

Sketch could link McVeigh with Aryan Nations' plot

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After years of gathering dust in an attorney's Nashville, Tenn., basement, a potentially explosive piece of evidence has been discovered that may link executed bomber Timothy McVeigh with a group of rabid neo-Nazi bank bandits that once operated from Elohim City – a Christian Identity 1,000-acre enclave and reputed terrorist training camp near Muldrow.

Despite vehement denials by top-level FBI and Justice Department officials that they possessed evidence linking neither McVeigh nor Terry Nichols to a larger group of radicals prior to the Oklahoma City bombing, the McCurtain Daily Gazette has obtained a set of police sketches that appear to defy those assurances – at least, in so far as the late McVeigh.

Sketches prepared from eyewitness accounts after a 1994 bank robbery in Overland Park, Kan., along with accompanying physical descriptions of two robbers, appear to implicate McVeigh with another well-known far-right criminal, Richard Lee Guthrie (deceased) – a figure once associated with one of the nation's most violent anti-government groups, the Aryan Nations.

Guthrie was found dead on July 12, 1996, dangling from a bed sheet in his Covington, Ky., jail cell – only months after his arrest for a string of bank robberies, some involving explosive devices.

The sketches of the two bank bandits were created when Overland Park, Kan. police interviewed witnesses who told them two men entered a suburban Kansas City bank at 10:35 a.m., on Sept. 21, 1994, wearing construction hard hats and work clothes. Sixty seconds later, the two ran off with \$13,000, leaving a black briefcase behind in the lobby.

When authorities arrived they realized the briefcase contained a fake bomb – apparently intended to slow down investigators.

Captured in Ohio over a year later, Guthrie was transferred to Covington, Ken., where he began providing the FBI extensive information about a multi-state crime spree.

Guthrie, a Navy Seal dropout, had been booted from the service years before his latest arrest because of radical neo-Nazi views and insubordination.

After a short stint in military prison, the highly trained explosives expert turned on the government and set about forming a gang bent on the overthrow of the federal establishment and the extermination of all blacks, Jews and mainstream political figures.

During wide-ranging debriefings with the FBI, Guthrie never acknowledged either McVeigh or Nichols, but did admit sympathy with the bombing in Oklahoma that occurred only eight months before his arrest.

When asked for an alibi for April 19, 1995, Guthrie was unable to provide any reliable witnesses for his whereabouts on the day of the bombing; saying only that he and gang members watched the drama on a television set located at a safe house in Pittsburg, Kan., – a three-hour drive from Oklahoma City.

As required by the plea agreement, Guthrie implicated several others involved in the bank robbery spree – including long time friend Peter Kevin Langan.

A federal grand jury in Pennsylvania eventually indicted Guthrie and Langan, along with former Elohim City residents Michael Brescia, Mark Stedeford and Kevin McCarthy in the plot to rob banks in numerous states and overthrow the government. Pennsylvania Aryan Nations' leader Mark Thomas was also indicted.

Guthrie apparently committed suicide and never faced trial. Brescia, McCarthy and Thomas pleaded guilty and received short prison sentences in return for their cooperation. Stedeford and Langan faced trial and received long prison sentences that each has appealed.

Timothy McVeigh three months after his arrest (photo provided by attorney Stephen Jones). Peter Langan

Plot to overthrow the government Langan, Guthrie said, was one of the nominal leaders of the bank bandit group and was known as Commander Pedro Gomez in the hazy underworld of the neo-Nazi movement in the U.S.

Guthrie told the FBI that their cell of radicals was called the Aryan Republican Army (ARA) and had been fashioned after the radical Irish Republican Army (IRA).

Bank robberies, Guthrie admitted, were simply the first stage in the group's long-term plan to form several underground cells and commit acts of terrorism against the federal government.

By the time authorities caught up with Guthrie and Langan in January 1996, the gang had stockpiled an enormous array of firepower for their home-grown revolution.

The inventory of storage facilities in two states included a remarkable cache of firearms, explosives, fake ids and neo-Nazi literature.

The FBI also learned that gang members were collecting addresses of federal offices buildings that housed FBI, ATF and Secret Service agents and employees.

With Guthrie's information, agents fanned out in 1996 and 1997 and eventually arrested several others – including Langan, also known as Commander Pedro.

While helping provide details the feds could use in rounding up the others, Guthrie's debriefings offered brief details of the '94 robbery of the Boatman's Bank in Overland Park, Kan.

Contained in an extensive FBI report of investigation, nearly 100 pages long, Guthrie implicated Langan in approximately two dozen other robberies. Referring directly to the Overland Park robbery, Guthrie told agents Langan was the only other person there to help.

