

World Apart

Anti-Government Rebels Attracted To Tiny Compound In Ozark Mountains That Promotes White Separatism

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Lifestyle Series: "The War Within" CROSSROADS: Elohim City

The tiny village is hidden away in the tree-covered Ozark Mountains of eastern Oklahoma.

There's a three-room schoolhouse where most lessons revolve around the Bible. Mobile homes and crudely built stone and wood houses provide shelter to about 90 adults and children. They eke out a living by milling cedar and doing construction jobs. Some men reportedly have more than one wife, and most families have several children.

A domed-shaped, stone church is the community's gathering place and the center of what Elohim City is all about, says founder and spiritual leader Robert Millar. "We don't seek recruits, and we're not looking for more followers," says the 70-year-old Millar.

Elohim City - loosely translated to mean city of God in Hebrew - is a Christian Identity community where residents promote white separatism as a religion and a way of life.

Millar is a Canadian-born Mennonite who founded the village on an 1,100-acre spread after moving to Oklahoma from Maryland in 1973. During outdoor religious services, everyone sings without hymnals. They know the verses by heart, singing that white people are the true Israelites, and that they are at war. Guns are as visible as Bibles. A skinhead carrying an assault rifle bows his head during a service. Children dance with joy when they learn that one of the families did barter work for a box of apples.

The people here lead a poverty-level existence, attracting little attention outside the small circle of residents and associates. But over the last quarter century, this rural community has become a meeting spot for people with similar beliefs.

Some residents, like Jim Ellison, once lived at a religious, paramilitary compound called The Covenant, The Sword & The Arm of the Lord in northern Arkansas. Ellison called himself "King James" and believed he had visions from God. When federal agents raided the Arkansas compound in 1985, they arrested some members of the neo-Nazi group

The Order, who also had ties to the Northwest. Agents found an arsenal of weapons and deadly chemicals that informers said were going to be used to poison a city's water supply. The defunct group's flag now is displayed during services at Elohim City.

The community is linked to Timothy McVeigh, the prime suspect in the Oklahoma City bombing. It's also the spot where a group of Oklahoma extremists planned to detonate a test version of a fertilizer bomb they intended for civil rights targets. And it was a meeting ground for the Aryan Republican Army whose members are accused of 19 Midwest bank robberies.

Millar denies any complicity in criminal activity and says he and his followers are the targets of a "Zionist plot." He can't explain why telephone records show that McVeigh called Elohim City just before the deadly April 19, 1995, bombing. On that same day, one of Millar's followers was executed in Tucker, Ark., for murdering a pawn shop owner he thought was Jewish, and a black state trooper. Millar had befriended Richard Wayne Snell and visited him regularly during the 10 years the convicted killer was on death row in Arkansas.

In 1988, Millar also counseled Snell when he stood trial in Fort Smith, Ark., with Aryan Nations leaders Richard Butler and Louis Beam on charges of plotting to overthrow the government. All were acquitted, and Snell returned to death row.

In early 1995, Snell's impending execution for the two murders was protested by white supremacy and anti-government groups, including the Militia of Montana. Snell warned there would be retaliation. As he went to his death, he told Arkansas Gov. Jim Guy Tucker, "look over your shoulder, justice is on the way." He was put to death 12 hours after the Oklahoma City blast.

Snell is buried on a red-clay hillside at Elohim City. His name is barely visible on the white wooden cross that marks his grave. Millar apologizes for the unkempt graveyard. Someday soon, he'll make a better tombstone for his friend, a martyr for the movement.