

Grand Jury in Oklahoma City Hears Bombing Suspect's Sister

By JOHN KIFNER

The sister of the Oklahoma City bombing suspect Timothy J. McVeigh -- and perhaps his closest friend and confidante -- testified yesterday before the Federal grand jury investigating the blast, which demolished the Federal Building there and killed 167 people.

The woman, Jennifer McVeigh, appeared in the grand jury section of the Federal courthouse in Oklahoma City, within view of the bomb site, although most of the sessions are held in the tight security of nearby Tinker Air Force Base. Later, Federal law-enforcement officers escorted Ms. McVeigh through the airport for her flight home to Buffalo, enabling her to avoid reporters.

"She is not a target," her lawyer, Joel Daniels, told a jostling crowd of reporters and camera crews on Tuesday, when Ms. McVeigh arrived in Oklahoma City. She spent several hours on Tuesday in the offices of the United States Attorney, suggesting that she may have become a friendly witness for the prosecution.

Ms. McVeigh's close relationship with her older brother, which included the exchange of dozens of letters, has been examined by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the search for clues to how the bombing was carried out and to a possible motive for Mr. McVeigh. At one point, Federal investigators have said, Ms. McVeigh shipped several hundred rounds of military ammunition to her brother.

Prosecutors are particularly interested in Mr. McVeigh's activities in the fall of 1994 when, investigators believe, Mr. McVeigh and the other suspect in custody, Terry L. Nichols, began putting the plot together. During this time, investigators said, the two men rented storage lockers in Kansas and bought quantities of fertilizer that could be turned into explosives. The investigators also believe that the men were involved in the robbery of a gun collector in Royal, Ark., that November, possibly to raise money to finance the bombing. Several score of rifles, silver bars, gold coins and \$8,500 in cash were taken in the robbery.

Ms. McVeigh, although friendly and outgoing, appeared to share the extreme right-wing views of her grim, taciturn brother, including anger over the Federal siege of the Branch Davidian compound near Waco, Tex., two years ago. She once wrote a letter to a newspaper in the Buffalo area warning of the dangers of gun control. Copies of books, videotapes and a newsletter, "The Patriot Report," popular among white supremacists and members of anti-government paramilitary groups, were found in a search of her pickup truck.

While Mr. McVeigh was known in the Army as somewhat of a loner who seldom discussed his family, some of his fellow soldiers recalled that he had a close relationship with his sister.

"He thought the world of his sister in New York," recalled John Kelso, who served in the same infantry company and shared an off-base house with Mr. McVeigh.

Photo: Jennifer McVeigh, the sister of one of the suspects in the Oklahoma City bombing, Timothy J. McVeigh, was escorted to an airplane after she testified before the Federal grand jury that is investigating the attack. (Associated Press)