

JOHN DOE 2 REMAINS A MYSTERY OKC BOMBING CASE'S UNKNOWN SUSPECT COULD BE MORE THAN ONE MAN, INVESTIGATORS BELIEVE

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He lurks around the dark corners of the Oklahoma City bombing case like Hamlet's father, an intruder whose long shadow clouds the body of evidence with unanswered questions.

Who is John Doe 2?

Or might the better question be who are John Doe 2?

The person who eluded the most intense criminal dragnet in U.S. history may actually be an amalgam of mystery men who moved in and out of defendant Timothy McVeigh's orbit during late 1994 and early 1995.

That's the crucial time when the government charges that McVeigh and Terry Nichols planned and executed the worst act of terrorism on U.S. soil - the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in which 168 people lost their lives.

McVeigh is to go on trial in Denver March 31.

Last week's media assertion that McVeigh purportedly had confessed to the bombing to his own lawyers and that he and Nichols had acted largely alone won't answer the haunting question:

Who are the men McVeigh and Nichols were seen with at what the government contends are key moments in which the conspiracy was blossoming into the awful fruit it bore in downtown Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995?

There are too many independent witnesses simply to write off the possible existence of the ``others unknown" cited in the indictment:

- * A possible John Doe 2 first turns up in witness accounts in the sandy-brown hill country around Fort Riley, Kan., in the searing hot summer of 1992.
- * Later, he is found in the company of the person, possibly Nichols, who in fall 1994 bought ammonium nitrate fertilizer that the government believes made up the bomb's main charge.
- * He is standing next to McVeigh at a methamphetamine dealer's home in Kingman, Ariz., in February 1995, when a friend of McVeigh's tries to confront the person he believes had a bomb set off near his house.
- * A woman who lost her leg while being dug out of the Murrah building rubble said she saw the man hop out of a Ryder truck that had been parked outside her garden-level office window, just before the explosion.
- * A man who says he sold McVeigh a soft drink and cigarettes at a deli at the Regency Towers apartments a block from the Murrah building says a passenger was waiting in the cab of the Ryder truck parked outside minutes before the explosion.
- * A man emerging from the post office next door also saw the truck, with three men near it.
- * A press worker north of the Murrah building claims he saw McVeigh fleeing in a car, with someone in the passenger seat next to him.

``We certainly believe that John Doe 2 exists," said Stephen Jones, McVeigh's attorney. ``We also believe that John Doe 1 is not Tim McVeigh."

John Doe 2 was born the day after the bombing, when witnesses at a Ryder rental shop in Junction City, Kan., described the second man they thought had come in when the bomb truck was rented.

The renter, who used the phony name ``Robert Kling," was John Doe 1. McVeigh's resemblance to that drawing led to his arrest.

The biggest misfortune for investigators in the John Doe 2 manhunt is that the famous sketch of the brooding suspect actually may be based on an error.

A key witness recently repudiated the description he gave to an FBI sketch artist after the bombing. The sketch triggered the rousting of dozens of innocent men unlucky enough to resemble the sinister and menacing-looking visitor.

That witness, a mechanic at the Ryder shop named Tom Kessinger, now says he inadvertently had in mind a completely innocent person who came into the shop a day after the bomb truck was rented.

If that's true, the real stranger who came into the shop with "Robert Kling" hasn't been described to this day.

All of the witnesses at the Ryder agency, when interviewed by FBI agents the day of the bombing, said that two men had rented the bomb truck. One employee, Fernando Ramos, told authorities the two men drove up in a blue Jeep Cherokee.

Clearly, not all of what has been claimed by witnesses can be true. Many of their stories conflict.

For instance, numerous people say they saw McVeigh with several men wandering Oklahoma City bars, restaurants and a pawn shop in the days before the bombing.

The likelihood is slim that McVeigh would make almost daily 10-hour commutes between Junction City and Oklahoma City during that final week.

The intrigue dates to 1992:

A Herington, Kan., woman and her mother told the FBI that McVeigh hung out with the older teen-agers there that summer.

Connie Smith, the mother, said she also saw McVeigh and Nichols in Herington in the weeks before the bombing, having lunch with other people. She never met McVeigh but says her daughter, Catina Lawson, met him at parties in 1992.

