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Connecting

April 19, 2015

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A special Connecting report:

Remembering Oklahoma City bombing: 20 years later

Twenty years ago Sunday, the nation and the AP focused on the bombing in downtown Oklahoma City that killed 168 people and marked the first significant terrorist attack on U.S. soil.

The country lost some innocence that day. Terrorist actions were supposed to happen in Europe or the Middle East, not in the middle of the country.

For AP, it was a total team effort. The entire Oklahoma crew and dozens of other AP staffers from around the country were committed from the start, at 9:02 a.m. April 19, 1995, until the execution of Timothy McVeigh in Indiana in June 2001.

Today's special edition of Connecting brings you the memories of some of those who covered the story for The Associated Press on that fateful day. **Lindel Hutson** (Email), who was Oklahoma City chief of bureau at the time, leads off the memories and shares those of others who were involved in the coverage.

For the AP wires this weekend, the AP produced the following:

AP Was There:
20 years later, the original AP dispatch reporting Oklahoma City bombing

By JUDY GIBBS

EDITOR'S NOTE: On April 19, 1995, a former U.S. Army soldier parked a rented Ryder truck packed with explosives outside a federal building in Oklahoma City. The blast killed 168 people and injured more than 500 others, and the attack is the worst homegrown terror attack on American soil.

The bombing came only two years after the first attack on the World Trade Center.

Former U.S. soldier Timothy McVeigh was convicted on 11 counts of murder, conspiracy and using a weapon of mass destruction in the blast, and was later executed. Another ex-soldier, Terry Nichols, was convicted on similar charges for his role in the bombing and sentenced to life without parole, because the jury deadlocked on the death penalty. The two were motivated by contempt for government, the hatred sharpened by the 1993 federal raid on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas.

Twenty years later, the AP is making the original story and photographs available.

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OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) - A car bomb ripped deep into America's heartland Wednesday, killing at least 33 people and leaving 200 missing in a blast that gouged a nine-story hole in a federal office building.

The dead included at least 12 youngsters, some of whom had just been dropped off by their parents at a day-care center.

The government had received calls from six people saying they were from different Muslim groups, asserting they were responsible for the deadliest U.S. bombing in 75 years.

Click here to read more.

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Here are the memories of some of those who covered the story:

By Lindel Hutson

Former Oklahoma City Chief of Bureau

Twenty years ago Sunday, the nation and the AP focused on the bombing in downtown Oklahoma City that killed 168 people and marked the first significant terrorist attack on U.S. soil.

The country lost some innocence that day. Terrorist actions were supposed to happen in the Middle East or Europe, not in the middle of the country. And one of our own was not supposed to light the fuse.

For AP, it was a total team effort. The entire Oklahoma crew and dozens of other AP staffers from around the country were committed from the start, at 9:02 a.m. April 19, 1995, until the execution of Timothy McVeigh in Terre Haute, Ind., in June 2001.

It was a story with many moving parts, and Assistant Managing Editor Mike Silverman noted in the May 5, 1995, Dialogue that "every regional and national writer in the system was thrown into the story, whether in Oklahoma City or on a related assignment...''

Executive Editor Bill Ahearn wrote a staff memo later that said, ``In Oklahoma City, we soared...''

I recently asked some former staffers for their recollections of that day and the succeeding coverage.

For me, the day began by dropping off the company car for servicing at Downtown Goodyear. A service tech drove me back to the office, about five miles away, and about 8:45 we drove past the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. It would be two days before the FBI let me get back to the car.

I'd no sooner sat down at my desk when there was a muffled roar and the building shook. I remember looking at News Editor Linda Franklin and we sort of shrugged and went back to work.

Almost immediately, things began to move, and they would not stop moving for a long time. The phones started ringing, and everyone in the newsroom turned to the TV which showed a huge cloud of black smoke over downtown.

At first we thought, gas-line explosion. But within minutes, TV was showing stunning video: the north face of the Murrah Building blown away.

Judy Gibbs-Robinson, who this April 30 will be inducted into the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame, was the first of what would become a legion of AP staff to report on the destruction from Timothy McVeigh's fertilizer bomb.

``I began seeing broken windows far north of downtown and pulled off Broadway around 10th or 9th and parked,'' Judy says. ``I started walking south toward downtown on Robinson, my feet crunching broken glass. (I still recall vividly the low-heeled brown straw shoes I was wearing; they were trashed by the end of that day from glass and, later, rain.)

``People here and there were coming out of buildings but no one knew what had happened. I opened my microphone and began dictating what I was seeing and hearing as I hurried south. I sent my audio later to AP Broadcast.

``I was still recording when I got to approximately Robinson and Sixth,'' she said. ``By now there were people everywhere on the street - much confusion and speculation. I saw injured children getting emergency treatment. My voice choked up a bit on the recording I was making.

``These were kids from the YMCA day care - most weren't hurt that badly. At the time, I knew nothing about the kids in the Murrah Building daycare.''

Judy later would become AP news editor North Carolina and now is faculty adviser to the student newspaper at the University of Oklahoma.

It soon became clear that this was not a gas explosion. Block after block of damage and too many badly hurt people spelled something more significant.

