

Dr. Larry C. Ford

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The Crime

James Patrick Riley

The day was less than ordinary for Biofem Pharmaceuticals CEO James Patrick Riley, on February 28, 2000. He had left from his home in Newport Beach, Calif., and arrived at the parking area of the Irvine Spectrum office complex shortly before 10 a. m. Riley parked his car and walked toward the Biofem office. Before he reached the entrance to the building, a masked stranger in a black hood approached Riley, pointed a gun to his face and fired. The bullet ripped through Rileys cheek, gashed his cheekbone, exited above his lip and ricocheted into the window of a nearby bank.

Dr Larry Ford

Witnesses who heard the shot turned to see the assailant running from the scene. The wounded 58-year-old executive immediately used his cell phone to call his business partner, Dr. Larry C. Ford, for assistance. Ford, 49, was in the building during the shooting and hurried out to help his colleague.

The assailant, who fled the scene, was seen diving into an approaching vans open sliding door before it sped away. Fortunately, the manager of a nearby bank saw the license plate of the fleeing van. The police traced the van and found it the same day at a Los Angeles auto shop, awaiting a paint job.

Dino DSAachs

Dino DSAachs, a 56-year-old Altadena businessman and a longtime friend and tax consultant of Ford, Rileys business partner, was the owner of the van. Twelve hours after Rileys shooting, police arrested DSAachs for allegedly driving the getaway vehicle. However, the identity of the gunman remained unknown. DSAachs claimed to have had nothing to do with the shooting, although he did admit to being in the area at the time of the crime. But police suspected it was more than a coincidence that connected Ford to the two men.

Ford and DSAachs had spoken on the phone on the morning of the shooting, investigators discovered. When questioned about the phone call, Ford said that DSAachs was only calling about a prescription. Shortly following the arrest of DSAachs, Ford became one of the main suspects in the attempted murder of his partner.

The *Irvine World News* reported on March 1, 2001, that Ford called Riley during his recuperation in the hospital to assure Riley that he knew nothing about the shooting. Ford also tried to persuade Riley that the phone call made to DSaachs on the morning of the shooting was also unrelated.

The police were suspicious of Fords explanation about the phone call and believed that money was the primary motive behind the alleged conspiracy, but they quickly discovered that the case would not be so clear cut. In fact, the investigation would take many unexpected twists and turns over the months to follow.

The Unexpected

The day following DSaachs arrest, police searched Fords Foxboro Street home, finding evidence described as germane to the case. On March 2, three days after Rileys shooting, Ford met with his lawyer for several hours. Later the same day, Ford shot himself in the head in the bedroom of his house.

He left behind a suicide note, in which he stated that he was innocent of the attempted murder of his partner. Fords lawyer, Bryan Card told the Associated Press on March 14 that the note stated that Ford believed he had been set up to look like he had been a part of the ambush. Ford wrote that he would be vindicated of the crime if the investigation was conducted appropriately. The suicide note also claimed that there was information related to the case hidden within his house, but the location written in the note was illegible.

Bomb Squad at Dr. Fords home

In a search of Fords property, police found five different guns in the bedroom where Ford had apparently committed suicide. None of the guns was connected to the Riley shooting. The guns were not the only weapons found on Fords property. Shortly following Fords death, a family member contacted the police anonymously to warn them that Ford had buried canisters of HIV-related materials on his property. The phone call sparked a massive search, which would expose much more than the caller suggested.

Biohazard suited police at Fords home (AP)

On March 9, 2000, police and FBI agents began a search of Dr. Fords backyard. However, before any digging began, the local elementary school and some 200 area residents were evacuated from their homes as a safety precaution and lodged for four days at a nearby Hyatt hotel.

Inspectors with barrels found at Ford's home (AP/Wide World)

After digging for some time beneath a concrete slab next to Fords swimming pool, they found six suspicious white plastic cylinder containers. The investigators x-rayed the cylinders on sight. We dont know whats inside, but we believe they are filled with illegal weapons and hazardous materials, Irvine police Lt. Sam Allevato said. Orange County Sheriffs Department used a robot to remove the containers from their location and sent them to the FBI crime lab in Quantico, Virginia, to be dismantled and analyzed. The six containers were filled with military grade explosives, including C-4 plastic blasting caps.

Twenty-one more sealed canisters were discovered on Fords property. The canisters contained several thousand rounds of ammunition and a multitude of guns, including automatic rifles. According to an article by WorldNet Daily, anthrax containers were also found buried in Fords yard. Some 25 jars of unidentified substances were removed from inside Fords home.

