

We Are Not Dangerous, Leader of Separatists Says

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ELOHIM CITY, Okla. - Robert Millar slowed as he reached a clearing in the dense woods on the side of his mountain.

Slightly out of breath from the quarter-mile hike, the 70-year-old leader of Elohim City - ``Elohim" is Hebrew for God - stopped at the foot of a grave decorated with red and white plastic flowers.

On a white cross, held in place by small red stones, was the name Richard W. Snell. Snell, a white supremacist and murderer, was executed by Arkansas on April 19, 1995 - the same day an ammonium nitrate bomb exploded outside the federal building in Oklahoma City, killing 169 persons.

``The funeral home put him in a casket and we put him in the back of the van at midnight and we brought him back here," said Millar, who served as Snell's spiritual adviser.

Though Snell has been laid to rest, the questions about this white-separatist religious community in the rugged Ozark foothills of eastern Oklahoma have not.

Elohim City came under scrutiny after it was revealed last May that bombing suspect Timothy McVeigh had phoned there two weeks before the blast. McVeigh was allegedly calling for a former lieutenant in the West German army who was living at the compound.

A few days before the bombing, McVeigh called the law office of Kirk Lyons, who is prominent in the right-wing extremist movement.

Lyons, of Black Mountain, N.C., represents numerous extremist groups, including Elohim City.

Two weeks after the Oklahoma City bombing, James Ellison, the former leader of the now-defunct Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord - a white-supremacist paramilitary compound near the Missouri-Arkansas border - showed up at Elohim City.

Elohim City surfaced again in November when four members of a national militia were arrested in Oklahoma for allegedly plotting to bomb several buildings.

According to federal documents, the four planned to ``practice" at Elohim City.

Millar acknowledged knowing one of the militiamen but said he knew nothing about the alleged plan.

The Oklahoma City bombing occurred not only on the same date that Snell was executed but also on the second anniversary of the fire at the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas. It also was 10 years to the day after a federal raid on the Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord.

Residents of Elohim City say the coincidences are meaningless.

They say they are peaceful, religious people, thrust into the spotlight by a government and media that don't understand them.

Others - including federal authorities and those who monitor the right-wing extremist movement - aren't so sure.

They wonder about the possible tie between Elohim City and McVeigh. They wonder what Ellison is doing at the compound. And they wonder if there is more significance to the April 19 date than originally believed.

``I think this thing about the dates is really weird," said Kerry Noble, the former second-in-command of the Covenant.

Noble served more than two years in prison for conspiracy to possess unlawful weapons and now is speaking out against right-wing extremists.

Noble also believes that Ellison is being groomed as Millar's successor.

``He could turn Elohim City into another CSA (Covenant)," Noble said. ``Millar has complete confidence in Jim. My belief is that he will try to end up having Jim as head of the entire right-wing movement. " Even Millar's attorney is concerned about Elohim City.

``I'm very, very upset about Ellison being there," said Lyons, whose other clients include Ku Klux Klan members and numerous Waco survivors and victims' families. ``If Ellison is out there trying to get back into the right-wing business, he's going to take down a lot of innocent people. " But Ellison - in his first extensive interview since he was imprisoned in 1985 - said that neither he nor anyone else at Elohim City is up to anything illegal.

``I'm no threat to anybody," Ellison said. ``This place is no threat to anybody. I'm here as a guest. " Inside Elohim City A six-mile, rutted dirt road leads to the community 35 miles northwest of Fort Smith, Ark. Post oak and pine trees line the path, and cattle roam freely.

The 400-acre compound consists of about 20 buildings, including a small school and several mobile homes, a logging business and a dome-shaped polyurethane structure that residents use for their daily worship.

Things are different here.

Elohim City operates on its own calendar and clock. Each year begins with the spring equinox and each day begins at noon. Millar said the concept is found in the Bible in Genesis and Deuteronomy.

Residents adhere to a religious doctrine called Christian Identity, which contends that white Anglo-Saxons, not Jews, are God's chosen people, and that America, not Israel, is the Promised Land.

According to Christian Identity, Jews are Satan's children, and nonwhites are believed to be ``pre-Adamic," a lower form of species than white people.

Those who monitor right-wing extremist groups say Millar is probably the most influential Christian Identity leader in the Great Plains.

``And the track record of violence coming out of Christian Identity is very strong," said Mike Reynolds, a researcher with Klanwatch in Montgomery, Ala. ``It is the foundation for the American jihad.