As local network affiliates had their signals picked up nationally, people around the

country saw the destruction.

Staff photographer David Longstreath said he kept seeing blood in the gutters - ``a lot of blood.''

``I photographed a man with shards of glass sticking in his face like daggers,'' he said. ``A little girl, a trickle of blood running down her temple, wore a blank stare and held tight to a stranger...

``Madness, utter madness,'' David wrote. ``Who would do such a thing? Later we would find out that it was one of our own.''

David, who now lives and works in Thailand, was one of only 14 photographers nationally who had been chosen to experiment with the new high-end Nikon digital cameras. Digital photos and smart-phones now rule, but in 1995 professional use of digital equipment was in its infancy. The good news was that David quickly had usable images. The bad news: the early cameras had very short battery life and low resolution.

He said the story was ``shot with images that were a mere 1.7 megs. Consider today my Canon shoots raw images at 21 megs per file.''

David was back in the office and at his desk with me looking over his shoulder at his photos when a bespectacled, sandy-haired young guy came in offering to sell us pictures

from the destruction.


© Charles Porter IV/ZUMA Press/Corbis

You have to consider that we're maybe two hours after the blast, and swamped and not high on our agenda was looking at amateur pictures. But Charles Porter IV held in his hand 35mm prints which had been processed at WalMart.

I thought the courteous thing to do was at least flip through the images before I sent him packing. I was maybe halfway through when two pictures stunned me. They were the photos of a policeman handing the body of tiny Baylee Almon to firefighter Chris Fields. The next photo showed Fields looking down at a bloodied and dirty Baylee. It would become the iconic image of the Oklahoma City bombing and it would win a Pulitzer Prize for AP and Porter.

I struck a quick deal with Porter to buy the images, and tried without success to get him to sell me the negatives. I also couldn't help but wonder what other amateur images would walk through the door.

The image of Baylee and Fields took up only about a quarter of the negative. The quality still was very good, compared to another similar image taken at almost the same moment by Lester E. LaRue, an employee of Oklahoma Natural Gas (ONG).

Porter's image took on a life of its own via the AP. It made front pages around the world. It ended up on the cover of Time magazine, while LaRue's was on the cover of Newsweek. LaRue eventually was fired by ONG when he tried to commercialize his photo. ONG won a federal lawsuit claiming it owned the rights to the picture since LaRue was on company time and using a company camera.

Fields is nearing 30 years as an Oklahoma City firefighter. He told The Tulsa World this week that the picture symbolizes the best and worst aspects of the bombing.

"I've heard people say that it kind of wraps everything up into one picture, and I guess that makes sense," he said. "You know, you look at it and you can see everything, the rescue effort, the innocence that was lost. It's all wrapped up in one image. I know I'll never be able to forget her."

Baylee, who would now be 21, was one of 15 children killed in the building's daycare center.

Aron Almon Kok stood by her daughter's chair at the bombing memorial this week and told the world that it's these anniversaries that are the worst.

"I know that when there's an anniversary, like the fifth anniversary of the bombing or the 10th or whatever, that people are going to come calling. But what's hard is Baylee's milestones - when she would have been a teenager, or been able to drive."

"It's OK," Kok said, resting one hand on Baylee's memorial. "We know it's coming, so we get ready for it."

Rochelle Hines, who spent much of her AP career as night supervisor in OKC and now

teaches at the University of Oklahoma, remembers interviewing Aron Almon.

`` ... She told me about how hard it was to cope with what had happened because she saw her child's image in the arms of firefighter Chris Fields everywhere. She also mentioned that she had attended a support group of family members, and got an earful from those who believed the stories of their children and grandchildren were not being told.

``One of them, Earnestine Looney, told me she wasn't angry at Aren, but felt slighted because her grandson, Domenique London, and the other kids weren't receiving as much attention. She said the picture of Baylee broke the world's heart, but that some children had been pulled out the rubble without their heads''

The AP image of Baylee saddened the entire world, and many people sent money to Almon. Some envelopes were addressed simply: ``To the mother of the baby in the picture.''

Porter was simply a nice young guy who stumbled into something unexpected and it changed his life. He has shied away from publicity in recent years. Locally, we kept up with him for a long time. Longstreath got him press passes to photograph sporting events. He eventually left OKC and I've lost track of him.

As the story unfolded, AP sent a legion of troops to Oklahoma City.

Assistant Managing Editor Mike Silverman arrived. National and regional writers included Sharon Cohen, Dan Sewell, Chris Sullivan, Fred Bayles, Bob Dvorchak, Julia Prodis, Ted Anthony, Pauline Arrillaga, and George Esper, the former Saigon bureau chief.

Sally Buzbee, now the AP Washington bureau chief, was here, along with Ann Levine and others from the General Desk.

Assistant Bureau Chief Fran Richardson, News Editor Peg Coughlin and Amanda Davis were here from Kansas City.

Arizona News Editor George Garties, now bureau chief in Chicago, worked the bombing, as did Katie Fairbank from Dallas and Harry King from Little Rock.

