

Teen Eyewitness Links Mcveigh To Ryder Truck

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DENVER — A 19-year-old motel clerk Thursday became the first eyewitness to link Oklahoma City bombing suspect Timothy McVeigh to a Ryder truck--the vehicle used to carry the bomb--saying he asked McVeigh to move the truck because it was parked in the wrong place.

However, Eric McGown admitted, under the fiercest defense cross-examination of the nearly 6-week-old trial, that he was unsure of the date and had once said his conversation with McVeigh was on Sunday, April 16, 1995, the day before the prosecution says the truck was rented.

In other testimony, prosecutors continued to present evidence of the 29-year-old defendant's writings, introducing a letter sent two months before the blast in which he said he had turned from "intellectual to animal."

McGown, who works as a maintenance man and desk clerk at the Dreamland Motel owned by his mother, Lea, in Junction City, Kan., said McVeigh checked in on April 14 and left on April 18.

The bombing of the Murrah Federal Building occurred the next day, killing 168 people and injuring more than 500 others.

McGown said he first saw McVeigh next to McVeigh's 1977 Mercury Marquis, parked outside Room 25, where McVeigh was staying. They chatted about the car and the weather in Arizona because the car bore license plates from that state, he said.

The second time McGown saw McVeigh, "he was backing up a Ryder truck next to our pool. I have a recollection of my mom telling me to tell him he can't park there," McGown testified. "He was starting to get out of the truck. I asked him if he could move the truck because the resident (in the unit near where McVeigh planned to park) was grouchy. He was really polite about it. He said, 'Yes,' and moved it right away."

Defense lawyer Stephen Jones, however, tore into McGown, who was 17 at the time McVeigh checked in, pointing to an FBI interview in which McGown said the incident occurred on Easter Sunday after he returned from lunch with his mother and sister.

"I said I thought it was Sunday," McGown snapped. "I was never sure of this day or the next day."

Jones suggested that McGown had given numerous interviews to television and newspaper reporters and consistently had said the sighting occurred on Sunday. Jones asked McGown if he was aware that prosecutors contend the truck was rented on Monday, April 17.

"I don't know when the truck was rented," McGown said.

"You are aware there is a \$2 million reward in this case?" Jones asked.

"I have heard there is a reward," McGown said.

In an attempt to rehabilitate McGown's testimony, prosecutor Patrick Ryan pointed out that, in McGown's FBI interview, he also had said that he "associates seeing the Ryder truck with an afternoon that he was cleaning the swimming pool . . . He cleaned the swimming pool on both Sunday, April 16, and on Monday, April 17."

The jury also was shown a videotape of the testimony of Thomas Manning, manager of a Firestone auto parts and repair shop in Junction City, who said he sold McVeigh the Mercury on April 14 for \$250 and McVeigh's failing 1983 Pontiac station wagon.

Manning, whose testimony was taken last November on video because he suffers from a serious heart condition, said McVeigh briefly left the store while the Mercury was being inspected and filled with transmission fluid.

The testimony is critical because telephone records show two calls linked to a pre-paid calling card allegedly used by McVeigh were placed from a pay telephone across the street, one to a Ryder truck rental dealership in Junction City.

McVeigh's letter, one of several in evidence, was sent to Gwen Strider, a relative of Kevin Nicholas, with whom McVeigh lived for a short time in 1994 in Michigan.

"I was in the educational/literature dissemination . . . field for quite some time," the letter said. "I was preaching and `passing out' before anyone had ever heard the words `patriot' and `militia.'

"I passed on that legacy about a 1/2 year ago," the letter said. "I believe the `new blood' needs to start somewhere; and I have certain other `militant' talents that are short in supply and greatly demanded."

The letter ended by saying, "Most of the people sent my way these days are of the direct-action type, and my whole mindset has shifted, from intellectual to animal . . ."