

Trail of Death Follows White Supremacist Gang Led by Chevie Kehoe

Trail of death follows white supremacist gang

Chevie O'Brien Kehoe, a pot-smoking 25-year-old who looks like he could be the logger next door, grew up dreaming about playing a starring role in the white supremacist revolution he was sure was just around the corner.

While only a boy of 12, Kehoe heard about the exploits of Bob Mathews, a self-styled white revolutionary who tried to live out a novel's vision of race war and died in a fiery shootout with the FBI in 1984.

Today, court documents on file in three states — Ohio, Washington and Arkansas — claim that Kehoe was grimly successful in achieving his life's dream of following in the footsteps of Mathews and becoming a blood-drenched Aryan warrior. He is tied to more acts of domestic terrorism than any other right-wing extremist arrested in the United States in the last decade.

As the alleged founder and leader of the so-called Aryan Peoples Republic, he is accused of involvement in five murders, the attempted murder of several police officers, bomb-making, armed robberies, burglaries and selling stolen property. Among other attacks, he allegedly pipe-bombed City Hall in Spokane, Wash. Officials are prohibited by a judge's gag order from discussing the Kehoe case. But the case stems from an investigation that began three years ago, stretches from coast to coast and in many ways offers a road map to the topography of today's radical right.

Kehoe, who goes to trial on racketeering charges starting Feb. 16 in a federal courtroom in Little Rock, Ark., could face the death penalty. In addition, he could face state charges of murder and other crimes in connection with a five-year crime spree.

Kehoe's plan — as far-fetched as it may sound to many — was to carve out a new, independent country in the United States that would limit citizenship to whites. All others were to face forcible deportation or death.

According to the indictment, Kehoe "patterned his enterprise's activities after the actions and ideology" of Mathews' group — The Order — that was responsible for a series of armored car heists that netted \$4 million and the murder of at least two people.

An 8-Year-Old Is Murdered

Kehoe's alleged violence was truly grotesque.

Among other things, Kehoe is accused of masterminding three Arkansas murders, including that of an 8-year-old girl who had a plastic bag duct-taped over her head. As

Sarah Elizabeth Powell suffocated to death, she was apparently tortured with electric cattle prods to reveal where her gun-dealer stepfather hid his gold and other valuables.

Officials also believe the little girl first may have been forced to watch while her stepfather William Mueller, 52, and mother Nancy, 28, were suffocated in a January 1996 triple homicide that shocked even seasoned murder detectives.

The attack may not have been a complete surprise. Less than a year before, William Mueller told authorities that his home near Tilly, Ark., had been burglarized of firearms and other items worth more than \$50,000. Mueller told friends that he feared the perpetrators — whom he hinted he might know — would return after the February 1995 burglary.

Officials now say that the proceeds from this burglary, including a 28-foot travel trailer stolen near Harrison, Ark., were taken to the Pacific Northwest by Kehoe, who earlier had teamed up with neo-Nazi Skinhead Danny Lee and federal prison escapee Faron Lovelace at Elohim City, a compound of religious extremists in eastern Oklahoma.

'A Liquid Diet'

After the Mueller family's bodies were tossed into a bayou near Russellville, Ark., Kehoe and his companions joked that the victims were on a "liquid diet," court records say. It would be six months before the badly decomposed bodies were discovered by a local fisherman. Investigators initially were completely stumped.

But small flecks of auto body paint were found on the duct tape used on the victims, eventually becoming the forensic clue that convinced federal ATF agents and Arkansas state investigators that Kehoe was connected to the three murders. The flecks scientifically matched paint found a year later on a freshly repainted pickup truck used by Chevie and his brother, Cheyne, authorities say.

The Arkansas killers stole a trailer full of firearms, ammunition, gold and militia supplies that the Muellers used to sell at gun shows, usually those tailored in part to militia fanciers and others interested in the same kind of antigovernment rhetoric that attracted Kehoe and his family.

