

Bombing Plotted Earlier?

By Howard Pankratz | Denver Post Legal Affairs Writer
July 29th, 1996

A white supremacist executed 12 hours after a bomb ripped through the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building "was the driving force" behind a plot to bomb the building 12 years earlier, according to a government memo filed by Timothy McVeigh's lawyers.

The report was filed in U.S. District Court as McVeigh's attorneys attempted to bolster their appeal of his conviction and death sentence with arguments that people other than McVeigh may have been involved in the bombing.

Richard Wayne Snell was mad at the Internal Revenue Service in 1983 and wanted to blow up the Oklahoma City building as revenge for IRS agents raiding his home, Fort Smith-based federal prosecutor Steven Snyder told the FBI in June 1995.

U.S. District Judge Richard Matsch would not let the defense attorneys explore other possible suspects, including Snell and the people he associated with during his years as a well-known and violent member of the ultra right.

Arkansas state officials have told The Denver Post that in the months after the April 19, 1995, Oklahoma City bombing, federal agents looked for links between Snell and the blast.

FBI agents at the time copied a prison log that recorded Snell's every move in the days before he died. They also reviewed correspondence that the white supremacist had with supporters around the United States.

In the hours before he was executed, Snell lay on his bunk "smiling and chuckling" as he watched television coverage of the Oklahoma City bombing, according to the log.

Snell was convicted in Arkansas of killing a black Arkansas state trooper and a pawnshop owner from Texarkana, Ark., whom he mistakenly believed was Jewish.

Snyder told the FBI his knowledge was based on information he received in early 1988 from James D. Ellison, the founder of an Arkansas-based paramilitary organization called the Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord. The CSA was closely affiliated with The Order, which assassinated Denver talk show host Alan Berg.

Only two men have been charged in connection with the Oklahoma City bombing - McVeigh and an Army buddy, Terry Nichols. McVeigh was convicted of murder and conspiracy charges in U.S. District Court in Denver last month and sentenced to death. Nichols is scheduled to be tried on the same charges Sept. 29.

According to testimony during McVeigh's trial, the only people who had knowledge of the plot before the bombing were McVeigh, Nichols, and Michael and Lori Fortier. The Fortiers, who testified for the government, did not mention Snell or indicate that McVeigh was motivated by anything other than his deep anger over the deaths of 75 Branch Davidians at Waco, Texas, on April 19, 1993.

The defense claims that conspiracies stretching to Northern Ireland and Iraq and Iran, including white supremacists in this country, may be behind the bombing.

According to the FBI report written by special agent Steve Crutchfield, Snell took Ellison to Oklahoma City, where they cased the federal building.

"Snyder admitted that there are several similarities between the plot to bomb the Oklahoma City Federal Building in 1983 and the actual bombing ... in 1995," according to the FBI report filed late last week.

"Snyder feels someone else must have been involved (in the 1995 bombing) other than McVeigh or Nichols.

Snyder could not speculate on what connection (there) might be between the plot and the actual bombing." A former high-ranking Arkansas prison official told The Denver Post a year ago that during the four days before his execution, Snell repeatedly predicted that there would be a bombing or an explosion the day of his execution.

According to Crutchfield's FBI report, Snell and Ellison attended an Idaho meeting of anti-government groups in July 1983, where it was allegedly decided to wage war against the United States, in large part as retaliation for the death of tax protester and Posse Comitatus leader Gordon Kahl, killed in a shootout with local and federal authorities in Smithville, Ark.

Part of the strategy allegedly was to blow up federal buildings. But Snell reportedly was motivated by a more personal reason for targeting the Oklahoma City federal building.

Federal prosecutor Snyder told the FBI that after the October 1983 meeting between Snell and Ellison in which the Oklahoma City bombing was discussed, they became involved in other activities and did not have time to carry out the bombing.

Snell had hoped to carry out the attack in Oklahoma City by use of a "rocket launcher," which was to be "left in a trailer or van" near the federal building and then fired by remote control, according to the FBI report.