

# **Eight Days in April; Tracing Suspects' Movements in Crucial Period**

The  
Washington  
Post

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July 3, 1995

In the United States v. Terry Lynn Nichols, eight days in April are crucial. Nichols spent them either engaging in the mundane details of a small-time businessman, devoted father and loyal friend - - or else helping put the final touches on plans for the bloodiest domestic terrorist attack in U.S. history.

While the case against alleged co-conspirator Timothy James McVeigh is relatively clear-cut, the evidence against Nichols is more ambiguous.

Investigators believe they can link Nichols to the purchase and storage of the kind of materials used to make the bomb, but they have had a harder time showing he helped mix the ingredients or dispatch the loaded Ryder truck to its target, the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. Michael Tigar, Nichols's lawyer, says his own detailed chronology of his client's activities will help prove Nichols's innocence.

This is the known sequence of events:

**FRIDAY, APRIL 14:** In the afternoon, Nichols, who has been living in Herington, Kan., for little more than a month, applies for a Kansas license plate for his 1987 dark blue GMC Sierra pickup truck with a white camper shell. His Michigan plates had expired the first of the month.

Meanwhile, McVeigh pulls into Junction City, Kan. -- 25 miles north of Terry Nichols's house -- at the wheel of the 1983 Pontiac station wagon he bought from Nichols's brother, James, in January. He swaps the Pontiac and \$250 cash at a local Firestone tire dealer for a yellow 1977 Mercury Marquis, then checks into the Dreamland Motel and pays \$88.95 cash for four nights.

Sometime that afternoon, someone using the name Bob Kling calls Elliott's Body Shop outside Junction City and reserves a large Ryder truck to be picked up the following Monday. The truck is to be used for four days and would be dropped off in Omaha, the caller says.

**SATURDAY, APRIL 15:** Nichols visits the Surplus Outlet outside Herington, offering to trade surplus Army shovels for roof shingles for his house. Store clerk Dale "Swede" Carlson calls his boss, Harry Herbel, who turns down the deal over the phone. Later, Nichols buys 14 gallons of diesel fuel in Manhattan, Kan., 50

miles away, where he also maintains a mail delivery box under the pseudonym "Joe Rivers."

McVeigh is seen at Nichols's house by a neighbor on either Friday or Saturday. Saturday evening, someone using the name Bob Kling orders a takeout Chinese dinner delivered to McVeigh's room at the Dreamland.

SUNDAY, APRIL 16: Nichols receives a phone call from McVeigh at around 3 p.m. from Oklahoma City saying the Marquis has broken down and asking for a ride back to Junction City. Although his 12-year-old son Josh is visiting for Easter week, Nichols agrees to drive 240 miles south to Oklahoma City but tells his wife he is going to Omaha. Nichols agrees to make the trip, Tigar has said, because McVeigh says he has a television set for Josh that he picked up weeks earlier from Nichols's ex-wife in Las Vegas.

Nichols picks up McVeigh, and drops him at the Dreamland early the next morning. During the ride back, according to Nichols, McVeigh says "something big is going to happen." When Nichols asks if McVeigh is planning to rob a bank, his friend merely repeats that "something big" is in the works.

MONDAY, APRIL 17: On Josh's last day in Herington, Nichols tries and fails to get the new television to work but succeeds in hooking it to a VCR. At 1 p.m. he and his son are seen at Catlin's IGA renting "The Lion King" and three other videos. Josh watches the videos that afternoon while Nichols works around the house. Later that afternoon, McVeigh picks up the Ryder truck at Elliott's Body Shop.

That evening, Nichols, his wife, Marife, daughter, Nicole, 2, and Josh go to the Sirloin Stockade in Junction City for dinner, after which Nichols drives the family 165 miles to the Kansas City airport for Josh's 10:45 p.m. return flight to Las Vegas. They return to Herington sometime after midnight.

