

PROSECUTORS DENY REPORTS AGENTS HAD PRIOR KNOWLEDGE OF BOMB THREATS

February 8, 1997 | Scripps Howard News Service

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Section: Scripps Howard News Service

Prosecutors in the Oklahoma bombing case on Friday refuted reports that an informant tipped off agents to bomb threats against the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building.

But the lead attorney for defendant Timothy McVeigh said the government never investigated the claims thoroughly enough to write them off, and asked for an independent probe.

The April 19, 1995, bombing took 168 lives.

A story in Friday's Rocky Mountain News detailed an Oklahoma racist leader's denial that he and an associate had discussed plans to bomb one of three federal office buildings in the state, including the Murrah Building.

That charge was made by an informant who in 1994 infiltrated Elohim City, an Oklahoma racist commune, on behalf of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms in 1994.

Two days after the bombing, informant Carol Howe told an FBI agent and her ATF contact that Dennis Mahon of Tulsa, Okla., a leader in the White Aryan Resistance, "had talked frequently with (her) about targeting federal buildings, such as the Internal Revenue Service building, the Tulsa federal building and the Oklahoma City federal building," according to an FBI report of the interview.

Mahon said it was Howe who instigated the talk, and that he steered clear of it.

The government insists investigators have closely examined every lead, including this one.

"As we told the court," said assistant U.S. Attorney Beth Wilkinson, "we have no evidence of the government having any prior knowledge of the bombing, and we stand by that today."

Howe isn't speaking publicly about what she might have said prior to the bombing.

Stephen Jones, McVeigh's attorney, said Howe's claims at a minimum should have promoted a search of Elohim City, where Mahon and a German citizen

named Andreas Strassmeir, also tagged by Howe as having spoken of committing terrorist acts, lived or frequently visited.

"She told investigators enough that Messrs. Mahon and Strassmeir should have been the subject of a vigorous investigation, which never took place," Jones said.

He suggested the matter be reviewed by a congressional oversight committee or an independent counsel.

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(Kevin Flynn writes for the Rocky Mountain News in Denver.)