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BEAN BRAINS



When four Minnesotans were busted for possessing poison made from castor beans, they became the first Americans convicted under a new law aimed at domestic terrorists

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The Oregon-based CBA Bulletin featured this ad, which offered the recipe for making ricin from castor beans.

RICIN BEANS

When four Minnesotans were busted for possessing ricin, a poison made from castor beans, they became the first American convicted under a new law aimed at domestic terrorists.

BY SARI GORDON

PHOTOS BY CHRIS PETERS

When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.

—Matthew 13:19

But if water has been put on the seed and a crooked fall on it, it is unclean for you.

—Leviticus 11:38

In the small towns on or near rural Highway 55 — Brocton, Sedan, Starbuck, Terrace — the news has been the same for years. Snowmobiling accidents, auctions and Ag Days make headlines. With the exception of a few letters to the editor and small notices of property seizures, political aberration rarely registers a blip. For the past decade, however, a handful of men and women with anti-government beliefs have gathered in homes and storefront churches to discuss their out-of-the-ordinary ideas about the U.S. Constitution,

religion, common law, militias and their suspicions about the media, crime and taxes.

But the news changed in spring 1991, when 32-year-old Bert Henderson, who shared these anti-government views, pulverized a handful of castor beans in a shed behind a house at 304 Lake St. in Alexandria. Not only did he release one of the most toxic chemicals on earth, Henderson and three friends went on to become the first to be charged, tried and convicted under the 1989 Biological Weapons Anti-Terrorism Act, thus heightening concerns of domestic terrorism in a state that prides itself on political tolerance.

A tour of the Minnesota towns where the so-called conspiracy to possess a biological weapon was hatched is an expedition through the looking glass of an alternate legal and moral universe. On paper, the men who plotted to kill U.S. marshals, judges and sheriffs seem sinister. But one trip through the rabbit hole of their beliefs dissolves any phantasm of

one-stepping neo-Nazis. Instead, a vision of amateur lawyers firing paper shotguns filled with Bowery Boys legales, apocalyptic paranoia, mope perspectives and good, old conspiracy theory kookiness prevails. If Henderson hadn't crushed up the castor beans, most the men involved would have seemed no one humbler than the bookish, bearded pos who hung around military paraphernalia shops, gun shows and spiatball games.

The irony is not that these anti-government fanatics are now lining up in prison cafeterias for three square meals a day at taxpayers' expense, but that they are now in line to soon chiseled into the pantheon of such glowing martyrs as Posse Comitatus leader Jeffrey Keith and Ruby Ridge, Idaho, tax protester Randy Weaver.

The men claim they're being imprisoned for their beliefs. The government contends that the four men were convicted because they are armed and dangerous.

At the time he was arrested, Dennis "Bert" Henderson was a drifter. A former Marine who was divorced, he had no fixed address. He lived with friends and grew up with around Alexandria. In the black and white photo taken when he was arrested, Henderson's face is a fishy white oval hiding behind jaunty handlebar mustache and large, thick nose. In person, Henderson is talkative and mopy — a human exclamation point.

It was late 1960 when Henderson ran into an old acquaintance and ex-convict, 36-year-old Ed Lovelink. During the years since Lovelink had served his two-year sentence from 1979 to 1981 in Indiana for a felony assault, he had been a truck driver and worked for a cattle breeding company and a lumber mill near his hometown of Garfield, a few miles northwest of Alexandria. At the time they met up, Lovelink was unemployed and had run off of his state unemployment checks.

It was later revealed in court that Lovelink had a big stack of ultra right-wing literature on Henderson. Among the papers was a subscription to Oregon-based newspaper, *The CREW* (accused by authorities to stand for Citizens Bar Association), which carried articles about conspiracies, Christian vigilantes, plans for "Proof that John Paul II is a Mason of a Kind" and "The Holocaust is a BIG LIE!" One advertiser in the bulletin offered "Suits of Justice and retribution specifically mailed for this present wicked age of oppressive viciousness and corruption, where evil THRIVES to reign supreme, unhindered, and unchallenged. Nature's God has provided us with our own way to 'kill-a-cat...' Beneath each of our envelopes images displayed in our ad were the words 'including instructions for extracting the deadly poison 'ricin' from castor beans.'"

