



Conflicting “Earwitness” Accounts

One of the initial objections to any double explosion or multiple explosion scenario for the Murrah Building bombing centered on the logical observation that any significant explosions subsequent to the track bomb detonation — especially if delayed by several seconds, as some were inferring from seismic records — would certainly have been heard by many thousands of witnesses. Most news accounts that dealt with this issue cited a complete absence of any such “earwitnesses” as proof that reports of additional explosions were completely unfounded.

The New American found that the facts of the matter were at odds with the conventional media accounts. Before leaving for Oklahoma we had already encountered a number of apparently reliable earwitnesses who reported hearing more than one explosion; conducting “man on the street” interviews in the Oklahoma City area, we found still more earwitnesses who heard double or multiple events. The conflicting variety of earwitness accounts is not entirely surprising, considering the uniqueness and traumatic magnitude of the event. Even with more “ordinary” traumatic occurrences — car accidents, homicides, robberies, etc. — eyewitness accounts of the same incident are notorious for widely divergent and sometimes opposite descriptions.

Many of the people we interviewed preferred not to be identified. Some were within a block of the blast, while others were several miles away. Those we talked with who were closest to the blast provided some of the most confusing and contradictory testimony. This is understandable when one takes into consideration that the sensory stimuli overload caused by the explosion was very disorienting. Many people who worked within a few blocks of the federal building were knocked from their chairs or from their feet, or had ceilings, walls, furniture, and broken windows crashing into them. Some could not even recall hearing a specific sound, but were simply overwhelmed by the “impression” of a massive explosive event.

One young man who works as a parking garage attendant one block north of the federal building told *The New American* that he was test driving a new pickup truck in the street in front of the parking structure when the bomb went off. “It seemed like one, big, long explosion,” he said, “but I can’t say for sure. My ears were ringing and glass and rocks and concrete were falling all over and around me.”

A manager of a loan company on Hudson Avenue two blocks west of the Murrah Building told us he was fairly sure he heard only one blast. It blew out his office’s plate glass windows just a few feet from his desk and knocked down the false ceiling, but no one was injured. Two secretaries who were at the office at the time of the explosion also recalled hearing only one blast. At the corporate offices of a department store two blocks north-east of the federal building, the receptionist on the ground floor was thrown out of her chair and against the wall by the force of the blast. She could not recall actually *hearing* the explosion, but had more the impression of feeling it.

One reliable witness we interviewed who heard more than one explosion is Lieutenant Colonel George Wallace, a retired Air Force fighter pilot with 26 years experience in the service (1952-78). On the morning of the explosion, Colonel Wallace was at his home nine miles northwest of the federal building. It sounded to him like “a sustained, loud, long rumble, like several explosions.” “I was pouring a cup of coffee and saw it jiggle and shake and immediately ran outside” to see what might have caused it, he recounted to *The New American*. To this combat pilot who has had much experience with explosives, it sounded very much like the familiar sound of a succession of bombs being dropped in the distance by B-52s. It was a sound he had heard often in Vietnam and one he didn’t think he would be likely to



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misread.

Another eyewitness who is “positive” that he heard two explosions was in his car five blocks north of the federal building. It sounded to him, he said, like two distinct blasts several seconds apart.

According to explosives experts we consulted, it is not unusual to have such divergent sound reports. John Donovan, a former Army EOD specialist and now one of the largest commercial users of plastic explosives, noted that “many variables — cloud cover, terrain, surrounding buildings, direction of the blast — greatly affect blast noise. Because of this, the same explosion may be heard for two miles in one direction and twenty miles in the opposite direction.”

There are other factors as well that may account for the conflicting testimony. General Benton Partin observes, for instance, that if a second bomb or series of bombs were detonated inside the Murrah Building, and if smaller charges were used (which would certainly be the case), the sound waves from the later event(s) would be much smaller than the original truck blast and greatly muffled by the collapsing building and debris above it. In the confusion and trauma of the moment they might not be discerned by many people as separate events.



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