

## A look inside the deeply flawed US prison system

May 20, 2010, was a day I will never forget. I had been up late the night before. The worldwide premier of "Running America" played at the Carolina Theatre downtown. My father, Charlie Engle, had produced and starred in the film, which documented his unsuccessful attempt to break the record for fastest crossing of the U.S. on foot.



BY KEVIN ENGLE  
STAFF WRITER

After a long day of school, I was in desperate need of a nap.

As I sat in the car on the way home, fighting to stay awake, I received a phone call from a number that I didn't recognize.

It was my dad, calling from the Guilford County Sheriff's Office.

He proceeded to tell me that authorities had detained him earlier that day outside his apartment, and that they still had not informed of his charges. He said they

were keeping him overnight and that he would call me as soon as he could.

He then told me he loved me and not to panic. And then his time was up.

It was a short call, lasting barely over a minute. In that short time, my brain was still fighting to comprehend whether it had been real or not. But it was all very real.

We came to discover that IRS Special Agent Robert

Nordlander was responsible for the initial investigation into my dad after seeing news coverage of "Running the Sahara," a documentary following my father's 4,600 mile run across the Sahara Desert in 2006 to create awareness of the water crisis in the area.

He personally invested 700 hours into my father for two months, going through my dad's tax returns, his mail, even his garbage, only to come up with no substantial evidence

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of financial deviancy.

After staging a full-scale operation involving an attractive female undercover agent — my parents are divorced — Nordlander finally found something that he could use against my father.

My father was accused of having illegally inflated his income on two stated-income mortgage loan applications

back in 2005-06.

Not only was this something that millions of people did before the housing market crashed, it was something done by mortgage brokers, unbeknownst to him.

He would eventually serve 21 months in federal prison for mortgage fraud, though found not guilty of providing falsified information.

I got to visit him five or six times, at a minimum-security prison in Beckley, W.Va.

The visiting room was surprisingly informal, almost cozy, with a deep-grey carpet and murals painted on the walls. In the corner, a 6' 7" inmate whom my dad had become friends with distributed toys to children.

Every time I visited him, I would see dozens of children playing games while their parents talked, their smiles contrasting with the concerned looks of their parents.

The majority of the inmates at Beckley were drug offenders, many of them middle-age men serving mandatory sentences of 10 to 20 years.

When 40-year-old men are still serving sentences from drug charges imposed when they were teenagers, there is a problem with the system.

There is little chance for reconstruction in our system. It prosecutes to punish, not to rehabilitate.

Although I will never get those two years with my dad back, we have been able to make up for lost time.

But, how do you make up for 20 years?

## Reactionary bomb-prevention strategies are not the solution

The reaction is nearly routine: tragedy strikes, America responds with angry harrumphs and rhubarb, then we slowly forget and return to our lives. Sometimes these harrumphs address a clear and present danger and are well deserved; sometimes they're just rhubarb.



BY ANTHONY HARRISON  
STAFF WRITER

In the wake of the Boston Marathon bombings, former Assistant Secretary for Infrastructure Protection Robert Liscouski published an opinion piece through CNN which stated, "IEDs are one of the biggest threats to the United States." His advice in order to prevent future attacks is increasing the Office of Bombing Prevention's budget.

What I ask in response is, "Why?"

"I don't think there is an urgent need for prevention (of bombings)," said Visiting Assistant Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies Jeremy Rinker in an email interview. "At least, no more than before the Boston bombings."

I believe there are two main reasons why bombing prevention in America is a fool's errand: they aren't a constant danger in our society, and the unpredictability and availability of materials renders them impossible to prevent.

"All the materials and ingredients (to make a bomb) are out there," said Visiting Assistant Professor of Political Science Robert Duncan. "You need fertilizer and diesel fuel. Washing detergent, nails, bolts."

But one might desperately ask, "Isn't there anything we can do to prevent these attacks?" The answer is technically yes, but Americans would be forced to cede fundamental rights.

"Sure, there are measures we could take: martial law, totalitarianism, reducing whole populations to the status of virtual prisoners in their own homes and cities," said Max Carter, director of the Friends Center,

in an email interview. "Is that what we want to do?"

I say no. There's no need to construct a police state because of one bombing.

So, in the face of facts, is bombing prevention in America a viable prospect?

"I am not at all convinced that our form of prevention would actually work," said Rinker. "Our tendency is to increase security without increasing our understanding and empathy of the possible root causes of such a horrible act."

One might ask what these "root causes" are. The answer is the same as usual: dissent against inequities, either real or imagined, leads to violent protest by disturbed individuals.

"People that are pissed off, at somebody or the government, want to make a statement," said Duncan. "As long as you have thinking like that, you're always going to have that possibility (of bombing attacks)."

"We are a very violence-prone society. Hell, our country started at the point of a gun. Our whole history sort of rests on violence."

One thing that maddens me about the proposal of stepping up bombing prevention in the United States is that it's raised in willful ignorance of America's most prevalent source of violence: guns.

"It takes a little brain power to build a bomb," Duncan said. "Any idiot can pull a trigger."

In light of this fact, I find it almost appalling Liscouski would state IEDs are a major threat in America after the rash of massacres in 2012. Where was he last year? Vacationing on Uranus?

Notably, Liscouski is the director of Implant Sciences Corporation, manufacturers of bomb detection equipment; I suggest he has a dog in the hunt.

In all seriousness, I believe the issue of bombing prevention in the United States to be nearly a moot point. I wouldn't advise eliminating the Office of Bombing Prevention or anything rash, but let's calm down, accept that we can't stop attacks like the Boston bombings and confront the more pressing problems facing our nation.

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