

**Acceptance Speech of Brent L. Smith**  
**Inaugural Distinguished Scholar Award**  
**ASC Division on Terrorism and Bias Crime**

I would like to thank the selection committee and the members of the Division on Terrorism and Bias Crimes for this honor. I look around and see lots of people in this room more deserving of this award than myself.

Gary LaFree asked me to make a few comments. I've chosen to answer the question that I am most frequently asked: "How did you become involved in terrorism research?" Answering that question will give me an opportunity to acknowledge that my own research owes a debt of gratitude to a number of people, some of whom are here today.

The answer to the question begins right here in Philadelphia. I attended my first ASC meeting here in 1979. After receiving the Ph.D. from Purdue in May of that year, I went on active military service and was assigned to teach at the U.S. Army's Military Police School. I came to Philadelphia that fall to receive the award for winning the Graduate Student Paper Competition that year.

If it hadn't been for my dissertation advisor and mentor, **Dr. Ron Huff**, I certainly would have never entered that competition and would probably have not attended the meeting that year. My wife, **Shery**, had been diagnosed with terminal brain cancer and was not expected to live more than six months. She was at Walter Reed Army Medical Center while I was here. She is in attendance today, 38 years later. I don't know what I would do without her. Dr. Huff introduced me to the ASC president that year, **Ron Akers**, who offered some words of support and encouragement, given the difficult time Shery and I were going through. I have never forgotten his kindness.

The Army had been directed to create a Counterterrorism Course for installation commanders and their staff in 1979. I picked up a couple of books on terrorism from the ASC book exhibit and took them back to the Lieutenant Colonel who was developing the course. I guess he thought I knew something about the subject (which I didn't), so he later asked me to teach a block of instruction in the week-long course. I was a Captain, had been in the army less than a year, and had zero credibility. I would be teaching career officers, most were senior commanders, LTC and above. So I was assigned a classified block of instruction entitled "Predicting Terrorism" in an effort to overcome the credibility issue. After teaching it for a year, I concluded we knew very little about "predicting terrorism." That was the initial spark that has guided my research over the years. Because the CT course was well funded, we had the opportunity to bring in some of the most respected terrorism experts in the United States. During that year, I had the opportunity to meet and work with **Dr. Steve Sloan**, **Arleigh McCree**, and guest speakers like **Brian Jenkins**.

After leaving active duty in 1981, I accepted a position at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and in 1985 wrote a short article on the inappropriate (or misappropriated) use of "terroristic threatening" statutes at the state level. The article attracted more attention than I ever imagined it would and **Dick Ward**, who was vice chancellor at the University of Illinois at Chicago at that time, asked me to come speak to a terrorism symposium that they were sponsoring.

I accepted and as soon as I got up to speak, they had a bomb threat called in. We had to evacuate the room and a man walked out with me and said "let's go get a cup of coffee." It was **Bill Dyson**, head of the counterterrorism section for the FBI in Chicago. By the time our conversation had ended, he said "we've got to get you some better data to work with." He told me to call **Dick Marquise** at the Terrorism Research and Analytical Center at FBI HQ. Dick arranged for the FBI to create a list of persons who had been indicted under the CT program from 1980-1987.

By the early 1990s, I had enough data to write a manuscript about American terrorism. I wanted to call it "Pipe Bombs and Pipe Dreams." But I couldn't find a publisher interested in publishing anything on terrorism at that time. I shopped it to 16 different presses and got 16 rejections. Then Ron Huff and I were talking at an ASC meeting and I explained my difficulty and he said "let's go see **Austin Turk**. He's editing a series on political crime." I had always been in awe of Austin's work, but never dreamed that he would select the manuscript for publication. *Terrorism in America: Pipe Bombs and Pipe Dreams* was finally published in 1994.

For those of you who haven't read or aren't familiar with Dr. Turk's advocacy of "nonpartisan conflict theory" in the 1979 so-called "infamous" issue of *Criminology* on radical criminology, I encourage you to dig it up. His article served as the impetus for two articles **Kelly Damphousse** and I published in *Criminology* in the late 1990s and has guided our belief that empirical research, particularly on terrorism and regardless of sponsorship, must be as apolitical as possible.

After the Oklahoma City Bombing in 1995, I was asked to testify in two of the four hearings the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime convened. I was, to say the least, nervous about making a presentation at such a highly charged hearing. I called Shery, and in her reassuring way she asked me "How much are they paying you?" I said "nothing." And she replied "I doubt that their expectations are all that high then." I wasn't any less nervous, but we did get a laugh out of it.

Over the years, the FBI graciously compiled lists of cases for us, but by the late 1990s, a Supreme Court ruling on the Privacy Act precluded the FBI from compiling the data for private individuals. With help from the National Institute of Justice and sponsorship from the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, a strategy was devised to allow data collection to continue. At a meeting in Washington at the District Chop House, **Jack Riley** from NIJ, **Bill and Erin Bryant** from the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime,

and **Kevin Giblin** from the FBI, arranged for Congressman **Bill McCollum**, chair of the Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime at that time, to write a letter to the FBI Director requesting the list of names. Since Congress was not subject to the Privacy Act, the House Judiciary Committee could distribute it to me for additional data collection. Without their help, the American Terrorism Study would not have been able to continue. Later the Senate Judiciary Committee with Senator Sessions as the sponsor continued this tradition until about 2006. Domestic lists from the FBI ceased about that time, but we had already devised a very reliable way of identifying these cases without actually having the lists.

I have never been a very confident person. I've always doubted the value of my own work – perhaps that was good, because it drove me to do better. In 1998, with coaxing from my colleague, **Kelly Dampousse**, we were awarded a small grant from NIJ. We had just completed that project when, in 1999, the National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism put out a solicitation to fund terrorism research. I would never have applied had it not been for Kelly and Steve Sloan, a member of MIPT's Board and an acquaintance from my days at the Army's Counterterrorism Course.

We were eventually awarded nearly two million dollars from MIPT to expand data collection on the ATS. An MIPT representative later told me that someone at NIJ, who managed the solicitation process for MIPT, told him that “we think they could do the work for less money, but we are convinced you will get your money's worth.” That comment has been a continuous reminder that I repeat to the graduate students who work with me in our Terrorism Research Center at the University of Arkansas – “Never promise more than you can deliver, but always deliver more than you promised.”

In more recent years, I had the privilege to get to work with **Gary LaFree** and the folks at the START center at the University of Maryland. I am deeply appreciative of their support over the past decade. And I have had some magnificent program managers at

NIJ. I am especially thankful to have had the opportunity to work with **John Picarelli** and **Kathy Girouard**. It's the likes of these people and other scholars like **Mark Hamm**, **Steve Chermak**, **Josh Freilich**, **Jeff Gruenewald**, and **Chris Shields** whom I've had the pleasure of working with that have made this honor today so special to me. Thank you all again.