

Leg Lost in Blast Still a Mystery - Forensics Analysts Divided on Age, Race of Victim

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OKLAHOMA CITY - Six months after the bombing of the federal building, the identity of a victim so damaged by the blast that only her leg was recovered remains unknown, a spokesman for the state medical examiner said Wednesday.

Five missing-person reports filed with the Oklahoma City Police Department were turned over to the FBI, but agents have had no success in their search for the leg's owner, said Ray Blakeney, director of operations for the state medical examiner's office.

"They don't have anything," Mr. Blakeney said.

Four of the missing women have been found, said police Capt. Bill City.

The FBI declined to comment on the search for the victim's identity.

Experts speculated that the woman's body was so close to the blast that it was blown into small pieces. The leg was not discovered until May 30, after the shattered hulk of the building was demolished.

Although efforts to identify the leg have proved fruitless so far, investigators are not yet giving up.

"I'm not sure we'll ever concede that. But the longer it is, the less likely it is," Mr. Blakeney said.

An FBI analysis of the left leg found in the rubble of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building showed that the 169th victim of the April 19 bombing was a black woman between the ages of 16 and 30. That conclusion contradicted a state medical examiner's opinion that the leg had belonged to a light-skinned man.

The severed limb was found wearing a black military-style boot and an olive-drab blousing strap, prompting Stephen Jones, the lead attorney for suspect Timothy McVeigh, to speculate that it might have belonged to the "real bomber."

When the FBI scientists said the leg probably belonged to a black woman, Mr. Jones took advantage of the flip-flop to challenge the quality of the government's forensic evidence in the case.

Mr. McVeigh and a former Army friend, Terry Nichols, face federal murder and conspiracy charges in the case. If convicted, they could get the death penalty.

Trial is set for May 17 in Lawton, Okla., about 90 miles southwest of the bombing site.

In other developments, Mr. Nichols' attorneys and the prosecution turned over lists of court documents that have been sealed in the case.

The lists were provided in response to a lawsuit filed by a group of media organizations two weeks ago seeking to open or identify more than 250 sealed records in the case. On Tuesday, The Dallas Morning News joined news groups including The Associated Press, Tulsa World and The Daily Oklahoman in asking the court to unseal the records. The suit also calls for procedures for sealing future documents.

Prosecutors and attorneys for Mr. Nichols and Mr. McVeigh were given until this week to respond. Mr. McVeigh's attorneys have offered no description of documents that remain sealed in the case.

Prosecutors and defense attorneys were to meet by conference call on Thursday to discuss which documents could be unsealed.

Mr. Nichols' attorney Michael Tigar said many of the sealed items involving his client relate to applications for services by his defense team, such as requests for pay and other costs. Other items include psychologists' records and records relating to grand jury witnesses.

Special U.S. Attorney Joseph Hartzler, the head of the prosecution team, provided the government's list Wednesday. It included search warrants for Mr. McVeigh's car and personal property, as well as material-witness warrants for three people identified only as Witness A, Witness B, and Witness C.

The prosecution's list also included a material-witness warrant for James Nichols, the brother of Terry Nichols. James Nichols was held as a material witness, but he was not charged in the bombing.