



WHAT CAN THE FIRST ATTACK ON THE WORLD TRADE CENTER IN 1993 TEACH US ABOUT THE ATTEMPTED CAR BOMBING OF TIMES SQUARE? THAT WITHOUT HEROES LIKE EMAD SALEM, THE WAR ON TERROR COULD BE ENDLESS

BY PETER LANCE

SEVENTEEN YEARS BEFORE Faisal Shahzad parked an SUV with an improvised bomb near Times Square, another Islamic terrorist, Ramzi Yousef, parked a Ryder truck with a similarly configured weapon of mass destruction beneath the World Trade Center. That 1,500-pound bomb exploded, killing six and injuring 1,000. While Yousef's scheme was more complicated and extensive, the methodology of the terrorists had not changed much in two decades. In both cases a spiritual leader had inspired the attacks, a shadowy network of money men had financed them and overseas camps had provided training to rabid fundamentalists willing to risk their lives to take those of Americans. The one significant difference between then and now? Back in 1993 the FBI had a courageous undercover asset who had buried himself inside the terrorist cell and was able to thwart a much bigger

plot to blow up the United Nations and the bridges and tunnels into Manhattan.

Indeed, the initial euphoria over the New York City police department's 53-hour investigation and arrest of Shahzad hid the most terrifying aspect of the takedown: The FBI's elite Joint Terrorism Task Force had the Pakistani-born U.S. citizen under investigation for six years prior to the bust, to little effect. Even more troubling: As early as 1999 the feds were onto a United States-born Yemeni cleric who not only influenced Shahzad but also inspired the Army major accused in the Fort Hood massacre and the 23-year-old Nigerian who tried to eviscerate 289 people on a Northwest flight into Detroit on Christmas Day.

Why has the FBI lagged in its efforts to infiltrate and quash Al Qaeda's terror campaign in the United States? Why, after so many years, was our only defense in this last attack the fortunate miswiring of a powerful car bomb? For





FBI ASSISTANT SPECIAL AGENT IN CHARGE CARSON DUNBAR (FAR LEFT), A FORMER STATE TROOPER, OFTEN ANGERED SALEM. INCREDIBLY, SALEM GAINED THE TRUST OF THE "PRINCE OF JIHAD," OMAR ABDEL RAHMAN (RIGHT AND BELOW).



SALEM WITH AN ANTIQUATED FBI BRIEF-CASE TAPE RECORDER (ABOVE). RAMZI YOUSEF, MASTERMIND OF THE 1993 WORLD TRADE CENTER BOMBING (LEFT).

answers one must go back to 1993 and examine how the FBI handled its best asset—a heroic undercover informant who risked his life for his country.

Last year I was in Manhattan to deliver a lecture on terrorism at New York University when I received a cryptic e-mail informing me that a man named Emad Salem might meet me after the talk. I was surprised. Salem was a former Egyptian army major and an undercover operative for the FBI. But after my speech, Salem, who had entered the witness protection program in 1993 and had not been heard from since, never showed.

There was no message for me when I got back to my hotel, either. So I went to bed. Then, around two A.M. the phone rang. A voice said, "26 Federal." It was the address of the FBI's New York Office. I jumped into a cab and rushed down to Foley Square in lower Manhattan, where a heavysset man stepped from the shadows to greet me. It was Salem, and he wanted to talk.

"IF THE APPROACHING ASSET DOESN'T SPEAK ARABIC OR KNOW THE KORAN, HE DOESN'T STAND A CHANCE."

I had told fragments of Salem's story in my book *1000 Years for Revenge*, which is ultimately why he contacted me six years later. His heroics had been related to me by agents who were unhappy with how he had been treated as an informant.

The gist of it: Salem had infiltrated the terrorist cell run by Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman and uncovered a plot to blow up 12 "Jewish" locations in Manhattan. However, missteps by the FBI forced Salem out of the cell and paved the way for the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. That attack was designed by Ramzi Yousef, whose uncle and collaborator Khalid Sheikh Mohammed went on to finish the job in 2001.

"You have to wonder what course history would have taken if Emad Salem had continued his role as an informant," says NYPD detective James Moss, who has been working a famous Al Qaeda murder mystery based on new leads from Salem. "Certainly the

first World Trade Center attack would have been thwarted."

