

Motive for Bombing May Lie With FBI Agent

■ **Probe:** Bob Ricks, assigned to Oklahoma City, was chief spokesman during raid at Waco, Tex. Some speculate blast may have been in retaliation.

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OKLAHOMA CITY — Why Oklahoma City? Although that remains one of most puzzling mysteries of last week's devastating car bomb attack, there is growing speculation here that the answer may lie with a low-key agent who heads the local field office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

He is the same agent who gained prominence two years ago when he served as the chief government spokesman during the long siege and fiery destruction of the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Tex.

"You have to ask yourself, Who was the guy you saw everyday on TV representing the FBI in Waco? And who is the guy who represents the FBI here? It's Bob Ricks," said a local lawyer who asked not to have his name used.

An FBI official commented that "we're not too keen to make that link," but "it's true he was a prominent figure in Waco."

Ricks, 50, was even a prominent figure on TV here during the hours after the bomb destroyed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. But during the second day, when evidence pointed away from international terrorists and toward home-grown, right-wing extremists, Ricks stepped back from the spotlight and was replaced as the lead spokesman by FBI agent Welton Kennedy.

Ricks is described by fellow agents as highly competent, experienced and generally unflappable. The FBI came into the Waco



FBI agent Bob Ricks, in 1993, served as chief government spokesman during Branch Davidian siege.

standoff only after four agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms were killed when they tried to assault the Branch Davidian compound.

During the standoff, Ricks and other FBI officials tried to negotiate a peaceful surrender of the Branch Davidians with Houston attorney Dick DeGuerin. But government agents slowly lost patience when David Koresh, the cult's leader, reneged on pledges to come out.

On April 14, 1993, the usually reserved Ricks warned that "the FBI's patience is not inexhaustible." In comments for the cameras, he added, "Unless David Koresh agrees to surrender, we will turn up the heat."

Five days later, federal agents shot tear gas into the compound, hoping to capture the cult members, but a wind-blown fire swept through the complex and killed Koresh and most of those who had remained with him.

Ever since, some right-wing extremists have cited it as the ultimate act of government lawlessness.

In court papers, federal officials say Timothy J. McVeigh, the accused bomber of the Oklahoma City federal building, was obsessed with the Waco incident and even visited the site during the seven-week siege.

Among some extreme right-wing activists, it is often noted that none of the FBI agents or other top federal officials suffered reprimands for their decision to end the standoff with the tear-gas attack. Ricks retained his post as special agent in charge in Oklahoma City.

A special inquiry undertaken by Atty. Gen. Janet Reno concluded that FBI officials acted properly, but a separate investigation resulted in sanctions and demotions for several ATF agents involved in the initial assault.

"I think there should have been strong disciplinary actions taken against all those who were involved in the decision to go ahead with the April 19 assault," DeGuerin said Tuesday. "Ricks wasn't calling the shots, but he was involved in the decision-making."

But DeGuerin added that it was probably wrong to leap to a

conclusion about Ricks and his connection to both events. That would be using a "logical reason to explain an insane act," he said. "This is the work of some nut who has decided to retaliate against the government."

The theory that links last week's bombing to an attempt to retaliate against FBI agent Ricks, as well as the ATF, has one obvious problem. The FBI does not have its offices in the Murrah building, but instead is located nearly 50 blocks away. But the ATF did have offices in the destroyed building.

"We have four ATF employees injured. None killed," said Larry Scott, a spokesman for the bureau. He refused comment on whether any of the injured employees were involved in the Waco incident.

"If this guy knew enough to make a bomb, you'd think he knew enough to look in the phone book and find where the FBI is located," said Merle Gile, another local attorney. But he admits that he too thought of the connection to Ricks since the Oklahoma City agent was featured so prominently in the Waco standoff. "He was on TV all the time," he said.