

Case 13: Grecula

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Ronald Allen Grecula, aged 68, aspired to become a modern-day Spartacus, delivering the country from the grip of a government that is “corrupt and beyond the state of repair” and bent on “world domination.” He was distraught, in addition, over the fact that said government had given custody of his two children to his estranged wife after he had abducted them and taken them to Malta. So aggrieved, he set out to find al-Qaeda. Variouslly described in Todd Ives’ account as emotionally embattled, mentally unstable, depressed, bipolar, delusional, and possibly paranoid, he planned to furnish the terrorist group with a “superbomb” that he would fabricate while they helped him murder his wife and/or get her arrested on a drug charge. He never found al-Qaeda, but a jailhouse informant eventually led him to FBI agents who convincingly played the role.

Although Grecula never finished high school (and had been kicked out of Jehovah’s Witnesses for holding “extreme beliefs”) he had worked at welding, metal working, and tree cutting at various times. He had also once struggled without success to invent a “new technology” for internal combustion engines. Although his wife’s new boyfriend thinks Grecula’s “engineering background” gave him the skill to make a bomb, others are less convinced. In trying to impress his talents on the people he took to be al-Qaeda operatives, he assured them that his bomb could destroy everything within a half-mile with the force of a nuclear explosion. Enterprising reporters from the *Houston Chronicle* took this extravagant claim to local explosive experts—a pattern in terrorism reporting that is much too rare. The verdict of a Nobel Prize winning chemist about Grecula’s planned bomb: “If somebody was standing right next to it, it might kill them. Maybe.”¹

Grecula was sentenced to 5 years in 2006 and presumably has been released by now. The sentence seems quite light, at least in comparison with that given Gale Nettles (Case 11) who received 160 years for much the same crime.

¹ Harvey Rice and Renée C. Lee, “Experts doubt suspect’s superbomb would work,” *Houston Chronicle*, May 25, 2005.

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1. Overview

In May 2005, Ronald Allen Grecula, then a 68-year-old resident of Bangor, Pennsylvania, was arrested and charged with attempting to provide material support and resources to a foreign terrorist organization.¹ Grecula's arrest was the result of nearly three years of work from a confidential informant he inadvertently met in prison and from undercover FBI agents who pursued the case for several years after.² Grecula was angry at the United States government because he lost custody of his children, and this led him to prison, first in Malta, where he fled in 2000, then in Pennsylvania, where he went on to befriend the informant who helped bring him down in 2005. Grecula had contacted his prison source, not knowing his true identity, about building and selling a bomb to al-Qaeda in exchange for the custody of his children.³ Grecula ultimately hoped to have his wife killed or falsely accused of possession of drugs. A tip from the informant led to a series of taped phone calls and personal meetings with undercover FBI agents that all but put an end to Grecula's malicious pipe dream.⁴ He was taken into custody in Houston, Texas, and was eventually sentenced to five years in prison in September of 2006.⁵ Grecula is not Muslim and exhibited no ideological connection to jihad or any foreign community, but his explicit support of al-Qaeda was troubling. Grecula saw himself as a sort of modern Spartacus who had his family taken from him, had been beat up, and had been locked in prison.⁶ He justified his actions as a response to the evil, corrupt government that had taken away his children and locked him up.

2. Nature of the adversary

Ronald Grecula, 68 at the time of his arrest in 2005, was not Muslim and did not have the nefarious background that is typical to most terrorist plotters. In fact, up until the early 2000s, one would be hard pressed to find anything particularly suspicious about Grecula's history at all. Few records exist of Grecula's childhood and early adulthood, perhaps indicative of a fairly normal life up until his points of arrest. In 1959, Grecula married his first wife, Angelina Condo in Connecticut. where the couple went on to raise three girls and a boy.⁷ Grecula was known by his colleagues to have an impressive knowledge of engines and fuels, but he never graduated Staples High School in Westport,

¹ FOX News, "Pa. Man Arrested on Terror Charges," *FOX News Website*, May 24, 2005.

