

A Low-Tech Suspect

April 7, 1996

Modern technology has created a brave new criminal world in which drug deals are conducted with stolen cellular phone numbers, would-be terrorists learn bomb-making over the Internet and anti-government renegades keep body and soul together through credit card fraud. But recent developments in the Unabom case suggest that one determined individual might still be able to spread terror across the country for nearly two decades without even the benefit of electricity and indoor plumbing.

Theodore Kaczynski, a recluse with a doctorate in mathematics, was arrested last week on a charge of possessing bomb components, and taken into custody as a suspect in the Unabom case. He had lived for 25 years in a one-room cabin in the Montana wilderness, living on vegetables from his own garden, fish and game. He reportedly once told a neighbor that his annual budget was about \$300.

The Unabomber has killed 3 people and injured 23 others over 18 years of mail-bombing. The victims were apparently all connected, in the Unabomber's own mind, with the proliferation of destructive technology. Ironically, officials say, Mr. Kaczynski turned his own corner of the unspoiled wilderness into a little factory of destruction, filled with raw materials for bomb-making, books on bomb manufacturing and notes of diagrams of explosive devices.

The F.B.I., in its search for the Unabomber, devoted endless time and resources to compiling a massive list of possible suspects. But Mr. Kaczynski's arrest suggests how little effect computerized background searches may have when the target has virtually no background – no friends, no associates, no neighbors, no relatives except a tiny nuclear family on the other side of the continent. Indeed, sources say the case was finally broken when Mr. Kaczynski's brother, David, made a connection between an anti-technology diatribe written by the Unabomber and his brother's writings, and reluctantly contacted the authorities.

The world grows increasingly complex for both lawbreakers and law enforcers. But the developments in the Unabomber case suggest a humbling lesson. The most sophisticated computer searches seemed incapable of unearthing a bomb-making hermit in the wilds of Montana. That task was left to one individual, who decided that he was, indeed, his brother's keeper.

Comment Reply

To the Editor:

"A Low-Tech Suspect" (editorial, April 7) suggests that David Kaczynski, the brother of the suspected Unabomber, is "his brother's keeper."

David Kaczynski is, in a more global sense, his brothers' keeper. He was really looking out for all of us.

MARTIN LAVANHAR

Tuxedo, N.Y., April 9, 1996

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The New York Times, Opinion piece, April 7, 1996, Section 4, Page 10.

<www.nytimes.com/1996/04/07/opinion/a-low-tech-suspect.html>

& <www.nytimes.com/1996/04/10/opinion/l-unabomber-represents-our-anarchist-within-his-brothers-keeper-065269.html>

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