



Stephen Jones



Michael Tigar

## THE DEFENDERS:

# Country Lawyer, Roaring Tiger

**E**ARLY IN HIS LIFE, Stephen Jones, Timothy McVeigh's court-appointed lawyer, got a taste of what it must have felt like in Oklahoma City on April 19. When he was in high school, a bomb planted in his old Houston elementary school killed some students and seriously injured the principal. It was "just horrible," recalls Mr. Jones, now 55 years old.

Yet the incident didn't shake Mr. Jones's resolve that any accused person, whatever the alleged deed, deserves an aggressive defense. In fact, Mr. Jones opened his own practice after being fired from a firm for defending a student who displayed a Viet Cong flag at a demonstration. "He had paid us, it wasn't a conflict of interest, he had a defense, and I didn't see any reason to drop the case," he says. Since then, Mr. Jones, who also has lengthy roster of corporate clients, has defended free speech and Vietnam War draft clients and represented two dozen death penalty defendants from his base in Enid, Okla.

Mr. Jones initially thought he would go into politics and interrupted law school at the University of Oklahoma for several months in 1964 to work as a researcher for Richard Nixon, who had heard about him through the Republican grapevine. After graduating, he went to Washington to work for Rep. Paul Findley, an Illinois Republican. "He was a star among all the congressional staff I dealt with," the retired congressman recalls.

Mr. Jones chose Enid as a home for himself and his family because it was a largely Republican county seat. But his political career faltered. In one of his four failed efforts, he took on the perennially popular David Boren in a U.S.

Senate race six years ago. Short on funds and organization, he traveled one Saturday to what he thought was a farmers' gathering at a local church. In fact, he had driven to the wrong town and ended up at a wedding. As he headed for the exit, the quick-thinking Mr. Jones said, "I'm David Boren."

Luckily, he was a better lawyer than politician and developed a broad legal practice, known for a focus on facts and procedural errors. In the McVeigh case, he recently delivered to the court a 300-page report accusing prosecutors of not producing evidence they had agreed to hand over. Late last week, the government turned over the material.

Mr. Jones's colleagues expect him to be methodical. "He's aggressive, but he's not going to leave anybody with a bad taste in their mouth," says Robert Bass Berry, a client and friend.

Representing Mr. McVeigh already has had a profound effect on the country lawyer's life. Mr. Jones says he's received a half-dozen threats. During a speech last fall, he confessed to "sleepless nights in which there has been a recurring dream of either someone parking a Ryder truck outside my home and blowing it up or my being shot in the hallway outside my office."

**P**OLITICS HINDERED Michael Tigar's early legal career, but over the years he has made peace between the two.

In 1966, Mr. Tigar, Terry Nichols's court-appointed lawyer, had just finished first in his Berkeley law school senior class when he won a clerkship with U.S. Supreme Court Justice William Brennan. "He was a dazzling student, probably the most engaging and challenging of all the students I've had," says Robert O'Neil, who taught him at Berkeley.

But as an undergraduate there in the early 1960s, Mr. Tigar, a native Californian, had worked for Pacifica Foundation Radio, espousing leftist politics with a voice Prof. O'Neil describes as being

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"sent directly from central casting."

When fellow justices and others learned of Mr. Tigar's political activities, they pressured Justice Brennan to rescind the job offer. Later, Justice Brennan acknowledged in a letter to Mr. Tigar that he had overreacted.

Mr. Tigar, 55 years old, a large, fit man with a booming voice and a flair for the dramatic, says he doesn't see that experience as a setback. He joined a Washington firm and argued his first case before the high court three years later, winning a victory for Vietnam War and draft protesters that led to the release of 3,000 young men from prison.

Mr. Tigar, who is now a professor at the University of Texas law school, also won an acquittal for philosophy professor and political activist Angela Davis, who was accused of providing weapons for a courthouse breakout in which three people were killed. His main strategy: dissecting the government's evidence with surgical precision.

When Mr. Tigar defended accused Nazi death camp guard John Demjanjuk, he and his team sifted through 100,000 documents stretching back 16 years to show that the government had suppressed evidence. "In most of these cases, the victory is in the details," he says.

In the courtroom, Mr. Tigar isn't expected to grandstand, but he could do it if he wanted. In addition to a voluminous list of law review articles, he's written three plays. A gourmet who favors French country and northern Italian cuisine, his home is a known social center for Austin's academics and professionals.

Mr. Jones and Mr. Tigar will receive \$125 an hour for their work, well below their normal rates. Although both he and Mr. Jones are aware that speaking engagements and book contracts may follow this trial, neither is pursuing those opportunities now. Mr. Tigar says a cookbook may be a likelier post-trial project. "I'm 55 years old, and most of what I'm going to accomplish I've accomplished," he says.