Kehoe and his white supremacist cohorts are accused of transporting the stolen firearms and half a million rounds of ammunition from the 1995 and 1996 thefts in Arkansas to Spokane, stopping at Elohim City on the way. The stolen loot was hidden in a garage at The Shadows Motel & RV Park in north Spokane, where Kehoe and his band of Aryan warriors holed up for a period of time in 1995 and 1996.

Later, the stolen items were kept in storage lockers rented under fictitious names in Oldtown, Idaho, and Thompson Falls in western Montana.

The Shadows during this period was home to an underground trade in guns and,

apparently, bombs. A former manager recalls that Kehoe spent time making his own blasting caps and pipe bombs, detonating the devices under stacks of telephone directories.

The manager also says that he saw Kehoe's stash of stolen firearms and other items he's accused of stealing from Mueller — including a handful of Mueller's business cards. Kehoe told the manager that he bought the guns, ammunition and survivalist supplies from a gun dealer who had gone broke, and authorities were never notified.

Timothy McVeigh in the Shadows

A tantalizing connection also emerged at The Shadows.

In early 1995, the former manager recalls, a man resembling Timothy McVeigh met Kehoe at The Shadows. The manager also says that Kehoe showed up hours before the April 19, 1995, Oklahoma City bombing and excitedly demanded that the manager turn on the CNN news channel, a hint that Kehoe had advance knowledge of McVeigh's plan.

The Shadows' former manager is not the only one to place McVeigh at the motel. A Spokane couple claims that a white supremacist who is now accused of molesting their children told them that he'd met McVeigh at the motel.

But the FBI has been unable to establish that McVeigh was ever at the motel — or, indeed, anywhere in the Pacific Northwest prior to the Oklahoma bombing.

It may not have been coincidence that The Shadows is a few steps from a bar that was one of Mathews' favorites hangouts in 1983 and 1984. (The bar also once hosted Madonna, who starred in a high school wrestling movie filmed there.)

But instead of drinking or spending much time at the bar his hero frequented, Chevie, or "Bud," as friends called him, seemed to prefer spending his time at the motel, regularly smoking marijuana.

Chevie wasn't the only Kehoe to occasionally live at The Shadows. His father, Kirby Keith Kehoe, and other members of his family apparently did so as well, frequently traveling 60 miles north to Colville, Wash., where the family once lived.

Officials say that Chevie and his father supported themselves while based in Spokane by brazenly selling some of the stolen Mueller firearms at gun shows around the country — a dangerous practice that may ultimately have led to the undoing of the Kehoe gang.

The first stolen weapon to surface in the case was a .45-caliber Colt pistol that authorities now say was Nancy Mueller's personal handgun. Seattle police seized the gun in February 1996 when they arrested a suspected drug user who was spotted carrying the gun in a pawn shop.

The man later told investigators that he got the gun from Kirby Kehoe, who was secretly indicted in Spokane in June 1997 for possessing the stolen firearm.

That revelation was the first break for state and federal investigators who jointly were investigating the Mueller murders. But it would be another 17 months before Chevie Kehoe and other alleged gang members were behind bars.

A life of Extremism

The Kehoe saga began long before.

Chevie Kehoe was born on Jan. 29, 1973, in Orange Park, Fla., to Kirby and his wife, Gloria. His name, a family friend who lives in Spokane recalls, came from a family preoccupation. "His father was a real good mechanic and particularly liked Chevrolets, and that's why they named their first son Chevie," the friend said.

The elder Kehoe was a Vietnam veteran, whose dislike and distrust for the federal government intensified as Chevie was growing up. Chevie, Cheyne and the six other brothers who followed sometimes attended public schools, but mostly were home-schooled by their parents, who deeply distrusted public education. Chevie listened and learned.

The family was itinerant, with the parents building pole barns, planting trees and doing other jobs — mostly just getting by in the underground economy that attracts so many in the extremist movement. They lived in Florida, Arkansas and elsewhere before moving to northeastern Washington state, near the Canadian border, in the late 1980s.