Michael Sniffen in Washington was invaluable in working his federal connections. Photographers included John Gapps III from Des Moines, Ric Bowmer from Houston, Pat Sullivan from Dallas, J. David Phillip from Houston, J. Pat Carter, an Oklahoma City freelancer who later would work fulltime for AP; Lacy Adkins and Jodi Steck from Los Angeles and Amy Sancetta and Elisa Amendola from New York. Also, the late Jerry Laizure, the Norman Transcript photographer who did such great work for Oklahoma AP.

Other Oklahoma City staffers at the time were Owen Canfield, Ron Jenkins, Cara Robertson and Victoria Wispell.

Thanks to Linda Franklin and Longstreath for helping me compile the list and our apologies to anyone we have inadvertently omitted.

Doug Ferguson, then Tulsa correspondent and now AP's golf writer, was at Perry, Okla., with Dvorchak to cover McVeigh's transfer from the county facility there to federal custody. ``There were a thousand or more people on the streets that surrounded the courthouse,'' he said. ``Longstreath, if I recall, had gone to a hardware store and bought a wooden ladder to be able to shoot over the people. McVeigh finally emerged from the courthouse into a convoy of cars, and the crowd let out a louder `boo' than anything I had ever heard at a sporting event.''

Linda wrote that the AP team in Oklahoma City worked together so well ''that the Oklahoma Highway Patrol was convinced at one point that we had somehow tapped into their fax machines and phone lines to come up with the names of the victims. It got us a visit from the OHP spokesman on a Sunday morning. We were just doing old-fashioned reporting - calling funeral homes - to get the information well before it was released by the medical examiner's office.''

Kelly Kurt, who would become Tulsa correspondent, was at a hair salon in Tulsa to have highlights put in her hair when she got the call to drop everything and get to OKC.

``The stylist had just put on the first round of chemical hair color,'' she said. ``I ran out of the shop with chemicals still in my hair and headed to Oklahoma City. ..''

She recalls her time covering the story as ``a blur of 18- to 20-hour days, death tallies, sitting at the site in the rain waiting for updates, wearing clothes that other AP staffers brought from home because I didn't have time to get back to Tulsa for other clothes.

``I went in to the Journal Record Building and saw 4-feet long daggers of glass sticking in the sheetrock. I remember the parades of headlights as the funerals began.

``I learned to take notes with a pencil, rather than a pen, in the rain. I lived on peanut butter and jelly sandwiches from the Red Cross van. I remember finally looking at my hair a week later and discovering that it had turned a weird shade of orange.''

Kelly was assigned to write about the news anchors who came to town.

In her story, she mentioned that many of them arrived as celebrities, with limos and a full complement of lieutenants. This didn't set well with Tom Brokaw of NBC.

Brokaw wrote a letter to Kelly protesting the implication of special treatment, and especially that there was a limo waiting. He said it was the only vehicle available.

I wrote Brokaw that we weren't singling him out (which we weren't) and said everyone - Brokaw included - was somewhat overwrought by what was going on and more than a

little tired. He quickly wrote back that he had overreacted and offered apologies to Kelly. He said he would drive her around his Montana ranch in his pickup if she ever was out there. She has not made the trip.

Staffer Libby Quaid said she remembers working at the bomb site ``for days on end and meeting people from publications all across the country and helping them out. I ran into many of those people later when I moved to Washington. I learned to keep some basics in my car - a raincoat, durable shoes - because you never know what you might be sent to cover and when, or how long you'd have to stay there. It got cold at the bomb site.''

Pat Casey, who would leave Oklahoma City for AP New York and later work for the Chinese news agency in Beijing, remembers: ``The Red Cross feeding us. CNN's Bernard Shaw steady and helpful. The OKC fire department spokesman giving us locals a few minutes lead on most of his news. Sitting in my car and talking with Billy Ray Cyrus for a few hours on an overnight because he just wanted to see and mostly duck the media.''

As visiting staffers poured in, finding a place for them to work became an issue. Fortunately, I was on good terms with building management and they let us use a vacant office space next door.

Chief of Communication Ron Bellafato and technicians Harold Percival and Larry Hamlin made things work.

Hamlin, who recently retired from AP, says, ``We were using Nokia terminals at the time and the kind folks at the East Brunswick production facility sent us all they could get their hands on. We also had a ton of photo equipment shipped in.

``We pulled cables and set up terminals, printers and phones in one room for AP personnel and visiting members. We also set up a room with LD phones for AP photographers and visiting member photographers. Normally when we ordered a phone line from AT&T, the wait time was a standard 19 working days. On this occasion our contact at AT&T asked us what we needed and usually got the line in the next day, if not sooner.

`` I don't think there was a nook or cranny in the office that didn't have a table of some type with a terminal on it. I also remember the food! Lots of food! I think we had food from just about every restaurant in Oklahoma City and Edmond.''

Although staffers at the bomb site had to fend for themselves for food, staff in the bureau was treated to a catered dinner every night, compliments of AP. I think that to this day I'm missing a few receipts, but to their credit the treasurer's office in New York never raised too many eyebrows.

As things began to slack off and our staffing helpers began to leave, it became apparent that coverage of the bombing was going to continue and that one person on our staff would be assigned exclusively to the coverage.

