

“We Want to Know the Truth”

by William F. Jasper

The beaming faces of Aaron and Elijah Coverdale shine from a profusion of photographs and paintings that adorn the walls and shelves of their grandmother's apartment, scarcely a hundred yards from the Alfred P. Murrah Building where their young lives were taken. Jannie Coverdale cherishes the paintings which artists have sent her of her beautiful little boys as winged cherubs, and she treasures the heavenly host of angelic figurines of all colors and sizes that have been bestowed on her by both friends and strangers.

But kind gestures, snapshots, and figurines cannot begin to fill the gaping hole in Jannie Coverdale's life, a void as cavernous as that left in the Murrah Building's concrete and steel frame by the devastating explosion of April 19, 1995. Her grandsons Aaron, age five, and Elijah, age two, were the light of her world. They had lived most of their short, precious lives with her and she had been their primary care giver while her son Keith, their father, an inter-state truck driver, was away on the road.

That fateful Wednesday morning in April a year and a half ago had begun like most others, with Mrs. Coverdale, Aaron, and Elijah walking the short block from her Regency Tower apartment to the America's Kids day care center at the federal building. Then, after dropping off her little charges at the center, she continued on, as usual, to her job at a nearby county office building. It was the last time she saw Aaron and Elijah. Barely an hour later a massive explosion shook her office. She ran to the Murrah Building to find her grandsons, but found only carnage, confusion, death, and destruction.

Searching for Answers

From her balcony high atop the Regency she can look down on the fenced-in grassy field where the federal building and day care center once stood. The chain-link fence surrounding it is festooned with thousands of bouquets, ribbons, notes, photos, banners, crosses,

condolences, and stuffed animals from friends, relatives, and strangers who have come to pay their respects to those who perished there. In September she marked both of her grandsons' birthdays with remembrances at that place of sorrows. Living in such immediate proximity to "ground zero" is simultaneously a source of pain and comfort.

But for Jannie Coverdale and for the many other survivors of that terrible day, there can be no real comfort without truth. "People have been telling us we have to go on with our lives," she says, "but we will have no peace and no closure until we know exactly what happened that day. We have too many questions. It's a puzzle with too many missing pieces."

"We're angry," Mrs. Coverdale told THE NEW AMERICAN. "We're very angry because we know that more than Terry Nichols and Timothy McVeigh were involved, but they're the only two people being charged with the bombing. They have Michael Fortier in jail someplace. He is not being charged with the bombing and we believe he is just as involved as the other two.... There shouldn't have been any deals, any plea bargains. Not after they murdered 168 people."

Anger was a dominant emotion in THE NEW AMERICAN's many recent meetings and interviews with survivors and with relatives of blast victims. Most of these asked that their names not be published — yet. "Yes, I'm angry because I know I'm being lied to," declared a man who lost his father. "They keep telling us they're looking for John Doe No. 2, but then they turn around and give statements indicating that they don't believe there is a John Doe No. 2," said a woman whose husband was killed in the bombing. "There's a lot that's being covered up, for some reason," charged a federal employee who narrowly escaped death but who lost many friends in the terrorist attack. "Many of us are going to come forward and challenge what's going on as soon as we get some more of the pieces figured out," pledged a law enforcement officer.

These are not "anti-government" militants; they are mostly government employees and family members who were directly, intimately affected by the bombing. Some have been upset since the start of the investigation, alarmed by things they witnessed on the day of the bombing that have been inadequately "explained away." Others have become concerned more recently as an accumulation of glaring inconsistencies and troubling information has begun to approach a

“critical mass.” “We’ve been here for over a year and never said anything,” Mrs. Coverdale told THE NEW AMERICAN. They were patient because they did not want to jeopardize the investigation. But they feel their patience has been rewarded with bad faith and deception. For a long time Edye Smith and Glenn and Cathy Wilburn were the only family members who vocally challenged the integrity of the investigation. That has changed.

“Everyone I talk to has the same questions: What happened? What is going on?” says Coverdale. “We don’t want this to be another John F. Kennedy deal, where 32 years later the real story is still unknown.” Yet that is what many of these people fear is happening. “I was upset right from the start when there was the big rush to destroy the crime scene, to take the building down,” says a victim whose spouse was killed in the explosion. “A lot of important evidence was destroyed that could have helped solve this.”

On recent trips to Oklahoma City, this reporter was the only representative of the media allowed at meetings of family members, witnesses, and survivors at which a considerable amount of evidence and sensitive information was brought forward and discussed. Those involved agreed that based upon past experience THE NEW AMERICAN could be trusted not to compromise sources or release sensitive material without explicit approval from those concerned. We have honored that trust.

