EATING THE FBI'S LUNCH

Just before New Years, the investigations subcommittee of the House International Relations committee issued a report which criticized the thoroughness of the FBI investigation into the Oklahoma City bombing.

I wrote a column about it. The column drew this nastygram from retired FBI agent Weldon Kennedy:

"How can you write such garbage -- full of rumor, innuendo and just plain falsehoods? The FBI has to deal in facts and has done so with incredible success for the last 50 years."

The subcommittee said the FBI ought not to have abandoned its search for John Doe Number 2; that there is substantial credible evidence he was with Timothy McVeigh on the day of the bombing, and is of Middle Eastern extraction.

The FBI also should have pursued evidence linking Mr. McVeigh to a neo-Nazi compound in eastern Oklahoma, and evidence indicating a connection between Mr. McVeigh's convicted accomplice, Terry Nichols, and Ramzi Yousef, mastermind of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the subcommittee report said.

I also mentioned the investigative reporting of Peter Lance, who said the FBI suppressed information indicating a tie between Mr. Yousef and the destruction of TWA flight 800 in order to protect a corrupt FBI agent (who was indicted on four counts of murder last March chiefly on the basis of the information Mr. Lance reported).

Mr. Kennedy headed the investigation into the Oklahoma City bombing, and understandably is sensitive to criticism of it. I asked him twice to specify what he considered false, but he did not respond.

In the absence of specifics, Mr. Kennedy's word ought not to be taken as gospel. In an interview with CNN on June 3, 2002, Mr. Kennedy said:

"Even in the Moussaoui case, there's a lot of uproar over the fact that there was a failure to obtain a warrant to search his computer... The computer was searched and guess what? There was nothing significant on there pertaining to 9/11."

Three days later the Washington Post reported:

> Amid the latest revelations about FBI and CIA lapses prior to the Sept. 11 attacks, congressional investigators say it is now clear that the evidence that lay unexamined in Zacarias Moussaoui's possession was even more valuable than previously believed.

> A notebook and correspondence of Moussaoui's not only appears to link him to the main hijacking cell in Hamburg, Germany, but also to an al Qaida associate in Malaysia whose activities were monitored by the CIA more than a year before the terror attacks on New York and Washington.

In three books (A Thousand Years for Revenge, Cover Up, and Triple Cross), Mr. Lance detailed FBI bumbling in the war on terror, and the tendency of the FBI to promote the bumblers.

Bill Gertz, national security writer for the Washington Times, has written an equally disturbing book, Enemies, about how foreign spies have been eating the FBI's lunch.

"Enemies" focuses on the case of Katrina Leung, who was permitted to pass along critical national secrets for years after she'd confessed to being a spy for Red China because the two FBI agents who were supposed to be monitoring her were sleeping with her. (Unbelievably, *neither of those agents was punished*.)

Mr. Gertz also details how the FBI botched the search for the Soviet mole who turned out to be FBI Agent Robert Hanssen, because the investigating agents began with the assumption that no one who worked for the bureau could possibly be a traitor.

So the FBI ignored evidence pointing to Hanssen, and persecuted instead CIA officer Brian Kelley, whose investigative work had revealed the existence of a mole.

The FBI claimed credit for belatedly discovering Mr. Hanssen, but as Mr. Gertz reports, the mole was uncovered only after a KGB defector provided a compromising tape recording of what was unquestionably Mr. Hanssen's voice.

The agents who headed the probe were Mike Rochford, Rudy Guerin and Jim Milburn. "According to a source present when Kelley's innocence was confirmed, Rochford said to Milburn: 'Our careers are ruined,'" Mr. Gertz wrote.

Agent Rochford needn't have worried. Despite their egregious mistakes, all three received bonuses and promotions.

But Mr. Rochford's comment is telling. For many senior people in the FBI, their careers come first, the reputation of the FBI second. The security of the United States is a distant third.

The revelations in Mr. Gertz's book make it all the more urgent that responsibility for domestic counterintelligence be removed from the FBI and placed in competent hands.