

Agents Probe OKC Bombing Links to Bank Robberies

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By J.D. Cash - Second of Two Parts

Elohim City is no stranger to problems with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms or intrusive surveillance techniques.

Today, folks who make their home on the 400-acre Christian Identity compound near Muldrow get a little edgy when you bring up the names of Andy Strassmeir or some of his purported associates.

It seems that Andy brought a lot of bad luck down on the white separatist colony. Last August, when investigators for the Timothy McVeigh defense team began showing up here, several residents suddenly took off.

"(Mike) Brescia, the Ward brothers and Strassmeir all sort of moved about that time," recounts the spiritual leader of the community. The Rev. Millar continued, "Andy was sent to us by Kirk Lyons, and I still believe Kirk is a fine patriot, but we're not so sure about Andy anymore."

Today's chief of security at Elohim City recalls some ideas Andy had, "As soon as Andy arrived here," remembers Zara Patterson, "he told me he wanted to take over the security job. I didn't care...It was one less headache for me."

Later, Strassmeir's demands became more questionable.

"Strassmeir went out and replaced all our deer rifles with assault weapons," said Patterson. "Next, he wanted us to start doing illegal stuff...a lot of illegal stuff. I kept telling Andy that we were defensive here, and we didn't want any problems from the law. During the mid-'80s, we had a standoff with the feds. I told him to keep us out of trouble."

Patterson wouldn't say what the projects were that Strassmeir wanted to do, but the Rev. Millar did shed a tiny bit of light on the subject.

"The illegal gun business!" Millar commented, "And when I found out about it, I put a stop to it!"

Kirk Lyons, Strassmeir's attorney, still maintains that Strassmeir was never head of security at Elohim City and that his client would certainly never promote anything illegal.

However, a source with state law enforcement quite familiar with intelligence reports on Elohim City residents says that Strassmeir was believed to be operating a large-scale terrorist training facility at Elohim City.

Speaking on the condition that his name not be used, the source said, "Every few months, 15 to 30 individuals from around the U.S. would show up for a few weeks of military-style training. The recruits," the source explained, "were primarily members of the Aryan Nation."

Among those who participated, the source said, was Timothy McVeigh, who, it is widely believed, was a regular visitor to the reclusive compound.

Tending to evidence this, in October 1993, McVeigh was ticketed on a backroads highway which winds its way past Elohim City.

And, in spite of Kirk Lyons' statements to the media, every resident at Elohim City interviewed by the Gazette says that Strassmeir and his roommate, Mike Brescia, were stripped of their security roles because of "training exercises" the elders thought were "too violent."

A professed revolutionary who kept a travel trailer at Elohim City well remembers the German Strassmeir.

"Yeah, I thought Andy was a friend," explained former Oklahoma KKK leader Dennis Mahon. He added, "I knew that he had some type of undercover background in Germany, but I didn't think he was all that smart."

Mahon, who shares a home with his twin brother in Tulsa, is currently the reputed No. 3 man in the Aryan Nation spin-off, White Aryan Resistance (W.A.R.).

Only a few weeks before the Oklahoma City bombing, Mahon received a phone call from a Nebraskan who the German government has long wanted to get their hands on. Gary Lex Lauck, dubbed the "Farm Belt Fuhrer" by the media, had, for many years, been the primary source of neo-Nazi materials flowing into Germany. But not anymore.

"Yeah, I got a call from Lauck sometime before the bombing...He told me that he was making another trip to Europe. I told him he was too hot, and he shouldn't." Shaking his head, Mahon says now, "He should have listened."

Mahon, who is also banned from traveling to Canada or Germany because of his own KKK-organizing activities, related how his buddy, Lauck, was arrested when he got off the plane in Denmark. Mahon believes the authorities knew he was coming. But how?

"Well, I did tell Strassmeir about the trip," said Mahon. "You know, I really thought Andy was OK..."