That person was Paul Queary, a tenacious and savvy young reporter who had come to us well trained by COB Eva Parziale and News Editor Sally Hale in Portland, Ore.

We were given a temporary staffer to replace Queary, who did excellent work ferreting out stories in the months after the bombing. Much of this was coverage of the legal aspect of the bombing for McVeigh, Terry Nichols and Michael Fortier. Queary also followed the case to the federal courts in Denver.

Because much of downtown was declared a crime scene and blocked off, two days passed before I could retrieve the company car at Goodyear, a couple of blocks west of the bomb site.

When I finally picked up the car, I was surprised that it was the only car on the lot that didn't have smashed windows or bomb debris on it. Turns out that the service tech dropped me off then stopped at a doughnut shop north of downtown. The car didn't have a scratch.

The OKC bombing remained the nation's worst terrorist attack until Sept. 11, 2001. Late the afternoon of 9/11, I received an email from Sam Boyle, the NYC bureau chief and an old friend from my General Desk days.

The note said simply, ``Sorry to knock you out of first place.''

Kelly Kurt Brown, former AP Tulsa correspondent:

I was supposed to have the day off and so I'd scheduled an appointment to have highlights put in my hair. The stylist had just put on the first round of chemical hair color when she got a phone call from someone she knew in OKC that something big had happened (you guys were probably the ones reporting this.) I called the office immediately and was told to get to Oklahoma City. I ran out of the shop with chemicals still in my hair and headed to Oklahoma City. I was going about 90 mph and being passed by highway patrolmen, so I knew it had to be huge. I still didn't really have any details but was getting what I could from radio reports that perhaps there'd been a huge natural gas explosion.

I went first to the OU Children's Hospital because there were reports of children being taken from the building to there. At the hospital, I interviewed many distraught parents. Some were quickly reunited with their children who had been at the YMCA. Other parents I interviewed at that time would later bury their kids. I will always think about the bombing in terms of those anxious faces, those parents who still had hope that things would turn out okay. Now that I'm a parent, those faces haunt me.

Later in afternoon I was sent downtown. It had started to rain. I ran into J. Pat Carter and started walking with him toward the building from the side which remained largely intact. At one point we passed a man who was standing in the street next to a twisted vehicle axle. He was pointing to it saying something about how it had come from near the federal building. I didn't make much of it. It turned out to be the axle of the Ryder truck, the critical piece of evidence in the investigation. Just after that, I saw the wrecked face of the building for the first time. It was then that I finally began to understand the magnitude of what had happened.

The next week was a blur of 18- to 20-hour days, death tallies, sitting at the site in the rain waiting for updates, wearing clothes that other AP staffers brought from home because I didn't have time to get back to Tulsa for other clothes. I learned to take notes with a pencil, rather than a pen, in the rain. I lived on peanut butter and jelly sandwiches from the Red Cross van. I remember finally looking at my hair a week later and discovering that it had turned a weird shade of orange. I went in to the Journal Record Building and saw 4-feet long daggers of glass sticking in the sheetrock. I remember the parades of headlights as the funerals began.

The bureau had been transformed from its usual quietly humming self. It was exciting to meet the AP editors and national reporters who came to help out. It was fascinating to see how they crafted the material we called in from the site into tightly woven stories. I was 25 at the time and had a lot to learn. (On the first anniversary of the bombing, I was the one assigned to craft the story from the reporters calling in. Mike Silverman was there, leaning over my shoulder as I typed. My first five words had typos. I told him I had trouble working with someone looking over my shoulder. He told me to get over it and write. In

those two seconds, I learned I could write with someone looking over my shoulder!)

I also remember how hard the local staff worked. Their spouses made meals for us. The first funeral story I wrote had a decent lede until Owen Canfield suggested a way better one about a preacher commenting on a crying baby and how good that crying sounded. I remember feeling in awe that I got to be part of this amazing team. It really changed everything for me. When I returned to Tulsa two months later, I no longer felt like a cub reporter. I felt like I could handle most any reporting situation because of what I had learned from the people around me.

The worst reporting memory I have of the bombing coverage was being sent to the airport to capture the arrival of Terry Nichols' 12-year-old son, who was coming there for questioning. It was a frenzy of reporters. The child and a woman with him got off the plane and were immediately being chased by reporters and TV crews. I chased along too for a bit, saw a camera hit the boy in the head and then got disgusted about the whole thing and decided I wouldn't be part of it. Instead, I went down to the rental car area and waited. Sure enough, after awhile, they both turned up there, alone. I quietly asked the woman if there was anything that she could say regarding why the boy was there, etc. She politely told me she couldn't. I apologized for the whole terrible scene upstairs and she looked at me with gratitude. I felt I learned then that we can never forget our humanity when we are reporting.

The other thing I learned, of course, was not to cross Tom Brokaw. :)

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Judy Gibbs-Robinson, former Oklahoma City staffer and now faculty adviser to the University of Oklahoma student newspaper:

* I remember our building shaking from the explosion and Linda sending the intern (can't remember her name) downtown before we knew what had happened.