On May 15, 2000, The Chemical and Biological Arms Institute released the results of preliminary tests on the substances found in Dr. Fords home. The *Los Angeles Times* reported on May 15, 2000, that some of the live cultures contained cholera and salmonella. The *New York Times* reported on November 3, 2002, that the refrigerators in Fords home and office had a total of 266 bottles and vials of lethal toxins. Live cultures of botulism and typhoid fever were also found. On November 7, 2002, *CBS News* said that police also found the medical files of some 83 women, including some of their personal effects and photos, below the floorboards of the house. Investigators believed that the discovery of the biological materials and other articles found at Fords home could serve as a link to a biological warfare program run by the military in South Africa a country that Dr. Ford visited often before his death.

The Doctor

Dr Larry Ford, taken
from a College group
photo

Dr. Larry C. Ford was born into a Mormon family in Provo, Utah, in 1951, and had what many would call a wholesome childhood. Following high school, Ford obtained a national research award and enrolled into Brigham Young University. Ford married his Sunday school sweetheart, Diane, moved with her to Los Angeles in 1970, and enrolled in the University of California, Los Angeles Medical School.

◆ At UCLA, Ford was considered to be a skilled researcher and brilliant inventor. Even before his enrollment at UCLA, Ford had patented a test for infections, according to *Mormon News*, February 24, 2001. In 1975, Ford graduated from UCLA medical school and did post-graduate work in biochemistry and gynecology. He remained at the university to conduct research and lecture to add to his impressive academic achievements, Ford wrote many scholarly articles, covering a wide range of topics infectious diseases, cancer and the uses of antibiotics. According to the March 20, 2000, report in the *L.A. Times*, Ford was an ingenious character who also developed methods to reduce scarring and cure male pattern baldness. Eventually in 1987, Ford and his wife moved to Irvine, California. They had three children, two boys and one girl.

People described Ford as an intelligent and friendly man, yet also opinionated and candid. He was known to give free physicals to the church Boy Scout troop and give first aid to neighbors in the kitchen of his house. His children considered him to be a good father and devout Mormon, who would travel the long journey to his temple once a week to teach Sunday school and take them often on family outings. The *Mormon News* of February 24, 2001, reported that his son, Larry C. Ford Jr., said his father was the most loving, giving and loyal person, especially towards the poor and his family. Ford was also considered to be an eccentric by some who knew him. He wore bright colored outfits and tennis shoes regardless of the occasion. However, his intellect, kindness and unusual style of dressing were not the only characteristics that distinguished Dr. Ford from others.

Dr. Ford was also an avid gun enthusiast and hunter. While he was researching AIDS in South Africa for several months, he went on safari. In fact, a prominent South African official and friend of Fords, Niels Knobel, had a photograph of Ford posing next to a lion he had shot. Ford attorney Bryan Card said during an interview with Salon.com that Ford enjoyed game hunting. The *Mormon News* reported that Ford had gone on safaris and collected such items as buffalo heads and elephants feet as trophies. Card had also commented to Mormon News on March 19, 2001, that Ford had collected weapons and that he had a great deal of guns including, M-1s, hunting rifles and muskets. Fords family was aware of his gun hobby and had even known that Ford buried his guns and other substances. Fords family, however, did not know what many of his friends and colleagues did that Ford claimed to have worked for the C.I.A.

It was no surprise to many of Fords co-workers and friends that he said that he had worked for the C.I.A. After all, they had heard Fords description of some of his missions with the agency on more than one occasion. Salon.com reported that Ford had told friends he had once parachuted into apartheid-era South Africa in order to obtain dead guerrilla fighters blood samples for the United States. According to Fords lawyer, the doctor told him he had worked for the C.I.A. for almost 20 years. Moreover, Dresch reported on July 6, 2002, that Ford had told colleagues that he had also worked with the U.S. biological warfare program. Interestingly, Fords wife had never heard that her husband had supposed ties with the C.I.A. Mrs. Ford seemed shocked when she learned of the C.I.A. connection, following her husbands alleged suicide.

Det. Victor Ray
(Courtroom
Television LLC)

The *New York Times* reported on November 3, 2002, that prior to the search of Fords home, Detective Victor Ray warned F.B.I agents that there were reports that Ford had worked for the C.I.A developing biological weapons. According to Detective Ray, F.B.I. agent Doug Baker made statements, which confirmed that Ford had worked for the CIA. However, when Baker was later confronted about Fords involvement with the agency, he denied any knowledge of the connection between the two. Police could find no other evidence to support the stories of Ford having worked for the C.I.A. or with the U.S. biological warfare program. Officials of the C.I.A. denied that Ford had ever worked for them.

Many of the people who knew Ford had mostly positive things to say about him. However, there were some people who painted a less than flattering picture of the doctor. The *Mormon*

News reported on February 24, 2001, that co-workers of Ford claimed that he had often misrepresented his work and career. One example was that Ford claimed to have been a member of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, although the college denied his ever having been.

