

Tests Confirm Additional Bomb Death

Dallas Morning News

August 31, 1995 | Laura Griffin | Page: 38A | Section: NEWS

OKLAHOMA CITY - The death toll in the Oklahoma City bombing rose to 169 Wednesday after the state medical examiner said DNA testing showed that an unidentified leg found in the rubble was that of a young black woman and did not match any of the known victims.

The leg, found clad in a size 7 1/2 black leather military style boot, a braided olive-cover blousing strap and dark socks, has been the focus of speculation in recent weeks.

The medical examiner's office - before DNA testing - identified the leg as probably coming from a young, light-skinned male, and an attorney for bombing suspect Timothy McVeigh suggested it might be the leg of the "real" bomber.

"DNA analysis by the FBI has shown conclusively that the left leg is not male but female," said a statement released Wednesday by Chief Medical Examiner Fred Jordan. "Hair analysis by the FBI laboratory has shown Negroid characteristics."

Mr. McVeigh's attorney, Stephen Jones, said in a prepared statement that the new findings will fuel doubts about forensic work in the bombing case.

"With this disclosure, no one can have confidence in any of the forensic work in this case," Mr. Jones said. "A white male becomes a black female. No wonder DNA testing has been discredited."

The leg was found May 30, one week after remnants of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal building were imploded by contractors and the day after what were believed to be the last three bodies were recovered from the rubble.

Officials originally deflected questions about the mystery limb, saying they had no body parts that positively did not match the known victims. After Mr. Jones suggested that officials were withholding information about the leg, they said efforts were continuing to identify it.

The medical examiner's office sent specimens to the FBI in Washington for DNA testing. The office also sent specimens from seven previously identified victims missing left legs, and one victim whose injuries made it difficult to determine whether it was a match.

But tests proved conclusively that the leg did not belong to any of eight previously identified victims, Dr. Jordan's statement said Wednesday.

Officials said they know of no one reported missing who could be victim No. 169 and appealed for help from anyone who might have information.

Decomposition of the leg made it difficult to determine the race, Dr. Jordan said. New analysis of the DNA and the hair testing suggests that the victim was between the ages of 16 and 30.

"All of us involved in this investigation continue our efforts to develop further information in the hope of ultimate

identification," Dr. Jordan said. ". . . We hope that the dissemination of this more detailed and scientific data will lead to the development of information helpful in accomplishing final identification of this individual who must now be regarded as representing the 169th victim."

Mr. Jones said he initially raised three possible explanations for the leg: a mistake by the medical examiner, a homeless drifter who "coincidentally was passing by and leaves no surviving family" or someone involved in the bombing.

"Apparently, my first hunch was correct, unless, of course, the experts are more interested in proving the nonexistence of a different bomber at the scene than validating the Oklahoma medical examiner," Mr. Jones said.

Mr. Jones' suggestion that the leg might have belonged to someone involved in the bombing was buttressed by eyewitness accounts that placed an unidentified man in Mr. McVeigh's company in downtown Oklahoma City on the morning of the blast. Mr. McVeigh and onetime Army buddy Terry Nichols are charged in the April 19 bombing, but prosecutors have said Mr. Nichols might have been in Kansas on the day of the blast.

On Wednesday, the medical examiner's office met with scientists from the Smithsonian Institution and the FBI to discuss the leg and exchange scientific information.

The bones of the leg continue to be studied, Dr. Jordan said. There were several blue-gray dots the size of a pen point on the bone; they have been identified by the FBI as polyvinyl chloride, his statement said. Officials would not discuss whether that material could have come from blue plastic barrels believed to have been used in the bombing.

The leg also has two fractures but Dr. Jordan's statement said they might not have been a result of the blast.

The medical examiner's office requested that anyone with information regarding the latest victim call the FBI at (405) 553-7100.

Staff writers Victoria Loe in Dallas and Arnold Hamilton in Oklahoma City contributed to this report.