

Nothing Lasts Forever: The CIA's Role in the Nakatomi Hostage Crisis

By Leo Klein

At 7:00 PM on Christmas Eve, the city of angels entered the twenty-ninth anniversary of one of its darkest days. On December 24, 1988, thirteen German terrorists, armed with fully automatic weapons, entered the Nakatomi Plaza in Los Angeles (present day Klaxxon Oil Building). With a company party in progress, the terrorists took everyone in attendance hostage. Within hours, two Nakatomi executives were killed and the FBI had its best negotiators on scene. Several hours later, with the help of an off duty police officer who had gotten loose inside the building, the hostages were set free, and all terrorists were killed or taken into police custody.

Initially, the story was sensationalized; an off-duty cop versus an international team of terrorists. It was the perfect tale of a blue collar “everyman” who helped foil a meticulous and violent plot. It all seemed pretty cut and dried, but now in the age of information, several documents have been declassified and they paint a different picture of what happened that fateful day. It's a picture that suggests US intelligence played a strong role in the incident.

The terrorist ringleader was a man named Hans Gruber. There is no information on him prior to his nineteenth birthday. Around this time, he joined up with the Volksfrei, a West German terrorist organization whose roots go back to the

beginning of WWII. During its inception, Hitler recruited able-bodied men between the ages of 16 and 25 in hopes of sniffing out foreign spies. It was around this time, however, that hand-selected CIA agents began to globally infiltrate different ranks and positions within socialist/communist governments. Hans Gruber's father, Arthur was one of the first German-born agents to be "flipped" by the CIA. From 1942 to 1945 Arthur Gruber provided key intel on troop movement throughout Berlin.

In August of 1945, over 1500 Nazi party scientists, engineers, and technicians were given sanctuary in the US under the protective government umbrella of President Truman's signature on "Operation Paperclip." Arthur Gruber was one of the 1500. Until his retirement in 1968 he remained one of the CIA's top assets. He died of heart failure in 1979. It was, and still is a common tactic of the intelligence community to recruit agents' family members. Documents show that the CIA had interest in Hans as early as age six. Did they recruit him as a young boy, and if so, when did they start "training" him?

The questions get murkier when we flash forward to that fateful Christmas Eve. Officially, Hans and his team were after \$640 million worth of bearer bonds, but an audit of the Nakatomi Corporation earlier that year revealed that the vault only held between \$12-16 million in bearer bonds. Another inconsistency with the story is the amount of explosives that were planted by Gruber and his gang. C4 was spread all through the inside of the building and on the roof, that latter of which was blown sky high. However, no detonators were recovered anywhere in the building.

Why would they plant such a deadly amount of plastic explosives and not bring along a means to control them? And since some of the charges did go off, who exactly was pushing the button?

Some of these inconsistencies have already been discussed and “debunked”, and even the most reasonable people need more “meat with their potatoes” before any personal red flags are raised. However, an audio recording that surfaced several months after the incident may be the missing link. The details of its contents have just been released to the public. Experts have since verified the voice as belonging to Hans Gruber, but not all experts fully agree on whether or not the tape is entirely unedited and genuine. In it Hans states: “the company will pay for what they’ve done.” He went on to explain in explicit detail how the CIA had been selling arms illegally to the military dictatorship of Chile since 1973, and were using the Nakatomi Corporation to alter receipts.

With the exception of the execution style murders of head executive Joseph Takagi and executive Harry Ellis, the taking of hostages (“who didn’t know what their bosses were up to”) was not intended to bring anyone harm. Its message was one that intended to bring awareness to the arms dealings, and more specifically to the CIA’s involvement in the September 11, 1973 overthrow of Chilean president Salvador Allende.

Unfortunately, the documents and audio recording only tell bits and pieces of the tale. The true story is buried deep between the black and white text of the CIA’s newest crop of “unclassified” documents. Was Hans Gruber just a violent terrorist

who wanted to steal some bearer bonds, or was he a CIA company man who became displeased with the agency's activities? Here we sit, almost thirty years later, with details to an entirely different story than the one that was presented in 1988. But what do these details mean, exactly? The only man who may have been able to shine a light on the matter was shot in the chest before crashing through a window. He fell thirty stories to his concrete doom, taking any secrets with him.