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## Oklahoma City Building Was Target Of Plot as Early as '83, Official Says

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Twelve years before the Federal Building in Oklahoma City was bombed, a group of white supremacists with close ties to the neo-Nazi group Aryan Nations drew up a plan to bomb the same building in much the same way, according to evidence gathered in the late 1980's by a Federal prosecutor.

The plot, conceived at the end of October 1983, called for parking a van or a trailer in front of the Federal Building and blowing it up with rockets detonated by a timer, the prosecutor, Steven N. Snyder, recalled in a recent interview.

In a strange coincidence, Richard Wayne Snell, an Oklahoma man identified by a Government witness as a participant in that plan, was executed in Arkansas this April 19, the day of the actual bombing. He was 64 years old, called himself a prisoner of war and had been convicted of two murders.

Although no evidence links Mr. Snell to last month's bombing or to either of the suspects now charged with it, his impending execution had been protested by right-wing paramilitary groups, which called him a patriot and termed the Federal Government "the Beast."

Timothy J. McVeigh, the prime suspect in the Oklahoma City blast, has never mentioned Mr. Snell, and Federal officials who investigated Mr. Snell on other charges say they consider it unlikely that he or his supporters were involved. Mr. Snyder -- who gathered evidence of the 1983 plot, including Mr. Snell's role in it, while preparing for trial of a sedition case against a group of white supremacists -- declined to say whether he had brought the similarities between the 1983 plans and the bombing last month to the attention of investigators in Oklahoma City.

Although evidence of an earlier plot does not itself demonstrate any links between those identified as plotters then and those accused now, it does suggest that the idea of bombing this particular Federal building could have been a subject of discussion among small extremist groups for more than a decade.

The only links between Mr. McVeigh and people identified as the earlier conspirators are extremely tenuous. Mr. McVeigh once got a traffic ticket in the Fort Smith, Ark., area, where some of them lived, and several months ago his sister Jennifer subscribed to The Patriot Report, a newsletter published there.

The details of the 1983 plan came from James D. Ellison, the founder of the Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord, an anti-Semitic paramilitary group that now appears to be defunct but once flourished in northern Arkansas.

Mr. Ellison's account first came to light when Mr. Snyder, an assistant United States attorney in Fort Smith, interviewed him in preparation for his role as the principal prosecution witness against 14 other white supremacists, including 10 charged with plotting to overthrow the Government by force. The trial was held in 1988, and all the defendants were acquitted.

In addition to Mr. Snell, who was already on death row, the defendants included Richard Girt Butler, chief of the Aryan Nations, a neo-Nazi umbrella organization for white supremacist groups that is based in Hayden Lake, Idaho; Robert E. Miles, a former Ku Klux Klansman who headed the Mountain Church of Jesus Christ the Saviour in Cohoctah, Mich., and Louis Ray Beam Jr., former grand dragon of the Texas Ku Klux Klan and "ambassador at large" of the Aryan Nations.

According to notes Mr. Snyder took before the trial, Mr. Ellison said he attended a meeting of extremist groups in Hayden Lake in July 1983 and told them of the death of Gordon Kahl, a member of yet another right-wing group, the Posse Comitatus. Mr. Kahl was a tax protester who fled North Dakota in early 1983 after a shootout with Federal agents and was subsequently shot to death in a gun battle with agents in Smithville, Ark.

"Kahl was the catalyst that made everyone come forth and change the organizations from thinkers to doers," Mr. Ellison said, according to Mr. Snyder's notes.

In late-night meetings, Mr. Ellison told Mr. Snyder, the leaders at Hayden Lake discussed how to topple the Government, using as a sourcebook "The Turner Diaries," an extremist novel that envisions the Government's overthrow by rightists who then systematically kill Jews and blacks. Mr. Ellison told Mr. Snyder that he himself had volunteered to assassinate Federal officials in Arkansas.

According to Mr. Snyder's notes, Mr. Ellison told him that the Ellison organization had discussed plans to bomb Federal buildings and the Dallas office of a Jewish organization.

At the 1988 trial of the 14 white supremacists, Mr. Ellison testified that in October 1983, Mr. Snell and Steve Scott, an associate, "asked me to design a rocket launcher that could be used to destroy these buildings from a distance."

"On one of the trips when I was with Wayne," Mr. Ellison said of Mr. Snell, "he took me to some of the buildings and asked me to go in the building and check the building out. This kind of thing."

And before the trial, Mr. Ellison told the prosecutor that at Mr. Snell's request he had entered the Federal Building in Oklahoma City to gauge what it would take to damage or destroy it.

