

Cincinnati Enquirer  
Saturday July 13, 1996. Page One.

## **ROBBER COMMITS SUICIDE**

"Midwestern Bandit" wore Nixon masks.  
by Tanya Bricking

COVINGTON (KY) - Richard Lee Guthrie Jr. led the life of a bank bandit right out of the movies. He wore a Richard Nixon mask, stole money and got away with it. He taunted authorities by sporting shirts and hats with FBI logos. He left real and fake explosives at the scenes of heists and sent sarcastic letters to newspapers.

But his dangerous lifestyle ended in a Kenton County (Kentucky) jail cell Friday when the man who admitted to being one of the "Midwestern Bank Bandits" hanged himself with a bedsheet tied to a ceiling vent. He'd been in jail since January 15, when FBI agents arrested him in Green Township.

Authorities had been talking to Guthrie in part of a federal investigation into white supremacist violence. Guthrie was identified by law enforcement sources as a member of a group called the Aryan Republican Army, which advocates killing killing Jews, deporting blacks and setting up a Bible-based nation. Authorities said Guthrie's discussions with investigators covered a broad range of topics.

The U.S. Marshal Service had contracted with Kenton County Jail to hold him as a federal prisoner awaiting sentencing. He was not on suicide watch because "no one noticed anything that indicated he was having any problems," said W. Kelly Johnson, an assistant federal public defender who last talked to him Monday.

Jailers' logs indicate that the 5:22 AM bed check found nothing out of order, U.S. Marshal R. Allen Smith said.

But 43 minutes later, Mr. Guthrie was dead. He left two suicide notes-- one for his family and the other for his lawyer.

The 38-year-old Maryland man admitted July 3 to being a member of the robbery gang that heckled authorities and stole more than \$200,000. He pleaded guilty in federal court to robbing 19 banks in seven states after striking a deal that he'd serve no more than 30 years in prison.

In return, he promised the FBI that he'd provide evidence against three other men awaiting trial. He was supposed to testify next month against one of his buddies, Peter Langan. He and Mr. Langan were longtime friends. When Mr. Langan lived in Cincinnati, Mr. Guthrie visited him, said Leslie Maloney, Mr. Langan's sister.

"I'm just flabbergasted," she said. "I have no idea why Richie would want to do that, because he made a deal with the FBI."

Despite the pending trial, the two men were still friends, Ms. Maloney said. But they hadn't talked since their arrests in January. "I know my brother thought that he was upset," she said. "I got the impression that Richie was being pressured into testifying against my brother."

Mr. Guthrie's lawyer and Ms. Maloney declined to discuss the case or Mr. Guthrie's possible motive. Mr. Johnson described his client as a "bright and outgoing" man who was polite to authorities. He grew up in the Washington, DC, suburb of Wheaton, MD. After a stint in the Navy, he worked and studied engineering but earned no degrees. "I'm shocked and saddened by this turn of events," said Mr. Johnson, who added that Mr. Guthrie's family on the East Coast was stunned.

Officials are investigating the death. After an autopsy by the Kenton County Coroner's office, the body will be released to his family. The cases against the other alleged bank bandits will continue. "What effect Guthrie's death will have is impossible to tell at this point, said Ed Boldt, spokesman with the FBI office in Cincinnati.

(The Los Angeles Times contributed to this report.)