

MCVEIGH'S ATTORNEYS DENOUNCE ROBBERY LINK

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The lead attorney for Oklahoma City bombing suspect Timothy McVeigh on Tuesday denounced attempts to link his client to a string of bank robberies investigators once thought could have financed the terrorist act.

Soon after the April 19, 1995, bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, federal investigators looked into the so-called Midwest Bank Robberies for a connection to McVeigh and co-defendant Terry Nichols. They claimed none was to be found.

But a fresh report Tuesday attempts to connect McVeigh to the Aryan Revolutionary Army -- the self-described terrorist cell charged in 18 bank robberies between January 1994 and November 1995.

A copyright story in the McCurtain County Gazette of Idabel, Okla., says Jennifer McVeigh, the defendant's younger sister, told the FBI her brother claimed he was part of a group that believed in robbing banks to overthrow the government.

Stephen Jones, McVeigh's attorney, labeled the report a leak by the government meant to divert attention from controversy over the FBI laboratory's handling of Oklahoma City evidence.

He said Jennifer McVeigh's statement was the result of weeks of FBI harassment.

"We believe she is referring to nothing more than an older brother's facetious comments to his younger sister," Jones said. Prosecutors declined to comment.

McVeigh gave his sister several \$100 bills he pulled from a larger roll of money and asked her to get him smaller bills, she said in a signed affidavit dated May 2, 1995.

The exchange was first reported in July 1995 in The Washington Post.

The only link mentioned between McVeigh and the Aryan Republican Army in the Gazette is through a white separatist compound in eastern Oklahoma called Elohim City.

Both the Gazette and the Tulsa World on Tuesday reported that an informant for the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms claimed two men associated with Elohim City talked about bombing federal buildings.

The informant said McVeigh and an admitted co-conspirator in the bombing case, Michael Fortier, visited Elohim City and were acquainted with German national Andreas Strassmeir, who has been looked at and dismissed by authorities as a suspect.

The Gazette reported that the informant said McVeigh and Strassmeir knew each other. Strassmeir has said that he only met McVeigh once for five minutes, at a gun show in Tulsa.