

# REST OF BOMBING STORY A MYSTERY DESPITE PROSECUTION, NAGGING QUESTIONS ABOUT CONSPIRACY THEORY REMAIN

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Byline: Lou Kilzer and Kevin Flynn Rocky Mountain News Staff Writers

Americans learned Monday that Timothy McVeigh is guilty of bombing the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, but they still don't know the full story.

The trial was a search for justice, not necessarily for the real story.

The prosecution of McVeigh left many nagging questions about the worst act of domestic terrorism in U.S. history.

Restricted as much by choice as by U.S. District Judge Richard Matsch's rulings excluding certain evidence and lines of questioning, lawyers on both sides honed their presentations to the narrow question of McVeigh's guilt or innocence.

Prosecutors made it clear from the outset that their job was to convict McVeigh - not necessarily answer every question about the bombing conspiracy.

They achieved their goal.

But now, a nation once captivated by the search for John Doe 2 is left to wonder whether there ever was such a man at the heart of the conspiracy.

The clues are tantalizingly strong and, without resolution, continue to feed conspiracy theories. These mysteries remain:

**Renting the truck**

Two witnesses who work at the Ryder agency in Junction City, Kan., where the bomb truck was rented testified that two men came into the office that day.

A third employee - the one whose memory was once deemed the clearest and provided the descriptions for the famous sketches of suspects John Does 1 and 2 - wasn't called as a witness. He also says two men were there.

And a fourth employee, also never called at the trial, told the FBI two men arrived to pick up the truck. He said they arrived in a Jeep Cherokee.

All this conflicts with the prosecution theory that McVeigh walked alone 20 minutes in the rain to get the truck.

With all the witnesses sure there were two men, neither of whom was co-defendant Terry Nichols, then who could this John Doe 2 be?

McVeigh at Denny's

A waitress at a Junction City Denny's restaurant testified she seated McVeigh and two other men for brunch on Easter Sunday, three days before the bombing. Again, Nichols wasn't among them; he was at home with his wife.

One of the men had long dark hair, similar to that of star witness Michael Fortier. Phone records in the case indicate no activity on Fortier's Kingman, Ariz., home telephone from April 14 until April 22.

This was in the midst of the most crucial period of the entire conspiracy. Who were those two other men having Easter brunch with McVeigh?

Dreamland Motel

Lea McGown owns the Dreamland Motel in Junction City. McVeigh stayed there for four nights before the bombing, registered in his own name.

One night, she said, she walked by his room and heard three male voices inside, one of them McVeigh's. She said she remembers this because McVeigh had paid a discount rate for a single room, and she would be upset if he had other guests.

Who were those other people?

McGown was not called to testify at the trial. The prosecution didn't call her perhaps because she told agents she saw McVeigh in a Ryder truck the day before the bomb truck was rented. The defense likely didn't call her because she did, in fact, see McVeigh in a Ryder truck.

The botched bomb

When McVeigh and Nichols tried to blow up a small ammonium nitrate bomb in a milk jug in October 1994 outside Kingman, Ariz., they failed miserably, Fortier testified.

In that tiny device, the booster went off and sprayed unignited ammonium nitrate all over the desert sand.

But in Kansas six months later, the government claimed, McVeigh took just a few hours the day before the bombing in Oklahoma City to mix nearly 5,600 pounds of ingredients into the same type of bomb.

On April 19, 1995, the bomb exploded so efficiently that the FBI laboratory could find just a few unignited crystals of ammonium nitrate at the crime scene. And McVeigh cleaned himself up so efficiently that no ammonium nitrate was found on him or his car.

How did he go from being unable to blow up a milk jug to cleanly igniting a Ryder truck full of explosives? The government says McVeigh learned the formula from *Homemade C-4*, a bomb-making book published in Boulder.

But the formula for such a bomb in *Homemade C-4* reads nothing like the way prosecutors said in court the bomb was built. The book calls for a slow, careful process of grinding and baking ammonium nitrate in small, coffee-can portions at a time.

