

Case 64: Fort Riley

John Mueller

November 1, 2016

In March 2014, John T. Booker, Jr., of Topeka, Kansas, diagnosed as bipolar but not taking his medication, posted on Facebook that he would “soon be leaving you forever so goodbye! I’m going to wage jihad and hopes that i die,” assuring everyone tuning in that “getting ready to be killed in jihad is a HUGE adrenaline rush!! I am so nervous. NOT because I’m scared to die but I am eager to meet my lord.” When a citizen filed a complaint about the posts, FBI agents interviewed Booker. After waiving his Miranda rights, he told them that he had applied to be in the United States Army and was hoping to commit an insider attack by shooting other soldiers on the firing range or by killing someone in the Army who had power using a small gun or a sword. Although the FBI deemed him to be “no imminent threat to the public,” he was rather understandably denied enlistment into the military.

Unbeknownst to his Methodist father, Booker had converted to Islam a few years earlier when he was in high school, and he came to wish to join ISIS, concluding that that American soldiers were enemies of true Muslims and that the Koran permits one to kill your enemies wherever they may lurk. Except for one Imam with whom he discussed militant Islam, Booker apparently did not know any other Muslims.

A few months after their interview, the FBI enlisted a couple of informants to work the case. Booker was soon enthusing about becoming a martyr (he was impressed about how martyrs look so peaceful after their deaths and about how their bodies don’t decay) and, inspired by a video called “Jihad Joe,” he cooked up a plan to die while exploding a truck bomb at Fort Riley, a nearby military base. The gullible wouldbe terrorist was aided in the pursuit of this terminal task by the informants who recorded him in a couple of videos (“today we will bring the Islamic State straight to your doorstep”) and supplied him with a guideline for creating bombs, a large amount of inert explosive material, a van to transport it all to Fort Riley, a map of the base, and instructions on how to arm the supposed bomb once he got there. He was arrested during the final act of this demented saga.

As Alex Rhodes stresses, Booker was more than willing to believe any information given to him by the undercover operatives, and he lacked all of the resources and skills that would have been necessary to prepare and execute just about any plan.

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Alex Rhodes

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1. Overview

On April 10, 2015, 20-year-old John T. Booker, Jr. was arrested near Fort Riley military base in Kansas while attempting to arm a 1000 pound vehicle-based bomb.¹ Booker planned on entering the base through a utility gate located on its perimeter, wherein he would detonate the explosive, killing as many soldiers as possible.¹ He had no legitimate connections to ISIS or any terrorist organization,² and was unaware that he had been under constant FBI surveillance during the entire planning and attempted execution of the attack.³ Though Booker had a clear intent to commit terrorism, it is doubtful that he would have had the ability without help. Two FBI confidential informants served vital roles in the planning and execution of Booker's attempted bombing.⁴ These informants provided Booker with initial instructions on how to create a bomb, a map of Fort Riley, "a large amount of inert explosive material," a van to bring the material to Fort Riley, and instructions on how to arm the supposed explosive.⁵

The FBI first became aware of Booker in March 2014 after a citizen filed a complaint about two public Facebook posts of his, both mentioning Booker's eagerness to die in jihad.⁶ The day following his second post, Booker was questioned by FBI agents. During questioning, Booker admitted to conspiring to join the Army in order to kill American soldiers.⁷ He was subsequently denied entry to the U.S. military.⁸

From October 2014 until his arrest, Booker was engaged with the first of two FBI informants. This informant served as a confidant with whom Booker communicated various ideas on how to join ISIS and scare the American people.⁹ In March 2015, upon being introduced to a second informant disguised as a high level sheik with ISIS connections, Booker began preparations to execute his plan to detonate a car bomb outside of Fort Riley, a high-profile Kansas military base.¹⁰ On April 10, days after gathering several bomb-making components and being given over 1000 pounds of an inert explosive by the second informant,

¹ Ralph Ellis and Joshua Gaynor, "Ex-Army recruit charged with trying to bomb Kansas military base," [cnn.com](#), April 10, 2015.

² United States District Court, District of Kansas, *United States of America v. John T. Booker, Jr.*, April 10, 2015, 6.

³ Jennifer Fenton, "US law enforcement accused of using entrapment to ensnare 'terrorists'," [america.aljazeera.com](#), April 23, 2015.

