

WHITE SUPREMACISTS FLOCK TO CITY OF ZEALOTS IN OKLAHOMA TIMOTHY MCVEIGH, BANK ROBBERS VISITED COMMUNITY.(Front)



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Up seven miles of bad road, past no-trespassing signs nailed to blackjack oaks, sits a major stop on the right-wing extremists' underground railroad.

It looks more like a low-rent trailer park. Ramshackle mobile homes and polyurethane huts sit willy-nilly on this Ozark mountain, hidden by woods and surrounded by the crackle of gunfire.

It's called Elohim City, and the name of the armed, all-white enclave of 80 or so religious zealots keeps popping up in criminal investigations.

Four of five white supremacists indicted last week on charges of conspiring to rob seven Midwestern banks -- including one in Madison -- have visited or lived there. And two weeks before the Oklahoma City bombing, Timothy McVeigh called the Oklahoma compound and spoke for nearly two minutes, phone records show.

Elohim City's leader is Robert G. Millar, a former Mennonite who brought his flock here 24 years ago. He is 71 and favors kilts and clerical collars. His followers, most of whom are related to him by birth or marriage, call him ``Grandpa." Elohim (pronounced eh-loh-HEEM) is a Hebrew word for God.

Millar is considered one of the most important leaders of America's Christian Identity movement, a theology common to an assortment of right-wing extremist groups.

`A religion on steroids'

The movement teaches that its followers are at war with the U.S. government, that racial minorities are sub-human ``mud people," that Jews are the offspring of Satan and that a ``New World Order" endangers freedom.

``It is a religion on steroids," said Morris Dees of the Southern Poverty Law Center, which tracks extremists through its Klanwatch Project.

Adherents include groups such as the Aryan Nations and the now-defunct Covenant, Sword and Arm of the Lord, or CSA, whose members have been implicated in robbery, terrorism and murder.

People seeking the company of like-minded zealots travel between Elohim City and other extremist encampments, including the Hayden Lake, Idaho, compound of Aryan Nations founder Richard Butler and the Pennsylvania farm of Aryan Nations leader Mark Thomas.

Thomas is one of the four men indicted last week in the bank robbery case to have visited Elohim City. Two men who already have been convicted of committing some of the robberies -- Scott William Stedeford and Kevin McCarthy -- took shelter at the compound during the spree, according to court testimony.

The robbers' intent, prosecutors say, was to finance a war against the government.

Elohim City itself remains unscathed. Millar has never been arrested, and his compound has never been raided.

In the 1980s, residents bearing semiautomatic weapons faced down federal and local law enforcement officers trying to enforce a court order in a custody fight. The officers left rather than risk gunfire. After the Oklahoma City bombing, as rumors spread that the compound would be raided by federal agents, residents were said to have aimed their guns at planes overhead.

Millar is the most powerful person in the Christian Identity movement, according to Kerry Noble, a former CSA leader who served more than two years in prison on racketeering and weapons charges after a three-day standoff with federal agents in 1985. Noble said he remains in contact with people in the movement, although he has abandoned its teachings and now advises law enforcement organizations about extremist groups.

``He's got charisma," Noble said of Millar. ``He's got money coming from somewhere. He's respected. He's well-known. Some people say he has spiritual powers."

Millar moved to the United States in the 1950s from Kitchener, Ontario, after God said, ``Thou shalt go to the state called Oklahoma," Millar told The Associated Press.

He followed God's voice to Oklahoma City, then to Baltimore, where he ran a youth camp. In 1973, Millar returned to Oklahoma with about 18 family members and bought the property they now live on. Today, several of Millar's eight children and more than 30 grandchildren live here.

According to Noble, Elohim City was not armed until after 1982, when Millar met Noble and CSA founder James Ellison. Until then, Noble said, Millar ``hadn't entertained the concept of a paramilitary outfit of God . . . that God would use a group to bring forth judgment."

Right-wing leadership

Today, Ellison lives at Elohim City and is married to one of Millar's granddaughters. Millar ``believes that Ellison is the one to lead the right-wing movement. And Robert sees himself as the power behind the throne," Noble said.

On a recent cold winter day, the children of Elohim City played outside, some barefoot, their faces dirty, the girls' hand-me-down dresses several sizes too big, with ripped-out hems. Their parents stared angrily and refused to be interviewed. Only Millar and his second-oldest son, John, would speak.

Millar allowed an AP reporter and photographer to attend one of Elohim City's daily religious services and visit the home of Millar's youngest son. Then he cut the visit short, saying his flock was fed up with the media.

The compound's chapel, a bubble of hardened polyurethane decorated with the Confederate and Christian flags, housed a service punctuated by dancing, salutes and lyrics announcing the time has come to ``raise our swords to fight." A young man wore a shoulder holster containing a semiautomatic pistol.

Robert Millar said his congregation just wants to be left alone to practice its religious beliefs of self-denial, hard work and simplicity: ``I am just repulsed by people who link white supremacists to Christian Identity."