In a series of conversations beginning that night last November, Salem told me his story of espionage and life on the run, starting with his attempts to help a slow-moving FBI snare Sheik Rahman, the father of all things Al Qaeda in America, and ending with information the NYPD feels may resolve Moss's unsolved murder case. Also, Salem now lectures special agents at Quantico, desperately trying to school the bureau on how to recruit a new generation of undercover assets. "This needs to happen immediately," says Salem, "before somebody parks a suitcase nuke in midtown Manhattan. But these agents I lecture at the FBI Academy have been slow to understand. It took the bureau how long to infiltrate the Mafia for the same reasons? The scary thing is, we don't have that much time.

"You cannot get next to these people without understanding the radical Islamic mind-set," says Salem. "More important is how we think in the Arab world. If the approaching asset doesn't speak Arabic, know the Koran or understand the most basic of Middle Eastern customs, he doesn't stand a chance."

Ever since he was a seven-year-old at the American School in Cairo, Emad Eldin Aly Abdou Salem had nurtured an abiding affection for the U.S. He spent 18 years in the Egyptian army and rose to the rank of major. As a soldier he had a conventional Islamic anti-Semitic worldview.

"Growing up, I had seen Jews as they were portrayed in the Egyptian newspapers," says Salem. "They were like demons. They had horns and big noses. That's the box of hate I lived in." All that changed in 1973 when he encountered the first Jewish prisoners captured during the Yom Kippur War. "For the first time I saw them as people," he says. "They were afraid. They were human. This was the first crack in my box of hate."

Salem's ultimate epiphany came late one night in 1986 when he was invited to the basement of a Cairo federal police precinct. There, an iron door opened and he saw a naked man hanging upside down being tortured mercilessly.

Salem hid his shock. He had no desire to find himself hanging in the next cell. "But the sight of that man shattered my box forever," he says. He quickly put in for retirement and got a visa to the U.S., where he became a naturalized citizen.

Prior to his disillusionment with the Egyptian ruling class, Salem had been something of a fixer in Cairo. He was the go-to guy if you needed anything—from a private tour of the pyramids at Giza to some backstage time with the lead belly dancer at the Hilton.

Once a friend of his put down 30,000 Egyptian pounds as a deposit on an apartment, but (continued on page 118)

THE SPY

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the unscrupulous landlord simply kept it. So the friend called Salem for help. He showed up with a pair of uniformed men. He pulled out a black hood and threw it over the landlord's head. "I told him that if we didn't get the money back for her, he would disappear," Salem says. At first the landlord stood his ground and claimed he didn't have the money. Then Salem took the hood off and went eyeball-to-eyeball with him. Though short in stature he has an imposing presence. He was a champion wrestler in Cairo and a second-degree black belt in judo. His biceps were the size of beef shanks. The landlord swallowed hard and gestured for them to remove a wall picture. He then opened the safe and handed back the money. "My friends always knew they could count on me," says Salem, who to this day remains close with perhaps the world's most famous Egyptian, Omar Sharif.

As an officer in Egypt he was chauffeured around in a private car and had a house full of servants. But once he made the move to New York, he found himself struggling as an immigrant, reduced to working as a cabdriver and a security guard. Then he got a job as the night manager at the Hotel Woodward at 55th Street and Broadway, a rundown destination for Russian UN diplomats who used the fleabag for trysts with hookers.

One night Nancy Floyd, a special agent for the FBI, walked in. She was a petite tough-talking redhead from Texas who was working Russian Foreign Counterintelligence. Floyd asked Salem if he might do her a favor and examine the room of one of the Russians who'd checked into a suite on an upper floor. When she told him she had to get a warrant, Salem was ready to use his passkey on the room.

Anxious to prove his worth, Salem did his own black-bag job, meticulously removing the outside wrapper of a Russian cigarette pack for prints and copying the full contents of the diplomat's briefcase. It turned out to be an inspired move—the documents provided the bureau with new details on the emerging Russian mob.

After another six months helping Floyd and an INS agent on a series of cases, Salem announced to her that "there is a man in this city more dangerous to America than the worst KGB hood."

"Who?" asked Floyd. Salem told her about Rahman. At the time, the sheik was preaching at two mosques in Brooklyn and a third in Jersey City.

Born in 1938 near the Nile delta, Sheik Omar lost his eyesight as an infant. But by the age of 11, reading in braille, he had memorized the entire Koran. He earned a Ph.D. in Islamic studies, and after escaping house arrest in Egypt following the assassination of Anwar Sadat, he made his way to Peshawar, Pakistan (close to the reported birthplace of Times Square bomber Faisal Shahzad). There he served as one of the CIA's point men in the smuggling of \$3 billion in covert arms to the mujahideen rebels fighting the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Then, in 1990, with reputed help from the agency, Rahman slipped past a watch list and flew to New York City. Within months of his arrival, one of his followers, an Egyptian named El Sayyid Nosair, gunned down Rabbi Meir Kahane, founder of the Jewish Defense League, in a bloody shoot-out at the Marriott Hotel on Lexington Avenue.