⁴ Justin Wingerter, "In the case of John Booker Jr., entrapment is an unlikely defense," [cjonline.com](#), April 14, 2015.

⁵ United States District Court, *U.S. v. Booker*, 10-12.

⁶ Ray Sanchez, "Ex-Army recruit pleads guilty to trying to bomb Fort Riley in Kansas," [cnn.com](#), February 4, 2016.

⁷ Sanchez, "Ex-Army recruit pleads guilty."

⁸ Sanchez, "Ex-Army recruit pleads guilty."

⁹ Department of Justice Office of Public Affairs, "Kansas Man Pleads Guilty in Plot to Explode Car Bomb at Fort Riley in Manhattan, Kansas," [www.justice.gov](#), February 3, 2016.

¹⁰ DoJ Office of Pub. Affairs, "Kansas Man Pleads Guilty."

Booker and the first informant drove from a location near Junction City, Kansas, to a gate outside of Fort Riley in the van carrying the inert explosive device.¹¹ While Booker was making connections on the explosive device, he was taken into custody by the FBI.¹² During the investigation, it was discovered that Booker had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, and had reportedly not been taking his medication.¹³ This may have led to his abnormal behavior.

On April 10, 2015, Booker was charged with one count of attempting to use a weapon of mass destruction, one count of attempting to damage property by means of an explosive, and one count of attempting to provide material support to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.¹⁴ He later pled guilty to the charges of attempting to use a WMD and attempting to destroy government property by fire or explosion.¹⁵ Booker has yet to be sentenced, but both prosecutors and Booker's attorneys have recommended he be sentenced to 30 years for the first charge and 20 for the second, with both sentences to run concurrently.¹⁶

2. Nature of the adversary

John T. Booker, Jr. was raised in Topeka, Kansas, the son of Methodist father and a Catholic mother. There is no evidence to suggest Booker had any strong faith or religious ties before his conversion to Islam during his high school years.¹⁷ Classmates of Booker described him as quiet and claimed that he "didn't say anything in class."¹⁸ He was an active member in his high school's JROTC, a program designed for students with an interest in military service after graduation, and was a "straight-laced cadet" according to Alfonzo Gonzalez, a fellow JROTC member. Booker reportedly also had a philanthropic side, and was instrumental in raising money for a JROTC program designed to help underprivileged rural children. Classmates began to express some reservations toward Booker after his conversion into Islam during high school. Gonzalez remarked that Booker's newly discovered faith upset some students, and that "people did give him a hard time."¹⁹ According to his father, Booker had moved out of his family's Topeka

¹¹ John Eligon, "2 Kansas Men Charged in Suicide Attack Plot at Fort Riley," *nytimes.com*, April 10, 2015.

¹² Eligon, "2 Kansas Men Charged in Suicide Attack Plot."

¹³ CBS/AP, "Kansas man pleads guilty in plot to bomb army post," *cbsnews.com*, February 3, 2016. Samantha Foster, "Topeka imam on bomb plot suspect: 'Maybe he came to me too late'," *cjonline.com* April 10, 2015.

¹⁴ Department of Justice Office of Public Affairs, "Topeka, Kansas, Man Charged in Plot to Explode Car Bomb at Military Base," *justice.gov*, April 10, 2015.

¹⁵ DoJ Office of Pub. Affairs, "Kansas Man Pleads Guilty."

¹⁶ Justin Wingerter, "Alexander Blair pleads guilty to aiding John Booker Jr.'s plot to bomb Fort Riley," *cjonline.com*, May 23, 2016.

¹⁷ KSN TV, Sharda Gray and The Associated Press, "Topeka man charged with plotting bombing at Fort Riley," *ksn.com*, April 10, 2015.

¹⁸ WIBW, "Former Classmate Describes John T. Booker As 'Quiet, But Strange'," *wibw.com*, April 10, 2015.