* A few minutes later, still not sure what had happened but realizing it was BIG, Linda told me to head down there too. I passed the intern on the highway; she'd had a small fender-bender. This is the only reason I became the "first AP reporter at the scene"; otherwise, it would have been the intern.

* I began seeing broken windows far north of downtown and pulled off Broadway around 10th or 9th and parked. I started walking south toward downtown on Robinson, my feet crunching broken glass. (I still recall vividly the low-heeled brown straw shoes I was wearing; they were trashed by the end of that day from glass and, later, rain.) People here and there were coming out of buildings but no one knew what had happened. I opened my microphone and began dictating what I was seeing and hearing as I hurried south. I sent my audio later to AP Broadcast.

* I was still recording when I got to approximately Robinson and Sixth. By now there were people everywhere on the street -- much confusion and speculation. I saw injured

children getting emergency treatment. My voice choked up a bit on the recording I was making. These were kids from the YMCA day care -- most weren't hurt that badly. At the time, I knew nothing about the kids in the Murrah Building daycare.

* I turned west and walked through growing chaos, including lots of emergency medical people. Not far from the Journal-Record building I interviewed a man in a business suit. He looked perfectly normal from the front, but when he turned around, the back of his suit jacket was in tatters.

* We didn't all have cell phones back then but someone left a landline phone on a busted half wall of one building and let people use it. I called in for the first time from that phone.

* I remember a long line of nurses (?) in scrubs and learned they were going into the blast site in shifts; those in line were waiting to replace some already working at the site.

* Later, it rained. By then I'd been assigned to the media corral where a PIO came by and briefed us occasionally. It was cold, wet and miserable waiting for those briefings.

* When I finally got back to the bureau that night, it had been transformed. People I'd known from the General Desk (including Mike Silverman) and others I didn't were there and in charge. New banks of computers had been erected in the reception area. The place I'd left in the morning had been transformed into something I barely recognized.

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Linda Franklin, Oklahoma City news editor who later worked with the Dallas AP:

Here are a few of my memories and thoughts to go along with all the fine offerings you've already received.

The Oklahoma AP was the perfect definition for the word teamwork with the Oklahoma City bombing story. It was a story that everyone dived head first into covering never knowing where all it would take us, but knowing that we were the ones who had to bring every detail to life for people around the world. And they clung to every word and photo, trying to understand just as we were what had happened.

From the moment I asked Owen about the view on the television and we had reporters scrambling for the scene, this story was in the most capable of hands - the Oklahoma team assisted by colleagues from all over the country. It was odd to settle into a rhythm where you didn't have to call the General Desk - you just had to turn to the editor at the next terminal and where the next cycle's stories for both the state wire and the national were hashed out in Lindel's office.

The burgeoning AP team in Oklahoma that spring worked well together - so well, in fact, that the Oklahoma Highway Patrol was convinced at one point that we had somehow

tapped into fax machines or phone lines to come up with the names of the bombing victims. It got us a visit from the OHP spokesman on a Sunday morning. We were just doing old-fashioned reporting - calling funeral homes - to get the information well before it was released by the medical examiner's office.

We learned quickly to make the point that we - the AP - would be there long after national media organizations had packed their bags and headed to the next big story. That helped some as the days wore on.

Sending Doug off with David and Dvorchak for Ponca City in pursuit of Timothy McVeigh. Mapping out plans for staffing the bomb site 24 hours a day with a staff that would never give up. Making sure that national writers knew the details about Oklahoma that were second nature to us. And then figuring out who we could dispatch to Ardmore when a tornado struck. Every day was filled with news.

One day I realized that I hadn't been near a computer terminal all day because I was just circling the room to answer questions from whomever was calling my name at the moment - national reporter, Oklahoma City staffer, photo editor, and on and on.

On Saturday after the bombing, my neighbor Anita Chambless and her 10-year-old daughters came over to our home briefly. Kristin and Kendra were part of the children's choir who would be singing at the memorial service the next day and they were excited. I almost felt guilty to be happy for them.
We all took so much away from that story - from the way we went about gathering facts to talking to people to organizing news coverage. All were made stronger.

Now, I watch television shows that make reference to the Oklahoma City bombing or Timothy McVeigh and am amazed that it has been 20 years since the news story that former FBI spokesman Dan Vogel told someone would be the biggest story of my career.

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David Longstreath, former Oklahoma City photographer who now lives in Thailand:

Bombs go off in Boston, I see the smoke and fire and then people shattered and dead. Eighteen years ago on a street in downtown Oklahoma City the scene was the same. Running up the street that day towards the Alfred P Murrah Federal Building I kept seeing blood in the gutters, a lot of blood. Following the blast, people cut and bleeding came out and sat on the curbs, the blood flowed in a steady streamed it seemed.

All around, following the truck bomb that partially leveled the Murrah building and killed 168 that day, were incredible scenes of horror. I photographed a man with shards of glass sticking in his face like daggers. A little girl, a trickle of blood running down her temple wore a blank stare and held tight to a stranger. Bodies with no heads, mangled humans remains left tangled and twister. Madness, utter madness. Who would do such a thing? Later we would find out that it was one of our own.

