

An Ordinary Boy's Extraordinary Rage; After a Long Search for Order, Timothy McVeigh Finally Found a World He Could Fit Into



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(PART ONE OF TWO)

In deeply disturbing ways, he is a prototype of his generation.

He lived the divorce revolution, age 10 when his parents split in 1978 for that increasingly familiar reason: They were just too different. He was an underachiever in high school, uninterested in college. He hit the job market in the mid-1980s as it ran out of room for young men with blue-collar skills. Aware of affirmative action for women and minorities, he began to feel shortchanged as a white male.

He worked dead-end jobs, voiced fears of going nowhere, tried a well-trod escape route -- the Army -- but bailed out as the military downsized with the fall of communism. Like millions in his generation, he ended up back home as an adult, a man sleeping in a boy's room, headed exactly where he'd feared: nowhere.

When he was charged with blowing up the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, everyone who knew Timothy James McVeigh in his formative years blamed this monumental madness on the Army, on Desert Storm, on places and people far from the wholesome community where he came of age with an American flag flying over his front yard. He was so indistinguishable from everyone else, they said. Even the problems in his life -- his parents' divorce, his alienated ennui as a young man -- were average.

No set of experiences would predict -- or explain -- an act as catastrophic as the Oklahoma bombing. Yet the roots of McVeigh's extremism are clearly traceable to his youth in pastoral western New York. By the time he was in junior high school, an early interest in guns had become an obsession; by high school, when he ran

track and sold fast food, he was arming himself to fight alone in an apocalyptic war; by age 20, he was making and exploding bombs and shooting guns on a wooded lot that he described to Army buddies as a survivalist bunker.

Americans were shocked to learn that the prime suspects in the Oklahoma City bombing were not foreign terrorists but men from the nation's heartland. The plot was not hatched in Beirut or Baghdad but possibly in the backwoods of northeast Michigan by a paramilitary cell that investigators allege McVeigh formed with accused conspirator Terry Lynn Nichols and Nichols's brother James.

Both Tim McVeigh and Terry Nichols are products of Middle America, and their lives raise troubling questions about the strength of the social fabric there. This two-part series of articles will explore their experiences against the backdrop of their times.

For the most part, any aberrations in Tim McVeigh's life were hidden under an exterior so bland as to be nondescript. Many acquaintances had to struggle to think of something -- anything -- to relate about him. His interest in firearms was known only to friends who also liked them; a good friend from the track team never even knew McVeigh owned a BB gun. In retrospect, merely appearing regular seems to have been a lifelong pursuit.

Even today, as the case against him grows ever tighter, a person who has seen and talked to McVeigh in prison near Oklahoma City saw in him a normalcy that rendered him "the scariest man in the world."

"There's nothing alarming about him -- nothing," this person said. "He's respectful of his elders, he's polite. When he expresses political views, for most of what he says, Rush Limbaugh is scarier. That's what's incredibly frightening. If he is what he appears to be, there must be other people out there like him. You look at him and you think: This isn't the end of something; this is the beginning of something."

Psychologists have warned for years that young people like McVeigh born in the late 1960s, whose families fractured in record numbers, whose economic frustrations far exceed those of their parents, are unusually alienated and vulnerable to fringe movements. In this view, the social and economic upheavals of the last 20 years have planted a virus in American society with still unrealized capacity for damage.

"A kid from the heart of America who feels the society has let him down can be very dangerous if he has underlying emotional quirks," said Charles Bahn, a forensic psychologist from John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York who studies the psyche of terrorists. "In urban America, gangs fill this void. In the Midwest, it's cults, the macho gun world, militias, belonging to fringe groups."

McVeigh's mother, Mildred Fraser, remarried and living in Florida, recently wrote of her son to the local Fort Pierce Tribune: "Sounds like he could be any of our children, right? People who live in glass houses should not throw stones. It could happen to your family just as it has to this one."

