

Did Arizona militia leader aid bomber?

Ex-FBI agent unconvinced by denials of late Patriot

By Mark Shaffer
The Arizona Republic

KINGMAN — It's a mystery the answer to which former Arizona Patriots militia godfather Jack Oliphant took to his grave, and that Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh likely will take to his this week.

What exactly was Oliphant's role, if any, in preparation for the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in 1995 that killed 168 people? And why did he allow McVeigh to use his remote Hephzibah Ranch 40 miles east of Kingman for explosives practice in the months before the bombing?

The curious relationship between Oliphant and McVeigh is only one of many connections that McVeigh, who is scheduled to be put to death Monday, has with Arizona.

McVeigh drifted to the Kingman area in 1993 because his old Army buddy, Michael Fortier, who is serving 12 years in prison for failing to notify police of McVeigh's bombing plans, was rearred in the high-desert city and returned there after leaving the military.

McVeigh rented a trailer south of town and a small house in Golden Valley. He stayed at Fortier's mobile home north of Kingman, where he stacked soup cans on the kitchen floor to indicate how he would stack fuel-soaked fertilizer containers in the back of a rental truck.

He worked briefly as a security guard and later loaded building products at the local True Value Hardware store. He had a local mailbox and stayed in two motels along old Route 66, the Hilltop and the Imperial, in the weeks before the bombing, the most deadly act of terrorism in U.S. history.

Unanswered questions

The largest Arizona riddle is the connection between McVeigh and Oliphant, who went to prison for four years in 1986 for plotting to hijack a Brinks armored truck from the casinos of Laughlin, Nev., and use the money to finance a White supremacist training compound at his ranch. Oliphant died of cancer seven months after the bombing.

Oliphant said shortly after the bombing that while he was



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in jail, his wife received support from a "longtime KKK man" who owns the Michigan farm where Terry Nichols, McVeigh's co-defendant in the bombing, once lived.

An undercover FBI agent recorded Oliphant, who in his younger days blew off his left arm in a shotgun accident, and others in the Arizona Patriots militia in 1986 talking about plans to bomb a synagogue, the Federal Building in downtown Phoenix and an Internal Revenue Service building in Ogden, Utah.

A few weeks after the Oklahoma City bombing, the FBI said it found no link between Oliphant and the attack.

But Kingman flight instructor Lee Fabrizio, a former FBI agent who was assigned to the bombing case in late 1995 before retiring from the agency, said he believes Oliphant was "up to his eyeballs" in helping McVeigh with bombing preparations.

"He gave them (McVeigh

and Fortier) the ranch. They all went up to his ranch, and they stayed up there and practiced and would be up there days at a time," said Fabrizio, who went to the ranch and interviewed Oliphant's widow, Margaret, numerous times. "They were there for the purpose of learning about (explosives) stuff."

Fabrizio said that Margaret even cooked for McVeigh on many occasions and referred to him affectionately as "Timmy." At the same time, he said, she was "saying that she did not know what was going on."

Fabrizio also said that when McVeigh was in Kingman shortly before the bombing, he turned up at the Lazy L Ranch, 25 miles north of the town, apparently on a weapons-related trip, and told a ranch resident that "something big was going to happen on the 19th" of April.

During testimony at McVeigh's trial, the Gonzales Pass area east of Bullhead City was mentioned as another place

where McVeigh ignited explosives.

A reputation in explosives

Dennis Mahon, a former Midwest leader in the White Army Resistance movement now living in the Kingman area, knew both McVeigh and Oliphant. Mahon also said he thought there was a connection between the two men.

"Oliphant was a weapons and explosives guy in the movement and was well known for that," Mahon said. "You can't tell me that they didn't know one another living that close."

McVeigh and Oliphant also had mailboxes at the same private mail service in Kingman.

In interviews after the bombing, Oliphant said he had never seen McVeigh before the FBI showed him pictures, and referred to him as "whatever his name is, McVeigh."

In a letter to Kingman radio station KGMM in April, McVeigh wrote, "There'd be no

Dennis Schroeder, owner of the Hilltop Motel in Kingman, says he believes that McVeigh highlighted an ominous verse in one of the room's Gideon Bibles during a four-night stay in February 1994, two months before the bombing. McVeigh briefly rented a house in Golden Valley (left), northwest of Kingman, in March and April 1994, a year before the bombing that killed 168 people at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City.

harm in saying I knew Jack O, but I didn't," and added, "which I admit is really weird given our (apparent) common interest; 'strange but true' coincidence."

McVeigh wrote that he had heard Oliphant's ranch "was a stone's throw away from my favorite stomping grounds," which McVeigh referred to as his "shooting area," and that he, McVeigh, had seen a sign pointing toward the ranch.