The day the bomb went off I carried one NC2000 (News Camera 2000) into that madness. This first digital camera was a vision of the future by the Associated Press and I, along with 14 others, had been chosen for this photography experiment.

I did not have a backup film camera with me that day. I had planned to use this new tool at an Oklahoma Governors news conference set for that morning, a photo op of sorts with college basketball players that seemed perfect or so I thought to continue my learning curve of the camera.

Instead I ran into the Oklahoma City bombing scene with the NC2000 which at the time had a notorious problem with battery life. I knew it would not take long to drain the power so I shot as much as I could as fast as I could. I was able to fill two portable disk drives then the camera was dead. I headed back to file.

I suppose if you were keeping score I was the first AP staffer to carry a digital camera into a major spot news story like this. History such as this gets lost in the cubicles of corporate headquarters though and at this point of my life who really cares?

On that day and the days that followed a crew of shooters, John Gaps III, Ric Bowmer, Pat Sullivan, J Pat Carter, David Phillips and myself took great risk to get it right and made the camera work. Others came into help but this first day was when madness was in full bloom all shot with images that were a mere 1.7 megs. Consider today my Canon 5d mk 2 shoots raw images at 21 megs per file.

When Timothy McVeigh was discovered locked up in a city jail in Perry, Oklahoma, for speeding, I raced the 90 miles to the scene with a reporter. Along with John Gaps III we

photographed his walk from the county jail to federal custody. Six seconds of history on 12 frames shot with a 300mm lens. Ten minutes later on a borrowed phone in a Perry, Okla., insurance office across the street, Gaps and I filed our digital images to AP headquarters in New York. Later when given the thumbs up, we found the only steak house in town, ordered t-bones and beers and sat silent for the entire meal. Both exhausted, spent would be a better description. The next day our coverage was the front page of most of the newspapers of the world. Digital had come of age in the heat of a major news story, again. In my mind that night driving back I knew the president of the company, Lou Boccardi, was smiling. My head was spinning and kept spinning for a long time after that.

Six months later though I was suffering Post Traumatic Shock. The company may have offered help, I don't recall though it being there for me. I doubt I would have gone, I was of course the strong silent type. I soon discovered my life was in shambles. My marriage of 24 years dissolved. I went from being depressed to being manic. I now cried where I heard cowboy music on the radio. When offered a position in Thailand I said yes without thought. This was the out I had been looking for.

I'm 63 years old now, loving retirement, loads of photos to shoot and fun doing it. I do not regret a day of the past 18 years.

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Former Oklahoma City night supervisor Pat Casey, who later worked for AP in New York and later the Chinese news service in Beijing:

Was sleeping after a night shift when the bomb exploded and briefly woke me. Glanced outside and thought it strange to have thunder on such a clear day and went back to sleep. Woke up later to numerous messages on my answering machine to call the buro immediately. Thought that maybe Lindel was irked that I had a buro laptop, so I called expecting something along those lines. Owen answered and told me to come in immediately because the federal building had been bombed. Didn't believe him at first because he always liked to play jokes. We went back and forth until he finally told me to turn my TV on and I saw the bombing for the first time. Was completely shocked and said I'd be there immediately. Sped at 90-plus on amazingly empty highways to get to the buro and when I walked in, it was like stepping into Oz. The newsroom was jammed with busy reporters and shooters and more were arriving by the hour. The phones were ringing constantly. The techs were wiring additional computers everywhere as fast as they could and David was setting up additional photo operations in another nearby office suite. The rest of that day was a blur but do remember not going home again until about 10 a.m. the next morning.

And in a mish mash, I remember noticing the name of a good friend's wife on the victims list while compiling it that first night. (She survived fortunately). Being taken aback while driving to the bomb site for the first time at how much damage there was to other buildings besides the courthouse. Being held against a building at gunpoint by an

overzealous OKC PD swat team while going to my car to get a coat because the bomb-site overnights were freezing. (I think Owen and David also were accosted by the police at other times). Staffers from the local TV stations being kind and accommodating at the scene. The Red Cross feeding us. CNN's Bernie Shaw steady and helpful. The OKC FD spokesman giving us locals a few minutes lead on most of his news. Sitting in my car talking with Billy Ray Cyrus for a few hours on an overnight because he just wanted to see and mostly duck the media. The smell of dead bodies when the wind blew from the south after a few days. All of OKC coming together to do whatever they could to help the rescue workers and the victims and their families. EVERYBODY in the buro selflessly working their butts off for 18 to 20 hours a day for weeks on end.

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Larry Hamlin, long-time Oklahoma City tech who recently retired:

I don't remember exactly what I was doing at the time, but I remember you coming back and asking us if we felt the building shake. I didn't feel anything but, on the other hand, I don't feel most of the earthquakes we have. I went out to the news room to see what was going on. The first images I saw on the TV monitors was from one of the TV station helicopters in the air and broadcasting live video as it approached the back side of the Murrah building. They moved around to the front side and you could see the entire front of the building missing. That's an image that will probably be imprinted in my memory for a long time.

