

Mathews, The 'Silent Brotherhood', and Revolution

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Second in a Series

(Editor's Note: Timothy McVeigh and other contemporary white separatists did not emerge full-blown like Zeus during the past several years. Instead, they are a continuum of the white separatist movement spawned by Robert Jay Mathews and others a decade or more ago. Here is the story of Mathews, who is credited with shaping much of the radical elements of the white separatist movement.)

In the early 1960s, Bob Mathews was growing up in Barry Goldwater's Arizona, amid a national political trend many believed was witnessing a nation going down the path of creeping socialism — even communism.

Perplexed by the course was taking, Mathews dabbled with right-wing issues when he joined the John Birch Society at age 12.

By the age of 18, Mathews was training in the desert with the Sons of Liberty, preparing for the coming guerrilla war against communist invaders.

His ideology and views continued to become more extreme.

After reading William Gayle Simpson's "Which Way Western Man," he became a tax protester.

And after mailing in his membership fee to the publisher of the book, William Pierce of the National Alliance, the die was cast for what Mathews would eventually, become.

Pierce, a former University of Oregon physics professor, is best known today for writing the "Turner Diaries" — considered a blueprint for a white-led insurrection by an underground group called "The Order." It was a bible for the white separatist movement.

And it provided both an identity and a purpose for people like Bob Mathews — and, later, Timothy McVeigh.

By 1974, Mathews was on probation for tax fraud. Intrigued by the allure of the former Northwest Territories, the young man packed up his wife and son, then headed for Metaline Falls, Washington. Not long after arriving, Mathews paid a visit to a white separatist enclave, the Church of Jesus Christ Christian, at Hayden Lake, Idaho, several hours from where he lived.

Soon, Mathews decided he and his wife had found a place they could call home, people they could befriend — and a cause they could support...the struggle for a white Aryan homeland.

Pastor Richard Butler ruled over the 20- acre retreat. It was rapidly becoming a mecca for white separatists seeking likeminded people.

Mathews became a regular. Eventually, he would become a leader.

Kahl's Death Proves Catalyst

By July 1983, the death of tax protester and Posse Comitatus member Gordon Kahl had fueled a rowdier-than-usual tone at Hayden Lake's annual "Aryan World Congress."

Already Mathews was emerging as a can-do leader. He had successfully convinced a few other men that he could translate the fictional "Turner Diaries" into reality.

Gordon Kahl's death, plus the fiery speeches, the inflammatory rhetoric and a sense of urgency to strike while the iron was hot, spawned Mathews' plan for guerilla warfare against the federal government.

The goal of "The Order," or "Bruders Schweigen" (Silent Brotherhood), as Mathews' group came to be known, was an all-white homeland in the Northwestern U.S.

Federal authorities, though, thought the plan sounded a lot more like secession and sedition.

But it was the group's means more than their ends that eventually caused the greatest calamity for all involved.

After getting a logging contract with the U.S. Forest Service to support their cause, but discovering that the work was hard and the returns insufficient for their purposes, the group turned to crime.

The gang's first hit was a porno store. Their take: \$369.10. "Revolutions have started from less," Mathews told his supporters.

Fulfilling his promise, it wasn't long before the Silent Brotherhood pulled more grandiose schemes.

Setting up a printing press they experimented with counterfeiting. But the real money, as former eastern Oklahoma outlaw "Pretty Boy" Floyd was wont to say was in banks. And that's where the Silent Brotherhood turned next...well, sort of.

In 1984, they robbed an armored car of \$235,000 in Washington state, sending \$40,000 of it to the Aryan Nations headquarters at Hayden Lake, Idaho.

With time, the gang's activities became more sophisticated. They experimented with disguises. They tried diversionary tactics designed to throw authorities off their trail.

Sending police to the wrong side of town just minutes before a heist was a favorite ploy.

Mathews' code name became "Carlos" after he darkened his face for a robbery and the police issued an APB for a Hispanic individual.

Using aliases, the gang paid cash for inexpensive used cars they'd abandon within a few hundred yards of the group's robberies.

They traveled under aliases obtained from cemeteries and obituaries, using those to get birth certificates, Social Security numbers and driver licenses.

After months of honing their skills, the gang worked up a plan which resulted in their largest and most daring heist ever. It was an ambush of a Brink's armored car. It took place in daylight at a steep bend in Highway 20, near California's scenic Route 101.

Working in full view of shocked motorists, members of The Order hauled sack after sack from the armored car — an incredible \$3.8 million when they tallied the take later.

Flush with more cash than they ever dreamed possible, the revolutionaries set out across country, making substantial donations to leading figures in the "movement."

Mathews' Death

But as is often the case in such matters, it was an informant that did the gang in. Tom Martinez had agreed to work for the FBI in exchange for a reduction in sentence on charges related to passing some of the gang's counterfeit money. He arranged a meeting in Portland with Mathews and another gang member. And by early November 1984, authorities had Mathews in their sights and were ready to close in.

Deploying 150 SWAT team agents from Seattle, Portland, Butte, San Francisco and Los Angeles, and supported by a hostage rescue team from FBI headquarters in Quantico, Va., the FBI surrounded Mathews inside a rented house at Smugglers Cove on Whidbey Island in Washington's Puget Sound.

But Mathews refused to surrender after hours of attempts. Eight agents stormed the two-story dwelling. Mathews fired his machine-gun blindly through the wood flooring, beating off the attack by FBI agents, who escaped unhurt but shaken into the nearby woods.

Next, the situation became a hide-and-seek game. Mathews ran from window to window, shooting at agents — who returned fire from the woods.

After attempting a helicopter assault that nearly got the craft shot down, instructions came from the FBI command post: Ixfo M- 79 starburst flares into the rapidly deteriorating vacation home.

That set it ablaze. Then stockpiled ammunition began detonating. As a conflagration enveloped the house, agents waited anxiously for Mathews to surrender.

He never did.

The following morning, the FBI surveyed the charred remains. There they found the badly burned remains of Robert Jay Mathews.

His gold "Bruders Schweigen" medallion had melted and was imbedded in his chest cavity. It seemed to symbolize Mathews' own version of Valhalla.

The Order Flounders

Following Mathews' death, and the arrest of other members, "The Order" completely crumbled.

Twenty-four members were indicted by a grand jury in Seattle, and by the time the trial began in the fall of 1985, 12 had already pled guilty. When verdicts were announced for the others, 10 more were headed to prison.

But Mathews' death, replete with its gotterdamerung Germanic myth overtones in his fiery death in battle, served to make him a martyr in the cause...and to keep alive the embers of the white separatist movement.