CBS News reported on November 7, 2002, that during the investigation into Ford, police found evidence that Ford had threatened a university student, who claimed to have had a relationship with him.

Ford offered an apartment and a car to the student, but later stopped paying for both gifts. She developed severe neurological conditions that resulted in her having to undergo brain surgery and medication. The *N.Y. Times* article on November 3, 2002, also stated that Ford had admitted to two friends that he had infected the student with an alpha toxin, a story which was later supported by evidence received during the investigation.

Tami Tippit met with Ford twice to discuss using her likeness in an advertisement selling a skin care product he had supposedly developed. She claimed to have been poisoned by Ford at one of those meetings. Like the university student, Tippit also contracted a mysterious neurological condition.

Tami Tippet before/after
(E. J. Swearingen)/ (Tom Russo)

Another unusual incident, this time directed against Ford, occurred during his earlier years at the university. According to the March 20, 2002, *L.A. Times*, Ford's life was threatened by a hit-man in 1978. One evening near the UCLA campus parking garage, a man shot four bullets directly at Ford. Only one bullet hit Ford and was deflected by a Dictaphone he had been carrying in his breast pocket. The gun man was never found and the incident was downplayed by the doctor. In fact, Ford's wife had never learned of the attempt on her husband's life until he mentioned it to her two weeks prior to Riley being shot. It is also not clear how aware Riley was of the many bizarre circumstances surrounding Dr. Ford and his past.

Partners

James Patrick Riley was a busy man. For years, Riley had been involved in the insurance business, real estate and other money-making projects. At the age of 32, Riley had become the founding chief executive officer of a brokerage corporation, which he later sold at a premium. Riley then worked at a series of projects, including real estate investments and the marketing of dietary supplements.

Biofem poster

According to the *L.A. Times* on March 20, 2000, Riley was introduced to Ford by a mutual business acquaintance. Together they developed a company, known as Biofem Pharmaceuticals Inc. in the late 1980s. Biofem's primary products were a vaginal suppository contraceptive, which supposedly prevented the spread of HIV and other venereal diseases, and a revolutionary antibiotic contrived from amniotic fluid. Ford had formulated both

products. When Riley was shot, the company was in the process of beginning clinical trials on the female contraceptive, which was called Inner Confidence. The trials resumed even though Fords life had come to an abrupt end and Rileys would be forever changed.

Soon following the death of Ford, Riley remained in seclusion to prevent another possible attempt on his life. He issued a statement that Biofem had never been involved in the use of toxic materials and chemicals. He also claimed to not have known about any of Fords supposed biological warfare links in South Africa or with the C.I.A. Biofems attorney, Lee, stated that Riley had thought his business relationship with Ford had been strong and that he had difficulty believing that his partner was responsible for the shooting. Eventually, Riley recovered from his physical injuries and rebuilt Biofem. However, the mystery around Ford and his possible ties to South Africas biological weapons program continued to baffle investigators and police.

Shady Dealings

Police suspected Ford of having links with the apartheid-era South African militarys biological weapons program from the beginning of the investigation. Bryan Card said that the doctor had at one time worked for the U.S. government on a chemical weapons project. According to the *L.A. Times*, Ford acted as a consultant to the South African Defense Force providing advice on protecting military personnel against biological attacks.

Former Surgeon-
General Niels Knobel



In the 1980s, Ford had met Niels Knobel, the surgeon general of the South African Defense Force (SADF). Knobel and Ford shared similar interests, including working toward a cure for AIDS. Investigators also found that Knobel and Ford had other similar interests. Knobel, who also served as the administrative overseer to a secret weapons project, had introduced Ford to South African biological weapons developers.

Dr. Wouter Basson
(AP)

The May 2000 issue of *Cockburn* claimed that Dr. Wouter Basson, the head of the South African biological warfare program secretly known as Project Coast, had been enlisting medical researchers worldwide to assist in the development of weapons. According to a South African newspaper, the *Sunday Independent*, Ford had given weapons training seminars to scientists working with the SADF on Project Coast. The training consisted of instruction on how to use bacteria called clostridium to contaminate tea bags, porno magazines and doilies with the goal of poisoning African National Congress members. In June 2000, Salon.com claimed investigators found evidence connecting Ford with the SADF and Project Coast; however, the extent of his involvement was not clear. Many of the documents from Project Coast were either destroyed or hidden away.

The *L.A. Times* wrote on March 20, 2000, that Ford's involvement with the SADF and Project Coast well extended beyond the weapons. The article stated that Ford had also worked under Basson to create commercial drug products and covert sensory irritants for the military to use. The developments were said to have taken place at a company known as Delta G Scientific lab. Sources told the Associated Press in early November 2000 that the company was actually a front for Project Coast. One formula, which was developed at the company by Ford, was said to be an effective treatment for baldness. Other sources had said that the formula was not as much a cure for baldness as it was a deadly poison, called silatrane. In November 2002, Basson was interviewed by Mike Wallace on CBS's popular news program 60 Minutes.

