

Mcveigh Suspected Of Leading Plot Midwest Robberies Believed To Have Financed Bombing

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Investigators are becoming convinced that the Oklahoma City bombing grew out of a conspiracy lasting more than six months and that Timothy J. McVeigh was "a driving force" financed by a series of robberies, sources close to the case say.

They also firmly believe that the attack was motivated by hatred of the U.S. government and that the 1993 assault on the Branch Davidian compound near Waco, Texas, served as "the flash point," in the words of one official.

Recovery workers at the crumbling remains of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building here predicted that their efforts to find victims and clear out debris could be completed as early as Friday. Workers recovered the bodies of two adults and a child Wednesday, and another victim was found today, bringing the death toll to 147.

About 25 people were believed still missing, and more than 400 were injured.

Oklahoma City aid officials asked donors to send cash to pay for counseling and other services, instead of food, clothing and teddy bears.

"We have more stuffed animals, per capita, right now than any city in the world," said Tom Brown of the local United Way. "We have all the supplies we need. Frankly, what we need now is cash."

Federal investigators pored over several tons of rubble excavated from the explosion site and were casting new nets in search of the elusive "John Doe No. 2" -- a tanned, muscular man believed to have helped deliver the bomb April 19.

"There's nobody high on the list -- no No. 2 du jour," one official said.

Early Wednesday, authorities released two drifters whose travels had seemed to connect them to McVeigh, the only person charged so far. Gary A. Land and Robert Jacks were taken into custody Tuesday in a dawn raid on a Missouri motel, then freed 18 hours later.

Authorities were trying to enhance the image of a brown pickup truck license plate captured on videotape by a camera in the car of the state trooper who arrested McVeigh, the Dallas Morning News reported. The truck pulled over when McVeigh, 27, was stopped for a traffic violation, the paper said.

Officials also told the paper that a blue pickup with a camper shell closely resembling one owned by McVeigh's Army friend Terry L. Nichols was seen by at least six witnesses at the rural Kansas lake where investigators believe the bomb may have been built. Nichols is being held as a material witness in the case.

Investigators, meanwhile, were interviewing everyone known to have been telephoned by McVeigh and Nichols. They also are trying to pinpoint the location of several purchases of ammonium nitrate, a major component of the explosive device.

In other developments Wednesday, McVeigh, in his first words from jail, issued a statement saying he does not want to be represented by two criminal defense attorneys from Houston who some believe are trying to elbow into the high-profile case.

One source close to the case said "it's becoming more viable" that McVeigh, a native of Pendleton, N.Y., was at least a "driving force" in the bombing. "He had the capacity and the anger," the source said.

The source said investigators are discounting suggestions that McVeigh was only a follower or had been duped by a larger group of conspirators.

Focusing on evidence that McVeigh had no known source of income for much of the period before the bombing, investigators were "pushing hard" to determine whether he and others might have been involved in criminal activities to finance the attack.

Agents were looking into 13 unsolved bank robberies in Nebraska, Iowa, Ohio, Missouri, Wisconsin and Kansas to try to find links to McVeigh or others. Also, one source said, "It's highly probable they're involved in other robberies, including commercial and home invasions." He declined to provide any details but emphasized that he was not talking about "street stickups."

So far, the search for other criminal activities has concentrated in the Midwest, but it will be extended to the Kingman, Ariz., area, where McVeigh lived and where investigators believe the bombing may have been planned.

The estimate that planning for the bombing was under way for at least six months stems from receipts of ammonium nitrate purchases that investigators have linked to McVeigh and Nichols, although the purchaser or purchasers used aliases. One receipt, found in Nichols' home in Herington, Kan., but bearing McVeigh's fingerprints, is for a ton of the fertilizer substance and dates back to last fall, one source said.

Other receipts from a store in McPherson, Kan., also have been located, according to the source. He would not identify the store or specify the amounts

purchased. The federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms estimates the bomb to have weighed about 4,800 pounds.

While agents believe they have more evidence of Nichols' possible involvement in a bombing conspiracy, they also suspect that his brother, James D. Nichols of Decker, Mich., also played a role. But the agents said James Nichols is not believed to have been near the bomb site on the day of the explosion or just before it.

The Nichols brothers also are charged with making explosive devices and conspiring in those actions with McVeigh -- although those alleged acts have not been linked to the bombing.

Weldon Kennedy, an FBI special agent in charge who is spearheading the investigation in Oklahoma City, suggested that the inquiry is far from over.

"We are now regarding this as a long-term investigation," he said this week. "To bring all the necessary parts of this case together and prepare it for prosecution will certainly take months and months."

In another development, Jim Rosencrans, 28, a Kingman man who said he has been close friends with McVeigh for about two years, called the Los Angeles Times from the Mohave County Jail in Kingman. Rosencrans, who is on jail on a disorderly-conduct charge, said McVeigh told him in February that he was planning to take action against the government to "make a change."

Rosencrans said that when he heard about the Oklahoma explosion, he knew immediately that McVeigh was involved. "When I saw it on TV, I said, 'Damn, our boy has been busy,' " he said.

McVeigh is "good people, he's righteous," Rosencrans said. "It's too bad things couldn't be different. It's too bad people have got to pay a high price. For freedom, there is a lot of patriot blood spilled. It's a high price, it's got to be paid. . . . He's not a criminal."