Red Flags From an Expert

One of the earliest calls placed by *The New American* in our investigation into the Oklahoma City bombing was to Brigadier General Benton K. Partin (USAF, retired). As one of the world's foremost experts in both the theoretical and practical applications of explosives technology, General Partin possesses virtually unparalleled qualifications to authoritatively evaluate the public-source information available on the bombing.

From the start, the general expressed very strong misgivings about the "official" story — that the horrendous damage to the federal building had been caused solely by the reported truck bomb. Too many facts, he said, "simply just don't add up" to support that convenient explanation. For Partin, the reported "facts" contradicted not only the laws of physics, but a lifetime of personal experience as well.

Appeal for Delay

In a letter to Senator Don Nickles (R-Okla.), which he personally delivered to the senator's Washington office on May 18 of last year, General Partin appealed for action to delay destruction of the Murrah Building until a full, independent forensic examination of the site could be conducted. In that letter, which was also personally delivered to the offices of 23 other senators and some 30 members of the House, the general offered his initial analysis of the bombing evidence and explained:

> I am concerned that vital evidence will soon be destroyed with the pending demolition of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City. From all the evidence I have seen in the published material, I can say with a high level of confidence that the damage pattern on the reinforced concrete superstructure could not possibly have been attained from the single truck bomb without supplementing demolition charges at some of the reinforced column bases. The total incompatibility with a single truck bomb lies in the fact that either some of the columns collapsed that should not have collapsed or some of the columns are still standing that should have collapsed and did not.

"To produce the resulting damage pattern on the building," wrote Partin, "there would have to have been an effort with demolition charges at column bases to compliment or supplement the truck bomb damage. A careful examination of the collapsed column bases would readily reveal a failure mode produced by a demolition charge. This evidence would be so critical, [that] a separate and independent assessment should be made before a building demolition team destroys the evidence forever."

General Partin was not offering another "wacko conspiracy theory." He was offering solid, compelling, methodical, scientific analysis backed by a sterling career and impeccable credentials. Twenty-five of his 31 years of active service in the Air Force were involved in intensive research, design, development, testing, and management of weapons at all levels. This included extensive hands-on work at the Ballistic Research Laboratories and field testing of all types of explosives on a broad spectrum of structures and targets. He served as commander of the Air Force Armament Technology Laboratory and was the first chairman of the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) joint service Air Munitions Requirements and Development Committee, responsible for munitions development for the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines.

General Partin is recognized as a major guiding force behind our modern precision guided weapons systems. As far back as the late 1950s, he developed the earliest focused energy weapons program, wrote the first contract for laser weapons development, and pushed for deployment of a functional "Star

Wars" missile defense system decades before it became the hotly debated issue of the 1980s. General Partin was a Command Pilot and Command Missileman, a Distinguished Graduate of the Air War College, a recipient of the Distinguished Service Medal, and thrice a recipient of the Legion of Merit.

In short, General Benton Partin is an "expert's expert," and his carefully reasoned analysis should command a respectful hearing. Unfortunately, he received no hearing whatsoever from political officialdom or from the arbiters of "acceptable" debate in the Establishment media.

Glaring Inconsistencies

General Partin's analysis focuses on a number of crucially important and glaring inconsistencies in the forensic evidence of the Murrah Building that continue to challenge the official truck bomb scenario. These include:

• Pattern and magnitude of the damage. These were "technically impossible without supplementing demolition charges," says Partin.

• Demolition charge signatures on columns and header beam. The smooth failure modes and exposed steel rebar are clear signs of contact charges.

• Position of the collapsed columns and header beam. If caused by the truck bomb, they should have been blown at least slightly inward, but instead came straight down.

• Contradictory damage to light and heavy materials. It is "absurd," says Partin, to hold that the truck bomb blast was powerful enough to take down large, steel-reinforced concrete columns and still leave sheet rock, furring strips, and other light, decorative materials virtually unfazed.

• Structural soundness of the remaining building. If the blast from the truck bomb was sufficient to cause the damage seen at the Murrah Building, much greater structural damage would have been sustained by the remainder of the building which was left standing. However, structural analysis revealed that it was relatively sound.

Evidence of Blast Charges

General Partin has repeatedly emphasized some of the basic physics problems associated with the single-truck-bomb scenario which seem to be lost on most laymen — and even many professional demolitionists — who are unduly impressed with the huge blast wave associated with the Ryder truck explosion. "First, blast through air is a very inefficient energy-coupling mechanism against heavy reinforced concrete beams and columns," the general points out. "Second, blast-damage potential initially falls off more rapidly than an inverse function of the distance cubed. That is why in conventional weapons development, one seeks accuracy over yield for hard targets. Columns in large buildings are hard targets for blast."

This principle was very well illustrated, he noted, in the bombing of the World Trade Center. In that case, he told *The New American*, a similar truck bomb blew a large cavity through several floors above and below the bomb but caused very little lateral damage. "The floor areas directly above and below the bomb were accelerated by the blast force and completely stripped away, but you can see in the published photos that the reinforced concrete column is standing there in the middle of the cavity with no damage."

"The entire building in Oklahoma City could have been collapsed with relatively small demolition charges against the base of the columns and with even less explosives if linear cavity cutting charges had been used," General Partin wrote in his letter to Senator Nickles. Partin's point was dramatically

illustrated with the final demolition of the Murrah Building on May 23, 1995. As that event demonstrated, a very small amount of explosives is required to bring down a large building — if the demolition charges are strategically placed within, or in direct contact with, the key structural points of the building. A spokesman for Control Demolition, Inc. informed *The New American* that less than 150 pounds of explosives placed in 420 locations were used to fell the three-fourths of the building left standing after the April 19 explosion.