``They see themselves in a war. It's not just a handful of people. But even if it were, it's not the quantity that matters; it's the intensity. A thousand hard-core, underground members bound by a religious zealotry that focuses on government and law enforcement as the enemy can do extraordinary damage for a considerable period of time in this country. " Millar said Christian Identity followers aren't dangerous.

``We're about as dangerous as Patrick Henry," he said. ``In ideas and thoughts and words. But militarily, no." Many Christian Identity followers, however, believe that the United States will come under attack, leading to a race war that will end with the second coming of Christ. Only Christian Identity followers will survive, they believe, and for that reason, many have stockpiled supplies.

That way of thinking is racist, say those who study extremist movements.

``The bottom line is that their theology, their beliefs in who is good, who is evil and who can be redeemed, are all biologically - meaning racially - determined," said Leonard Zeskind, a Kansas City author who is writing a book about extremist groups. ``That means that they're racists in the basic, most core meaning of the term. " Millar said Elohim City is not racist. Its mission, he said, is to maintain the ``purity" of every race and establish a place for Christians to seek refuge.viable afterward. " Practicing polygamy?

Worship plays an integral part of life at Elohim City. Each day at noon, the community's faithful hold a ceremony to give thanks for the old day and invoke God's blessing on the new.

In the church, a black assault rifle was propped on a shelf along with a U.S. flag, a Christian flag and a Confederate flag. Hanging above was a larger flag bearing the design of a lion with a blood-tipped sword raised in the left paw. Millar said it represents the lion of the tribe of Judah, an ancient Hebrew tribe from which he believes he's descended.

When the ceremony began, a young man in camouflage pants picked up the assault rifle and carried it to the door, where he stood at attention.

``We usually have a young man with a weapon at each door," Millar explained later. ``That means it's a sacred time not to be interfered with. " At the service, many clung to worn Bibles, listening intently as some went to the center of the room to speak. Shouts of ``amen" and ``hallelujah" filled the air.

``Yahuah reigns! " cried one man, his right arm outstretched, palm down. ``Yahuah," pronounced ``Yaw-hew-ah" here, is an Elohim City word for God.

Millar, with a long, silver-gray beard and thick hair, sat in the back of the room with a microphone, occasionally calling out instructions and requesting songs or dances. His followers affectionately call him ``Grandpa" - he has 34 grandchildren, 25 of whom live at Elohim.

Some men at the service were clearly with more than one woman.

Millar would not say whether he or anyone at Elohim practiced polygamy, but he did say that ``we would be open to accepting more than one woman as a wife. " ``We teach that if a man sleeps with a woman, he should take responsibility for her the rest of her life," he said.

Dreams and visions Millar's life began in Ontario, Canada, in 1926. He was raised in what he called a progressive Mennonite faith. As a minister in his early 20s, Millar said, he had a life-altering experience. While on his knees praying with two ministerial students, he began to speak in tongues.

``And when I went home, I felt like I was drunk for about three weeks. And I had dreams and visions about America, about Africa, about India and Canada. And many of the things I saw then have come to pass. " Millar said he moved to Oklahoma City in 1951 after having a vision. After preaching 10 years in Oklahoma City, Millar went to California for a year, then became a pastor in Baltimore for 10 years.

``All the time I was in Baltimore, I felt I should come back to the state of Oklahoma," he said.

Millar moved to the isolated area in 1973 with 17 persons. Today, about 100 people from 15 families live there, he said, including his four sons and most of his grandchildren.

One son operates an over-the-road trucking business. Another is an independent contractor. The others run trucking and logging businesses.

Millar's three daughters live elsewhere.

Millar didn't plan on naming the community Elohim City: ``I wanted something that didn't have a religious sound to it. " He chose the name Counselor Inc., after a Bible verse in Isaiah 9:6 that says, ``and His name shall be called (Wonderful,) Counselor, (Mighty God,) Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. " But when he went to the Oklahoma secretary of state's office, he learned that a computer database company had that name.

``So I just reached in my head and said, 'Elohim. ' " Those who live at Elohim City own their houses, Millar said, and the church - incorporated as a nonprofit organization - owns the land. Over the years, the residents have installed their own water and sewer systems. They grow much of their own food in organic gardens and raise beef cattle, milk cows and sheep.

Still, Millar said, ``I wish we were a lot more self-sufficient.

``The more we require a cash flow to exist, the less we are independent of the system. " Another Waco?

Millar and other Elohim City residents are aware of the rumors circulating about their community.

