

Militia Head Has Ties To Area Group

Mark Koernke, Who May Be Questioned In Bombing, Once Spoke In Spokane

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A Michigan militia leader who authorities may question in connection with the Oklahoma bombing has ties with the Militia of Montana.

Authorities said Mark Koernke is not a suspect in the deadly terrorism, but they are interested in a fax his group sent to a Texas congressman about the bombing. James and Terry Nichols, who are in custody for the Oklahoma bombing, attended militia meetings in Michigan.

The anti-government, pro-gun, constitutionalist groups blame the federal government for deaths at Waco, Texas, and at the North Idaho cabin of Randy Weaver.

After disappearing for more than a day, the 38-year-old university janitor surfaced Monday in his hometown of Dexter, Mich.

He denied knowing the Nichols brothers or a third suspect, Timothy McVeigh, a former Army soldier also being investigated for an earlier bombing in Arizona. But militia leader Bob Johansen of Port St. Lucie, Fla., told The Associated Press by telephone that McVeigh and Koernke visited South Florida together about 18 months ago.

Koernke, a spokesman for the Michigan Militia-at-Large, was a featured speaker last December in Spokane at an anti-government rally sponsored by the Militia of Montana.

The Militia-at-Large is a secretive, heavily armed group whose members have been ejected by the larger Michigan Militia or who have rejected it themselves as too tame, The Washington Post reported.

The Michigan Militia has tried to distance itself from some of the underground group's activities, including a recent alleged plot to attack a Michigan National Guard base, The Post said.

A flier promoting the Spokane rally last December said, "Mark uses his military knowledge, connections and training to keep us up to date of advances of the World Government and the atrocities that have been taking place against citizens of this nation."

An estimated 300 people paid \$5 apiece to hear his speech. The Militia of Montana, based in Noxon, rented the music auditorium at Spokane Falls Community College for \$515.

Montana militia leader John Trochmann introduced Koernke and sold pro-militia videos, books and pamphlets at the gathering.

"They're scarier than any government I've heard about," said Spokane police officer Jack Pearson, who attended the gathering.

Koernke talked about international symbols and codes he believes are being placed on freeway signs to direct U.N. troops, Pearson recalled Monday.

The Michigan militia leader also talked about Russian tanks and aircraft which he claimed are being imported secretly into the United States for a forthcoming takeover by the New World Order.

"When it was over, I felt like standing up and telling him, 'Why don't you tell them the truth? Are you doing a gullibility study?'" Pearson recalled Monday. On Monday, Koernke told reporters in Michigan that he has contacted the FBI each day since Saturday and "they've had no interest in talking," The Associated Press reported.

Sheriff's Sgt. Dan Minzey said the FBI has told local authorities that it has no plans to question Koernke nor to search the two-story home Koernke shares with his wife and four children.

But FBI spokeswoman Dawn Moritiz in Detroit could not confirm that federal authorities have dropped all interest in Koernke. "We're not in a position to answer that right now," she said. "We're not giving out a list of people we're interested in questioning."

The oblique fax sent to the office of freshman Rep. Steve Stockman, R-Texas, appears to be a report from the scene of the bombing: "First update. Bldg 7 to 10 floors only. Military people on scene _ BATF-FBI. Bomb threat received last week. Perpetrator unknown at this time. Oklahoma."

Stockman's chief of staff Jeff Fisher said the congressman's office identified the sender as Libby Molley by sending a fax back to the number stamped on the message and asking the sender to call.

The relationship between Molley and Koernke couldn't immediately be determined, The Associated Press reported.

Molley could not be located for comment.

There is no telephone listing in the Dexter area under her name. Koernke is known as "Mark from Michigan" on a shortwave radio show he hosts to promote his militia views.

A militia supporter in Kalispell, Mont., also is on the show. Transcripts of the broadcasts are posted on various computer bulletin boards.

In a February profile of Koernke, the Detroit Free Press said he preaches that gun control is a prelude to a U.N. takeover of the U.S. government and says Los Angeles street gangs are being recruited as part of a secret police force to disarm Americans. He signs off each broadcast: "God bless the Republic, death to the New World Order. We shall prevail."