

John Doe 2? It's still an open question.



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The sentencing of Oklahoma City bombing suspect Terry Nichols on Thursday closed another chapter in the case, but the question of whether a wider conspiracy was involved in the deadly 1995 blast may never be laid to rest.

"There clearly is a lot of evidence that came out during Nichols' trial that points out that there were other people involved," said Joel Dyer, a Colorado author who recently was hired as an investigator for convicted bomber Timothy McVeigh's defense team. "I don't even have a doubt about that."

Prosecutors see things differently.

"We interviewed more than 30,000 witnesses in this case and reviewed thousands of pieces of evidence looking for everybody responsible, and we came up with those two people (McVeigh and Nichols)," said Justice Department spokeswoman Chris Watney. "We did an exhaustive search for anyone else involved. The investigation was the largest ever conducted by the FBI."

Watney added that investigators "would follow any credible leads if we got them."

Critics, including jurors in the Nichols trial; militia members; and the Oklahoma City Bombing Investigation Committee, a nonprofit group conducting its own investigation of the blast, contend that the government dropped the ball in the case. They noted that the federal indictment charges that McVeigh, Nichols and "others unknown" were involved in the plot.

Even U.S. District Judge Richard P. Matsch, who presided over both the McVeigh and Nichols trials, apparently thought others may have been involved. Matsch told Nichols that he would consider a lesser sentence if he would provide answers to lingering questions about the case.

``It's highly unusual for a sitting judge to do something like that," Dyer said.

``Basically, he took all the evidence he'd heard in two cases and made his own pronouncement, which was that there were other people left out on the street."

And what about John Doe 2?

Sketches of the mystery suspect were circulated across the country after the bombing as the man seen with McVeigh when he rented a Ryder truck at Elliott's Body Shop in Junction City, Kan.

But the Justice Department later announced that the target of the largest manhunt in U.S. history was actually a soldier from nearby Fort Riley who had rented a truck at the body shop the day after McVeigh.

Recent reports, however, suggest that independent investigators are continuing to search for a man named Robert Jacks or Jacques who they think may be John Doe 2.

``John Doe 2?" Dyer said. ``Everything I've looked at over the last two years is that there was certainly a person described in a similar way by a lot of different people who didn't know each other. It would be hard to explain him away."

Some of the most compelling evidence of other possible conspirators came from a key defense witness at Nichols' trial.

Charles Farley, a mechanic, testified that he was at Geary State Fishing Lake, south of Junction City, around 6 p.m. April 18, 1995 _ the day before the bombing. As an employee of Outdoor Recreation Center at Fort Riley, he said, customers had asked him to check fishing conditions.

Farley said that while driving around the lake he came across a Ryder truck, a brown car, a rusty green-and-white pickup and a green, 2-ton flatbed farm truck. The flatbed, Farley said, was weighed down with white bags that he identified as ammonium nitrate.

Farley said he saw five men standing near the vehicles. He was about to ask whether they needed help, but one of the men gave him a dirty look, so he drove away. He described the man as having gray hair and a beard.

After the bombing, Farley said, he saw news reports that the bomb may have been mixed at the lake, and ``I started putting two and two together immediately."

That same day, Farley said, he was watching a television newscast and saw an

interview with a Kansas militia leader whom he said was the man who had glared at him at the lake. He said that he called the FBI to report what he had seen and that an agent later questioned him about it, but that no follow-ups were conducted.

``The Farley testimony, according to the jurors, was the turning point," Dyer said. ``Nichols wasn't found guilty of murder because of Farley. And the fact that the government ignored his entire story is incredible to me."

Meanwhile, an Oklahoma County, Okla., grand jury is investigating allegations that federal authorities had prior knowledge of the bombing plot.

A key component of that theory is former government informant Carol Howe, who infiltrated Elohim City, a Christian Identity paramilitary compound in eastern Oklahoma. Howe said she gave agents information that federal buildings were targets for bombings before the Oklahoma City blast.

Prosecutors, however, said the information was not specific and not helpful.

McVeigh's former attorney, Stephen Jones, believes in a wider conspiracy. So strongly, in fact, that it's the central theme of a book he is completing. Called *Others Unknown*, the book is scheduled to be released in November.

``There clearly are others implicated by the evidence," Jones said. ``There are serious questions. There's the unidentified leg that was found at the Murrah Building, there's the testimony of four people at Elliott's that there were two of them who rented the truck."

Jones also believes in John Doe 2.

``I think he definitely existed. I don't know if he exists now, but he definitely did then."

So what happens next?

``It would be disappointing to me if the law enforcement agencies of the United States government have quit looking for answers in this Oklahoma bombing tragedy," Matsch said after Nichols was convicted in December.

Prosecutor Larry Mackey replied: ``We continue to work."

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