

OKLAHOMA BOMBING: ECHOES RECALL MURDER, '83 PLOT IN ARKANSAS

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FAYETTEVILLE -- For most Americans, the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City is an image burned forever into their brains.

The 9:02 a.m. blast killed 168 people. About 500 people were injured. Fort Smith native, Rebecca Anderson, a nurse, died from injuries she received while helping in the rescue effort.

The massive investigation in the case has swept some Arkansans into the vortex of what FBI agents now call "OKbomb."

Richard Wayne Snell, a double murderer who called himself "a prisoner of war" and was executed in Arkansas 12 hours and eight minutes after the Oklahoma bombing, has been linked to the case. His final statement was for Gov. Jim Guy Tucker, whom he warned: "Look over your shoulder."

Snell, who killed a pawnbroker and a state trooper, has no known ties to bombing suspects Timothy J. McVeigh, 27, and Terry Lynn Nichols, 41, both of whom face federal murder and conspiracy charges in the bombing. McVeigh and Nichols will be tried in Denver late this year or next year.

But Snell has a link to Oklahoma City. In 1983, Snell, angry at the Internal Revenue Service, spoke of a plan to strike a federal building in Oklahoma City with a truck-based rocket.

Snell discussed a bombing as part of a government coup during a meeting of the Aryan Nations at Hayden Lake, Idaho, in 1983, federal prosecutors say.

The Rev. Robert Millar, spiritual leader of a 100-member white separatist community in Oklahoma near the Arkansas border, sat with Snell during his final hours. Then Millar drove Snell's body to Elohim City, near Muldrow, for burial.

Also living at Elohim City is James Ellison, who told federal prosecutors preparing for a 1988 sedition trial in Fort Smith that he and Snell discussed blowing up a federal building in Oklahoma City.

All 14 defendants in that case were acquitted. Ellison, a government witness in that case, was tried and convicted separately and served a prison sentence. But he

has retained his legacy as the leader of a well-armed Arkansas offshoot Aryan Nations.

Ellison was the leader of The Covenant, The Sword and The Arm of the Lord at a heavily armed military compound in Marion County, just below the Missouri border. Millar negotiated an end to the four-day standoff between Ellison's followers and 200 local, state and federal police in 1985.

The standoff began April 19, 1985, exactly a decade before the Oklahoma City bombing.

Ellison later admitted visiting "a federal building" in Oklahoma City at Snell's request, and drafting plans to destroy it with rockets launched from a truck.

Federal prosecutors say McVeigh was distraught over an assault by federal agents on the Branch Davidian compound near Waco on April 19, 1993. Eighty-five people, including 17 children, died as federal agents moved in to end a seven-week standoff there. The government blamed the deaths on a fire set by followers of cult leader David Koresh.

Stephen Jones, McVeigh's lead attorney, said in an affidavit filed in a wrongful death civil case waged by the mother of two bombing victims, that prosecutors overlooked Snell's execution as a possible reason for the bombing.

Prosecutors have confirmed that Snell and Ellison used the "Turner Diaries," a 1978 novel based on a plot to overthrow the government and exterminate Jews and blacks, as a source book in planning the rocket attack.

McVeigh peddled the same book as he traveled to gun shows across the nation for at least two years before the bombing.

Ellison, who moved to Elohim City last year after his release from prison, has declined repeated requests for an interview.

During a recent federal court hearing involving the McVeigh and Nichols case, Jones filed a sealed request for documents supporting his contention that federal intelligence agencies searched for an international terrorist immediately after the bombing.

Jones has been granted court permission to question Andreas "Andy" Strassmeir, a German national who worked on the security force at Elohim City.

Strassmeir adamantly denies any connection to the bombing, although he says he probably met McVeigh at a Tulsa gun show. Millar confirmed again this week that McVeigh called Elohim City asking to talk to "Andy" a few days before the bombing.

Jones said last week that Snell's execution is part of the investigation, "But, right now, we're pursuing some more promising leads overseas."

Playing a more clearly defined role in the bombing case are Royal gun collector Roger Moore and his girlfriend and co-worker, Karen Anderson. Moore said he was robbed Nov. 5, 1994, by a man wearing a ski mask and military camouflage clothing. The robber bound and gagged Moore and made off with more than \$59,000 in guns, coins, gold, silver, jewelry and pre-Columbian jade, Moore said.

Federal indictments and FBI records link an Arkansas robbery to the money raised by McVeigh and Nichols before the bombing, though the robbery victim isn't identified. But McVeigh had stayed twice with Moore and Anderson for short periods of time at their horse ranch in Royal. And Moore said he has positively identified guns and the safety deposit box key traced back to the bombing suspects.

McVeigh and Nichols have not been charged in Moore's robbery. But the indictment against a third suspect in the bombing case, Michael Fortier, 26, of Kingman, Ariz., alludes to the robbery.

In a one-page, handwritten statement, Fortier said he rode with McVeigh on Dec. 15 and 16 in 1994 to scout the Murrah building as a bomb site and to "receive weapons that Tim McVeigh told me had been stolen by Terry Nichols and himself."

Fortier has pleaded guilty to four counts of conspiracy to steal weapons and transporting stolen weapons in connection to the Moore robbery. He faces 23 years in prison and a \$1 million fine. He won't be sentenced until the conclusion of the McVeigh-Nichols case, prosecutors said.

Moore and Anderson insist they have been cleared by the FBI and that McVeigh was not the intruder. But Anderson said Thursday that Moore is unsure whether Terry Nichols was the robber.