¹⁹ M. L. Nestel and Ryan Walsh, "What We Know About John Booker, the Man the FBI Thought Might Be a Jihadi," *vocativ.com*, April 2, 2014.

home after high school graduation.²⁰ At the time of his arrest, Booker was still residing in Topeka.²¹

Many details on how Booker converted to Islam are unknown. Booker's father had no knowledge of his son's newly acquired faith.²² It is possible that Booker was self-recruited through material found on the internet. There is no evidence to suggest the Booker attended any religious institution regularly during or after his conversion to radical Islam. Except for a local Imam, there is no evidence to suggest he personally knew any other Muslim individuals. Within the year before his arrest, he visited a local Islamic Center on several occasions to get counseling from Imam Omar Hazim. By this time, according to Hazim, his radical beliefs "were already deep-rooted." Booker had heard Hazim speak in disapproval of ISIS, and despite Hazim's attempts to show Booker "the straight, wholesome Koran, and how Islam condemns any kind of terrorist activity," Booker spent much of his discussions with Hazim defending militant Islam. During these discussions, Booker also admitted that he had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Hazim tried to help Booker take his prescribed medication, yet Hazim still "felt like he hadn't been taking it."²³

Two years before Booker's arrest and then again as on April 5, 2015, just five days before his arrest, Booker met with a Catholic priest, Paul Tessaro. During their two conversations, Tessaro recalls that Booker wished to compare notes on theology. Booker "had mentioned the differences between Islam and Christianity" and "was hoping to build some bridges in that area." Booker brought a 12-14 inch sword to their second encounter, but Tessaro claimed not to notice the sword until Booker was already leaving.²⁴

3. Motivation

It is clear from information gathered by FBI informants that Booker had radical views. Although no source shows what inspired Booker to convert to Islam, his discussion with FBI agents on March 20, 2014 about his two Facebook posts, as well as the online videos that Booker watched and discussed with informants, gave an idea of why he considered committing terrorist acts. During the March 20 meeting with FBI agents, Booker confessed to wanting to join the army to murder a powerful military target.²⁵ He claimed that he was inspired by the actions of Major Nidal Hasan at Fort Hood, Texas.²⁶ Hasan had committed a mass shooting at the Texas military base in 2009, killing 13 individuals and wounding 30 more. Booker claimed that American soldiers were enemies of true

²⁰ Nicholas Clayton, "John Booker Sr.: Glad no one hurt after son arrested at military base," *cjonline.com*, April 10, 2015.

²¹ United States District Court, *U.S. v. Booker*, 4.

²² Clayton, "John Booker Sr.: Glad no one hurt."

²³ Foster, "Topeka imam on bomb plot suspect."

²⁴ Samantha Foster, "Clay Center pastor recalls encounter with John Booker Jr. in Topeka on Easter," *cjonline.com*, April 16, 2016.

²⁵ KSN TV, Sharda Gray and The Associated Press, "Topeka man charged."

²⁶ Eligon, "2 Kansas Men Charged in Suicide Attack Plot."

Muslims, and all of the known potential targets of Booker throughout his investigation were members of the military.²⁷

On November 12, 2014, Booker showed a YouTube video about suicide bombing and martyrdom to the first undercover FBI informant that would follow him throughout his case. Booker claimed that he wished to die a Shaheed—a Muslim martyr, or one who has died fulfilling a commandment—and it is likely that Booker was motivated by this video to commit an act of martyrdom himself. He spoke to the informant about how martyrs look peaceful after their deaths, and about how he believed the bodies of martyrs don't decay.²⁸

On February 3, 2015, in a conversation with the first informant, Booker spoke of a video entitled “The Flames of War,” which contains footage of Syrian soldiers getting shot after digging their own graves. He then told to the first informant that he wanted to produce a propaganda video for ISIS. On March 9, he also discussed a video he called “Jihad Joe” with the second confidential informant, a video that served as recruitment material for the Mujahedeen in Syria. In it, a driver drove a truck containing 16 tons of explosives into a Syrian army stronghold. Booker said that he wanted to make and use a truck bomb just like “Jihad Joe.” He aspired to do a suicide bombing, he said, because it removed the risk of being captured, all evidence would be destroyed, and the target would be guaranteed to be hit. When told by the second informant that he could move forward with a suicide bomb plan only if it is being done for the sake of Allah, Booker agreed.²⁹ Though Booker had never actually made contact with ISIS members, both “The Flames of War” and “Jihad Joe” served as strong motivators for Booker to commit an attack in their name.

