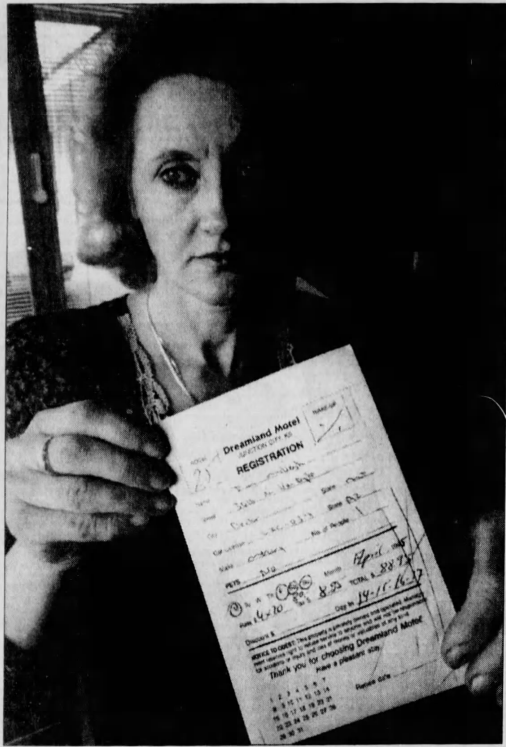


THE EXPLOSION

IN OKLAHOMA



RICHARD LEE/Detroit Free Press

Dreamland Motel owner Lea McGown holds a copy of the registration form filled out by Timothy McVeigh.

Suspect's travels raised no suspicions

At motel, he was quiet - and paid in cash

By JEFF TAYLOR
Free Press National Correspondent

JUNCTION CITY, Kan. — Lea McGown had no reason to worry about the guest in Room 25.

The thin young man with a buzz cut and hard-hewn face was polite, quiet and paid in cash. The only thing that stood out about him was the yellow Ryder truck he rented last Monday.

He parked close to the motel's flashing sign, about 20 steps from his room at the Dreamland Motel, and left the truck there until he pulled out around 5 the next morning.

McGown, the Dreamland owner, never expected to hear the name of Timothy McVeigh again.

But after explosives in a Ryder truck ripped through the Oklahoma City federal building and killed dozens of people, the name has burned an imprint on the country — as the man suspected being one of the most evil killers in American history.

"He seemed like a nice American boy," McGown said. "Smiling, clean and neat."

"You never know what's behind a face."

If charges against him prove true,

then McVeigh's road to deadly terrorism began in the peaceful Kansas Flint Hills and swept through several small, Midwestern towns that will never be the same again.

Based on FBI accounts and interviews, this is the picture that has begun to emerge of the final days that lead to the explosion:

In Kansas

McVeigh walked through the battered front door of the Dreamland Motel late on the afternoon of April 14, a Friday.

McVeigh, 27, knew the area well. In the Army, he had been stationed down the road along I-70 at nearby Ft. Riley.

McVeigh registered under his own name and gave his address as 3616 N. Van Dyke in Decker, Mich. — the home that belongs to James Nichols.

McGown, the motel's owner, saw McVeigh's car through the office windows — a late '70s Mercury Marquis, she recalled.

McGown said she noticed that the license plate on McVeigh's Mercury was loose, hanging at a crooked angle. Later, she said, it fell off.

SWIFT INVESTIGATION

Here is how the Oklahoma City bombing and the case against suspect Timothy McVeigh unfolded:

Wednesday

■ Explosion occurs at 9:04 a.m. at the Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City.

■ A charred truck axle that carried a vehicle identification number is found two blocks from the federal building.

■ A check of the VIN shows it was rented from Elliott's Body Shop in Junction City, Kan. One of the two men who rented it signed the agreement with the name Bob Kling and

provided a South Dakota driver's license.

Thursday

■ The identities of the two men are found to be bogus. Officials question Junction City merchants, gather descriptions of the men from the rental agent and create composite drawings.

■ In Oklahoma City, three witnesses who left the federal building nine minutes before the blast recognize the drawing of John Doe No. 1 as a man they saw outside the building at 8:55 a.m. Wednesday.

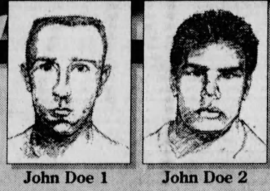
■ In Junction City, Dreamland Motel owner identifies the sketch as a man registered as Timothy McVeigh from Decker, Mich., who had stayed at the motel April 14-18. McVeigh arrived in a car with a loose license plate that later fell off, the owner noted, but two days later returned with a Ryder truck. The owner didn't see the car again.

Friday

■ A dozen agents search and fingerprint the Junction City motel room.

■ Agents search a Decker farmhouse, the address on McVeigh's license, owned by James Nichols.

