

A Hate-Filled Man

Neighbors See Salvation in Death Of Violent Racial Fanatic

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Screaming his hatred of the black race with reddened face, terrifying his wife, threatening his neighbors, stocking his house with guns and radio sets and boxes of ammunition, he was a man so nasty and eccentric that his neighbors scoffed in disbelief when he bragged angrily that he'd blow them off the face of the earth.

That's how neighbors remembered Jesse C. Stephens yesterday, the day after the FBI and Army ordnance squads moved into his cluttered backyard in the working-class suburb of Brentwood and removed 50 pounds of Gel-X dynamite, 15 blasting caps, a bottle of sulphuric acid and—the neighbors say—rifles, an air-cooled machinegun, Browning automatic rifles, and boxes of ammunition and hand-grenades.

Stephens, the 48-year-old self-proclaimed Minuteman and white supremacist who had played a role in the tense racial confrontations over school desegregation just northeast of the D.C. line in Prince George's County, died of a heart attack last week.

His neighbors now say they think his death may have been their salvation, and they wonder how this violent man could have lived among them plotting his plots, proclaiming his hatreds and stashing away his weapons without having been discovered and arrested by authorities.

James Dunn, the deputy FBI director in Baltimore, said yesterday, "We're still looking into it." He declined further comment. Authorities said the search of Stephens's

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'He Said He'd Blow Us Up...

STEPHENS, From A1

House was made after a telephoned request by Stephens's frightened, 30-year-old Mexican wife on Monday.

"He told me he had bombs and dope and dynamite and he said he'd blow me off the street," said Mrs. William A. Hennessy, who lived next to the Stephenses for the seven years they resided at 4307 39th Pl. "He said he'd blow us all up if we didn't leave him alone."

Mrs. Hennessy said she constantly pushed Stephens to clean up the clutter of sheds, cabinets, automobiles, radio sets, wheelchairs and other assorted junk in his unmowed yard but that her efforts only provoked his anger.

She said she complained about the mess to county and town officials but that no one ever forced Stephens to clean it up.

"He said if I sold my house to them (Negroes) he'd blow 'em clean out of here," said Mrs. Hennessy. "I told the real estate man. He said, 'Oh, he's crazy. You give it to me and I'll sell it to them.'"

"He was a very violent person," recalled LaVerne Whitt, another neighbor who said she has known Stephens ever since he entered the Marine Corps in 1942 and went to fight in the Pacific. "He's been that way since he was a kid. He would get so mad his face would get red."

"He always had trouble with the police. He was a radical and he was so prejudiced. He said to my son, 'Take a fire iron with you (when you walk down the street). He had a hatred for everything and everybody... He had a terrible hatred for colored people.'"

Mrs. Whitt said Stephens used to fight with his wife frequently and that when he shouted at her, "You could hear him all over the neighborhood... He chased her around and tried to kill her. She said he tried to drown her one time. With his temper I could believe it."

Stephens once tried to buy three rifles from Mrs. Whitt's son, she said.

The son refused to sell, but the rifles were stolen the next day, she said.

Mrs. Whitt recalled other things about Stephens—he once had as many as 100 wheelchairs in his backyard, nobody knew why; he had a heart attack a year ago but refused to stay in the hospital; he used to hand out "Back to Africa" tickets to black school children.

Dave Hammond, who lived nearby, said Stephens tried to recruit young men in the neighborhood for some sort of gang.

Hammond said that Stephens kept a small arsenal in the backyard shed where the dynamite was found. He said he once saw there two cases of hand grenades, an air-cooled machinegun, several military automatic rifles, plus ammunition and a tripod for the machine gun.

FBI agent Dunn declined to confirm that these items were removed in the Monday night search that netted the dynamite, but county fire and police officials said the FBI arrived early on the scene and may have removed these items without telling other officials.

Neighboring children said they saw rifles being removed from the premises during the search.

Yesterday, children played in front of the house on bicycles and recalled how Stephens had been friendly to them, how they had helped him carry radio sets and other items into his backyard sheds, and how he had helped establish the teen club in the Brentwood recreation building in the small park across the street.

The children recalled that Stephens had chased off black children from the area, however.

"He'd sic his collie on black kids," said Jeff Manchester, 15.

Stephens's fenced-in lot yesterday was filled with the clutter of his recent years. In his front yard, hundreds of expended copper bullet casings spilled out of a paper bag sitting on top of an old generator.

A battered green van filled with ra-

dio equipment, a small house trailer and a black car with a radio transmitter and assorted junk inside also sat on the front lawn. On top of the junk inside the car was a small plastic case with short pieces of clothesline and an eyedropper—apparently the makings of fuses.

No one answered the door at Stephens's house. Neighbors said Mrs. Stephens was staying with friends.

An ancient, run-down, green Dodge was parked on the street in front of the house. Its windows were cluttered with stickers of the National Rifle Association, Shooters Club of America, Marine Corps and Mexico's tourist office.

In the backyard was a 100-foot radio tower and two sheds crammed with wheelchairs, electronic gear and other junk. The floorboards of one shed had been pried up, where a large hole had been dug in the earth beneath it by the FBI.

Four empty brown one-gallon bottles were strewn on the grass. They were labeled "Acetone. Extremely Flammable. Danger! For laboratory and manufacturing use only."

County fire officials said the sulfuric acid they found in Stephens's yard could be used in making molotov cocktails. They said the dynamite was so old and unstable that nitro-glycerine was oozing from it. They said that a slight jar could have caused it to explode.

Mrs. Hennessy stood in her adjacent, neatly trimmed backyard yesterday and shook her head as she looked across at the mess.

Mrs. Hennessy said she was a religious woman and that she thought the Lord had blessed and saved her life and the lives of others by taking Stephens last week.

"He coulda blowed me off the map, couldn't he?" she said. "Something led me to leave him alone. I just prayed and that very night the Lord said he'd move my foes from my door, and he (Stephens) died that night."

"I felt sorry for him. I really did."