

RYAN BANK BANDIT PLEADS GUILTY - * MCCARTHY WAS - Morning Call, The (Allentown, PA) - February 22, 1997 - page B03

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A teen recruited by Mark Thomas to rob banks pleaded guilty Friday to robbery, weapons and conspiracy charges, completing a deal he struck last summer to be the key prosecution witness against members of the Aryan Republican Army.

Kevin McCarthy, 19, of Philadelphia admitted he participated in six armed robberies between Dec. 9, 1994, and Dec. 9, 1995, that netted the gang \$109,290 in cash and checks. He also agreed that he and other members plotted heists with the goal of overthrowing the government.

McCarthy, indicted Jan. 30 with Thomas, the 46-year-old Aryan Nations leader, and three others, faces a maximum prison term of 35 years. But prosecutors are expected to seek a far lighter sentence.

His testimony has helped them win convictions against two of the gang members. Scott Stedeford was sentenced to nearly 10 years for his role in an Iowa robbery; Peter Langan could receive more than 30 years after his conviction for robbing two Ohio banks.

McCarthy's cooperation also probably influenced Thomas' decision to plead guilty Tuesday to conspiracy and receiving stolen bank money.

Nicknamed "Blondie," McCarthy wore short dark hair above his prison jumpsuit during the brief hearing before U.S. District Judge Ronald L. Buckwalter. On his right forearm were the tattoos of his skinhead past, including one of barbed wire that circled his wrist.

He told the judge he had completed 10th grade, dropping out after attending George Washington High School in Philadelphia and another school near Allentown whose name he could not remember. His mother was dead and his father's whereabouts unknown, he said. He had lived with his grandmother.

She sat behind him in the courtroom, along with his infant daughter and girlfriend. He smiled at them as he was led from the courtroom, and mouthed "Write me."

They later declined comment.

The gang, also called the Midwestern Bank Bandits, committed at least 22 robberies in seven states, using a collection of disguises and taunting investigators who tracked them.

At one December 1994 heist in Cleveland, McCarthy donned an elf hat while Langan dressed in a Santa Claus outfit; both also toted guns. In the March 1995 robbery of an Iowa bank, McCarthy left behind a pipe bomb in an Easter basket to slow police.

McCarthy was arrested in May and charged in the August 1995 robbery of a Bridgeton, Mo., bank.

Those charges were ultimately transferred here.

Soon after the arrest, Thomas admitted that the teen was not only a friend but had lived for several months at his Longswamp Township home in 1992 or 1993. McCarthy's attorney, A. Charles Peruto Jr., once said his client considered Thomas "a father figure."

In interviews, Thomas said he drove McCarthy to Elohim City, a separatist Christian Identity compound in Oklahoma, to be "schooled." Prosecutors contend that in November 1994, Thomas, McCarthy and the others gathered near there, in Fort Smith, Ark. Thomas introduced McCarthy as a potential recruit for the gang and they discussed the robberies.

Thomas visited McCarthy in prison after his arrest. But he was apparently crushed when McCarthy decided to cooperate.

"All Mark did was complain to me about McCarthy turning on him," said Dennis Mahon, an officer of the White Aryan Resistance, this week from his Oklahoma home. "He was very upset with Kevin, and rightfully so. If McCarthy would've kept his ... mouth shut, just take it like a man ... "

Mahon declined to elaborate.

In an interview before his Jan. 30 surrender, Thomas accused McCarthy of being an accomplice to the April 1995 bombing of the Alfred Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. (A pending civil suit contends another Aryan Republican Army defendant, Michael Brescia of Philadelphia, played a role in the blast.)

Prosecutors have dismissed any link between the robberies and the bombing, but decline to discuss the allegations.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael Schwartz said McCarthy is not scheduled to testify in any cases unrelated to the robberies.

Stedeford, 28, and Langan, 38, are to be arraigned next month in Philadelphia on the conspiracy charges. Brescia, 24, is jailed without bail awaiting trial.

But McCarthy -- and Thomas -- are expected to take the witness stand against their onetime comrades.

"I expect him to testify here," Schwartz said. "I expect Thomas to testify here, too."

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