

Witnesses help authorities build case in bomb blast

By TOM HAYS

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OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — One witness spotted Timothy McVeigh driving a rental truck toward the federal building. Another saw him minutes later, speeding away in a car just before an explosion ripped through the building.

The alleged sightings, and those of several other witnesses, are part of what a U.S. magistrate called "an indelible trail of evidence" against the only person charged so far with the deadly April 19 bombing.

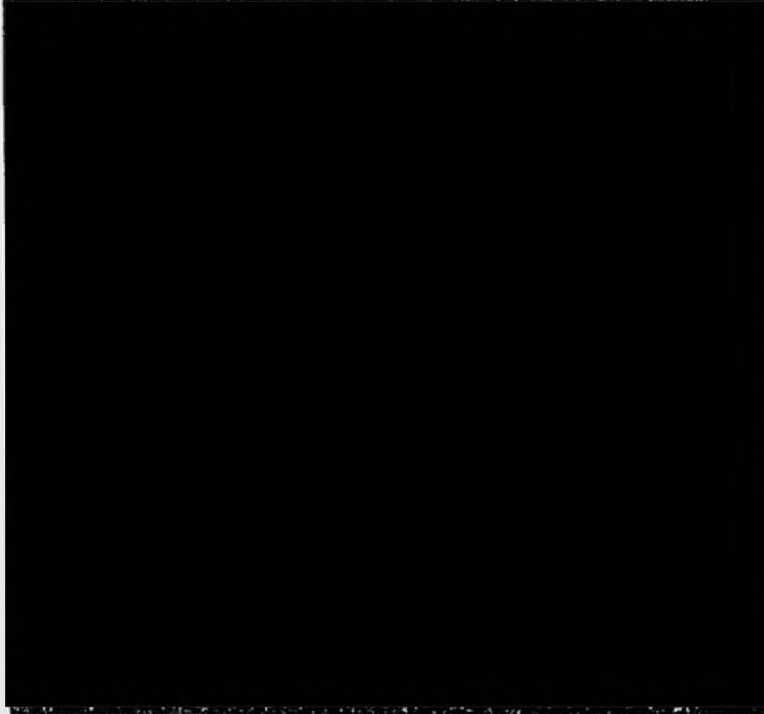
A manhunt continued today for a second suspect, known only as "John Doe No. 2" — who authorities fear may bomb again.

At a hearing Thursday, U.S. Magistrate Ronald Howland found sufficient evidence to hold McVeigh without bail pending a trial. A grand jury will be asked to return an indictment. McVeigh, 27, is charged under a federal anti-terrorism statute that carries the death penalty.

"I could not imagine a more heinous offense than this," federal prosecutor Merrick Garland told Howland.

The death toll stood at 110 today, including 15 children killed in the destruction of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building.

At the building, a firefighter and an FBI agent sustained minor injuries overnight, and a major part of the search was



called off after a slab of concrete broke loose and slid into the area that held a Social Security office and day care center, Assistant Fire Chief Jon Hansen said.

Hansen did not know when the search could continue in the area known as "the pit," where firefighters expect to find many bodies. Authorities had expected to have all the bodies out by early next week, but Hansen said that may no longer be possible because of the delay.

During McVeigh's preliminary hearing, FBI Special Agent

John Hersley testified for four hours, describing accounts of several witnesses. He also testified that authorities fear John Doe 2 may strike again.

The success of the manhunt may hinge on Arizona license plate LZC646.

When McVeigh was stopped by a state trooper less than 90 minutes after the explosion, his yellow Mercury Marquis was missing the plate. The FBI is still looking for the plate, said Special Agent Weldon Kennedy, who is in charge of the investigation.

Investigators have recovered a videotape showing that the "plate was on a vehicle in Oklahoma City before the blast," according to a federal law enforcement source in Washington who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Why would it be useful now? "It might be on the ground," and the location might help pinpoint an escape route leading to John Doe 2, the source said.

The source said there has been no reliable sighting of John Doe 2 since the explosion.

Arizona records show the plate belongs to a 1983 Pontiac station wagon that McVeigh registered in that state in February. McVeigh lived in a trailer park outside Kingman, Ariz., from June through September 1993. He continued to pick up mail at a private postal company as recently as early this month.

Michigan records show he bought the Pontiac for \$100 in January from his friend James Douglas Nichols.

Nichols and his brother, Terry, are being held as material witnesses. They have also been charged in Michigan with conspiring with McVeigh to build and detonate homemade bombs at James Nichols' farm.

The Nichols brothers are not charged in the Oklahoma bombing, and McVeigh is not charged in Michigan. James Nichols was to return to court this afternoon outside Detroit for a hearing.

Suspect Nichols may have registered at Superior Motel

SUPERIOR (AP)— On the day of the Oklahoma City bombing, a man registered at a motel here under the name of a Michigan man who has since been held as a material witness in the case, a sheriff says.

Nuckolls County Sheriff Jim Marr said Thursday that information from the manager of the Plains Motel showed that a man registered there April 19 under the name of James Nichols. He said the man checked into the motel late in the evening, perhaps 6 p.m. CDT, and checked out the next morning.

The sheriff said he sent the information to the FBI on Tuesday and had heard nothing back. Omaha FBI spokesman Jim Lovelace said he was unaware of the report.

Marr told The Hastings Tribune that the man who registered at the hotel had the same birth date as James D. Nichols of Decker, Mich., and that his physical description was basically the same.

James D. Nichols and his brother Terry were charged Tuesday in Milan, Mich., with conspiring with bombing suspect Timothy McVeigh to make illegal explosive devices.