

War on terrorism and my almanac

D.G. MARTIN



I am in trouble with the FBI. So are some of my best friends, the ones to whom I gave a new almanac for Christmas.

According to news reports last week, the FBI has warned 18,000 police organizations to be on the lookout for people with almanacs.

"What is the FBI thinking?" I thought. The almanac is one of my favorite books. I like to have a recent copy nearby, all the time, to settle arguments with my friends on questions such as, what is the tallest building in the world?

The FBI says that terrorists use almanacs "to assist in target selection and pre-operational planning."

"The practice of researching potential targets is consistent with known methods of Al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations that seek to maximize the likelihood of operational success through careful planning."

After reading about this report, one of my friends confronted me and said, "I'm giving your almanac back. What were you trying to do? Get me arrested?" He was smiling, sort of.

I may be in even bigger trouble. Last month I bought three different almanacs—"The World Almanac and Book of Facts," "Time Almanac," and "The New York Times Almanac." I planned to compare them over this year to see which one of them served my purposes best.

The FBI's terrorism-almanac alert spurred me to begin my comparisons now, starting with which one of these almanacs might be most useful to a terrorist.

Since I knew that terrorists have an interest in tall buildings I checked "The New York Times Almanac" to see if it had such a list. It didn't. "Time Almanac" has a list of the world's 100 tallest buildings, a list of notable modern bridges, the world's highest and largest dams, and notable tunnels. Since most of the listed structures are in other countries, I am not sure this almanac would

be of much use to terrorists working on targets in this country.

On the other hand, "The World Almanac" has a comprehensive list of the tall buildings in North America, organized conveniently by cities. It also lists more than a hundred important bridges in North America as well as major U.S. Dams and reservoirs and about 15 of the longest North American underwater vehicular tunnels.

Each of the almanacs lists the world's busiest airports. "The World Almanac" has a separate list for North America.

"The New York Times Almanac" has something for the terrorists that the other ones miss, a complete listing of all the nuclear plants in the United States.

I do not really think that any of these almanacs is going to provide a terrorist with key information that he could not find in other readily available public records. But the FBI has a point. Our open society and the vast amount of information that is available to all of us can be used against us. By

terrorists or other enemies. But the free exchange of information is one of the greatest benefits of living in a free society. We cannot let the terrorists or the FBI take that benefit away from us.

In any event, anyone who tries to take away my almanacs is going to have a fight on his hands.

Just a couple of weeks ago one of my almanacs helped settle a big argument a friend and I had after church on December 21—the day of the winter solstice. "This is a great day," I said. "I love it when the days start to get longer."

"Me too," my friend said. "But, you know, the sun is still going to keep on rising a little bit later and later for the next few days."

"That just can't be right," I said. "If the days are getting shorter, the sun has got to start rising earlier."

I rushed home to check my almanacs. Only "The World Almanac" has a list of sunrises and sunsets for each day of the year.

It settled the argument in my friend's favor. Its chart showed that, while the sun begins to set later and later

sometime in early December, the sun does not begin rising earlier until a few days after the beginning of January.

Before I put my almanacs down, I checked to see what each one said about North Carolina. Not much, although each of them gave a very brief summary of some important facts. All gave a short list of famous North Carolinians. There were some interesting variations. For instance, "The New York Times Almanac" and "Time Almanac" omitted Andrew Jackson, but they included him in the South Carolina list.

So much for those almanacs, at least for the time being.

If you are interested in seeing the complete list of famous North Carolinians from each Almanac, send an e-mail request to dmartin13@nc.rr.com.

But you have to promise not to tell the FBI that I own so many almanacs.

D.G. MARTIN hosts UNC-TV's *North Carolina Bookwatch*, which airs Sundays at 5 p.m. For information, log on to the website at www.unctv.org.

OUR VOICES

Catching Saddam, questioning conclusion

Admittedly, my understanding of politics is puerile, naive perhaps. That's why though I'm glad Saddam's been seized, I'm not consumed. Nor do I intend to celebrate another victory for democracy. In fact, throughout my life (and his reign) I've never been ruffled. Even after September 11, normalcy ruled. Though, I have struggled with domestic salvos. Iraqis, however, are different except for loyalists. Otherwise, his capture encourages.

But what about those who've lived free for the past three years, how do they feel? Much of it of course depends on how they've fared under Bush's influence. In keeping with our conceit, the real issue is "how will Saddam's arrest improve our — my life?" Rhetorically (patriotically), answers engulf. Theoretically, of course, it truncates the possibility of terrorism, which engenders business (and boasting) during campaign stops. It also makes the world "safer for democracy", ideologically.