The brazenly public murder moved the bureau to act. Salem was enlisted to risk his life and go undercover. His handlers gave him three months to infiltrate the sheik's cell; he did it in three weeks. In fact, he got so close that a bearded Salem (in trench coat) turned up in news photographs escorting Rahman.

Soon he was driving the sheik on a fund-raising trip to a Detroit mosque in a van provided by the FBI. The sheik's new handler also went up to Attica to visit Nosair, who had been convicted on gun charges in the rabbi's murder. Posing as a bomb maker, Salem vamped through a plot hatched by Nosair to blow up a dozen Jewish targets, including a series of synagogues and the 47th Street diamond district.

Each night Salem, who wasn't wearing a wire, was compelled to spill what he'd uncovered. Unfortunately his FBI control agents, John Anticev and Detective Lou Napoli of the Joint Terrorism Task Force, often proved to be unavailable. Instead, Nancy Floyd worked double duty, debriefing Salem at the T.G.I. Friday's near 26 Federal Plaza. She would then run upstairs to type the required serial reports before driving home to Stamford and commuting back in the morning to work Russians again.

"Salem was hanging his ass on the line," says retired special agent Len Predtechenskis (Floyd's mentor in Russian Foreign Counterintelligence). "If these terrorists around him had gotten even a whiff that he was working for the G, they'd have slit his throat. He was getting the job done, spying on the cell, and then Carson Dunbar took over the JTTF and blew the deal." Dunbar, a former New Jersey state trooper with no background in counterterrorism, didn't like the tough-talking Floyd and, according to Salem, resented him even more.

"Carson called me into his office," says Salem, "which was really reckless because I was undercover and the sheik's people were everywhere. I sat in a chair by his desk. He got up and sat down across from me, kicking off his shoes. He eyed me for a minute and then said, 'You think you can come here from Egypt with sand in your shoes and tell me how to do my job?' I looked at him and said, 'I'm doing your job, sir. Who else do you have who could get this close to the sheik?' He didn't have an answer for that except to tell me to get out of his office." Dunbar then insisted that Salem take a series of polygraphs—in effect, demanding that the ex-Egyptian major re-audition for the undercover job months after he'd penetrated the sheik's cell.

"The first two tests were 'inconclusive,'" says Salem, who had learned how to "beat the box" years earlier, in the Egyptian military. "Then they sent in the head FBI polygraph man from Washington. He was cocky. He said, 'These other operators who tested you before were trained by me. They made mistakes. I don't do mistakes.'" At that point the lie detector specialist wrote the numbers one to 10 on a piece of paper and taped it to the

wall, telling Salem to choose a number, write it down and stick it into his pocket.

"Then he ran through the numbers," says Salem. "'Is it one, two, three?' I answered no to all 10. And then the guy started to look confused. Finally he said, 'It's either five or six,' and I made a noise like a buzzer on a game show—'Annnnh. Wrong. It was number four.' The guy was livid. He stormed out of the room. Later, word came back from D.C. that the test was 'inconclusive,' but they changed it to 'deceptive.'"

Dunbar then insisted Salem wear a wire. "At that point Emad had family in Egypt, and they would be at risk if he was exposed," says Predtechenskis. Salem was also sleeping on the floors of mosques, where the guards around the sheik could easily pat him down for a recording device. So with the rules of engagement altered, Salem was effectively terminated. "The FBI lost its eyes and ears inside this incredibly dangerous Al Qaeda conspiracy," says Predtechenskis.

"What happened next," Salem tells me, "is the blind sheik contacted Sheik Osama, and they sent a world-class bomb maker to New York. His name was Ramzi Ahmed Yousef."

Yousef, an engineer trained in Wales, arrived at JFK in early September 1992 and began building a bomb with the intent of producing a "Hiroshima event" beneath the Twin Towers. Working out of an apartment on Pamrapo Avenue in Jersey City, Yousef was aided and abetted by the identical cell Salem had infiltrated—some of whose members the FBI had had under surveillance from the summer of 1989, when agents followed them from a Brooklyn mosque to a Long Island shooting range. Two of the principals were Mahmud Abouhalima, a six-foot-two redheaded Egyptian cabdriver, and Mohammed Salameh, a short, bearded Palestinian.

