

Witnesses Say Fugitive is Not Nichols's Son - FBI Widening Hunt for Bomb Conspirators, John Doe Still Elusive

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Three persons who helped the FBI create a sketch of Oklahoma City bombing fugitive John Doe No. 2 said Tuesday that he was not the husky 12-year-old son of suspect Terry Nichols, as speculated last week.

The FBI, meanwhile, apparently has widened its search for conspirators. An FBI agent Tuesday showed a Kansas convenience store clerk snapshots of six persons, five in military uniform, who are of interest in the investigation.

The search for John Doe 2 continues to frustrate investigators, who have apprehended and released numerous look-alikes. The man was seen in Kansas with bombing suspect Timothy McVeigh in the days before the April 19 destruction of the federal building in Oklahoma City.

Josh Nichols, big for his age, visited his father in Herington, Kan., for a few days before the blast and has been questioned by authorities. Terry Nichols and McVeigh are close friends.

Although he was not considered to be implicated in the bombing itself, law enforcement sources told reporters late last week they were investigating whether Josh could be the mystery man seen with McVeigh.

Three Junction City persons who gave the FBI descriptions of John Doe 2 discounted suggestions that he is the Nichols boy, who lives in Las Vegas with his mother.

"I really don't think so," said Kathy Henderson, who said that on April 18 McVeigh and John Doe 2 visited her Junction City hair style salon, Gracie and Co. "You can tell a 12-year-old, even if he is husky."

Employees at the Texaco Food Mart and Quick Kash store in Junction City also said the man they described to the FBI three weeks ago did not resemble Josh Nichols.

"He was over 21, that's for sure," said Sylvia Niemczyk, a clerk at the food mart. The employee of Quick Kash, who did not want her name used, agreed.

John Doe 2 is described as being in his 20s or 30s, muscular, tan, known to wear a hat with a zigzag design and to have a tattoo on his arm. He reportedly was present when McVeigh rented a Ryder truck April 17 in Junction City. The truck was destroyed in the blast.

An employee at Elliott's Body Shop, where the truck was rented, would not comment when asked Tuesday whether it could have been Josh Nichols with McVeigh.

A law enforcement official in Washington told the Associated Press last week that Josh Nichols was visiting his father for a week, up until a day or two before the bombing April 19.

Walt Lamar, special agent for the FBI in Oklahoma City, would not say Tuesday whether Josh Nichols is or ever was considered a possible John Doe 2.

But Niemczyk said agents told her they had discounted that possibility.

"They've blown off the theory that it was the son," Niemczyk said.

Niemczyk said FBI agents had been regular visitors to the Texaco store where she works, but for the first time Tuesday showed her pictures of persons other than McVeigh or John Doe 2. An agent showed her six snapshots.

"They were all kind of together on one strip," Niemczyk said.

"He asked if any of the faces looked familiar. I didn't recognize them."

Of the six persons, five were of young men in military uniforms, she said. Junction City is near the Fort Riley Army post where McVeigh and Nichols were once assigned.

Investigators are trying to identify anyone associated with McVeigh. They have said several persons probably conspired to make and transport the 4,800-pound bomb, which was made of fertilizer and fuel oil.

Lamar said he could not confirm that the FBI was beginning to ask about sightings of persons other than Nichols and John Doe 2.

Terry Nichols and McVeigh are the only persons charged in the explosion, which killed 168.

Nichols was charged in Oklahoma on Thursday after agents reported finding bomb-making materials at his Herington home, along with evidence he rented storage lockers for fertilizer and had close ties to McVeigh.

Nichols has denied involvement in the bombing, which occurred at 9:02 a.m. Evidently, he was in Herington, about 260 miles from Oklahoma City, late that afternoon.

Nichols' next-door neighbor, Etta Mae Hartke, said he borrowed a ladder from her to fix an attic fan.

"It was toward evening," Hartke said. Nichols didn't seem nervous or upset, she said. Hartke did not notice whether Nichols was home earlier in the day.

Two days later, Nichols turned himself into the Herington Police Department after hearing that the FBI was looking for him.

Caption: Photo