

Suspect in Oklahoma City Bombing Remains a Mystery



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Nine months after the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City, John Doe #2 remains a mystery. Although federal prosecutors say he may not exist, several witnesses claim to have seen him with McVeigh.

NOAH ADAMS, Host: On April 19th, 1995, a Ryder rental truck parked in front of the federal building in downtown Oklahoma City exploded, destroying the building, killing 169 people. Shortly after the bombing, the FBI released sketches of two suspects, whom it called John Doe #1 and John Doe #2. The first was eventually identified as Timothy McVeigh. He and his friend, Terry Nichols, will stand trial later this year. But despite a massive manhunt, John Doe #2 has never been found, and some federal prosecutors hint he does not exist. NPR's Wade Goodwyn reports that there are people all over Kansas and Oklahoma who say they saw John Doe #2 with McVeigh and Nichols just before the bombing.

WADE GOODWYN, Reporter: It was just after 9:30 in the morning on what promised to be a beautiful spring day in Oklahoma City. At Johnnie's Tire and Auto Shop, mechanic Mike Moroz watched a Ryder rental truck pull into the driveway. Sitting behind the wheel was a young man with sharp pointed features, a military hair cut, wearing a baseball cap on backwards.

MIKE MOROZ, Auto Mechanic: *"Well, he'd just gotten in that morning, had coffee, smoked a cigarette. You know, he wasn't- we could tell he wasn't a customer. He looked like he was kind of lost they way he pulled in. He asked me where Fifth and Harvey was. I kind of directed him to where it was. He didn't understand what I saying so he got out of the vehicle, and I walked to him maybe 15 feet away from the vehicle and pointed toward the downtown area."*

WADE GOODWYN: The corner of Fifth and Harvey was where the federal office building would stand intact for about another 15 minutes. Moroz says that he is 99.9 percent sure that the man he gave directions to that day is Timothy McVeigh. He believes he correctly picked McVeigh out of an FBI line up, and Moroz says he's sure of one other thing as well.

MIKE MOROZ: *"There was another gentleman sitting beside him. He seemed to be dark skinned. The reason I say dark skinned, I'm fair complected and he wasn't fair complected. He had dark hair and he had a baseball cap on."*

WADE GOODWYN: Moroz cannot say for certain whether the passenger in the Ryder truck that morning is the same man in the two composite sketches the FBI has released as John Doe #2. He said that he still agonizes that he didn't look closer.

MIKE MOROZ: *"As far as John Doe #2, I wish I could be a lot more help but, I mean, who would have ever thought?"*

WADE GOODWYN: There were a number of times in the weeks following the April 19th bombing when the FBI thought they were closing in on John Doe #2. But it turned out that their most promising leads led nowhere. That such a prominent suspect is still missing will be headache for the prosecution. Defense lawyer Steven Jones and Michael Tigar may well try to suggest that their clients are being scapegoated because the real culprits can't be found.

But while some government officials try to judiciously explain away the missing man's existence, there are plenty of witnesses who don't.

BARBARA WITTENBERG, Owner, Santa Fe Diner: *"What had happened is that it was early in the morning, probably right after we opened up. There was a Ryder truck parked out front."*

WADE GOODWYN: Barbara Wittenberg [sp] owns the Santa Fe Diner in the tiny town of Herington, Kansas, about 300 miles due north of Oklahoma City. She said that on the morning of April 18th, the day before the bombing, Terry Nichols, Timothy McVeigh, and a third man she believes may be John Doe #2 came into her diner to have coffee. Wittenberg knew Terry Nichols because Nichols had been a regular customer.

BARBARA WITTENBERG: *"He was always very quiet. He stayed to himself. He sat in the smoking section, and he never tried to speak or be friendly, and I never tried to either because he just didn't seem like the person that you'd strike up conversations with."*

WADE GOODWYN: Wittenberg says she knew Timothy McVeigh's face as well, that he'd come into the diner a couple of times before with Nichols.

BARBARA WITTENBERG: *"A lot of my customers talk very loud. You can tell what their conversation is. You could never tell what they talked about. Never."*

WADE GOODWYN: In the early morning hours of April 18th, Wittenberg says that her curiosity was piqued when she saw a big Ryder rental truck parked in front and Nichols, McVeigh, and a third man she'd never seen before sitting in her round booth. In a town the size of Herington, a rental truck does not go by unnoticed, and parked next to it, Wittenberg says, was a light-colored car with Arizona plates.

BARBARA WITTENBERG: *"Anyway, so I noticed that it was Arizona tags and I struck up a conversation, and I said, 'Oh, who's from Arizona?' And they didn't answer, and I says, 'Well, I come from Yuma, Arizona, ' and I said, 'I'm kinda homesick. My sister's moving there,' and we just started talking. And then I asked whoever had the truck were they moving in or out, and it was Nichols, the guy with the dark-rimmed glasses, he said, 'We're not doing either.'*

WADE GOODWYN: Wittenberg may be the only witness who actually had an extended conversation with John Doe #2. Wittenberg says she got him to talk a little bit about Arizona.

BARBARA WITTENBERG: *"I asked, 'Well, where are you headed?' And suspect two said Oklahoma. At that time, McVeigh and Nichols looked at him and a bucket of ice water hit the conversation. At that point, I was smart enough to know, don't say no more. They don't want to talk about anything."*

WADE GOODWYN: Later the same day, Barbara Wittenberg and her husband drove to Junction City, which is 30 miles away, to buy supplies for the restaurant. The highway runs past a small camping area called Geary Lake State Park. That's where, the FBI believes, the fertilizer and diesel fuel were mixed together in large, blue plastic barrels to make up the bomb.