Sometime during the day a phone call is made from McVeigh's room at the Dreamland to Nichols's house. Early that evening, a neighbor sees a Ryder truck parked at the rear of the house.

TUESDAY, APRIL 18: McVeigh leaves the Dreamland parking lot in the Ryder truck about 5 a.m. Two hours later he meets Nichols for breakfast at a local diner. Nichols's lawyer says McVeigh had arranged to borrow Nichols's pickup and agrees to drop Nichols off at a military surplus auction at nearby Fort Riley. But, according to the FBI, Nichols does not register at the auction until "after noontime."

Meanwhile, according to witnesses, a yellow Ryder truck and a dark pickup are seen parked for several hours at Geary State Fishing Lake between Junction City and Herington. FBI investigators later find deadened grass and traces of diesel fuel oil on the spot. They believe McVeigh and Nichols may have mixed the

ingredients of the bomb -- fuel oil and ammonium nitrate fertilizer -- at the site in 55- gallon barrels, which were then packed into the Ryder truck. Witnesses also report seeing the Ryder truck and the pickup backed up to shed #2 at a storage rental facility outside Herington. Nichols had rented the shed in September 1994 but had turned it over to McVeigh a month later, according to Nichols's lawyer.

Nichols says McVeigh returned the pickup at around 1 p.m. The two men are seen with a third, unidentified man having lunch at a Subway Sandwich Shop in Junction City. McVeigh tells Nichols to clean out the shed if he does not hear from McVeigh again.

At around 5 p.m., Nichols picks up his new Kansas license plate from a branch office of the county government. At 9:30 p.m., he calls his brother, James, in Decker, Mich. They speak for 13 minutes about "magnets for a water well," James Nichols says. Later that same evening, Terry Nichols also calls his ex-wife, Lana Padilla, in Las Vegas and makes plans for Josh to visit again during the summer.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 19: At 9:02 a.m., the Ryder truck explodes outside the Murrah building. Some 80 minutes later McVeigh is stopped on I-35 just north of Perry, Okla., about 60 miles north of Oklahoma City, for a traffic violation and arrested for carrying a concealed weapon. In the afternoon, a neighbor sees Nichols working on a screen door on his porch with a man in a red baseball cap. Around 6 p.m., he returns the videos to the IGA and rents several others. Nichols later says he did not know the bombing had taken place.

THURSDAY, APRIL 20: At around 8 a.m. Nichols phones Multimedia Cablevision in Herington, asking to have cable installed. He wants it hooked up that day but is told he will have to wait until Friday. Later he goes to the shed and cleans it out as per McVeigh's request, finding a rifle, sleeping bag and other items.

FRIDAY, APRIL 21: The cable is installed by Chad Albin, who says he left the television tuned to CNN and the bombing coverage. A neighbor later sees Nichols spreading ammonium nitrate fertilizer on his lawn. In Perry, FBI agents arrive around 11 a.m. to interview McVeigh and quickly discover he is using the Nichols farm in Decker as his driver's license home address. Checks in Michigan disclose Nichols's identity, and by noon FBI agents begin arriving in Herington. At around 2 p.m., Nichols hears his name broadcast over radio and television. Shortly after, he leaves the house and drives his pickup to the police station. When he gets there, he tells public safety director Dale Kuhn: "I'm Terry Nichols and my name's on TV. I want to know why."

Investigators searching the house later that day find a loaded Glock semiautomatic handgun under his mattress and another in a storage area, 31 other firearms and an antitank weapon. There are five 60-foot cords with nonelectric blasting caps, four white barrels with blue lids resembling the blue plastic fragments found at the bomb scene, a fuel meter, five gas cans and several

containers of ground-up ammonium nitrate, along with a large selection of books, pamphlets and brochures about tax protests, anti-government warfare and the Branch Davidian siege near Waco, Tex. They also find a safe deposit key stolen five months earlier from a gun collector in Arkansas, and a receipt for the purchase of 40 50-pound bags of ammonium nitrate that they later find has McVeigh's fingerprint on it.