

FBI hunts mysterious bomb suspect

By SANFORD J. UNGAR
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WASHINGTON — When the FBI announced last Thursday that it was seeking Ronald Kaufman as the man who allegedly planted time bombs in nine banks last summer, "movement people" across the country began trying to figure out if he was one of them.

The facts published about him made Kaufman eligible for several different slots on the spectrum of American radical left politics.

One-time member of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Former shepherd of Yippie leader Abbie Hoffman. Recent resident of Berkeley, Calif. A 33-year-old AWOL Army private with a Ph.D. in psychology.

But the "movement people" drew a blank. Most had never heard of Kaufman, not even under one of his several aliases. Those who once knew him hadn't seen Kaufman in at least a year.

Radical priest Dick York at the Episcopal "free church" in Oakland, Calif., talked with some activist friends and found them as mystified as he was himself.

A Chicagoan who had known Kaufman during the demonstrations at the 1968 Democratic national convention in Chicago said Kaufman had always opposed the tactics of the Weathermen, a militant faction of SDS which has taken credit for other bombings around the country.

Besides, as a long-time activist at the University of Wisconsin pointed out, Yippies seldom return to SDS.

At 33, he said, Kaufman would

be "a real old-timer" in SDS, and if he had an important role, that would be widely recognized— "Everyone who's ever been on the SDS side of the movement knows everybody else who has, and we don't know him."

The only clue in the movement's own internal manhunt for Kaufman seemed to lie in the identical letters he sent to newsmen, announcing the locations of the bombs and providing the keys to safety deposit boxes where they had been placed.

To some people, the letters (which the FBI says were in Kaufman's handprinting) were a polemical contribution to a search that has been going on within the movement in the last year for new modes of action.

"Kidnapping people and demanding property (or money) in exchange for their lives exemplifies the anti-life property value of our sick and brutal society," the letters said.

"The movement in America would do better to kidnap property and offer it in exchange for the freedom of our people."

The letter went on to say that it would be simple, for example, to "kidnap a luxury hotel, a corporate office building or a superhighway and demand the release of political prisoners as ransom."

The device used in the "kidnappings," the letters explained, could be seven-month time bombs like the ones discovered in the safety deposit boxes, but substituting "highly reliable, nearly silent electronic watches" and "compact plastic explosive" for the cordless electric clocks

and slow-burning power used in the bank bombs.

Such a bomb, it said, "could easily be embedded in the structure of a building under construction (e.g., the new FBI building in Washington) or under the roadbed of a highway not yet paved over."

"In 3 or 4 months continued construction would make the device virtually undetectable. The authorities and the public would then be told who is to be freed in exchange for the exact location of the device. They would also be told how much time remained on the timer."

Should "the power structure" refuse to go along, the letters concluded, "they would then have the option of sitting around for months waiting for some portion of one of their empty toys to blow up."

"Who will want to vacation in that hotel, meet in that boardroom or drive on that super highway for the next few months?"

It was a chilling proposal, not only to the government but also to movement groups that have been increasingly rejecting violence as a tactic. But how the proposal might be viewed by the weathermen and other "underground" groups was impossible to determine. Conceivably, someone among these could be sheltering Kaufman and other radical fugitives sought by the FBI.

In St. Louis — where Kaufman re-enlisted in the army last summer under the name of James Edward Jensen — Chris Hayes found it inconceivable that Kaufman could have been involved with the local religious-

radical movement in which Hayes is active. Whatever the government may think, he said, violence of any sort is now unacceptable among them.

But several people interviewed suggested that if the person who planned the bombs was already in the underground movement, he may have been a maverick "because of his extreme concern for lives."

If the FBI's information on the bombings is correct, and if the identification of Kaufman is as certain as the bureau says it is,

he apparently planned the action over a long period of time.

Using the name of Christopher Charles Mohr, the man the FBI says is Kaufman rented safety deposit boxes at nine banks in New York, Chicago and San Francisco a year ago and returned in July to plant the bombs.

Then he mailed deposit box keys to selected newsmen a month before the bombs were set to go off.

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"We ran an ad for apartment refrigerators for just three days and rented every one we had in stock. Then, later, we ran the same ad and sold out in just one day. We have rented more than 100 refrigerators with our ads in the Emerald. I think it is the most successful ad I've ever run, and the people in the home office are also well pleased. Our only problem is a lack of immediate supply. We have a long waiting list," said the young manager of the rental firm.

"People no longer have the psychological need to own things like they used to, they are more mobile and like to use things now rather than waiting to save until they can buy them.

"Everybody from low income to company executives are renting everything from furniture to boats and airplanes these days. Why not enjoy things while you are using them? In most instances rental agencies allow customers to buy the merchandise for \$1 when the rental contract expires, and it usually costs less than borrowing from a finance company," he went on.

A Portland-based firm, Custom Furniture Rental has doubled in size each year for the past six years and has offices in most major west coast cities from Vancouver, B.C. to San Diego. But, Don Bjorklund, president of the firm, says his company "is a peanut when you look at the potential market."



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