Now out of the cell, Salem kept his ear to the ground at the Al-Farook mosque in Brooklyn. He soon learned that a major bomb plot was afoot. A month after Yousef's arrival in 1992, Salem met Nancy Floyd at the Subway sandwich shop near the FBI's New York Office and warned her to tail Abouhalima. "If you do this, Nancy," Salem told her, "the Red will lead you to the man building the bomb."

But by then interoffice politics had hamstrung the FBI. Floyd had been described by a senior agent as "the bitch" he had to get off the case. She warned Salem that she didn't think Dunbar would approve the surveillance. With that, Salem delivered a chilling warning: "Don't call me when the bombs go off."

Around noon on February 26, 1993, Yousef's urea-nitrate fuel-oil bomb detonated on the B-2 level beneath the north tower. Blowing through four floors of 11-inch-thick reinforced concrete, it was a formal declaration of war by Al Qaeda that would culminate in the destruction of the World Trade Center eight years later.

"After the 1993 bombing, when those people died, including a pregnant woman, I blamed myself," says Salem. "I thought that if I had only stayed inside that cell I could have stopped it. That's when the FBI called me back, and I said, 'Whatever it takes. Wire

me up. I'll go back under. I don't care, live or die. Nobody harms my America.'"

It took him five months. "We set up a bomb factory in Queens," says Salem, "and we were building five devices the size of Yousef's bomb. One day Sheik Omar asked me to sweep his apartment, and I called John Anticev and Louie Napoli to get me a device. Carson sent them to Radio Shack. They had a black limo they used to ferry me around, and for four hours these agents went from store to store, calling Dunbar for approval on the purchase. He kept saying, 'No, that's too much.' Can you imagine? I'm this close to one of the world's most dangerous men and Dunbar is nickeling-and-diming. I had to get this device or the sheik would be suspicious. So finally I went to the Spy Shop and bought my own."

Salem then concocted an ingenious plan by which he set the sweeping device's levels such that it appeared the sheik's entire apartment except the tiny kitchen was bugged. And that's where on FBI tape CM #28 he has the spiritual head of Al Qaeda uttering the words that would finally convict him: "Find a plan to inflict damage on the American Army itself." It turned out to be the most dangerous moment in Salem's undercover infiltration.

"Because the sheik cannot see, he has hypersensitive hearing," recalls Salem, who was armed with a crude Nagra reel-to-reel

recorder hidden in a briefcase. The *Get Smart*-era technology put Salem at high risk of exposure—he had to put chewing gum on the briefcase to hide a flashing red light the FBI had installed to indicate when the tapes were running. "Keep in mind that there are a half dozen guys in the front room with Uzis and AK-47s who will blow me apart if they know what I am doing. The feds needed me to get an actual threat on tape, so I am lifting the briefcase up to my face level because he is leaning in to whisper the fatal words to me. All this time my heart is pounding because I am convinced he will hear the handle of the briefcase creak and I will be blown."

At every turn, Salem continued to demonstrate incredible courage, even after someone leaked word to the media that the FBI was working an undercover asset who had penetrated a bombing conspiracy. "I was livid," says Salem, "but by then I'd risked my life for months, so I decided to brass it out. I called Siddiq Ali, the head of the cell, who had waved an Uzi at me a few days before. I pointedly told him about this news story and that it must have been one of the others and we should shut the operation down. I used the anger I had with the FBI, and he believed me. He said, 'No. Let's keep going.'"