Growing Up: An Unexceptional Boy Who `Never Showed Any Troubled Side'

McVeigh's beginnings mirror so many millions of others in small-town America that the generic "John Doe No. 1" initially assigned him by the government seems as fitting as his own name. Almost from the start, there were two Timothy McVeighs: one the "boy next door," as his lawyer dubbed him, named Timmy; another germinating in a secret cocoon, the future John Doe No. 1.

He was raised in a conservative, almost exclusively white community, where changes arrived years after sweeping metropolitan centers. Long patches of farmland separated many houses in Pendleton, N.Y., near Buffalo. McVeigh's father, Bill, 55, worked the midnight shift then as now in the same auto plant where his own father had put in 30 years. Bill McVeigh raises money for civic causes, bowls, runs bingo night at the Catholic church, gardens and golfs. He is a registered Democrat and union man who on a recent afternoon sported a black nylon United Auto Workers windbreaker and baseball cap.

His staid style was a factor in the breakup of his marriage to Mildred "Mickey" McVeigh, who considered him "too domesticated," said an acquaintance of hers. "Bill's idea of a Friday night was to have a pizza, watch the ballgame and water his plants," the acquaintance said. Neighbors said Mickey McVeigh often went without her husband to bars, restaurants and clubs.

In 1978, as the hit movie "Kramer vs. Kramer" projected the public's anguish over the nation's rising divorce rate, Mickey McVeigh moved out. "Just like that," Bill McVeigh's friend Richard Pearce recalled. "There was no trial separation. She just packed her bags and left. I guess the kids took it pretty bad. It hurt Bill badly."

Tim, then 10, and sister Patty, 12, stayed with their father; 4-year-old Jennifer went with her mother to neighboring Lockport, but later also joined her father. Friends of Tim's do not recall seeing his mother after that except when she drove up wearing a business suit (she worked in a travel agency), stayed a few minutes and drove off.

The prevailing view in Pendleton was that Tim weathered the storm well. "People ask me, `Wasn't Tim crushed?' " said Father Paul Belzer, the family priest for 20 years. "But he didn't seem to be. He lived in the same house, had the same friends. Yeah, he'd have to miss his mother, but so many of the anchors were there."

The mother of one of Tim's best friends paid close attention to him, assuming he wanted to talk. "I just felt for him," she said. "His mother wasn't around. The

father worked nights. The kids were alone. But he never showed any troubled side to me. He never seemed to be affected by it. He was always smiling, always polite."

Neighborhood boys noticed differences between the McVeighs' home and theirs. Adults were rarely around. Tim never had birthday parties. His chief disciplinarian was his sister Patty, only two years his senior, who summoned his friends' mothers to reprimand the boys when they got out of hand.

Tim wanted to have the kind of home where friends congregated after school, like the Maurer brothers down the street, who always had a crowd around. So he made it happen. He built a skateboarding ramp in his driveway, invited everyone to shoot baskets in his hoop, created a haunted house in his basement and held weekend casino fairs, acting as dealer. He charged admission to the haunted house and won money from the casino -- "like a young entrepreneur, trying to make money on his own," recalled friend John Waugh.

"He was very advanced for our age," Keith Maurer said. "I remember saying to myself: I wouldn't have thought of that."

Only in retrospect would friends find it odd that Tim never mentioned his mother, almost from the day she left, although he spoke fondly of his father, who coached Little League, raised him as a Buffalo Bills fanatic and never raised his voice. "I thought his mother was dead or something," said Army roommate and friend William "Dave" Dilly.

In a region of hunting enthusiasts, it caused little stir when Tim, at 10, became interested in guns. But a close relative said that the family saw this as a bid for attention by a boy who didn't know how else to ask for it.

Bill McVeigh had little interest in hunting, having bought only one gun in his life -- a shotgun when he was 19. But he eventually bought his son a .22-caliber rifle, which Tim used for target shooting in the deep, uninhabited woods behind his home. He soon had a semiautomatic BB gun that could fire 15 rounds with the pull of a trigger; other boys had only single-shot varieties. Tim used to show them at school how he held it, posing police-style with hands clasped together. During boring classes, when other students doodled, he drew guns.