² Steve Esack and Romy Varghese, "He has a way of stepping on toes," *Morning Call*, May 25, 2005.

³ FOX News, "Pa. Man Arrested on Terror Charges."

⁴ Eric Lichtblau, "Trying to Thwart Possible Terrorists Quickly, F.B.I. Agents Are Often Playing Them," *New York Times*, May 30, 2005.

⁵ United States of America v. Ronald Allen Grecula, Sr., Judgment in a Criminal Case, Investigative Project, www.investigativeproject.org/documents/case_docs/374.pdf.

⁶ FOX News, "Pa. Man Arrested on Terror Charges."

⁷ Esack and Varghese, "He has a way of stepping on toes."

Connecticut.⁸ A noted career hopper, Grecula was a onetime land surveyor, auto mechanic, ironworker, and business owner.⁹ He held his job as an iron worker for a decade, where he gained considerable knowledge in welding and metal-working. Just two years after starting his tree cutting business, RR Tree Service, in 1985, Grecula and his son, Ron, Jr., began working on a new invention, referred to as “a new technology for gasoline internal combustion engines.”¹⁰

By 1988, Grecula and his wife had to refinance their house in Bridgeport, Connecticut, so he could continue to develop his invention.¹¹ He had racked up a \$60,000 debt by that point, leading him to seek investors in Europe and Florida.¹² It was during a trip to Paris in the late 1980s that Grecula met Monique, a French flight attendant.¹³ He went on to divorce his wife of 32 years in 1991 to marry Monique. By 1999, Monique Grecula stated that their marriage had gone through a depression.¹⁴ Grecula lost his business in Connecticut, and the couple moved to Florida to live in his father’s house.¹⁵ At this point, Grecula, according to Monique, grew more depressed and violent, even hitting her on occasion.¹⁶ In 1999, Grecula was out of a job, and Monique separated with but never divorced him after she found out he had also been hitting their son.¹⁷ Monique mentioned that Grecula had become a religious fanatic who was kicked out of his Jehovah’s Witnesses group because of unspecified extreme views.¹⁸ Monique also reported that Grecula became paranoid by 1999, believing that the world was coming to an end in 2000 and that the United States was controlled by evil forces.

The late 1990s seem to be the beginning of Grecula’s downward spiral from a man going through a midlife crisis to a bomb-plotting terrorist. Following a custody dispute with his estranged wife, Monique, Grecula abducted their two children, ages 10 and 3, and fled to Malta. In November of 2000, Monique alerted authorities that he had not returned home with their two children, Berenger and Emilie. On March 1, 2002, Grecula was jailed in Malta for overstaying his visa, and his children were returned to the United States. On September 12, 2002, he was arraigned in a federal court in New York on abduction charges. The case was later transferred to a Pennsylvania federal court where he was sentenced to six to 23 months in a Pike County Prison. On September 19, 2002, the federal abduction charges against Grecula were dropped, but he was charged with wire-tapping his wife’s phone in November of 2002.

It was in the Pike County Prison that Grecula met a man who the government describes as a confidential informant.¹⁹ On March 21, 2003, Grecula

⁸ Esack and Varghese, ““He has a way of stepping on toes.””

⁹ Esack and Varghese, ““He has a way of stepping on toes.””.

¹⁰ Esack and Varghese, ““He has a way of stepping on toes.””.

¹¹ Esack and Varghese, ““He has a way of stepping on toes.””.

¹² Esack and Varghese, ““He has a way of stepping on toes.””.

¹³ Esack and Varghese, ““He has a way of stepping on toes.””.

¹⁴ Harvey Rice and Renée C. Lee, “Experts doubt suspect’s superbomb would work,” *Houston Chronicle*, May 25, 2005.

¹⁵ Rice and Lee, “Experts doubt suspect’s superbomb would work.”

¹⁶ Rice and Lee, “Experts doubt suspect’s superbomb would work.”

¹⁷ Rice and Lee, “Experts doubt suspect’s superbomb would work.”

