

Brains Behind Oklahoma Blast Still at Large, Authorities Believe

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OKLAHOMA CITY -- Investigators in the Oklahoma bombing believe the mastermind of the attack is still out there, a federal law enforcement source said Tuesday.

Timothy McVeigh, 27, and Terry Nichols, 40, are the only ones charged in the April 19 attack that killed 168 people. They are being held without bail under a federal anti-terrorism law that could bring the death penalty.

"There's somebody still out there," a source told The Associated Press. "Somebody had to point (McVeigh) at a target and tell him what to do. The guy isn't capable of doing it by himself."

The source cited McVeigh's failure to "look at the back of his own car."

Less than 90 minutes after the bombing, McVeigh was pulled over by an Oklahoma trooper for not having a license plate on his car.

Terry Nichols' brother James was arrested in Michigan as a material witness two days after the bombing. He was indicted on an unrelated explosives charge and released on bail a month later.

James Nichols, 41, is the "sharper of the two brothers and a lot more hard-core in his beliefs," the source said. Authorities have said McVeigh and the Nichols brothers share a hatred of the government.

Nearly seven years ago, James Nichols talked about blowing up the federal building with a "megabomb" and drew a diagram of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, according to an FBI informant in court papers.

The affidavit was among more than 100 pages of documents released this week in response to a lawsuit filed by the Detroit Free Press and the Detroit News.

Authorities have not re-arrested James Nichols because they want to concentrate on building their cases against McVeigh and Terry Nichols, the source said.

The Los Angeles Times reported Tuesday that federal authorities believe they have identified the "John Doe No. 2" in the bombing case -- but he probably had nothing to do with the attack. Investigators questioned the man several days ago. But rather than finding a leading accomplice, sources say, they apparently have an innocent man who happened to be at a Kansas truck rental firm at the same time as McVeigh.

Also on Tuesday, FBI agents in Kansas sought help in the search for a red homemade trailer.

Federal sources believe that the trailer was used to make ammonium nitrate purchases on Sept. 30 and Oct. 18 in McPherson, Kan. Ammonium nitrate is the type of fertilizer used to make the 4,800-pound bomb.

And a major fertilizer and explosives company, Dallas-based ICI Explosives USA Inc., said Tuesday tests show that no known additive can make ammonium nitrate safe from being made into a bomb such as the one in Oklahoma City.

In a related development, the largest ammunition seizure in U.S. history ended in embarrassment Tuesday as federal authorities in California said they would return all 75 million rounds at taxpayer expense.

The May 3 seizure at the Eagle Exim Inc. warehouse in Santa Clara came shortly after the Oklahoma bombing, and authorities hinted then that the ammo might have been bound for militia groups. But no one has been arrested

Caption:

Photo: A two-wheel trailer

Associated Press