Langan ruled out Langan, a preoperative transsexual, was 36 years old at the time of the robbery and was active in a Kansas City cross-dressing club.

Known as Donna among members of the cross-dressers club, Langan was a mere 5-feet, 6-inches tall, weighed only 135 lbs. and sported flowing black shoulder-length hair – making him a very unlikely match with the description of the second man who helped Guthrie rob the Overland Park bank.

For years, no one questioned the fact that Langan's physical description was wholly inconsistent with eyewitness accounts of the Overland Park robbery.

Professor Mark Hamm, a criminologist with Indiana State University, in Terre Haute, Ind., has written extensively on the ARA and the Oklahoma City bombing and was shown the newly discovered sketches last week.

After reviewing both sketches, Hamm says he doubts Langan could possibly be either one of the subjects depicted.

"After reviewing the sketches, it's obvious Langan is not one of those subjects in the bank. He may have driven the get-away car. Kansas City was a town he practically lived in, because of a romantic link he had there. However, the sketch and description of the man inside the bank with the neatly combed moustache is clearly Guthrie. There's no doubt.

"I believe that sketch of the other subject is Timothy McVeigh and not Langan. It's almost a perfect likeness of McVeigh. We know the ARA had not recruited any of the other young men yet that were later arrested. It was weeks later before Stedeford, Brescia and McCarthy were brought in to help with the later heists.

"We do know McVeigh, in his mid-20s then, was in the area at this very time. Also, isn't it interesting how the accounts of this subject match exactly what the witnesses from Junction City recalled when McVeigh rented the bomb truck there?"

Indeed, the physical description witnesses provided of the second bank robber in Overland Park heist are identical to the same features eyewitnesses used in describing McVeigh when he rented the Ryder Truck in Kansas used in the bombing.

Witnesses at Elliott's Body Shop and the Boatman's Bank estimated the subject was 5 feet 10 inches tall and had brown hair. Also, those witnesses noted areas of pocked complexion on the suspect's face and estimated him to be 25 or 26 years old. Both groups even estimated the subject's weight at 180 pounds.

Stephen Jones, the attorney who represented McVeigh at his Denver, Col., trial, has trouble with the newly found sketch.

"I can't help you with this sketch," Jones said. "The witnesses have the age correct but I'm not comfortable with the height they give. McVeigh was taller."

Robbery links not new Information that McVeigh was somehow linked to bank robberies surfaced during the time Jones represented McVeigh and the trial attorney hinted at the important fact in a book he later wrote.

On May 1, 1995, McVeigh's younger sister broke down under intense questioning by the FBI and admitted she had withheld information about her brother who had just been arrested as a prime suspect in the Oklahoma City bombing.

In a subsequent sworn affidavit obtained by this newspaper, Ms. McVeigh finally provided a few snippets of details about her brother's bank robbery activities, including the admission that she helped him launder bank robbery proceeds in the winter of 1994. Ms. McVeigh would not help with names of the persons involved with her brother in the robberies, however.

Before making these statements, investigators had been grilling her as to how a college student working nights as a barmaid and Jell-O wrestler was able to purchase an expensive new pickup truck in the fall of 1994 – the same period her brother was visiting the family home.

Once Jennifer McVeigh told agents about the bank robbery money she laundered, the FBI dropped the inquiry about the expensive new pickup truck.

After the trial was over, Stephen Jones wrote in his book, *Others Unknown*, that McVeigh admitted he and Terry Nichols had surveyed various banks for a robbery prior to the bombing of the federal building.

Guthrie's trail On the eve of his death, bank bandit and revolutionary Richard Guthrie was scheduled to be moved to another state where he was set to give testimony about a violent and wide-ranging scheme by men closely associated with the top rungs of the Aryan Nations – a violent neo-Nazi group.

Guthrie was prepared to expose a plan by the far right to overthrow the U.S. government and many thought the testimony could lead to arrests of a number of other extremists.

Adding to the mystery of his sudden demise, Guthrie's death came only two days after he told a reporter for the Los Angeles Times newspaper that he was writing a book about his exploits as a bank robber and much more.

Guthrie's courtroom testimony was widely expected to provide important firsthand accounts of dealings with such legendary figures in the so-called white power movement as Aryan Nations' leaders Mark Thomas of Pennsylvania, Louis Beam of Texas and Hayden Lake, Idaho's Pastor Richard Butler – the undisputed head of the Aryan Nations.

During extensive plea-bargain negotiations for this testimony, Guthrie told FBI agents that the Aryan Nations terror plot was financed with proceeds from banks looted in several mid-western states.

Guthrie also provided names of some of the men provided by the Aryan Nations leadership that were directly involved in some of the bank robberies and other criminal acts.

Lacking Guthrie's profound testimony, after his death only one member of the Aryan Nations' hierarchy was arrested and sent to prison for a role in the plot.

