

# Trial of ex-Klansman Begins 38 Years After Deadly Church Bombing

**By JAY REEVES**  
**THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
 BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — A jury pool three times larger than normal was summoned Monday for the trial of a former Ku Klux Klansman accused in one of the most notorious crimes of the civil rights era: a 1963 church bombing that killed four black girls.

Thomas Blanton Jr., 62, entered the courthouse without comment.

"He's nervous ... scared, as any human being would be under the scrutiny he's received," defense attorney John Robbins said.

If convicted, Blanton could get life in prison. About 100 prospective jurors were called. Jury selection is expected to extend into next week.

Circuit Judge James Garrett told the prospective jurors that the jury will be sequestered for the trial, which is expected to last at least two weeks, and that the jurors will be anonymous, identified in court only by number.

The explosion at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church on Sept. 15, 1963, killed Denise McNair, 11, and three 14-year-olds: Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley and Carole

Robertson. The bombing galvanized the civil rights movement.

Blanton is one of four men sus-



Thomas Blanton Jr.

pected of planting the dynamite. Only one — Robert Chambliss — has been tried. He was convicted of murder in 1977 and died in prison.

Another suspect, Herman Cash, died in 1994 without being charged. And last week, the judge indefinitely postponed the trial of Bobby Frank Cherry for tests on whether the 71-year-old is mentally competent.

In a statement, the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church congregation said the trial would not produce healing and suggested the case would have gone to court long ago had four white girls been killed.

"While a 38-year delay is not a real source of elation or encouragement, we do believe that it is never too late to do what is right," the congregation said.

At the time of bombing, blacks were integrating Birmingham's all-white schools and the church was a gathering site for protest marches.

The FBI concluded within two years that the bombing was the work of the four men, but closed the case in 1968 without filing charges.

The case was reopened by state prosecutors in the 1970s, resulting in Chambliss' conviction. Blanton and

Cherry were indicted last May after black ministers asked the FBI to take another look.

In recent years, other civil rights-era murder cases have also been revived. In 1994, Byron De La Beckwith was convicted of assassinating civil rights leader Medgar Evers in Mississippi in 1963.

In 1998, former Klan imperial wizard Sam Bowers was convicted in the 1966 firebomb-killing of an NAACP leader in Hattiesburg, Miss. In 1999, three men were convicted in Mississippi of the 1970 killing of a black sharecropper.

# American Military Crew Discuss Their Spy Plane Ordeal

(AP) — In the moments after the American spy plane was bumped by a Chinese fighter, crew members feared they would have to bail out with parachutes or crash land in the South China Sea. Many were certain they would die.

The fighter pilot buzzed the American EP-3E several times before clipping the turboprop's No. 1 propeller, knocking it out of operation and knocking off the plane's nose cone.

"After his first two runs at us, it got kind of surreal, like slow motion," Lt. Patrick Honeck told The New York Times in Monday's editions. He recalled that the Chinese pilot saluted on his first pass, and "mouthed something to us" on the second.

On the third approach, the Chinese fighter collided with the American plane, causing it to plummet from an altitude of 22,500 feet. The fighter broke in half and crashed into the sea, presumably killing the pilot.

"The first thing I thought of was, 'Oh, my God,'" said Aviation Machinist's Mate Second Class

Wendy Westbrook, the navigator. "All I could see was blue water."

After their landing on China's Hainan island — where they were detained for 11 days — they were subjected to hours of interrogation. To pass the time, they played cards, acted out skits and even taught a guard the words to the song "Hotel California."

Sunday was their first full day back home at the Whidbey Island Naval Air Station in Washington, and several crew members gave their fullest account yet of their experiences after the aerial collision on April 1.

After the collision, there was bedlam in the plane. "I didn't think we were going to make it. ... I said another prayer at that time, just in case I didn't get it right the first time," Lt. j.g. Jeffrey Vignery told The Washington Post. He said that when mission commander Lt. Shane Osborn ordered the 24 crew members to put on parachutes and prepare to bail out, he thought that "obviously some of us wouldn't have time to bail out."

As the plane leveled out, Osborn canceled the bailout order and told the crew to prepare for an emergency ditching at sea. But Osborn regained enough control of the plane that Honeck studied maps to see where they might land. The plane's base at Okinawa, Japan, was too far away, as was the Philippines.

They chose Hainan island even without permission from the Chinese to land. As they headed for the island, the crew began destroying sensitive equipment. Crew members declined to discuss what they did or whether they completed the tasks.

After they landed, Osborn said, a small group of armed Chinese military, including an interpreter, approached.

"He told us not to move and don't do anything," Osborn told the Times. "I asked if I could use a phone to call the U.S. ambassador to let him know we were safe on deck, but he said they had already taken care of that."

Then they told us to get off the plane and they were pretty adamant



Crew members are welcomed home to Whidbey Island, Wash.

about it. We dropped a ladder, and I got off first."