Soon after receiving the bulletin, Henderson told Lovelink that he had placed an order for the castor beans. Lovelink, who claims he had a pang of conscience, turned to his father-in-law. He and his father notified a friend about Henderson's purchase. The friend informed an agent at the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, who turned Douglas County Detective Jerry Colette. After completing a year-long local investigation and subsequent inquiry, the FBI used Lovelink as an informant on Henderson and three other men for plans to murder government officials, which the government says was spearheaded by the newspaper.

Throughout the summer of 1991, Henderson was living out with Lovelink at his Garfield address, which included an outdoor gun range. Henderson, who had had a run-in with Idaho County Deputy Sheriff Dave Ahlquist

over fireworks, talked big about getting revenge against Ahlquist.

Court documents say it was Henderson who introduced Lovelink to Richard Oelrich, a 51-year-old from Alexandria, who was respected in the underground for his common-law knowledge. Oelrich, a fireplug of a man with a broad head and bright blue eyes, has the clear and steady mien of a shoot Paul Newman. If, as the government claimed, Oelrich and Henderson were the kingpins of an anti-government conspiracy, Henderson was the hopped-up Beavis of the bunch and Oelrich, the steady-eyed logician. (Apparently, however, Oelrich's legal expertise was not enough to keep the Internal Revenue Service from seizing his Alexandria home in 1994 for back taxes and unpaid bank loans that totaled between \$30,000 and \$40,000.)

Court documents state that late that summer, Henderson brought a baby-food jar that was three-quarters filled with white powder to Lovelink's house. He called the powder "Maynard." Lovelink said that Oelrich once told him the powder could cause a "bureaucratic flu" among government officials, locally and in the Twin Cities.

Though Henderson did not refer to the substance as "ricin," he told Lovelink that he had ordered the castor beans he used to make the powder from "Maynard's Avenging Angel Supply," in Ashland, Oregon. Oelrich was acquainted with bean supplier Maynard Campbell, a hero in tax-protester circles, according to Lovelink's testimony. (Campbell is currently serving two years in Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary after a 12-hour standoff with up to 70 law-enforcement agents before he was taken into custody on charges of illegal logging in northern California.) Henderson also showed Lovelink the recipe he used to process the beans into ricin, Lovelink testified.

That summer, Henderson had been crashing at the Alexandria house of an old friend, 55-year-old LeRoy Wheeler, and his wife, Judy, according to an affidavit by FBI Special Agent Daniel Lund.

Since Henderson was broke and homeless, Wheeler paid for and took delivery of the mail-order beans. Rather than process all of the beans, the two planted a few of them in the garden behind Wheeler's home, according to Lovelink's testimony.

By February 1992, Wheeler had grown tired of his house guest. An acquaintance of Wheeler's, 55-year-old salesman Duane Baker, says that without calling him first, Wheeler drove 50 miles south from Alexandria to Sedon to unload Henderson at Baker's house. Baker says that he and his wife, Mary Jane, normally would have taken in the transient Henderson, but "one of our ... sons was having problems with [his] wife and got the god-danged cops all involved and we just didn't have time for it."

Baker says he sent Henderson to stay with his son Doug, who lived down the road. Although that son is now in prison for possession of ricin, many say Duane, an anti-government doomsayer, was the real target of the FBI and local police. Duane and his family had long antagonized local cops, including suing the police for trespassing on their property.

Doug and his wife, Colette, lived with their two children in a mobile home on property adjacent to Duane's. Doug, who is now 31, had worked as a welder and carpenter. Though Colette was suffering from lupus and unable to work outside the home, the couple allowed Henderson to stay, with the agreement that he would help out by chopping wood for their fire-heated home. After about a month, according to Colette's testimony at Henderson's trial, they too kicked Henderson out, claiming that he hadn't held up his part of the agreement.

When he moved on in March 1992, Henderson left various belongings around the Baker's home, including a coffee can containing a baby-food jar full of white powder. By that time, the police had known about the ricin for about a year.

Shortly after noon on May 21, 1992, Colette walked into the Pope County Sheriff's office in Glenwood. No one was around, so she spoke with Joan Holtberg, the sheriff's secretary.

