

# **Bomb Witness Tells of Plan; Friend Says McVeigh Scouted Blast Target**

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A Kingman, Ariz., man has told federal prosecutors he drove to Oklahoma City in April with his Army buddy, Timothy James McVeigh, who said he planned to blow up the federal building there, senior law enforcement officials said last night.

Michael Fortier, 27, late yesterday afternoon told prosecutors that before the April 19 bombing he and McVeigh drove to the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, apparently to size up the nine-story structure where several hundred federal employees worked. During the trip, Fortier told authorities, McVeigh confided he was going to detonate a bomb. "He said something to the effect that McVeigh said, 'I'm going to blow it up,'" a senior law enforcement official said last night.

Fortier's alleged remarks could significantly bolster the government's case against McVeigh, who along with another Army buddy, Terry Lynn Nichols, is a suspect in the bombing. Fortier made the statements after a series of discussions with federal prosecutors and appearances before a federal grand jury. It was unclear last night whether Fortier's remarks were part of a deal with federal authorities. One source said that while authorities were elated to obtain Fortier's comments, they now must intensify their investigation of him to determine whether he played a direct role in the bombing. "We don't want to let him off easy if he turns out to be a mastermind," the official said.

Fortier is one of a number of McVeigh's friends, relatives and associates who have come under intense scrutiny by FBI and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agents in the wake of the deadliest terrorist assault in U.S. history, which killed 167 people, including 19 children.

Jennifer McVeigh, the suspect's sister, has been interviewed repeatedly by federal authorities and recently has been asked to take a polygraph test. Authorities have obtained correspondence from McVeigh to his sister in which he warned her that federal agents might be monitoring his telephone conversations with her.

Kingman, where Timothy McVeigh lived in the months immediately preceding the bombing, has been a primary site of the federal investigation as authorities attempt to piece together McVeigh's life and learn who his friends and associates were. By investigating essentially everyone known to have associated with McVeigh in at least the last year, authorities hope to find additional conspirators or additional evidence that would further implicate McVeigh.

Investigators have obtained phone records for McVeigh and others, including Nichols, the Herington, Kan., man who also has been charged in the bombing, in an effort to obtain additional evidence. More than 66,000 phone calls are being dissected, senior law enforcement officials said yesterday.

Both Nichols and Fortier are former Army buddies of McVeigh; all served at Fort Riley, Kan. Since the bombing, federal agents have focused their attention on the Fort Riley area, interviewing former and current military officials who knew McVeigh and Nichols. The agents also have scoured the highway corridors between the fort, Junction City, Kan., where the rental truck used in the bombing was obtained, and the final destination of the bomb, Fifth Street and Robinson Avenue in Oklahoma City.

Agents have canvassed virtually the entire city of Kingman in a search for associates of McVeigh who were interested in the militia movement and who espoused anti-government sentiment. They sifted through Fortier's belongings at his mobile home, from which they removed boxes of items after a five-hour search on May 1, and a storage shed, where they found household items during a 20-minute search two days later.

McVeigh and Fortier were described as best friends by Fortier's mother, Irene, who said McVeigh was best man at her son's wedding.

But if Fortier had an inkling that McVeigh was plotting the Oklahoma City bombing, he did not reveal it when he was interviewed by CNN on May 8. In the interview, Fortier said, "I do not believe Tim blew up any building in Oklahoma. There's nothing for me to look back on and say, 'Yeah, that might have been. I should have seen it back then.' There's nothing like that."