

Postal worker says she reported seeing Unabomber suspect in '95

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HELENA, Mont. — Postal inspectors and the FBI said Thursday that they are investigating whether officials missed a chance to arrest Theodore J. Kaczynski last September based on the account of a postal worker who says she told authorities at the time that she had seen him and identified him as the elusive Unabomber.

According to the postal worker's account, she became suspicious that a dirty, bearded man who presented a passport application to her at the Berkeley post office where she works was the Unabomber because of his resemblance to a widely distributed police sketch and because he listed his occupation as "carpenter." She had recently attended a seminar at which officials had talked about the Unabomber and his preoccupation with wood.

The man identified himself as Theodore Kaczynski, the woman has told authorities.

The woman, who first told her story to the San Francisco Chronicle, says that when the man appeared, she alerted a supervisor and the U.S. passport office in San Francisco that she believed the Unabomber was standing at her counter, but no one ever contacted the San Francisco-based Unabom Task Force, which includes agents from the FBI and the Postal Inspection Service.

"The Unabomber is here," she told the Chronicle she remembers telling one passport official.

Feds puzzled

Federal officials are uncertain what to make of the account. So far, they have not found any documents—such as the passport application—that would corroborate her story. “We’ve been unable to find any records of him applying for a passport,” said FBI spokesman George Grotz. “We’re still checking.”

Officials say it is possible the application, which the woman said she forwarded to the passport office, has been lost. They also say, however, that while the postal employee seemed sincere in her recollection that the man was Kaczynski, the intervening seven months and the wide publicity now given his name may have caused her to confuse his name with that of another applicant.

The Unabomber case

Kaczynski, now locked up in the Helena jail, was arrested earlier this month after family members reported their suspicion that he was the elusive terrorist, who killed three and injured 23 others in a 17-year string of bombings. There were no Unabom attacks in the period between the reported sighting and Kaczynski's arrest.

If the postal worker's recall proves correct, the incident raises several intriguing questions:

Why was Kaczynski seeking a passport? And what emboldened him to go to a post office, the one institution besides the FBI that he could expect would be on the lookout for a package bomber who had used its services in the past?

The reported sighting came just days before the publication of the Unabomber's 35,000-word manifesto. At the time, the news media were saturated with stories about the case. Applying for a passport in Berkeley would seem out of character for the Unabomber, who had gained a reputation among investigators for his great care in leaving few clues in his bombings.

The postal worker, who sought to remain anonymous, said that after Kaczynski's arrest, she recognized his picture as the man who applied for the passport.

"It was the spitting image of him," she told the Chronicle. "That was the person who stood in front of me."

The man also sticks out in her mind because he was unclean and had green mold on the bridge of his reading glasses, which he kept shoving up on top of his head as he sorted through outdated ID cards in the hope of authenticating his application. Among the documents he showed her, she said, was a 23-year-old UC identification card. Kaczynski quit his post as a Berkeley math professor in 1969.

FBI agents and postal inspectors spent much of the day Thursday searching for paperwork that would show whether it was Kaczynski who applied for a passport.

"We are checking out the veracity of her information," said Grotz, the FBI spokesman.

Postal Inspector Don Davis added: "If it happened the way she says it happened, there should be some paper around."

The State Department, which oversees the Passport Office, is also looking into the matter, said spokesman Glyn Davies.

According to the Chronicle, the woman told her supervisor and a Passport Office official, who she said both seemed more concerned about the approaching end of the workday than about her suspicions.

Finally she was told to attach a note to the application and she recalled writing something like: “Check this out. Very suspicious. I think this is the Unabomber.” She heard nothing further.

Dated Kaczynski

Meanwhile, Ellen Tarmichael held a news conference in Chicago, where she said she had dated Kaczynski twice in 1978 and confirmed that he had been fired from the factory where they both worked because he had harassed her.

But Tarmichael said the events took place in August—some months after the first of the Unabom attacks. At one point investigators had looked into whether a failed relationship with Tarmichael might have served as a triggering event for Kaczynski, but they have since abandoned that theory.

The two went out together only twice and were never romantically involved, she said. Once they went out to dinner; the second time they picked apples and baked a pie at his parents' house. While baking the pie, she said, she told him she did not want to see him anymore.

Tarmichael said she decided to speak publicly for the first time to end days of media interest in her, her family and friends. She turned down offers of \$10,000 to tell her story, she said.

“I didn’t invite this invasion of my privacy.”



At news conference: Ellen Tarmichael of Chicago says she dated Unabomber suspect Theodore Kaczynski twice in 1978.

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