Source: Associated Press, FBI affidavit, wire services



John Doe 1 John Doe 2

Friday

■ In Oklahoma City, a check of McVeigh's Social Security number in the national police computer shows he had been arrested for a minor traffic and weapons violation in Perry, Okla. — 70 miles north of Oklahoma City — 76 minutes after the bombing. McVeigh's vehicle had no license plate.

■ A slow divorce hearing keeps McVeigh from being arraigned and released on bail. An hour before his probable release, FBI notifies the Noble County Jail in Perry that they are holding the bombing suspect.

■ James Nichols is questioned by authorities in Michigan.

■ Terry Nichols surrenders to police in Herington, Kan.

Saturday

■ James Nichols is moved into federal custody in Detroit.

Sunday

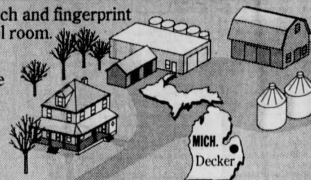
■ David Iniguez is picked up by military authorities in San Bernardino, Calif., on charges unrelated to the attack and is questioned about the bombing.

■ Timothy McVeigh turns 27.

Background:

■ McVeigh personally visited the Waco, Texas, compound of the Branch Davidians and expressed harsh anger at the federal government for the April 19, 1993, deaths.

■ McVeigh, Terry Nichols and Iniguez all served at Ft. Riley in Kansas.



MARTY WESTMAN / Detroit Free Press

In filling out the registration form, McVeigh listed the car as having an Arizona license plate, number LZC-034, which turned out to be fake.

The owner noticed the discrepancy between McVeigh's Michigan address on the register and the Arizona plates, but said she didn't think much of it.

McVeigh talked her down on the room rate, from \$28 to \$20 a night. He paid cash for four nights — an \$88.95 bill, including tax.

Last Monday, while still in Junction City, McVeigh and a second man went to Elliott's Body Shop, where the Ryder truck was rented.

It was rented under the name of Bob Kling. The renter provided a South Dakota driver's license, YF942A6, and gave his Social Security number as 962-42-9694. He listed his home address as 428 Malt Dr., Redfield, S.D., and said he planned to drive to Omaha.

The FBI later found out that all the information was false.

Later that day, McVeigh pulled up in the Dreamland Motel parking

lot in a Ryder truck. McGown, the owner, saw nothing suspicious. The next morning, the truck was gone.

A convenience store manager and several other people recall seeing that morning a man who matched McVeigh's description and a companion, with dark hair and a heavy jaw, in Junction City and further south in Newton, Kan.

In Herington, a town of 2,600 people about 50 miles south of Junction City, Terry Nichols was living quietly with his family in a one-story, pale blue bungalow at 109 S. Second Street.

Nichols — one of two Michigan brothers who have been detained and questioned about the bombing — had bought the house last month, neighbors said, and lived with his wife and young daughter.

Leroy Hodson, 75, who lived across the street from Nichols, said he rarely ran into the slim, bespectacled Nichols.

The last time Hodson saw his neighbor was last week.

Nichols' possible connection with

McVeigh remains unclear. He is being held in Wichita, Kan., where federal authorities have been questioning him.

On Saturday — a day after Nichols turned himself in — federal agents cordoned off a rental storage complex northeast of Herington. They searched one bay. But so far they have not disclosed whether this is connected to Nichols, why they were searching the storage bay or what may have been inside.

But there are deep ruts leading from the bay. And the storage garage sits just off Kansas Highway 77, on the most direct route way from Junction City to Oklahoma City.

In Oklahoma

On Wednesday, the Ryder truck pulled up on the Fifth Street side of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. The driver parked closed to the building, beside three support pillars.

Three witnesses later told the FBI that they saw someone matching McVeigh's description at the Fifth Street entrance shortly after

they arrived for work. They saw him again at 8:55 a.m., still at the entrance, when the three were leaving the building.

Nine minutes later, at 9:04, the explosion ripped through the structure, tearing away at least one-third of the building and sending floors crashing down on each other.

One hour and 16 minutes after the explosion, Oklahoma State Trooper Charlie Hanger pulled McVeigh over in Perry, Okla., just north of Oklahoma City. McVeigh was driving a 1977 yellow Mercury Marquis with no license plate.

When Hanger asked for a driver's license, he noticed a bulge under the left side of McVeigh's jacket. He pulled his revolver and pointed it at the back of McVeigh's head.

"I thought it could be a weapon," the trooper recalled in an affidavit filed with McVeigh's arrest.

McVeigh, according to the trooper's account, admitted he was carrying a gun — a loaded .45-caliber Glock in a shoulder holster. He also was carrying a five-inch knife.