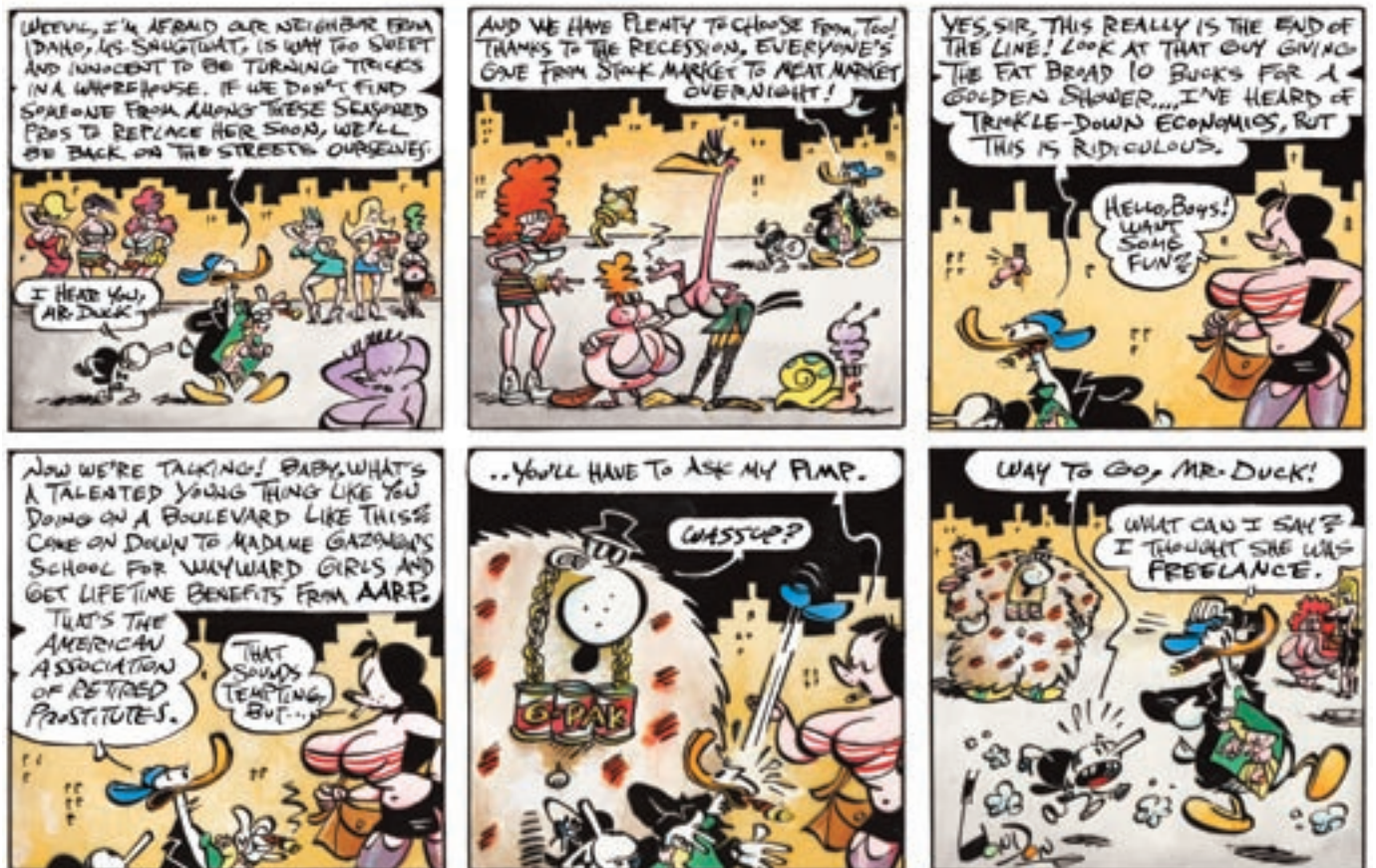
Still mistrustful, the FBI kept Salem in the dark about its plans until the day of the plot's takedown. He and his family were given no notice about how the endgame would be

handled. "The agents who came in for the arrest roughed me up pretty badly," says Salem, who was hospitalized with chest pains. "Then they told my wife and kids we had three hours to pack." The FBI Hostage Rescue Team quickly grabbed Salem's family and moved them to a safe house. That's when Salem dropped his own bomb. He'd been so mistrustful of Dunbar and other FBI bosses that in addition to taping the bad guys he'd made his own tapes of the feds. "I was afraid that if something went wrong, they would blame me," Salem now says. "Dunbar and James Roth, the head lawyer in the New York Office, went nuts." Under federal law the red-faced prosecutors in the U.S. attorney's office were now forced to turn over this second set of 70 "bootleg" tapes to the defense.

In one of those tapes Salem is heard telling Anticev and Napoli that he'd warned them the Trade Center had been a target. They denied it, but in another tape Anticev admitted, "You were right...we were stupid in a lot of ways." Salem responded, "If we was continuing what we was doing, the bomb would never go off." At that point Anticev said, "Absolutely. But don't repeat that."

On another recording the outspoken Floyd described her bosses in the New York Office as "gutless" and "chickenshits" for the way they'd treated Salem. Her honesty almost derailed her career. Instead of getting a corner office in the Hoover Building for recruiting perhaps

Dirty Duck by Bobby London



the most important undercover asset in recent FBI history, Floyd found herself the focus of a multiyear internal affairs investigation by the bureau's Office of Professional Responsibility. Before it was over she was suspended for two weeks. "They took her badge and her gun and put her on the street," says Predtechenskis. The reason? "Insubordination to Carson Dunbar." Worse yet, someone leaked a story to the *New York Post* suggesting she'd been having an affair with Salem.