Other threats

A paid federal informant infiltrated a racist compound in Oklahoma in 1994 and told her government contact that people there were talking about bombing federal facilities and the need to take action against the federal government.

One of the men she said was talking this way was a German illegal alien named Andreas Strassmeir. He is the person McVeigh is alleged to have called from Arizona two weeks before the bombing, immediately after McVeigh called a Ryder agency in Arizona, according to phone records the government put into evidence.

Despite this information, the FBI never interviewed Strassmeir before he fled to Berlin in January 1996. Why?

The government successfully argued to Matsch that the informant, Carol Howe, should be prevented from testifying.

Why?

## Eyewitnesses

Tulsa banker Kyle Hunt is certain he saw McVeigh driving a big yellow car in downtown Oklahoma City, several blocks from the Murrah Building, a half-hour before the blast.

Hunt said two men were with McVeigh in the car - one with long dark hair similar to the unknown person with McVeigh in the Denny's restaurant. The men in the yellow car were tailing a big yellow Ryder truck and appeared to be lost in downtown's one-way street maze.

Hunt told the FBI McVeigh glared at him when Hunt caught his eye, ready to offer directions.

Hunt is only one of several people who claim to have seen McVeigh that morning in downtown Oklahoma City. All but one say they saw him with other men. None of these eyewitnesses was called to testify at the trial.

Why?

## Philippine connection

Nichols traveled often to the Philippines, where he married a mail-order bride. McVeigh's defense team interviewed a jailed Filipino terrorist, Edwin Angeles, who said he met with an American matching Nichols' description in 1992 on Mindanao, the hotbed of Islamic terrorism against the Philippine government.

Angeles also claimed in his videotaped statement that his associate, Ramzi Yousef, participated in the meeting. Yousef is the alleged mastermind of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

In November 1994, a month after the milk-jug bomb failed in Arizona, Nichols set up a two-month trip to the Philippines, where his wife was finishing school. Nichols left behind a letter for McVeigh indicating he might not return alive and that he should "go for it."

While Nichols was in his wife's hometown of Cebu City, Yousef also showed up there. He boarded a jumbo jet in Manila, planted a small bomb under his seat and got off the plane in Cebu City. The flight continued and the bomb went off en route to Tokyo, killing a Japanese tourist who had taken Yousef's seat. The plane landed safely.

Yousef has been convicted in this crime, which authorities say was a practice run for

a plot to bomb 11 U.S. airliners over the Pacific Ocean on a single day.

Did a meeting between Yousef and Nichols really happen? Matsch barred McVeigh's lawyers from presenting evidence about a possible Philippines connection, ruling it irrelevant to the charges against McVeigh.

### Spotlight calls

One mystery that no one has yet explained involves dozens of calls, lasting only seconds, to the company issuing the telephone calling card used by the conspirators.

On the surface, the calls were merely made to determine account balances. But often the balance was called for repeatedly, only minutes apart. Sometimes a dozen consecutive calls were made to the balance number.

The defense believed that the calls may have been used to connect the caller to a second, untraceable line. The issue, however, did not come up at McVeigh's trial because neither side could clearly work the evidence in their favor.

The records indicate, as McVeigh's lawyers contended, that a third person had access to the card.

The computer records show that on Feb. 17, 1995, several calls were made on the Spotlight card by McVeigh from the Hilltop Motel in Kingman, Ariz., to gun show promoters and to his father in New York.

The same day in Junction City, Nichols placed two calls from a hardware store.

But that evening, two calls totaling less than a minute were made from a pay phone east of Des Moines, Iowa, both made simply to check the credit balance on the Spotlight card.

Who made those two calls?

Terry Nichols' trial, expected to begin in August, might answer some of these questions.

But it's unlikely that America will ever get the full story unless Timothy McVeigh talks.

CAPTION(S):

Illustration

The prosecution's goal was to convict Timothy McVeigh, not to solve the bombing's mysteries. By Pat Lopez / CBS-Associated Press.