

KANSANS DESCRIBE MCVEIGH'S COHORTS SOME WITNESSES ALTER RECOLLECTIONS OF MEN SEEN IN JUNCTION CITY DAYS BEFORE BOMBING.(Local)

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A parade of Kansans on Wednesday placed Timothy McVeigh with one or more unidentified men days before the Oklahoma City bombing.

They were among 18 witnesses called by Terry Nichols' lawyers to suggest that McVeigh's real accomplices remain at large and that Nichols' links to the plot are insignificant.

Several of the witnesses who recalled seeing McVeigh with others have changed their descriptions of the men over time.

The men allegedly seen with McVeigh were described variously Wednesday as short, tall, dark-skinned, fair-skinned, clean-cut and scraggly.

One witness even raised the specter of a second Ryder truck's involvement in the bombing.

Mary Louise Martinez, a nurse, said she saw McVeigh and a Hispanic man in a Ryder truck about 8:20 a.m. on April 17, 1995, in Junction City, Kan.

That was eight hours before McVeigh rented the Ryder truck used in the bombing on April 19.

Questioning from prosecutor Patrick Ryan drew out the fact that Martinez has changed her description of the passenger and the man she identified as McVeigh and now doesn't remember what she told FBI agents months ago.

Martinez acknowledged, ``Everybody was saying that they saw him . . . in Junction City, everybody was coming out."

Many people in Kansas and Oklahoma have said they saw McVeigh - alone and with one or more others, sometimes in a Ryder truck and sometimes not - before the blast.

Some lawyers dismiss such claims as ``Elvis sightings," saying it is common for people to sincerely believe in retrospect that they saw key figures in major crimes, even when they didn't.

During McVeigh's trial, prosecutors avoided calling such witnesses to avoid raising contradictions his attorneys might have exploited.

Nichols' lawyers, however, are making the most of those witnesses, hoping to persuade the jury that McVeigh conspired with several men, none of them Nichols.

For example, a Junction City waitress testified that she saw McVeigh and two men three days before the bombing at a time when Nichols was home having Easter dinner with his family.

Nancy Kindle said she later saw McVeigh at a gas station about 4:30 p.m. But the jury already has been told that McVeigh was en route to Oklahoma City at that time and could not have been in Junction City.

Two other Junction City residents described men they said they saw with McVeigh before the bombing.

Jeff Davis, who delivered Chinese food to a motel room McVeigh had rented, said the man he saw there wasn't McVeigh. He said the man had unkempt, tousled hair - far different from McVeigh's clean-cut burr.

Eldon Elliott, owner of the body shop where McVeigh rented the bomb truck two days before the bombing, said a man with McVeigh was wearing a white baseball-style cap styled with blue lightning bolts.

The government says the man with the cap came into the shop the day after McVeigh did and had nothing to do with the bombing.

The defense called other witnesses to bolster their contention that Nichols, instead of helping McVeigh, was settling down with his family and starting a military surplus business.

Wende Menke testified that Nichols placed several ads in the Plug Nickel, a weekly

shopper, offering to sell nails, a fuel meter, hand tools and other items.

Spectators got a jolt when they learned the date the ads first ran: April 19, 1995 - the day of the bombing.

Dennis Crawford testified that he met Nichols at a gun show in Des Moines, Iowa, two months before the bombing. Nichols was selling canteens, sleeping bags and other items.

Prosecutor Jamie Orenstein scored a point when he asked whether Nichols was selling ammonium nitrate.

“No, he was not,” Crawford said.

Nichols has said he had ammonium nitrate at his home because he was selling it at gun shows as plant food.

Prosecutors say the bomb was made of two tons of ammonium nitrate fertilizer.

FBI agents found a receipt for the fertilizer at Nichols' home. It carried McVeigh's fingerprint.

THE NICHOLS TRIAL / DAY 45

WEDNESDAY'S SUMMARY: Defense witnesses placed Timothy McVeigh with one or more men who weren't Terry Nichols in the days before the Oklahoma City bombing

WITNESSES TO DATE: 98 for prosecution, 28 for defense

TODAY'S SCHEDULE: The defense will continue its effort to distance Nichols from McVeigh.

QUOTE OF THE DAY: “I can't really tell you what he looked like.” - Eldon Elliott, owner of a Kansas body shop, discussing a man he said accompanied McVeigh when the truck used in the bombing was rented.