Family's Remains Located

On June 28, the remains of an Arkansas couple and an eight-year-old child were located by a fisherman in the Illinois river bayou near Russellville. State authorities report that the bodies had been handcuffed at the feet and hands and their heads wrapped in trash bags and bound with duct tape.

William Mueller, 53 a gun show dealer, his wife, Nancy, 28 and her daughter, Sarah Powell, lived in a cabin near Tilley, Ark. Authorities believe they were abducted from their home on Jan. 5 of this year. Neighbors say the couple's place had been broken into and there were some signs of trouble inside, but no blood. Since the bodies were discovered, the Arkansas Democrat Gazette has been regularly reporting on the story. The eerie similarities to another robbery of an Arkansas gun dealer have caused investigators to examine possible connections to suspected members of the Oklahoma City bombing conspiracy.

On Nov. 5, 1994, a Royal, Ark., gun dealer was robbed and bound with duct tape. His wife spared, Roger Moore lived to tell authorities that he suspected a former house guest, Timothy McVeigh. Later, a federal Grand Jury reported that the robbery was indeed linked to McVeigh, Nichols and Fortier. And, evidence showed, the proceeds of the stolen loot helped finance the bombing conspiracy.

Authorities believe the Muellers were preparing to attend a gun show in Oklahoma, but probably never left their home. An investigation was begun when neighbors reported the family, and much of their personal property, was missing. Friends also noted the Muellers' animals were locked up and had not been fed. A month later, the missing family's automobile and trailer were found some 17 miles from their house.

Arkansas authorities also say that the Muellers were involved in an earlier incident.

In February 1995, William Mueller reported that his home had been broken into and some \$35,000 to \$50,000 worth of silver bars, gun parts and ammunition had been removed. Later, friends say, Mueller began expressing fears that the robbers would return and kill him. Some of those same friends say Mueller knew who the burglars were.

Mueller, a Special Forces veteran, told a friend and fellow militia member, George Eaton, that he was concerned that he might be a target for assassination. Mueller explained to Eaton that he believed this because he had been having trouble with the ATF. The problem, Mueller said, centered on the type of products the family was selling at gun shows.

The Muellers did not sell many firearms at the shows, rather, their sales were primarily gun parts, ammunition and anti-government video tapes, books and assorted literature. Friends say much of that literature was highly critical of the Clinton administration and his political cronies.

Complaining about the situation to an Arkansas news reporter a month before the family was murdered, Mueller and his wife told Gene Worgis that they had written a letter to their congressman detailing their feelings about the ATF's (perceived) harassment.

Armed with correspondence related to the subject, Mueller explained to Worgis that promoters of gun shows told him to stop selling the anti-government literature because the ATF was threatening to "cause them problems."

One letter Mueller showed Worgis was from the director of the ATF, John Magaw, that responded directly to Mueller's complaints. In that document, Magaw explained that, "While the ATF couldn't legally regulate the type of products Mueller sold, the ATF had a new policy which encouraged promoters of gun shows to improve their image by essentially policing their clients who rented tables at the shows."

Producing a spiral binder that Mr. Mueller kept his notes in, the dealer told Worgis that he was especially concerned about two men who had given him trouble at an earlier show. Those two men, Mueller believed, were probably ATF agents because they were arguing with him about the type of materials he was selling. Worgis told the *McCurtain Gazette* that the two men's names, written down in Mueller's notebook, were Michael Brescia and Andreas Strassmeir.

Informant Scared Stiff

During a series of interviews conducted by Ambrose Evans-Prichard, the Washington-based correspondent for the *London Telegraph*, Strassmeir revealed many of the closely guarded facts, involving the bombing of the Murrah federal building. Some of the facts that Strassmeir exhibited knowledge of have never been reported. When asked how he knew these things, the coy German replied, "I have sources."

