

Gun Dealer's Robbery Tale In Dispute

Defense Plans To Link Witness With Man Once Thought To Be John Doe 2

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A mystery man is about to surface in the trial of Terry Nichols.

Arkansas gun dealer Roger Moore is a pivotal government witness against Nichols in the second Oklahoma City bombing trial.

Prosecutors say Nichols robbed Moore of \$60,000 in guns, gems, precious metals and cash to help finance the bombing of Oklahoma City's federal building with Timothy McVeigh.

Nichols' lawyers will paint a starkly different picture - there was no robbery, and Moore, in fact, was a friend of McVeigh's.

The defense attorneys will go even further - they will try to link Moore with a man once suspected of being the shadowy John Doe No. 2 accomplice of McVeigh.

It will be part of the team's attempt to discredit Moore.

As testimony in the Nichols trial enters its second week, the relationships among Nichols, McVeigh, Moore and a handful of other figures loom as a key issue for the 12 Colorado jurors considering Nichols' fate.

The alleged robbery took place Nov. 5, 1994.

But evidence shows that Moore, of Royal, Ark., exchanged letters with McVeigh, whom he considered a suspect in his robbery, early in 1995 - three months before the April 19 bombing.

Moore identified McVeigh and three other men as possible suspects in the robbery. But Garland County Sheriff Larry Selig said Moore misspelled McVeigh's name and said he didn't know McVeigh's whereabouts.

That left police at a dead end.

But lawyers for both Nichols and McVeigh have said Moore and his companion, Karen Anderson, were instrumental after the robbery in trying to get McVeigh together with Steve Colbern.

Colbern, then of Oatman, Ariz., was investigated but cleared by the FBI of being the McVeigh accomplice who became known as John Doe No. 2.

If Moore had been able to help police track down McVeigh in the robbery investigation, could authorities have apprehended the embittered ex-soldier and headed off the bombing?

Michael Tigar, Nichols' attorney, is expected to suggest Moore was McVeigh's ally and hardly a man Nichols would have robbed.

Some of Moore's and Anderson's belongings were found in Nichols' house in Herington, Kan., when the FBI searched it after the bombing. They included a safe-deposit box key, camera equipment, pre-Columbian carved jade and the quilt from Anderson's bed, found on Nichols' bed.

While that links Nichols to Moore, Tigar will argue that Nichols left the quilt on his own bed the same day he turned himself in to police for questioning in the bombing case - clearly a sign Nichols didn't believe the goods were stolen.

But chief prosecutor Larry Mackey said McVeigh outlined the robbery - beforehand and afterward - to his friends, Michael and Lori Fortier, and said Nichols committed the crime because Moore knew McVeigh too well.

Evidence in the case shows McVeigh and Moore being together at least eight times since their first meeting at a gun show in Miami in February 1993. In September 1994, on a tip from Moore, McVeigh visited a private installation in Gulfport, Miss., where he thought former Soviet military vehicles were being refurbished for sale to the United Nations.

That same month, McVeigh and Moore had their last known face-to-face meeting at a Soldier of Fortune magazine convention in Las Vegas.

While Moore told police he didn't know how to reach McVeigh, a still-unexplained incident over three weeks after the robbery could undermine that claim.

A utility worker found a note McVeigh allegedly posted on a high-voltage tower in the desert outside Kingman, Ariz. It was addressed to ``SC." Its text hasn't been disclosed.

Tigar said ``SC" is Colbern, and the letter was an attempt by McVeigh to recruit Colbern. But McVeigh's lawyers said their client used the note in the desert to tell Colbern he wouldn't meet with him.

But Colbern was cleared of involvement in the bombing.