

## Chemist held during probe of bomb ties

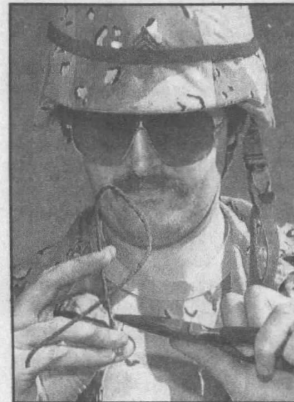
By SERGE F. KOVALESKI  
and WILLIAM CLAIBORNE  
of The Washington Post

PHOENIX — A magistrate Saturday ordered California biochemist Steven Garrett Colbern held without bond in an old firearms case and on new federal charges while authorities continue to explore his relationship with Timothy McVeigh, a suspect in the Oklahoma City bombing case.

Colbern, 35, who was arrested Friday after pulling a loaded revolver and scuffling with U.S. marshals, has told authorities he knew McVeigh as "Tim Tuttle," a name the suspect apparently used in a business he ran with Terry Lynn Nichols, another suspect in the case.

But Colbern has denied any connection to the bombing, and The New York Times reported Sunday that a preliminary inquiry has led authorities to conclude that he probably had no role in the attack that killed 168.

At Saturday's hearing, U.S. Attorney Janet Napolitano requested that Colbern be detained in federal custody, and U.S. Magistrate Judge Barry G. Silverman scheduled a hearing for Tuesday.



Associated Press photo

**Steven Garrett Colbern holds a blasting cap in a November 1993 file photo.**

This gives authorities more time to seek information from Colbern that might be relevant to their attempt to reconstruct the movements of McVeigh and his Army buddy, Nichols, in the months before the bombing.

Colbern quit his job as a medical researcher in Los Angeles last

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Associated Press photo

Steven Garrett Colbern poses by a car in California's Mojave desert in a November 1993 photo.

## Chemist held without bond

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fall and moved to Oatman, Ariz., an old mining town near Kingman, where McVeigh lived in the months before the bombing.

Oatman residents describe Colbern as an angry man, embittered over a failed marriage and zealous in his dislike for the government.

His landlord and roommate Preston Haney described sitting in his trailer living room with Colbern watching early news accounts of the Oklahoma City bombing.

Colbern's initial reaction was that "he kind of liked the idea of someone blowing up the feds."

But Haney, a 52-year-old ex-Marine and self-described survivalist, added, "I don't blame him. There are a lot of people around here who feel that way."

But Haney said Colbern was upset and near tears when he heard the first reports that children had been killed in the blast, and for several days appeared depressed at the rising death toll.

### Making bombs

When asked if Colbern ever discussed a knowledge of making bombs, Haney said, "We talked about things. Yeah, he knew how to make them. After Oklahoma City, he said, 'Yeah, ammonium nitrate and fuel oil. I know how to do that.' But any farmer knows that. That doesn't mean anything."

Colbern drifted into the Arizona town last year and worked as a miner and dishwasher known as Steve.

In a search of his residence conducted after his arrest Friday, authorities recovered four rifles, three handguns and 16,000 rounds of ammunition, including 4,000 rounds of 7.62mm bullets, which are commonly used in assault rifles.

Officials also seized documents that they declined to describe and some evidence indicating that the residence might have been used as a laboratory to produce methamphetamine, a drug commonly known as "crank."

At his arraignment in U.S. District Court, Colbern appeared expressionless as he stood in the courtroom, murmuring answers to questions from the magistrate.

Asked if he could afford a lawyer, Colbern replied: "No I don't, your honor."

### Bruised from scuffle

Colbern, flanked by two federal public defenders, was wearing beige prison garb, his arms badly bruised and scratched, apparently from the scuffle with U.S. marshals.

Neither Oklahoma City nor McVeigh were mentioned during the court proceeding, but law enforcement sources said investigators are exploring possible connections between McVeigh and Colbern.

According to several law enforcement sources, Colbern has ties to the Arizona Patriots militia, an armed group that splintered several years ago and recently began to re-emerge in scattered groups.

His roommate Haney, however, disputed that notion, saying Colbern was a "loner" during his four to five months in Oatman.

There are reports that McVeigh tried to contact Colbern last fall while McVeigh was in the Kingman area.

McVeigh also was known to associate with members of the Arizona militia and a similar group in Michigan.

In addition, the sources say, Colbern apparently used a commercial mail drop in Kingman — the Mail Room at 1711 Stockman Road — where McVeigh rented boxes under his own name and that of "Tim Tuttle," an alias he allegedly used to buy and sell guns.

McVeigh and Nichols sold surplus military equipment in recent years at gun shows.

Authorities also have recovered a letter that McVeigh wrote to someone whom he described only as "S.C." The contents of the letter are not known.

Authorities also have been

tracking a tip that a witness had noticed a brown truck when McVeigh was arrested about 80 minutes after the Oklahoma City bombing on traffic and weapons charges.

They were intrigued to learn that Colbern owned an old brown pickup truck, only to discover later that the cobweb-covered truck has not been recently moved.

A brown Chevrolet pickup truck is parked at a mobile home that Colbern's father, Robert, owns in Bullhead City, Ariz., an address the younger Colbern occasionally visited.

Law enforcement sources have been cautious in assessing these links, still stung by the arrest and subsequent release of two drifters whose movements had paralleled McVeigh's.

"I don't know that we can tie him to anything," said one law enforcement official.

### A father's insistence

Colbern's father Robert Colbern Saturday insisted his son is not involved in the Oklahoma City bombing.

Standing outside a simple stucco house adorned with Christmas lights in Oxnard, Calif., the father said Colbern was "just a gun collector. They're trying to make something out of that."

"It would be out of character. I don't say he was wrongly accused, [but] I don't believe he was involved in the Oklahoma deal," he said. "He was carrying a silencer in his car and he ducked out because he got scared. ..."

Colbern said the last time he saw his son was on Oct. 17, 1994, when his daughter got married and after that "he just disappeared."

Steven Colbern was supposed to show up for a trial on the July 1994 gun charges at federal court in Los Angeles in October, his father said, but "I showed up to support him and he was gone."