The young woman had come to the sheriff's office to turn in some very poisonous material of her husband's. "Ms. Baker stated that she planned to leave her husband," according to FBI agent Lund's affidavit, "because he had pointed a shotgun at her and threatened to kill her." Colette also said that she feared for the lives of her parents and that her children were



**There is no known
antidote to ricin
poisoning, which
induces abdominal
pain, vomiting,
bloody diarrhea
and decreased
urine production.
Death by ricin
has been reported
to occur within
10 minutes.**

in peril because of the contents of the can. She opened the Folger's coffee can for Holtberg and took out the contents one by one: the Gerber's baby-food jar, a pair of gloves, a nail-polish bottle filled with green gel and a yellow Post-It note.

On the note, written in a childish scrawl, were the words, "Doug, Be extremely careful! After you mix the powder with the Gel, the slightest contact will Kill you! If you breath [sic] the Powder or get it in your eyes, your [sic] a dead man. Dispose of all instruments used Properly. Always wear rubber gloves and then destroy them also. Good hunting!! P.S. Destroy this note!!" A smiley face had been drawn at the bottom.

Colette told Holtberg to be very careful with the substance, saying that the poison would "kill on contact."

Two years later, on August 4, 1994, about 20 agents stormed Wheeler's mother's farm south of Alexandria, arresting LeRoy Wheeler on charges of possessing a biological substance for use as a weapon. Wheeler did not put up a struggle. Neither did Doug, who was arrested later that same day for the same crime.

Hours after his arrest, Wheeler signed a nine-paragraph confession hand-written by agent Lund implicating himself in the possession of a biological weapon. Doug never made a confession. After five more days of questioning, Wheeler and Baker were released on \$10,000 bond.

Even before the trial of Doug Baker and LeRoy Wheeler began on February 23, 1995, the two defendants began their campaign to bring their own brand of justice to the proceedings. Their defense attorneys had to wrestle with their clients' legal maneuverings — and those of Doug's dad.

About a month before his son's trial, Duane Baker put an ad in the Alexandria *Echo Press*, requesting jurors for a "constitutional jury trial." Though the trial was advertised as "an historic common law trial," Baker now says he cannot remember the name of the judge who presided at the VFW club meeting room. About 15 people showed up and found both men not guilty. Duane Baker issued and distributed an official-looking notice stating that his son had been found innocent and that the United States need not continue its prosecution.

Nevertheless, the Bakers drove their son the 250 miles to the Federal Building in downtown St. Paul for the three days of his real trial in February 1995. Relying on testimony from the FBI's toxicologist, Collette Baker, informant Lovelink and FBI agent Lund, the prosecutor, Assistant U.S. Attorney Nate Petterson, quickly wooed the jury to his side. Though eyewitness testimony was scarce, the toxicologist provided a lengthy description of the chemical ricin.

The defense brought only two witnesses: Doug's mother, Mary Jane, who was begrudgingly compliant, almost surly, on the stand, and a family friend named Tim Schirmer who had lived at Doug and Colette's. Schirmer, the prosecution revealed to the surprise of the defense, was himself an ex-convict.

Doug Baker's court-appointed attorney, Scott Tilsen, the articulate and ruffled public defender who worked on the Qubilah Shabazz team with the late William Kunstler, says he had no conflicts with his client's alleged anti-government beliefs.

The Baker family believed that the federal government had no right to convict or even to try Doug. Doug and Duane Baker clogged the federal clerk's office with letters and motions. They said they didn't want an attorney but, because of their views, they refused to sign documents dismissing their public defender. In a profusion of "writs," motions and other common-law commandments, Duane Baker made frequent references to the Uniform Commercial Code (the federal code adopted by each of the states to regulate interstate commerce), the Magna Carta, Supreme Court decisions, habeas corpus rulings and Fourth Amendment claims.

Tilsen says he had long conversations with his client's father, and agreed with many of his client's anti-government sentiments. Still, he says, "The bottom line is they're [the Bakers] just wrong. They want to believe that there's a secret answer to what's wrong with the world."

Despite his client's unpopular political beliefs, Tilsen never defended Baker's views. The government centered its case around the
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rich. The state merely had to prove — in this, the first prosecution of the Biological Weapons Anti-Terrorism Act of 1989 — that the men possessed the poison "for use as a weapon." Whether they ordered it through a Nazi fanzine or from the local hardware store was of little consequence.

"Let's say somebody publicly or secretly bitterly criticized the government, said it was awful, said it was terrible, that public officials ought to be shot for the jobs they're doing," Tilsen says from his office in downtown Minneapolis. "Let's say that same person buys himself three guns legally. Should we be worried about that? What if he goes out and buys himself a supply of rat poison? I guess the question is whether you connect the obtaining of something that is arguably dangerous with their politics."