"It wasn't a time to make a stand. We were unarmed. They're armed. So they have the advantage," Osborn said Sunday on ABC-TV's "This Week." The Americans were taken to a barracks. "Their best barracks," Osborn said. "But by American standards, they were poor. Lots and lots

of bugs and mosquitoes. But it was livable." After two nights, they were moved to a nearby base lodge. Aside from meals, they were segregated from other residents. Interrogations were conducted at various times, often in

the middle of the night and sometimes lasting as long as five hours.

The food varied. "It was Chinese food, but definitely not Americanized," Vignery said. They were served fish heads "until they realized we weren't into fish heads."

Vignery said the crew played cards and read a few English-language Chinese newspapers they were given. They learned little about the tense diplomatic standoff surrounding their detention. For amusement, Vignery and Honeck said they wrote skits. "They got quite a few laughs," Honeck said. "We did a 'People's Court' spoof, news like on 'Saturday Night Live' and one of 'The Crocodile Hunter.'" He said guards who understood English laughed at the skits.

One guard, Honeck said, "wanted to know the lyrics to an American song he heard, 'Hotel California,' by the Eagles."

# Kids Back on Track

**STORY CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE**

learned more in a few weeks than I learned in a few years at her previous school," explained Chasity Madrid.

The strength of the school's program is their intensive and accelerated one-on-one education. At Judon, the school focuses on a breadth of subjects: math, English, literature, social studies, science, French, GED preparation and counseling for positive self-change — offering a more holistic approach to working with the child. Teachers at Judon also follow the cognitive development methods of one of the twentieth century's most influential theorists, Jean Piaget.

Judon Line Academy II was named after a Mississippi school that was formed to educate African American children. During the 1960's, these black students had to be educated well enough to pass the required academic tests that would allow them to enter the integrated school system.

Many of the kids were poor and disadvantaged. Despite that, their teachers held the belief that all children could learn and insisted on it. "Still today, we are witnessing institutionalized racism in schools. Like in the Old South, it was about color."

Now it's about color, creed, economics, class, clothing, psychological profiles and a multitude of labels placed

on them," explained Dr. Flora Holden.

As a tribute to the founders of the Mississippi school, who were the aunts of Dr. Holden, the Judon Line Academy in Portland was named in memory of them. Under her direction, she serves as the principal teacher by taking a non-nonsense approach tempered with counseling, sensitivity and understanding.

Judon Line Academy II opened early this year under the sponsorship of Give Us This Day, a nonprofit organization that has placed foster children in good homes for over 25 years. The school consists of seven students and manned by a volunteer staff of two teachers and an administrator. Both programs are founded on the idea of an extended family concept where children come into a family as life long participants. A bond is established and many children stay connected with the families even after they have left the program. To keep the school operational, Mary Holden is currently writing grant proposals and asking for donations. She wants to progressively expand enrollment up to 25 kids. "I am doing my small part to help."

The Judon Line Academy and Give Us This Day will go on trying to find solutions to ensure that its children get the best society has to offer where education and citizenship are concerned," explained Holden.

# McVeigh Execution

**STORY CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE**

exactly," Lifton said. "But one might suspect that he would try to structure his martyrdom in some way by creating the narrative of how he dies."

For most of the next few weeks, McVeigh will be in his usual cell. He has a television and can exercise indoors or in a caged, outdoor area. Family members, a spiritual adviser or his lawyers can visit.

Two to three days before his execution, McVeigh will be placed in a Bureau of Prisons vehicle under heavy guard and driven about 500 yards from death row to the death house, a windowless, two-story brick building surrounded by a fence topped with barbed wire.

The transfer will be done in such a way that no other inmates will catch a glimpse of McVeigh. His short walk from the van into the death house will be the last time he sees the outdoors. He will be allowed to have a spiritual adviser walk with him to the death house, but that seems unlikely. A nun from the Sisters of Providence who ministers to federal death row inmates said McVeigh has declined any spiritual counseling. And other inmates who have tried to speak to him about religion have been rebuffed.

"Often Tim will just change the sub-

ject when (an inmate) brings up something like that," said Sister Rita Clare Gerardot. "We don't understand the way he thinks. It's like he's justified."

Prison protocol says that when McVeigh enters the death house, he can bring only these items: a Bible, one religious item (a rosary, for example), five unframed personal photographs, one magazine, one paperback and a newspaper. He will be kept in a 9-by-14-foot cell, with a small bed built into the tan wall, a wall-mounted metal table and a toilet. On one wall are windows that look into a guards' office. McVeigh will be monitored around the clock. Personal calls from the death house will be suspended 24 hours before the execution. McVeigh will be able to speak only with his attorneys. On May 16, he will change into prison-issue white briefs, khaki trousers, a white T-shirt, socks and slip-on shoes. After a slow march to the death chamber, McVeigh will walk across the white and gray tile floor, past the green-tile walls and the clock that will register his time of death. He will be strapped to a T-shaped gurney and given a lethal injection. About seven minutes later, the man responsible for the deadliest act of terrorism on American soil will take his final breath.

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