

In Unabomber's Own Words, A Chilling Account of Murder

David Johnston

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In a chilling compendium of journal entries disclosed today, Theodore J. Kaczynski, the confessed Unabomber, pronounced that a fatal attack on one victim was “excellent,” mused on killing a “scientist” or “big businessman,” and in workmanlike lab notes recorded how he had taped razor blades and nails to a pipe bomb to increase its destructiveness.

Over all, more than 100 new excerpts from Mr. Kaczynski’s diaries and journals were detailed in a presentencing memorandum filed in court today by the Federal Government. The excerpts, taken by the authorities from Mr. Kaczynski’s mountain shack after his arrest in April 1996, provide a penetrating insight into Mr. Kaczynski’s isolated world in what amounts to an autobiographical account of the Unabom crimes.

The serial terrorist’s attacks, which began in 1978, killed three people and injured 22 others. A search of his cabin turned up a huge cache of journals and other evidence against him. Mr. Kaczynski pleaded guilty on Jan. 22 to 13 Unabom offenses, including the bombings that killed three people and maimed two others.

In exchange for his guilty plea, Mr. Kaczynski accepted a life sentence in prison while Federal prosecutors agreed they would drop their demands that he be put to death for his crimes. A formal sentencing hearing, when some victims and family members are expected to testify, is scheduled for Monday in Federal court here.

The highly incriminating entries made public today are far different from the earlier, more generalized writings released by the Government. In coldly candid detail, Mr. Kaczynski discussed his motives, techniques and planning for specific bombings in a number of the entries filed today.

Some of the notes were written by hand, some were typed and others were contained in a code of Mr. Kaczynski’s own design, which agents said they had deciphered by using a key they found in his Montana cabin.

Federal prosecutors had asked Judge Garland E. Burrell Jr. of Federal District Court here, who has presided over the Unabom case, for permission to file today’s sentencing memorandum in an effort to demonstrate the credibility, breadth and persuasiveness of evidence the Government would have presented had the case gone to trial.

The case was given the name “Unabom” because the bomber appeared to be tormenting universities and airlines. In the memorandum, the prosecutors also recounted, in sometimes gruesome detail, accounts of the effects of the fatal bombs on their victims.

In the case of Gilbert B. Murray, an official of the California Forestry Association, a trade group in Sacramento who was killed in April 1995 when he opened a package bomb at his office, the prosecutors wrote, “The bomb so badly destroyed Gil Murray’s body that his family was allowed only to see and touch his feet and legs, below the knees, as a final farewell.” Mr. Murray, the prosecutors wrote, was 46 years old, married with two children.

But Mr. Kaczynski, a Harvard-trained former professor with near genius level ability in mathematics, showed little sympathy for his victims. In one diary entry Mr. Kaczynski wrote that he had “no regret” about the bomb that killed Mr. Murray, who

was described by Mr. Kaczynski as “the wrong man,” since the package had been sent to another forestry official.

Mr. Kaczynski’s writings became widely known after he sent The New York Times and other publications a 35,000-word tract bitterly criticizing the dehumanizing impact of technology on society. The Times and The Washington Post jointly financed publication of the manifesto in 1995 by The Post. When Mr. Kaczynski’s brother, David, read a copy on the Internet he approached the authorities with suspicions that led to Theodore Kaczynski’s arrest.

In a journal passage dated sometime between the autumn of 1977 and August 1978, when the bombing campaign was just beginning and Mr. Kaczynski was still learning how to build bombs, he wrote to himself: “I emphasize that my motivation is personal revenge. I don’t pretend any kind of philosophical or moralistic justification.”

He added: “My ambition is to kill a scientist, big businessman, government official or the like. I would also like to kill a Communist.”

Throughout the court proceedings leading up to his plea bargain, Mr. Kaczynski’s lawyers tried to emphasize his disturbed mental state – even as the defendant himself fought furiously against using an insanity defense. Prosecutors, though, offered a highly selective batch of journal entries today to highlight their view that Mr. Kaczynski was a calculating killer who methodically prepared the deadly bombs, gloated over news accounts of their detonations and took pains to avoid getting caught.

The excerpts describe how Mr. Kaczynski finely sanded bomb components and treated the stamps he used with soy bean oil and salt water to avoid leaving fingerprints.

The passages included in the court filing also seemed intended to show that Mr. Kaczynski was aware of the wrongfulness of his actions and considered how to conceal his wrongdoing to continue the attacks.

“My first thought was to kill somebody I hated and then kill myself before the cops could get me. (I’ve always considered death preferable to long imprisonment.) But since I now had new hope, I was not ready to relinquish life so easily. So, I thought, I will kill but I will make at least some effort to avoid detection, so that I can kill again.”

Mr. Kaczynski wrote in 1980 that the bombings made him feel less angry. “Since committing these crimes reported elsewhere in my notes I feel better. I am still plenty angry, you understand, but the difference is that I am now able to strike back, to a degree.”

A number of entries focused on Mr. Kaczynski’s meticulous notes on his evolving ability as a bomb maker and his frustration over his inability to seriously hurt his victims.

“May about 1982 I sent a bomb to a computer expert named Patrick Fischer. His secretary opened it. One newspaper said she was in hospital? In good condition? With arm and chest cuts. Other newspaper said bomb drove fragments of wood into her flesh. But no indication that she was permanently disabled. Frustrating that I can’t seem to make a lethal bomb.”

In the entries that have been disclosed, Mr. Kaczynski expressed no remorse for his victims. After a bomb in 1985 ripped through the arm of John E. Hauser, a pilot and graduate engineering researcher at the University of California at Berkeley who hoped to become an astronaut, Mr. Kaczynski wrote, in a coded journal that was deciphered by Federal agents: "I am no longer bothered by having crippled this guy. I laughed at the idea of having any compunction about crippling an airplane pilot."

As his bombs became more powerful, Mr. Kaczynski's coldness toward his victims grew more apparent. After his first deadly attack in 1985 in Sacramento killed Hugh Scrutton, the owner of a computer rental store, Mr. Kaczynski wrote: "Excellent. Humane way to eliminate somebody. He probably never felt a thing."

He maintained notes about making his bombs, logging the chemical compositions and construction methods as he labored with only hand tools to complete the increasingly efficient devices. Between May and December 1994, his notations trace the construction of what Mr. Kaczynski called "Experiment 244," the lethal bomb that killed Thomas J. Mosser, a public relations executive who opened the package bomb in his home in North Caldwell, N.J. Among some passages that he wrote were these:

May 26. "As usual, I am using mixture #2 as an igniting mixture."

May 28. "Weight of the pipe 12.0 oz."

June 11 and 12. "During the night of June 11/12, I kept the device wrapped in foil, and when I unwrapped it in the morning I was not able to smell any acetone."

Aug. 19. "I attached to the side of the pipe with strapping tape a layer of thin flat steel fragments consisting of razor blades and a watch mainspring broken into very small pieces. On top of these I attached on the side of the pipe with strapping tape a layer of small nails."

Oct. 13. "The weight of the complete package, with the envelope and all but without a label or postage, is 3 lb., 0 oz., according to the postal scale."

December. "The device in experiment 244 was used in December 1994 and it gave a totally satisfactory result."

In their arguments, the prosecutors provided an account of Mr. Mosser's death from the victim's point of view. "Thomas opened the package; the ensuing blast drove shrapnel into his body, leaving a gaping hole in his head, opening his body and piercing his organs with nails. He died at age 50 on the floor of his own home, his wife at his side trying in vain to aid and comfort him."

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