

Plot Implied In Letter Written By McVeigh To Sister, Reports Say

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The FBI has recovered 20 to 30 letters that Oklahoma City bombing suspect Timothy J. McVeigh wrote to his sister before the blast, including one hinting he was involved in a plot, Newsweek reports this week.

The latest letter to his sister, Jennifer McVeigh, that was recovered was an unsigned March 25 note warning her not to incriminate herself, the magazine says in its May 22 issue -- out on newsstands today -- quoting law-enforcement officials it didn't name.

Ms. McVeigh, a student at Niagara County Community College, hasn't been charged and denies any involvement in the bombing. Authorities say she apparently shared her brother's extreme anti-government views.

Newsweek quoted the March 25 letter as saying:

"Still waiting on your last letter as to whether you rcv'd my last letter. (About being a 'rock.')

That had a lot of sensitive material in it. So it's important to know if you received it, or if it was intercepted (either by G-men or Dad)."

"Please respond ASAP, only one letter. If one is already en route, Don't send another. Send no more after 01 APR, and then, even if it's an emergency -- watch what you say, because I may not get it in time, and the G-men might get it out of my box, incriminating you."

The federal building in Oklahoma City was bombed on April 19. McVeigh, 27, a native of Pendleton, and Army buddy Terry Nichols, 40, of Herington, Kan., have been charged in the blast that has killed 168 people. Authorities are still searching for another suspect, John Doe No. 2.

The Buffalo News reported on May 5 that authorities had recovered a letter from the Pendleton home of McVeigh's family in which McVeigh warned his sister to be careful what she said on the phone because "G-men" may have been monitoring.

Meanwhile, Steven G. Colbern, 35, a fugitive gun enthusiast who reportedly told investigators he knew McVeigh under the name Tim Tuttle, remained in custody Sunday in Phoenix. A trained chemist, Colbern was held without bail on charges stemming from an old federal weapons case and a scuffle with agents who arrested him in Oatman, Ariz., on Friday.

Authorities have come to believe Colbern probably had no role in the bombing, the New York Times reported Sunday. But Justice Department officials had no comment on that report Sunday.

Law enforcement sources told the Washington Post that Colbern apparently used the Mail Room, a commercial mail drop in Kingman, Ariz., where McVeigh rented boxes under his name and that of Tim Tuttle.

A search of Colbern's mobile home and two storage sheds in Oatman, Ariz., has turned up five rifles and shotguns, four boxes of machine gun ammunition, ammunition belts, and chemicals and glassware consistent with methamphetamine production, Oatman Fire Lt. Rick Armstrong said.

Kingman resident John Gohn, 65, who lived next door to McVeigh for four months, told the Dallas Morning News Sunday that he recognized Colbern from photos shown on the news as a man who had been to McVeigh's home last June.

He said Colbern and another man who looked like Nichols were riding in a blue pickup truck with Michigan plates. Nichols owns a blue pickup, which has been impounded.

Officials on Saturday also arrested one of Colbern's roommates, Dennis K. Malzac, on a charge of arson in connection with a small bombing in February in Kingman that officials had investigated to see if McVeigh was involved.

In other developments:

Newsweek, citing unidentified sources, reported that McVeigh's lawyer, Stephen Jones, was considering filing a motion to halt demolition of the federal building until he can study the structure. Demolition crews are preparing to bring down the bombed wreckage with more explosives, possibly by the end of this week.

There was no answer at Jones' office Sunday afternoon, and he did not immediately return a message left on an answering machine at his home.

Nichols' new lawyer, Michael E. Tigar, said Sunday that he will meet with his client today. Tigar, a law professor at the University of Texas at Austin, has represented clients ranging from John Demjanjuk, accused of being Nazi death camp officer "Ivan the Terrible," to 1960s activist Angela Davis, to U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas.

Attorney General Janet Reno said on CBS' "60 Minutes" Sunday that she would not have approved the raid on the Branch Davidian cult in Waco, Texas, two years ago if she had known it would end with more than 80 deaths.

"Obviously, I saw what happened and knowing what happened, I would not do it again," she said, adding "We are not going to do it again. Our whole purpose was to save human lives."

Ms. Reno said she approved the FBI's plan to fire tear gas into the Branch Davidian compound because she felt there was no other way to end the 51-day siege. But cult members refused to surrender and set the compound on fire.

The standoff began after four agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and five cult members were killed in a gun battle on Feb. 28, 1993.

The April 19 bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma City came on the second anniversary of the Waco assault, and officials believe it may have been an act of revenge.

Several members of Congress have called for a new investigation into what happened in Waco.

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