By Scott Stewart

On July 22, special agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and the FBI arrested Walter Bond in Denver and charged him with conducting the April 30 arson that destroyed a Glendale, Colo., business, the Sheepskin Factory, which sold a variety of sheepskin products. According to an affidavit completed by a special agent assigned to the Denver ATF field office, Bond used the nom de guerre, "ALF Lone Wolf" and boasted to a confidential informant that he not only torched the Sheepskin Factory but also was responsible for a June 5 fire at a leather factory in Salt Lake City and a July 3 fire at a restaurant in Sandy, Utah.

The Bond case serves as a reminder that activists with organizations such as the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) are still very active — indeed, there have been several firebombing attacks by such activists in the United States this year, not only at businesses but also at the homes of animal researchers. And there have been scores of animal rights-related attacks in other countries, with Mexico being among the most active. The Bond case also provides an opportunity to examine the manner in which the animal liberation movement conducts its leaderless resistance campaign, to draw lessons from the case and to assess the trajectory of the animal rights movement.

The Structure of ALF

Like its kindred organization the Earth Liberation Front (ELF), the ALF was created to follow the organizational principles of leaderless resistance. The leaderless resistance model, as envisioned by proponents such as white supremacist Louis Beam, employs a two-tiered approach to revolutionary struggle. One tier adheres to the laws of the land and serves as the aboveground propaganda service for the cause. In the United States, such activists take full advantage of their First Amendment freedoms and are careful to ensure that their propaganda efforts do not cross the line of legality. This caution is necessary because many of these first-tier activists, such as former ELF spokesman Craig Rosebraugh, are the public faces of the movement and receive a great deal of law enforcement attention.

The second tier in leaderless resistance is composed of anonymous individuals ("lone wolves") and small groups of activists ("phantom cells") who are responsible for conducting attacks — often referred to by the ELF/ALF and other activists as "direct actions." The aboveground propaganda activists are responsible for providing motivation and general guidance to the operational tier as well as publicizing the cause and exploiting the illegal actions of the underground activists in the media. This second tier is supposed to remain low-key and anonymous and maintain no traceable connections to the aboveground activists.

This operational model is quite evident in the Bond case. Aboveground ALF propaganda outlets such as the Animal Liberation Press Office initially posted news articles on their websites

pertaining to the three arsons in which Bond was allegedly involved. Later, they posted anonymous communiques that purported to be from the perpetrator, like the following: "The arson at the Sheepskin Factory in Denver was done in defense and retaliation for all the innocent animals that have died cruelly at the hands of human oppressors. Be warned that making a living from the use and abuse of animals will not be tolerated. Also be warned that leather is every bit as evil as fur. As demonstrated in my recent arson against the Leather Factory in Salt Lake City. Go vegan! — ALF Lone Wolf"

Following Bond's arrest, these ALF propaganda websites posted articles glorifying Bond and his activities for the movement. They also have been very busy using Bond and the press to promote their cause and the case for activists to conduct more direct action attacks. The spokesman for the Animal Liberation Press Office is Dr. Jerry Vlasak, a California physician who, along with his wife, former child actress Pamelyn Ferdin (the voice of Lucy from Peanuts), are perhaps the highest profile animal rights activists in the country. They are also prime examples of aboveground activists in the leaderless resistance.

Vlasak has told various media outlets that he is unsure if Bond is responsible for the arson, but that if he is, Bond is a hero and the ALF supports him. Vlasak was quoted by Denver's Channel 9 News as saying, "There are a lot of examples of cases where these actions have been taken and we've gotten concrete results as opposed to lobbying our congressmen and writing letters to the editors. When you measure these types of actions against other options, this has actually shown to be one of the most effective ways to get things to change."

Vlasak's statement highlights an ideological rift that exists in the animal rights movement between those who favor violence to further their cause and those who disdain violence and prefer to use legal methods. Clearly, Vlasak is on the side of those who advocate violence, which he states is more effective than nonviolent approaches. Vlasak is known for making such attention-getting quotes in the press. Discussing a pair of August 2008 fire-bomb attacks against the homes of biologists at the University of California-Santa Cruz, Vlasak remarked: "It's regrettable that certain scientists are willing to put their families at risk by choosing to do wasteful animal experiments."

According to the ATF affidavit, a search of Bond's backpack after his arrest revealed that he had a copy of an ALF publication titled "The Declaration of War: Killing People to Save the Animals and the Environment." The book, which was first published by the ALF in 1991, contends that nonviolent methods such as those laid out by Gandhi and Jesus are not productive (especially when applied to animals) and explains that violence is justified to protect animals, who cannot protect themselves. The book's author contends that people who seek to liberate animals (which the author refers to as "brothers" and "sisters") from human oppression and abuse will "use any and every tactic necessary to win the freedom of our brothers and sisters. This means they cheat, steal, lie, plunder, disable, threaten, and physically harm others to achieve their objective."

The Challenges of Leaderless Resistance

This ideological split within the movement appears to be what ultimately led to Bond's arrest. According to the ATF affidavit, on July 1, 2010, a confidential informant (CI) called the ATF to

report that Bond was the person responsible for the Sheepskin Factory fire as well as the fire at the leather factory in Salt Lake City. The CI said that he or she had recently been called by Bond after a period of 12 years, and that when the CI asked Bond what he had been up to, Bond told the CI to go to an ALF-related website and scroll down to the Sheepskin Factory fire story and the leather factory fire story and that those arsons were what he had been up to. Upon hearing of Bond's activities, the CI became concerned that firefighters could be harmed while responding to an arson fire lit by Bond and called the ATF in order to prevent Bond from lighting more fires.