Booker was also seemingly motivated by the undercover FBI informants assisting him in executing his attack. After the first informant told Booker about a “cousin” of his that knew how to get people overseas, Booker committed to doing anything the first informant may “think is good.” After the informant challenged him by saying that the cousin (actually a second undercover FBI informant) wouldn't take “just anybody” and that Booker would have to prove he was ready to fight, Booker commented that he would follow the guidance of ISIS “without any question.”³⁰ Though Booker did not believe either informant to be a member of ISIS, the second informant was introduced as a sheik planning terrorist attacks in the United States.

4. Goals

Throughout the formulation and planning of the various acts of terrorism that Booker hoped to commit, there was one common target: U.S. military personnel. More specifically, Booker spoke on several occasions of his desire to kill a member of the military with power.³¹ Booker believed that American soldiers were enemies of true Muslims, and that the Koran permits one to kill

²⁷ United States District Court, *U.S. v. Booker*, 4-12.

²⁸ United States District Court, *U.S. v. Booker*, 6.

²⁹ United States District Court, *U.S. v. Booker*, 7-9.

³⁰ United States District Court, *U.S. v. Booker*, 6.

³¹ KSN TV, Sharda Gray and The Associated Press, “Topeka man charged.”

your enemies wherever they may be.³² He wanted not only to scare Americans, but also to frighten members of the military into quitting.³³ Though a significant goal of Booker's was to commit jihad in the name of ISIS, he was particular with the message he wanted to send with his attack.

5. Plans for violence

From his original Facebook posts in March 2014 to his arrest in April 2015, the desired scope and significance of Booker's attack changed drastically. With the help of the informants and a few videos found online, Booker went from wanting to stab or shoot a military leader at close range to wanting to kill as many people as he could on a military base through the use of a 1000 pound weapon of mass destruction.

On Facebook, on March 15, 2014, John Booker Jr. posted: "I will soon be leaving you forever so goodbye! I'm going to wage jihad and hopes that i die." Four days later, on March 19, Booker posted again, saying: "Getting ready to be killed in jihad is a HUGE adrenaline rush!! I am so nervous. NOT because I'm scared to die but I am eager to meet my lord." Booker did not divulge over Facebook how he planned to commit Jihad. The day of Booker's second post, a citizen filed a complaint to the FBI. One day later, on March 20, 2014, FBI agents interviewed Booker at an undisclosed location about his posts. FBI Task Force Officer Mark P. Engholm stated that after waiving his Miranda rights Booker told the agents that "he enlisted in the United States Army with the intent to commit an insider attack against American soldiers like Major Nidal Hasan had done in Fort Hood, Texas." Upon further questioning, Booker admitted to having several ideas of how to commit violent jihad once in the Army. He first remarked how he wished to "fire at other soldiers while at basic training at the firing range or while at his pre-deployment military base." Booker explained to agents that he had no desire to kill "privates;" he would rather kill someone within the Army with power. He then went on to reveal that he intended to use a small gun or a sword to kill his target. Following the FBI's questioning, Booker was denied enlistment into the military.³⁴ In a public statement, he was deemed by the FBI to be "no imminent threat to the public."³⁵ It is possible Booker's unmedicated bipolar disorder played a part in his behavior with FBI agents.

Between Booker's March 20, 2014 meeting with the FBI and his October 8, 2014 engagement with an FBI federal informant, not much is known of Booker's actions or intentions. There is no evidence of any FBI involvement with Booker over this time period. There is also no information about why an FBI source was initially assigned to Booker. Once in contact with the informant, though, Booker quickly began sharing his intention of committing violent jihad for ISIS. On October 10, 2014, in a conversation between Booker and the informant, Booker remarked that he "was in jihad before ... I was captured by

³² United States District Court, *U.S. v. Booker*, 7.

³³ Justin Wingerter, "John Booker Jr. pleads guilty to terrorism charges stemming from 2015 Fort Riley bomb plot," cjonline.com, February 3, 2016.

³⁴ United States District Court, *U.S. v. Booker*, 4-5.

³⁵ Nestel and Walsh, "What We Know About John Booker."