Regular readers of this magazine will recognize that the story in this issue departs from our past reports on the Oklahoma City bombing investigation in that we have utilized a far greater number of unidentified sources than we would normally consider acceptable. These sources have various legitimate reasons for maintaining their anonymity at this time. Some are concerned for their own personal safety or that of their families, aware that one or more “John Doe” accomplices are still at large. Others are concerned that by coming forward now they may be marked for harassment or cut off from access to important channels of information in the case.

We are making reference to these sources and witnesses at this time, and to certain evidence which we would prefer to have left unmentioned at present, because of special circumstances, and because of concerns by those most closely involved that this evidence had leaked out to

other media organizations who were likely to misrepresent it. We will be covering these matters in more explicit detail as circumstances permit.

A “Sting” Gone Bad?

“It’s clear to me that the ATF knew in advance something was about to happen,” says a man whose wife was seriously injured that fateful April 19th. Mounting evidence of forewarning and the steadily multiplying number of witnesses who have reported seeing bomb squad units around the Murrah Building before the blast are inclining many people to give credence to the theory that the deadly blast was the result of a “sting” operation gone bad — and that a massive cover-up is now underway to hide that deadly “mistake.”*

* Much of this information was first brought to public attention in THE NEW AMERICAN. See [“Did Federal Agents Have Prior Knowledge?” \(December 11, 1995\)](#) and our [May 13, 1996 special report on the Oklahoma bombing.](#)

The “botched sting” scenario has received a boost with the recent surfacing of audio tapes of three recorded telephone conversations. In all three cases, the party to the conversation who recorded the calls is a rescue worker who was intimately involved in the Murrah rescue efforts and has been closely involved with a large network of survivors, family members, and other rescue personnel. In two cases, the callers are trying to dissuade the rescue worker from “rocking the boat” — from challenging the “official line.”

In the first case, the caller goes on at length detailing what allegedly happened in the failed sting operation, warning that the rescue worker’s quest for the truth could jeopardize other undercover operations meant to prevent future bombings. According to the caller, John Doe No. 2 was a federal informant who had penetrated the bombing conspiracy. The mystery caller relates that “John Doe No. 2, who helped [McVeigh] build this bomb, was a federal agent. In his job, I’m sure he’s a trained explosives expert. His job was to render the device safe. But something happened and there was a mistake made. Either he did not either he thought he had rendered it safe and he did not, or he rendered it safe and then later on after it was rendered safe, McVeigh went back to the truck and set a second timer.”

The caller asserts that “this plan was put in motion before the bomb ever went off. Their intent was to allow McVeigh to be arrested later on [and for] John Doe No. 2 to get away.” Then “the federal government would have released a sketch or picture” of John Doe No. 2. “And then, that man would have had to go underground and hide. Where would he hide? He would have hid with the militias. The militias would take him in as a hero. The militias would give him a hero status in the militia movement, which would allow him to be privy to information that the government could use later on....”

However, says the caller, someone erred terribly. “Basically, what happened is, this was a mistake. Someone screwed up....”

“Why didn’t you talk to me about this a long time ago?” asks the rescue worker. “Well, I didn’t know you’d be able to get this far with it.... By going this far with it — let me explain something to you: Your actions have consequences. There are a lot of witnesses, there are a lot of agents right now in the hills that are infiltrating these militia groups — and — all these people will get killed. Their blood will be on your hands.”

The second taped caller — a law enforcement officer — is not as explicit and expansive as the first caller. Nevertheless, he says he knows “for a fact” that federal authorities knew in advance specifically when and how the Ryder truck bomb was to arrive at the Murrah Building. But, he says, something went “very wrong”; the bomb was supposed to have been disarmed. Multiple sources have confirmed that this officer could be in a position to know what he claims as fact.

The third taped caller — also a law enforcement officer — confirms the claims of an increasing number of credible witnesses who have independently reported seeing bomb squad vehicles and personnel at the Murrah Building before the blast. This caller even identifies the officer who was driving one of the bomb squad trucks. Officials have repeatedly denied that any bomb units were on the scene that morning before the explosion. But those denials are becoming less and less believable.

Before THE NEW AMERICAN could even begin having the tapes examined by certified forensic voice analysts, we received calls from concerned congressional staffers and from a source considered reliable who claimed that his contacts at the Pentagon told him they had already received a tape of the first caller mentioned above and were busily

analyzing it themselves. These “contacts” also allegedly threatened with arrest and severe penalties anyone involved with making or disseminating these tapes. As to how copies of these tapes might have made their way to Washington so quickly we can only speculate. However, it was soon confirmed that many of the family members and other participants at the meetings had begun sharing the tapes with their relatives and co-workers and that many copies were being made.

