

`ARYAN ARMY' ALLEGEDLY HIT MID AM BANK

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There may be a connection between a bank robbery in Sylvania and the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City.

The Mid American Banking Center at 5830 Monroe St. was robbed on Dec. 19, 1995 by two white males in their middle 20s.

On April 19, 1995, the Alfred P. Murrah building in Oklahoma City was destroyed by a massive truck bomb. Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols go on trial for that crime in Denver later this year.

The Sylvania heist was one of 22 pulled off in Ohio and six other states in 1994 and 1995 by a neo-Nazi group known to law enforcement as the ``Midwest Bank Robbers," and who called themselves the ``Aryan Republican Army."

The gang stole an estimated \$250,000, none of which has been recovered.

Four gang members have been identified.

Richard Lee Guthrie, 38, was arrested by the FBI in Cincinnati on January 15 of last year. He agreed to testify against the others in exchange for a lighter sentence. He was found hanged in his jail cell in Covington, Ky., on July 12.

Guthrie died less than a month before he was supposed to testify against Peter Langan, 37, who was arrested last year in Columbus after a shoot-out with FBI agents.

Scott Stedeford, 27, was arrested in the Philadelphia suburb of Upper Darby May 22 at the recording studio where he worked as a guitarist.

Two days later, Kevin McCarthy, 19, was arrested at his grandmother's house in the Bustleton section of Philadelphia.

McCarthy made a plea bargain June 25. In a hearing in federal court in Columbus July 30, he testified he participated with Langan and Stedeford in a number of robberies.

McCarthy testified against Stedeford in a trial in Iowa. On Nov. 18, a jury convicted Stedeford of robbing the Boatman's bank of West Des Moines on March 29, 1995.

Langan was convicted Feb. 10 after a trial in federal court in Columbus. He was charged with robbing banks in Columbus and Springdale in 1994, and is alleged by federal authorities to have driven the getaway car in the Sylvania holdup.

In the Iowa trial, McCarthy testified that a fifth man - who he did not name - took part in a bank robbery in Madison, Wis., on Aug. 30, 1995.

Two grieving grandparents, a small town newspaper reporter, and a militia leader in Alabama think that fifth man was John Doe Number 2, the mystery figure sought in the Oklahoma City bombing.

The FBI released a sketch of John Doe Number 2 - said to have been seen with McVeigh in Oklahoma City on the day of the bombing - and launched a highly publicized national manhunt for him.

But the FBI suddenly seemed to lose interest in John Doe Number 2. The bureau issued a statement saying it was a case of mistaken identity. The man in the sketch was an innocent soldier unconnected to the bombing, the FBI said.

Glenn and Kathy Wilburn of Oklahoma City, grandparents of Chase, 3, and Colton, 2, killed in the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah building, have been conducting their own investigation.

They've been assisted by J. D. Cash, a reporter for the McCurtain County (Oklahoma) Gazette, and by Mike Vanderboegh, a leader of the 1st Alabama Cavalry Regiment, a militia.

The Wilburns believe John Doe Number 2 is Michael Brescia, 26, of Philadelphia, who was in a rock band with Stedeford and McCarthy.

In June, the Wilburns showed a photograph of Mr. Brescia to witnesses in Herington, Kansas, home of Oklahoma City bomb suspect Terry Nichols, and in Junction City, Kansas, where Timothy McVeigh and John Doe Number 2 allegedly rented the Ryder truck used in the bombing.

Among those who identified Mr. Brescia as John Doe Number 2 are Catina Lawson, who dated Tim McVeigh; her mother, Connie Smith, and Tom Kessinger, who works in Elliot's Body Shop in Junction City where the truck in the bombing was rented, Glenn Wilburn told The Blade.

Mr. Kessinger subsequently has said he was mistaken in his identification of Mr. Brescia.

