

FBI Ignored Lawman's Elohim City Information

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By J.D. Cash with Jeff Holladay

In the days following the April 19, 1995, bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building, the FBI received information from state law enforcement sources that documented questionable activities at Elohim City in extreme eastern Oklahoma related to their investigation. Incredibly, they ignored it.

That information, included identifying a person wanted by federal authorities and disclosing that another resident of the white supremacist enclave "strongly resembled the sketch of John Doe No. 2," the McCurtain Gazette has learned.

This newspaper has also learned that not only did Timothy McVeigh visit the religious compound near Muldrow but so too did his ex-Army buddy Michael Fortier at least once.

And from 1991 until the summer of 1995, Elohim City was also the primary residence of German national Andreas Carl Strassmeir, whose links to McVeigh and other have raised questions about what, if any, role he played in the Oklahoma City bombing.

Strassmeir and his lawyer vigorously deny he had any personal involvement in the bombing of the federal building. But as this newspaper reported earlier, Strassmeir was linked to Tim McVeigh by telephone calls and personal contacts. Strassmeir, though, filed a document with the federal court in Denver, saying he'd only met Timothy McVeigh once — at a Tulsa gun show in the spring of 1993.

Visits to Elohim City

While the Gazette had earlier obtained information showing that McVeigh made telephone calls to Elohim City, new information from a law enforcement source shows the FBI was provided documents and direct testimony from an Oklahoma law enforcement officer that McVeigh visited Elohim City as far back as October 1993.

That source also said Michael Fortier — who has already entered a guilty plea for his role in the bombing and is expected to be a prime witness for the government against McVeigh and co-defendant Terry Nichols — visited Elohim City at least once, using the alias "Mike Fountain." Tending to substantiate the claim of McVeigh's presence at Elohim City is a copy of a traffic ticket McVeigh received on Oct. 12, 1993, from an Arkansas State trooper. The violation occurred on a lightly traveled two-lane highway near Cedarville, Ark. — only 4 miles from the east property line of Elohim City.

The source also said Michael Fortier made at least one visit to the white supremacist compound and that it occurred in late 1994.

Terrorist Camp?

The newspaper's source also asserted that Strassmeir, a former German military officer, was known to be operating a terrorist training facility at Elohim City. "Every 90 days, Elohim City was receiving 25 to 50 men associated with militia groups from around the U.S.," the source said. "Strassmeir was in charge of training those men in terrorist activities."

Yet Strassmeir's true identity, was often concealed because, the source claimed, he used aliases and traveled with false identification papers.

Few knew his real identity, which Gazette investigative reporter J.D. Cash later learned was Andreas Strassmeir — former German military officer with a background in intelligence and a father who was a high-ranking member of the German parliament.

Evidence of those false identification papers was provided federal authorities several days after the Oklahoma City bombing by the law enforcement source — along with information that a "close associate of Strassmeir's at Elohim City...very strongly resembles the sketch circulated of John Doe No. 2...even down to a tattoo on his arm."

This newspaper independently verified that this associate of Strassmeir's moved from Elohim City shortly after the bombing.

While described as extremely dangerous and prone to violence, residents of Elohim City believe the individual was never interviewed by the FBI.

Another person of interest to law enforcement sources who passed information to the FBI was Michael Brescia, a one-time roommate of Strassmeir's at Elohim City.

Family members said Brescia fled to Tennessee from Pennsylvania to avoid attention by the press and authorities. They said they had no knowledge of his ever being interviewed by the FBI about his possible knowledge of the Oklahoma City bombing.

Strassmeir Wanted

After the Gazette first broke the story that linked Andreas Strassmeir to McVeigh and white supremacists, he fled the U.S. through Mexico, it has been confirmed by Kirk Lyons, a friend and the attorney who now represents Strassmeir.

Since then, it has been learned that a warrant for Strassmeir had been issued in the early 1990s by the Immigration and Naturalization Service for overstaying a visa. The FBI received a copy of the warrant.

Lyons, Strassmeir's attorney, now concedes there are "unresolved legal problems" related to his client's U.S. residency, but he said Strassmeir fled for another reason.

Due to death threats passed by the FBI through Interpol, Strassmeir had to be spirited out of the U.S. with the aid of the German counter-terrorism unit, GSG-9 Even though

Strassmeir's father was a powerful political figure in German, some observers said the cooperation of the FBI and GSG-9 to extricate Andreas Strassmeir seemed to suggest his own importance as well.

Bundes Grenschutzgruppen 9, (GSG-9) is Germany's most revered military counter-terrorism unit. Established in the wake of the slaughter of Jewish athletes at the Munich Olympic games in the Seventies, it is today considered on a par with their American counterpart, the Delta Force.

An Undercover Operative?

There has been speculation that Andreas Strassmeir might have been a member of German intelligence, but no official documentation or confirmation has been publicly reported.

What is known is that in 1989, Strassmeir graduated from a Military Academy in Hanover, Germany — and that immediately afterward he came to the U.S. on a tourist visa and subsequently established close ties to the leading neo- Nazi and white supremacist groups in the United States.

Strassmeier's attorney says that Strassmeier once associated with the most extreme elements of those groups and that he never held a job while in the U.S. But Kirk Lyons, Strassmeir's attorney, denies that his client had any intelligence training.

Lyons claimed that Strassmeir was a "regular guy" who just wanted to carve little wooden figurines of Civil War figures and marry an American girl.

FBI Ignores Evidence?

Despite the state law enforcement tips and the presence of McVeigh, Fortier and Strassmeir at Elohim City, the FBI apparently was not interested. It never pursued the information it was given by the law enforcement source.

At least that's the information from Stephen Jones, defense attorney for McVeigh, who says he knows of no FBI interview with these subjects mentioned previously.

Why, when the FBI so proudly touts the 11,000 interviews conducted in its investigation of the Oklahoma City bombing, did it ignore Strassmeir, Brescia and others?

"We had no reason to interview Strassmeir," and FBI spokesman said.

A Burning Suspicion

Concerning this new information about the linkages between McVeigh, Fortier, Strassmeir and Elohim City, the Gazette contacted Hoppy Heidelberg, the federal grand juror dismissed from the panel after criticizing its methods and what he considered to

be deliberate aversions. "I said it then and I will repeat it now: John Doe No. 2 is either a government agent or informant!"

Just a few weeks after receiving the information about Strassmeir and Elohim City from state law enforcement sources, the Justice Department announced that its hunt for John Doe No. 2 was being discontinued — saying it was all a matter of misunderstanding.

The department's explanation was that the confusion resulted from certain witnesses at Elliot's Body Shop, the rental establishment in Junction City, Kan., where McVeigh purportedly rented the truck to carry the bomb.

The FBI and Justice Department said an innocent Army private was in the establishment the day before McVeigh, and that his presence was the source of the confusion.

But published interviews with several friends of the employees of Elliot's Body Shop say those workers vividly recall seeing McVeigh with John Doe No. 2 when a cash deposit was put down to reserve the truck on April 15 — and again when it was picked up April 17, 1995.