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Jan. 6 pipe bombs at RNC, DNC were inoperable, says ex-agent who contradicts FBI's official story

By Kerry Pickett - *The Washington Times*
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Nearly two years ago, a person wearing a sweatshirt with the hood pulled up, a pair of Air Max Speed Turf shoes with a yellow Nike logo, a backpack and gloves walked through Capitol Hill alleys equipped with what federal investigators say were two live pipe bombs.

Now a former FBI agent who worked on the case says the pipe bombs planted near the Republican National Committee and Democratic National Committee a day before Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the Capitol were inoperable.

The former agent, Kyle Seraphin, said that technicians who worked in the Joint Program Office for Countering IEDs told him that the devices left at the RNC and DNC were incapable of detonating.

“The devices were primitive and had all the components you would have for a bomb, but they weren’t assembled like a real bomb,” he said. “They would have never gone off. There was no chance they could have actually detonated. So they were inert devices. They just looked good.”

His account contradicts the FBI’s official version that the bombs could have gone off at any time that day — a story the bureau repeated in January when offering a \$500,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of a suspect.

“Although these bombs did not detonate, it is important to remember the suspect walked along residential and commercial areas in Capitol Hill just blocks from the U.S. Capitol with viable pipe bombs that could have seriously injured or killed innocent bystanders,” the FBI’s news release said. “Moreover, the suspect may still pose a danger to the public or themselves.”

“They would have exploded. They could have exploded,” Steven D’Antuono, the former assistant director in charge of the FBI’s Washington Field Office told ABC News chief justice correspondent Pierre Thomas last year. “They are viable devices that could have gone off and exploded, causing a lot of serious injury or death.”

Mr. D’Antuono has since retired from the FBI.

Mr. Seraphin stressed that investigators don’t know whether the devices were intended to be inert.

The FBI did not respond to a request for comment.

Former FBI Assistant Director Christopher Swecker said the bureau sometimes withholds or circulates incorrect information to protect the investigation, though he didn’t know if that was the case with the pipe bombs.

“You’re really not supposed to put out ... any information about the investigation. And that’s the golden rule, and initial reports are often not correct, or garbled,” he told The Washington Times.

“It probably still qualifies as a weapon of mass destruction, even if it’s the tiniest little pipe bomb ... whenever you have the ingredients together, even though you’re too incompetent to actually make it go off or wire it,” he said.

Former FBI agent Jonathan Gilliam also said it is common practice to withhold information that could reveal sources and methods or compromise leads in an investigation.

He offered another take, however. He said that if the FBI leadership had a “leftist” political agenda in the pipe bomb investigation, perhaps they “don’t want it getting out that there was nothing to this.”

The bomber is believed to have carried the devices, which were made of threaded galvanized pipes, kitchen timers and homemade black powder, in a backpack.

At a congressional hearing, Rep. Thomas Massie, Kentucky Republican, recently asked ATF Director Steven Dettelbach about the status of the pipe bomber investigation. The congressman said he assumed the devices were likely inoperative given the timers used.

Mr. Dettelbach refused to give any details about the ongoing investigation.

Mr. Seraphin, who was suspended from the FBI in April 2022 after refusing to get a COVID-19 vaccine and eventually fired last month for alleged unprofessional conduct, also criticized the bureau’s early handling of the pipe bomb investigation.

He said that within days of the discovery of the bombs, FBI investigators review closed-circuit video of the masked pipe bomber as he traveled through the Washington Metro system.

What’s shocking, Mr. Seraphin said, was that early on the FBI linked the suspected bomber to a D.C. MetroRail SmarTrip card. The card indicated the individual got off at a Northern Virginia stop after planting both devices on Jan. 5.

“So they tagged the entrance time and the exit time to that card to that guy. And then they found out who bought the card. And the guy who bought the card was not the guy who was using it,” Mr. Seraphin said.

“The card had never been used before. It was bought a year prior by a retired chief master sergeant in the Air Force, and he was a security contractor. So, he held a security clearance.”

Mr. Seraphin and his team surveilled the retired airman, who lived in a Northern Virginia townhouse, for a couple of days and learned about his background.

Although Mr. Seraphin, who also served in the Air Force, wanted to approach the Air Force veteran and talk to him, his bureau superiors forbade him to do so before his team was removed from the case.

“I don’t know what they [eventually] did on that case, but I know that it was BS and the bombs were BS, and it seems like they had a good lead, and they could have run it down. But as far as I know, they never did,” he said. “He may still be occasionally surveilled. That’s how dumb it gets.”

Mr. Swecker, the former FBI assistant director, said he couldn’t explain why the Air Force veteran wasn’t more aggressively pursued.

“That’s a lot of good lead material there to work with. And you can peel back layer after layer using that information. I’m just astounded,” he said. “It just doesn’t add up. There’s just way too much material there to work with. ... There’s just too much video, financial transactions, a car, a Metro card. There’s just too much to work with there to not know who this guy is.”

The devices were placed outside the two buildings between 7:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. on Jan. 5, 2021, but law enforcement did not find them until the following day.

U.S. Capitol Police and agents from the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives were called to the RNC’s office at about 12:45 p.m. on Jan. 6.

Another call came in about 30 minutes later about the device found at the DNC headquarters nearby, as agents and bomb technicians were still examining the bomb at the RNC. No one was hurt, and federal officials said both bombs were rendered inoperable.

The FBI released surveillance video that showed a person wearing a gray hooded sweatshirt, a mask and gloves placing one of the explosives under a bench outside the DNC.

Another surveillance video shows the same person walking in an alley close to RNC headquarters before the bomb was planted there.

When offering the \$500,000 reward in January, the FBI said it has poured significant resources into the pipe bomb investigation.

The bureau said its agents and its partners in law enforcement have conducted approximately 1,000 interviews, visited more than 1,200 residences and businesses, collected more than 39,000 video files and assessed nearly 500 tips.

“We remain grateful to the American people, who have provided invaluable tips that have helped us advance the investigation,” said David Sundberg, assistant director in charge of the FBI Washington Field Office. “With the significantly increased reward, we urge those who may have previously hesitated to contact us — or who may not have realized they had important information — to review the information on our website and come forward with anything relevant.”

“Despite the unprecedented volume of data review involved in this case, the FBI and our partners continue to work relentlessly to bring the perpetrator of these dangerous attempted attacks to justice,” he said.

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