Afterward, he testified in court, he made preliminary sketches and drawings. Rocket launchers were to be "placed in a trailer or a van so that it could be driven up to a given spot, parked there, and a timed detonating device could be triggered so that the driver could walk away and leave the vehicle set in position, and he would have time to clear the area before any of the rockets launched."

"And I was asked to make it so it would fit in either a trailer or a van or a panel truck," Mr. Ellison continued.

"Ellison," Mr. Snyder recalled, "said that Snell was bitter toward the Government because of the I.R.S. And I think these were agents from the Oklahoma City office, and they had taken him to court, and his property had been seized by the F.B.I. and other agents in a raid. But you can't be sure about any of this, because a Federal raid, to a lot of these people, is any time the postman brings the mail."

In 1984, a black state trooper stopped Mr. Snell for a traffic violation near De Queen, Ark. Mr. Snell shot the trooper, Louis Bryant, as he approached the vehicle, then shot him again as he lay on the ground, killing him. Mr. Snell always contended afterward that he had killed the officer in self-defense.

Mr. Snell fled and was chased to Broken Bow, Okla., where he was wounded in a gun battle with the authorities before he was subdued. In his car, the police found a gun that had been used the previous year in the robbery and murder of William Stumpp, a Texarkana pawnbroker. Mr. Snell was convicted of both murders and sentenced to death in the Stumpp case.

Mr. Snell always denied that murder, but Mr. Ellison said at the sedition trial that Mr. Snell had killed Mr. Stumpp because he believed -- wrongly, as it turned out -- that Mr. Stumpp was Jewish.

Mr. Ellison himself became a Government witness after plenty of trouble with the law. On April 19, 1985 -- 10 years to the day before the Oklahoma City bombing -- a heavily armed force of 200 state and Federal officers surrounded his remote mountain compound on the shores of Bull Shoals Lake in northern Arkansas. A four-day siege ended when he was persuaded to surrender by Robert G. Millar, who is still the spiritual leader of an armed apocalyptic sect in Elohim City, a rural compound near Muldrow, Okla.

Three months later, on July 17, Mr. Ellison was convicted of racketeering charges. And two months after that, he was sentenced to 20 years in prison. The following year, he agreed to become a Government witness.

The defense at the sedition trial contended that Mr. Ellison had fabricated the conspiracy. Having listened for seven weeks, an all-white jury acquitted all the defendants. Afterward, one juror

announced that she had fallen in love with one of the defendants and planned to marry him.

After the trial, Mr. Ellison went to prison, entered the Federal witness protection program and eventually ended up living on parole in Jasper, Fla., midway between Tallahassee and Jacksonville. He later left the witness program, finished his parole on April 21, two days after the Oklahoma City bombing, and was last seen that day in Jasper with two women, driving a car with Oklahoma plates.

From his prison cell in Varner, Ark., Mr. Snell began publishing a periodic newsletter, *The Seekers*, which told of the "war to establish righteousness," a war in which he considered himself a P.O.W.

*The Militia of Montana*, which rallied to Mr. Snell's cause in the March issue of its publication, *Taking Aim*, reminded its readers that his execution was set for April 19.

"If this date does not ring a bell for you then maybe this will jog your memory," the newsletter said. "1. April 19, 1775: Lexington burned; 2. April 19, 1943: Warsaw burned; 3. April 19, 1992: The fed's attempted to raid Randy Weaver, but had their plans thwarted when concerned citizens arrived on the scene with supplies for the Weaver family totally unaware of what was to take place; 4. April 19, 1993: The Branch Davidians burned; 5. April 19, 1995: Richard Snell will be executed -- unless we act now!!!"

The action suggested in a note written by Mary Snell, his wife, and published by the newsletter, was to flood the Arkansas Governor's office with letters.

As his execution approached, Mr. Snell was frequently visited by Mr. Millar, who shared Mr. Snell's final hours, witnessed his execution and took his body to Elohim City the next day for burial.

Mr. Snell watched televised reports of the Oklahoma City bombing on the very day he died, Mr. Millar said, and was appalled by what he saw.

Mr. Snell's last words, however, were threatening. He addressed them to Gov. Jim Guy Tucker just as he was strapped to a gurney for execution by lethal injection.

"Governor Tucker, look over your shoulder," witnesses quote him as saying. "Justice is coming. I wouldn't trade places with you or any of your cronies. Hail the victory. I am at peace."

Photos: Richard Wayne Snell, above, executed for murder on the day of the Oklahoma City bombing, was identified by James D. Ellison, below, as a conspirator in a virtually identical plot 12 years ago. (Photographs by Associated Press)

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