

# Terror-Buster!

## *Storage Manager Foils Plot*

By John Dunlap

This is a cautionary tale, one which everyone in self storage should take to heart. It is a story of a person who paid attention to strange doings at his facility, called local police and helped thwart a planned attack by terrorists. The good news is that this cautionary tale is not only true, but comes with a happy ending.

Jordon Garrand is a co-manager of the Guardian Self Storage facility in New Windsor, New York—north of New York City and West Point, just off I-87 and not far from the Hudson River. It is a scenic and beautiful area, not one in which you'd expect a terrorist plot to be brewing. But four men living in Newburgh started hatching a plot in June of 2008 to use surface-to-air missiles to blow up military planes at the Air National Guard Base at Stewart Airport, as well as explosives to blow up a Jewish synagogue in the Bronx.

James Cromitie (also known as Abdul Rahman), Onta Williams (aka Hamza), David Williams (aka Daoud) and Laguerre Payen (aka Amin) were together in the plot to do major damage and likely take some American lives. They all followed the lead of Cromitie, who told an FBI informant in the summer of '08 that he had parents living in Afghanistan and was upset about the war there, especially the killing of Muslims in Afghanistan and Pakistan by American forces. He also told the informant that if he were to die in the raid, he would do so as a martyr and would go to "paradise."

In April of 2009, two of the men bought a nine millimeter semi-automatic pistol for use during the planned terrorist operations. The same FBI informant also directed the men to Stamford, Connecticut, to purchase a Stinger missile as well as three IEDs that each contained over 30 pounds of C-4 explosive. What the terrorists didn't know was that the Stinger was inoperable and the explosives were inert. In short, the FBI was on to them thanks to the informant.

### **Garrand Takes Notice**

Nonetheless, the men decided to store their weapons in the Guardian Self Storage facility, which is where Garrand's role in the story commences. The group rented a unit at the beginning of May. They introduced themselves to Garrand and told him they were starting their own business and wanted to store their merchandise at Guardian. But soon thereafter Garrand started noticing strange behavior.



*Jordan Garrand (right) is honored by New York state law officials on August 6 for his actions to help thwart terrorists in New Windsor.*

"They would often have three or four cars on our site at the same time," Garrand said. "One time I noticed them on the property and went out to talk to them. The further back on the property I got near them, the further back they went. When I got near them they scattered. Later on I checked and discovered they had come in and out of the facility 200 times over the course of only a few days."

"They were constantly in their cars, either across the street or next door," Garrand added. "Strangely, all their activity took place during the daytime hours; they were never there at night. All that activity tipped me off to contact my manager. Then we went to the local authorities."

One question looms: If the FBI knew of the plan all along and had helped orchestrate the sale of unusable weapons to the terrorists, why did they not know where the terrorists were storing their cache? According to both Garrand and Kelley Redl Hardisty, one of the owners of Guardian, the FBI never bothered to contact them.

"Perhaps they just didn't feel it would be an intelligent move to let civilians know what was going on," Hardisty said. "Whatever the case, we were just happy that Jordon did an excellent job of seeing something wrong and doing something about it. His actions are the kind that can help save lives."

The four men were arrested on conspiracy charges on May 20, 2009. On August 6, New York law enforcement officials held a ceremony to honor Garrand at the self storage facility in New Windsor.

New York State Homeland Security director Thomas Donlon noted that the public's input can make a big difference in finding and tracking down terrorists. "When you look at past successful terrorism cases, the eyewitnesses and the people who come forward, like Jordon, provide us with information that leads to the successful prosecution of these terrorist organizations," Donlon said.

### See Something, Say Something

For Garrand, 25, and originally from Poughkeepsie, New York, all the attention he received was nice. But as far as he is concerned, he was only doing his job.

"All the attention has seemed a little extreme at times," he says. "People come in and say thanks and tell me they saw me on TV or in the newspaper. I had no idea what I had done was of such a magnitude. The last thing on my mind was that I'd get all this attention. It has been somewhat overwhelming. But things seem to be getting back to normal."

Ever since 9/11, New York crime fighters have used the slogan, "See Something, Say Something." Garrand obviously did his part to show why the slogan is still important eight years later. But as far as he is concerned, everyone involved in self storage should be looking out for the best interests of their business and their customers.

"What it really comes down to is that I was just doing my job," Garrand says. "When people store their stuff, they are often putting so many meaningful things that they own in self storage. They deserve to have the best security possible. Security is what helps sell self storage. So if you work in self storage, it is really important to be aware of what is going on at your facility for that reason."

The message is clear: terrorism is still a possibility within the borders of the United States. People from all kinds of backgrounds can have a beef with the U.S. government or military. Part of their plan may involve storing weapons in self storage units. It thus becomes imperative for those who work at self storage facilities to be observant. Likewise, one shouldn't jump to immediate conclusions or profile customers based on their backgrounds. In this country, you still are innocent until proven guilty.

But if you see suspicious behavior, just like Jordon Garrand saw, and can back it up with facts and video, then contacting your local police might be a good idea. And you, like Garrand, may be doing a very good deed for your community and your country. ❖

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