

## **Possible Link to Robberies Investigated - Officials Say Suspects May Have Held Up Banks**

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WASHINGTON - Oklahoma City bombing suspect Timothy McVeigh often carried wads of cash.

He paid cash to rent a Ryder truck used to carry the bomb, authorities say, and to rent motel rooms in the days before the explosion. And a cash receipt for two tons of fertilizer - a component in the bomb that destroyed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building - bears Mr. McVeigh's fingerprints, authorities said.

But where did that money come from? Bank robberies, perhaps, federal investigators theorize. They've long believed that roughly a dozen robberies in the Midwest over the past 18 months were linked. Now they're checking to see whether they might also be connected to the bombing.

Experts who have studied the radical fringe of the "patriotic militia" movement say such gunpoint fund raising wouldn't be new.

Robbery is "a time-honored tradition" among fringe elements, said Jonathan Mozzochi, executive director of the Coalition for Human Dignity in Portland, Ore.

Robberies in the 1980s netted roughly \$4 million for The Order, a murderously militant group that hoped to establish a "white homeland" in the Pacific Northwest, he noted.

'Turner Diaries'

The Order closely tracked the robbery-and-revolution plot of a book called The Turner Diaries, Mr. Mozzochi said.

That anti-Semitic, white-supremacist novel has become almost a bible to some members of the "patriot" militia movement, according to James Corcoran, a Boston-based expert on The Order.

"Apparently, that included McVeigh," Mr. Corcoran said. One of Mr. McVeigh's Army comrades reportedly has said that Mr. McVeigh once showed him a copy of the book and urged him to read it.

Leftist groups also have robbed and stolen to finance terrorism, Mr. Corcoran noted. "Like Willie Sutton said, banks are where the money is."

But among right-wing extremists, he added, bank robbery is more than a matter of money. "It's seen as being a (political) strike against the money lenders, the people who are part of this horrible conspiracy to strip them of their way of life."

Federal investigators have announced no links between the bank robberies and the only named suspects in the Oklahoma City bombing, Mr. McVeigh and Terry Nichols.

But they say some evidence suggests both bombing suspects may have robbed banks. And local investigators say the Midwestern bank robberies appear to have been committed by a small group of people matching the bombing suspects' general descriptions.

### Robbery pattern

Authorities say 13 robberies that fit the same general pattern criss-crossed the Midwest, beginning with Ames, Iowa, on Jan. 25, 1994. Cases eventually stretched from Ohio to Nebraska and from Green Bay, Wis., to Springfield, Mo.

Each involved two or three white men in their 20s or 30s. Often they dressed as construction workers, wearing hard hats, gloves and camouflage netting over their faces. Sometimes they wore masks.

Usually they left behind something that looked like a bomb. Sometimes it was made of road flares. Sometimes it was a simple pipe-bomb.

None of those devices exploded. All, however, distracted bank employees and forced authorities to deal with removing the bomb, as well as chasing the robbers.

The robbers also showed a certain comic flair. They donned Santa Claus hats last December as they robbed an Ohio bank. After they hit a bank in West Des Moines, Iowa, on March 29, they left behind a gold-plated pipe bomb in an Easter basket.

In every case where authorities found a getaway car, they discovered a dummy or inoperative hand grenade inside it.

"When you have so many similarities . . . it's a real reasonable assumption that you're dealing with the same set of suspects," said Sgt. William Muldoon of the Omaha, Neb., Police Department. "Whether they're linked to Oklahoma City is another question." Getaway car

Seeking an answer, federal authorities have investigated the West Des Moines robbery - one of the few cases where authorities found a getaway car.

That vehicle had been purchased with cash at RVR Car Co. in West Des Moines.

The FBI sent a list of seven names to RVR. It asked if any of those names - including Mr. McVeigh and Mr. Nichols - were listed on the getaway car's documents. Neither name appeared in RVR's papers, according to RVR employee Diana Ladd.

FBI agents have declined to comment publicly on the progress of any robbery investigations connected to the Oklahoma City explosion. But it was a federal prosecutor who first raised the question of whether Mr. McVeigh might be robbing banks.

During a court hearing, U.S. Attorney Randy Rathbun testified about an exchange Mr. Nichols said occurred between him and Mr. McVeigh a few days before the blast.

Mr. McVeigh, according to Mr. Nichols, said, "Something big is going to happen."

Mr. Nichols told investigators his reply: "Are you going to rob a bank?"

McVeigh's sister

Federal officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, say Mr. McVeigh's sister, Jennifer McVeigh, also has given them indications that her brother may have been involved in bank robberies.

Mr. Nichols' ex-wife, Lana Padilla, recently told the American Journal television show that she was shocked when she visited a storage room Mr. Nichols had rented in Las Vegas.

Ms. Padilla said she found \$20,000 to \$40,000 in cash and gold, along with camouflage gear, pantyhose, masks and some pipe.

Other investigators said agents searching Mr. Nichols' home in Kansas found at least one men's wig, plus evidence that Mr. Nichols might have manufactured pipe bombs. Authorities are looking for any similarities between those materials and devices used in the bank robberies.

In Wisconsin, federal investigators say they are exploring possible links between the Oklahoma City bombing suspects and a bank robbery suspect with alleged ties to white-supremacist groups.

That man is James Oswald, currently on trial in Waukesha County on charges of murdering a police officer and robbing three banks, often using pipe bombs as diversions.

Police said Mr. Oswald is not a suspect in the Midwestern robbery string. During a news conference before his trial, however, Mr. Oswald said FBI agents had

asked him whether he knew he had been photographed with Mr. McVeigh at a shooting range.

"All I want to say is at this time I have broken no blood oath," Mr. Oswald said. The oath, he added, was sworn with "the Group of Teutonic Warriors."

Caption:

MAP(S): / CHART(S): (DMN) Robberies Across The Midwest.