¹⁸ Esack and Varghese, ““He has a way of stepping on toes.””

¹⁹ Matt Birkbeck, “Terrorism suspect pleads guilty,” *Morning Call*, September 22, 2006.

was released from that prison and moved to Monroe County Prison on the wiretap charges.²⁰ On May 19, 2003, he was released from Monroe County Prison.²¹ After prison, Grecula grew angry at the U.S. government over the loss of custody of his children. He also blamed the U.S. government for a foreign policy of world domination.²² It was this anger toward the government and at the loss of the custody of his kids that would later push the already emotionally embattled Grecula over the edge.

Grecula had no immediately available health record; however, he was required to participate in mental health treatment during and after incarceration on orders from the federal district court judge.²³ After his arrest, his attorney stated that psychological testing revealed he was bipolar and delusional.²⁴ Perhaps Grecula's most revealing description is the one he held of himself. He referred to himself as a modern day Spartacus, having been imprisoned, beaten up, and his family taken from him.²⁵ It is not difficult to imagine the desperation and longing for revenge that Grecula was feeling when he attempted to contact al-Qaeda.

3. Motivation

Even in his old age, Grecula remained a man spiteful at his government and his situation. Never in his life had he held a steady job. His wild ideas of innovating combustion engines never came to fruition and cost him tens of thousands of dollars. Grecula was desperate to retain custody of his second set of children with Monique, which ultimately landed him in prison after he abducted them. He blamed the government for his hard times including his trips to prison and for the loss of custody over his kids. Grecula eventually told undercover agents that he had "no loyalty for America."²⁶ In a released excerpt of Grecula's telephone conversations, he told undercover agents that "This government is the most wicked and the worst it has ever been. They want to put democracies right in the middle of Islam... America is going to pay for that."²⁷ In comparing himself to Spartacus, Grecula justified his terrorist plot in stating that the United States, like Spartacus' country, was corrupt and beyond the state of repair.

Grecula sought out his confidential source (CS) from prison, looking to build a bomb for al-Qaeda in exchange for the custody of his two children.²⁸ Court documents later revealed that between July and December of 2002, Ronald Grecula and the CS discussed regaining custody of his children by having Monique Grecula either killed or arrested with drugs. In January of 2004, after his

²⁰ "Grecula Case Timeline"

²¹ "Grecula Case Timeline"

²² Lichtblau, "Trying to Thwart Possible Terrorists."

²³ "United States of America v. Ronald Allen Grecula, Sr., Judgment in a Criminal Case."

²⁴ Birkbeck, "Terrorism suspect pleads guilty."

²⁵ FOX News, "Pa. Man Arrested on Terror Charges."

²⁶ FOX News, "Pa. Man Arrested on Terror Charges."

²⁷ "The Terror of His Ways," *Harper's Magazine*, August 2005.

²⁸ FOX News, "Pa. Man Arrested on Terror Charges."

release from prison, he sent the CS a map to Monique's home in Woodlands, Texas attempting to have her killed or have drugs planted in her home.²⁹

Grecula's driving motivations appear to be a generally vindictiveness against the U.S. government and a desperation to regain custody of his children. His comments about the United States, though, must be tempered with the fact that he believed he was talking to an al-Qaeda agent. In this case, Grecula, of course, had to convince the undercover agent that he was really willing to attack the U.S. From this perspective, it is possible that Grecula came off more aggressive than he actually felt in order to persuade the "al-Qaeda operative." Still, when his contacts asked Grecula if he was okay "to kill a bunch of Americans," he responded "I can stand it."³⁰ If anything, Grecula's narrative seems to be one of a mentally unstable father who wanted more than anything to have custody of his kids. It may be the case that he solely wanted to send a message to America, but more likely Grecula's main motivation was to get his kids back at all costs. Of course, his time in prison and failed custody battles only soured his image of the American government.

