

# Tracking the Truth

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By Kevin Flynn

Timothy McVeigh is the second man to land on death row after plotting to destroy the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. The first, Richard Wayne Snell, was executed in Arkansas for murdering a state trooper. His crime spree also included a 1983 conspiracy to bring down the Oklahoma City building.

The date he was put to death — was the day McVeigh's bomb went off. Four days earlier, Snell predicted there would be an explosion the day he died. Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols conspired with "others unknown" to destroy the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, according to their grand jury indictment.

Carol Howe believes she knows something about those "others unknown." But she can't tell.

The 26-year-old former government informant is the witness McVeigh's lawyers weren't allowed to call during his Denver trial.

She would have given "compelling" evidence that other "had not only the intent to bomb buildings but also the means to carry it out," according to her lawyer, Clark Brewster.

But U. S. District Judge Richard Matsch ruled her testimony to be irrelevant. At least, that's what he was reported to have ruled. His official ruling isn't known because it is still under seal. Howe now faces trial herself in Tulsa, Okla., on charges of making a bomb threat and illegally possessing a destructive device.

Prosecutors have asked a judge to order her not to tell what she knows about the Oklahoma City case should she take the stand in her own defense. But the Rocky Mountain News has pieced her story together through research and interviews.

Here is what jurors — and the rest of the nation — weren't allowed to hear: On Sept. 2, 1994, an attractive 24-year-old blond woman drove alone up a seven mile Oklahoma dirt road into a secluded encampment of white separatists called Elohim City.

A former Tulsa debutante, Carol Howe now sported a swastika tattoo on her left shoulder.

A few days earlier, she had signed a contract with the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms to inform on the White Aryan resistance group in Tulsa headed by former Ku Klux Klan leader Dennis Mahon.

The daughter of the wealthy president of oil drilling and pipeline giant MAPCO Inc., Howe was now earning \$120 a week as a government spy on the extremist fringe.

She already was a committed racist. She had first joined Mahon's group shortly after a confrontation with three black men in a Tulsa park in February 1994. They pushed her off a two-story building, crushing her heels, Howe told police.

She still walks with difficulty, and bums with anger. By August of that year, she was angry with Mahon, too.

He had raped her and threatened her over the phone, she told law officers. On Aug. 23, 1994, she filed for a restraining order against him in a Tulsa court. Tulsa police noticed the filing and tipped off the ATF, where agent Angela Finley was assigned to investigate white supremacy groups. She immediately contacted Howe and asked if she would like to get revenge on Mahon by becoming an informant.

Howe agreed and briefed Finley on what she already knew of Mahon's group. Finley wrote six reports from August 1994 through February 1995 summarizing what Howe told her. Information in this article comes from those ATF documents. Howe told Finley that Mahon was preparing for a race war and she believed his group was stockpiling weapons. She said Mahon told her he knew how to make bombs and bragged about exploding a 500- pound ammonium nitrate bomb under truck in Michigan five years earlier.

He also told her about Elohim City, 120 miles southeast of Tulsa. A few days after the first interview with Finley, Howe drove there alone.

There she met Andreas Strassmeir, a German citizen living illegally in the United States.

Strassmeir had lived at Elohim City since 1991 and helped with security. His tourist visa had expired, but he wanted to stay in the country.

Howe reported that Strassmeir said he knew black-market munitions dealers from whom he could get grenades, plastic explosives and more.

He also told Howe that a long anticipated race war would begin in 1995 on the hottest day of the year. Mahon, too, talked about bombing power lines into Oklahoma City on a hot summer day in hope of instigating riots.

Finley asked Howe to try to get Mahon, Strassmeir and others from Elohim City to make explosives at Howe's Tulsa home so they could be arrested. On Sept. 27, 1994, the ATF placed a surveillance camera in her home.

But the most Howe could do was get some of them to paint inert hand grenades to look like Halloween pumpkins. However, during another visit to Elohim city on Nov. 3, 1994, Howe said Strassmeir told her his plans were to take "direct actions and operations such as assassinations, bombings and mass shootings" to try to forcibly destroy the government.

In Finley's report No. 4, dated Nov. 29, 1994, she underlined the work "bombings." It was less than five months before the Murrah building was destroyed. By December, the ATF had begun planning to raid Elohim City and arrest Strassmeir on weapons charges.

That month, Howe said, the camp began to get more militant. She told Finley about a speech the leader of Elohim City, Rev. Robert Millar, gave that month.

"During the Sabbath meeting," reads Finley's fifth report dated Jan. 1, 1995, against the United States government. He brought forth his soldiers and instructed them to take whatever actions necessary against the United States government." Millar told Howe "they were prepared to fight a war against the government." They considered themselves kindred folk with the 80 Branch Davidians killed in the confrontation with the government near Waco, Texas, on April 19, 1993.