At the ATF's request, the CI then met with Bond on July 22 at a Denver hotel room that the ATF had wired for audio and video. During the meeting, Bond reportedly was captured on tape admitting that he had committed the Sheepskin Factory and leather factory fires as well as the July 3 fire at a restaurant in Sandy, Utah, that served foie gras. He admitted that he used the nom de guerre Lone Wolf and stated that he was planning future arson attacks. This meeting provided the government with the probable cause required to arrest Bond and charge him with the fires, though the ATF and FBI will certainly be working hard to find other evidence linking him to the crimes.

In general, lone wolf and small cell attacks conducted by ELF/ALF operatives are very difficult to investigate. First of all, as discussed, the ELF and ALF are intentionally nebulous and promote leaderless resistance, which means there is no centralized command structure for law enforcement to target. Second, many people associated with the ELF/ALF are transient and nomadic. Because of this lifestyle, they are often very hard to track using public records and credit card transactions, making it a challenge for law enforcement to know they are in an area or where they went to when they left. They are also frequently known by nicknames within their activist/fringe communities and frequently don't carry identification documents. This makes it difficult for law enforcement to figure out who a potential suspect is even if they know his or her nickname.

This ambiguity is compounded by the fact that organizations like the ELF and ALF have produced some very good instruction manuals pertaining to the construction of timed incendiary devices. These manuals not only provide sound instruction on constructing and placing incendiary devices but also describe in great detail steps that can be taken to minimize the physical evidence left at a crime scene. ALF operatives have long favored isolated targets without much security — what we refer to as soft targets. While they occasionally have targeted the offices and laboratories of companies involved in animal testing, such targets have increased their security in the wake of past attacks and many ALF operatives have diverted their efforts toward the homes of executives and researchers (like the UC-Santa Cruz researchers) and other soft targets.

Gravitating toward softer targets makes it less likely operatives will be caught in the act. Additionally, the surveillance tradecraft utilized by the ALF and its operatives and the operational security they practice is usually better than that demonstrated by jihadist lone wolves. Organizations such as the Ruckus Society conduct detailed courses on preoperational surveillance, which is called "scouting" in their parlance. Also, since ELF/ALF activists tend to be young Caucasians, they are generally not viewed as a potential threat, even if they are

spotted conducting surveillance. Moreover, since these activists have focused mainly on attacks that cause property damage, law enforcement has understandably not placed the same priority on catching ELF/ALF activists as it has other actors such as jihadists, who intentionally target people.

In Bond's case, he might have had some difficulty not drawing attention to himself as he cased leather stores and foie gras restaurants because he had tattoos covering half his face with the word "vegan" tattooed across his throat in large block letters flanked on either side by crossed wrenches. "Monkey wrenching" is a term widely used by activists associated with ELF/ALF and anarchist groups to refer to direct-action attacks that involve property destruction such as arson. Anyone involved in animal research or selling animal products who is observant enough would surely look suspiciously upon a person with such distinctive markings.

When all of these factors combine, it is usually very difficult to solve an ELF/ALF arson or bombing case unless a mistake is made, or a confidential informant comes forward. Most successful prosecutions in such cases have come as a result of informants, and because of this we have witnessed a cat-and-mouse game between activists and the government regarding informants, with activist groups pressing informants to commit illegal activities before being accepted and the government giving them permission to do so. Although the CI in the Bond case was just an acquaintance of Bond who was concerned about his arson activities and not a person specifically dispatched to penetrate the movement, without the help of the CI, the government probably had very little chance of identifying Bond.

Animal rights blogs and websites have already begun dissecting the Bond case and providing lessons learned to current (and aspiring) animal rights activists. Many of these sites have focused on Bond's mistake in confiding in the CI and have indicated that they believe the informant is a woman, which is a fair guess, based on the way Bond appeared to be trying to impress the CI with his exploits. In all likelihood, such sites will soon learn the identity of the CI through court documents and appearances and will publish the CI's name and photo in order to prevent the CI from informing on other activists. The ALF has threatened informants, and has even created websites devoted to identifying "informants, infiltrators, snitches and agents." As previously imprisoned ALF activist Peter Young once said: "For the sake of clarity, let us be uncomfortably honest: To snitch is to take a life. By words and by weapons, each day lives are taken in the most egregious of crimes. When this happens in the courtroom, we call it 'cooperation.' I call it violence, and I call anything done to keep an informant out of the courtroom 'self-defense.'" Despite this rhetoric, however, to date, none of the people identified by the ALF as an informant have been harmed.

And despite the uproar the Bond case has caused on websites affiliated with animal liberation, when it comes to the national media, the case appears to have received more coverage because of Bond's dramatic facial tattoos than for his string of successful arsons. Yet even with a dearth of media reporting, a review of the communiques carried on the websites of groups such as ALF and Stop Huntington Animal Cruelty shows that animal rights activists remain surprisingly active, not just in the United States but also in Mexico and elsewhere. Operationally, many of their lone wolves have been more successful in conducting attacks than jihadist lone wolves.

Polarization in the animal rights community continues to grow, as do calls for lone wolves to remain isolated from more moderate elements of the community, who are seen as potential security threats. As those activists favoring violence draw further from the more moderate members of the movement — either due to ideological differences or the need for operational security — any moderating influence on the radicals will also be removed, and the lack of this influence will result in the more radical elements becoming even more violent. This dynamic will certainly produce more attacks against property and can be expected to lead to more attacks of the kind advocated by the book found in Bond's backpack — attacks against people.

Read more: Escalating Violence From the Animal Liberation Front | STRATFOR

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