Unabomber Will Kill Again, Says Ex-FBI Agent in Intriguing Profile

John Douglas sees the culprit as a meticulous underachiever in his late 30s or 40s, smart and relatively anti-social.

Richard Cole
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The Unabomber probably drives an older car but keeps it in good condition. He may have a wife or girlfriend, but she knows there's a certain part of the house—a basement, a special room—that's off limits.

In the same way other people might talk baseball, he likes to discuss the bombings—how stupid the FBI is, how smart the bomber is.

He probably visited the scene of his early bombings, talked to police, asked questions, maybe even offered advice.

He may have taken a trip this summer.

And he will kill again.

So says John Douglas, the now-retired FBI agent who developed the agency's psychological profiling techniques and drew up the Unabomber's profile when the bombings began 17 years ago.

Douglas, 50, discusses the Unabomber in his new book "Mindhunter," an account of his successes and failures, including the Green River killings and the investigation that inspired the book and the movie "Silence of the Lambs."

In a recent interview, Douglas offered insights into the Unabomber, who has killed three people and wounded 23 in 16 attacks since 1978.

The Unabomber is believed to be a white man now living or working around San Francisco. His first few bombings were at Chicago-area universities.

"I'm sure with those early bombs he hung around," Douglas said. "He would have been interviewed [by police], he would have been standing there, and he would have tried to inject himself into the investigation."

Douglas strongly favored publishing the Unabomber's 35,000-word manifesto, as the Washington Post did in September, calling it a good investigative tool. But he said no one should believe the Unabomber's promise in return to stop killing.

"A person like this will find some other excuse, some other happening," Douglas said. "It's not going keep him satisfied. I would expect there to be another bomb before long."

Douglas was intrigued by the Unabomber's hastily withdrawn threat to blow up a Los Angeles airliner in June. He noted it came at the beginning of his three-month deadline to publish the manifesto.

"Why do you give somebody that long a deadline? Why not a week?" Douglas asked.

He suggested the threat's withdrawal and the long deadline were related.

"It's June—maybe he's off from school, he's traveling, he won't be available for the summer," Douglas said. "And since he's traveling, maybe flying, he realizes he doesn't want a hardening of security at the airports."

The manifesto reaffirmed for Douglas his picture of the Unabomber as now in his late 30s or 40s, meticulous—he spray-painted the inside of some of his bombs—underachieving, intelligent and relatively anti-social.

Based on the habits of other multiple killers he has studied, Douglas also thinks the Unabomber probably drives an older car and keeps it in very good condition.

He has trouble establishing romantic relationships, but there could still be a woman in his life.

"But it's a convenience-type of thing," Douglas said. "They may share resources. But if this woman is at his house, she knows there's a spot that's off-limits—basement, cellar, a private room."

In that room, Douglas said, besides his workbench and bomb parts, the Unabomber probably keeps a scrapbook or diary of his deeds.

Douglas agreed with the FBI's recent focus on Chicago, where the Unabomber probably lived or went to school when the bombings began. He's more likely to have made mistakes early on, before he refined his methods.

"He also would be obsessed with the investigation," Douglas said. "While other people would want to talk about the Cubs, he would want to talk about the bombings, how badly law enforcement was handling them, maybe how 'it served so-and-so right' " to be bombed.

The Unabomber would also praise the intelligence of the person who made the bombs, Douglas said.

"Mindhunter: Inside the FBI's Elite Serial Crime Unit," published by Scribner, goes on sale Tuesday. In it, Douglas recounts how he parlayed his psychology degree into a job as the agency's serial crimes expert. He was the model for agent Jack Crawford in "Silence of the Lambs."

In real life, he correctly profiled the Trailside Killer near San Francisco, right down to the murderer's stutter. He predicted the Atlanta child murderer would be black, not a white racist as many feared, and correctly said the killer was tied to only 12 of the slayings.

To reach his insights, Douglas interviewed such killers as Charles Manson, Chicago nurse killer Richard Speck and David (Son of Sam) Berkowitz.

The caseload, the cruelty and the pressure almost killed Douglas during the still-unsolved Green River killings in Washington. In 1983, agents found him in his hotel room in a coma, partially paralyzed and almost dead of viral encephalitis. Doctors blamed the illness on stress; recovery took six months.

Though he retired in June, he still finds himself watching over his daughters. He knows too well what can happen to the unwary.

"We've become desensitized," he said. "It's the increased mobility, the breakdown of the church, the breakdown of the family."

The Ted K Archive

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