

End to John Doe Search Leaves Some Questioning - Critics Say FBI Identified Wrong Man

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JUNCTION CITY, Kan. - Is the search for John Doe No. 2 really over?

Timothy McVeigh's attorney isn't so sure it is. Neither are some residents of Junction City, who insist a soldier from nearby Fort Riley isn't the man they thought resembled FBI sketches of the second Oklahoma City bombing suspect.

And even the Justice Department's announcement that Pvt. Todd D. Bunting was cleared of any involvement in the April 19 blast seemed to leave open the possibility that another lantern-jawed, dark-featured suspect may be out there.

"I think they're really hedging their bets," said Enid, Okla., attorney Stephen Jones, the lead counsel for Mr. McVeigh, accused by federal authorities of being the slender, crew-cut John Doe No. 1.

Ever since federal authorities released the sketches of two John Does the day after the bombing and even after Mr. McVeigh's arrest on traffic and weapons charges, John Doe sightings have been common and persistent.

From California to Ontario and Arizona to Missouri, authorities detained several men who - at least momentarily - were believed to be John Doe No. 2.

Nowhere, however, were there more John Doe No. 2 sightings than in this central Kansas town where Mr. McVeigh allegedly rented the Ryder truck used in the bombing. And nowhere does it seem more difficult for people to accept the Justice Department's explanation that John Doe No. 2 may be the result of a confused witness.

Employees at the truck rental agency described a man accompanying Mr. McVeigh, and the description was used to draw a composite of the man who came to be known as John Doe No. 2. This week federal officials confirmed the sketch depicted Pvt. Bunting, who visited the truck agency another day and had no involvement in the bombing.

Indeed, when Pvt. Bunting's photo appeared on television screens earlier this week, there was skepticism bordering on disbelief.

"I bet there's a third guy that looks like John Doe," said the night clerk at the Great Western Inn, where a man who resembled the sketch of John Doe No. 2 checked in April 17, driving a Ryder rental truck. "But it's not him (Pvt. Bunting) - that's for sure."

Like many in Junction City, the clerk declined to be identified, expressing concern for her safety. She and others said they believe more individuals must have been involved in the nation's worst terrorist attack.

But if there are accomplices, they remain unidentified and at large, fueling caution among those who work in the area frequented by Mr. McVeigh and second bombing suspect Terry Nichols.

As another clerk at a nearby motel put it, "Militants have guns, and guns hurt people."

While the Justice Department said it cleared Pvt. Bunting, it held out the possibility that someone else may have accompanied Mr. McVeigh into the shop April 17.

"I assume he looks like that composite," one federal official said, referring to all three versions of the sketch of John Doe No. 2. "There's been a lot of guys who resemble that composite."

Mr. Jones, the defense attorney, said confusion over John Doe No. 2 raises questions about other identifications in the case.

"If John Doe No. 2 is Bunting, how are they going to explain all these people who saw Doe No. 1 and Doe No. 2 in downtown Oklahoma City on Wednesday morning (the morning of the bombing)?" Mr. Jones said.

Meanwhile, Ramon Albina Irizarry, who owns a liquor store two miles from Fort Riley, said he told federal investigators that a man with a remarkable resemblance to the sketch of John Doe No. 2 appeared in his store on Good Friday, six days before the bombing.

He also said that Mr. McVeigh was in his shop at least three times in the two months before the bombing, but never with the man he thought was John Doe No. 2.

Shown a photograph of Pvt. Bunting, Mr. Irizarry said it did not appear to be the man whom he considered to be the John Doe No. 2 lookalike. He said Pvt. Bunting's face was too round to be the man who came into his store.

"This doesn't look like the sketch," Mr. Irizarry said when shown a photograph of Pvt. Bunting. "I've got my doubts, but they (federal agents) know more than I do."

He said the John Doe No. 2 lookalike was by himself when he purchased a 12-pack of Keystone Light beer about 9:30 a.m. on April 14. He also said Mr. McVeigh, who never purchased anything, was accompanied by others each time he entered the store.

He said Mr. McVeigh did not respond to his parting small talk: "I said, 'Have a nice day,' and he didn't reply back. That puts a question in my mind. He's either unfriendly or he doesn't want to be recognized."

What drew attention to the man who resembled the John Doe No. 2 sketch was that he paid with a \$50 bill, and Mr. Irizarry didn't have enough change in the register at that early hour.

Mr. Irizarry said the man he believed was John Doe No. 2 told him he was passing through town, staying in a local motel.

The man had dark skin, wore a ball cap pulled down on his forehead, and his hair was longer, flipped out in the back from underneath the hat, Mr. Irizarry said. The ball cap was similar to one that appeared in the FBI sketch of John Doe No. 2, with royal blue streaks on it.

"When they say John Doe No. 2 doesn't exist, I do not agree," Mr. Irizarry said. "When they showed me that sketch, it immediately brought someone to mind."

Meanwhile, a helicopter mechanic who lived for about two months in the Dreamland Motel, three doors down from Mr. McVeigh's room No. 25, said he saw a man who closely resembled the sketch of John Doe No. 2 visiting Mr. McVeigh's room.

Shane Boyd, working on a Lockheed Corp. contract at Fort Riley, told the television newsmagazine American Journal that the man had a narrower face than the composite sketch.

Mr. Boyd has since moved temporarily to another state and could not be reached for comment.

The night clerk at the Great Western Inn, about a mile west along Interstate 70 from the Dreamland Motel where Mr. McVeigh stayed, said she registered a man on April 17 who closely resembled the FBI sketch of John Doe No. 2.

The clerk said the guest, who stayed only one night, told her he was traveling from Colorado to somewhere in the South, possibly North Carolina or Georgia. She said she and the motel owners told the FBI what they had seen and heard, and federal agents took possession of the hotel's registration cards from 1993 through 1995.

Asked if the man resembled the photos of Pvt. Bunting, she said, "Heck, no. I never seen that guy until tonight."

Junction City doesn't have the corner on John Doe No. 2 sightings.

In the last week, an Oklahoma City television station, KFOR, reported that men resembling Mr. McVeigh and John Doe No. 2 had been seen in the days before the blast at several businesses along NW 10th Street, west of Pennsylvania Avenue and not far from the State Fairgrounds.

The station declined to identify the man, but described him as an Iraqi who once served in Saddam Hussein's army. It also reported that he worked for a northwest Oklahoma City business and that it had surveillance photos of him.

Another Oklahoma City television station, KWTW, this week reported that it had found and interviewed the John Doe No. 2 lookalike who had been the focus of KFOR's story. The man, a former political prisoner who fled Iraq for Oklahoma City last August, denied any involvement and said he feared for his safety after the report.

The man spoke to KWTW through an interpreter, who just happened to be Abraham Amhad, a Jordanian-American detained for questioning at London's Heathrow Airport in the frenzied first hours after the bombing.

In Oklahoma City's Muslim community, the television station reported, Mr. Amhad is now labeled "Scapegoat No. 1."

And the man considered a possible John Doe No. 2? He now is being called "Scapegoat No. 2."