Of those eventually tried for possession of ricin, Doug Baker best fits the role of patsy. His pre-sentence report portrays someone who had disliked school and who was indifferent to serious issues. When his father talked to him about politics, Doug said he couldn't care less. Doug had no previous criminal record and always paid his taxes. He didn't own a phone, drink or do drugs. Loverink, the state's only eyewitness, had never met Doug Baker, and had never claimed that Baker was part of the alleged conspiracy to kill government officials.

Tilsen says that Baker's mistake was letting Henderson stay at his home, where the poison was left behind. But what about the note addressed to "Doug," found in the can in Doug Baker's closet? Tilsen argued that Doug never saw the note, and that there was, in fact, another Doug — Doug Madison — hanging around that summer.



When drifter Bert Henderson moved in with acquaintances near this Pope County town, he brought along a jar of deadly poison that eventually sent him and three friends to prison.



Pope County Sheriff Mark Hedner says local residents think tax protesters are "crazy."

Although LeRoy Wheeler's fingerprints were found inside the gloves contained in the Folger's coffee can, private attorney Neal Shapiro says Wheeler was a nice guy who couldn't have been involved in assassination conspiracies. Asked why Wheel-

er grew the beans in his back yard and allowed ricin to be manufactured in his home, Shapiro, who was appointed to defend Wheeler, says, "Why do people collect guns? I don't know why. Lovelink talks about Wheeler and Henderson and Oelrich as blowhards. . . . 'We're gonna kill this guy!' and 'This son-of-a-bitch arrested me!' just like a bunch of guys down at the bar who get a couple of beers, and they're gonna do this and they're gonna do that, but they never do it! These guys are great talkers, but they never do anything."

Neither defendant spoke much in the courtroom. Wheeler, who testified at the subsequent trial of Henderson and Oelrich, did not take the stand. On February 28, 1995, after just four hours of deliberation, the jury found both defendants guilty of possession of a chemical for use as a weapon. Though there are no sentencing guidelines for conviction under the Biological Weapons Act, the law specifies that life imprisonment is an option. Petterson asked Judge Robert Renner for 10-year sentences.

Before both men were sentenced to 33-month prison terms on May 18, 1995, Doug Baker read a 10-minute statement in court, with references to himself as "the aggrieved party," claiming that the federal government

had no jurisdiction in his case and that his court-appointed attorney had no license to practice law.

Doug Baker is currently serving his sentence at the Rochester Federal Medical Facility and working in the commissary. Wheeler, whose confession and testimony were instrumental in the convictions of the other two defendants, is being held at the Federal Prison Camp in Duluth.

Eight months later, Petterson represented the government again in charges against Richard Oelrich and Bert Henderson.

At the time of the Baker-Wheeler trial in early 1995, no others had been charged with ricin-related crimes. But newspaper accounts of the trial referred to two unknown "mystery men" whose involvement seemed to overshadow the proceedings. To secure testimony from Baker and Wheeler against others still being investigated, the government declined to name Henderson and Oelrich, the two men it planned to bring to trial.

In July, the government filed "Secret Indictments," naming Bert Henderson and Richard Oelrich, who were then arrested. Both were charged with possession and "conspiracy to possess" ricin. Henderson was arrested



Otter Tail County Sheriff Gary Nelson says common-law activists are "articulate" and nonviolent.

on July 27, 1995, at an Alexandria apartment. Oelrich was nabbed a few days later in his car near Detroit Lakes. A police search of Oelrich's car turned up a veritable survivalist's supply cabinet: nine 30-06 cartridges, (Continued on next page)

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999 rounds of .22 ammunition, three boxes of shells for a Russian-made SKS assault rifle, as well as clothing, bedding and canned foods.

Henderson and Oelrich's two-day trial began October 23, 1985. Each attempted to represent himself and to introduce politics to the proceedings. Henderson rejected outside counsel, and Oelrich allowed only minimal help from his court-appointed attorney, Douglas Scheel, who spent most of the trial in the back of the courtroom. The trial was punctuated with a flurry of objections from the two defendants, among them the claim that they would not allow their names to be used in open court. After the state's handwriting analyst testified that the smiley-face note was written by Henderson, Henderson cross-examined himself.

