

Unabomber became an icon on the Net

Andrew Walton

(CNN) – From the beginning, the Unabomber was a fixture on the Internet. Before the beginning, actually, since the bombings began in 1978, long before the 'Net was particularly well known or accessible to the general public, when computers were room-sized monsters few people ever saw.

The FBI called the case UNABOM, after the first targets – University researchers and Airline executives. The bombings targeted people connected with high-tech industries, so the FBI turned to the 'Net for help in catching the bomber.

On May 15, 1995, FBI Special Agent William L. Tafoya asked for help, before the FBI even had its own Web site – Tafoya's return e-mail address was at NASA. In a letter to the Internet community at large, he wrote:

The purpose for submitting the information on the Internet is twofold. First, the Internet is another medium that enables us to reach as wide an audience as possible; to "spread the word." Second, Internet users are precisely the type of individuals that to date have been recipients of explosive devices attributed to UNABOM; scholars and researchers.

Once the FBI developed a Web site, it featured the Unabom investigation prominently. On its major investigations page, it continues to ask the public for information.

Manifesto strikes a chord "FC," as the bomber called himself, went public in September 1995.

He demanded publication of his "manifesto," a rambling, nearly 35,000 word (over 200K online) diatribe against technology and industrial society. Ironically, "FC," who decried modern living, has found an audience – and even a following – on this flashy symbol of high-tech consumerism, the World Wide Web.

Several sites offer the full text of the manifesto, including Time-Warner's Pathfinder. Some sites offer professional or amateur analysis and commentary – as with anything on the Web, the quality of analysis varies widely. But the FBI's decision to recommend publishing the manifesto – it also ran in the New York Times and the Washington Post – yielded at least one important lead, David Kaczynski, after reading it, became convinced that his brother, Theodore, was involved.

Ted Kaczynski, accused in federal court of being the Unabomber, initially pleaded not guilty, but changed that to guilty in a plea bargain that gave him a life sentence instead of the death penalty.

The Unabomber's manifesto offers the 'Net one of the commodities it values most highly: a political and philosophical argument. The particulars of the case are debated in the newsgroup alt.fan.unabomber– "fan" in the loosest sense of the word, as alt.fan newsgroups exist for many famous and infamous people. While many posts on alt.fan.unabomber endorse his philosophy, nearly all denounce his methods.

There's the usual ration of speculation in alt.fan.unabomber; complaints about the judge's decision to withhold some evidence from the public are the most common sentiment. Discussion of the Unabomber's philosophical influences are also common;

some say he was influenced by Ayn Rand, others that he admired neo-Nazi leader William Pierce. Others compare his writings to Earth First!, a radical environmental movement. Online "Tributes" to the Unabomber range from the tasteless – Chronic Filmwerks bills its mock film documentary "Ted" as "an explosive comedy" – to the tame. Court TV has a more conventional offering of updates, legal analysis and documents.

Even for the most wired of the Internet cognoscenti, dropping out and living in a cabin has a certain allure (on some days more than others). "Mountain Man" Writing is a collection of works inspired by Kaczynski's life as a recluse. Unabomology is one person's musings on the manifesto. The Writings of Theodore J. Kaczynski is less exciting than it sounds. It's a list of Kaczynski's published works, including his doctoral thesis; all are on mathematics, and all published between 1964 and 1969. Whatever the outcome of the Kaczynski trial, the Unabomber will remain an icon on the 'Net.

The Ted K Archive

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<t-h-e-n-e-t.com/html/_mani/_una_R.html#anker2>

www.thetedkarchive.com