Under the banner headline *TEMPTRESS & THE SPY*, Floyd found herself portrayed as a kind of bureau Mata Hari when in fact the bootleg tapes proved conclusively that she'd been 100 percent professional with Salem. "This story was the ultimate cheap shot," Predtechenskis tells me, "an attempt by people in the New York Office to smear a great young agent."

Years later, when I interviewed him, Dunbar was unrepentant, calling Salem "a prolific liar" and an informant who was "out of control." But when it counted, at trial, Salem and Floyd, who was also subject to brutal cross-examination, came through. When he described how he'd used the briefcase tape recorder to trap the sheik in a seditious threat to the U.S. military, the 57-year-old cleric screamed, "Satan! Infidel!"—issuing a de facto fatwa, or death warrant, against Salem. The blind sheik and nine others, including Kahane's killer Nosair and Clement Rodney Hampton-El, an American Black Muslim who had offered to supply explosives and weapons, were convicted of seditious conspiracy for the Day of Terror plot—their plan to blow up the United Nations, the FBI's New York Office, the George Washington Bridge and the tunnels leading into Manhattan. "The U.S. is trying to kill me with a slow death," hissed the sheik. "But God is great, and he will be revengeful." There was little doubt, as he was led out of the courtroom, that the central focus of his vengeance would be Emad Salem.

So lethal was Rahman's grip on Osama bin

Laden and Al Qaeda's number two, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, that even from prison the blind sheik inspired the Luxor, Egypt massacre in 1997, the bombings of two U.S. embassies in Africa in 1998 and the attack on the USS *Cole* in 2000—acts of terror committed in his name that collectively left hundreds dead.

Facing three separate death threats, Salem and his family had either to move or to change their identities multiple times in the first two years. He practically lived in a Kevlar vest.

"It's difficult for the average person to understand what you give up when you do this," says Salem. "I can no longer pull out my résumé for a job. I can't say I have an engineering degree. My wife, who is a jewelry designer, can't mention her master's degree or ever set foot in a jewelry exchange again. We're alive, but we are also ghosts."

After 24 months of constant movement by the U.S. Marshals Service, Salem, his German wife, Karin, and their two children, Sherif and Noha, were finally able to breathe. The feds had given them new names: Tom and Yvette Parks. The kids (then 13 and 17) were called Mike and Jennifer. Salem used \$116,000 of the funds he'd earned from the Rahman conviction to buy a house in Orange County, California.

"For the first time we were beginning to feel stable," he says now. "Then one day at school Noha's teacher had a newspaper with my picture in it. Innocently my daughter said, 'That's my dad who stopped those terrorists.'"

"The next morning there was a knock at the door," says Karin. "Again the marshals gave us just hours to pack." A convoy of black Suburbans showed up, and suddenly the Salem-Parks had to abandon their home—whisked by jet to a new city, where their identities were washed and they had to start all over again.

"We lost the house," says Salem. "It was a brutal reminder of how fragile our life was." His son, Sherif, says, "The roughest part was

going from school to school and always having to be somebody else." And that meant short stays of two to three months in Tennessee, Minnesota, Virginia and California.

"They'd pick us up in a van with no windows and take us to a hangar," says Salem. "We'd board a jet, and they wouldn't get their flight plan until we were airborne. Then we'd land in an unknown city and go into another van and into a garage somewhere and up an elevator and finally out into a hotel, where we'd live for a while—until the marshals picked up wind of another threat and we'd have to move."

By 1996 the ex-Egyptian army engineer and his family were tired of running. "We were exhausted," he says. "So I asked Hal and Mark, two of the marshals in my detail, 'Please go and get the rest of my money.' 'How much?' they asked me. I told them *all* of it, and I wanted it in cash in a large duffel bag. So they literally went to the U.S. Treasury and withdrew \$750,000 in cash and took me to a bank, where I put it in a safe-deposit box."

Salem and his family have nothing but praise for the witness protection program and the marshals who kept them alive all those years. They were finally able to settle in one city somewhere in the continental U.S. They put down roots, bought a modest house and ran a relatively successful small business until the recession hit.

They were forced to leave the Witness Security Program after Salem's sister, whom he'd had the feds bring over from Egypt for her safety, decided she wanted to go home. "It was too big a risk," says Salem, who is still wanted by Al Qaeda, Sudanese intelligence and Siddiq Ali, the émigré from Khartoum who hatched the bridge-and-tunnel plot.

