

McVeigh described bombing, defense reports say

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Timothy McVeigh has described for his defense team how he bombed the Oklahoma City federal building, saying the daytime attack left a "body count" intended to get a point across to the government, according to confidential defense reports

In the documents, examined by The Dallas Morning News, Mr. McVeigh implicated his former Army buddy and co-defendant Terry Nichols in the plot but insisted he alone drove the explosives-filled truck that destroyed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building on April 19, 1995.

Mr. McVeigh's lead attorney, Stephen Jones, called The News' report "irresponsible" and "sensational" at a news conference Friday evening in Denver.

He suggested that the newspaper had been fed bogus documents by a person who had some ill will toward the paper.

The reports quoted by The News "do not resemble anything that's in our office," Mr. Jones said after a hastily convened meeting with the judge in the case, U.S. District Judge Richard Matsch.

Mr. Jones declined to answer when asked whether Mr. McVeigh had ever made similar statements to him, citing a gag order by the judge and attorney-client privilege.

"I can't tell you what he said in my interviews," he said.

Later in the news conference, Mr. Jones denied that Mr. McVeigh had ever made comments reflected in the reports.

Ralph Langer, executive vice president and editor of The News, said the newspaper obtained the documents legally.

"Clearly, we would not publish a story if we weren't confident of the quality of the information we have," Mr. Langer said.

Prosecutors and lawyers for Mr. Nichols had no comment, but Mr. Nichols has pleaded not guilty and denied any part in any illegal activity related to the bombing.

Both defendants face possible death sentences if convicted of murder and conspiracy. Mr. McVeigh's trial is set to begin March 31.

Mr. McVeigh's statements, culled from summaries of several 1995 interviews with a defense team member, appear to validate key elements of the prosecution's case. They describe how the two men committed robbery and burglary in the course of assembling money and materials for the worst terrorist attack on U.S. soil. The blast killed 168 people and injured more than 500.

Some anti-government activists condemned the attack because of its high death toll, and one militia leader said Mr. McVeigh would have been a hero had he bombed the building at night to minimize casualties.

Asked about that by the defense staffer in July 1995, "Mr. McVeigh looked directly into my eyes and told me, 'That would not have gotten the point across to the government. We needed a body count to make our point,'" the staff member wrote in notes of the interview with Mr. McVeigh.

Prosecutors have said the bombing attack was revenge on the government for the deadly 1993 Branch Davidian siege near Waco, in which more than 80 people died.

Though Mr. McVeigh has pleaded not guilty, he has never publicly denied committing the bombing. Nowhere in the documents examined by The News does he deny the attack.

The reports were written based on meetings with Mr. McVeigh between July and December 1995 at El Reno Federal Correctional Institution in Oklahoma, where he was held before his transfer to the Denver area in March 1996.

Because the reports were based on Mr. McVeigh's meetings with a defense team member, they are not available to prosecutors and will probably never be introduced to the jury.

The reports provide no details on whether Mr. McVeigh was accompanied by another man - the elusive John Doe 2 - as initially described by witnesses at the Junction City, Kan., Ryder agency that rented the truck used in the blast.

In one meeting, Mr. McVeigh disputed the account of a waitress who said she knew the identity of another man who actually drove the bomb truck.

The reports contain several references by Mr. McVeigh to Mr. Nichols' participation and knowledge of the bomb plot, but he denied any involvement by Terry Nichols' brother, James. James Nichols, of Decker, Mich., was arrested after the bombing and held for a month as a material witness.

"Mr. McVeigh stated that [James] Nichols had no knowledge about the bombing as far as he knew, but that he didn't know what Terry Nichols might have told brother James," says one report.

Federal prosecutors have accused Mr. McVeigh and Terry Nichols of starting in September 1994 to assemble components for the bomb, allegedly built the day before the blast at a lake near Mr. Nichols' home in Herington, Kan