

Sketchy Picture Emerges About Suspect's Moves

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April 30, 1995 | DAVID WILLMAN and RICHARD A. SERRANO | TIMES STAFF WRITERS

Wednesday, April 12, between 6 a.m. and 10 a.m.: After a 12-night stay, McVeigh drove out of the Imperial Motel in Kingman, Ariz., the desert town where federal investigators suspect that the bombing in Oklahoma City was planned.

"He was driving a two-door Pontiac," said the motel's owner, Helmut Hofer. "It was greenish in color. It was a real rust bucket."

McVeigh was a low-key tenant at the motel on old U.S. Route 66, demanding nothing beyond what the basic quarters of Room 212 had to offer: push-button telephone, color TV, king-size bed, table-top refrigerator and microwave and a bathroom with a shower and tub.

The FBI has searched the motel's records and even rented Room 212 for two days, scouring the unit for physical evidence. Hofer said he does not think that agents could have found much.

"I don't think so," Hofer said, "because the maid has cleaned that room four times since he was here."

If McVeigh placed any toll or collect calls from his room, none appear in the motel's records, Hofer said. Local calls are free at the Imperial, with no records kept on which numbers are dialed.

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Early April, 1995: McVeigh showed up for the last time to pick up his mail at a letter-drop in Kingman, according to Lynda Willoughby, manager of the The Mail Room. Willoughby said that she has told the FBI that two men, one of them resembling the sketch of "John Doe No. 2" once picked up McVeigh's mail, sometime in February or March of this year.

Willoughby, whose business is located in a pink-stucco strip mall in Kingman, told The Times that two men showed up during a period of up to 10 days when McVeigh had told her he would be out of town.

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Friday, March 31: McVeigh checked into the Imperial Motel, where Hofer said he appeared to be alone at all times. He dressed in the camouflage gear so popular with anti-government militia enthusiasts and carried only one visible piece of luggage, Hofer said, "a green duffel

bag."

McVeigh was unfailingly polite and booked his room on March 31 on the pretext of being an active member of the military.

"He came in here and said, 'I'm in the military' and can I give give him a discount," Hofer said. "He claimed to still be active in the military."

McVeigh listed his address as "Ft. Riley, Kansas," even though he was discharged honorably from the Army on Dec. 31, 1991.

The motel granted him the discount and McVeigh paid \$136.88 cash, in advance, for the first seven nights. For the remaining five nights, Hofer said, McVeigh paid \$19.95 in cash, each day.

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Friday, Feb. 17: Again appearing to be alone, McVeigh checked out of the Hilltop Motel, across the street from the Imperial on old Route 66 in Kingman after a five-night stay.

Tuesday, Feb. 14: McVeigh prepaid, in cash, for the rental until July 1 of his mail box in Kingman. According to Willoughby, The Mail Room's manager, McVeigh did so even though his existing rental agreement with the private mail center was not scheduled to expire until April 1.

Many of the letters and parcels that McVeigh continues to receive at The Mail Room are addressed to "T. Tuttle," according to Willoughby.

She said that she has known McVeigh over the last two years as a polite, even friendly, customer who typically wore combat boots and camouflage shirts. She said that McVeigh always acknowledged her with "either a nod or a hello."

Investigators are now trying to determine whether McVeigh used the mail drop to finance illegal weapons dealings or to contact others potentially responsible for the Oklahoma City bombing.

Saturday, Feb. 12: McVeigh checked into the Hilltop with a Kansas-issued driver's license, driving what appeared to be a gray, 1983 Pontiac station wagon, with an Arizona plate. According to Fred Paulson, owner of the motel, McVeigh "was an excellent customer."

"He would make up the bed in the morning," Paulson said. "The maids loved him."

McVeigh's Spartan habits are apt to be of little joy to investigators trying to reconstruct his movements, who would like to pin them down to the minute. McVeigh paid cash for his \$24.10-a-night room; the motel's records show no toll or collect calls placed during his stay in Room 119.

"He was never a problem," Paulson said. "No noise. No drinking. He took a nonsmoking room. . . If we had 29 customers (a night) like that, we'd be the happiest innkeepers in the world."

Paulson said he contacted the FBI after the Oklahoma City bombing because his business

partner remembered that McVeigh had been a guest at both the Hilltop and, later, across the street at the Imperial.

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February through April, 1994: McVeigh worked as a yard hand at the Tru Value hardware store in Kingman, a \$5-an-hour job that he got through the help of a friend, Michael Fortier, with whom he occasionally lived on the town's outskirts.

Fortier, 26, lived for three years in the same Ft. Riley barracks as McVeigh before the Persian Gulf War. The two have shared a fondness for what Fortier recently called the "pro-Constitution" bent of the far-right militia cause.

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