

Investigator quits in anger from McVeigh's defense

Houston Chronicle (TX)

March 20, 1997 | PAUL McKAY | Page: 1 | Section: aNEWS

CONROE - Private investigator Richard Reyna - known locally for helping free Clarence Brandley from death row - resigned angrily Wednesday from Oklahoma City bombing suspect Timothy McVeigh's defense team

Reyna said he quit because lead defense attorney Stephen Jones had failed to clear his name amid allegations that Reyna had fabricated a confession by McVeigh.

"Stephen Jones said he was going to take care of this, and as far as I'm concerned, he didn't," Reyna said from his Conroe home. "It looks like I turned on Timothy McVeigh and that's damaging to my livelihood."

Reyna expressed dismay at recent published reports that he concocted a phony confession by McVeigh to try to trick a possible suspect in the Oklahoma City federal building bombing that killed 168 people and injured more than 500.

"It's an absolute falsehood," he said. "I never falsified any documents."

Reyna was in Europe earlier this month when an Oklahoma free-lance writer, J.D. Cash, said he had permission from the private investigator to say Reyna had made up a confession linked to McVeigh. Cash contended that Reyna had written the phony confession in an effort to trick a possible suspect into giving information about the April 19, 1995, bombing.

"I like Cash; I really do. I have a lot of respect for him," Reyna said. "But why he would say something like that is beyond me. It just didn't happen.

"I spoke to John Cash last night and I told him that he knows this never happened. It's insane. Why would I show it to Cash or anybody else if I had made up a confession?"

He said Cash did not change his position during the discussion.

"This is the biggest case in the country right now and one of the biggest cases in the history of the country, and here I am accused of turning on my client," Reyna said. "It doesn't make sense. I wouldn't do it.

"I've had extensive interviews with Timothy McVeigh and I'm not going to comment on what Timothy McVeigh has told me. I put what he told me in report forms and gave those reports to Stephen Jones. I've never given those reports to anybody but Stephen Jones."

Reyna has been working since May 1995 for Jones, an Enid, Okla., lawyer who grew up in Houston.

He said his recent trip to Europe was partly a vacation and partly for work, but he would not say whether he worked on McVeigh's defense during that time.

McVeigh, 28, was living in Decker, Mich., when he was arrested and charged in the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building.

With Terry Nichols, he faces murder, conspiracy and weapons charges. McVeigh is awaiting a March 31 trial in Denver. Nichols will be tried separately, but no date has been set.

Cash, a former lawyer who works with the McCurtain Daily Gazette in Idabel, Okla., was quoted about Reyna in national news accounts after the Dallas Morning News reported it had confidential documents showing that McVeigh had confessed to the bombing.

Defense attorneys accused the Dallas paper of stealing private documents, later contending a faked confession was part of the defense plan to trick a possible suspect.

Cash, who has authored several articles suggesting the bombing was part of a larger conspiracy, was quoted earlier this month as saying he and Reyna are good friends and that they once laughed over "creative juices" flowing in the creation of the bogus confession.

Reyna said Wednesday night that he and Cash "went into areas together so that I could talk to white supremacists."

"Cash has ties with right-wingers. He was opening doors for me so that I could talk to these people during the course of my investigation," he said. "But this stuff about the creative juices and me making up the confession is simply not true. That didn't happen."

Reyna said Jones had assured him many times that he was going to clear his name because he knew Reyna had not leaked information to news reporters.

"Hell, instead of clearing me, he said I faked these documents trying to trick Louis Beam," Reyna said. "I did meet Louis Beam. I met Randy Weaver. I interviewed many white supremacists. I'm not going to do something as stupid as trying to trick them."

Beam, a former Ku Klux Klan leader in the Houston area, is a militant white supremacist and frequently quoted writer on "leaderless resistance." Weaver, a white separatist, was acquitted of murder and conspiracy charges after an 11-day

siege in 1992 at his remote cabin in Ruby Ridge, Idaho. His wife and 14-year-old son were killed during the siege, and a federal marshal also died.

Reyna, who would not give his age, is a former sheriff's deputy in Harris and Montgomery counties. Although he received honors from both departments, he resigned from the Montgomery County unit amid allegations that he had accepted a bribe.

Reyna later was nobilled by a county grand jury. He said the accusations had been lodged by powerful people who were angered by his aggressive investigations of labor camps that harbored illegal immigrants.

He gained national attention when he worked with defense lawyers to get new evidence that overturned a guilty verdict in the case of Clarence Brandley.

Brandley, who moved to the Houston area to become a minister after his release from prison, is a former Conroe school janitor. He had been accused of raping and strangling 16-year-old Cheryl Dee Fergeson of Bellville during an Aug. 23, 1980, volleyball tournament at Conroe High School.

Cash could not be reached for comment Wednesday, but he told The Daily Oklahoman, in a copyright story, that he stood by his comments

Caption:

Photo: Private investigator Richard Reyna, shown Wednesday at his Conroe home (p. 18)

Kerwin Plevka/Chronicle

Memo: Copyright 1997, Houston Chronicle.