Exhaustive Study

On July 13, 1995, General Partin released his 23-page report entitled *Bomb Damage Analysis of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma*. The study includes five full-page color photographs taken of key areas of the crime scene which the general asserts provide "irrefutable evidence that at least four demolition charges were set off at four critical columns of the reinforced concrete structure at the floor level of the third floor." The report also includes an important aerial-view diagram of the Murrah Building showing the position of the truck bomb in relation to the building damage and a computation by Partin of the damage potential of the blast wave pressure in concentric circles as it radiates out from the blast source.

The New American stands virtually alone in having published not only all of the report's photographs and the building diagram, but a substantial portion of the text as well, together with interview comments from General Partin. (See our August 7, 1995 issue, "Explosive Evidence of a Cover-up.") Space does not permit us to duplicate that valuable and extensive coverage here, so we have summarized some of the most compelling points made by General Partin.

It is particularly worth noting that no developments in the ensuing months have impeached or seriously challenged Partin's compelling analysis. Indeed, quite the contrary. One of the more interesting examples of the general's vindication can be found in the "official commemorative volume" of the Oklahoma City tragedy, *In Their Name*. This "officially authorized" book, with an epilogue by Governor and Mrs. Frank Keating, contains many moving photographs and stories, as well as much useful data and many valuable illustrations. In the middle of the book is a large illustration of the Murrah Building spanning two pages (pages 86-87) and detailing the damage caused by the April 19 blast. What is quite striking about the illustration is that the artist has obviously moved the bomb crater to the left so that it is aligned with the deep blast cavity that extends into the building where the B3 column was collapsed, thus "solving" one of the glaring inconsistencies in the crime scene evidence pointed out in the Partin analysis.

That this placement of the crater is clearly wrong can be verified by an examination of almost any aerial photo of the building which shows the crater. In fact, *In Their Name* provides just such a shot a few pages earlier in the book (pages 82-83) which patently contradicts the illustration. What this episode demonstrates is that — whether consciously or unconsciously — the illustrator (and/or the book's producers) have attempted to reconcile the conspicuously conflicting data by altering the evidence to fit the official story. However, this only serves to reinforce the trenchant arguments advanced by Partin.

Diagramming the Blast

General Partin's bomb-damage diagram illustrates the fact that in the first row of columns facing the street where the truck bomb was parked (row A), seven columns (A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, A7, A8) collapsed, while in row B only B3 failed. Unlike rows B and C, where all 11 columns ran from the ground floor to the top of the building, in row A the bases of the even-numbered columns stood on a heavy reinforced

horizontal concrete header which was supported by the odd-numbered columns.

“The truck bomb was not in front of column A3,” the general explains, “but instead, as the crater shows, between columns A4 and A5, which means that column B4, which did not come down, would have received about 40 percent more blast pressure than B3 which did come down. If any columns were going to come down in the B row it would have been columns B4 and B5. You don’t have to go any further than that to know that you had a demolition charge on column B3 — unless you believe in magic.”

Additionally, the photographs reveal a number of other troubling dilemmas. “If you look at those B-row columns,” says Partin, “you can see that they still have furring strips and sheetrock on them.… Now, you can’t have the blast reaching clear in to column B3 and bringing down that heavy reinforced column and at the same time not even blowing off this lighter covering from the column.”

Restating his earlier point about the tremendous falloff of blast pressure traveling through air, General Partin makes this important observation:

> Using the official estimate usually cited for the amount of explosive in the truck bomb — 4,800 pounds — would yield a sphere of ammonium nitrate about 4 1/2 feet in diameter with a blast pressure of about 1/2 million pounds per square inch at the detonation point. But by the time the blast wave travels through the air to the nearest of the columns in the A row (A5) it dropped off too around 375 pounds of pressure per square inch, and by the time it reaches the B row columns it’s down in the range of 27 to 38 [pounds per square inch]. And out at column A7 it’s down around 25 to 35 pounds per square inch. The yield strength of concrete is around 3,500 pounds per square inch, and yet we’re supposed to believe that this large, reinforced concrete column is going to be brought down by 25 to 35 pounds of pressure? It’s absurd.

According to General Partin’s authoritative analysis, the blast wave from the truck bomb would have carried sufficient force to cause considerable damage to the face of the building and to some of its floors, but would have fallen far short of the force needed to cause the massive structural damage experienced at the Murrah Building.

Other Examples

This opinion is consistent not only with the bomb damage at the World Trade Center cited earlier, but from the results of other terrorist bombings as well. One of those which closely parallels the Oklahoma City incident is the 1989 bombing of the DAS (Colombia’s police intelligence) headquarters in Bogota, Colombia, by drug lords of the Medellin cartel. An estimated 1,300 pounds of dynamite (which is much more powerful, pound-for-pound, than the ammonium nitrate mixture suspected in the Oklahoma City Ryder truck) packed in a bus was detonated in front of the 11-story DAS building. Although witnesses and survivors compared the explosion, which caused damage in a 26-block area and took dozens of lives, to “a mini-atom bomb,” the blast did not cause the kind of severe structural damage seen in Oklahoma City.

Another strike against the single-truck-bomb theory is the structural integrity of the remainder of the Murrah Building after the explosion. A single bomb large enough to cause the devastation seen in that structure would also cause considerable structural damage to the rest of the building. However, architects involved in the structural safety assessments said that this was not the case. Architect Ed Kirkpatrick told *The New American* that most of the building was structurally sound and worth rebuilding. Jim Loftis, the architect who designed the award-winning building, concurred, stating, “I

think technologically we could have removed the damaged part of the building and rebuilt it."