



Court documents: Vow to put bombs under judges' cars triggered raid

By ELIZABETH EVANS -- *The York Dispatch*

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A 73-year-old York City man arrested by federal agents Wednesday had vowed to put homemade bombs under the cars of two York County Court judges, and to blow up the homes of people who had "hurt him in the past," according to court documents.

Confidential informants told agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives that Christopher Peter Renda, of 432 Wallace St., had a drug problem and had become increasingly erratic, introverted and withdrawn, according to an arrest affidavit filed by the ATF.

About six weeks ago, one of the informants went to Renda's home, where he saw cans of black powder, mercury switches, thermostats, fuses, propane tanks and "multiple how-to instruction manuals with regard to bomb-making, including the Poor Man's James Bond manual," documents state.

According to the informant, Renda talked about how he could mix the materials he kept in his garage, "and make a bomb that he could use to finally get back at people who had hurt him," the documents state.

"Renda told (the informant) that he did not have much time left so he had a list of people he wanted to harm," according to the documents. "Renda had spoken angrily many times about putting bombs under York County Judge (Penny) Blackwell and (York County Judge Sheryl Ann) Dorney's vehicles.

"Renda advised he had gone on 'surveillance' to 'check things out'" at the judges' homes, the documents state, but the informant initially didn't take him seriously.

Talked of revenge: However, over the past two months Renda kept referring to the judges who'd sent him to prison, as well as to an unnamed prosecuting attorney, repeating that he planned to get revenge while he still could, according to the documents; Renda also began carrying bear spray and a center-punch hand tool with him, and people with whom Renda had bad blood had recently had their vehicles' windows broken or tires flattened.

"Coincidentally, Renda had been observed driving by those premises either before or after the vandalism," according to the affidavit.

By late September, the informant began to grow concerned that he, too, may be on Renda's revenge list, documents state, in part because when he tried to talk to Renda about Renda's drug use, Renda threatened to blow up the man's business.

The informant went to local police "because he felt that Renda was dangerous and did not want anyone to get hurt," the affidavit states, especially since Renda lives across the street from Goode Elementary School.

"(He) thought that if Renda made a mistake if he really was making bombs, that innocent children could be hurt," documents state. "(He) truly believed that Renda was capable of manufacturing explosive devices...."

Federal raid: ATF agents executed a search warrant at Renda's home Wednesday, seizing two rifles, more than 200 rounds of ammunition and smokeless powder, according to the affidavit.

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He was arraigned in federal court in Harrisburg on a charge of felony possession of firearms and ammunition, according to ATF spokesman John Hageman. Renda is in federal custody, pending his detention hearing Monday, Hageman said.

U.S. Attorney Martin Carlson on Wednesday filed a motion asking that Renda remain in federal custody for a number of reasons, including that he is a danger to the community, that he's a flight risk, and that "a serious risk exists" that Renda would try to obstruct justice or try to threaten, injure or intimidate a prospective witness or juror.

Carlson declined to say whether bomb-making materials were found in Renda's home.

"It is an ongoing investigation. I'm not able to get into the details about what else is found," he said, but noted that the public court documents are "not an inventory of the search."

ATF agents were alerted to the alleged threats by York City Detective Tony Fetrow, and also received information from Spring Garden Township Officer Jacob Clevenger, according to the ATF.

Criminal history: Renda has an "extensive" criminal history dating back to 1953, according to the affidavit; in 1983 he was convicted in federal court of possession of a silencer, and had drug-related convictions as well. In Pennsylvania, convicted felons are forbidden from possessing firearms.

Renda's most recent conviction stems from a March 2002 raid of his former home in the 300 block of North Broad Street, where York City Police seized several firearms, cans of black powder and ammunition, according to the affidavit. In October 2003, Renda pleaded guilty to former convicts not to possess firearms and was later sentenced to six to 23 months of house arrest, the affidavit states.

Judges Dorney and Blackwell both presided over that case, according to online court records.

Through he office staff, Dorney declined comment. Blackwell did not return a call seeking comment.

It was unclear Thursday whether Renda has retained legal counsel.

- Reach Elizabeth Evans at levans@yorkdispatch.com or 505-5429.

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