During the program, Wallace confronted Basson with a document, which read, The acquisition of any relevant chemical and biological weapons literature from Dr. Ford. The document was supposedly found in Basson's possession by investigators searching for evidence to convict the former SADF and Project Coast leader. Basson denied ever seeing the document. When Wallace confronted Basson about Ford developing silatrane at the Delta G lab, he again denied that Ford had ever developed such a formula. Basson insisted that silatrane was never developed for use as a weapon. According to 60 Minutes, a South African scientist had testified that silatrane was a poison and that scientists had developed creative devices for its inconspicuous delivery. One such device, which had been supposedly developed by the South African scientists, was umbrellas that were altered to distribute the poison. Intriguingly, one such umbrella was discovered in the home of Dr. Ford during the search conducted by investigators. The evidence was just another clue linking Ford to Basson and Project Coast.

It was also reported by 60 Minutes that the U.S. government was concerned that Basson may have been selling biological weapons secrets obtained during research for Project Coast. Basson had frequently visited countries such as Libya, Iraq and Iran, throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Investigators and federal agents have voiced suspicion that the trips were connected with Project Coast. Basson claimed that the CIA threatened his life if he pursued any relationships with those countries. It is unclear if there was any chemical or biological weapons information exchanged between Basson and the three countries.

The Outliers

While investigators unearthed much information about Ford and his unusual contacts, it was difficult for investigators to put together the entire puzzle because a great deal of information is still missing. However, as the Ford story developed over time, a more frightening picture of the doctor emerges.

An alleged mistress and lab assistant of Ford's told the *New York Times* in early November 2002 that she had seen Ford carrying a vial on the airplane to South Africa. She stated that the vial was later handed over to a South African official. She claimed that the vial Ford carried contained deadly bacteria that could have endangered everyone on the plane. Basson admitted to the *Times* that Ford had carried biological samples to South Africa, yet claimed they were not lethal and had no military significance. In 1986, two F.B.I informants attended a meeting in South Africa at which Knobel and Ford were present. The informants overheard a conversation indicating that Knobel had received toxic agents from Ford and another doctor named Nilsson.

Dr. Jerry Nilsson, a friend, fellow Mormon and former colleague of Fords, often accompanied him to South Africa. Ford and Nilsson had at one time shared an office together at UCLA and had co-authored several gynecological papers. Nilsson had been involved in many projects, some controversial, that had included Ford. In the late 1980s, Nilsson attempted to organize with Ford and other doctors the creation of an infectious disease center in Los Angeles. The center was to have related facilities in Africa, Germany and other countries. However, the project fell through due to a lack of funding. Nilsson had been involved in other projects involving gold mining and hospital management, according to Salon.com. Investigators received information that Ford had buried anthrax in a gold mine. Nine months following Fords death on November 3, 2002, the *New York Times* reported that police found the doctors business card and directions for making chemical and biological weapons, including anthrax, in a gold mine in Nevada. It was unclear if the gold mine was related to the one Nilsson had been involved with. During the Ford investigation, Nilsson was named as one of the key suspects in the case, the *L.A. Times* claimed in July 2000.

Dino DSAachs, the strongest link between the doctor and Rileys shooting, continued to deny that he drove the gunman to the shooting. Police found other evidence linking DSAachs to Riley, following the discovery of the van. According to the *Irvine World News*, a manual about gun silencers and photos of Rileys parking area marked with an X was found at his home. Investigators also linked DSAachs to Nilsson as well as Ford, when it was discovered that the three men had been frequently seen at the Beverly Hills home of their mutual friend Gideon Bouwer. More than one year following the crime, DSAachs was put on trial for conspiracy to commit murder. He was found guilty and sentenced to 26 years to life in prison, still refusing to identify Rileys shooter.

Gideon Bouwer frequently held parties at his Beverly Hills home. On July 17, 2000, the *L.A. Times* wrote that two FBI informants and acquaintances of Bouwer and Ford Peter Fitzpatrick and Tom Byron told investigators that Bouwer would often brag that Nilsson and Ford were supplying a high-ranking South African official with lethal bacteria to be used in warfare. The two informants also said that Bouwer would invite businessmen to his home in order to obtain military intelligence. On several occasions, the FBI had monitored Bouwers home, but was unable to find enough evidence to charge him.

The Ford investigation yielded many intriguing connections, most of which included links to South Africas biological and chemical warfare program. However, the investigation failed to solve two of the most crucial mysteries of the Ford-Riley case the identity and motive of the gunman responsible for shooting Riley and the extent of Fords alleged connection with Basson and Project Coast. They are mysteries that Ford may have taken to his grave.

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