``The reports about us are just ridiculous," said Millar's 27-year-old son, David. ``People have said that we've got tanks and rocket missiles. People have called us a nudist colony, a religious cult, a hate group and a love group. We've even been called Love City.

One story going around Sallisaw, 35 miles away, is that Elohim City ordered several truckloads of cement a couple of years ago.

According to the story, the cement was used to build an underground bunker.

``We have no need for that," Millar said. ``I sure could use the cement, but I wouldn't use it on bunkers. But anyway, what threat are bunkers to people? You can't put them on wheels. " The plant manager of the Mid-Continent Concrete Co. in Sallisaw said his company had delivered cement to Elohim City, but ``it wasn't for anything like that. " ``They're just normal people," said Jesse Kendrick. ``I think they're just sick and tired of the government sticking their noses into everybody's business. Just because they want to be left alone doesn't mean they're dangerous. " Another story is that the folks at Elohim City have arsenals.

None of it is true, Millar said.

``All of the weapons on this land are privately owned, and they're all legal," he said. ``Most of them are hunting rifles. I think they're called mini-14s or something like that. " During two lengthy visits to him City by a reporter for The Kansas City Star, no bunkers, tanks or perimeter defenses were observed and only one assault rifle was in plain view. News reports last May, however, noted that weapons were prevalent.

``Sometimes, if we have reasons to believe we need to be on alert, we carry them," Millar said.

Though virtually all of the men at Elohim City have guns, Millar said, ``most of the people living around here have more guns per capita than we have. " He added, however, that if authorities attempted to raid the compound, ``We would resist. We'd use every legal means at our disposal. " Even the children know how to use weapons, Millar said.

``We have a lot of deer here," he said, smiling. ``Most of our young people are dead shots. " And that's what worries some authorities.

``Not only are the 20 to 30 adults armed out there, but you've got 50 kids running around with guns," said a federal agent familiar with the compound who asked not to be identified.

``And you have to consider that they go on survival training.

Those kids out there are just as dangerous or more dangerous than the adults. They're not afraid of anything. " Some authorities also fear that Elohim City could turn into another Waco.

``If anyone tried to raid the place, there could be the potential," the agent said. ``The people who would survive a raid on that place would have to go in with major force. " Millar acknowledged that residents are well-versed in strategic maneuvers.

``We have a firing range down that side of the mountain over there," he said. ``When the young people get an idea that they want to practice, they will. " 'King James' Millar said he met Ellison when he went to the Covenant compound to speak in the early 1980s.

``I was shocked," he said, ``being met by a guy with a gun, a man in camouflage. I thought, 'What is this? ' " Before long, Millar said, he realized that Ellison was ``a man with tremendous gifts and ability. " Millar later anointed Ellison as ``King James of the Ozarks" in a ceremony at the Covenant compound.

The federal raid of that compound began on April 19, 1985, four months after a crackdown on a neo-Nazi group called The Order. Its leader, Robert Mathews, was killed in a shootout with federal agents in December 1984.

The Order, which had recruited several members from the Covenant, had funded its activities by robbing banks and armored cars. Several members were involved in the June 1984 murder of Alan Berg, a Jewish radio talk show host in Denver.

During the Covenant siege, the FBI contacted Millar and asked him to help negotiate with Ellison. When he got there, Millar said, ``Most of those people were ready to die. They weren't cowed or anything by 300 FBI people around there ... They were equipped. " Ellison surrendered and received a 20-year sentence on weapons and racketeering charges. After a year in prison, he agreed to become a witness for the prosecution in exchange for leniency in a 1988 Fort Smith trial in which Snell and 13 other white supremacists had been charged with seditious conspiracy and plotting to kill a federal judge and an FBI agent.

At the trial, Ellison told authorities that in 1983, Snell and other white supremacists had hatched a plot to bomb the federal buildings in Oklahoma City or Dallas, but nothing had come of the plan.

Despite Ellison's testimony, all the defendants were acquitted.

Ellison now is looked upon as a turncoat by many of those in the extremist movement, but Millar has stuck by him.

``Before the trial was over, I was visited by some extreme right-wing people who said, 'You consider yourself a friend of Jim?' I said, 'Yeah. ' And they said, 'Well, you won't be a friend of ours. ' ``I don't claim that everything Jim ever did was right. But I also don't think I'm his judge. " Snell's adviser The day of the Oklahoma City bombing, Millar went to the state prison to say goodbye to Snell.