Readily admitting that the ATF "blew the sting" at the Murrah building, Strassmeir told Evans-Prichard that, "McVeigh made some changes in the plan — he is a very undisciplined soldier, you know.. .In retrospect, the ATF should have made the bust when the bomb was being built in Junction City."

When was the building to be blown up? Evans-Prichard reports that Strassmeir replied, "During the night, when no one was there — that's why the ATF had the building staked out from midnight until 6:00 a.m. Later, the informant believed that the bombing was off for that day and reported that...The ATF lost control of the situation, and McVeigh and the others, were able to bomb the building."

How many trucks were used?

"Two trucks were used in the operation."

How many men were in the parking lot with McVeigh?

"Four, plus the informant and McVeigh."

Asked if the informant would ever speak out, Strassmeir was quoted as saying to Evans-Prichard, "How can he? What happens if it was a sting operations from the very beginning? What happens if it comes out that the plant was a provocateur? What then? the relatives of the victims are going to go crazy, and he's going to be held responsible for the deaths of 168 people? Of course the informant can't come forward. He's scared stiff right now."

Dead Men Don't Speak

Immediately after the arrest of McVeigh and Nichols, federal investigators said there could be reason to suspect the bombers might have been involved in a series of bank holdups which had spring up across the Midwest. A group calling itself the Aryan Republican Army had been on a wide-ranging and profitable crime spree since 1992.

Mocking their pursuers with cartoons and letters to newspapers, the bandits used various disguises, including Bill Clinton masks and Santa Claus hats, and sometimes even donned makeup and wigs to appear Middle Eastern. Witnesses said the crooks often spoke in "gibberish" while they cleaned out the tellers' drawers. By December of last year, the men had hit 22 banks and made off with some \$250,000. Investigators said that much of the money was funneled back to various neo-Nazi groups. None of it has ever been recovered.

Finally, a break in the case occurred in January, when pair of suspects were arrested in Ohio. Peter K. Langan, 37, and Richard Lee Guthrie Jr., 38, were picked up and charged as accomplices in the robbers. Soon after, Guthrie made a deal with prosecutors and began naming names. And some of those names would be familiar ones.

Admitting that the, gang's purpose was to finance the white supremacist movement, Guthrie eventually led investigators to two other members of the group, Kevin McCarthy, 19, and Scott Stedeford, 27. On May 24 and 22, respectively, the two were arrested near their hometown of Philadelphia, Pa. In short order, various news organizations found out that the last two suspects hail links to Elohim City and two former residents there, Andreas Strassmeir and Michael Brescia.

"Yes, it's true," said Millar. "Those two men stayed at Elohim City before the bombing. Stedeford for a short time, maybe a few weeks. Kevin McCarthy, for several months."

Also, Millar remembers, "Strassmeir and Brescia did spend some time with them while they were here."

In fact, after Brescia left Oklahoma in January, he returned to his native Pennsylvania and stayed with white supremacist guru Mark Thomas, 44, also a Pennsylvanian.

A close friend of fellow Aryan Nation radical Dennis Mahon, Mark Thomas now admits that he visited Elohim City just days before the bombing. Thomas says the trip was to visit with his son, who also lived at the compound. During questioning by the FBI, the elder Thomas admitted that he introduced Stedeford and McCarthy to Guthrie and Langan.

Media investigators also report that Mike Brescia formed a rock band dubbed "Cyanide" with McCarthy and Stedeford just prior to the pair's arrest.

Referred to as the "Mystery Man" in a June 30 story appearing in the Philadelphia Inquirer, local authorities indicated that Brescia could be of special interest to them, although his whereabouts are unknown.

However, the man who recently made a deal with prosecutors is not going to be of any help now. Richard Guthrie's testimony was expected to unlock this tangled web of characters and events, but that inmate was found dead Friday.

Kentucky prison officials said that they found Guthrie hanging from a bed sheet in his cell. The cause of death has been tentatively ruled as suicide. Authorities say two notes were left in the cell. The contents of the notes were not released.