Government prosecutors proceeded much as they had in the earlier trial, though for this trial, they put LeRoy Wheeler on the stand. And this time, the jury returned a pair of guilty verdicts after two hours. At Oelrich's sentencing on February 19 of this year, he stood at the podium in his tan jail-house coveralls and plastic sandals, dutifully reciting 20 minutes worth of "aggrieveds," referring to himself as "this freeman character, having lawfully expatriated" and to his arrest as "kidnapping." As Oelrich read, he instructed the court reporter to place a name in uppercase letters. The reporter rolled her eyes. Oelrich's two stern-faced sisters and one brother sat in the courtroom. They refused to comment, saying only that their brother had been convicted for "having a big mouth."

Oelrich was sentenced to 37 months in prison and was later moved, presumably due to a heart condition, to an out-of-state facility. No relatives were at Henderson's sentenc-



Bert Henderson



LeRoy Wheeler



Richard Oelrich

ing, when he gave his final statement to the court in tones of rising indignation. After he read his statement, he turned to the nearly empty courtroom and pulled his fist down in a sign of athletic triumph, "touchdown!"

Chief Judge Paul Magnuson seemed to be shuffling papers during each of the men's statements, glancing up occasionally as though he was looking at a mute television at a noisy bar. He sentenced Henderson to 48 months in prison.

Since the trial, Henderson and Oelrich each have sent court officials and reporters bills for up to \$1 billion for "libel of my Christian name."

Duane Baker says that his son has a new-found interest in studying and is poring over law books in his cell. The senior Baker's hope is that Doug will "be able to get out and speak to huge numbers of people and tell them exactly what this is all about. And I think [he and Colette will] be pretty good advocates of people that have made a commitment to one another in marriage to say, 'Hey, if you got problems, try to deal with them yourself. Do not involve 911, never call in the police, never involve the state, because once you've got them in your life, you'll never get 'em out.'"

U.S. Attorney David Lillehaug says, "The sentences are disappointing. It's clear that there are at least several more jail-house lawyers in federal prison."

The irony is not that these anti-government activists are now lining up in prison cafeterias, but that they are in line to become chiseled into the pantheon of martyrs like Posse Comitatus leader Gordon Kahl and Ruby Ridge tax protester Randy Weaver.

Peterson: What did Mr. Henderson say about the effect of ricin on people?

Loverink: He laughed and said that, as I understand it, 'They shit themselves to death.'

— Court transcripts

Ricin, along with numerous other legal and lethal homegrown toxins and biological poisons, is "about as complicated [to produce] as manufacturing beer and less dangerous than refining heroin," according to *America the Vulnerable, the Threat of Chemical and Biological Warfare* by Joseph Douglass and Nell Livingstone. The concoction the four Minnesota men allegedly agreed to make was simple and heinous. To extract the ricin, Henderson boiled down the crushed seeds a few times through an elementary distillation process. The trick then was to get the powder into the victims' bodies.

The government claimed that the four men mixed the ricin with aloe vera in order to make it easy to smear on door handles, steering wheels and inside someone's shoes. Then they added dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO), a powerful, commercially available solvent once popular among arthritis sufferers. DMSO creates a warm sensation when applied to the skin. Thomas Lynch, the FBI toxicologist who testified at both men's trials, said DMSO would speed delivery of the drug into a victim's bloodstream. When the men tested the DMSO on their wrists in Loverink's loft, they reportedly could taste the aloe vera in their mouths instantly.

The Department of Agriculture says that it's legal to sell castor beans, and numerous people involved in these cases say they can be purchased at "any hardware store." But at Lyndale Garden Center in Richfield, management pulls castor-bean packets out of

mixed shipments, jacks them in a safe upstairs and then returns them to the supplier.

The garden center sold two packages of 10 beans each to the *Twin Cities Reader* for \$1.39 apiece. The bush on the seed packet looks, at first glance, like marijuana. "CASTOR BEAN (*Ricinus communis*) forms a giant plant with huge fleshy leaves," the description on the back says. The seeds themselves are the size of grapes, with a brown mottled exterior and a small, whitehead-like tip.

There is no known antidote to ricin poisoning, which induces abdominal pain, vomiting, bloody diarrhea and decreased urine production. Death by ricin has been said to occur within 10 minutes, but the FBI toxicologist testified that the fastest a person could die from ricin poisoning would be three days. Ricin is viewed by many as a perfect murder weapon, since it virtually disappears from the body after ingestion.