When we realized how big this was going to be, we (TM Ron Bellafato, former Technician Harold Percival and me) started getting equipment ready. We were using Nokia terminals at the time and the kind folks at the East Brunswick production facility sent us all they could get their hands on. We also had a ton of photo equipment shipped in. Fortunately, the building we were in had some empty space and the property managers gave us free access to it. We pulled cables and set up terminals, printers and phones in one room for AP personnel and visiting members. We also set up a room with LD phones for AP photographers and visiting member photographers. Normally when we ordered a phone line from AT&T, the wait time was a standard 19 working days. On this occasion our contact at AT&T asked us what we needed and usually got the line in the next day, if not sooner.

I don't think there was a nook or cranny in the office that didn't have a table of some type with a terminal on it. Everything was running smoothly, for us tech types, until one night we had a storm roll through. Lightning took out several of the Nokia terminals. We isolated the trouble to one circuit board. No problem. Easy fix. Just call East Brunswick and have them next day ship some circuit boards. Big problem! They didn't have any boards or terminals. I discussed the problem with former Technician Mike Hostettler and he told me what usually happens is a very small surface mounted IC chip gets fried when lightning hits the receive side of the circuitry. He shipped the chips and using a very large magnifying glass and very small soldering iron, we were able to repair all the boards. If I remember correctly that is the only hardware problems we had. Another thing I remember is we had next to no trouble calls from our state members which made our job a lot easier. I also

remember the food! Lots of food! I think we had food from just about every restaurant in Oklahoma City and Edmond.

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Former Tulsa correspondent and now AP golf writer, Doug Ferguson:

A late arrival in so many ways, but here are a few contributions that standout. I was in Tulsa and still remember the urgent ("There are reports of an explosion in downtown Oklahoma City" or words to that effect) coming across at 60 words a minute on Line 09.

Once we got a handle on the severity of the destruction and loss of lives, I was asked to drive down that afternoon. I didn't really start until the next morning, but you can imagine how jarring it was to pull into a hotel and the only parking lot was next to a Ryder truck.

A week or so after the bombing, there was a makeshift day-care center in the YMCA building for the Murrah building kids. I'll always remember a sign in the weight room at the Y asking its patrons to please set the weights down softly. The day-care center was in the room below, and they worried that the rumble of large weights being set down would scare the children.

Robert Dvorchak from Pittsburgh was among several of our fine national writers who came in to help. Once we learned that McVeigh had already been in custody in Perry, Bob and I drove up there for his transfer to a federal facility in El Reno. There were a thousand or more people on the streets that surrounded the courthouse. Longstreath, if I recall, had gone to a hardware store to buy a wooden ladder to be able to shoot over the people. McVeigh finally emerged from the courthouse into a convoy of cars, and the crowd let out a louder "boo" then anything I had ever heard at a sporting event.

I don't remember which night it was, but Rochelle was working the late shift at the bombing site and we went down there to bring her some dinner. I was with Sally Buzbee and one other writer. There were four of from AP, including Rochelle, when Gov. Frank Keating came by with the news that they had ended the search for more survivors. Rochelle was taking notes. Sally was dictating.

(In a twisted way, perhaps the most disturbing part of this development was that we heard later the LA Times and called the general desk to question the news because they didn't see it on TV. Sign of the times, maybe).

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Former Oklahoma City night supervisor Rochelle Hines, now an adjunct professor at Oklahoma University:

I worked a night shift on April 18, so I didn't know about the blast until Lindel called me at

9:15 a.m. and told me to go to downtown OKC. I threw on a jumper and some boat shoes, sped toward I-35 and was fortunate to get behind several Oklahoma Highway Patrol troopers who were speeding up the interstate from the south, sirens blaring. When I arrived at the downtown exit about 9:40, I couldn't believe what I saw: the north side of the building looked like it had been cut with a jagged knife, there was broken glass and debris underfoot. People were walking around dazed, some with bandages on their heads and wounds, and several women were crying because someone they knew or a loved one was in the building. I found Judy, and we were on hand when information was released at two news conferences that it was a terrorist attack, and there was a daycare in the basement.

By nightfall, a surgeon spoke to the media and recounted how he had to amputate Dana Bradley's leg to extract her from the rubble of the building. It stormed terribly, and I ended up staying at the bombsite overnight wrapped in a trash bag and eating a bologna sandwich from the Salvation Army. I left the site the next morning at 7:45 a.m. The next few nights, I reported on the death toll and talked to any rescue team workers who were willing to speak. I remember Doug arriving one morning to relieve me when we saw Gov. Frank Keating, who had just spoken with national media but was good about talking to Oklahoma-based reporters. Doug asked him about the status of the rescue operations, and Governor Keating said that it had transitioned into a recovery operation. He hadn't said that to any other news outlet.

As the weeks passed, I began to work on stories about the victims and their loved ones. I interviewed Aren Almon, whose daughter, Baylee was among the children killed in the building. She told me about how hard it was for to cope with what had happened because she saw her child's image in the arms of firefighter Chris Fields everywhere She also mentioned that she had attended a support group of family members, and got an earful from those who believed the stories of their children and grandchildren were not being told. One of them, Earnestine Looney, told me she wasn't angry at Aren, but felt slighted because her grandson, Domenique London, and the other kids weren't receiving as much attention. She said the picture of Baylee broke the world's heart, but that some children had been pulled out the rubble without their heads ...