FBI before... because I was with al Qa'ida.” He then showed the informant the first of numerous violent videos, this one consisting of Muslim forces fighting American forces in Iraq. Booker told the first informant that he wanted to join ISIS after hearing about the organization, yet “he didn’t know anyone who could help him do so.”³⁶

Around November 12, 2014, Booker showed the first informant a video about suicide bombers and martyrs, and said that he wanted to die a Shaheed, or martyr. The next month, on or about December 18, 2014, after being told by the first informant about an individual who could help him travel overseas to help ISIS, Booker discussed committing acts of terror. He hoped to travel to help ISIS, and thought that he should commit acts of terror in the United States before he moved. He proposed getting a grenade or gun and going to a local military base (presumably Fort Riley) to kill soldiers. Booker claimed that American soldiers were enemies of true Muslims, and that the Koran permits one to kill your enemies wherever they may be.³⁷

On or about February 3, 2015, after viewing “The Flames of War” video, Booker explained to the first informant his desire to make an ISIS propaganda video outside of an American landmark or military base. He wished to film a video that would inspire individuals to leave the military, and suggested that he and the informant capture and kill a soldier right after filming the video and that they “will be coming after American soldiers in the streets” and “will be picking them off one by one.”³⁸

On or about March 9, 2015, Booker was introduced by the first informant to a second FBI informant. This second informant was introduced as a sheik planning terrorist attacks on American soil. Booker began discussing ideas with this informant that would later develop into his final plan. Booker told both informants that he had been studying suicide bombing and that he was inspired by an American that brought a suicide bomb to a military base in Syria. Later that day, he told the second informant about the “Jihad Joe” video. This is presumably the suicide video Booker spoke of earlier that day, though the relationship is not certain. He now expressed his desire to die by suicide bombing with a truck bomb. At this point, Booker had seemingly moved past his desire to travel to join ISIS. Upon being questioned by the second informant if he had a target in mind for a suicide bombing, Booker, using the nickname of a U.S. Army division stationed at Fort Riley, replied that the “Big Red One” would be a good target.³⁹

On or about March 10, 2015, Booker and both informants travelled to Freedom Park near Fort Riley, where the second informant recorded a video of Booker reading his own ISIS message. He swore allegiance to the leader of ISIS and called for other Muslims to support ISIS however they could. Booker then said that ISIS wanted to deliver a message:

to all the mothers, daughters, fathers, brothers, sisters and friends or loved ones of ... any soldier in the United States military. Get your kids out. Get

³⁶ United States District Court, *U.S. v. Booker*, 5-6.

³⁷ United States District Court, *U.S. v. Booker*, 6-7.

³⁸ United States District Court, *U.S. v. Booker*, 7.

³⁹ United States District Court, *U.S. v. Booker*, 7-8.

your loved ones out of the military. Because, wallahi, Dualah Islam is coming for them. From inside, whether it be in their homes, whether it be on a base like this, whether it be in the recruiting stations, whether it be in the streets ... Wallahi, we are coming for them and we seek their blood because their blood is halal for us to kill them.⁴⁰

On or about March 17, 2015, Booker rented a storage unit to hold “some items” at the request of the second informant. On March 25, 2015, after the first informant told Booker that he had been chosen (not specifying by whom he had been chosen) to accompany him on his suicide mission, the informant gave Booker a list of items needed to construct the bomb to be used in the attack. That day, they went out to several local shops to purchase the supplies that would later be stored at the unit.⁴¹ There is no evidence to suggest whose money was used to purchase the supplies, but Booker needed to borrow \$100 from a friend to rent a storage unit⁴² and it is very possible that funds for bomb-making supplies came from this informant. During the shopping trip, Booker told the informant that he wanted to be the one to detonate the explosives when the time came.⁴³

On or about March 26, 2015, Booker and the two informants met to talk about potential targets. Booker said that he wanted to blow up the bomb in a location that both hurt the military and allowed him to see the fear in the eyes of his victims as they ran for their lives before the detonation. At this meeting, he picked several potential targets around the southeast corner of Fort Riley as well as two potential routes from Topeka to Fort Riley. On or about April 8, 2015, Booker and the first informant moved the bomb components from Booker’s storage unit to a second storage unit where the second informant was waiting with a large amount of inert explosive material to be used in Booker’s car bomb. At this location, Booker was given a map of Fort Riley, and he used it to mark potential targets and routes. Booker spoke about his desire to make sure his debts were paid before he died a Shaheed, but later retracted the thought after a negative response from the second informant. Booker had originally planned to commit acts of terrorism seemingly without an escape plan. It is possible that, from the beginning of his conversion to extremist Islam, he valued ISIS and his Muslim brothers more than his own life. That same day, Booker made a second video in the storage unit. There is no information about who filmed the video, but Booker is recorded saying, among other things:

Today, Inshallah, we are going to build this bomb with 1,000 pounds of Ammonium Nitrate. Inshallah, this will kill many kuffar. This message is to you America. You sit in your homes and you think that this war is just over in Iraq ... Wallahi, we today we will bring the Islamic State straight to your doorstep. You think this is just a game, wallahi when this bomb blows up and kills as many kuffar as possible, maybe then you’ll realize it.

On April 10, 2015, Booker drove with the first informant to meet the second informant at a location outside of Junction City, Kansas. The second informant

⁴⁰ United States District Court, *U.S. v. Booker*, 9.

⁴¹ United States District Court, *U.S. v. Booker*, 10.

⁴² Wingerter, “Alexander Blair pleads guilty.”

⁴³ United States District Court, *U.S. v. Booker*, 11.

explained the explosive device and how to arm it. Booker and the first informant then drove to an area just outside of Fort Riley that Booker believed to be a utility gate they could enter the base through. While Booker was attempting to arm the device, he was arrested by a team of FBI members.⁴⁴

6. Role of informants

Little information has been released regarding the identities of the two FBI informants: their ages, genders, motivations, and involvement after Booker's arrest have not been disclosed. We do know, though, that the informants played a significant role in the orchestration and execution of the plans created by John T. Booker, Jr. The first FBI informant was in contact with him from October 8, 2014, more than six months after his original meeting with the FBI and his subsequent denial from military enlistment. Booker shared numerous ideas with him on how he might commit jihad in the name of ISIS. Knowing the explosive material to be detonated was inert, the first informant made Booker believe he was planning to commit suicide with him as part of the jihad.⁴⁵ An informant planning to die with a suspected terrorist is an unusual characteristic of the case.

When the first informant introduced Booker to the second one who was disguised as a high ranking sheik involved with planning terrorist acts, the involvement of the informants quickly became more significant. Along with helping Booker by filming his speech outside of Freedom Park, the informants provided Booker with all of the necessary resources used in creating and attempting to detonate the car bomb. They provided Booker with initial instructions on how to create a bomb, a map of Fort Riley, "a large amount of inert explosive material," a van to bring the material to Fort Riley, and instructions on how to arm the inert explosive.⁴⁶ Throughout the investigation, the two informants served as confidants and vital resources to Booker.⁴⁷

7. Connections

There is no evidence to suggest that Booker had any legitimate connections with an organized terrorist group such as ISIS. Booker told the first informant in October 2014, that despite his desire to do so, he didn't know anyone who could help him join ISIS.⁴⁸ There is no information to suggest Booker made contact with any terrorist. Booker was largely self-motivated, often drawing inspiration for acts he desired to commit from online videos. Although Booker believed that he was put in contact with a "high ranking sheik planning terrorist attacks in the United States," he merely met an undercover FBI informant introduced to him by another FBI informant.⁴⁹ Booker seems to have been more than willing to believe any information given to him by the informants.

⁴⁴ United States District Court, *U.S. v. Booker*, 12.

⁴⁵ United States District Court, *U.S. v. Booker*, 5, 10.

⁴⁶ United States District Court, *U.S. v. Booker*, 10-12.

⁴⁷ Wingerter, "In the case of John Booker."

⁴⁸ United States District Court, *U.S. v. Booker*, 6.

⁴⁹ United States District Court, *U.S. v. Booker*, 7.

Booker was in contact with a friend named Alexander Blair during the investigation. Though Blair did not play a significant role in the planning or execution of the attempted terrorist attack, he did loan Booker \$100 for the renting of the storage unit used to house bomb-making supplies.⁵⁰

8. Relation to the Muslim Community

There is little evidence that Booker attended any religious institution regularly before or after his conversion to Islam that reportedly took place during high school.⁵¹ During the year prior to his arrest, Booker met with Imam Omar Hazim several times at a Topeka Islamic Center.⁵² According to Hazim, when Booker reached out to the Islamic Center, “his beliefs were already deep-rooted,” and he commented to FBI officials on Booker’s fixation with militant Islam. Although Hazim tried to show Booker how Islam condemns terrorist activities, Booker defended his militant Islamic faith.⁵³ There is no evidence to suggest Booker personally knew any other Muslim individuals, but due to his presence online, it is possible he met extremists through social media sites.