Now that he's out of the program, Salem spends his nights waiting for some rabid jihadist to jump out of the dark to even the score. "I know that as long as I live, I'll be a target," he says. "You don't put the prince of jihad away for life and expect to walk away." Still, despite the price he's paid, Salem is remarkably free of remorse about his decision to risk his life to go undercover for the feds. "America is the country I chose. I love it beyond anything you can imagine, and I'll never let anybody harm this country."

Emad Salem succeeded in spite of the FBI, not because of it. Sadly, his experience points to the FBI's long-standing inability to effectively combat outlaw organizations from the inside. Even having a single FBI agent go undercover to gain the trust of a low-level wiseguy in the Bonanno family proved daunting.

The sting of Benjamin "Lefty" Ruggiero by Special Agent Joe Pistone (a.k.a. Donnie Brasco) was touted by the bureau as so significant that it spawned a series of books and a feature film starring Johnny Depp as Pistone and Al Pacino as Ruggiero. "In truth, Lefty was a low-level petty thief who had the IQ of a mothball," says retired detective Joe Coffey, former commanding officer of the NYPD's Organized Crime-Homicide Task Force. "The feds spent millions to get Pistone in, and he didn't really develop anything. He never put a hole in the Bonannos."

That minor infiltration of La Cosa Nostra pales in comparison with what Salem accomplished by stinging the spiritual head of Al



Qaeda. But his success against the blind sheik is a bitter reminder of how little the FBI has progressed since then in developing undercover assets. Worse, it still can't seem to connect the dots when confronted with compelling evidence of a terror threat.

Case in point: Anwar al-Awlaki. Within days of Faisal Shahzad's arrest for the Times Square bomb attempt, he reportedly admitted that he was influenced by the U.S.-born radical Yemeni cleric—the same imam who had inspired Major Nidal Malik Hasan to open fire at Ford Hood, killing 13 and wounding 38. More shocking, Awlaki was also linked to 23-year-old Nigerian Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, accused of trying to down Northwest flight 253 with an underwear IED on Christmas Day.

The bureau's failure to put the bracelets on Awlaki is a metaphor for its seeming inability to thwart the radical Islamic threat. Not only was the then 30-year-old imam linked to three of the 9/11 hijackers back in 2001, but he was interviewed multiple times by special agents before skipping the country in 2002.

He then audaciously returned to JFK, where he was detained by Customs agents after his name turned up on a watch list. But after a few hours he was released when an FBI agent called to clear him. Now Awlaki is considered such a threat to U.S. interests that he became the first American citizen on the CIA's list of terrorists approved as a target for assassination.

Nearly a decade after 9/11, one has to ask whether the FBI has any better idea of how to stop terrorism on American soil now than it did before the emergence of Al Qaeda. Officially the bureau has 6,000 operatives assigned to counterterrorism, yet there are still fewer than 50 Arabic-speaking agents. Recently, the bureau admitted its second attempt to create a computerized "virtual case file system" to replace its paper-driven records system was months away from deployment almost eight years after its inception. Its soaring development costs are now approaching half a billion dollars.

Meanwhile, in his PowerPoint presentations at the FBI Academy, Salem tries to attack Al Qaeda at its roots. He says agents need to gain an understanding of how men like Bin Laden preach a "distortion of the prophet's words."

"You may think that as a devout Muslim I view you as an infidel," he tells me after I relate how I spent my grammar school years as a Catholic altar boy. "But the Prophet Muhammad says that *no one* who is a believer can be punished this way. In the Koran there are five pillars that make up a believer. If you embrace these five, you cannot be condemned with a fatwa. First, do you believe in God? Second, do you believe in his angels? Third, do you believe in the prophets, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jesus and Muhammad? Fourth, do you believe in the holy books, the Torah, the New Testament and the Koran? Lastly, do you believe in the Day of Judgment? Ninety-five percent of Christians and Jews believe in these five pillars, which means they are believers and cannot be seen as infidels."

So how is it, I ask him, that the Al Qaeda hierarchy can get away with branding the Jews and "the Crusaders" as infidels, subject to death—its justification for the

murder of thousands on 9/11?

"These men have corrupted Muhammad's words," insists Salem. "And they have done it for profit." He says that when the blind sheik declared it "permissible" to attack Coptic Christians in Egypt, he was after their wealth. "When Sheik Omar was arrested in 1993, the feds searched his apartment and found tens of thousands of dollars in cash under his bed," he says. "The very reason he came to New York was to grab the millions still being raised for the mujahideen in Afghanistan who had battled the Soviets."

