

Return of the 'Unabomber'

Terror through the mail

Susan Headden

May 8, 1995

The body count hardly compared with the holocaust wreaked by the terrorists in Oklahoma City, but the deadly return last week of the so-called Unabom serial killer was no less sinister for its smaller scale. And if anything, the man and the motive behind the attack are even harder to understand.

When California timber-industry lobbyist Gilbert Murray opened the package that exploded in his face April 20, he became the latest victim of a lone psychopath who has killed three people and injured 23 others in 16 bombings since 1978. The explosive device, the most powerful yet, was mailed along with four letters that for the first time hinted at the elusive bomber's tangled motives. The killer was also ready to deal: If a major publication printed his views, he wrote the New York Times, he would stop his terrorist campaign.

Psychological profiles now being updated by the FBI suggest the Unabomber is getting bolder and more communicative. He is believed to be a white male in his 40s with a grudge against technology and a fascination with wood. He signs his letters "FC." One recent message singled out a public relations company for "manipulating people's attitudes" and expressed a desire "to reduce society to small autonomous units." In a chilling missive, he taunted one victim, a computer scientist, saying, "If you'd had any brains you ... wouldn't have been dumb enough to open an unexpected package from an unknown source."

Why now? Was it coincidence that the Unabomber so named because he first targeted universities and airlines struck again just a day after the worst terrorist act in American history? A former member of the FBI's Unabom task force thinks not. "The Unabomber saw what happened in Oklahoma, he saw the children and he wanted to distance himself from it," surmises Lou Bertram. "I think it infuriated him. It was like he was saying, 'This is me. That was them.'"

That does not make the Unabomber any less diabolical than those responsible for the Oklahoma City tragedy. It only means he is now sharing the spotlight he apparently craves.

The Ted K Archive

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U.S. News & World Report. Vol. 118, No. 18, Pg. 36. Section: U.S. NEWS;
EXTREMISM IN AMERICA. <usnews.com/.../unabomber.PDF>

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