

# Informant links McVeigh with supremacists

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DENVER — Terry Nichols' lawyers tried to shift blame to others in the Oklahoma City bombing plot, calling a federal informant yesterday who said Timothy McVeigh visited a white supremacist compound before the blast.

Carol Howe, who infiltrated the group at the government's request, testified that she saw McVeigh with Andreas Strassmeier, a German who was head of security for the

heavily fortified compound in Elohim City, Okla.

Howe contradicted Joan Millar, daughter of founder Robert Millar, who testified that Elohim City was a religious village made up of about 70 people who opposed violence and believed whites were the chosen people of God.

"Some of us may not be happy with what the government is doing, but there's not a mandate to go out and attack the government," Millar said.

But Howe said she heard the group's leaders preach "that the federal government was an evil entity," adding that residents talked frequently about "destroying the government."

Howe, who was acquitted this summer on unrelated conspiracy and bomb threat charges, was barred from testifying at McVeigh's trial after U.S. District Judge Richard Matsch deemed what she would say to be irrelevant.

Howe's testimony was allowed in the Nichols trial, but restricted. According to her lawyer, the judge barred her from telling jurors she overheard white supremacist Dennis Mahon and Strassmeier discuss blowing up federal buildings before the bombing. Neither man was named as a suspect.

"It will be another occasion before the public really is able to be informed about what she knew," said her attorney, Clark Brewster.

Howe said she believes she saw McVeigh at Elohim City in July 1994, near a church building. She said she later realized the man was McVeigh. Under cross-examination, Howe admitted she did not tell the FBI initially that she had seen McVeigh at the compound.

Authorities have said Howe was dropped as an informant in March 1995 because of questions about her mental stability. The federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and the FBI briefly reactivated her after the bombing, but they said she provided no useful information and was dropped again.

Defense attorneys, who are expected to wrap up their case this week, also called FBI agent William Tobin, who acknowledged that a drill and drill bits found in Nichols' home were damaged by water while in FBI custody.

Tobin insisted the tips of the drill bits, including one linked through scratch marks to the burglary of Kansas quarry and the theft of explosives, were not corroded. But Tigar introduced FBI photos showing the shafts of the bits had corroded.

Before testimony began yesterday, jurors were told to disregard testimony from a manufacturer who said the chemical formula used in barrels found in Nichols' garage was the same unique mix contained in plastic fragments recovered at the Oklahoma City bombing scene.

Matsch said Smurfit Plastics barrel designer Theodore Udell and FBI agent Jeff Hayes relied on hearsay for parts of their testimony because the information was obtained through phone calls to unidentified workers at other barrel makers.

Nichols is charged with murder, conspiracy and weapons counts and could be sentenced to die if convicted in the April 19, 1995, truck bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building that killed 168 people.

McVeigh, 29, was convicted on identical charges earlier this year and sentenced to death.