

## **DEFENSE: IRAQ PROBABLY LED PLOT**

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Michael W. Brescia, son of a fireman from Roxborough, started out to be an accountant but now finds himself in a federal prison cell, charged with conspiring to rob banks to finance a plot to overthrow the government.

Along the way, Brescia wandered through the southwestern United States and, according to the authorities, fell in with a government-hating, white-supremacist crowd that loved guns and explosives.

Now, with Timothy McVeigh, 28, set to go on trial Monday in the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing that killed 168 people, it appears likely the name Michael Brescia will figure prominently in the defense case.

That's because a number of people - but not including government prosecutors - have identified Brescia, 24, as the mysterious John Doe 2. John Doe 2 is the man who was described the day after the bombing as having accompanied McVeigh to a Junction City, Kan., agency to rent a Ryder truck two days before the April 19, 1995, bombing.

John Doe 1, the government says, is McVeigh.

But the only other person charged with murdering the occupants of the federal building is Terry Nichols, 42, who will be tried separately. Brescia, the government insists, was not involved.

Two days after McVeigh allegedly rented the truck, it was left in front of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, where it blew up, destroying the building, including a day-care center, killing 168 and injuring 500 in the worst case of terrorism in the nation's history.

Among the dead were Chase Smith, 3, and his brother, Colton, 2, who had been dropped off at the day-care center by their mother, Edye, who then went to work.

Smith's co-workers had bought a cake to celebrate her 22nd birthday and, just after the candles were lit, she heard the explosion. Her mother, Kathy Wilburn, 43, worked in the same office, and the two of them raced the few blocks to the federal building, where they gasped in horror because they knew ``the babies were gone," she told the Washington Post.

Smith has filed a \$30 million wrongful-death lawsuit against McVeigh. And she has named as co-defendants Brescia and Brescia's former roommate Andreas Strassmeir, a German national.

``Those guys are in it up to their heads," Smith said, when the suit was filed.

Smith's lawyer, Larry Oliver, told reporters the men were seen together at Lady Godiva's, a topless bar in Tulsa, days before the bombing. And, said Oliver, he has witnesses who will testify to that and to McVeigh's discussing the bombing before it occurred.

Although artists' sketches of the elusive John Doe 2 were given wide circulation on television and in newspapers, the government in June 1995 said that person was no longer a suspect.

According to the government, John Doe 2 is Todd Bunting, an Army private who happened into the truck rental agency the day after McVeigh rented his vehicle. Through a mixup, a witness described Bunting as the man who had been with McVeigh.

In effect, the prosecution said, the man identified as John Doe 2 was not involved in the bombing.

Stephen Jones, McVeigh's lawyer, said the conflicting stories about John Doe 1's being with John Doe 2 will help his client at the Denver trial.

``If they [the government] have decided John Doe 2 is innocent, what does that say about the witnesses that claim to have seen him with John Doe No. 1, my client?" said Jones. ``Obviously, either the witnesses or the government are confused, or perhaps both."

The government's dismissal of John Doe 2 as a suspect did not go over well with Edye Smith, who was divorced, or with her parents, Kathy and Glenn Wilburn.

Glenn Wilburn, 47, is a CPA - ironically, the career goal Brescia was pursuing - and he was not going to accept the government's shrinking of the conspiracy that killed his two grandsons.

Wilburn had been conducting his own investigation when he was contacted by J.D. Cash, 44, a newcomer to journalism who was writing about the bombing for the McCurtain Daily Gazette, a 6,500-circulation paper in Idabel, Okla. The two became close, and together they went conspiracy hunting.

It was Cash who looked into the activities of the Aryan Republican Army, a white separatist group whose members lived in a compound in Elohim City in eastern Oklahoma.

The government subpoenaed phone records during its investigation of McVeigh and discovered that on April 5, 1995, two weeks before the bombing, McVeigh had called the Elohim City compound from a Kingman, Ariz., motel. The call lasted one minute and 46 seconds.

Brescia, who had dropped out of La Salle University, was living in Elohim City at the time. So was Andreas Strassmeir, a onetime German army lieutenant who has returned to Germany.

Others living in the compound were Kevin McCarthy and Scott Stedeford, who were indicted with Brescia for conspiring to rob seven banks in the Midwest.

``Hell, we know he did it," said Cash, referring to Brescia's alleged involvement in the blast. ``We have too many IDs on him for it to be anyone else."

Despite the government's pooh-poohing of the Wilburn-Cash conspiracy theory, it has taken root on the Internet and thus has received international attention.

Defense attorney Jones, in seeking to turn the John Doe 2 controversy to his own advantage, pointed out the government's difficulty. How, he asked, do you disprove the existence of John Doe 2 after people already have identified him?

Brescia, once an Eagle Scout, left Oklahoma in August 1995 and returned to this area, according to the government. He moved back in with his parents, respected members of the community, and he brought with him his fiancée, Esther Den Hartog, the step-granddaughter of Robert Millar, 71, the right-wing militant who runs Elohim City.

When he was indicted in the bank robbery case in January, Brescia was back in school, going to La Salle on Tuesday and Thursday nights.

Although Brescia's current attorney, Edward Daly, could not be reached for comment, his previous lawyer, Brian McMonagle, hotly disputed any suggestion Brescia was involved in Oklahoma City.

Brescia's family asked that he be released on bail to await trial in the bank robbery case. But U.S. District Judge Ronald Buckwalter refused, committing Brescia to prison because he considered him a threat to society.

Buckwalter made his decision after Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael Schwartz said that Brescia had vowed to ``have it out with the feds" if they ever tried to arrest him. Staff writers Don Russell and Jim Smith contributed to this report.

Caption:

PHOTOPHOTO ASSOCIATED PRESS ASSOCIATED PRESS/FBI Michael Brescia (left) is reportedly identified as John Doe 2, seen in government sketches

The two young sons of Tony and Edye Smith were killed in the blast at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building Bombing suspect Timothy McVeigh and the mystery second bomber were allegedly seen at this strip club in Oklahoma City before bombing (ASSOCIATED PRESS) Kathy Wilburn, in the bedroom of her dead grandsons, Colton and Chase; her family has filed wrongful-death suit (ASSOCIATED PRESS) Glenn Wilburn (left) is getting help in his investigation of bombing from free-lance investigator John Cash

Memo:  
OKLAHOMA BOMBING