Lynch testified that the powder manufactured by Henderson was 5 percent ricin, and amounted to about 129 lethal doses.

Despite doubt about an amateur's ability to properly extract ricin, many hopeful poisoners have turned to ricin through the years. Saddam Hussein reportedly included it on a list of desirable biological weapons. The most famous case of ricin poisoning was the 1978 assassination of Bulgarian exile Georgi Markov in London. Markov died when he was stabbed with an umbrella that lodged a ricin-filled pellet in his leg.

In 1983, FBI agents arrested two brothers who manufactured the toxin in Springfield, Massachusetts. They had managed to make an ounce of nearly pure ricin, which they kept in a 35-mm film canister. A Nashville neurosurgeon was recently charged with conspiring to kill another doctor by soaking the pages of a book with ricin. In Kansas City, Dr. Deborah



The former Laundromat in Brooten where Duane Baker held "religious" meetings that the FBI says were "secretive," anti-government confabs.

Green put castor beans in her husband's food, but he didn't die.

In December, Thomas Lavy was arrested for possessing 130 grams of ricin and became the fifth person in the United States charged under the Biological Weapons Act. Authorities first became suspicious when Lavy was detained at the Canadian border in 1993, while in the process of moving from Alaska to Little Rock, Arkansas. In addition to ricin, officials found 20,000 rounds of ammunition, \$98,000 in cash and "Nazi literature." On December 23, 1995, Thomas Lavy hung himself in his jail cell.

Many observers agree that, of those investigated, the most ardent anti-government partisan, the common-law patriot with the most highly evolved theoretical critique, is 36-year-old Duane Baker.

Duane, who has 11 grandchildren, looks remarkably young. His black hair is slicked back, with just a hint of a pompadour. He is rosy and dark, and wears a Dayton's Boundary Waters wool sports coat and jeans. On the bumper of his van is a sticker that says, "I love my country. It's the government I'm afraid of."

Sitting on the orange vinyl chair of the

Hometown Cafe in Brooten, just a few feet from the storefront where he used to hold religious meetings, Baker says he thinks his son went to prison so that Congress could justify the Biological Weapons Act passed five years before Doug's arrest.

He says he doesn't advocate violence, but he believes in the threat of a "one-world government." Putting innocent people in jail for "thought crimes" is just the beginning, he says. Gesturing to a binder swelling with papers relevant to his son's conviction, Baker lowers his voice. "They know that the truth is coming out. . . . They're getting scared," he says. Baker has created an artillery of literature, documentation and educational material in pursuit of his politics. He and his wife recently returned from Ohio, where they attended a seminar regarding their "rights."

A veteran "networker," Baker has sold vacuum cleaners and used cars, but his greatest vocational passion is his most recent one, CARE International, the "structured" selling organization that supplies him with tapes, literature, income and "product." He says he is in the "health and wellness" industry.

After lunch, he quickly pops several capsules of brownish powder into his mouth, explaining that he ingests and recommends the use of enzymes, "the life of the plant," which he claims have cured attention-deficit disorder. Baker refuses to travel by air because he believes that the "virus" known as Gulf War syndrome is more dangerous than AIDS and can be caught through airplane ventilation systems. When asked about ricin, he says, "Would a common, ordinary person living out in the boonocks know how to make ricin? I don't think so."

FBI agent Lund's affidavit stated that Baker and his sons "are avid advocates of 'people's rights' and have intimidated their entire

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neighborhood. They were heavily armed, and Duane Baker always carried a sidearm." When the FBI tapped Duane Baker's home and business phones for six months in 1993, the bureau discovered enough phone calls between the four men to substantiate suspicions of a conspiracy.

According to the FBI, Duane Baker "held weekly meetings, under the guise of religion, attended by his supporters." Lund's affidavit states, "Baker was very secretive about what transpired at the weekly meetings."

Until recently, Baker hosted meetings at the small storefront a few feet from the Hometown Cafe and Bowling Alley. The government alleges that the group was known as "The Patriot's Council." (In an interview in Anoka County Jail, Henderson called the Patriot's Council "the biggest bunch of sit-on-their-ass do-nothings I ever met"). Dennis Dalman, in the Alexandria *Echo Press*, reported that two confidential sources claimed that the Patriot's Council "was an informal group of people who have met off and on at various places in Central and West Central Minnesota, including St. Cloud, Alexandria, Glenwood and Starbuck." Others say the group claimed to be a campaign center for "Bo" Gritz's 1992 run for the White House.