Somewhere along the way, the elder Kehoes connected with the Christian Identity belief that whites are the true Israelites, God's chosen people, who have a moral obligation to fight for the preservation of their race. They heard the Identity message, which also emphasizes that Jews are the children of Satan, at Elohim City, the neo-Nazi Aryan Nations compound in Idaho and a small church called The Ark, north of Colville. In his mid-teens, Kehoe met Jake Settle, a former Marine and ex-cop who was living in the area. Settle, who frequented the Aryan Nations compound with his wife, Susan, shared the Kehoe family's Identity beliefs. As Chevie matured, he became somewhat estranged from his father and came to see Settle as his mentor. "He really liked Jake and looked up to him as a big brother, even a dad," a former friend recalls.

Polygamy and the Chosen People

In the early 1990s, Chevie and his family began visiting Aryan Nations, where they listened to the Identity teachings of leader Richard Butler. A decade earlier, Butler had been the inspiration for Mathews, Bruce Carroll Pierce, David Lane, Gary Yarbrough, David Tate and other young men who soon grew tired of merely listening to Butler's hate-filled speeches and decided to take action by secretly forming The Order. Ultimately, Chevie would decide to avoid the mistakes of Mathews, whose downfall came largely because of the size of his group, which numbered more than 30. Following

the strategy of "leaderless resistance," Chevie allegedly kept his group of Aryan warriors much smaller, determined to avoid the attention of the authorities.

As he grew toward manhood, Chevie became increasingly interested in polygamy, arguing that it was accepted in biblical times and permitted under the Identity doctrine, according to the federal indictment. He told friends and family that it was his obligation to enhance the population of the white race by having multiple wives and as many children as possible.

Ultimately, the indictment says, he saw the practice of polygamy as vital to building the Aryan Peoples Republic that he envisioned.

Soon enough, he was turning those words into action.

In 1993, Susan Settle introduced her 18-year-old sister, Angie, to Chevie, who by then was married to Karina Gumm. Chevie later went to Angie's house in Spokane, hoping she could supply him marijuana. Before the encounter ended, Angie had agreed to become Chevie's second wife in a polygamous relationship that lasted less than two months.

Chevie took both wives to the 1993 Aryan World Congress, an annual event hosted by the Aryan Nations, apparently hoping to impress others that his polygamous ways would help ensure the vitality of the white race. While there, Kehoe assaulted Karina, who was seven months pregnant.

She suffered a black eye and a bloody lip, apparently because she was having trouble accepting her role in Chevie's polygamous family.

Enter the Aryan Republican Army

Chevie, Karina, Angie and one child spent a couple of weeks in a small cabin near the Canadian border, north of Kettle Falls, Wash. Soon they headed to Elohim City, where Chevie's polygamy was accepted by others pursuing a similar lifestyle.

After 54 days of marriage, Angie grew homesick, tired of the marriage and the domestic violence that accompanied it. With the help of another woman at Elohim City, she planned her flight. But she soon learned she had an ally in Gloria Kehoe, who convinced her son to allow Angie to return home to her parents in Spokane.

While at Elohim City, a community to which his parents had originally introduced him, Chevie met up with a group of like-minded white supremacists. Authorities now believe that beginning in 1994, Chevie began supplying firearms to members of the Aryan Republican Army, a group that would steal \$250,000 in a series of 22 bank robberies in the Midwest.

It's unclear if the group, with a name remarkably similar to the Aryan Peoples Republic

Chevie was striving to create, was connected to him in other ways.

Soon, Chevie was staying at The Shadows and, in a parallel to McVeigh, traveling the gun show circuit. It was in this period as well that authorities now believe he was involved in the murders of two neo-Nazi Skinhead associates.

In the summer of 1995, prosecutors allege that Kehoe ordered Faron Lovelace to murder Jeremy Scott. The reason: Kehoe had convinced Scott's wife to join him in a polygamous marriage and Scott stood in the way.

