

AS MIDNIGHT APPROACHED on Friday, July 26, 1996, there were still 15,000 people crowding Centennial Olympic Park. A heat wave that had kept temperatures hovering near 90 degrees for the past week had broken, and there was a cool breeze in the air.

For eight days, ever since Muhammad Ali lit the Olympic cauldron to open the Summer Games, the eyes of the world had been fixed on Atlanta. A stroll through Centennial Park meant overhearing conversations in exotic tongues, or standing in line behind someone from Ireland while standing in front of someone from Nigeria, or swapping pins with a visitor from Australia.

If you were there that evening, you may have passed by twenty-nine-year-old Eric Robert Rudolph, dressed in jeans and a blue short-sleeve shirt. A large pack was strapped to his back. Rudolph had grown up in the mountains of western North Carolina, where he had come under the influence of Nord Davis Jr. Besides being a former IBM executive, Davis was the leader of the Christian Identity movement, which posits that Jews are the children of Satan and that Christ cannot return to Earth until the world is swept clean of the devil's influences. Davis said often that the movement needed a "lone wolf"—an agent who could plan and execute an attack all on his own, telling no one.

For the past seven years, Rudolph had been a voracious reader of the Bible and of hate-filled propaganda denouncing gays, abortion, the government. He worked odd jobs, always demanding cash payment, and grew marijuana. He filed no tax returns and had no Social Security number. Two months before the Games, he told his family he was moving to Colorado, but actually he stayed in North Carolina. At some point, he decided to plant bombs on five consecutive days at Olympic venues, each one preceded by a warning call to 911. His goal was simple: shut down the 1996 Summer Olympic Games.

As the R&B band Jack Mack and the Heart Attack took the AT&T Stage that evening, Richard Jewell, a thirty-three-year-old security guard, kept watch near the sound and light tower. Born in Virginia, he moved to DeKalb County with his mother when he was six, after his parents divorced. He graduated from Towers High School and worked as a clerk at the Small Business Administration. A lawyer he befriended there would describe Jewell as earnest, sometimes to the point of being annoying.

Jewell always wanted to be a cop. In 1990 he landed an entry-level job as a jailer with the Habersham County Sheriff's Department. While working a second job as a security guard at his DeKalb County apartment complex, Jewell was arrested for impersonating an officer; he pleaded guilty to disorderly conduct and was put on probation.

He worked as a deputy sheriff for five years, and he was remembered for his zeal for the job and his tendency to wreck patrol cars. After his fourth crash, Jewell was demoted back to jailer. He chose instead to resign.

He was hired as a campus cop in 1995 at the tiny Piedmont College in Demorest. It was an ill fit. Jewell would write long, detailed reports on minor incidents. He upset college officials when he stopped someone for operating with one taillight. Although the main highway ran past the school, traffic violations were supposed to be handled by the Demorest police.

He got into trouble when he made a DUI arrest on the highway and didn't follow protocol by radioing the police department to handle the case.

He resigned in May of 1996 and moved into his mother's apartment on Buford Highway. She was about to have foot surgery; he wanted to be there for her and also to find a police job in the Atlanta area after the Games. In June he began working for a security firm contracted by AT&T, which was building a stage in Centennial Park. Jewell joked to a friend that if anything happened at the Games, he wanted to be in the middle of it.



SATURDAY, JULY 27

Rudolph found an out-of-the-way spot in front of the sound and light tower that faced the AT&T stage. Inside his backpack were three pipe bombs filled with gunpowder and six pounds of 2.5-inch steel nails, stuffed into Tupperware containers. The bombs were powered by an Eveready six-volt lantern battery hooked to a model rocket engine igniter and triggered by a Westclox alarm clock.

Rudolph put the bag on the ground, reached inside, and set the alarm to go off in fifty-five minutes. There were three benches in front of the tower. The one to his left was tucked against a steel barrier that paralleled what is now Centennial Olympic Park Drive, and he stashed the bag under that bench. Michael Cox, who worked for the Turner Associates architectural firm, and some friends were at the bench minutes before Rudolph's arrival.

MICHAEL COX: We were sitting on that bench about thirty minutes before the bomb went off, and we saw Eric Rudolph in the park. He

An Alice pack like the one Jewell discovered under a bench in front of the sound tower. Inside was Rudolph's bomb.

