

Guilt Cited In Bombing Hero's Suicide

Oklahoma City Officer Despondent Over Failing To Rescue More Victims Of Blast, Friends Say

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Byline: Paul Queary Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY -- A reluctant hero of the Oklahoma City bombing who took his own life was wracked with guilt because an injury kept him from rescuing more victims, his closest friend said Friday.

``The federal building claimed 169 lives," a tearful Officer Jim Ramsey said. ``It just got another one."

Sgt. Terrance Yeakey, 30, was found Wednesday in a field near his hometown of El Reno. He had apparently tried to slit his wrists, then shot himself to death, just three days before he was to have received the department's medal of valor.

Ramsey and Yeakey were among the first Oklahoma City police officers to reach the scene of the April 19, 1995, bombing that killed 168 people at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building.

Suspects Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols will be tried in Denver before U.S. District Judge Richard Matsch.

Yeakey rescued at least four people before he fell through two floors of the wrecked building and injured his back.

Yeakey did not leave a suicide note, said Capt. Bill City, the department's spokesman. That left friends and co-workers to speculate that he was driven by guilt over the bombing rescue and his despondence over a troubled family life.

``He had a lot of guilt because he got hurt," Ramsey said.

Ramsey, who is to receive the city's medal of honor Saturday for the bombing rescue, choked back tears as he clutched a thick pile of letters from children praising Yeakey. Yeakey had taught in the department's D.A.R.E. program, which tries to keep kids away from drugs, since August.

``I have to bury one of my very dear friends and four hours later I have to accept the highest honor that's ever been given in the police department," said Ramsey, 27. ``I just want him back. I'm going to have to figure out how to function."

Repeatedly hailed as a hero of the bombing's immediate aftermath, Yeakey shied away from the attention, said his supervisor, Lt. Joe Ann Randall.

``He didn't like it. There are some people that like to be heroes and some that don't," she said. ``He was not one that wanted that."

Interviews with Randall and Yeakey's fellow officers portray an ambitious man, full of life and dedicated to his work, who covered up his despondence.

Divorced from his wife, Tonya, Yeakey was legally prevented from entering the house the couple had shared with their two daughters, ages 2 and 4, Ramsey said.

``His ex-wife, his love for his two daughters that he could not see," Ramsey said when asked for reasons that might have driven Yeakey to suicide.