Elohim City would be the next; Waco, they thought, and some talked about making the first strike, she said. Howe gave Finley a copy of the racist novel, *The Turner Diaries*, telling her to "make sure you read this," Finley testified later in a pre-trial hearing in Howe's case. The book by William Pierce, leader of the neo-Nazi National Alliance, depicts a racist takeover of the United States. Its scenes include a massive truck bombing of FBI headquarters in Washington, D.C. Howe told authorities that *The Turner Diaries* — which federal prosecutors said was McVeigh's "blueprint" for the Oklahoma bombing — was required reading at Elohim City, along with Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.

About this same time, Howe heard Mahon and Strassmeir discuss someone named "Tim Tuttle." The name meant nothing to her then, but prosecutors later said it was an alias used by McVeigh. In her last summary report before the bombing, dated Feb. 28, 1995, Finley wrote that Howe took a trip to Oklahoma City on Jan. 19, 1995, with several people from Elohim City.

The FBI questioned Howe about this trip two days after the bombing, and she told agents that Mahon and Strassmeir made a total of three trips to Oklahoma City, including the time Howe went. But, she said, she "heard of no specific plans" to strike against the government. In a later FBI interview, she told agent she was "fairly certain that Mahon is not directly involved in violent acts."

Mahon and Strassmeir strongly deny any involvement in the Oklahoma City bombing. Strassmeir fled to Germany after his name surfaced publicly in January 1996. He says that on the day of the bombing, he was fixing fences near Elohim City.

Mahon remains in Tulsa and last week took the fifth Amendment before the special Oklahoma grand jury re-examining the bombing case. He calls Howe a pathological liar.

The only concrete link between McVeigh and Elohim City is a phone call. The FBI's reconstruction of telephone records shows McVeigh used a calling card to telephone Elohim City from the Imperial Motel in Kingman, Ariz., on April 5, 1995, two weeks

before the bombing. The call came immediately after he called a Ryder truck rental agency.

During the call, which lasted one minute and 56 seconds, McVeigh asked to speak with "Andi," but Strassmeir wasn't around to take the call, said residents of Elohim City.

While federal authorities once regarded Strassmeir as a subject in the bombing investigation, they now don't believe he was involved.

They have, however, arrested Strassmeir's one-time roommate at Elohim City, a former Philadelphia college student named Mike Brescia, as a member of a bank robbery gang called the Aryan Republican Army.

In the days after the bombing, the FBI investigated whether a series of Midwestern bank robberies were related. Federal grand juries later indicted six men, including Brescia, as members of the gag suspected of up to 19 bank robberies in seven states.

Four of the six lived at or frequently visited Elohim City.

But the FBI found no connection to the Oklahoma City bombing, despite McVeigh's phone call.

Many conspiracy theorists and even mainstream anti-militia groups such as Morris Dees' Klanwatch in Montgomery, Ala., claim that McVeigh was a frequent visitor to Elohim City.

But there's no evidence McVeigh was ever there at all.

The only documented meeting McVeigh had with a resident of Elohim City came when he and Strassmeir met at the April 1993 Tulsa Gun Show, two years before the bombing. McVeigh was selling military clothing there, Strassmeir recalled in an affidavit.

Strassmeir sold McVeigh a U. S. Navy combat knife and sheath and later returned to buy a shirt, trousers and leather gloves from him. They discussed the ongoing Branch Davidian siege at Waco, which hadn't yet culminated in the fatal fire.

Strassmeir said he may have given McVeigh an Elohim City business card containing his first name and the compound's phone number.

The Elohim City leader, Millar, dismisses talk of links between his group and the bombing. To him, Strassmeir was nothing but a lazy mooch who "cost me every week he was here," Millar wrote in a letter detailing Strassmeir's stays there. He told the News that Strassmeir and Brescia were more militant than he liked. Several months after the bombing, they were asked to leave Elohim city. Brescia returned to his parent's home in Philadelphia, went back to classes at La Salle University and married one of Millar's granddaughters.

He was indicted in January on the bank robbery charges pleaded guilty in May and is awaiting sentencing. He is named as a defendant in a civil lawsuit brought by some bombing victims who believe he was involved.

Strassmeir's attorney, Kirk Lyons of Black Mountain, N.C., says the fuss is nothing but smoke and mirrors. He says Strassmeir was an American history buff who came to the United States in 1988, liked it and stayed.

Strassmeir's fled to Germany in January 1996. He denies involvement. A U. S. State Department memorandum says Strassmeir shouldn't be permitted to return to this country.

Millar says he would never condone violence in the cause of change. "I don't think terrorism or blowing up buildings accomplishes anything. It's counter-productive."

Carol Howe goes on trial next week on the bomb-threat charges. The charges are trumped up to keep her quiet, claims her attorney, Clark Brewster.