

Former Red Army Faction members linked to botched robbery

**DNA of three members of disbanded leftwing German terror group found
at scene of attempted armoured car heist**

Kate Connolly

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Red Army Faction members at large (l-r): Burkhard Garweg, Ernst-Volker Wilhelm Staub and Daniela Klette. Photograph: DPA/AFP

Three on-the-run militants from Germany's far-left terrorist group Red Army Faction, better known as the Baader-Meinhof gang, have been linked to two armed robberies by their DNA.

The genetic traces of ex-RAF militants Ernst-Volker Staub, 58, Daniela Klette, 57, and Burkhard Garweg, 47, were found in getaway cars used in two botched attempts to rob security vans in north Germany in June and December 2015, police said.

The first attack took place on 6 June last year in the car park of a supermarket in Gross Mackenstedt near Bremen, when three masked people dressed in camouflage outfits and armed with two assault rifles and a grenade launcher brought a security van to a halt by blocking it with their car. But bullets they fired at the vehicle lodged in a tyre and the van's armour as well as smashing a windscreen. The two security guards inside were uninjured and refused to move. Attempts by the trio to open the doors failed and they fled empty-handed.

On 28 December in Wolfsburg, once more in a supermarket carpark, the same trio tried and failed again to ambush a security van.

The three are among the so-called "third generation" of the RAF. The group was a byword for terror and violence in Germany in the 1970s, 80s and early 90s when it killed 30 people and injured many more as part of its anti-capitalist, anti-establishment campaign.

The third generation, which was behind the organisation's final push before it announced its dissolution in 1998, is held responsible for the murders of German bank chief Alfred Herrhausen in 1989, Siemens manager Karl Heinz Beckurts in 1986, and the head of the Treuhandanstalt, the trust responsible for the privatisation of state-owned property from East Germany, Detlev Karsten Rohwedder in 1991.

Staub, Klette and Garweg are believed to have been directly involved in a 1993 bomb attack on a prison in Weiterstadt in Hesse after traces of their DNA were found on a scrap of carpet discovered there.

The June robbery attempt was featured in the popular TV programme *Aktenzeichen XY Ungelöst* (File Reference XY Unsolved) but until now police had failed to come up with any leads.

According to the broadcaster NDR, the breakthrough came when investigators discovered face masks in cars involved in both incidents on which they found the DNA traces of the gang.

Staub, Klette and Garweg's DNA had previously been found at the scene of an armed hold-up in Duisburg in 1999, which was similar to the Gross Mackenstedt incident. On that occasion they were successful, managing to escape with more than 1m deutschmarks after holding up a security van with a rocket-propelled grenade, a submachine gun and an assault rifle. Helmets and balaclavas found at the scene provided police with DNA traces.

The RAF declared in a written statement in 1998 that it had disbanded. But several of its former members remain on the run and like Staub, Kette and Garweg, are still on the Federal Criminal Police's wanted list.

Staub was convicted of membership of a terrorist organisation in 1986, but went underground soon after being released from a four year prison sentence. Police believe he and Daniela Klette were a couple. She was part of an RAF support group in 1978, and later joined the so-called third generation of the RAF. Garweg became radicalised in Hamburg in the 1980s and is often cited by RAF experts as proof of the cross-generational nature of the organisation, as at 47, he was not even alive when RAF founders Andreas Baader and Gudrun Ensslin started their revolutionary campaign.

Tens of former terrorists have been on the run for decades and as well as being dependent on RAF sympathisers for hideaways and support, look to armed robberies as a vital source of income rather than as a continuation of their urban guerrilla activities, police say.

Experts say the two failed robberies in relatively close succession are a sign both of the fugitives' growing desperation to obtain money, as well as of their waning abilities as a criminal force. Police insiders have told German media they believe they are close to capturing the trio.

The fascination in the phenomenon of ageing, on-the-run, former RAF terrorists, has spawned a number of novels, films and crime dramas in recent years in which typically their erstwhile romantic exploits disintegrate into hit and miss attempts at survival by ageing and crotchety pensioners whose dreams of revolution have long-since expired.



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