At 14, Tim confided that he was a survivalist, stockpiling food, camping equipment and weapons "in case of a nuclear attack or the communists took over the country," recalled a neighbor whose daughter was Tim's schoolmate. The neighbor said Tim had always talked patriotically of defending America. Perhaps it made sense that a young boy often forced to fend for himself would fantasize about fighting the world all alone. But, said the neighbor, "some people thought maybe the divorce put Tim over the deep end."

To outsiders, these impulses went unnoticed. At school, he always had friends. When neighborhood boys played hockey or other sports, Tim was always there, differentiated only by his skin-and-bones build and noticeable clumsiness. Teased often for his lack of coordination, he took taunts without sulking. "The next day, he'd always show up ready to play again," Maurer said. "I gave him a lot of credit."

Tim was unusually bright, but didn't show it in high school. Teachers expressed surprise when the quiet, unmotivated boy with the mop of blond hair won a state Regents scholarship his senior year for high scores on standardized tests. "He was a boy who did well in subjects he was interested in, passably in subjects he wasn't interested in," said Harold Smith, his guidance counselor.

Tim's high-school yearbook entry in 1986 listed no organized activities (he omitted the track team), rather: "staying away from school, losing sleep, finding it in school." Under future plans: "Take it as it comes, buy a Lamborghini, California girls." This last reference surprised schoolmates, who said McVeigh never had a girlfriend in high school and seemed uninterested in dating.

Smith said he was struck by the alienated tone of McVeigh's entry. The boy who celebrated "staying away from school" had not missed a day of classes from seventh through twelfth grade.

After High School: In and Out of Work, Increasingly Obsessed With Guns

McVeigh's teens coincided with the most traumatic economic times since the Depression. Buffalo's experience was typical of the Rust Belt. Major blue-collar employers -- steel and auto plants -- shut down or downsized dramatically. Two major banks failed, throwing thousands of white-collar workers out of jobs and causing downturns in real estate, advertising, law and other fields.

Closer to home, the Harrison Radiator plant, the biggest blue-collar employer in the area and Bill McVeigh's employer, halted hiring in 1979. The talk in plant workers' homes was filled with fear that the country had lost its way, foreign competition had destroyed the American Dream for their children and the federal government wasn't helping.

"There are no jobs around here unless you want to work for \$6 an hour or less at a McDonald's or Wendy's," Bill McVeigh said. "It's rough for anybody looking for work."

Race was becoming another theme for blue-collar resentment. "People said if you were a minority, you had a better chance of getting an apprenticeship {in skilled trades} than if you were a white male," said Richard Ludwig, a classmate of McVeigh's and son of a Harrison worker. "There was a lot of resentment of affirmative action."

With work options slim, more than 90 percent of McVeigh's classmates went to college, but not Regents scholar McVeigh. He took a couple of computer courses at a two-year business college in Buffalo, then quit, saying he was bored. A school spokeswoman said no teacher even remembered him.

He took a job driving an armored truck, delivering money to banks and businesses. He told a co-worker that the job bored him except for two requirements: He loved wearing a uniform and carrying a gun. The co-worker, who asked not to be named, viewed McVeigh as gun-obsessed. He said he once came to work wearing bandoliers laden with deer slugs, "looking like Pancho Villa." He owned a semiautomatic AR-15 rifle, handguns and a semiautomatic Desert Eagle so large he had trouble wrapping his bony hands around it.

McVeigh, who seemed bland in the extreme in high school, struck a co-worker as wild. McVeigh gave him rides home, tearing down side streets at 70 miles an hour. From the truck, the man said, McVeigh yelled at slower drivers and grabbed the butt of his shotgun, "like he was going to blow them away."

"Sometimes when I was driving, he'd put his face right next to mine and scream that the cars were going too slow, and then just keep his face there and stare at me," the co-worker said. "Other days he'd be all right. It was like sometimes he was on medication. I think maybe he was just starting to go crazy when I knew him."