BARBARA WITTENBERG: *"And I looked over because we always look over at the lake to see how low it is or, you know? And there was a Ryder truck down there. And I laughed at my husband and said, 'I wonder if they couldn't find a place to stay or if Herington kicked them out?' And my husband said, 'Well, they may down there fishing.' And I said, 'Fishing and in a Ryder truck? You got to be kidding.'*

WADE GOODWYN: As evidence, the FBI has taken Wittenberg's sales receipts from her trip to Junction City which contain the exact date and time of her purchases. And when asked to describe the man who sat in her diner with Nichols and McVeigh, like the mechanic in Oklahoma City, it's the unusual color of the missing suspect's skin that first jumps to Wittenberg's mind.

BARBARA WITTENBERG: *"Dark skin, olive skin. I would- it was not a Mexican skin, nor was it Indian skin. If you put him in with a group of Hawaiian people, that's the skin he'd had. It was not a tan, it was the texture of his skin."*

LARRY WILD, Retired Coach and Baseball Scout: *"And his hair went straight back, and right straight back up over the top. And he was a clean-cut individual."*

WADE GOODWYN: Barbara Wittenberg is not the only one in town who believes she saw John Doe #2 with Timothy McVeigh. Larry Wild is a retired high school baseball coach and major league scout who lives in Herington. On Monday afternoon, two days before the bombing, Wild believes he saw John Doe #2 and McVeigh at Cardie's Corner, a local convenience store. It was John Doe #2 who first caught Wild's attention.

LARRY WILD: *"There was a guy that I had never seen in town before, and he had a real glossy complexion. And it just stuck out and it was somebody I hadn't seen, and I was pumping gas I was just kind of watching. And he had gone to the coolers there where the Pepsis are in the corner and was just standing there looking at them. And as I finished pumping the gas, why I started to cross the driveway, and I as I got just before the doors why the man at the counter turned around and started to the doors and it was McVeigh."*

WADE GOODWYN: Wild told the FBI that the instant that McVeigh finished paying at the counter, the man in the back also headed for the door.

LARRY WILD: *"And immediately as he turned, this glossy complected, who I think is a half Native American and Mexican individual, turned and came right with him and they walked out the two swinging doors right in front of me."*

WADE GOODWYN: Coach Wild is a big, burly man, a hunter who drives around in a pick-up truck, often with the hunting dogs he trains yelping in their cages in the back. He's not the kind of person you associate with being frightened, but he is. Now he rides around with a loaded pistol sitting in its leather holster on the bench seat beside. Wild says that not long after it got around that he talked to the FBI, a man approached him and his wife as they sat in his pick-up truck in town. The man walked to the window and threatened to kill Wild. Wilde believes there may be others in Herington who know more about the bombing than they're saying.

LARRY WILD: *"Well, I just feel like that there's some people that could really step forward that know some other things besides what I saw. That is the not the American way."*

WADE GOODWYN: On the outskirts of Junction City, near the Ft. Riley Army Base, the Dream Land Motel sits about 50 years off of I-70. On Friday, the weekend before the bombing, Timothy McVeigh, using his own name, checked into room 25. The next day McVeigh called and reserved the Ryder rental truck the government believes was used to blow up the federal office building. It was just after midnight when 29-year-old Connie Hood pulled into the Dreamland Motel to visit a friend, David King. But the parking spaces in front of his room were taken, so Hood pulled into a space next door in front of room 23. As she stepped onto the sidewalk, a man Hood now believes was John Doe #2 flung open the door.

CONNIE HOOD: *"And it scared me and I ended up leaning on my car because it took me off balance, and then he ended up pulling the door closed but he left his head sticking out of the door, which I thought was odd. And then we stood there staring for a second and I got myself together and I proceeded to walk to David's room, which was next door."*

WADE GOODWYN: Both Connie Hood and David King have told the FBI that they could hear the man next door moving around his room throughout the night. Hood says she remembers hearing him take a shower. But in a taste of what the FBI must often be faced with, the owner of the Dreamland, Leah McGowan, insists she never rented room 23.

LEAH MCGOWAN, Owner, Dreamland Motel: *"Room 23 wasn't rented that night. I probably showed it several times because it was a good weekend. Room 23 wasn't rented."*

WADE GOODWYN: The next day, Connie Hood again visited the Dreamland Motel, this time bringing her husband Don with her. Don was driving. But they had trouble pulling into the motel parking lot because the driveway was blocked by a Ryder rental truck. They waited and watched through the windshield as a man got out of the truck and walked into the motel office. Connie says she recognized him from the night before. He was the same man who threw open the door of room 23. Her husband Don says that it was John Doe #2 who walked across the parking lot in front of them.

DON HOOD: *"The individual we know as John Doe #2 got out of the driver's side of the van and went into the office. A few moments later, I caught an individual out of the side of my vision going behind my car to the Ryder van, and he did get into the passenger side of that van, and that's the individual Timothy McVeigh."*

WADE GOODWYN: It is Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols that the government is most concerned with these days, but if John Doe #2 is never found federal prosecutors may have trouble explaining away the famous missing suspect who the government itself introduced to the world. The original indictments against McVeigh and Nichols refer to unknown conspirators. Steve Mullins, [sp] a spokesman with the Justice Department, says the FBI is still looking.

STEVE MULLINS, Justice Dept. Spokesman: *"We believe there were other people involved with the bombing. We do believe that we should still look for them. We've not, for example, the FBI has not recalled this sketch that we've drawn up. We do have an ongoing investigation with a number of FBI agents assigned to the investigation on all phases, including what was known as John Doe #2."*

WADE GOODWYN: Mullins insists that the famous missing suspect will have little or no impact on their case against McVeigh and Nichols. But as the trial date approaches, the pressure on the FBI will increase to either find John Doe #2 or find a good explanation as to why they haven't.

I'm Wade Goodwyn reporting.