Increasing Evidence

The verdict is still out on the authenticity and ultimate significance of these tapes. We cautioned those involved to consider the possibility that caller No. 1 could be a *provocation* intended to discredit the whole notion of prior knowledge. At some future date he might state that he had merely been expressing his *opinion* about what *may have* happened — or even claim that it was a well-intentioned hoax aimed at keeping the rescue worker from doing harm to the investigation. However, these tapes do add to an increasingly convincing aggregation of evidence which points toward the likelihood that the elusive John Doe No. 2 (and perhaps additional John Does associated with the crime) may indeed be a federal informant or agent. That evidence includes:

- Testimony to this reporter by a source believed to be reliable that a high-level federal law enforcement officer (who was identified by name) told this source that his agency was involved in this “botched” operation, and that he would be willing to so testify if subpoenaed.
- Testimony to this reporter by another source of proven reliability that a state law enforcement officer confirmed “absolutely” that John Doe No. 2 is an ATF operative.
- Testimony to this reporter by a reliable source that a state public safety official (identified by name) admitted factual knowledge that at least one federal informant was directly involved in the Ryder truck delivery to the Murrah Building on April 19, 1995.
- Testimony to this reporter by an Oklahoma law enforcement officer that at a mandatory daily security briefing at the Murrah Building blast site he and other assembled police/rescue/recovery personnel were told “in no uncertain terms” by one of the lead federal officials that it was necessary for “security” reasons to provide the public with

“misinformation” regarding certain aspects of the case, and that this “official line” was not to be contradicted by any of those in attendance.

- The inexplicable failure of the FBI to question German national Andreas Strassmeir and several of his associates who had been reliably tied by witnesses and evidence to Timothy McVeigh and to an odd sect which had been involved years earlier in a plot to bomb the Murrah Building.
- The equally perplexing failure of the FBI to question a number of Iraqi nationals residing in Oklahoma City who had been connected by witnesses to Timothy McVeigh and to the Murrah Building on the morning of the explosion.
- An alarming number of cases in the past several years — from the New York City Trade Center bombing to Ruby Ridge, Waco, the Midwest bank robberies involving the “Aryan Republican Army,” the Muskogee, Oklahoma “bombing conspiracy,” and more recent high-profile militia arrests in the Macon, Georgia and Phoenix, Arizona — forming a pattern in which federal agents and informants have badly “bungled,” or have actually performed as *agents provocateur*, instigating and perpetrating the activities for which dupes were then prosecuted.

Previous issues of THE NEW AMERICAN have covered the intriguing connection between Andreas Carl Strassmeir and accused bomber Timothy McVeigh. (See “More Pieces to the OKC Puzzle,” June 24, 1996 and “Phone Trail to Oklahoma City,” July 8, 1996.) Strassmeir, the mysterious German soldier with high-level political connections to the Kohl government, was apparently the intended recipient of at least two telephone calls by McVeigh in April before the bombing. The calls were placed to “Andy” Strassmeir at “Elohim City,” a “Christian Identity” commune in rural Oklahoma where the former German army officer roomed with Michael Brescia, a former college student at LaSalle University in Philadelphia.

Strassmeir claims that he only met McVeigh once, at a 1994 Tulsa gun show, where he sold McVeigh a knife and purchased some military clothing from McVeigh. He also states that he has only been to Kansas once, to help a truck driver friend unload a truck in Dodge City. However, both Strassmeir and Brescia have been identified by multiple witnesses as having been associated with McVeigh in and around Herington, Kansas, the small town where McVeigh’s co-defendant Terry

Nichols lived when he was arrested. One of those witnesses is Catina Lawson, a college student who has identified Strassmeir as the German man she knew only as “Andy” at parties she attended with McVeigh in 1992. According to Glenn Wilburn, whose two grandsons, Chase and Colton Smith, were killed in the bombing, Lawson also identified Michael Brescia as the young man she knew only as “Mike” who dated her roommate. She recalled that he was from Pennsylvania and had Pennsylvania tags on his car.

In June, Lawson’s mother, Connie Smith, was quoted in an article in *The Sunday Telegraph* of London identifying Brescia as the man her daughter introduced to her as “Mike,” and recalled seeing him later in Herington with McVeigh. In the *Telegraph* article and other news interviews, both mother and daughter noted Brescia’s close resemblance to the FBI sketch of “John Doe No. 2” and relayed this information to FBI agents shortly after the bombing.

Other witnesses include Larry and Cathy Wild of Herington. Mr. Wild, a retired high school coach, says he and his wife were fishing near Fort Riley, Kansas the week before the bombing when they met Strassmeir. They chatted with him briefly and could not help but note his German accent.