Individually though it denies. That's why politicians and their policies intrigue. Why do they routinely harm those who they are supposed to help? Is equality that elusive? Or are we innately evasive and politically provincial? In this climate, utilitarianism usurps and goodwill exhausts. Can we not achieve parity without unjustly punishing? Must we, moreover, unfairly privilege? Once celebrations settle that's what Americans will ask. That's what makes us great, though it also makes us narrow. That, and our ability to be hypocritical and self-critical together.

Even so, psychologically Saddam's capture encourages our belief in an evil triumphing good. Though, the two often entangle. That's probably why Superman fastened an S to his chest. It's also why Captain America was flag enwrapped. Bush, of course, never claimed to be super or exceptional. Figuratively, however, he flexes. But that won't stop our soldiers from being strengthened. Being so is like getting a hit or making a basket after a prolonged slump. In this regard, Bin Laden is on deck waiting to be dunked.

For now, however, Saddam consoles, especially the pictures, replete with a defeat democratically inflicted. Never mind the invisible weapons or innovative technology, the presence of which would've further impeached. Textually, these are footnotes. What matters are the footprints. These track him through three presidencies, two wars, and innumerable whys. Independently, they justify. But justification alone won't achieve justice. Here we must consider, question at least, our exclusive claims to the good.

Saddam is evil no doubt. But evil is never as political (or geographical) as we project or pretend. Hence, much remains domestically undone, morally perhaps. Here we must scrutinize our history as well as the present. In doing so, we might become nationally enlightened, more so perhaps than we've previously allowed. Besides, war's tie eventually tears.

Joel Bryant
Charlotte

Will 2004 be N.C.'s year for education lottery

VAL ATKINSON

We're back again talking about a North Carolina lottery. And the reason it's a hot topic again is because it's an election year.

North Carolinians will be asked to choose a president, U.S. senator, governor and nine other Council of State members. And they'll also be asked to choose 50 state senators and 120 state House members. Although our president, U.S. senator and Council of State are very powerful people, it's the North Carolina legislature who'll decide whether you and I will have an Education Lottery in North Carolina or not.

There are some state legislators who are unshakably opposed to a State Education Lottery because of religious reasons; there are others who are opposed to a lottery because they are Republicans and most of their constituents oppose an education lottery, but the worst kind of opposition to an education lottery is our Democrat elected representatives who oppose an education lottery because they're afraid of giving Republicans a campaign issue.

What they don't realize is that they don't have to worry about giving them a campaign issue when they've already given them what they want - a no on the



Lottery question. This is stupid politics!

A Democratic legislators' position on an education lottery should be high on the priority list of voters during the primary elections. Incumbents' records should be reviewed and those who voted against the education lottery previously should be asked if their sentiments have changed. It's unacceptable to have representative who vote against the wishes and predilections of their constituents. In every poll ever taken on a lottery, between 66 and 75 percent of the people were in favor of North Carolina having an Education Lottery. But the

anti-lottery forces always managed to peel-off enough Democratic legislators to beat back the people's will.

This year ought to be different. That 66 - 75 percent majority ought to start flexing its muscles. The first thing they ought to do is tell those representatives who voted against the Education Lottery... "No vote for the Lottery, No vote for you".

The final vote on the referendum was Ayes 50 and Nays 69. If Democrats would have supported their governor and voted Aye with him, the final vote would have been aye 62 and no 57.

Democrats voting against Gov. Easley's Education

Lottery were: Walter Church, House District 86, Burke County; Joe Hackney, House District 54, Orange County; Bob Hensley, former Legislator, Wake County, Dewey Hill, House District 20, Brunswick County; Verla Insko, House District 56, Orange County; Paul Luebke, House District 30, Durham County, Paul Miller, House District 29, Durham County; Martin Nesbitt, House District 114, Buncombe County; Edd Nye, House District 22, Bladen County; Dan Blue, former Legislator and Speaker, Wake County, and Jennifer Weiss, House District 35, Wake County.

The striking thing about their no vote was that the bill they voted against didn't ask them to vote up or down on the approval of a lottery, the bill asked if they would allow the people (their constituents) to vote in a non-binding referendum on whether they wanted a lottery or not.

Our legislators' vote was "No, the people shouldn't have a say in whether they want a lottery or not". Their no vote on this issue was the height of condescension and parental arrogance. Maybe they've forgotten for whom they work.

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