The co-worker said McVeigh never talked politics except to complain, as he opened his paycheck, that the government took out too much money. He also observed in McVeigh both anger and indifference toward women. A woman once passed her phone number to the co-worker, seeking a date with McVeigh. "He looked at the piece of paper and just ripped it to pieces," the co-worker recalled.

McVeigh also worked briefly as a gun salesman in Lockport at a large sportsmen's shop with guns lining most walls.

In January 1988, McVeigh bought 10 acres of thickly wooded land southeast of Buffalo with a high-school friend, David Darlak. Darlak's mother said the boys wanted the land for hunting and an investment. McVeigh and Darlak paid for the land in monthly installments from their earnings on the \$7,000 price. A year later, in the Army, McVeigh told friends that the land was to be a survivalist bunker.

Charlie Morgan, who lived nearby, recalled that McVeigh and two friends spent five hours there one day in May 1988 shooting and setting off what sounded like large explosives that "rocked the entire valley for hours."

In the evenings after work, McVeigh would talk at home with his father and a fellow auto worker who often stopped by. Tim vented frustration, saying he felt he was going nowhere. He complained that he was unemployable except at jobs

that paid "no money," the friend recalled -- exactly the fate the two older men had feared for their children.

"Bill and I had both been in the service," the friend said, "and one night we said to Tim, 'That's what you ought to do: go in the service.' A week later, he had joined."

"It happened in a split second. I never saw a guy who wanted to go in the Army that bad," said McVeigh's fellow truck driver. "I asked him why the Army, and he said, 'You get to shoot.' He always wanted to carry an M-16."

"The people who have no options are always the ones who go into the military," a boyhood friend recalled. "Tim was so bright. He had lots of options. Nobody could understand it."

The Army: Shining as a Soldier While Preparing to Fight Alone

McVeigh leapt at the Army as if it were his only hope of shoehorning an increasingly strong passion for guns into a life that looked normal from the outside.

Dave Dilly, McVeigh's Army roommate, recalled meeting an extremely thin, underconfident 20-year-old at basic training at Fort Benning, Ga., in May 1988. McVeigh gravitated toward a soldier 13 years his senior, Terry Nichols from Michigan, who was similarly directionless but had an impressive air of experience because of his age. McVeigh and Nichols were "hard into guns," recalled Dilly. In long talks, they discovered both were survivalists who believed warnings in gun magazines that the government would take away their weapons.

McVeigh's love of guns and explosives stood out even in the Army, where gun lovers abound. In the first weeks of basic training, when soldiers learn to make explosives, recalled platoon mate Fritz Curnutte, McVeigh boasted to fellow soldiers that he already knew how to make a powerful bomb using a bottle, then told them how to make a Molotov cocktail.

The soldiers were sent together to Fort Riley, Kan., and assigned to Charlie Company of the 2nd Battalion, 16th Regiment of the First Infantry Division, famous as the Big Red One. If McVeigh's potential lay hidden in high school, it was lit up in lights at Riley. His entrance test scores reflected exceptional intelligence -- with particular skill in math, science, electronics and high-tech. He fired a rare perfect score in a Bradley Fighting Vehicle gunner competition. Always eager to please, he carefully starched the pleats into his uniform, spit-polished his shoes, won days off for immaculate appearance. He was always early, always up for guard duty no one else wanted.

"Any test, he'd ace it. He got the top score on everything," said Dilly. "He knew he was exactly what the Army wanted. It was going to be an easy life for him."

One of the first in his company to make sergeant, McVeigh was considered a rising star, but with one blind spot: race. Todd Regier, who served with him, said McVeigh was criticized for assigning undesirable work to black specialists. Other soldiers said he made derogatory remarks about blacks.

Dilly said McVeigh "picked the best man for the job," adding that his views on race were not unusual for whites in the unit. "If you're white," he said, recalling their conversations, "you can do better on a {fitness} test, show up on time every day, look perfect in your uniform, and if eight jobs are open, five will go to blacks no matter if they're overweight, barely pass the test, and their uniform is wrinkled." (A supervisor of the two men said: "Race was an issue, like everywhere in America, but not one that affected anyone's promotion.")

