

HOUSTON CHRONICLE ARCHIVES

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Page: 1

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Third suspect identified in Oklahoma bombing □□By DAN THOMASSON, PETER COPELAND □Scripps Howard News Service, Newsday

A third man wanted in the Oklahoma City bombing has been identified as Steven Colbern, a fugitive from a previous firearms charge.

Colbern, aged 35 or 36, is described as 6-foot-1 and 195 pounds with green eyes, which roughly matches the description of John Doe II.

Law enforcement sources said Thursday night that Colbern was identified through his brown pickup. It was captured, by chance, on video taken from the state trooper's car that stopped Timothy McVeigh for speeding only 80 minutes after the blast.

"That trooper had a hell of a day," a federal investigator said.

An automatic camera in the car of Trooper Charles Hanger was taping the arrest of McVeigh. In the background was the image of the pickup, which also pulled over while McVeigh was being questioned.

Sophisticated enhancement techniques were used to improve the video until investigators could read the license plate number.

The truck, registered to Colbern, contained traces of ammonium nitrate, believed to be the main explosive ingredient used in the bombing.

Colbern's age is uncertain. His address is unknown, but he shared a mail drop with McVeigh in Kingman, Ariz., sources said. The truck was found parked outside an abandoned mobile home in Kingman.

Colbern already was wanted on a federal firearms charge, officials said. He was arrested last summer in San Bernadino, Calif., for carrying a gun with a silencer. He was allowed to post bail but skipped.

The FBI revealed evidence Thursday that Terry Nichols, another of the alleged Oklahoma bombers, had amassed huge quantities of explosive material.

Storage sheds and a Ryder truck were rented using false names, and 80 bags of fertilizer -- 4,000 pounds -- were purchased during the weeks before the April 19 bombing.

Nichols heard the evidence against him at a hearing at El Reno, Okla., Thursday. His next hearing was set for May 18.

Although the information was not released until Thursday, Nichols, 40, of Herington, Kan., was charged Tuesday with destroying a federal building, a federal crime, and with aiding and abetting the bombing.

After the hearing, U.S. Attorney Patrick Ryan said, "Since the crime resulted in the loss of life, it would qualify for the death penalty."

The FBI affidavit said Nichols acknowledged that he was with McVeigh in downtown Oklahoma City three days before the explosion, but "denied involvement in or knowledge of the bombing."

And it said the FBI had obtained a letter from Nichols to McVeigh dated last Nov. 22, the day before Nichols left on a trip to the Philippines.

"In the letter, Terry Nichols tells Timothy McVeigh that he will be getting this letter only in the event of Nichols' death," the affidavit said. Nichols instructs McVeigh to "clear everything out ... liquidate" two of the storage lockers, the document said, adding, "Terry Nichols also tells McVeigh he is on his own and to 'Go for it!!' "

McVeigh, arrested in Perry, Okla., for speeding and carrying a weapon, was charged in the bombing. The address he gave police was a farm in Michigan owned by James Nichols, brother of Terry.

Terry Nichols turned himself in on April 21, but not before he took some of the ammonium nitrate in his house and "placed it on his yard as fertilizer."

"Nichols said that he did this after reading in several different newspapers that ammonium nitrate was used in the Oklahoma City bombing," according to the affidavit.

Nichols also said he hoped the FBI "would not mistake household items" for bomb-producing materials.

Meanwhile, FBI Director Louis Freeh told Congress that federal agents have had to be relocated after they received death threats from members of extremist militia groups. It was unclear from Freeh's remarks whether the threats were made before or after the bombing.

Also Thursday, the government awarded contracts to demolish the bombed building. Within 10 days, it will be destroyed by implosion, according to the General Services Administration.

Implosion is controlled explosion where debris collapses into the center of a building site rather than flying outward. Some Oklahomans have expressed concern that an explosion of any kind at the site might be psychologically damaging.

GSA said it has determined that the other common method of destroying a building, using wrecking balls, could pose a greater physical hazard to workers.

In another development, O.J. Simpson lawyer Johnnie Cochran Jr. filed a lawsuit in federal court in Oklahoma City against ICI Explosives U.S.A. Inc., the manufacturer of the fertilizer used in the bomb. The lawsuit, filed on behalf of four survivors but seeking class action status, seeks \$50,000 per plaintiff on the grounds that the company didn't attempt to reduce the explosive potential of the fertilizer.