

Jones says conspiracy theory backed - McVeigh lawyer cites ex-informant's account

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DENVER - Testimony by a former government informant at her recent trial supports an often-stated defense theory that a larger conspiracy was behind the Oklahoma City bombing, Timothy McVeigh's attorney said Sunday.

In an interview on NBC's Meet the Press, Stephen Jones said he thought that Carol Howe's statements, which were not allowed at Mr. McVeigh's trial, prove that Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agents knew in advance of bomb threats to Oklahoma federal buildings.

"If you make a list of everything that the ATF knew on the night of April the 18th, no one could have assumed anything other than federal buildings were at risk in the state of Oklahoma," Mr. Jones said.

"The government, whoever they may have arrested, they have not arrested all the conspirators responsible for the deaths of 168 people in Oklahoma City. " Mr. Jones also said his post-trial dispute with Mr. McVeigh has been the most trying time of their relationship and called his client's recent newspaper interview - in which Mr. McVeigh criticized Mr. Jones - "ill-advised. " "Most of the time, I would say 90, 95, 98 percent of the time, Tim and I worked well together. That's not to say there weren't stresses . . . but, frankly, I didn't see anything out of the ordinary," Mr. Jones said.

The contentious relationship surfaced when Mr. McVeigh told the Buffalo News this month that Mr. Jones had "screwed up badly" and lied to him.

Mr. McVeigh has asked the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to grant him a new lawyer to handle the appeal of his conviction and death sentence in the April 19, 1995, bombing. Mr. Jones has asked to withdraw as Mr. McVeigh's counsel, calling his client ungracious and petty. Both motions are pending.

Mr. McVeigh was convicted of murder, conspiracy and weapons-related counts in the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building that killed 168 people and injured more than 500.

Co-defendant Terry Nichols is scheduled to stand trial Sept. 29 on identical charges.

During Mr. McVeigh's trial, U.S. District Judge Richard Matsch refused to allow evidence about a defense theory that an international conspiracy was behind the bombing.

He denied the defense's request to call Ms. Howe, who testified during her trial that she overheard talk of bombing federal buildings while working undercover at Elohim City, a white separatist community in eastern Oklahoma.

A government agent testified that Ms. Howe was dropped as an informant in March 1995 because of questions about her mental stability. The ATF and FBI renewed her services for two months as part of the Oklahoma City bombing investigation, but the agencies said she provided no useful information.

Ms. Howe was acquitted Aug. 2 of criminal charges unrelated to the Oklahoma City bombing.

Memo: A shorter version of this story appeared on page 20A. in the Home Final edition.