McVeigh was always flush with cash and became the barracks bank, lending money for a price. If a recruit ran out of cash, McVeigh would lend him \$75, for a payback of \$100 on payday. He drove soldiers for a fee to and from bars in nearby Junction City, but he rarely stayed, spurning alcohol and women. Instead, he read survivalist magazines and watched videos such as the 1983 Cold War fantasy "Red Dawn" -- he rented it four times -- about Midwestern high-school teenagers taking on the Soviet army.

By now McVeigh's preparations for disaster or communist attack had become obsessive. Dilly said McVeigh rented a storage locker in Junction City, stockpiling military meals ready to eat (MREs) saved from field maneuvers, weapons and a 100-gallon jug of water. He separated the MREs by vintage, often replacing old with fresh ones, Dilly said, selling spares to Army surplus stores for cash. He also freshened the water at regular intervals.

On weekends, he covertly hauled at least 20 guns in a duffel bag into the barracks -- breaking Army rules -- and cleaned them meticulously. Dilly once asked McVeigh what he did in his spare time. "Buy guns," came the answer. According to Dilly, McVeigh had rifles, assault weapons and semiautomatic pistols but no revolvers -- "he thought revolvers were too slow."

The guns were "all ready to go all the time," Dilly said. Ready for what? "I can remember him saying that when the crap hit the fan, he would be ready," said Troy A. Charles, a platoon mate. If soldiers scoffed at his preparations, they recalled, he said: "Just wait."

Fellow soldiers said McVeigh was extremely uncomfortable around women. He once showed Ayers Anderson a picture of a woman with whom his sister Jennifer wanted to set him up. "We encouraged him to follow up on it, but he seemed really awkward," Anderson said. "He just kept turning red."

Jennifer was the only female McVeigh mentioned fondly, other soldiers said. Family friends said Tim loved protecting her as a child, as if it filled an emotional

hole. Dilly said he used to call her often from Riley. "I remember him saying that he loved her so much," Curnutte said.

"There were things we never knew about him because he was so much to himself, and I wonder if there must've been an emptiness there," said Anderson. "He was always the perfect soldier, uniform always perfect, and yet here's this guy who I don't know if he ever had a date. One side is outstanding and another side so lacking. It makes me think the Army filled a lot of voids, and when he no longer had the Army, he had to fill the void with something."

If McVeigh thought the Army would shield him from the perils of the civilian economy, his outlook soon changed. When he enlisted, the Berlin Wall was standing tall and communism was entrenched in Eastern Europe. "Ronald Reagan was president and it all seemed real good," said Anderson. By the end of 1989, the Berlin Wall was in pieces, communism along with it, and the military was headed for a downsizing. Dilly said McVeigh decided then to try out for the Green Berets, a corner of the Army unaffected by cutbacks.

He trained compulsively for the punishing physical exam, doing 400 push-ups a day, 50 at a time with 30-minute rests, Dilly said. When others relaxed after drills, McVeigh loaded his rucksack with 80-pound sandbags and marched around the post -- a spectacle Curnutte saw as "so gung-ho it was wacky."

But his tryout, scheduled for November 1990, was put off; Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had invaded Kuwait, and McVeigh was training for war in the Persian Gulf.

As a Bradley gunner, McVeigh saw less action than he expected. He told Newsweek only one shot was fired the first day, and the targeted Iraqis then surrendered. His fellow soldiers remember him hitting an Iraqi tank more than 500 yards away with that shot. He also hit an Iraqi from 1,100 yards with a 25mm cannon, said Regier, recalling: "He said his head was there one minute and it was gone the next."

If some soldiers suffered emotionally, McVeigh took war in stride, several soldiers recalled. Dilly said McVeigh took photographs, many of dead Iraqis.

The Army showered McVeigh with war medals, including a Bronze Star and the coveted Combat Infantry Badge. He was called home soon after the cease-fire for his long-awaited Green Berets tryout, but Dilly said McVeigh had not been able to maintain his conditioning during the war, and feared he'd fail the physical test.

