

FBI Report Says James Nichols Targeted Building

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More than six years ago, Michigan farmer James Nichols singled out the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building as a tempting bomb target, according to an FBI affidavit unsealed in response to a newspaper lawsuit.

An informant says he "drew . . . a diagram of the building . . . similar to the construction of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City" and then showed the informant a newspaper clipping that mentioned the Murrah Building, the affidavit said.

Mr. Nichols denied the allegation.

"I didn't even know there was a federal building out there," he told CNN. "I never, I think I've been to Oklahoma once in my whole life, and that was 20 years ago. No, there's no validity to that whatsoever," he said.

Mr. Nichols' brother, Terry, and friend Timothy McVeigh are charged in the April 19 bombing that killed 168 people. James Nichols is charged with unrelated explosives violations on his farm near Decker, Mich., but has not been charged in the Oklahoma City case.

Also on Tuesday, the FBI said it is seeking public help in locating a trailer that might have been used to carry materials for the bombing.

The May 3 affidavit, by FBI Agent Arthur Radford Baker, was among 100 documents unsealed Monday in Detroit as a result of a lawsuit by The Detroit Free Press and The Detroit News.

The affidavit identifies the informant only as a "cooperating individual" who visited James Nichols' house several times between August 1987 and May 1990.

The informant told FBI agents that James Nichols singled out the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building on Dec. 22 or Dec. 23, 1988, shortly after the bombing of Pan American Airways Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland.

James Nichols attributed the Pan Am bombing to the U.S. government and said a "small bomb could cause such a disaster." He also said a "megabomb" could be built to level a building and made reference to a federal building in Oklahoma City, the affidavit said.

The affidavit also suggests that a rifle found at James Nichols' residence, an SKS 7.62 .39-caliber, may have been among several stolen in the November 1994 robbery of an Arkansas residence.

The Arkansas robbery victim included such a rifle on his list of stolen items, although he did not have a complete list of serial numbers, the affidavit said. Also stolen was a safe deposit box key recovered during recent searches of Terry Nichols' residence, the affidavit said.

"The owner (of the rifle) believes that Tim McVeigh may have been involved in the robbery, in that he had visited the owner on several occasions and was familiar with the gun collection," the affidavit said.

Among items seized during the FBI search of James Nichols' farm was a note addressed to James and apparently written by Terry saying "enclosed are 2 SKS 30 round magazines so you can try out your SKS."

Also Tuesday, FBI investigators in Kansas issued a plea for public help in finding a red trailer possibly used last fall to haul materials for the Oklahoma City bombing.

Investigators already have tracked a series of purchases of ammonium nitrate, a key ingredient in the fuel-oil-and-fertilizer bomb, to several farmers' cooperatives in Central Kansas beginning in late September 1994.

A receipt for the purchase of a ton of the fertilizer was found in the Herington, Kan., home of Terry Nichols, and it bore a fingerprint of Mr. McVeigh. Authorities also have said they have evidence that Mr. Nichols began renting storage sheds under fake names - possibly to store the bomb materials - in the same area soon after the fertilizer purchases began.

Jeff Lanza, an FBI spokesman in Kansas City, said the two-wheeled trailer being sought was believed to have been constructed from the bed of a red pickup truck and may have had large white letters on its tailgate.

He said it was unclear whether the letters spelled out the name of a business or the model of truck that the bed came from. He also declined to say how authorities learned of the trailer. "They're asking me not to get into it right now," he said.

In two news conferences in Wichita and Topeka, Kan., FBI investigators also said they were searching for the source of 55-gallon barrels made of blue or white plastic that may have been used in the bombing, Mr. Lanza said.

"Investigators want information from anyone who may have lost, had stolen or given away a quantity of blue or white barrels sometime between September 1994 and the bombing," he said, adding that federal agents were not specifying how many barrels might be involved.

In a search of Mr. Nichols' home, authorities found white 55-gallon plastic barrels with blue lids. Authorities said they believed similar barrels were used to hold the 4,800-pound bomb because they were made out of plastic identical to shards of plastic found at the bomb scene.

Mr. Lanza said FBI officials were taking information at a toll-free number, 800-FBI-OKLA or 800-324-6552.