

McVeigh Recruiting Note Alleged - Judge Approves Delay in Building Demolition

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Oklahoma bombing suspect Timothy McVeigh wrote a recruitment letter seeking "fighters not talkers" and citing the high-profile 1992 federal confrontation with Idaho separatist Randy Weaver, said federal officials close to the case.

The letter, addressed only to "S.C.," is part of Mr. McVeigh's apparent obsession over government confrontations and actions against anti-government groups, white supremacists and the Branch Davidian sect near Waco, the officials said Wednesday.

Authorities believe that the letter might have been addressed to Steve Colbern, a 35-year-old California man arrested last week in an Arizona desert town on unrelated weapons charges.

In Oklahoma City, an attorney for Mr. McVeigh on Wednesday obtained up to a week's delay in the demolition of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, site of the April 19 blast. The added time will allow defense investigators inside.

U.S. Magistrate Ronald Howland granted a motion by attorney Steven Jones after prosecutors agreed to the delay.

The defense says it can probably finish its work in the building by Sunday, and officials at the site said they could complete demolition by Tuesday.

Mr. McVeigh's lawyers are waiting for approval from U.S. District Judge David Russell to hire experts. He must approve such expenditures over \$300 from court-appointed defense lawyers.

Judge Russell was out of town Wednesday, his staff said. The judge has already approved the hiring of two Oklahoma-based private investigators for Mr. McVeigh.

Mr. Jones played down the significance of a report in The New York Times in which two sources were quoted as saying Mr. McVeigh told them that he accepted responsibility for the blast. The explosion claimed 166 lives - a total that authorities reduced by one after authorities completed forensic tests on previously unidentified partial remains.

Mr. Jones said there are at least 40 people who have had passing or prolonged contact with Mr. McVeigh since his arrest, and he could not guess which, if any, the report was quoting.

"That's an endless game," he said.

Unless the statements show up in FBI reports, Mr. Jones said, he has no way to judge their credibility and won't worry about them.

Although Mr. Jones would not discuss his conversations with Mr. McVeigh, he said he routinely instructs clients not to talk about their cases to anybody except their attorneys.

He said Mr. McVeigh is allowed visits from family, and his telephone calls are almost certainly screened. Additionally, he is monitored on a remote closed-circuit television by federal agents in Washington.

Officials in Washington said Mr. McVeigh has not said anything to federal agents.

"I just know it's not coming from the feds or from the institution at El Reno," Okla., where Mr. McVeigh is incarcerated, a federal official said of Mr. McVeigh's reported acknowledgment of responsibility.

"As far as I know, he has not - and he's not having one word with other prisoners," the official said.

Authorities said they continue to hope for assistance from the other identified suspect, Terry Nichols, hoping the prospect of a death sentence will persuade him to cooperate.

They also said agents are talking to Mr. McVeigh's sister, Jennifer, believing she may have known of plans for the bombing. They have similar feelings about James Nichols, who's now in a Michigan prison on firearms charges.

The remainder of the defense teams began to take shape Wednesday, with the appointment of a second lawyer for Mr. McVeigh, and the pending approval of a second lawyer for Mr. Nichols.

Rob Nigh, the chief federal public defender in Lincoln, Neb., was approved as the second attorney for Mr. McVeigh, said Mr. Jones.

Mr. Jones said he expects at least one more lawyer to be appointed.

Ron Woods, a former FBI agent who was U.S. attorney in Houston from 1990 to 1993, confirmed that he is awaiting final approval of his appointment to represent Mr. Nichols, along with University of Texas law professor Michael Tigar.

Mr. Tigar failed Wednesday to have all Oklahoma--city based prosecutors and Judge Howland removed from the case. Without comment, Judge Howland

rejected Mr. Tigar's arguments that the prosecutors have a personal stake and the judge has first-hand knowledge of the explosion that should disqualify him.

Mr. Nichols' ex-wife, Lana Padilla, arrived in Oklahoma City, wearing a blue bomb-memorial ribbon as she got off a flight from her home in Las Vegas. A family spokesman said Mrs. Padilla is expected to testify before a grand jury this week. The panel is considering indictments in the bombing case.