4. Goals

Ronald Grecula was self-recruited for his terrorist plot and unknowingly worked for undercover agents. As Grecula was the sole actor in his plan, his goals were singular. His ultimate goal was to incapacitate his estranged wife, Monique, in order to gain custody of his kids. He wished to do this through building and selling an explosive device to al-Qaeda that would be used against American citizens.³¹ It remains unclear how exactly al-Qaeda would help Grecula regain custody of his kids. Perhaps this half-baked plan is a testament to Grecula's delusional nature. Before his arrest, Grecula claimed that something big was going to happen and that he was going to make a lot of money from it.³² Grecula seemed to have hoped to leverage his money and alliance with al-Qaeda to either kill off his estranged wife or have her falsely accused of possession of drugs. Thus, he had two goals. The first was to conspire with a terrorist organization to attack the United States and in return have the terrorist organization take out his wife for custody of his kids. The second concerned his grievances with the U.S. government.

5. Plans for violence

Grecula first met his confidential source in Pike County Prison in July 2002.³³ The two discussed Grecula regaining custody of his children, and Grecula explained that he would be willing to build bombs for terrorist groups, specifically seeking al-Qaeda. In December, he placed a \$2800 down payment to the CS's sister to purchase heroin to be used in a plan to set up Monique for

²⁹ "United States of America v. Ronald Allen Grecula, Sr., Superseding Indictment," Investigative Project, http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/case_docs/336.pdf.

³⁰ "The Terror of His Ways."

³¹ FOX News, "Pa. Man Arrested on Terror Charges."

³² Rice and Lee, "Experts doubt suspect's superbomb would work."

³³ "United States of America v. Ronald Allen Grecula, Sr., Superseding Indictment."

possession of drugs. In April 2005, after Grecula's release from prison, the CS informed DEA Special Agent Barry Robinson that Grecula was attempting to locate a buyer for an explosive device. In May, Grecula spoke to the CS in an FBI monitored phone call about building an explosive device for potential clients and "getting rid" of his wife. Shortly after this, Grecula placed a recorded phone call to a FBI undercover agent in which they discussed Grecula's dislike for America and Grecula's desire to have his wife imprisoned. During this time, Grecula also spoke to a flea market worker in Pennsylvania, inquiring about a "white light laser" to be used as a detonation device. On May 18, 2005, Grecula spoke to the undercover FBI agent stating that some of the components for the explosive device could be found at a hardware store. On May 20, he traveled from Pennsylvania to Houston, Texas to meet face to face with the undercover FBI agent posing as an "al-Qaeda" client. During this meeting Grecula revealed a briefcase containing the material "related to his ability to build an explosive device, his passport, and his expired pilot's license." He also expressed his willingness to help kill Americans, and even recommended possible targets. On the same day, agents recovered a residence mercury switch and a pound and a half of lithium nitrate.³⁴

Grecula had told the undercover agents that he had experience as a mechanical engineer and had experimented with alternative fuels and energy.³⁵ He reportedly wanted to target Washington D.C., New York, or even a Super Bowl.³⁶ Grecula talked about using a device to even take out the Federal Reserve Bank in New York, and believed that his bomb could "wipe out everything within 3,000 feet."³⁷ Experts who reviewed Grecula's bomb-making blueprints, however, thought differently. One of these, Robert Curl, Jr., a chemistry professor at Rice University who shared the 1996 Noble Prize in Chemistry, stated, "I can't imagine that he has any sort of superbomb."³⁸ Grecula appeared to be using a hydrogen and chlorine gas bomb, ignited by ultraviolet light. Curl believes that this would produce a mild explosion that might kill someone if he were standing right next to it and attests that the plans read "like somebody who is trying to get money."³⁹ If Grecula were trying to sell the bomb, he would most likely run into trouble from whomever he sold it to when it did not deliver. Of hydrogen and chlorine gas, Curl said, "If I was going to make a bomb, this would be one of the last things I would choose to do."⁴⁰

Grecula's plans were destined to fail from the very beginning, of course, because he never had contact with an actual terrorist operative throughout the whole ordeal. Once investigators obtained the evidence that they needed against Grecula, they detained him immediately. Even if Grecula somehow managed to contact a terrorist organization, he likely would not have gotten far. His bomb plan was suspect and ineffective according to experts. Grecula was not an

³⁴ "United States of America v. Ronald Allen Grecula, Sr., Superseding Indictment."

