

Arizonan Possibly Tied to McVeigh Faces Trial on Unrelated Charges

Dallas Morning News

May 17, 1995 | Stephen Power | Page: 18A | Section: NEWS

PHOENIX - An Arizona man possibly linked to Oklahoma City bombing suspect Timothy McVeigh will stand trial in federal court on unrelated firearms charges but has not been charged in the deadly blast.

Steven Garrett Colbern, 35, of Oatman, Ariz., was ordered Tuesday to stand trial on charges that he fled from justice last year on an outstanding weapons charge in California and resisted arrest when federal marshals took him into custody Friday in Oatman.

Officials have said that Mr. Colbern told investigators that he knew Mr. McVeigh by an alias, but refused to answer further questions.

On Tuesday, U.S. Magistrate Morton Sitver ordered Mr. Colbern held without bail.

U.S. Attorney Janet Napolitano, who attended the hearing, declined to comment on any connection between Mr. Colbern's arrest and the Oklahoma City bombing.

Mr. Colbern's court-appointed attorneys, Jon M. Sands and John Hannah of Phoenix, declined to comment on any connection between their client and Mr. McVeigh. They also refused to say whether investigators have questioned Mr. Colbern about the April 19 bombing.

"The evidence (in court) was all about the local charges. . ." Mr. Hannah told reporters after Tuesday's hearing. "These allegations have nothing to do with the tragedy that took place in Oklahoma City."

Mr. Colbern, a chemist originally from Oxnard, Calif., had been working at an Oatman restaurant until his arrest Friday on firearms charges dating from October 1994.

Three federal marshals arrested him after a brief struggle.

Throughout the hearing, Mr. Colbern sat upright with a straight face. There was a large, purple cut on Mr. Colbern's left elbow, but no tattoo like the one seen by eyewitnesses described on John Doe No. 2, a mystery suspect who accompanied Mr. McVeigh when he allegedly rented a truck to carry the homemade bomb that destroyed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building.

As the search continues for John Doe No. 2, one official said Tuesday there are at least 150 leads to be checked. "They still aren't convinced 100 percent they really know who John Doe was," the official said.

Elsewhere in Arizona, Clark Vollmer, 41, sought on a warrant from a February bombing outside Kingman, turned up at Kingman Regional Medical Center, according to The Associated Press.

Mr. Vollmer checked in Monday night for treatment of an ulcer, said hospital spokeswoman Carla Malvick.

There has been speculation the Feb. 21 blast, which blew several windows out of a house, was related to the Oklahoma City bombing. Mohave County officials say they've found no link.

Investigators also are trying to determine whether gun show sales were the source of money that Mr. McVeigh and the man accused of being his accomplice, Terry Nichols, used to fund the Oklahoma City attack.

"It appears that he may have made a lot of money going from gun show to gun show, selling things," one official said, adding that investigators are also checking the possibility of insurance scams involving stolen guns.

Still under scrutiny is the appearance of two men at the Omaha federal building about a week before the Oklahoma City blast, an official said. The two men, whom witnesses have been unable to pick from photographs, "walked in and were asking questions about the ATF office," an official said.

Authorities have said they think that the Oklahoma City attack was considered revenge for the actions of the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and the FBI during the 1993 Branch Davidian siege near Waco.

Also Tuesday, an attorney for James Nichols - the brother of Terry Nichols, held on explosives charges unrelated to the Oklahoma blast - sought his release from a Michigan prison by arguing that the government has failed to implicate his client in the explosion conspiracy.

"There was/is no legal connection between incidents in Oklahoma and James Nichols," said an appeal filed by defense lawyer Robert R. Elsey.

The government's response did not mention any specific Oklahoma City connection but described Mr. Nichols as a potentially dangerous person who might try to skip the state.

Privately, federal officials said they are looking into possible evidence that James Nichols helped organize and finance the bombing.

Staff writers Lee Hancock and David Jackson in Washington contributed to this report.