During one visit to the area, McVeigh wrote, a vehicle he was in with Michael and Lori Fortier became stuck in a wash and "a one-arm man in his pickup and his wife" towed them out.

"I suspect this was him, but I didn't know him, or who he was, at the time," McVeigh wrote.

Changes since bombing

Meanwhile, McVeigh's other connections to the Kingman area have undergone a face lift.

Fortier's mobile home on McVicar Avenue, which federal agents raided on two occasions, has a new owner who remodeled the place. Gone is the flagpole in front with the menacing "Don't Tread On Me" Revolutionary War flag and the weedy, gravel-covered lot. They were replaced by 6,000 square feet of grass and flowers.

"But it still gives me the heebie-jeebies every time I look at that kitchen floor and know what happened there," said an elderly woman who lives in the trailer and refused to identify herself.

Fortier's mother, Irene, and wife, Lori, remain in Kingman. Both refused to be interviewed.

Fortier's neighbor, another McVeigh associate named Jim Rosencrans, sold his ramshackle trailer to the owners of Fortier's property, who promptly removed the trailer. Rosencrans, who walked out of his trailer armed with a rifle during one of the FBI searches of Fortier's trailer, remains in Kingman. He refused to be interviewed.

At the Hilltop Motel, where owner Dennis Schroeder says he believes McVeigh circled an ominous verse in the room's Gideon Bible during his four-night stay in Room 119, new tile has been added to the bathroom, but otherwise the room is unchanged.

"I just keep waiting for the FBI to return the Bible," Schroeder said.

The Imperial Motel across the street, where McVeigh rented a room for three weeks immediately before leaving for Oklahoma, has new owners. A man at the front desk refused to be interviewed about McVeigh.

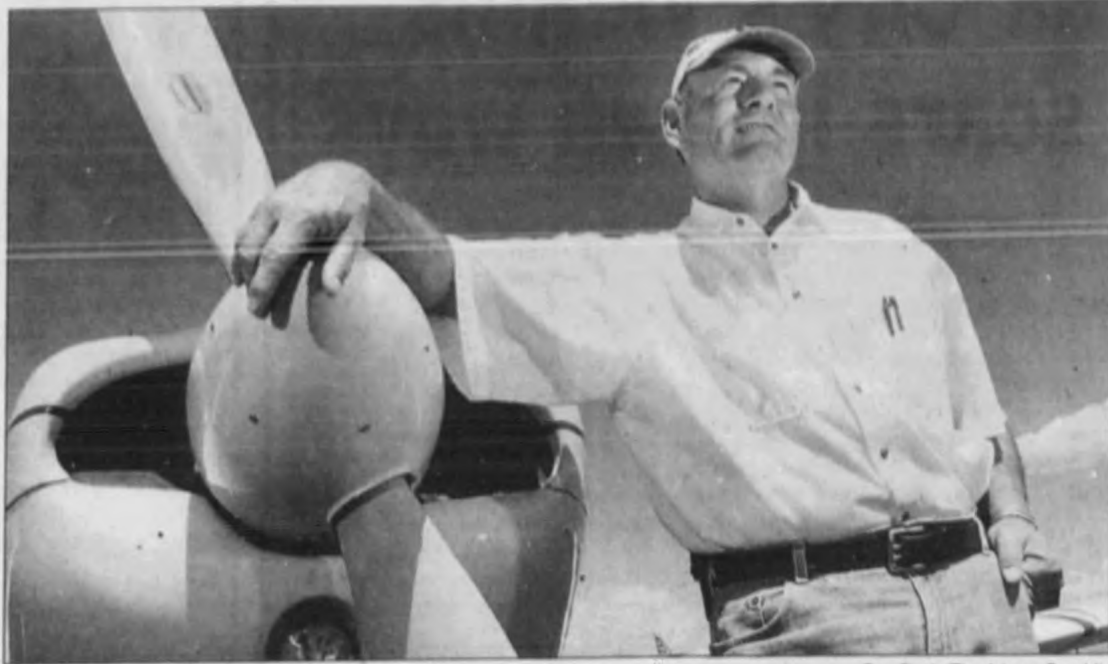
Little has changed at the True Value Hardware store, where McVeigh worked for two months in the warehouse and back dock. McVeigh's lawyers have kept his mailbox, located at a postal store on Stockton Hill Road called the Mailbox, open under the same pseudonym he was using at the time, Tim Tuttle.

And, out in the incorporated area of Golden Valley, northwest of Kingman, where McVeigh once played bingo at a charity function, the tiny house he once rented has another tenant.

A disheveled, bearded man cracked open the front door as the dialogue of *Silence of the Lambs* could be heard from a television inside.

"You can't come in," he said before closing and locking the door.

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