³⁵ FOX News, "Pa. Man Arrested on Terror Charges."

³⁶ Juan A. Lozano, "Texas Tall Tales, Or Terror Plot?" *CBS News Website*, September 10, 2009.

³⁷ Lichtblau, "Trying to Thwart Possible Terrorists."

³⁸ Rice and Lee, "Experts doubt suspect's superbomb would work."

³⁹ Rice and Lee, "Experts doubt suspect's superbomb would work."

⁴⁰ Rice and Lee, "Experts doubt suspect's superbomb would work."

experienced terrorist and was limited by his age. Any violence he was capable of would likely have failed to inflict much damage.

He was indicted on two counts. First he was charged with knowingly attempting to provide material support and resources to a designated foreign terrorist group, namely al-Qaeda. He was also charged with conspiring to distribute a controlled substance of less than 100 grams. Grecula pleaded guilty to count 1 on September 21, 2006. The remaining counts were dropped on the motion of the United States. He was sentenced to a term of imprisonment of 60 months with a three year term of supervised release.⁴¹ Although no new stories have been published about Grecula's case since his sentencing, his prison sentence should have ended in 2012, and he should now be in his period of supervised release.

6. Role of informants

As Grecula never actually made contact with a member of a terrorist organization, the informants played the sole role in finding and detaining him. The first informant was the confidential source he met by chance in Pike Country Prison. After Grecula was released from jail in 2003, he maintained contact with the confidential source over the next two years. The CS then informed the DEA about Grecula in April of 2005, and in May the FBI became involved in monitoring him.⁴² After about three weeks, Grecula was arrested by the FBI after a series of taped phone calls and meetings with the undercover agents.⁴³ After the meetings and with evidence found in Grecula's home, the FBI judged his intentions to be explicitly clear and acted.

Officials stated that "whereas people like Mr. Grecula might have garnered sporadic attention from investigators before September 11, or led to a long-term intelligence investigation stretching over years, undercover agents and prosecutors are now moving with urgent speed." United States attorney, Michael T. Shelby, believed that the risk of waiting was too great at the time. He stated, "Once we see that a threat is plausible, that it's real, and that person has the intent to carry it out and takes some steps to show it's not just idle talk, that's enough for us to move."⁴⁴

Some defense lawyers and civil rights advocates, though, believe that the government's tactics raise questions about possible entrapment of people who are lured into plots that the government is urging. Perhaps Grecula was drawn in in some degree by federal agents, but he did actively seek out a terrorist client and had gone as far as buying components of his proposed superbomb. It is true that his case might have been handled differently before September 11, but the FBI saw a credible threat and acted on it with deliberate speed.

If there were no confidential source or undercover agents acting as al-Qaeda, it is doubtful that Grecula would have caused any major harm. It appears his estranged wife was in the most direct danger. Grecula would have had no real

⁴¹ United States of America v. Ronald Allen Grecula, Sr., Judgment in a Criminal Case.

⁴² United States of America v. Ronald Allen Grecula, Sr., Superseding Indictment.

⁴³ Lichtblau, "Trying to Thwart Possible Terrorists."

⁴⁴ Lichtblau, "Trying to Thwart Possible Terrorists."

way of contacting al-Qaeda, and thus he would never have had a reason to proceed with his plan to assist terrorists.

