

Suspect May Have Taken Pictures/Authorities Are Suspicious of Larger Plot

Houston Chronicle (TX)

April 23, 1995 | ARMANDO VILLAFRANCA, JOE STINEBAKER, BILL DiSESSA,
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The man charged in the Oklahoma City bombing may have photographed his work and stayed at the scene taking pictures of the bloody aftermath, an FBI source said Saturday.

Timothy McVeigh, who turns 27 today, may have snapped a photograph of the massive explosion Wednesday as it occurred, according to the source. McVeigh, who was arrested 80 minutes after the blast on a traffic violation while driving north of Oklahoma City, was charged Friday in the truck bombing, which demolished the front of the A.P. Murrah Federal Building, killing or trapping hundreds.

The death count late Friday remained at 78 as workers, hampered by cold weather and increasingly unstable rubble, continued to dig for more than 100 believed buried. All but six of more than 20 children believed to have been at a day care center in the building are dead or missing.

Meanwhile, authorities Saturday began seeking evidence of a broader plot behind the bombing, which already has led them to a Michigan farmhouse and reported links to the Michigan Militia, a paramilitary organization. Investigators are probing ties between McVeigh, an Army veteran, and an Arizona paramilitary group.

The search also continued Saturday for the second of two suspects originally sought by the FBI.

That suspect, the subject of a widely circulated composite drawing, is described as square-jawed and tattooed on his left arm.

"We have at least one and there could be others," said Weldon Kennedy, an FBI special agent.

An FBI source said Saturday that hours after the 9:04 a.m. blast, after McVeigh had been arrested by an Oklahoma state trooper, another man, now held as a material witness, not as a suspect, also may have been at the scene taking photographs.

Terry Nichols, who surrendered to authorities in Herington, Kan., on Friday, may be the person who was photographed at the scene by a Houston man who had flown to Oklahoma City to volunteer as an emergency medical worker, the FBI source said.

The Houston man called the FBI office in Houston on Thursday, claiming he had taken a snapshot of a man who looked like one of the composite drawings released by the FBI. The Houston man, speaking on condition of anonymity, said he flew to the bomb scene to offer his help because he is a private paramedic.

The FBI has said Nichols is not the man in the second composite, called "John Doe II." However, the FBI source said the photograph of a man riding a bicycle away from the rescue scene may be Nichols. But the photo was among hundreds sent to FBI investigators in Oklahoma City. The FBI command center overseeing the investigation in Oklahoma City has not confirmed the identity of the man in the snapshot.

"McVeigh was there, too, walking around taking photographs," the FBI source said.

Nichols, 40, and his brother, James Douglas Nichols, were ordered held as material witnesses in separate court appearances Saturday. Authorities said McVeigh and Terry Nichols are Army acquaintances.

James Nichols was extradited to Oklahoma City to testify before a grand jury after his Michigan court appearance.

Terry Nichols appeared in a Wichita, Kan., court, but supporting affidavits in the matter were sealed. Authorities evacuated and barricaded a one-block area around his home in Herington, Kan., Saturday as part of a search.

At James Nichols' farm in Decker, Mich., federal agents continued their search into the evening. Several small packages and boxes, some wrapped in bright orange material, were carried from the house and loaded into cars or helicopters.

James Nichols was jailed about 10 p.m. Friday after being taken into custody at his home without incident. McVeigh may have visited the farm, authorities said.

According to an affidavit filed by the FBI, a former co-worker of McVeigh's also told agents that the last address he remembered for McVeigh was in Kingman, Ariz., an area known to be frequented by members of the paramilitary Arizona Patriots.

Sources in Arizona said the Arizona Patriots sometimes use the desert areas around Kingman to detonate explosives.

FBI agents were reported to have been scouring the area near Kingman Saturday for bomb fragments and had checked with local government offices to see whether McVeigh owned property in the area.

Although investigators have declined to publicly confirm McVeigh's ties with anti-government paramilitary groups, an FBI affidavit said that McVeigh was "known to hold extreme right-wing views . . . and was particularly agitated about the conduct of the federal government" and its handling of the standoff at the Branch Davidian compound in Waco in 1993.

The Houston volunteer who turned his film over to the FBI said he photographed a man riding a bicycle toward him at a checkpoint about 150 yards from the bombing scene Wednesday afternoon.

The man approached the three volunteers and asked if he could join them.

"He was definitely by himself and all he wanted was photos," the Houston volunteer said.

In exchange for being allowed to tag along, the unidentified man claimed he had a friend who had taken a photograph of the explosion as it occurred.

The man was friendly, but seemed very excited as if he was "extremely turned on by this whole thing," the Houston volunteer said.

He said the man spent about 90 minutes at the scene, taking photographs until he was told to leave by a law enforcement officer guarding the perimeter.

The volunteer said he called the FBI after developing his film upon returning from Oklahoma City on Thursday. His wife had noticed that the photograph of the man on the bicycle looked like a published FBI composite.

Richard Evans, director of socio-psychology at the University of Houston, said it is not uncommon for a suspect in a crime such as the bombing to return to the scene to record the damage. If the crime is committed by individuals acting alone, documenting the evidence is a way to enhance their egos.

"If it's a member of some kind of a group or team, they want to use that as a symbol or evidence that they've carried out their mission that they really can disrupt the government," Evans said.

He said terrorists will record the damage to prove and boast about their deed to other members of their group or organization.

"To them it's not a tragedy involving children, to them it's nothing more or less than evidence of a successful mission," Evans said

Memo: Chronicle reporter Joe Stinebaker in Oklahoma City and correspondent Bill DiSessa in Michigan contributed to this story.