

Blast Probe Zeros In On License Missing Plate May Yield Link To 'John Doe 2,' Official Says

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A videotape made before the federal office building bombing shows Timothy J. McVeigh's Arizona license plate on a vehicle other than his, and the missing suspect still might be driving it, a source said today.

The plate had been on the Mercury Marquis that McVeigh bought five days before the bombing. A state trooper stopped McVeigh in the Mercury after the bombing because its license plate was missing.

The source told the Associated Press that investigators have an Oklahoma City videotape that shows both the Ryder truck believed to have carried the bomb and a vehicle other than the Marquis bearing Arizona license plate LZC646.

The official, a law enforcement official in Washington who spoke on condition of anonymity, would not describe the third vehicle but said investigators suspect it was used in the getaway and may be even now in the possession of the elusive "John Doe No. 2."

The videotape is not good enough to positively identify people on it, the official said.

Thursday, the FBI agent in charge of the investigation asked for the public's help in finding the plate. Weldon Kennedy didn't say why it was important, but the source said the possibility that John Doe 2 still is driving around in a vehicle with the plate was the most important reason it was announced.

Federal authorities now believe that four or five people were involved in the blast that destroyed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, and they are investigating a father-son team in the Midwest about explosives that may have been supplied to the bombers, a source familiar with the inquiry said Thursday.

As the nationwide search continued for those responsible for the worst act of domestic terrorism in U.S. history, sources close to the investigation said the father operates a military supply store in the small town of Antigo in north-central Wisconsin and the son is believed to live in Chicago.

At a hearing Thursday in the Federal Correctional Center in El Reno, Okla., the FBI said three eyewitnesses were prepared to testify that they saw McVeigh, who is now in custody, driving toward or away from the Murrah building near the time of the explosion.

U.S. Magistrate Ronald Howland, saying an "indelible trail of evidence" links McVeigh to the crime, ruled that the 27-year old defendant should remain in federal custody without bond.

According to John Hersley, an FBI agent who testified at the hearing, one of the witnesses -- whose name was not released -- was driving in her car and had to slam on her brakes to avoid hitting McVeigh as he walked slowly across the street from where the Ryder truck containing the bomb was parked in front of the federal building.

McVeigh was taken into custody about 90 minutes after the April 19 bombing when he was stopped near Perry, Okla., 63 miles north of Oklahoma City, for driving without a license plate. He was charged two days later in connection with the bombing, in which 110 people are known to have died and about 90 remain missing.

During the hearing, Hersley was asked by a defense lawyer why federal authorities were pressing their investigation so vigorously. He replied: "We're trying to identify the identity and location of other subjects to prevent another bomb from going off."

Later, federal officials said that they do not consider a second attack highly probable but that, with other suspects still being sought, the possibility remains.

In another element of the inquiry, FBI agents are investigating whether those responsible for the Oklahoma City explosion may have financed their activities with the proceeds from a bank-robbing spree across the Midwest. In 13 unsolved bank robberies in Nebraska, Iowa, Ohio, Missouri and Kansas, robbers sometimes left pipe bombs at the scene.

McVeigh is believed to have traveled with large amounts of cash, although he carried only about \$250 when he was arrested. Authorities are trying to examine bank accounts to which he and others may have access and to determine any sources of income that he and others may have had.

Three sources in Kingman, Ariz., where McVeigh is last known to have lived, described him as having been closely associated with a man whose description in some ways resembles that of John Doe No. 2, the missing second suspect.

The friend was said by the sources to have left the Kingman area hurriedly last February soon after a mysterious explosion near his home. That blast has attracted renewed interest in the wake of the Oklahoma City explosion.

Kingman now is thought by investigators to be the likely base from which the Murrah attack was planned. And investigators are looking into possible McVeigh connections in recent months with Michael Fortier, a Kingman man who served in the Army with McVeigh.

Among the elements that surfaced Thursday in the El Reno hearing, in accounts provided by sources close to the case and in accounts furnished by those who have been interviewed by investigators:

Hersley said that tests on McVeigh's clothing uncovered traces of explosive materials normally used in assembling bombs. He also revealed that investigators first linked McVeigh to the attack after finding the badly burned but largely intact Florida license plate that belonged to the rental truck believed to have carried the bomb.

Merrick Garland, a deputy attorney general from Washington, said that the government now will push for a grand jury indictment within the next 30 days. "We could not imagine a more heinous offense than this," he told the judge.

A crumpled business card found in the Oklahoma Highway Patrol car in which McVeigh was carried to the Noble County Jail after he was stopped by Trooper Charlie Hanger on Interstate 35. The card led to the father-son team who, authorities believe, deal in the smaller explosive devices needed to set off bombs such as the one used in Oklahoma City. That bomb, authorities said, was a combination of at least 4,800 pounds of ammonium nitrate and fuel oil that was packed into the 24-foot Ryder rental truck.

The business card was from Paulsen Military Supply, which uses the family name, in Antigo, Wis. The father and son were described as gun traders.

In addition, investigators are trying to determine whether McVeigh's 21-year-old sister, Jennifer, knew of the bombing conspiracy.

Earlier this year, she was said by sources to have told friends, who have been interviewed by the FBI, that "something big is going to happen in March or April, and Tim's involved."

No further details were immediately available, but McVeigh used the same language, according to an FBI agent's account presented in a court hearing Wednesday in Wichita, Kan., while purportedly being driven from Oklahoma City to the Junction City area three days before the bombing.

As recounted by U.S. Attorney Randy Rathbun, McVeigh told his friend Terry Nichols that "something big is going to happen."

The FBI questioned Ms. McVeigh, 21, a student at Niagara County Community College, twice this week. Although she is not a suspect, authorities say they believe she might know something about the bombing because she stayed in contact with her brother.

McVeigh followed Thursday's proceedings intently, showing little emotion but becoming more animated as the hearing wore on. He even chuckled a few times

during light-hearted moments. He seemed most interested when one of his attorneys showed the court a large collection of newspaper headlines about the case.

One witness, a meter maid, told the FBI she saw the defendant driving a Ryder truck toward her in the direction of the building shortly before the blast. The truck was moving slowly enough that she thought the driver was going to stop and ask directions.

She described only one occupant in the truck, but other witnesses said there were two.

In his ruling, Howland said, "The court finds an indelible trail of evidence that starts in Junction City and ends up at the front door of the Murrah building."

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