Two days into the tryout, he washed out. "I am not physically ready and the rucksack march hurt more than it should," he said in a handwritten letter released by the Army. There were no second chances.

When McVeigh returned to Riley, his spirit was broken. He also felt a letdown from the war's end and the departure of close friends for civilian life, according to Newsweek. Other soldiers taunted the sergeant who once could do no wrong, said Capt. Terry Guild, one of his supervisors.

"He always wanted to do better than everyone, and that {Green Berets} was his way of trying to do it," Guild said. "He took a lot of flak. He was really down on himself."

McVeigh expressed frustration with the Army and was vocal about his fear that government agents would try to seize his weapons, according to fellow soldiers. Still, Guild observed, his performance was excellent. A December 1991 Army evaluation released by McVeigh's lawyer, Stephen Jones, rated him "among the best" in leadership potential and an "inspiration to young soldiers."

At about that time, McVeigh called Dilly, who had left the Army to become a correctional officer, and said he too planned to leave. He seemed emotionally detached, said Dilly, explaining that he flunked the Special Forces tryout because of an injury. If he couldn't be a Green Beret, he told Dilly, he wouldn't rise quickly enough to make the Army worth the effort -- hardly the view of his Army evaluators.

"I thought he had wised up," Dilly said. "He said he thought he'd go back to New York and start selling guns. At that point, I'd have pegged him as somebody who'd end up being real rich."

After Discharge: Anti-Government Drifter Who Clung to Military Issue

A rail-thin, low-wage security guard patrolling the desolate grounds of a Buffalo defense contractor was hardly the way Dilly envisioned McVeigh's future. But that was where he landed after a Dec. 31, 1991, discharge. Outside the Army's rigid structure and expectations, outside a world organized around guns and uniforms, McVeigh was rudderless.

"I always thought he was the lost child looking for something solid, to be accepted," said Irene Fortier, mother of Michael, an Army friend of McVeigh's now under investigation as a possible conspirator in the bombing. "There was something about him that wanted normalcy so badly. Each time he came back and got a job I thought, 'Well, he finally settled down,' and then he was gone again."

He showed up in his hometown of Pendleton; in Decker, Mich., home of Terry Nichols; and in Kingman, Ariz., home of Fortier, each time telling people he was looking for a place to settle after the Army. But no matter how much time passed, or how far he traveled, he wore all or part of his Army uniform. The shirt around Pendleton. The military-issue underwear in Decker. The hat at the lumber yard at True Value hardware in Kingman. The full battle fatigues at his grandfather's

estate sale in Lockport last November. The pants when he rented a motel room days before the bombing.

In Decker, he told some people the Army had implanted a microchip in his buttocks so the government could spy on him. But he greeted Gary Blackwell, who served in the Army in the 1960s, with a salute, declaring: "Thank you for serving and making this a great country and place I could live."

"Not making the Special Forces was something that was very hard for him to deal with," said a law enforcement source. "In his mind, much of his life has been one of thinking that he is in a kind of Special Forces of his own."

Federal investigators believe McVeigh's violent anti-government views evolved gradually after the Army, not in a blaze of conversion.

He spent the first year back in Pendleton living with his father, working as a security guard. Anne Marie Fitzpatrick, a real estate agent, said he was "very dynamic" and had "a twinkle in his eye and a smile" when she helped sell his and Darlak's land. He needed the cash, he told her, because "My life is starting." That May, the security company that employed him promoted him to supervisor, according to records released by McVeigh's lawyer.

But co-workers at the Niagara Falls convention center, one of the sites his security company was responsible for, knew him as emotionally spent, veering from passivity to volcanic anger. A supervisor placed him at the back door to minimize contact with crowds after he exploded at a teenage girl while checking her identification. An old friend said he looked "like things were really weighing on him."