Snell, a former Covenant disciple, was on death row for killing a pawnbroker in 1983 who, according to court documents, he mistakenly believed to be Jewish. Snell also killed an Arkansas state trooper in 1984 and was indicted - but later acquitted - in the Fort Smith case.

``I spent the last three hours of his life with him, and then I was there for the execution as a witness, by request," Millar said. ``It could've been hard, but Richard Snell wasn't wringing his hands; he wasn't terrified. " Millar said Snell brought up the Oklahoma City bombing when he arrived.

``He thought it was awful," Millar said.

Could the bombing have been in retaliation for Snell's execution?

``That's a possibility," Millar said, ``but I don't think so.

There's a possibility, though, of it being a response to the government continuously using that (April 19) date. " During Snell's final hours, Millar said, the two talked politics and theological issues.

``Then they had him behind a glass and they wheeled him in on a hospital bed and they said, 'Sir, do you have anything to say?' And he said, ``Governor (Jim Guy) Tucker, look over your shoulder, justice is on its way. ' " Millar doesn't believe Snell's comments were threatening.

``We have a saying that you'll find among Christian Identity people, which is 'Hail His Victory. ' We believe communism isn't going to win and one-world global economy is not going to be dominant. We feel that God is going to be the final winner. And that's what he meant by that. His last words were 'Hail His Victory. ' " Three men linked to Elohim City Andreas Strassmeir Andreas Strassmeir, a former lieutenant in the West German army, came to the United States in 1988 and eventually ended up at Elohim City.

Known at the compound as ``Andy the German," Strassmeir, 36, said in a recent affidavit that he lived at Elohim City off and on from 1991 until last August. While there, he routinely attended gun shows, including one in Tulsa, Okla., in the spring of 1993. It was there, Strassmeir said, that he briefly met Oklahoma City bombing suspect Timothy McVeigh.

After the bombing, Strassmeir said, he learned that McVeigh had called for him at Elohim City two weeks before the blast. He said he didn't take the call and didn't know why McVeigh called.

Strassmeir said he had no personal knowledge of the Oklahoma City bombing.

Strassmeir left Elohim City in August 1995 on the advice of his attorney.

Dennis Mahon Dennis Mahon, a former Northmoor resident and imperial dragon of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, also has ties to Elohim City.

Mahon moved to Tulsa in 1990 and now is a Midwest consultant for the White Aryan Resistance.

Mahon said he and Andreas Strassmeir were close. Strassmeir spent several weekends with him in Tulsa, he said, and from 1992 to 1995, Mahon visited Elohim City every month or two ``to visit and fellowship and do some target shooting and military maneuvers. " Mahon said he saw McVeigh at the same 1993 Tulsa gun show that Strassmeir attended but that he never talked to McVeigh.

Mahon, 45, said he last visited Elohim City about four months ago.

Ray Lampley and three other members of a national militia were charged in November with plotting bombings against abortion clinics, homosexual gathering places, welfare offices, the Anti-Defamation League and the Southern Poverty Law Center.

A federal complaint alleges that Lampley suggested that the buildings be blown up to create problems for the government. " The complaint also outlines a series of November purchases by Lampley of materials that could be used to make a bomb, including ammonium nitrate, the fertilizer used in the Oklahoma City bombing.

The complaint also alleges that the group was going to practice at Elohim City.

Lampley and the other defendants have pleaded not guilty.

Elohim City leader Robert Millar said he knew Lampley but had no knowledge of the alleged plotting.

Caption:
Photos (5, color and b/w)

Graphic (map)CAPTION: Elohim City's founder, Robert Millar (front), adheres to a doctrine said to have a track record for violence. James Ellison (rear), former leader of a white-supremacist paramilitary compound, now is at the Oklahoma community.

CAPTION: Richard W. Snell, a white supremacist and murderer executed last year, is buried in Elohim City. Robert Millar, the community's leader (above), was Snell's spiritual adviser.

CAPTION: Singing and dancing are part of the worship that occurs daily at Elohim City, above, a white-separatist religious community in Oklahoma. While residents performed in the community's dome-shaped polyurethane structure, James Ellison (standing, right) watched with Elohim City leader Robert Millar (sitting near Ellison). Millar held his great-grandson. Ellison is the baby's father. During a morning break from class, an Elohim City child, left, played atop a stone wall a short distance from her one-room schoolhouse.

CAPTION: Mahon

CREDIT: RICH SUGG/The Star

CAPTION: Elohim City

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