9. Depiction by the authorities

Following Booker’s March 2014 interview with FBI agents, Booker was declared to be “no imminent threat to the public.”⁵⁴ After his April 10, 2015 arrest, though, authorities had contrasting depictions of Booker and his attempted terrorist attacks. While some acknowledged that throughout the investigation there were no significant threats to the safety of Fort Riley personnel, others characterized Booker’s arrest as a hard-fought win for law enforcement. FBI Special Agent in Charge Eric K. Jackson spoke in the public announcement following Booker’s indictment: “I want to assure the public there was never any breach of Fort Riley Military Base, nor was the safety or the security of the base or its personnel ever at risk.” This contrasts with the statement of Assistant Attorney General for National Security John P. Carlin, who stated: “Thanks to the efforts of the law enforcement community, we were able to safely disrupt this threat to the brave men and women who serve our country.”⁵⁵ U.S. Attorney Barry Grissom claimed that if the “defendant would have succeeded, American soldiers would have died.”⁵⁶ There continues to be no clear consensus on the level of threat that Booker truly posed.

10. Coverage by the media

Overall, media coverage of the attempted Fort Riley bombing was accurate and didn’t stray from the facts of the case. Much of the information in reputable news sources refrained from taking an alarmist tone. The Topeka *Capital Journal* covered the case in much more detail than many other acclaimed

⁵⁰ Wingerter, “Alexander Blair pleads guilty.”

⁵¹ Nestel and Walsh, “What We Know About John Booker.”

⁵² Foster, “Topeka imam on bomb plot suspect.”

⁵³ Nestel and Walsh, “What We Know About John Booker.”

⁵⁴ Nestel and Walsh, “What We Know About John Booker.”

⁵⁵ DoJ Office of Pub. Affairs, “Topeka, Kansas, Man Charged.”

⁵⁶ Wingerter, “John Booker Jr. pleads guilty.”

outlets. Regarding major news outlets, waves of stories were released on Booker's case. The first occurred directly after Booker's arrest, and the second came after he pled guilty in court. Most coverage reviewed information covered in the *United States of America v. John T. Booker, Jr.* Topeka court docket. While a few news outlets emphasized Booker's bipolar disorder in their stories, most did not.

Seeing as the FBI informants involved in the case provided Booker with all of the resources he needed to execute his attack, some stories mentioned that law enforcement may have entrapped Booker. Some headlines noted that "US law enforcement accused of using entrapment to ensnare 'terrorists'."⁵⁷ However, news reports also often acknowledged that entrapment was an unlikely defense because Booker was predisposed to commit terrorist attacks before his engagement with the government.⁵⁸

11. Policing costs

The FBI investigation on John Booker Jr. lasted from at least October 8, 2014, the date in which the first FBI informant was in contact with Booker, to April 10, 2015, the date of his arrest.⁵⁹ There is no supporting evidence, but it is possible that the FBI was keeping tabs on Booker between his March 20, 2014, meeting with the FBI agents and October 8. Though no official information has been released on the level or cost of surveillance on Booker, the funds paid to the FBI informants for their involvement in the case may be significant. The cost of the inert explosive and the van used to transport it is also unavailable.

The cost of Booker's trial and containment is also noteworthy. Booker may be spending 30 years or more in prison.⁶⁰ The cost of his imprisonment is likely to be substantial. The individual who loaned him \$100 to rent a storage unit, Alexander Blair, faces up to five years in prison.⁶¹

12. Relevance of the internet

The internet was the primary way through which authorities identified Booker as a potential threat. After Booker's two Facebook posts on March 15, 2014 and March 19, 2014 detailing his excitement to commit jihad, the FBI was alerted to Booker by a citizen's complaint.

Booker also used the internet to access content he used as inspiration to commit acts of terrorism. Videos of Muslims fighting American forces in Iraq, "The Flames of War" and "Jihad Joe," are examples of influential content he found on the internet. Although it is not known how Booker initially adopted extremist views, it is possible that online media played a significant role.