Baker says he's never heard of the Patriot's Council. He says the meetings were at the Church of Israel, and that's where his son met LeRoy Wheeler, and that his old friend, Dick Oelrich, attended the small services led by Pastor Don Solomonson from Stacy. He said he finally broke up the church because he didn't want to endanger people's lives "like Waco." He claims there were helicopters and squad cars in constant surveillance of the former Laundromat. Asked about his political beliefs, Baker says, ominously, "One day something's gonna have to be done. There's gonna be cleaning. There's gonna have to be a housecleaning some way or another. It's gonna have to be a mass uprising of people. Good people who say this bullshit's all over. We don't want people who are in there for their own selfish motives who are promoting corporate America. We want people who have a concern for the average, working person."

Baker also says that if the *Twin Cities Reader* "twists and perverts" his words, he will "never, ever do another interview."

Mark Hedner, the sheriff of Pope County is a big man with a neck that spills over his star • I collar. He has bright blue eyes, a down-home style and unwavering dislike for the remaining "tax protesters" in his county. Hedner says the groups still operating in his county are the Patriot's Council and the tax-protesting Posse Comitatus, though he says most of that group's activity is centered in Todd and Otter Tail counties. Since the arrests, a couple of the most "avid" protesters, who were closely affiliated with the Bakers, "have moved out, thank goodness," he says. To Duane Baker's claim that his is a good family and that God will prove him right, Hedner says in true Minnesota downplay, "Well, we'll see. The investigation is still open. Four guys have been arrested, and who knows, there might be more."

"People don't put up with that bullshit. The neighbors think they're crazy," Hedner says. Asked if he wishes the rest of the protesters would leave town, Hedner says simply, "Yeah."

Douglas County Detective Jerry Werner, the detective who first investigated the case, will not comment on Duane Baker as an ongoing subject of investigation, but concurs with Hedner that there have been problems in Otter Tail and Todd counties. "They've

If Oelrich and Henderson really were the kingpins of an anti-government conspiracy, Henderson was the hopped-up Beavis of the bunch and Oelrich, the steely-eyed logician.

brought in speakers from the western United States, who are very militia-oriented," Wern says. Both men recommend speaking to Otter Tail County Sheriff Gary Nelson.

Another 50 miles northwest of Alexandria the stretch of highway is bleak and the fields close-cropped. At his office in Fergus Falls Sheriff Nelson is tightlipped about local political activity. He wears a brown uniform with dark brown trim and a large belt buckle emblazoned with "GOD, GUNS AND GUTS." Whether he is calculatingly quiet about local investigations or simply suspicious of outsiders, Nelson won't allow taping. He has a "Clinton Countdown" daily calendar and says, "There are a lot of investigations." The last he heard, a "common law" group requested permission to speak at the Todd County Courthouse, and they were granted rights for 100 people, but 150 showed up. According to local newspaper reports, right-wing jargon identical to that used by the four defendants during their trials was in abundance at the meeting. The *Henning Advocate*, for instance, reported last November that a group calling itself the "Justices of Our Old Supreme Court" "served" Sheriff Nelson with a 77-page document alleging that Otter Tail County is in violation of "Man's Law."

"I went," Nelson says. "They were articulate. They quoted from the Bible, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. There was nothing to disagree about." He says he has no problems with the regular meetings that take place in Browerville because "the Constitution is almost a sacred document, and they don't talk about anything violent."

He adds, defensively, "What about the SL and the Weathermen [the Weather Underground], the American Indian Movement and the Black Panthers and left-wing groups bombing draft places? Detroit. Watts. City after city went up in smoke. The liberal media elite said we were supposed to understand these misunderstood people. Violence is violence whether it's on the left or the right."

Duane Baker says he has no desire for violence. "All I can do is furnish information. Some of the seed falls on fertile ground, some of the seed falls on rocky ground, some of the seed germinates and grows up but never produces fruit — the Bible talks about it. All I can do is plant seeds. If they won't germinate within you, and it doesn't take root, that's not my problem. That's God's problem. He'll deal with you." ♦