There is an exceptional lack of clarity and information regarding the role, identity, and background of the confidential source and of the FBI undercover agents. The government seems to suggest that the CS was a prisoner who maintained contact with Grecula over several years and later decided to rat him out to the government. The CS appears to have had no government connection prior to alerting the DEA of Grecula's plans in 2005. Therefore, it is likely that the CS had no role in trying to lead Grecula on in his plot but rather acted as an outlet to Grecula's wild ideas until the government got involved. Of course, after contacting the government, the CS did pretend to connect Grecula with supposed al-Qaeda clients who were actually undercover agents. No information was released as to the scale of the operation or the number of FBI agents involved. Due to the nature of this case, it seems reasonable to assume that a large operation was not necessary.

7. Connections

As stated, Grecula had no connections to any real terrorists within the country or abroad. Throughout the entire ordeal, he was only in contact with a confidential source and undercover FBI agents. Grecula was entirely motivated by personal reasons.

8. Relation to the Muslim community

Grecula had no relations with the Muslim community. He was a Jehovah's Witness who was ostracized for his unspecified extreme beliefs.

9. Depiction by the authorities

In every aspect of Grecula's case, the plot did not garner much attention. Authorities handled the situation swiftly and diligently without stirring up much sentiment either positive or negative. Few public statements were made by the authorities. U.S. attorney Michael Shelby commented, "The very first priority of this administration and this Department of Justice is to stop another 9/11 attack and this is a success story in that effort."⁴⁵ Obviously, Shelby exaggerates in the sense that Grecula was not even close to capable of a terrorist attack of the magnitude of 9/11. Other than a few comments, the authorities chose to keep the majority of this case quiet.

10. Coverage by the media

The media never really picked up on this case. It was sparsely covered by the *Houston Chronicle*, Fox News, the *New York Times*, CBS, and a local Pennsylvania newspaper, the *Morning Call*. The media can hardly be said to have generated a reaction of any sort. Most of the journalistic response was reiterating basic facts of the case. The media's reaction can largely be described as factual but cursory, leaving many questions unanswered and many holes in the timeline of Grecula's interactions after 2000. The *New York Times* briefly highlighted the

⁴⁵ FOX News, "Pa. Man Arrested on Terror Charges."

political ramifications of the government's change in approach for pursuing terrorist suspects. The *Houston Chronicle* provided a great review on the practicality and chemistry behind Grecula's bomb plans. And, the *Morning Call* offered the best chronicle of Grecula's background and early life. Most of the stories broke during Grecula's initial arrest. No new stories have been published since his sentencing in 2006.

11. Policing costs

Henry Klingeman, a defense lawyer in New Jersey, stated upon Grecula's arrest that such cases as his are a waste of man-hours and money the FBI would be better spending on real threats.⁴⁶ It is hard to argue, though, that the FBI spent a significant amount of unnecessary manpower on this specific case. The whole operation involved a chance confidential informant and a handful of FBI agents that actively pursued the case for less than a month. The rest of the case involved sporadic monitoring of Grecula and occasional conversations either in person or via phone call. From the CS's first communication with Grecula, the case lasted under three years. Grecula's trial ended in an unceremonious plea—a rather speedy process compared to a full trial. No quantitative costs of the case were released.

12. Relevance of the internet

The internet was a non-factor in this case. All of the business with Grecula was completed over the phone or in person. Grecula himself was never reported to use the internet to contact the undercover informants.

13. Are we safer?

All signs point to yes—the public is safer. The United States can sleep easier knowing that Grecula did not get away with his plot to build a superbomb. The real question is to what extent the United States can sleep easy knowing that Grecula's plot was foiled. Well, the U.S. can go to bed not having to worry about rolling over onto a microscopic dust particle, either. Actually, Grecula, aged 68, posed no significant threat to the well-being of the country. His bomb, as he drew it up himself, was hardly capable of killing a single person standing right next to it. Furthermore, Grecula had no legitimate contact with any terrorist organization, and was unlikely to find one with his main source of communication being the phone. Friends and neighbors of Grecula in his hometown, Bangor, Pennsylvania, were skeptical that he posed any real threat. Some even suggested that idle talk about building a bomb may have spun out of control as a result of the FBI's tactics.⁴⁷

On the other hand, Monique Grecula's boyfriend, Manuel Mireles, said that Ronald Grecula was a dangerous man “at every level” and that he was relieved when the authorities arrested him. Monique herself said that Grecula made her fear for her life, and she feels safer now that he is in custody.⁴⁸ If

⁴⁶ Lichtblau, “Trying to Thwart Possible Terrorists.”