In a special supplement published December 15, the Denver Post confirmed facts uncovered more than six months before by the Wilburns and Mr. Cash: that a second Ryder truck was involved in the Oklahoma City bombing; and that that

truck was at the Geary State Fishing Lake near Junction City - where the government says the bomb was built - at a time when neither McVeigh nor Nichols was in Kansas.

At the time of the bombing, and for months afterward, Mr. Brescia was living at Elohim City, a Christian Identity compound on the Oklahoma-Arkansas border near Fort Smith.

Christian Identity is a racist religion that contends Anglo-Saxons are descendants of the lost tribes of ancient Israel.

Mr. Brescia's roommate at Elohim City was Andreas Strassmeir, a former intelligence officer in the West German army whose father is a prominent figure in the ruling Christian Democratic Party.

Mr. Strassmeir came to the United States in 1988. He hoped to find work as an undercover operative for a U.S. government agency, according to retired air force Col. Vincent Petruskie, at whose Manassas, Va., home Mr. Strassmeir lived for a short while.

Waitresses and dancers at a strip club in Tulsa called "Lady Godiva's" placed Mr. Brescia and Mr. Strassmeir with McVeigh 11 days before the Oklahoma City bombing.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) interviewed five women who were working at the strip club on the night of April 8, 1995. A portion of the interviews was broadcast on the CBC program "Fifth Estate" the night of Oct. 22, 1996.

The CBC also broadcast a portion of a videotape from a security camera at Godiva's in which a dancer tells her friends that a customer she has been sitting with told her "you're going to remember me on April 19, 1995. You're going to remember me for the rest of your life."

Mr. Strassmeir stayed at Elohim City for several months after the bombing. He has returned to Berlin.

The Wilburns, Mr. Cash, and Mr. Vanderboegh think the Oklahoma City tragedy was the result of a BATF "sting" gone bad.

That belief is shared by Rick Sherrow, a former BATF explosives expert who is now a reporter for Soldier of Fortune magazine.

"I've seen how (B)ATF operates stings, and this sure looks like one," Mr. Sherrow said. "Both the air force base (Tinker) and the city fire department were on alert for up to two weeks prior to the bombing. There were reports the bomb squad was on the scene even before the bombing."

In a broadcast aired Jan 24, the ABC news program ``20-20" reported the bomb squad was on the scene before the bomb exploded.

A spokesman for the BATF denied the agency knew in advance of plans to destroy the Alfred P. Murrah building.

The Wilburns, Mr. Cash, Mr. Vanderboegh and Mr. Sherrow believe the FBI's lack of interest in Mr. Brescia is because scrutiny of Mr. Brescia would lead to scrutiny of his former roommate at Elohim City, Mr. Strassmeir, whom they believe was an informant for the BATF.

In an interview with the Berlin correspondent of the London Sunday Telegraph, Mr. Strassmeir said the BATF had an informant among the bomb conspirators - but it wasn't him.

``McVeigh made some changes in the plan," Andrew Gimson quoted Mr. Strassmeir as saying in a story printed May 19, 1996. ``... The ATF should have made the bust when the bomb was being built in Oklahoma City."

Asked if the informant would ever speak out, Mr. Evans-Prichard quoted Mr. Strassmeir as saying:

``How can he? What happens if it was a sting operation from the very beginning? What happens if it comes out that the plant was a provocateur? ... The relatives of the victims are going to go crazy and he's going to be held responsible for the deaths of 168 people? Of course the informant can't come forward. He's scared stiff right now."

Mr. Strassmeir says now that he was misquoted. The Telegraph stands by its story.

The FBI arrested Mr. Brescia Jan. 30 and charged him with conspiracy in the Madison robbery and six other bank robberies, including the one in Sylvania.

U.S. Attorney Michael Styles insisted Mr. Brescia's indictment had nothing to do with the Oklahoma City bombing case.

Caption: ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTOS A hooded figure, above, holds money allegedly taken in holdups by the `Aryan Republican Army' in a frame from a video produced by the group; at right, supremacist Mark Thomas after a 1995 speech in Boyertown, Pa.