McVeigh resumed a close relationship with his sister Jennifer, then a high-school senior, who did not appear to share his political views. Wearing a glamorous cloud of hair and a double-wide smile in her class photo, she wrote in her yearbook under "favorites": "dancing . . . & passing out" and "i layed on the ice," the words "purr" and "meow" interspersed here and there. She was a waitress at the Crazy Horse Saloon, where she was a champion jello wrestler, fighting male patrons while wearing a bikini, ankle-deep in gelatin.

McVeigh by now was railing at virtually every aspect of American government, and at least beginning to consider a violent solution, as reflected in letters he wrote to the Lockport Union-Sun and Journal in February and March 1992. The first bewailed rising crime, "cataclysmic" taxes, politicians serving only themselves and the disappearance of the "American Dream . . . substituted with people struggling just to buy next week's groceries." Just as communism failed, he said, democracy "seems to be headed down the same road. No one is seeing the `big' picture . . . AMERICA IS IN DECLINE."

He closed: "Do we have to shed blood to reform the current system? I hope it doesn't come to that! But it might."

The second letter extolled the moral superiority of hunting one's own food rather than buying it. Animals raised for slaughter live and die in misery, McVeigh said; those shot by hunters live blissfully. "Would you rather die while living happily or die while living a miserable life?" he wrote.

McVeigh's father told a friend he disapproved of the letters and told his son so. "Bill felt that what you believe is your own business. Publishing it in the paper was something else," the friend said. "He thought that was one reason Timmy finally left; he wanted to be somewhere he could talk about what he really believed."

The Last Two Years: Fitting Right In With the Far-Right Militants

In the summer of 1992, McVeigh made his first extended visit to Terry Nichols at the northeast Michigan farm owned by Nichols's brother James. From early 1993 until shortly before the bombing, he moved between Kingman and northeast Michigan, two centers of burgeoning interest in paramilitary, anti-government organizations. In between working odd jobs, he hovered on the edges of the gun show circuit in Arizona and Nevada, using "Tim Tuttle" as his business name. He told Phil Morawski, a neighbor and friend of the Nichols brothers, that he needed an alias to protect himself from people at gun shows who disagreed with his political views.

He conducted much of his gun business by mail, and once advertised an anti-tank missile launcher in the far-right national newspaper the *Spotlight*, which has been criticized by Jewish groups as being antisemitic. He regularly visited gun shops, many of which had become distribution points for militia tracts.

If McVeigh needed provocation to turn to violence, he did not lack for it in this new world. The survivalist movement he had followed since his teens had shifted after the fall of communism from warning of Soviet-inspired disasters to inveighing against the federal government and gun control. The militia movement sprang to life as Bill Clinton campaigned for president on a platform of gun control, which militia leaders called a prelude to tyranny. The National Rifle Association, to which he belonged, became increasingly incendiary in its attacks, although McVeigh dropped out in 1994, saying the group was soft on defending assault weapons.

The August 1992 shootout between federal agents and survivalist Randy Weaver at his cabin in Idaho, in which Weaver's wife and son were killed, followed by the April 19, 1993, inferno near Waco, Tex., that consumed about 80 followers of David Koresh and the Branch Davidians, deeply radicalized many pro-gun forces.

As an NRA solicitation letter put it recently: "Not too long ago, it was unthinkable for federal agents wearing Nazi bucket helmets and black storm trooper uniforms to attack law-abiding citizens. Not today."

Federal investigators know from more than 20 letters McVeigh wrote to his sister Jennifer that he believed all this and more. In his mind, said a source, war had been declared. He was merely responding, a soldier defending his country from oppressors. He became fascinated by the significance of April 19, the date of both the Waco attack and the Battle of Lexington and Concord in 1775, which opened the American Revolution.

The 51-day Waco siege, covered nightly on television, further turned McVeigh against his government, according to a knowledgeable source. McVeigh traveled to Waco to witness part of the standoff, the source said. A co-worker said McVeigh also traveled to Ruby Ridge to perform his own inspection after the Weaver shootings, and returned certain that federal agents intentionally killed Weaver's wife and son.

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