

SUSPECT DETAILS HOW GANG WORKED

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A 19-year-old former white supremacist testified yesterday in Columbus that he accompanied Peter "Commander Pedro" Langan on six bank robberies in 1994 and 1995.

In riveting testimony in U.S. District Court, Kevin McCarthy, who was arrested in May in Philadelphia, also said that:

He was introduced to Langan in October or November 1994 by Mark Thomas, a white supremacist from Allentown, Pa., during a meeting in a Van Buren, Okla., restaurant.

During the meeting, Langan boasted that he had already robbed 12 banks. "He wanted me to know what I was getting involved in," McCarthy told Judge John D. Holschuh.

He joined Langan's gang, the Midwestern Bank Bandits, shortly after the Oklahoma meeting. The four-member gang also called itself the Aryan Republican Army.

The gang's goal was "to open the door to the overthrow of the United States government." He said he no longer believes in white supremacy or the overthrow of the government.

A rift within the gang developed in late 1995. McCarthy and another gang member, Scott A. Stedeford, 27, became angry with a third member, Richard Lee Guthrie, 38. "Mr. Guthrie had made a few mistakes," McCarthy said. McCarthy and Stedeford refused to participate in more bank robberies with Guthrie. "We weren't on speaking terms."

Earlier this year, Guthrie pleaded guilty to 19 robberies and agreed to testify against Langan and other gang members. However, Guthrie was found hanged last month in his Kentucky jail cell, an apparent suicide.

Each gang member had specific duties. Langan's job was to plan bank robberies.

Each gang member got an equal share of money from robberies. Some of the holdup money was put away for expenses. And some was saved "to do other acts." While McCarthy did not elaborate, authorities are investigating allegations that the gang had links to domestic terrorist organizations.

Langan had built a pipe bomb he dubbed "Commander Pedro's Mark II" that was carried in bank robberies. The bomb, equipped with a wooden handle and fuse, was to be used if the gang was chased or stopped by police.

Federal agents discovered the bomb behind the front seat of a van that Langan was using when he was arrested Jan. 18 behind 585 Reinhard Ave. Langan is charged with shooting at agents from the van during his arrest. Langan was slightly injured in the gun battle. No law enforcement officers were hurt.

A federal grand jury sitting in Columbus issued a 12-count indictment against Langan, 38, in connection with the shootout and a bank robbery in Columbus and another in Springdale, Ohio, in 1994.

McCarthy testified during the fifth day of a pretrial hearing. The hearing is to consider defense motions to suppress much of the evidence the government collected in its investigation of Langan and the gang. Langan's trial is scheduled to begin in Columbus on Oct. 7.

McCarthy said one of the six banks he robbed with Langan was in a Toledo suburb. McCarthy did not give details of the other five robberies.

Langan, 38, stared at McCarthy throughout the 19-year-old's testimony. In contrast, McCarthy looked at Langan only once, while he was identifying Langan. McCarthy showed no expression while testifying in a monotone.

McCarthy described himself as a former drug abuser who was first sent by his parents to a rehabilitation center at age 12. He has not used drugs in the past four years, he said.

McCarthy said he signed an agreement June 25 to plead guilty to one

count each of bank robbery, conspiracy and illegal use of firearms. The agreement also requires him to "testify truthfully" about the activities of other gang members, including Langan, McCarthy testified. He hopes his cooperation will earn him a leniency motion from the government, he said.

Mark Thomas, 44, is a leader of the Aryan Nations and Christian Identity, two national white-supremacist groups. In a September speech in Boyertown, Pa., Thomas advocated returning America to its Christian principles, according to the Allentown Morning Call. Five members of the audience were dressed in Ku Klux Klan garb, the newspaper reported.

Christian Identity operates a 1,000-acre compound in Oklahoma called Elohim City. Timothy McVeigh, accused of bombing the federal building in Oklahoma City, phoned Elohim City before the explosion, authorities have said.

People quoted by the Philadelphia Inquirer last month described Thomas as McCarthy's mentor. One person in the Inquirer report said Thomas took McCarthy to Elohim City. Thomas denied this, the Inquirer reported.

In other testimony yesterday, FBI agents Ed Woods and Roger Wilson testified that authorities learned of the existence of a gang storage locker in Shawnee, Kans., from Langan himself.

Langan told the agents of the locker in exchange for a cigarette and cup of coffee, the agents said. The two agents were interviewing Langan in the Franklin County jail shortly after his arrest.

The locker later was found to contain firearms, pipe bombs and masks, according to court records.