

FBI Says Strassmeir Was Government 'Operative'

Sunday, July 14, 1996 - McCurtain Sunday Gazette

By J. D. Cash - First of Two Parts

After months of official "no comments," and even outright denials, a highly placed source at the FBI has confirmed that Andreas Carl Strassmeir was a paid government informant sent by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms to infiltrate Elohim City — a Christian Identity religious compound near Muldrow, Okla.

Following numerous investigative reports by national and international news services about the mysterious German "tourist" with suspicious ties to Timothy McVeigh, some supervisory-level agents at the Bureau now want to distance themselves from mounting evidence that the QKC bombing was a "blown sting operation" by the ATF — an operation of which Strassmeir, himself, has admitted intimate knowledge.

Supplementing the Gazette's nine-month investigation into links between Strassmeir, McVeigh and the neo-Nazi movement in this country, a variety of news organizations have also begun uncovering and reporting some unsettling facts about the German national's activities and associations. Such revelations now include that of a family in Arkansas whose bodies were recently found handcuffed and submerged in an Arkansas bayou and a bank robber turned government witness — discovered Friday, dangling from a bed sheet in his cell.

ATF Computer Fingerprints'

Speaking on the condition of anonymity, a high-level source at the FBI confirmed that the ATF "indices" reflect "substantial" intelligence-gathering activities in which Strassmeir was a participant.

"Indices" are classified computer generated files, maintained by federal law enforcement organizations, and are used by their intelligence units to track data on the suspicious activities of various groups and individuals.

This last Monday, the Denver court made public an order that gives lawyers for Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols approval to gain access to any government wiretaps on the bombing defendants. Any FBI and ATF indices that mention Strassmeir are expected to become hotly contested targets of discovery requests as well.

In the past, attorneys for McVeigh and Nichols have bitterly argued to Judge Matsch that the Justice Department has not been forthcoming with all "exculpatory" evidence that it has in its possession. Very clearly, said one legal expert, if there is evidence that a government informant was working within the Oklahoma City bombing conspiracy, that evidence could be critical to a defense team's case — especially if the defense of "entrapment" is to be raised.

The McVeigh-Strassmeir 'Flap'

As reported earlier by the Gazette, the "flap" over Andreas Strassmeir began when the Gazette reported that residents of Elohim City said that Timothy McVeigh was trying to contact Strassmeir — just days before the bombing of the Oklahoma City Federal Building.

Phone records indicate that on April 5, a call was made to Elohim City from a motel room registered to Timothy McVeigh. That call was just seconds after McVeigh is widely reported to have called a Ryder truck rental establishment in Arizona.

When evidence of the Elohim City call was leaked to the press, national attention suddenly rained down on the white supremacist community.

"We don't know anything about such a call," the Rev. Millar assured reporters a month after the bombing, adding, "If Tim McVeigh did call, no one here knows anything about it."

Months later, Millar discovered that there had been one or two calls to the compound — by McVeigh. Today, Millar says those calls were for their "Chief of Security," Andreas Strassmeir.

The substance of the message, Miller recalls, was that Strassmeir should be told that McVeigh would be visiting soon. Today, residents there maintain they don't know Tim McVeigh and don't believe the bombing defendant ever visited Elohim City.

Following the Gazette story concerning the McVeigh phone call(s), Strassmeir's attorney, Kirk Lyons, sent out a newsletter to his friends and supporters.

Detailing Strassmeir's sudden departure from the U.S., Lyons explained that due to death threats and harassment, his client had to be spirited out of the U.S. using a covert route through Mexico — eventually arriving safely in Berlin.

Aiding Strassmeir's "escape," Lyons said, was Germany's equivalent of our Delta Force — the vaunted counterterrorism unit, GSG-9.

Strassmeir's Story

Hoping to explain away the McVeigh phone calls to Elohim City, Strassmeir's attorney prepared and distributed an unsigned and unsworn statement saying that if Strassmeir ever met McVeigh, it was a single encounter at a gun show in Tulsa in the summer of 1993.

In that document, Strassmeir says he can only vaguely recall such a meeting, but, if there was one, he may have given McVeigh a card with Elohim City's phone number on it.

Also, the statement includes a reference to some military fatigues that McVeigh traded for a Navy combat knife that belonged to the German national. Documents obtained by the Gazette indicate that McVeigh had, at the time of his arrest, a knife quite similar to the one Strassmeir describes.

Based on the formal statement, Strassmeir believes that McVeigh must have retained the Elohim City card for two years, until, as prosecutors allege, he was in the midst of planning and executing the Oklahoma City bombing. And then, for reasons no one has publicly explained, the accused mass-murderer suddenly decided to contact Strassmeir for the first time since the Tulsa Gun Show.

The Strassmeir Family

The son of one of Europe's most able and influential politicians, Andreas Strassmeir began "visiting" the U.S. in 1988. Up to that time, the then 28-year-old German army officer had served in the Panzer Grenadiers and a short stint as liaison to Great Britain's prestigious Welsh Guards.