Josh Nichols, Mrs. Padilla's and Mr. Nichols' 12-year-old son, was not on the flight, but a source close to the investigation said that a duffel bag she carried contained the clothes her son wore during a visit to his father in Kansas a week before the blast.

Last week, Josh Nichols accompanied his mother to Oklahoma City after investigators raised the possibility that he was John Doe No. 2, a man spotted with Mr. McVeigh at the Kansas rental agency where the truck used in the bombing as leased.

Mrs. Padilla, her lawyer and an FBI agent from Las Vegas were led to a car on the tarmac and avoided contact with reporters.

In Arizona, Mr. Colbern has told federal investigators that he knew Mr. McVeigh - but only by an alias.

Federal officials familiar with the "S.C" letter said it was left on a telephone pole in the desert some distance from Kingman, Ariz., in November 1994, a month after authorities believe that Mr. McVeigh and Mr. Nichols - and possibly others - began amassing materials used in the 4,800-pound Oklahoma City bomb.

"It looks like it was just a drop, left on a telephone pole," an official said.

The letter, signed "Tim McVeigh," was bound in double plastic bags and was recovered by federal investigators in Kingman, officials said. The officials declined to elaborate on how or when it was recovered.

It is not the only letter recovered by authorities that makes reference to the Randy Weaver case, a Ruby Ridge, Idaho, standoff. It began in August 1992 when U.S. marshals searching for Mr. Weaver, a white supremacist, on federal weapons violations got into a shootout with Mr. Weaver, a second man, Kevin Harris, and Mr. Weaver's son.

One marshal was killed, along with Mr. Weaver's 14-year-old son. In an ensuing standoff, an FBI sniper shooting at Mr. Harris as he ran toward the Weaver cabin killed Mr. Weaver's wife, Vicki. The incident has become a major rallying point for many militias and right-wing, anti-government groups.

Authorities disclosed that a second letter written by Mr. McVeigh refers directly to the FBI sniper, stating that "what goes around comes around," an official said.

The official declined to identify that letter's recipient.

The Weaver standoff occurred six months before the Branch Davidian siege near Waco, a tragedy that authorities believe motivated the Oklahoma City attack.

Authorities are continuing to explore Mr. McVeigh's possible ties to anti-government extremist groups, including the Arizona Patriots, authorities said.

In Phoenix, a federal grand jury returned a multi-count indictment Wednesday charging two members of the Arizona Patriots with the manufacture and sale of illegal explosives.

Kenneth Zesk and Danny Fite of Snowflake, Ariz., were arrested Monday and charged with manufacturing and selling 26 home-made grenades, detonator cord and blasting caps to informants and undercover agents of the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, according to a federal complaint filed Monday in Phoenix.

Officials said the two sold grenades to undercover investigators as recently as April 19.

During the investigation, Mr. Zesk told the informant that the Patriots had a militia organized in a number of states, with a "communications network" that could mount an armed confrontation if any of their members or sympathizers were arrested, the complaint stated.

The two men remain jailed and are scheduled to appear for a detention hearing Thursday.

Officials said the case, which began in December, is probably unrelated to the Oklahoma City investigation. But officials said they plan to compare the home-made grenades sold by the two men with similar devices used in a string of unsolved bank robberies across the Midwest.

During an April 5 meeting with undercover agents, Mr. Zesk showed them detonator cord and electric blasting caps, describing how he used them with ammonium nitrate to make bombs, officials said.

Ammonium nitrate was a key component in the Oklahoma City bomb.

Investigators have been trying to determine whether Mr. McVeigh and bombing suspect Terry Nichols could have participated in the bank robberies because they involved two white men armed with explosives, including grenades.

Staff writer David Jackson in Washington, D.C., contributed to this report.

Caption:

PHOTO(S): 1. Steven Jones. 2. Rob Nigh . . . is approved as the second attorney for bombing suspect Timothy McVeigh.

; PHOTO LOCATION: 1. Disk 68a / Jones 051895. 2. Disk 68a / Nigh 051895.