

No Fingerprints of McVeigh Found on Ryder Truck Key; Testimony Is First Boost in Days for Bomb Defense



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An FBI fingerprint expert conceded today that no fingerprints of Oklahoma bombing defendant Timothy J. McVeigh were found on a rental receipt for the Ryder truck used in the blast, inside the Ryder dealership, inside lockers the government believes were used to store explosives used in the bomb, or on the Ryder truck key found in an Oklahoma City alley after the bombing.

FBI specialist Louis Hupp repeated earlier testimony that McVeigh's fingerprints had been found, however, on the receipt for ammonium nitrate, which prosecutors allege was used to make the massive bomb that exploded April 19, 1995, killing 168 people and injuring more than 500 others. McVeigh faces the death penalty if convicted in the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building.

Hupp said it is fairly common for items such as those examined to show no prints because people often remove oils and other residues by washing or wiping their hands. "It's a chance impression and there must be something on the fingers to transfer," he said. Hupp's testimony was the first bright note in days for the defense, which has watched a parade of prosecution witnesses take the stand and identify McVeigh as the man who rented the Ryder truck, caused the Murrah building to be bombed and openly expressed his hatred for the federal government and determination to take action. Prosecutors, meanwhile, turned the courtroom here into a virtual automotive warehouse as an engineer identified charred and mangled remains of the Ryder truck allegedly used to blow up the Murrah building. "I believe that there was only one vehicle used in the Oklahoma City bombing and that vehicle was bought for and sold to Ryder, and that vehicle had only one vehicle identification number," testified Edward Paddock, a former design engineer for Ford, which built the truck.

The government identified the Ford truck used to carry the bomb to Oklahoma City through an identification number on a 250-pound axle found at the scene. After the FBI approached Ford for help in the case, Paddock said, the company located the truck that came off the assembly line just after the bomb truck and used it to compare parts found in the rubble. Today, jurors stood up to see the parts as Paddock identified pieces of the frame, brakes, bumper and the axle. The government today also sought to establish the chain of custody for McVeigh's clothing and personal effects from the time he was arrested on an unrelated charge in Perry, Okla., 75 minutes after the explosion. Deborah Thompson, a jailer at the Noble County Jail, testified that McVeigh's black jeans, T-shirt and boots were placed in a brown paper sack when he was booked. Cross-examining Thompson, the defense pressed for testimony that the clothing -- which the government contends contained explosives residue -- could have been compromised because of poor security procedures at the county jail. But Thompson said that access to the jail's fourth-floor storage area was limited and that prisoners who used the room to change into jail clothing were always accompanied by jail personnel. Prosecutors are likely to rest their case next week, with the first defense witness coming to the stand as early as Tuesday or Wednesday, according to sources close to the case. The government's case has moved much faster than expected, with over 125 witnesses testifying in less than three weeks. From the start, government sources said privately that they intended to make the complex case simple and swift for fear of losing the jury's attention. The defense to date has not challenged the government's case as vigorously as some legal observers had predicted. However, sources say that McVeigh's lead attorney, Stephen Jones, will take about three weeks to call witnesses who will try to dispute chunks of government testimony. As it has throughout the fast-paced trial, the government today presented testimony that reminded jurors of the horrific pain experienced by victims and survivors of the explosion. The trial adjourned for the week today.