Concurrently, Strassmeir's father, Guenther, had risen to the position of Secretary of State to Berlin, a position which gave the veteran parliamentarian virtual control over almost every ministry in the former capital city.

The younger Strassmeir has admitted to journalists that his military assignments sometimes included covert projects and training. This was at a time when his father was deeply involved in West Germany's effort to destroy communism abroad and quell the rise of fascism at home.

Eventually, the family's shared dream of reunification of the divided Germanies was realized* but in its wake, the streets of Germany would be littered with elements of discontent. Such discontent was often directed by a violent and burgeoning fascist movement — the neo-Nazi "Skinheads," a movement with direct links to the United States.

Special Project Promised

Reported in Hit London Sunday Telegraph, Strassmeir told interviewers that he settled in the U.S. in 1989 because of a "special project" he was promised by the U.S. Justice Department.

Although Andreas Strassmeir has never commented publicly about what that project may have been, one clue may be gleaned from the announcement of a joint surveillance operation between the United States and Germany. The target of that operation — the U.S.-based neo-Nazi movement.

In 1993, Louis Freeh, the head of the FBI, and Ron Nobles, then the No. 2 official from the Treasury, revealed for the first time that an agreement had been reached between the U.S. and Germany to monitor the export of U.S.-produced neo-Nazi literature.

Also announced at that time was an agreement to share intelligence on terrorist groups that were suspected of operating in concert between the U.S. and Germany. Making this necessary, the governments agreed, was the recent rise of "skinhead" and Ku Klux Klan cells in Germany. Such groups were believed to be, in large part, supported by members of various white supremacist groups, who had been traveling to Germany from the U.S.

Civil War or 007 Buff?

Retired U.S. Air Force colonel, Vincent Petruskie, of Petruskie and Associates of Manassas, Va., recalls that the first time Strassmeir came to the U.S., he was with some other young Germans, intent on participating in the 125th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg.

Petruskie, a former intelligence agent for the Office of Special Investigations (OSI), says he took Strassmeir under his wing and tried to find him employment in the federal government performing undercover work. It was a task that, Strassmeir's attorney now says, could not be accomplished because of legal hurdles. Says Lyons, "Colonel Petruskie and I tried to find Andy any kind of job we could, but since he (Strassmeir) only had a tourist visa and no green card (work permit), we couldn't find him anything but odd jobs."

Disputing the story that Strassmeir didn't have proper documentation to obtain employment is a copy of a driver's license that the Gazette has obtained. It shows that, somehow, the German "tourist" was able to obtain a valid Tennessee license and social security number in 1992. And apparently, one of the "odd jobs" Lyons and Petruskie spoke of was, indeed, unique.

During an interview in Berlin a few weeks ago, a question was put to Strassmeir which appeared to shock him. Conducting the interview was Oklahoma City attorney Mike Johnston, who asked Strassmeir about the attempted purchase of some Boeing 747s that the German had been involved with.

Johnston recalls that "Strassmeir was shocked, and then sputtered, 'How did you know that?'"

Eventually, Strassmeir settled down and said he was acting as a middle man for an old family friend, Colonel Petruskie, who he also described as "an ex-CIA guy that my father has known since the Cold War." However, Petruskie told the New American magazine afterwards that, yes, he was trying to help set up an air cargo service in South America, but he was not ex-CIA, but rather a former OSI intelligence officer. Also, Petruskie told the New American he had never met Strassmeir's father, who he believed he had spoken with on the phone one time. So why did Strassmeir "vacation" in the U.S. for eight years, in clear violation of the normal short-term tourist visa restrictions?

Kirk Lyons said, "When Andy came to the U.S., he found our way of life much more free and easy than the stifling political atmosphere in Germany. Andy was really hung up on our Civil War history and wanted to meet American girls."

Strassmeir's attorney adds, "So, for a while, I arranged for Andy to stay with a friend of mine in Texas...Later, I arranged for Andy to move to Elohim City." Texans Remember Strassmeir Former and current members of the Texas Light Infantry Brigade (TLI), a mish-mash of Civil War reenactors and survivalists, vividly recall the lanky foreigner — some with disdain. "Strassmeir set me up and ruined my life," reports one man, who has fled Texas and now lives in Colorado.

Referring to the TLI militia group that was established initially with the help of Kirk Lyons and Lyons' close associate, Dave Holloway, the Colorado resident spoke only on the condition of anonymity during a tape-recorded interview.

"Andy was coming to our meetings in 1989 and 1990, By July of 1996, my life and freedom were in danger because of Strassmeir," he said, adding, "Some of the members of our group began following that guy at night. We were suspicious of him and who he really was...He told us he was wanted by the Immigration Service because he said he was here illegally. Once, we followed him to a federal building and watched him use the key pad to enter the offices at night. Then, we knew he was a federal agent of some kind."

Following this incident, the source said, other members of the group became concerned, too.

