

Witnesses at Bombing Trial Testify About Seeing John Doe No. 2

By JO THOMAS

DENVER, Dec. 3— John Doe No. 2 and maybe No. 3 -- made an appearance, of sorts, in the Federal court trial of Terry L. Nichols today.

Three witnesses testified that in the days before a bomb destroyed the Federal Building in Oklahoma City in April 1995 they saw the shadowy suspect who came to be known as John Doe No. 2.

Lawyers for Mr. Nichols, who is charged with murder and conspiracy in the bombing, are trying to show that Timothy J. McVeigh, who has been convicted on identical charges and sentenced to death, had help from unknown conspirators, but not from Mr. Nichols.

Eldon Elliott, the owner of the Junction City, Kan., shop where Mr. McVeigh rented the large Ryder truck that carried the bomb, said today that he was positive that Mr. McVeigh was with another man when he picked up the truck, on April 17, 1995, two days before the bombing, which killed 168 people.

All he could remember was the man's hat, white with blue thunderbolts, Mr. Elliott testified, but the man was not Mr. Nichols. Mr. Nichols has said he was at home in Herington, Kan., at the time, and prosecutors have presented no evidence that he was elsewhere.

Stella Weigel, a health worker, told the jury that she was driving south on Interstate 135 near McPherson, Kan., on April 18 between 7 A.M. and 8 A.M. when she had to slow for a large Ryder truck following closely behind a beige car that "reminded me of my sister's '78 Mercury." Mr. McVeigh owned a car of similar make and color.

As she passed the car, Ms. Weigel said, she saw that it had no license plates. The driver, she testified, resembled John Doe No. 2, whose square jaw and dark good looks became familiar through a sketch issued by the Federal Bureau of Investigation shortly after the bombing. There were two men in the truck, she said, and neither was Mr. Nichols, a middle-age man with a medium build who wears glasses.

At that time, prosecutors say, Mr. McVeigh and Mr. Nichols were miles away, on their way to a state park near Mr. Nichols's home to load the Ryder truck with the two-ton bomb.

The John Doe No. 2 shown in the F.B.I. sketch turned out to be a soldier who had come to the rental office the next day, and Federal investigators have expressed doubt that anyone was with Mr. McVeigh when he rented the truck. The investigators still say others may have been involved in the bombing.

Another witness, Mary Martinez, an obstetrical nurse, told the jury she saw Mr. McVeigh driving a large Ryder truck in Junction City on the morning of April 18, before he rented the truck. The truck was stopped for a light, she said, and Mr. McVeigh was accompanied by a man she thought was Mexican.

On cross-examination Mrs. Martinez conceded that she had originally described a smaller Ryder truck, said the driver's hair was light red. She also said she saw the passenger stood up in the cab of the truck.

Other sightings of Ryder trucks and McVeigh companions included those of men who did not match the description of John Doe No. 2. On April 18, Rosemary Zinn, a grocery store worker in Lincolnvillle, Kan., said a blond man and a man with a dark complexion, too tall to be John Doe No. 2, parked a large Ryder truck and came into the store.

Nancy Kindle, a waitress at a Denny's Restaurant in Junction City who testified at the McVeigh trial, said she saw Mr. McVeigh shortly before 1 P.M. on April 16 with two men, one of them short and unkempt. Neither was Mr. Nichols, she said.