"His nickname, I think, was 'My Way' McVeigh. He was very arrogant," Smith recalls of her daughter's stories.

Smith said her daughter's roommate that summer dated a man named Mike with Pennsylvania tags on his car.

Some amateur investigators of the case believe "Mike" is Michael Brescia, 24, a Philadelphia college student indicted last month for conspiracy in a string of Midwestern bank robberies carried out by the self-described Aryan Republican Army.

Smith and Lawson say he could be the man who moved in McVeigh's circle.

Brescia, through his attorney, told the News he had no involvement in the bombing.

He resembles the sketch of John Doe 2, but the government points out that's meaningless now that Kessinger has repudiated the sketch.

The Aryan bank robberies were probed for a possible connection to the Oklahoma bombing, with some FBI agents thinking the money - never recovered - might have financed it. The government says no connections were found.

The Herington story has problems, however.

McVeigh lived in Herington in 1991, but after mustering out of the Army in December, he returned to western New York by Christmas and appears to have spent all of 1992 there. He worked as a security guard in Buffalo.

McVeigh had an AT&T long-distance calling card, records of which have been obtained by the News. Every call charged to that card during 1992 originates within western New York. There appears to be little time he could have gone to Kansas to party with teen-agers.

If Brescia knew McVeigh, he could provide that link. Brescia lived for a time at Elohim City in Oklahoma with a German citizen named Andreas Strassmeir. Various witnesses, including a stripper in a Tulsa topless bar, say they saw Brescia and Strassmeir with McVeigh.

The stripper, on a security videotape in the topless club's dressing room shot 11 days before the bombing, can be heard telling a friend about a man in the bar named Tim.

`` `And you're gonna remember me in April 1995,' " she quotes Tim as saying. ``
`You're gonna remember me for the rest of your life.' "

Authorities doubt the relevance of the stripper's information but won't say why.

Another John Doe candidate appeared with someone who may have been suspect Nichols.

On Sept. 30, 1994, at Mid-Kansas Cooperative in McPherson, Kan., two people bought a ton of ammonium nitrate fertilizer that the government believes went into the bomb.

The salesman has testified he is 50% sure the man who paid using the name Mike Havens was Nichols. However, he is sure, he testified in Denver two weeks ago, that the second person wasn't McVeigh.

McVeigh's fingerprint allegedly was found on the receipt, although, if true, it could

have gotten there later.

John Doe 2 - or 3, or 4 - next shows up with McVeigh in Kingman, Ariz.

Rocky McPeak, who worked at a shelter in town, says he hired McVeigh to do security work there in 1993. McPeak's girlfriend was arrested in December 1994 in Las Vegas on a bad credit charge, McPeak told authorities.

A man who uses a wheelchair, Clark Vollmer, helped bail her out.

In February 1995, McPeak says, Vollmer asked him to carry some drugs for him. McPeak refused, even after Vollmer reminded him of the favor he had done by raising bail.

On Feb. 21, an ammonium nitrate-fuel oil bomb exploded under a chair outside McPeak's home, blowing out five windows.

McPeak went to Vollmer's house to confront him. He says he found McVeigh with another man McPeak didn't recognize.

In the last week before the bombing, several people in Herington and nearby Junction City say they saw a man with McVeigh.

A Texaco clerk said the mystery man came in and bought a pack of Marlboros and Big Red chewing gum. A liquor store owner said he came into his shop.

A convenience store clerk in Herington and one of her regular customers said McVeigh came in two days before the bombing with another man - not Nichols. The stranger fiddled with a refrigerator door while McVeigh bought a pack of Camels. She spoke to the stranger, but he didn't answer.

The next morning, the day before the bombing, a restaurant owner in Herington says she served breakfast to McVeigh, Nichols and a third man. A Ryder truck was parked outside.

In Oklahoma City, banker Kyle Hunt of Tulsa exited the freeway on his way to a meeting when he came upon a Ryder truck followed by a large, light-colored sedan.

He told the FBI he is certain the car's driver was McVeigh and that there were two other men in the car. At least one person had to have been in the truck, for a total of four people. Nichols was in Herington that morning, so he wasn't among them.

Hunt isn't being called at the trial. In fact, the government currently doesn't plan on

calling any witness placing McVeigh in Oklahoma City the day of the bombing.

CAPTION(S):

Illustration

John Doe 2.