

Chemist Linked To McVeigh Arrested Reportedly Shared Mailbox Address

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A chemist who may have shared a mailing address with bombing suspect Timothy J. McVeigh was arrested Friday in Arizona on weapons charges after a brief struggle with federal agents.

U.S. marshals arrested Steven G. Colbern on a federal firearms charge in Oatman, Ariz., when a hotel owner recognized him from the hotel bar after agents showed his picture around town.

Justice Department spokesman Bert Brandenburg confirmed that Colbern was arrested but gave no details.

Colbern, 35, worked at the Oatman Mining Co. restaurant as a prep cook and dishwasher. He lived with two roommates in a white trailer on a hill at the edge of town. He attracted little attention except when he talked about the government. It wasn't so much what he said as how he said it, an acquaintance said Friday.

"He was really intense," said David Scott, who knew Colbern as a regular at the Oatman Hotel bar and took notice when he would complain about the government. "We all bitch about stuff like that, but he seemed to have more zeal."

Scott Johnson, an Oatman bartender, told agents Colbern was a "radical" and "pro-Nazi."

A senior federal official in Washington, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Colbern might have links to McVeigh. "We have found a letter from McVeigh addressed to 'S. C.' and Colbern is thought to have used McVeigh's mailbox address in Arizona," the official said Friday night.

"The arrest of Colbern is part of a search for an associate of McVeigh who might help us clear up the mystery of John Doe No. 2. We are not saying he is John Doe No. 2."

John Doe No. 2 is the elusive, square-jawed suspect in FBI sketches distributed shortly after the Oklahoma City bombing.

Earlier, authorities said they were searching for a man who might have driven a brown pickup truck alongside McVeigh's car immediately after the bombing. However, a brown pickup linked to Colbern and sitting outside his residence might not have been moved for some time, the official said. A neighbor, however, said another brown pickup truck had been seen at times near the site.

Colbern pulled a .38-caliber gun on agents when they approached him on the street, said Tom Nixon, chief deputy in the marshal's office in Phoenix. Officers struggled with him and pushed him to the ground. A marshal was slightly hurt in the struggle when he hit his head on the sidewalk.

Colbern was to be arraigned today before a federal magistrate in Phoenix, Nixon said. Describing Colbern as the "suspect du jour," one federal official said, "I don't know if he's involved. He's got an interesting background."

Colbern, described by a neighbor as a "weirdo" who dressed in camouflage and "liked to play soldier," is also believed by authorities to have ties to the Arizona Patriots, an extremist, anti-government group.

Though he is roughly the same height and weight as the suspect portrayed in an FBI composite released nationwide, officials said he is not known to have a tattoo. Witnesses told authorities they saw a tattoo on the left arm of John Doe No. 2.

McVeigh was pulled over in Perry, Okla., 75 minutes after the bombing for not having a license plate on his car and was jailed after he was found to be carrying a gun.

According to the federal official in Washington, a witness told investigators that a brown pickup that appeared to be traveling in tandem with McVeigh's car pulled over in front of McVeigh's vehicle, waited and then moved on.

"It might have been someone traveling with McVeigh or it might have been someone who was speeding, heard the siren and thought he was being pulled over until he saw there was another car stopped," the official said. Authorities are checking to see if the pickup appears in a videotape produced by a camera in an Oklahoma police car.

McVeigh and his Army buddy, Terry Nichols, have been charged with the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. They could get the death penalty if convicted.

Lynda Willoughby, manager of The Mail Room, where McVeigh picked up his mail in Kingman, Ariz., said federal marshals have been by in recent days, asking her if a box there was ever in the names Steven Colbern, Bill Carson or Steven Garrett. She said no one had gotten mail under any of those names.

Ms. Willoughby said investigators showed her a photo of a dark-haired man with bushy eyebrows. She said she did not recognize him. Earlier, Ms. Willoughby said a man who came in to pick up McVeigh's mail was a rough match for the man in the John Doe No. 2 sketches.

A U.S. Marshal's wanted poster describes Colbern as trained in survival skills and a chemist by trade. It says he is 6-foot-1, 195 pounds, with brown hair and green eyes, and that he also goes by the name Bill Carson.

Colbern was stopped for a traffic violation in July 1994 in Upland, Calif., and officers seized a knife, an assault rifle, a silencer and two loaded handguns from his vehicle, said Richard Maxwell, chief deputy district attorney for San Bernardino County.

He was freed on bail but failed to appear in court and was considered a fugitive, Upland Police Sgt. Kevin Cushman said.

On Friday, a brown pickup sat outside a trailer home in Bullhead City, Ariz., owned by Colbern's father, Dr. Robert Colbern. Arizona motor vehicle records show the truck was registered to Steven G. Colbern, who listed a Los Angeles address. Colbern's father, a 60-year-old dentist in the Los Angeles suburb of Oxnard, said federal agents had searched his house.

A woman living in a trailer park in Bullhead City, about 30 miles from Kingman, recalled a next-door neighbor named Steven who wore fatigues, liked to raise snakes and lizards, and left his trailer so dirty it smelled.

"He was a jerk. He's a lazy, no-good mama's boy," said Maybelle Hertig, 70. Ms. Hertig recalled that Steven, whose last name she did not know, had packages of ammunition delivered to her trailer and other neighbors'.

From June 1993 to November 1994, Colbern was a research associate at Cedars-Sinai Research Institute in Los Angeles, said Marilyn Sharpe, senior vice president of human resources for Cedars-Sinai Health System. He resigned voluntarily, she said.

In other developments:

Officials said they had ruled out Josh Nichols, Nichols' 12-year-old son, as a possible match for John Doe No. 2.

Authorities said they still hoped the boy could provide helpful information because he was with his father the entire week before the bombing. However, one official described the effort to question him as "stagnant."

In Kansas, a law enforcement source told The Associated Press investigators are looking into the possibility that Nichols visited the day-care center 15 or 20 minutes before the blast, asking questions.

The source said investigators might have witnesses or videotape to place Nichols there.

Of the 19 children who were killed in the blast, 15 were in the day-care center.

Prosecutors have suggested the federal building was bombed to avenge the cult disaster at Waco, Texas, exactly two years earlier.

A man wounded in the April 19 explosion died in a hospital Friday, raising the death toll to 168.

John Youngblood, 52, died of smoke inhalation and had suffered multiple fractures, cuts and other injuries, said Dr. Tom Coniglioni, a spokesman at St. Anthony Hospital in Oklahoma City. At the time of the blast, Youngblood was on the fourth floor in the Department of Transportation office.