

Bomb Case Part of Emerging Pattern - Wife of Murdered Talk-Show Host Makes Appearance

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DENVER -- Victims of the Oklahoma City bombing were not among the spectators at last week's pretrial hearing for defendants Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols.

The Colorado snows and the Colorado costs apparently kept them away.

But sitting in the second row of Colorado U.S. District Judge Richard Matsch's courtroom was a victim from another decade and another crime that allegedly was generated by hate.

Judith Berg slipped into the courtroom without fanfare, recognized only by a few local reporters who knew who she was and why she had come.

Exactly a decade ago, Berg had watched this same judge preside over the three-month federal civil rights trial of four men who were accused of murdering her husband, Alan Berg. The controversial Denver radio talk-show host, fond of on-air baiting of neo-Nazis, was assassinated in June 1984 outside his home by members of an anti-Semitic, white supremacist group called The Order and the Silent Brotherhood.

Alan Berg's murder later became the subject of the book "Talked to Death," and the 1989 Oliver Stone movie "Talk Radio" was loosely patterned after Alan Berg. Since her husband's death, Judith Berg has given public lectures against hate crimes.

Bruce Pierce and David Lane, charged in Alan Berg's death, were convicted and sentenced to 150 years in prison by Matsch. Two other men were acquitted. The four members of The Order had been charged with willfully violating Alan Berg's civil rights because he was Jewish.

Members of The Order also were implicated in a spree of 1983-84 crimes that included bombings, armored car heists, bank robberies and counterfeiting to subsidize their operations.

Eventually all known members of the Silent Brotherhood were arrested except for leader Bob Matthews, who died in a gunbattle with FBI agents in August 1984.

Authorities who investigated the Berg assassination believed the anti-government manifesto, "The Turner Diaries," written in 1978 by William Pierce, was a blueprint for The Order.

Eleven years later, investigators in the Oklahoma City bombing claimed that the same novel, detailing a fictional terrorist truck-bomb attack on FBI headquarters, was a blueprint for McVeigh, who hawked the book at gun shows throughout the Midwest

The novel's author, William Pierce, a University of Colorado graduate, has denied in recent months that he knew McVeigh or that the book was an inspiration for terrorist activity.

In April 1987, the same month the four Order members were indicted in Colorado in the Berg case, another indictment was unfolding across the country.

A federal grand jury in Fort Smith, Ark., charged Aryan Nation leader Richard C. Butler and nine others with conspiracy to overthrow the government. Among those charged with Butler were David Lane and Bruce Pierce (no relation to William Pierce), the two Order members convicted later in 1987 in the Alan Berg case. Also charged was Arkansas white separatist Richard Wayne Snell.

On April 7, 1988, in a verdict that stunned prosecutors, all nine Aryan Nation/Order members were acquitted in Arkansas of seditious acts against the government. Information emerged in the case that the Alfred P. Murrah Building had been considered a bombing target by the group.

Seven years later, on April 19, 1995, 12 hours after the Murrah Building was bombed, Snell was put to death in Arkansas for another crime -- the 1983 slaying of pawn shop owner William Stumpp, who Snell mistakenly had believed was Jewish.

In his last words, Snell advised then Arkansas-Gov. Jim Guy Tucker to "look over your shoulder. Justice is on the way."

In the weeks after the Oklahoma City bombing, investigators attempted to determine if there was a link between the bombing, which claimed 168 lives, Snell's execution and the April 19, 1993, government raid on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas.

A day after the bombing, Snell's attorney, Jeff Rosenzweig, told the Tulsa World his client had seen the bombing aftermath on TV before his execution and was sickened by the crime and that Rosenzweig did not believe the blast was an act of retribution organized by Snell supporters.

Snell was buried on the grounds of Elohim City, a white separatist enclave near Mul-drow in eastern Oklahoma.

On April 5, 1995, two weeks before the Murrah bombing, phone records indicate that McVeigh called Elohim City, unsuccessfully trying to reach compound

security chief Andreas Strassmeir, a German national who lived at the rural enclave. Strassmeir, who has returned to Berlin, later said he knew McVeigh only in passing and had traded items with him at a 1993 Tulsa gun show.

Also reportedly living on and off at the Elohim City compound in the spring of 1995 was Strassmeir associate Michael William Brescia, allegedly a member of the Aryan Nation extremist group.

Last month, Brescia and his mentor, ex-Pennsylvania Aryan Nation leader Mark William Thomas, and others were named in a Philadelphia conspiracy indictment, which alleged that the defendants had robbed a series of Midwestern banks to subsidize their operations.

Last year, Brescia's name surfaced in the Oklahoma City bombing case when he was named, along with McVeigh, in a Canadian County, Okla., wrongful-death action filed by the mother of two young boys who were killed in the blast.

Stephen Jones, McVeigh's lead attorney, has said his client does not know Brescia.

Brescia reportedly is represented in the conspiracy indictment by Kirk Lyons, a Black Mountain, N.C., attorney, who also has represented Strassmeir in immigration matters and Branch Davidian survivors in their suits against the government.

Last Wednesday, the same day Judith Berg braved a Colorado snowstorm to attend the pretrial hearing here for McVeigh and Nichols, Mark Thomas, 46, pleaded guilty in Philadelphia to conspiring to rob the Midwestern banks. He agreed to tell authorities everything he knows about criminal activity by racial extremists nationwide.

Across the nation, in Hayden Lake, Idaho, Richard Butler, the aging leader of the Aryan Nation movement, was contacted by the Philadelphia Inquirer for reaction about the plea of Thomas, his longtime protege.

Butler, 79, acquitted in the 1988 Arkansas sedition trial along with David Lane and Bruce Pierce, said:

"We are fighting for the life of the white race. This is very significant. I'm shocked to hear this. I don't know what they had on him.