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Probe Has Failed to Detect Leaker In Jewell Episode, Freeh Tells Panel

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FBI Director Louis J. Freeh told Congress yesterday that investigators have been unable to identify the law enforcement official who told reporters that security guard Richard Jewell was a leading suspect in the bombing at the Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta.

Within three days of the bombing, more than 500 people in 10 law enforcement agencies knew that Jewell, the man initially hailed as hero for spotting a knapsack containing the bomb, was a suspect, Freeh said. But the FBI chief acknowledged that an investigation by the Justice Department's Office of Professional Responsibility has failed to find the leaker.

In late October, the Justice Department formally acknowledged that the 33-year-old Jewell was no longer a suspect in the July 27 bombing at Olympic Centennial Park. The action ended what Jewell has said was a nightmare that left him unemployed and hounded by reporters demanding to know if he was responsible for the explosion, which left two dead and 111 injured.

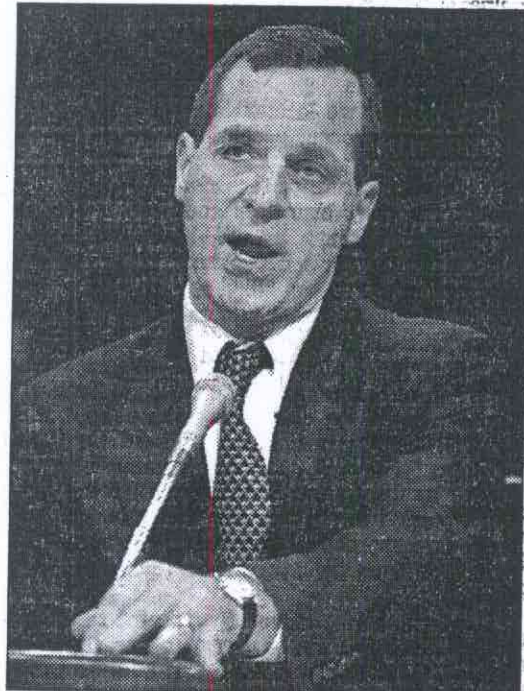
Yesterday Freeh took a hard line against the person who told reporters Jewell was a suspect. If an FBI employee is ultimately accused of providing that information, Freeh promised the Senate Judiciary subcommittee on terrorism, technology and government information, he would fire the worker and recommend "he or she be prosecuted for obstruction of justice—and a few other things." The director said he had "zero tolerance" for leaks about criminal suspects.

Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), who chaired the hearing, and Sen. Patrick J. Leahy (D-Vt.) expressed concern that the FBI waited until earlier this month to ask the public for photographs and videotapes of individuals in the park with knapsacks the night of the bombing and to announce a \$500,000 reward for information on the bomber. Freeh insisted that his agency was not ready to be inundated with tips from the public until recently and said it had taken his agents weeks to develop a precise picture of the knapsack.

Specter also warned the FBI director that the obstruction of justice charge would be difficult to prove and suggested he might introduce legislation that would make it easier to prosecute government employees who give confidential information to reporters. But Specter stressed, "We've tried to make clear our oversight is over the federal government—not the media."

In his testimony, Freeh also disclosed that the investigators have been unable to identify another leaker in a major criminal case. That individual tipped CBS News about the pending arrest of Unabomber suspect Theodore J. Kaczynski and the planned search of his remote Montana cabin.

The FBI director's statement that the two leakers remain unknown tends to reinforce the widespread belief that most government investigations aimed at identifying leakers are unsuccessful. But Freeh, a former federal judge, also told the subcommittee that Justice's Office of Professional Responsibility had investigated



BY RAY LUSTIG—THE WASHINGTON POST

FBI Director Louis J. Freeh testifies that he has "zero tolerance" for leaks by agents about criminal suspects.

48 instances of "unauthorized disclosure to the media" by FBI officials between 1992 and 1996. Eight of those cases resulted in disciplinary action and one in a dismissal, he said.

Yesterday's Senate hearing was limited to what impact the Jewell disclosure had on the FBI's investigation. Freeh called the news media's attention to Jewell "a major distraction" and said that while agents were investigating the security guard, another, larger group known as "the other suspects squad" was checking out other individuals.

Weeks after Jewell's name had been placed before the public as the only suspect in the case, the federal prosecutor in Atlanta released a statement declaring Jewell was no longer under investigation. By then Jewell was unemployed and demanding that his good name be restored.

Specter said that Jewell is expected to testify before the subcommittee, but that the panel agreed to delay any testimony about how FBI agents questioned him until after the Office of Professional Responsibility issues its report. Freeh said the report will be completed in "a week or so."

Jewell's lawyers have said FBI agents tricked their client into believing that he was being interviewed on videotape for a training film and failed to explicitly advise him of the rights that any criminal suspect is entitled to receive before being questioned.