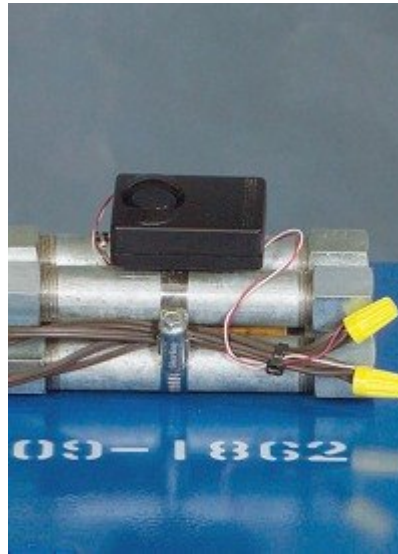




Written by [Denise Behreandt](#) on June 24, 1996

The FBI's Pipe-bomb Provocateurs

Robert Starr and William James McCranie Jr., members of the "Militia-at-Large for the Republic of Georgia," were charged with conspiracy and possession of unregistered explosives. A federal search of a tract of property owned by Starr and McCranie in Crawford, Georgia unearthed a collection of chemicals and pre-cut threaded pipe that could be used to create pipe bombs. An early CBS news report of the raid suggested that the pipe bombs would have been used in a terrorist strike against this summer's Olympic Games. However, Justice Department spokesman John Russell assured THE NEW AMERICAN that there was "absolutely no basis" for this element of the CBS story. Nevertheless, CBS defiantly refused to retract or clarify its original account.



Although another Justice Department spokesman dismissed the incident as a case of "Goober and Gomer [making] a bomb," numerous print and electronic media reports were quickly hung on the spurious CBS news hook, helping to reinforce the Clinton Administration's line that "right-wing" terrorism is now the chief threat to domestic security. Such accounts were saturated with commentary from "experts" on "right-wing extremism" who pointed to the Georgia case as conclusive evidence of the danger posed by the militia movement. One such "expert" was Mary Ann Mauney of the Atlanta-based Center for Democratic Renewal, who opined to the *Los Angeles Times*: "What was behind the Oklahoma City bombing was so easily forgotten by the American public. We have become very complacent about the force of the militia movement in the United States today."

From Mauney's vantage point — that of a professional left-wing alarmist awash in foundation grants and other Establishment largesse — it may indeed appear that the public is "complacent" about the threat of right-wing extremism, despite the media's relentless campaign to vilify the right in the wake of the Oklahoma bombing. The Georgia militia crackdown was a fortuitous development for those who needed a fresh outrage to fuel the campaign against the right — and there are strong indications that the incident had been stage-managed by the feds to achieve exactly that purpose.

A Contrived Case

The case against Starr and McCranie depends heavily on accounts provided by at least two "confidential informants" who infiltrated the militia group for the FBI. However, the sole witness to appear on behalf of the federal government at the May 6th preliminary hearing in Macon, Georgia was ATF Special Agent Steven Gillis. His testimony proved to be a coup for the defense. As Audrey Post of the *Macon Telegraph* recounts, Agent Gillis admitted in court that Starr may not have been aware that the supposed pipe-bomb components were on his property — a curious oversight for someone



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purportedly involved in a “conspiracy.” Furthermore, Gillis acknowledged that Starr’s supposed co-conspirator McCranie had declared, “I don’t want to know anything about it,” when, during a militia meeting, a federal informant brought up the possibility of making pipe bombs.

Agent Gillis maintained that at least one militia member had been present on the property at some point on the day that the bomb-making materials were to be moved. However, under cross-examination by Starr’s defense attorney, Nancy Lord, Gillis refused to say whether the militia member had actually been involved in moving the materials, citing the need to protect the confidentiality of the federal informants.

Another damaging admission made by Gillis was that federal agents did not actually have to search Starr’s 16-acre plot, but rather went directly to the buried bomb components. “There was not much of a search on the property; they went right to it [the buried bomb components],” Lord declared at a post-hearing press conference. “They didn’t have to look around [because] the confidential informants were there when the material was moved.”

From her vantage point, Lord perceives the entire incident to be a straightforward case of federal entrapment:

They [federal agents] created whatever little piddling case they have. They have no conspiracy, they have no nexus to interstate commerce, they don’t even have an explosive device. What they have is an *agent provocateur* who came into a group, trying to cause trouble, who was involved in this, who was actually involved with putting it on Mr. Starr’s property. And we have Mr. Starr naïvely believing that he could expose him [the provocateur] by pretending to go along with him.

It was the desire to protect the identities of the federal informant/provocateurs, rather than to forestall a potential terrorist strike, which led to the April 26th arrests, according to Lord. During the May 6th preliminary hearing, the defense entered into evidence a recording of a short-wave radio program entitled *Arming Yourself With Knowledge* which had been broadcast two nights before the arrest. During that program, Starr announced that he intended to expose a government set-up against him and his militia group. He also claimed that FBI sources had warned him of a threat against his life — a claim that was confirmed on the witness stand by ATF Agent Gillis.

“This goes beyond an illegal search,” Lord protests. “The government actually put the evidence on his [Starr’s] property; they’ve admitted that. [Gillis] admitted that his confidential informants were there, and that they put it there. [Starr] was not there. He did not know what it was; he did not know it was there. They have never asserted otherwise. They are trying to create a case out of some things [the informant] said at meetings that nobody even supported, because he was saying them to try to nail these guys.”

No Federal Jurisdiction

J.J. Johnson, a militia activist and host of *Arming Yourself With Knowledge*, was present in Macon for the May 6th hearing. Johnson informed THE NEW AMERICAN, “We have accumulated some persuasive evidence that the federal government has been paying people to join the militia and make bombs. After Starr became aware of this, he realized that he had some bad people in his group, and he wanted to expose them. After he went on our show to blow the whistle, the next day a warrant was issued for his arrest.”

Furthermore, according to Nancy Lord, the “offense” for which Starr and McCranie have been arrested has no statutory basis. “The substances used to make the pipe bombs are not listed as explosives in the



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Federal Register,” Lord explained to THE NEW AMERICAN. “Steven Gillis has admitted as much on the witness stand. He admitted on the stand that there were no chemical tests performed on the bombs; he admitted that there was no conspiracy except that which involved his informants. He also said that if these chemicals were mixed together in one’s kitchen and blown up in his backyard, it would still be a violation of federal statutes. There’s no nexus to interstate commerce here, so the statute probably won’t be constitutional under the most recent Supreme Court case dealing with the Commerce Clause [*U.S. v. Lopez*]. Even before *Lopez* many federal arson cases were overturned because of a lack of a nexus to interstate commerce.”

As of this writing, Starr and McCranie remain in jail without bond as the legal machinations continue. Lord believes that the U.S. Attorney’s office and the ATF are following a fabian strategy, “delaying action and prolonging the affair in an attempt to get them [Starr and Mc Cranie] to snitch on each other.” In the meantime, if the suspicions expressed by Starr and Johnson are correct, other “confidential informants” in the employ of the federal government may be active in other militia groups across the country, laboring to create a “right-wing” menace as a foil for the increasingly intrusive counter-terrorist apparat.



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