

## **New Details Revealed in Bombing Plot/Officials Say Prime Suspect Boasted of "Something Big"**

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WICHITA, Kan. -- The man accused in the Oklahoma City bombing told an old Army buddy now held as a material witness that "something big is going to happen," just days before the massive blast, a federal prosecutor said Wednesday

U.S. Attorney Randy Rathbun also said in a court hearing for the jailed witness, Terry Nichols, that investigators found an anti-tank rocket and blasting caps in Nichols' basement after he surrendered last week in Herington, Kan.

Nichols' brother, James Nichols, of Michigan, also is being held as a witness in connection with the worst terrorist bombing in U.S. history. Timothy McVeigh, 27, was charged Friday in the bombing and is jailed in Oklahoma City.

In an effort to persuade U.S. District Judge Monti Belot to order Terry Nichols held without charges and returned to Oklahoma City, prosecutors revealed details of the investigation not previously released.

The Nichols brothers were charged Tuesday with conspiring to make explosive devices with McVeigh on James Nichols' Michigan farm. The prosecutor said Nichols had close ties with McVeigh (they served in the same Army unit together at Fort Riley) and had important information about McVeigh in the days immediately before the bombing.

As the investigation into the blast continued without capture of a second suspect known only as "John Doe No. 2", residents and search teams in Oklahoma City and mourners across the country observed a moment of silence at 9:02 a.m., the exact time one week ago when a truck bomb blew the front off the downtown A.P. Murrah Federal Building. Schoolchildren bowed their heads at their desks, rescue workers at the blast site interrupted their grisly work, and state legislatures across the country, including in Texas, paused to honor the dead.

But even as Oklahoma City residents held hands and shed a few more tears, someone began calling in bomb threats to the Federal Aviation Administration offices at the Oklahoma City airport. Eight telephone threats were received, and police evacuated FAA offices.

Threats also were telephoned to a United Parcel Service office, police said. UPS is handling food delivery to the blast site and to rescuers' hotels.

Bomb-sniffing dogs found no devices in any of the buildings, but the timing of the threats enraged city officials.

The death toll rose to 94 by Wednesday evening, including 14 children and a nurse killed in the rescue effort, and at least 90 people were listed as missing. Officials report only five of the missing as children -- reducing previous estimates that as many as 25 children were unaccounted for.

Oklahoma City Fire Chief Gary Marrs said workers have removed the last of two concrete panels obstructing search efforts of the area where the remaining children's bodies may be found.

President Clinton declared the city a "major disaster area," an upgrade from his previous disaster declaration, which could make the site eligible for such types of federal aid as disaster housing, financial grants and low-cost loans. State insurance officials are now predicting that the economic losses from the blast may surpass the damages incurred in the World Trade Center bombing in New York City.

Clinton also proposed significant staff increases for anti-terrorism programs and endorsed stiffer penalties for attacks on government workers.

During Nichols' Wichita hearing, prosecutor Rathbun said Nichols told an FBI agent that McVeigh had called him from Oklahoma City on April 16, three days before the bombing, and asked Nichols to pick him up as soon as possible. Nichols picked up McVeigh later that day and drove him back to Junction City, Kan., dropping him off at 1:30 a.m. April 17.

"On the trip back from Oklahoma City late Sunday or early Monday, McVeigh said, 'Something big is going to happen'," Rathbun told the court. "Nichols said, 'Are you going to rob a bank?' McVeigh said, 'Something big is going to happen.'"

The day before the April 19 bombing, Rathbun said, McVeigh called Nichols at 7:30 a.m., borrowed his pickup and returned it at 2 p.m. The two men later went to a rented storage shed near Junction City, where McVeigh told Nichols, "If I don't come back in a while, you clean out the storage shed." Rathbun said Nichols did clean the shed.

Rathbun also detailed items found when agents searched Nichols' home in Herington. In addition to anti-government literature and blasting caps, Rathbun said, agents found three empty 50-pound bags of ammonium nitrate, 33 firearms and the anti-tank rocket. Authorities say the bomb used in Oklahoma was a mixture of ammonium nitrate and fuel.

Nichols' attorneys, David Phillips and Steve Gradert, argued that those supplies were not surprising, given Nichols' business selling military surplus items.

"He deals in military surplus. Most of the items found at his house are found at military surplus stores, military surplus shows," Gradert said, to which Belot replied, "Anti-tank rockets?"

Rathbun argued against bond for the 40-year-old Nichols, citing fears that he would flee. Belot first ruled that authorities could continue to hold Nichols until he testifies in Oklahoma City, but he delayed the effective date of his order until May 5 to allow Nichols to appeal.

In other investigation developments:

A law enforcement official told the Associated Press that witnesses who reported seeing McVeigh in front of the federal building shortly before the blast apparently spotted him there before arrival of the Ryder rental truck believed to be carrying the bomb. An affidavit accompanying the federal charge against McVeigh said three witnesses matched the composite drawing that resembles McVeigh to a man seen at the blast site 15 minutes before the explosion.

The Daily Oklahoman reported Wednesday that federal agents were pursuing a theory that "John Doe No. 2", the dark-haired suspect with the tattoo, may have died in the blast.

McVeigh wrote a letter printed in his hometown newspaper in Lockport, N.Y., three years ago, saying government was out of control and it might take violence to cure society's ills.

CBS News reported that McVeigh tried to hide a note from authorities at the time of his arrest by a state trooper which leads them to believe he may have been planning another bomb attack. The note, scrawled on the back of a Wisconsin gun dealer's business card and found in the trooper's patrol car, read "Need more 5 lb. sticks TNT after May 1.

Caption:

Photo: Chris Levick with AT&T wipes away tears as he stands with Southwestern Bell employees outside their building in Oklahoma City Wednesday to observe a national minute of silence (color)

Smiley N. Pool / Chronicle

Memo: Chronicle reporter T.J. Milling contributed to this story from Oklahoma City.