

Oklahoma Rescue

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Sunday, 31 August 2008 19:50 - Last Updated Sunday, 22 November 2009 04:32



By Jon Hansen, Mass Market Paperback, 1995, not in print, but copies widely available online at about \$5.

NOTE: I wrote the following review in July, 1995 - when emotions were still running raw from the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. I had worked with Jon Hansen for a few years at this point, and considered him a friend. But I shouldn't have done this review.

First, I was still traumatized by being a witness to this tragic historic moment. And right or wrong, I felt as if it was distasteful for Jon to have cranked out a book only a few weeks after the last bodies were recovered from the wreckage. At least when the review was turned in, it was stripped of an even harsher tone by editors. And that's probably just as well.

Looking back now, it's a decent glimpse at the media craziness that surrounded the disaster. So, without any further delay, here is my review of Oklahoma Rescue:

Review: Jon Hansen is a natural at public relations. The Oklahoma City assistant fire chief is a veteran in dealing with the media, having developed the department's public information program in 1983. His job is to relay information and stories to the public about the men and women who risk their lives daily as Oklahoma City firefighters. And usually the story is not about himself.

"Oklahoma Rescue," now on sale in Oklahoma bookstores, promises the "heroic untold story, direct from the heartland and the heart" of Jon Hansen's role during the rescue and recovery efforts following the April 19 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. Hansen's book should not be confused with the book project involving Oklahoma first lady Cathy Keating. Proceeds from the first lady's project are designated for the victims' families. Hansen told The Oklahoman he won't make much money from his book, but won't say how much he has received or will receive. A large portion of the profits will go to the publisher, agents, lawyers and editors, he said.

"Oklahoma Rescue" is a 185-page paperback Hansen said he wrote while off duty. The book may provide some new details for anyone who did not watch, listen to or read the daily news coverage of search and rescue efforts following the bombing. He tells the stories of his department - with kudos for all and not one ill word toward others.

Hansen is careful not to hog the credit, always attributing actions and decisions to "we" and not "I."

A chapter titled "Satellite City" is probably the closest Hansen gets to relating his own story. While generally praising the media, Hansen focuses on celebrity television journalists he met. "Ted Koppel of ABC really felt for the people of Oklahoma City," Hansen wrote.

"Though I didn't meet him personally, I could hear the compassion in his voice when we talked over the airways. " Bryant Gumbel of NBC's "Today" show, "is a guy who does his homework," Hansen notes. "When he arrived on the scene he walked up to me and said, 'Hi, Jon. How's your wife Jenifer? ' Having never met the man, I couldn't help but be impressed. " Jenifer Reynolds, Hansen's wife, is an anchorwoman for KWTW in Oklahoma City.

Hansen also gives his account of the interview with Connie Chung, who was then with the "CBS Evening News. " After arriving at the bomb site in a limousine, Chung posed the question that angered many Oklahomans - "Can you (the Oklahoma City Fire Department) handle this? " "My initial reaction was certainly surprise, because that's exactly what we'd been doing, and doing well, since 9:02 a.m. "I had dozens of interviews by that time and no other member of the press had questioned our ability to deal with the crisis. "At the time I didn't really take offense. I simply answered what seemed to be a silly question as politely as possible. " Hansen said "It wasn't until the next day that I realized the problem that Ms. Chung had created for herself. "

- Steve Lackmeyer, July 1995, The Daily Oklahoman

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