

Eyewitness to Bombing Saw McVeigh, Smiling Mideasterner

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A strong Mideast connection to the April 19 blasts that destroyed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City is suggested by eyewitnesses interviewed by The McCurtain Daily Gazette — including one who told of seeing a man of obviously Middle Eastern origins grinning from ear to ear after viewing the aftermath of the explosion.

That witness, just minutes before the explosion, also told of almost being run over by a big yellow Mercury driven by a man he later identified as Tim McVeigh and a passenger he said bore a striking resemblance to the "John Doe II" sketch later released by the FBI.

And yet another witness interviewed by the Gazette told of seeing a stocky Mideast male park a pickup truck near where she lives in Oklahoma City soon after the explosion.

About a week later the FBI came around she said, and an FBI agent told her the yellow pickup had been repainted, was originally brown and had been used in the bombing.

The FBI and federal prosecutors have never publicly acknowledged any Mideast connection to the case. They have blamed the building's destruction on a fertilizer-and-fuel oil bomb set off by McVeigh and fellow antigovernment conspirators.

A federal grand jury Thursday indicted McVeigh and Terry Nichols on 11 felony counts, charging them with being, along "with others unknown," behind a seven month conspiracy to bomb the Murrah building.

But if the FBI and federal prosecutors are refusing to acknowledge a possible Mideast connection, it is apparently bulking large in the defense strategy of McVeigh's chief defense attorney Stephen Jones of Enid.

"The government's claims that they don't know of any other conspirators in a bombing of a federal building in the Midwest seems to me not to withstand scrutiny," Jones said.

Earlier, he had charged that the FBI and federal prosecutors have had a secret informant, granted immunity from prosecution, who as early as last September warned of a conspiracy to blow up federal buildings within the U.S. 10th Circuit Court of Appeals district. Jones said the informant told the FBI that the conspirators were a combination of American citizens and individuals with Arabic names.

But the Enid lawyer said the informant contacted him after seeing McVeigh's photo on the cover of a news magazine and told Jones he'd never heard McVeigh's name or seen him during the time he was doing his undercover work.

Adding Credence to the Mideast Connection

The eyewitnesses interviewed by the Gazette add credence to Jones' contention of a Mideast connection to the Oklahoma City bombing.

One of those, who spoke exclusively to the Gazette, may have had one of the most singular experiences so far of any firsthand observers — being almost run over by a car he says was driven by Timothy -McVeigh and occupied by "John Doe 11" and later witnessing a Mideastern man grin with smug satisfaction immediately after the bombing.

Gary Lewis, at the time of the blast, was a pressman for the Oklahoma Journal, which was extensively 'damaged by the force of the explosion.

About 15 minutes before 9 a.m. that fateful morning of April 19, Lewis said he'd stepped outside the building to smoke his pipe.

He suddenly remembered that it was Wednesday and realized he had not turned in last week's uniforms for clean ones. Lewis retrieved the dirty uniforms from his pickup truck, parked just around the corner.

As he was walking back to the south side of the Journal Record building, he saw a big yellow Mercury sedan (similar to the one that led to McVeigh's arrest on I- 35 near Perry) racing through a parking lot — right at him.

Suddenly, the vehicle made a sharp right turn just a few feet in front of him, then jumped a par of curb guards, Lewis said.

Once in the alley in front of the Journal Record building, Lewis said the vehicle with two men inside sped toward Robinson Street and out of the parking lot. Recalling what he'd seen in a taped interview, Lewis said the man driving the Mercury matched the photo he'd seen of Timothy James McVeigh.

And, he said, the fellow riding in the passenger seat of the Mercury was identical to the sketch that the FBI released of "John Doe II" right after the bombing. Lewis also noted that the license plate on the Mercury (which was stopped later on 1-35 because it did not have a license tag) was dangling by only one screw and was clearly an Oklahoma tag.

But it was what happened after the blasts that day that stick out even more strikingly in Lewis' mind.

After emerging from the damaged Journal Record building with only minor injuries, Lewis said he immediately spotted a man with Middle Eastern features standing only a few feet away.

"This guy stood out to me because with all the chaos and injured people around me, this guy was just standing by himself, staring at the Murrah with a smile from ear to ear!"

Another Mideast Connection

Despite the FBI and federal prosecutors failing to acknowledge any possibility of a Mideast connection, tapes of Oklahoma City police radio traffic shortly after the April 19 explosion raise that same question.

' That police radio traffic indicated two Middle Eastern males were seen leaving the downtown areas at a high rate of speed in a brown pickup truck.

For several days afterward, Oklahoma City police were on the lookout for the vehicle.

Meanwhile, during that same time period, Oklahoma City resident Mrs. Joe Royer was walking her dog behind her apartment when she noticed a stocky man of seemingly Mideast origin backing a yellow pickup truck into a grassy parking area used by tenants for their boats and recreational vehicles.

Once the truck was in the spot, she said the man gave her a chilling look "that told me to forget I had ever seen him." "So I got my dog and we went back into the apartment," she told the Gazette. "and it was about a week later that the FBI showed up and this fellow (an FBI agent) is going around the apartments, asking if anyone knew anything about that truck parked out back."

She told the FBI agent of seeing the man parking the yellow pickup. Then her husband asked the agent why it was important.

"That truck was used in the bombing," she said the FBI agent related. Startled, her husband said, "I thought you were looking for a brown truck, not a yellow one."

"If you look close," the agent answered, "you can tell that the truck over there has recently been painted yellow — there's overspray on the fenders and the VIN (identification numbers) have all been ground off."

When asked if she'd been shown any photos by the FBI, she answered emphatically, "No!"

But when a source close to the Gazette's investigation showed Mrs. Royer a photograph of a stocky Mideastern male obtained from other sources, she said, "It sure does look like him. I would sure like to see a close-up of his eyes. Those eyes of his were frightening!"

John Doe II Spotted Again

Yet another person interviewed by the Gazette said he saw Timothy McVeigh in a yellow Ryder rental truck shortly before the explosion — with a passenger he said showed a striking resemblance to the FBI's sketch of "John Doe II."

Mike Moroz, an employee of Johnny's Tire Store, was working at the store on the morning of April 19 when two men pulled up in a yellow Ryder truck.

A man he later identified in an FBI lineup as Timothy McVeigh got out of the truck, Moroz said, and asked for directions to 5th and Harvey — site of the federal building.

"Then," Moroz told the Gazette, "he crawled back into the truck, and sitting right next to McVeigh was a man wearing a ballcap who, during the entire conversation, just sat staring straight ahead."

Moroz said he continued to watch the pair off and on for about 10 minutes as they just sat in the truck.

Finally, the truck pulled out. And not long after that, he said, an explosion rocked the area.

On Aug. 8, Mike Moroz was shown a photo of a suspect obtained by a source close to the Gazette investigation, and he said it bore a strong resemblance to the man he had seen with McVeigh. But when asked if the FBI had ever shown him the photograph or one of the same person, Moroz said "No." That photo is one of several of men of Middle Eastern origin obtained by a source close to the Gazette investigation.