The literal translation of *Al Qaeda* is "the base." Named for the database of thousands of so-called Afghan Arabs who came to fight Russians during their occupation of Afghanistan, Bin Laden's terror network was bankrolled via the Makhtab al-Khidamat—the so-called services office for the mujahideen—a worldwide organization of brick-and-mortar fund-raising centers.

The largest center in the U.S. was called the Alkifah and was based at the Al-Farooq mosque on Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn. At one point in the early 1990s the Alkifah was bringing in millions of dollars a year in cash. "One of the reasons Sheik Omar came to New York," says Salem, "was to take over the

*"The humps are the agents
who do the heavy lifting.
The suits are the managers
who sit behind their desks
and worry more about
failing than succeeding."*

Alkifah, and he did it by ordering a hit more grisly than any Mafia execution."

In early 1991 police discovered the ravaged body of Mustafa Shalabi, the Egyptian who ran the Alkifah center. He had been punctured and slashed with 30 stab wounds and shot six times. "After the sheik branded him a bad Muslim, Shalabi became terrified," says Salem. "He sent his wife, Zinab, home to Egypt with their child, and he was packing up to join her when he met that terrible death." The murder sent a message throughout the radicalized Arab community in America.

In 1993, after the Day of Terror bust, the feds reopened the case. Hampton-El was identified as a prime suspect. Also implicated was Mahmud Abouhalima, the redheaded Egyptian cabbie who had been the sheik's personal driver. And by November the U.S. attorney's office had issued grand jury subpoenas in the probe. Then, for unknown reasons, the feds mysteriously backed away from the case. It was ice-cold until Salem started talking to me.

During our interviews he casually revealed that he'd worn a wire and taped a conversation with Hampton-El, the American Muslim who had confessed to being a participant in the crime. "He told me that the sheik had ruled that Shalabi's blood had become permissible," says Salem. "So they went to his house and

shot him, and then they said, 'Okay, it's time to cut him and move him upstairs to make it look like the Jews did it as revenge.'"

After Salem gave me that account I met with NYPD detective James Moss and passed on a detail about the homicide from Salem (via Hampton-El) that had never been in the press. Within days the NYPD reopened the case, and Moss flew to meet Salem in the state where he lives with his family under an assumed name.

"Emad Salem is the most interesting person I've interviewed in my 19 years in law enforcement," says Moss. "He may be the only man in America with unique firsthand knowledge into both the World Trade Center bombing and the Day of Terror plot. He single-handedly put away the blind sheik, who has to be maybe the most dangerous terrorist ever convicted. Salem has given us invaluable leads. His information is accurate, captivating and frightening." After reopening the Shalabi case, Moss made a startling discovery: Key forensic evidence on the hit was taken from the NYPD property clerk's office in fall 1993—months after the feds had restarted the murder investigation and used a grand jury to work the Shalabi probe. After the feds shut the case down in 1994, the evidence was not returned.

In late June, after pressing the feds for additional information on the case, Moss learned that a member of the cell Salem had infiltrated had given a full confession to the murder, but it had been buried for years in the files of the Joint Terrorism Task Force. "Emad Salem has ripped the lid off one of the great murders in the history of the war on terror," says Moss. "And we can now say that the discovery of the killers' identities became known to us now largely because of him."

"I told Detective Moss that if they bring charges, I will testify in open court," says Salem, who would once again be risking his life by coming out of hiding. For now, he lives quietly with Karin, with whom he recently celebrated his 20th wedding anniversary. Almost every month the FBI flies him to the academy at Quantico, where he lectures the special agents and assistant special agents in charge—men at the same level as Carson Dunbar—who Salem hopes will adopt a more aggressive approach to counterterrorism.

If he can change anything, Salem would love to address the problem that lies in the vast divide within the FBI between the street agents and management. "In the bureau you have two divisions," he says. "The humps and the suits. The humps are the agents like Nancy Floyd who do the heavy lifting. The suits are the managers who sit behind their desks and worry more about failing than succeeding." Salem pauses and thinks back. He still unfairly blames himself for not stopping Ramzi Yousef's first date with the Twin Towers. Finally, he goes on.

"I close each lecture at Quantico by telling these assistant special agents in charge that the suits need to behave more like the humps. Maybe if that happens and these FBI bosses start to understand how Al Qaeda thinks, we can stop the next big one. And it's coming. We got very lucky with that kid in Times Square. But we can't keep counting on luck. It's just a matter of time."

