

## **Investigators Identify, Clear John Doe No. 2**

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WASHINGTON - Oklahoma City bombing investigators now believe an innocent bystander at a truck rental agency is the so-called John Doe No. 2 but are still searching for an accomplice to bombing suspect Timothy McVeigh, federal officials said Wednesday.

"We're still looking for a second man," an official confirmed.

The Department of Justice issued a terse statement saying "an individual" - identified by sources as Todd Bunting, a soldier from Fort Riley, Kan. - "resembles the sketch" of the man known worldwide as John Doe No. 2.

Witnesses at the rental agency said such a man was with Mr. McVeigh when he rented the truck used to blow up the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building on April 19, killing 168 people.

A federal official, insisting on anonymity, said the government believes Pvt. Bunting, 23, is the man depicted in the sketch. He was cleared of any involvement in the bombing after interviews with the FBI.

The official blamed the misidentification on confusion by witnesses and agents in the early, hectic days of the investigation.

The Justice Department statement said only that the FBI "has determined that the individual who has been interviewed was not connected with the bombing. The FBI is continuing to investigate whether there was a second man who participated in the rental of the Ryder truck on April 17."

Officials noted that Pvt. Bunting was at the rental agency in Herington, Kan., on a different day but somehow became associated with Mr. McVeigh.

The announcement is the latest complication in the eight-week manhunt for John Doe No. 2, a search that has included at least eight tentative identifications and later retractions.

On May 20, the FBI denied a report in the Fort Worth

Star-Telegram that John Doe No. 2 had been identified as a person who rented a truck within a day or two of Mr. McVeigh and was eliminated as a suspect after questioning.

The Florence (S.C.) Morning News first reported questioning of Pvt. Bunting June 7.

Defense attorneys jumped on the mistaken identification of Pvt. Bunting as evidence of a sloppy investigation that unfairly ensnared their clients.

The same witnesses who helped develop the sketch of John Doe No. 2 identified Mr. McVeigh as the renter of the truck used in the bombing.

"It's telling that the person who started the chain of events is now determined to be mistaken as to an important perception about that other fellow," said Richard Burr, an attorney for Mr. McVeigh. "The government has moved quite hastily and sometimes when you do that, you make mistakes."

"The only time the truth is going to be determined is at the trial itself," he said.

Mr. McVeigh faces the death penalty if convicted of the bombing. So does Terry Nichols, the other man charged in the nation's worst terrorist attack.

But federal officials said questions about John Doe No. 2 will not shake their case against Mr. McVeigh, citing other evidence tying him to the the attack.

Investigators found Mr. McVeigh's fingerprints on the form used to rent the Ryder truck and matched his handwriting to the signature on the form, one official said.

Officials also noted that other witnesses have identified Mr. McVeigh as a man seen near the federal building just before the bombing.

Witnesses also described seeing Mr. McVeigh's yellow Mercury Marquis racing from the building. He was arrested less than 90 minutes after the attack, when a state trooper in Perry, Okla., stopped the Mercury for having no license plate.

Officials also cited tests revealing that Mr. McVeigh's clothes contained elements of explosives used to detonate the 4,800 fertilizer-and-fuel oil bomb.

"Periodically, you just get something in an investigation that goes nowhere," a federal official said. "John Doe No. 2 goes nowhere. It doesn't show up in associations, it doesn't show up in phone calls. It doesn't show up among the Army buddies of McVeigh. With McVeigh, on the other hand, there's a lot of corroboration."

But Mr. Burr contended that the questionable description of John Doe No. 2 calls into question the identification of Mr. McVeigh, at least partially.

"To the extent that it rests on that person's identification, indeed it does," said Mr. Burr, of Houston. "The government has said in preliminary hearing testimony that they have other eyewitness identification. Whether they're reliable is up for grabs."

The FBI affidavit used to obtain an arrest warrant against Mr. McVeigh on May 21 stated that a rental agent at the Ryder dealership, Elliott's Body Shop, told FBI agents that two people had rented the truck used in the bombing.

In an April 27 preliminary hearing, an FBI agent testified that the composite sketch dubbed John Doe No. 2 was a man who brought Mr. McVeigh to the dealership and stood in the office while Mr. McVeigh filled out paperwork for the truck rental.

Officials at Fort Riley confirmed that Pvt. Bunting had been stationed there since last September and was assigned to Company A, 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry as a fighting vehicle infantryman.

Base officials said Pvt. Bunting was away on personal business until late June, and they referred all other questions to the FBI.

In Timmonsville, S.C., relatives of Pvt. Bunting's wife, Denise, said the soldier arrived in his hometown Wednesday for the funeral of his wife's mother, who was killed in a car accident Monday. They declined further comment, and neither Pvt. nor Ms. Bunting could be reached.

Ms. Bunting told the Florence (S.C.) Morning News last week that agents had told her husband he was John Doe 2.

The newspaper said Pvt. Bunting is heavy set with dark hair and a tattoo on his upper left arm. The FBI have a similar description of John Doe No. 2.

Officials still believe at least one other person helped Mr. McVeigh ignite the bomb. Citing evidence that Mr. Nichols was home in Kansas at the time of the explosion, one official said it was hard to believe that Mr. McVeigh got the truck to the building, lit the fuse, and escaped without help.

Officials also noted that Mr. McVeigh was seen with at least one other man in the days before the bombing.

One witness, Jeff Davis, who delivered Chinese food to Mr. McVeigh's motel room in Junction City, later told the FBI about a large, clean-shaven young man.

"The only person I saw at the motel is someone who doesn't fit the description of either sketches," Mr. Davis said Wednesday. "He was maybe as old as 30 and didn't look like anyone involved so far."

In South Carolina, relatives of Pvt. Bunting said the family has been besieged by television crews at their rural homes. One relative said she has fielded calls from all three networks, major newspapers and "some TV stations that aren't even from around here. It's been chaos."

Sue Anderson of Layton-Perry funeral home in Timmonsville, S.C., a town of about 2,800, said she has been swamped with media calls because she is handing the funeral.

"It's a shame," she said. "For all this to be happening and for them to be bothered during a tragedy like this, it's terrible."

Staff writer Laura Griffin contributed to this report.

Caption:

PHOTO(S): (1.) Pvt. Todd Bunting is thought to be John Doe No. 2, shown at right in (2.) an FBI sketch. CHART(S): (DMN) The Search For John Doe No. 2. ; PHOTO LOCATION: 1. Disk 70a / Bunting 061595. 2. Digital.

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Transcriber's notes:

Eldon Elliott, Tom Kessinger, Vicki Beemer, and Fernando Ramos--all employees of Elliott's Body Shop--remember McVeigh coming to the rental shop with another person on April 17 1995.

The feds allege that two unrelated men who picked up a different truck on April 18 were confused by the witnesses.

The problem with the feds' theory is that owner Eldon Elliott, who inspected the truck with McVeigh and the other man present, was not at work on April 18. So Elliott has no memory of these other men with which to confuse with McVeigh and JD2.

Later news reports will recount that Elliott felt that interviewing FBI agents were hostile and pressuring him to change his story, saying "They wanted me to change my mind that there was a second person there. And I wouldn't change my mind."