hope that they would trigger their own demise, rather than detonate such devices in public were (sic) innocent men, women and children might by some quirk of fate, happen to be when one of their bombs went off.

It did not seem a wise move to this man to report what he knew to federal authorities, for he was aware that whenever something of this nature was done, such information was not acted upon, since those in charge were much more interested in Minutemen activities than anything illegal that leftists might be planning or had committed.

He also realized that had he given information to local law enforcement agencies, that even though they usually would take some action, that their work was compromised when the courts to which the arrested were brought before would pass the accused (sic) through the judicial filter which allows these chosen types to somehow never end up behind bars for their illegal acts.

Since the town house blast our Minuteman infiltrator has relocated himself, despite financial difficulties, to another part of the country fearing the chance that he might be recognized by leftists in New York who were formerly acquainted with him, or the even greater possibility that he might fall victim to government intelligence (sic) agencies if they learned of his identity and location.

We of the National Minutemen organization wish to take this opportunity to pass on our heart felt thanks to one more unknown individual, who without constant direction, or continuous inspiration had the initiative, intelligence (sic), and courage to cut through the Gorian (sic) Knot which confronted him with a single swift blow!

This raises an ineluctable question: is the Minuteman infiltrator described in this passage Larry Grantwohl? There are certain reasons for concluding that they are one and the same person. Consider these factors:

--The Times article of May 20, 1973, stated that "Grantwohl immediately began giving lessons in bomb-making and the use of de-

laid fuses to his Weathermen associates." On Target! describes its Minuteman infiltrator as having "offered" to provide the Weathermen who gathered at the Wilkerson home with "the practical mechanics involved in using mercury switches for setting off high explosive charges."

--The Times reported that Grantwohl received demolition training in the Army. On Target! states that the Minuteman possessed "technical skill and knowledge" about how to use mercury switches to set off explosives."

--According to the Times, Grantwohl's friends said that he is convinced he is in mortal danger from his former associates in the Weathermen underground. On Target! declares that "since the town-house blast our Minuteman infiltrator has relocated himself, despite financial difficulties, to another part of the country fearing the chance that he might be recognized by leftists in New York who were formerly acquainted with him . . ." The Times adds to its account that Grantwohl is living under FBI protection in San Francisco.

Despite some possible discrepancies, the close similarities in these two accounts seem to point to one conclusion: Larry Grantwohl, in addition to being an FBI informer on the Weathermen, was also a member of the Minutemen.

There are, of course, other possibilities. One of these two accounts may be false. Or, though this seems very unlikely, the two accounts may refer to two different persons. Assuming that

Grantwohl is the Minuteman infiltrator, it is even conceivable that Grantwohl attempted to inform on the Weathermen and the Minutemen at the same time.

More ominous--and more likely--is the possibility that the FBI and the Minutemen collaborated to achieve a mutual goal: annihilation of the Weathermen.

For the moment these mysteries remain. They await clarification from Grantwohl and the Department of Justice.

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