Prosecutors say the other man, Jon Cox, may have been killed because Kehoe believed he was telling friends of Kehoe's alleged plans to rob a series of armored cars, just as Mathews had done a dozen years before. Members of Mathews' Order had also killed a suspected informer, Walter West, whose body, just like Cox's, was never recovered from the wilds of the Pacific Northwest.

By late 1996, after Nancy Mueller's handgun was found in Seattle, investigators were closely examining Chevie and Kirby Kehoe in the Mueller case. They also were looking for one of their alleged associates, Timothy Coombs, who remains a fugitive in the attempted assassination of a Missouri state trooper shot through his kitchen window.

The Muellers had lived in a home that was once owned by Coombs.

The Net Begins to Close

Another big break in the case came on Dec. 10 of that year, when a Spokane Skinhead was arrested while getting a traffic ticket in South Dakota. In Sean Haines' vehicle, police found a Bushmaster .223-caliber assault rifle stolen from Mueller.

When Arkansas and federal investigators began talking to him about the possibility of being charged in a triple murder, Haines quickly rolled over and implicated Chevie Kehoe.

Apparently hearing of the arrest, Kehoe hit the road. First he moved from The Shadows to another Spokane recreational vehicle park. Then he convinced his brother, Cheyne, and Cheyne's young family, to join him and his wife in leaving Spokane in a motor home that allegedly was purchased with proceeds from stolen goods.

The families moved fast, passing through Nevada, Texas and Alabama, before checking in to an Ohio campground. Then, on Feb. 15, 1997, two Ohio police officers stopped a Chevrolet Suburban with expired Washington plates.

Cheyne came out shooting.

In a dramatic exchange of fire captured on a police car video camera and broadcast

around the nation, no one, amazingly, was killed, and the Kehoe brothers escaped. A few minutes later, Chevie opened up on other officers, again escaping unhurt.

A nationwide manhunt was on. Officials put up a wanted poster and offered a \$60,000 reward. But the Kehoes had disappeared, moving through a murky antigovernment underground, selling Mueller weapons as they went, and ending up in southern Utah. There, the brothers and their families found ranch work under assumed names.

The Final Target: Chevie's Own Family

They might have remained hidden, officials say, if not for Chevie's tendency to extreme violence. While at the ranch, he allegedly began speaking of killing his parents to secure a pricey gun collection.

Cheyne remembered well how Chevie had spoken calmly to friends of killing his own wife, Karina, after learning she might be part Native American.

To top it off, Chevie had developed an unhealthy interest in Cheyne's wife.

So Cheyne fled. In June 1997, he drove straight through to his family's old hometown of Colville and, accompanied by Identity minister Ray Barker, turned himself in to local authorities. The next day, armed with a map Cheyne had provided, FBI agents arrested Chevie as he walked into a feed store in Gunlock, Utah.

Cheyne cooperated fully, and federal officials asked a state judge for leniency. But the judge handed him a 24-year sentence on charges stemming from the Ohio shootout, pointing out that Cheyne had guns stolen from a murder victim and had tried to kill several Ohio police officers. Cheyne's wife reportedly got the \$60,000 reward.

Lovelace is now on death row after a state conviction in Jeremy Scott's death. Chevie, his father Kirby and Danny Lee go to trial in February on the federal racketeering charges. And Cheyne is being hidden by prison officials who fear he could be killed at the hands of imprisoned white supremacists who see him as a traitor.

Like his fallen hero, Bob Mathews, Chevie appears unrepentant. Suckled on the theology of Christian Identity, he has promised to fight to his dying breath.

In an undated letter to his wife seized by authorities in Utah, Chevie allegedly wrote that he would "rather die on my feet than live on my knees." He told Karina that he "had to represent the ideals that I [have] so long honored." Then, in a postscript to federal agents, he added that he would "'forever and always' seek to destroy you and yours.

"I will see to it on earth if alive and will see to it in the heavens if made a 'GOD,' either way my fears and pains [will] torment you and yours forever."