13. Are we safer?

Government officials have said yes. Despite this, questions arise as to whether Booker posed a capable and legitimate threat to American citizens.

⁵⁷ Fenton, "US law enforcement accused."

⁵⁸ Wingerter, "In the case of John Booker."

⁵⁹ United States District Court, *U.S. v. Booker*, 5-12.

⁶⁰ DoJ Office of Pub. Affairs, "Kansas Man Pleads Guilty."

⁶¹ Wingerter, "Alexander Blair pleads guilty."

Though Booker did possess the intent to cause harm to others, he lacked all of the resources (money, connections to terrorist organizations, weaponry, etc.) and skills (knowledge of explosives, tactical expertise, etc.) that would have been necessary to carry out any type of attack. He had no legitimate connections to ISIS or any terrorist organization. Booker had no way to make a bomb, nor did he have access to the materials even if he wished to do so. After being denied entry to the Army, he had no access to the military base he desired to infiltrate. Even the map he would later use to plan his approach of the base was provided by FBI informants.⁶² No evidence suggests that Booker had a vehicle of his own to use as a transportation device for a large homemade explosive.

Booker's original plan consisted of walking through an army base with a gun or sword and firing upon or stabbing an individual with power.⁶³ There is no evidence to suggest he owned a gun prior to his arrest. Even if Booker hadn't been denied entry to the military after his Facebook comments, the chance that Booker would be given the opportunity to walk into a military base with a sword or gun to kill a high-ranking member of the military would be almost nonexistent, especially in the wake of the 2009 Fort Hood attack. Even as his plans developed into more significant acts of terrorism after watching "The Flames of War" and "Jihad Joe," Booker still greatly lacked the competency to prepare and execute any plan. These acts only become possible because of the two confidential informants helping and encouraging him along the way. Booker had a clear intent to commit terrorism, but it is doubtful that he had the ability. We are likely not much safer after his arrest.

14. Conclusions

The case of John T. Booker, Jr. fits well with a recent trend. Frequently, after individuals have been brought to the attention of the FBI as a possible threat to national security, informants are assigned to monitor and assist the suspects in their pursuits of terrorism. It is also often common for the individual being assisted to lack the ability to plan and execute any attack without the guidance and resources of the informants. In Booker's case, it is very unlikely he could have committed any significant attack on American soil for several reasons. Not only did he have unattainable, grandiose plans of attack like walking up to, and then stabbing, a military officer on a military base, but he also lacked the skills required to execute an attack of the caliber he desired. Though Booker was a member of the JROTC, there is no evidence to suggest he owned or had any experience with firearms. With regards to his later plans for violence, Booker also had no experience with creating explosive devices or detonators. He had no access to any member of ISIS, and there is no evidence he had any friends that he could work with to commit terrorist attacks. Similar to numerous other cases, Booker played into the hand dealt to him by FBI informants. Even though he came up the ideas for who, where, and what to attack, the informants were left to figure out the logistics.

⁶² United States District Court, *U.S. v. Booker*, 6, 11.

⁶³ United States District Court, *U.S. v. Booker*, 5.

Booker's mental condition is a significant part of his story. Similar to many cases in this book, the case centered around a man with notable mental illness. Booker admittedly had not been taking medication, and his thoughts and behavior may have suffered because of it. Had he been given proper medical treatment and medication for his condition, his actions throughout might have differed. FBI informants took advantage of Booker's desire to be part of an organization or group bigger than himself, and they helped lead him into the trap he set for himself. Several officials then used Booker's case to tout the heroic actions of law enforcement officers around the United States. Now imprisoned for an extended period of time, Booker's access to proper mental health treatment will probably be limited.

This case also has some unusual characteristics. Booker planned to commit suicide in his attack instead of, for instance, waiting at a safe distance and detonating a remote explosive: in the end, he was ready and willing to offer his life to jihad. Booker had originally planned to commit acts of terrorism seemingly without an escape plan. It is possible that, from the beginning of his conversion to extremist Islam, he valued ISIS and his Muslim brothers more than his own life.

In addition, one of the FBI informants involved with Booker said he would give his life in the attack. Even though the informant knew there was no danger of being killed by the inert vehicle-based IED, it is not common for informants to plan suicide along with suspected terrorist.