Aryan Connection

An even more ominous nexus concerning Brescia and Strassmeir involves their alleged associations with a bank robber who was found hanged in his Kentucky jail cell in July and a murdered Arkansas family whose bodies were found in June. After the arrests of McVeigh and Nichols, federal prosecutors postulated that the two suspected bombers may have been involved in a spree of bank robberies across the Midwest. A group calling itself the Aryan Republican Army and noted for its mocking letters to newspapers and the FBI has been credited by authorities with 22 robberies in seven states. Federal investigators speculated that McVeigh and Nichols may have been involved in the robberies and used funds from the heists to finance the bombing operation.

In her book, *By Blood Betrayed*, Terry Nichols’ ex-wife, Lana Padilla, also ponders this possibility. Writes Padilla:

Terry had told some investigator that he asked McVeigh if he “was going to rob a bank.” Where did he get that idea? Did he know McVeigh had robbed banks before? An unnamed federal official said that Jennifer McVeigh had given them indications that her brother may have been involved in bank robberies. Maybe that’s why she had been granted immunity in exchange for the kind of information that would be brought out at the trial.

Or perhaps it was to keep certain information *from coming out* at the trial. With the arrests earlier this year of four suspects in the bank robberies, it looked like the Aryan Republican Army might be broken. Interestingly, the arrested quartet — Richard L. Guthrie, Peter K. Langan, Scott Anthony Stedeford, and Kevin McCarthy — was tied to Elohim City. Robert Millar, the patriarch of the commune, has admitted that McCarthy and Stedeford did indeed spend some time there, and McCarthy stated at his plea hearing that he had visited the compound many times. Dennis Mahon, a former Ku Klux Klan leader and now a leader of the White Aryan Resistance (WAR), asserts that all four of the suspected robbers had been to the rural redoubt. Mahon, who spouts an odd amalgam of racist, national socialist, and Marxist/Hegelian rhetoric, told THE NEW AMERICAN that while he was visiting Elohim City in October 1994 — five months before the bombing — Guthrie, Langan, McCarthy, and Stedeford were also there, as were, he says, Strassmeir, Brescia, and Tom Metzger of the Ku Klux Klan. Mahon says he knows all of these men well and considers them friends. He has been especially close to Brescia and Strassmeir and says he loves them “like brothers.” But Mahon vows terrible vengeance against them if they turn out to be federal informants, as some have alleged.

As reported in the June 24th issue of THE NEW AMERICAN (“Hard Left’s ‘Right-Wing’ Kin”), Langan was revealed to have been a federal informant. He claimed at the time of his arrest that federal agents who he supposedly was working for had tried to assassinate him. As for Guthrie, after having worked out a plea agreement with authorities, he was found hanged in his cell on July 13th.

Body Count Rises

More disturbing than the Strassmeir-Brescia connection to the Aryan bank robbers, though, are their alleged ties to the grisly execution-style deaths of an Arkansas family. William Mueller, an Army Special Forces veteran and gun show dealer, had reported in February 1995 that his

rural Arkansas home had been broken into and some \$35,000 to \$50,000 worth of guns, silver, and ammunition stolen. Mueller confided to friends and to an Arkansas newspaper reporter that he was fearful that the robbers might return and kill him. Two names he reportedly had written down in his notebook as prime suspects were Michael Brescia and Andreas Strassmeir. He told Gene Wirges, editor of the newsweekly *Common Sense American*, that these two men had verbally accosted him at a gun show and he believed they were ATF agents. He said that they had also bullied him over his anti-Clinton literature.

In January 1996, the Mueller family disappeared. Friends and law enforcement officials believed circumstances indicated they may have been victims of foul play. On June 29th, the bodies of William Mueller, age 53, his wife Nancy, 28, and their daughter Sarah, 10, were discovered in the Illinois River near Russelville, Arkansas, their hands and feet handcuffed and their heads wrapped in trash bags and bound with duct tape.

Does all of this mean that Strassmeir and Brescia are in fact connected not only to these robberies and deaths, but to the Oklahoma City bombing? Not conclusively. But it is difficult to understand how the FBI could deploy such an enormous share of its investigators and resources to this investigation and conduct over 20,000 interviews, and yet somehow miss these prime suspects.

Eight months after the bombing, long after this magazine and other private investigators had been trailing Strassmeir, Brescia, and company, the federal investigators finally became interested. By that time Strassmeir had fled back to Berlin and Brescia had, according to Mahon, escaped into Canada. Brescia reportedly has returned to Philadelphia and is staying at his parents' home. In a recent telephone call to the Brescia home, Michael's mother told THE NEW AMERICAN she would check with Michael to see if he would consent to an interview. She returned to the phone a short time later to say that he did not wish to speak with the media. Subsequent attempts to reach him were also rebuffed.