"So, I told Andy that if he had some problems with the feds, he should quit coming to our meetings...We didn't need his problems.

"After that," the man explained, "All hell broke loose...The ATF set me up on two occasions, and some of the other guys were set up, too. Finally, in July of 1991, I took off."

According to an Aryan Nation official who has been serving time since late 1992 in a Texas penitentiary, he, too, recalls Strassmeir's associates in the Lone Star State, and, as well, in Hayden Lake, Idaho. "I met Strassmeir at a Aryan Nation function at Hayden Lake in early 1992," recalls B.J. Farrington. "I also remember another guy that we there, Timmy McVeigh!"

The convicted car thief said of McVeigh and Strassmeir, "I can't tell you much about the German fellow. Everyone in the (white separatist) movement knew who Andy was, but not much about him...Timmy, though, was known in the movement as a "mercenary," someone you could wind up and send out on a job. That guy is an idiot for killing all those kids," said Farrington, adding, "McVeigh should have blown up the building at night."

According to Strassmeir, he has never been to any Aryan Nation functions in Idaho. His statement says he attended a Klan rally in Texas once, as an observer.

Kansans ID Photos

It was in the rough-hewn flint hills of central Kansas that indicted bombing conspirators and ex-army buddies Tim McVeigh, Michael Fortier and Terry Nichols spent much of their time.

When McVeigh finished his service at nearby Fort Riley, the decorated Desert Storm hero settled in Herington for a short while. Later, he would frequent the area regularly. Mike Fortier made some Mends there as well. And, after coming and going from the area for several years, Terry Nichols even purchased a home there. But Kirk Lyons says his client has never been to Kansas. A statement several witnesses strongly disagree with.

Connie Smith, who lives near Herington, recognized photos of Strassmeir and some others she was shown. "Yes, I recognize that man's picture," said Smith recently. "In 1992, my daughter was a student, and she had a lot of friends in Herington and Junction City. Tim McVeigh was one of them.

"My daughter, Catina, and her roommate dated some soldiers that year. Sometimes, the girls would bring their friends to our house...That is how, I believe, I met Andy Strassmeir...He came to our house with some of the other young people."

When shown a picture of a man Strassmeir would later share a house with at Elohim City, Connie Smith said, "Yes, that is Mike Brescia...I met him at a convenience store in Herington. Timmy was there and my daughter and brought Mike over and introduced me...He (Brescia) was a friend of McVeigh's and some of the other young people in Herington.

"I told the FBI about Brescia four days after the bombing, because he (Brescia) fits the description of John Doe No. 2." Catina Lawson, Smith's daughter, recalls the German's acid personality and several of his friends from her "party days" in Herington and Junction City.

"Yes, I met Andy that year (1992). He told me his father was some big political deal in Germany. I don't think he was a soldier in the American army...And I remember that he liked to dress in black, and he was real cold and arrogant — a real jerk!"

Explaining the others in the group, Catina said, "My roommate dated a friend of his, Mike Brescia. I was friends with McVeigh and Fortier as well. I've already told the FBI that they should be looking for Brescia — he fits the description of John Doe No. 2."

Barbara Wittenberg, who owns the Santa Fe Trails Diner in Herington, remembers that Nichols and McVeigh came into the diner on Saturday before the bombing. Sitting with them that day was, Wittenberg believes, the elusive John Doe No. 2.

Wittenberg recounted the morning: "I asked them why they had a Ryder truck outside. I wasn't being nosey, I just wondered if Terry Nichols was moving. My sister was moving here, and she needed to find a place. Well, the guy who they haven't arrested yet — John Doe No. 2 — he blurted out that they were going to Oklahoma. When that happened," Wittenberg said, "it was like someone threw ice water on the conversation...McVeigh and Nichols just stared at the guy."

Larry Wild and his wife say they met Strassmeir in the days before the bombing near a wooded area on Fort Riley property.

"We go up to Cameron Springs when they stock trout," said Mr. Wild, a retired high school coach. "I was shown a picture of Strassmeir by the FBI earlier...Yes, he's a German you know...He and someone else walked near us while we were fishing. We struck up a conversation. I noted his accent and thought maybe he worked at the Fort. I asked him if he worked for the government, and he just laughed."

Confronted with what these witnesses have told this paper and the FBI, Kirk Lyons said that McVeigh defense investigators have been passing his client's picture around in an attempt to influence them to lie. Also, Lyons says, he has worked out an "ironclad alibi" for his client.

According to Lyons, Strassmeir couldn't have been in Kansas before the bombing, because he was building a fence for an elderly couple near Elohim City. "Those people Andy worked for made notes on their calendar and can prove that Andy was near Elohim City from April 5 through the 19th."

Several weeks ago, this paper asked Mr. Lyons to provide the name of the persons Andy was working for and a copy of the calendar. At that time, Lyons said he would think about it. To date, he has not provided such information.

(Tuesday: How a key witness, shortly after making a deal with agents, was found dead in his jail cell Friday).