Not long after that, I was on hand for a news conference about Dana Bradley, who was receiving a prosthetic leg. Dana lost so much on April 19, her mother and daughter were killed and her sister lost her ear and had significant brain damage. Dana blamed herself for the deaths, asking herself why she didn't just turn around, take her family and leave. Jannie Coverdale expressed a similar pain. She was sick that morning, but went to work anyway and left her grandsons, Aaron and Elijah, at the daycare. When I went to interview her, she showed me their rooms, beds made and toys arranged the way they were when the boys were alive. She told me she was angry at God for taking them away from her ...

It was such a team effort, from Lindel arranging the logistics to Linda herding the copy (she was always there) and Ron, Harold and Larry setting up dozens of computers and phones so that everyone, AP staff and member employees, could work. Kelly and Doug pretty much lived in OKC for weeks, Owen and other sports writers telling stories from the perspectives of athletes. David, J. Pat, Jerry Laizure (God rest his soul) and all the photogs, Cara kept everything running, alerting us to important phone calls, making sure our guests

had somewhere to stay and feeding us. The General Desk folks (Ann) who made our copy look really good. It was a historic moment, one that unfortunately, would be repeated six years later ...

And from Kansas...

Former Topeka newsman Matt Truell:

That was a long time ago. I remember going to work at the Kansas Statehouse on the morning after the bombing in a relatively new suit. Late morning Lew asked me if I had any money in my checking account, and when I said yes, he replied, "Good. You're going to Junction City." I got home three weeks later. That night I slept on a concrete bench in the Geary County Jail's lobby in case an arrest was made. One wasn't, but the AP was there, just in case.

The scene at Junction City, where the bomb-carrying Ryder truck was rented, and where the bomb was made, was chaotic. Federal agents and reporters from all over the country, (actually, all over the world) had descended on this military town. Rumors were rampant. At one point there was talk of a late-night FBI raid in nearby Ogden, KS, which never materialized. A reporter from Boston and I made a midnight trip there just to be sure.
I did a lot of driving around in the Junction City area during the day; at one point I followed FBI cars as they fanned out across the countryside, and would stop where they stopped and talk to whomever they talked to. That was not very productive, so I gave it up. The FBI set up a command post at Fort Riley, which I tried keeping under surveillance until a couple of nervous-looking MPs ran me off and told me not to come back without a military escort.

The sequence of events was pieced together over a period of days. Clerks at the motel where Timothy McVeigh stayed, at the Ryder Truck Rental, at the gas station where McVeigh gassed the truck up and at the next-door sandwich shop where he ate were repeatedly interviewed, by myself and others. I also interviewed bar maids and waitresses at strip clubs where Nichols went.

As the investigation shifted to the Geary County Fishing Lake (I think that's the name of it) where the bomb was made and to Harrington, where Nichols lived, the chaos subsided a little. We did a lot of standing around at that point. I had to make a mad dash down to the federal courthouse in Wichita, where Nichols was being arraigned (the only time I ever saw him) and then drove back to Harrington, where the FBI was still slowly and meticulous searching his house with a robot.

Most of my reporting was done by car phone and by pay phone (remember those?) to the Kansas City bureau. News Editor Kent Zimmerman did an outstanding job. I couldn't have asked for a better rewrite man.

The lingering mystery about the Oklahoma City bombing is the existence of John Doe. The

FBI said it was a case of mistaken identity. I don't know if John Doe II was part of the conspiracy, but I do know there are people at Junction City who swear someone who meets the description was with McVeigh when he gassed the truck up and ate at the sandwich shop.

Former Topeka newsman, now correspondent, John Hanna:

I recall Matt Truell telling me that he'd had to stay overnight in Junction City and had checked in at the Dreamland Motel, the same place McVeigh stayed in. The clerk had a strange sense of humor and put him in McVeigh's room, and at least one international film crew knocked on the door in the middle of the night to get a shot of the room.

My most vivid memories were from Herington, where Terry Nichols lived. I remember hanging out with the crowd outside the law enforcement building for hours, as Nichols was being questioned. It was there I struck up a conversation with a kid who worked at a quarry, who told me that blasting caps had been stolen from there and how weird that seemed now. Of course, when the indictment came down, the stolen blasting caps were mentioned; Nichols had worked at the quarry.

The other vivid memory from that time was seeing a jar on the desk of the little motel in Herington, donations for bombing victims' families being collected by the Herington Skunk Hunters Club. I had to ask, and a young man explained that skunk hunting was a pastime for some of the young men. They'd go out in the country at night in their pickups and play hide and seek, with the hiders turning their lights off while tearing around the countryside. Also, the motel gave me a room next to the air conditioning unit for the whole complex, so I got very little sleep.

I think AP still has the binoculars I bought so that we could spy on the FBI from a distance as they searched around the fishing lake near Herington. I think everyone in Herington -- literally every man woman and child -- was interviewed by some reporter at least four times.

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