⁴⁷ Lichtblau, “Trying to Thwart Possible Terrorists.”

⁴⁸ Rice and Lee, “Experts doubt suspect's superbomb would work.”

anything, Monique and Manuel's testimony proves that Grecula was mainly a threat to a select few people. His core motive was to take out his wife and get sole custody of his kids. Thus Grecula posed the greatest direct danger to Monique, her boyfriend, and possibly even his children. Grecula was inexperienced, aged, and lacked the knowhow to successfully execute an operation of this magnitude. If there were no informants, Grecula would not have gotten far in his attempts to contact al-Qaeda and build a bomb. Perhaps the district court that sentenced Grecula took into account these unique aspects of his case, assigning him a distinctly light sentence of only five years in prison.

14. Conclusions

Grecula's case inevitably raises the question of how cases of domestic terrorism such as his should be approached by the United States government. Grecula lived a seemingly normal life for the majority of his years. He failed to graduate high school and career hopped for a while. He went through a sort of crisis after failed ventures in combustion engines. He had marriage problems and was tormented over the custody of his children. Aside from some wacky ideas on alternative energy and fuels, Grecula's narrative is not dissimilar to many others at this point. Grecula, though, began to show signs of mental instability in the late 1990s to early 2000s. The abduction of his children may have been of concern, but this is hardly indicative of future terrorist activity.

A chance meeting of a confidential source in prison led to his eventual downfall. It is impossible to speculate what would have happened to Grecula had he not met the informant. Surely he lacked the connections to plan a large scale terrorist attack on the U.S. Furthermore, he was limited in any technological capacity to build a functioning bomb of the scale and magnitude that he described. Still, Grecula did knowingly seek out foreign terrorist support and made threats on his estranged wife. In this regard, the FBI was successful in stopping a man with extreme ideas from hurting people, even if the threat was minimal. Still, it appears that Grecula actually had little idea what he was getting himself into. Perhaps this, along with age, led to his light prison sentence.

Before September 11, Grecula might never have been actively pursued like he was in this case. In this instance, though, the FBI did not need a lot of manpower or other resources to successfully carry out their mission. It would be hard to argue then that the FBI wasted any resources to catch a man who did in fact purchase components to make a bomb and willingly supported al-Qaeda. The authorities, therefore, seemed to handle the case in the right way. They swiftly and responsibly apprehended a man who had dangerous intent without causing a media circus. At the same time, Grecula's light sentence reflected an acute awareness of the lack of severity his case presented. To be sure, the Department of Justice seemed to strike the right balance in pursuing Grecula's case with the care and caution that it warranted. Grecula never posed a grave immediate threat to the U.S. population, and the FBI and the courts treated his case accordingly.

Grecula's case draws parallels with that of Michael Curtis Reynolds, another homegrown terrorist with no connections to the Muslim world (Case 16). Both cases involved individuals reaching out unsuccessfully to terrorist

organizations, Grecula over the phone, and Reynolds via internet. Neither Grecula nor Reynolds successfully contacted a terrorist organization, both only succeeding in reaching undercover informants. Each case involved half-baked plans that never really came close to fruition. Both Grecula and Reynolds exhibited some sort of anger toward the U.S. government, but neither had the technical knowhow to build a successful bomb. Finally, both cases were similar in that Grecula and Reynolds exhibited signs of mental instability. The parallels between the Grecula and Reynolds case again raise the question of whether these types of individuals are truly a terror threat to the United States or mental health outliers with wild, half-baked ideas that will never pan out. The United States government must tread carefully in pursuing these types of cases where suspects explicitly support terrorism, but perhaps do not exhibit the severity or immediacy of most other terrorism cases.