Mark Thomas, considered one of Pastor Butler's closest aides inside the Aryan Nations, eventually pleaded guilty to conspiracy and other criminal acts associated with the bank robbery spree. Thomas is due to be released from prison in January.

Contact with McVeigh While Guthrie never implicated McVeigh or Nichols in his schemes, very clearly McVeigh was close at hand when the Overland Park robbery took place.

Testimony in two federal trials in Denver established McVeigh was in the area of the bank heist at the time and also that the unemployed drifter needed money to pursue his plot to bomb the federal building in Oklahoma City.

On Sept. 12, 1994, McVeigh drove from Arizona and to Oklahoma and checked into a motel in Vian – only a short drive from Elohim City.

A year later, a federal grand jury charged with investigating the bombing said that on or about Sept. 13, 1994, a conspiracy to bomb the Oklahoma City federal building was formed.

On Sept. 14, at 12:05 p.m., McVeigh was captured on a security camera in Wichita, Kan., selling gold coins at a coin shop.

Using a calling card linked to McVeigh and Nichols on Sept. 19 and 20, McVeigh used the card several times in Marion, Kan. The card was not used again until several hours after the bank robbery in Overland Park, Kan.

Guthrie subsequently told the FBI that he and Langan drove from Pittsburg to Overland Park the morning of the 21st and robbed the bank. After taking approximately \$13,000, Guthrie said they returned to the Pittsburg safe house.

At 3:37 p.m., on the 21st, phone records show, McVeigh used his calling card at a pay phone in Manhattan, Kan., approximately a two hours drive west of Overland Park.

The next day, McVeigh rented a storage locker in Herington under the assumed name of Shawn Rivers.

Within a week, 2,000 pounds of fertilizer were purchased at McPherson Coop in central Kansas by someone using the name of Mike Havens. Government prosecutors alleged in Denver that McVeigh and Nichols were behind the purchase and stored the fertilizer in the locker in Herington.

On or about Oct.1, 1994, the government says McVeigh and Nichols stole several hundred pounds of explosives from a rock quarry in south-central Kansas. Authorities later linked some of these explosives to those found at Nichols' residence after the bombing in Oklahoma City.

During the afternoon of Oct.1, 1994, phone records show that McVeigh called a friend on the east coast from a payphone in Wamego, Kan. At trial the individual testified that McVeigh tried to arrange the sale of explosives.

When the FBI arrested Richard Guthrie, they found a motel receipt indicating he was checked into a Motel 6 in Wamego, Kan., on Oct. 2, 1994, under an alias.

That Guthrie did not directly implicate McVeigh in the bank robberies should not be surprising.

Dr. Hamm observed: "Guthrie left us some clues in his manuscript, but he never came out and admitted he and McVeigh were co-conspirators. He wrote of someone named Tim or Speedie, but Guthrie never admitted his own role in the bombing. That should not surprise anyone."

Sketch could impact trial Evidence of McVeigh's involvement with other radicals is precisely what attorneys for Nichols have been gathering and are expected to present to a jury next year when their client is expected to go on trial.

A gag order prevents those lawyers from commenting on the case, but statements during pre-trial hearings make clear Nichols' defense team will point the finger at members of the ARA, including those who lived at Elohim City before the bombing.

After this paper printed excerpts of phone records showing McVeigh called Elohim City two weeks before the bombing, the FBI acknowledged that it believed he was seeking support from the group, but denied he had any close ties with persons there and also doubted the bomber received any support from the Elomites.

During 1997, this newspaper printed a series of articles detailing a cover-up of ATF undercover files that showed the agency was warned months before the bombing that certain residents of Elohim City were part of a group plotting to bomb federal buildings in Oklahoma.

Eventually Bob Ricks, a former agent in charge of the Oklahoma City FBI office, admitted he had stepped in and stopped a plan by the ATF to raid Elohim City and to arrest purported radical Andreas Carl Strassmeir – a central figure in the ATF investigation.

Lawyers for Nichols hope to prove that McVeigh was criminally involved with the ARA and not their client.

Set to begin March 1 in McAlester, the stakes could not be higher. Nichols is facing 161 counts of first-degree murder and if convicted could receive the death penalty.

The 48-year-old father of three is currently serving a life sentence after a jury in Denver, in 1998, found him guilty of conspiracy to kill eight federal agents and other crimes.

The jury in the Nichols' case in Denver refused to find Nichols guilty of first-degree murder of the eight federal agents killed.

After the jury deadlocked on a punishment, jury foreperson called the government's case "shoddy and incomplete."

McVeigh was executed at a federal facility in Terre Haute, Ind., on June 11, 2001, for his role in the bombing.