

## McVeigh Case Takes A New Twist

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Los Angeles - The FBI suddenly dropped its search for suspects who may have helped Timothy McVeigh bomb the Oklahoma City federal building, a month after the investigation started, an internal FBI memo shows.

Despite multiple witness sightings of accomplices with McVeigh in Oklahoma City on the morning of the bombing, and despite a nationwide hunt for a man the authorities called John Doe 2, the leaked memo suggests the search was in fact quietly dropped, at least temporarily, sometime in mid-May.

The memo is a report by a field officer in San Francisco, who tells his superiors he has made unsuccessful attempts to track down the landlord of a possible John Doe 2 - known in the bureau's own investigative language as Unsub ( "unidentified subject") No 2.

"In view of the fact that the Oklahoma command post has directed all offices to hold Unsub No 2 leads in abeyance, San Francisco will conduct no further investigation regarding this lead," the memo from Special Agent Thomas P Ravenelle reads.

The exact day the memo was written is unknown, but it refers to an investigative lead taken up on May 3 and clearly abandoned shortly afterwards.

Why the FBI would have dropped its interest in John Doe 2 so early on is a mystery, but the decision is in keeping with the line eventually taken by government lawyers at the 1997 trials of McVeigh and his main known accomplice, Terry Nichols - that John Doe 2 did not, in fact, exist.

The issue has returned to prominence since last week's revelation that the FBI had withheld more than 3 000 pages of evidence from the defence at the McVeigh and Nichols trials. The revelation prompted John Ashcroft, the Attorney-General, to announce a 26-day delay in McVeigh's execution, which had been due to take place on Wednesday.

It is believed the newly revealed documents contain witness statements on John Doe 2 and possibly other suspects.

From the beginning of the case, defence lawyers have accused the government of holding back evidence pointing to a wider conspiracy. On Monday, Nichols's lawyers said they had asked the Supreme Court to reopen his case on the grounds that they were denied access to key documents at the time of his trial.

Nichols is serving a life sentence in a federal prison, and could still face capital charges in state court in Oklahoma. McVeigh's execution has been reset for June 11, but many legal experts expect a much longer delay before he is put to death.

On Monday, the Supreme Court released the request by Nichols's defence after the FBI turned over the newly discovered documents to his lawyers and lawyers for McVeigh.

McVeigh's defence team has left open the possibility its client may seek a new trial or reduced sentence, which would mark a reversal of his decision last year to waive all appeals and go forward with his own execution.

But McVeigh's lawyers declined to comment on Monday on the status of their review as they waded through the FBI reports.

Attorneys for Nichols asked the Supreme Court to reconsider its denial in April of his appeal claiming the federal government withheld information that could have helped his defence at trial and sentencing.

The latest request was made "in good faith and not for purposes of delay", Susan Foreman, a Boulder, Colorado-based attorney for Nichols, said in the court documents.

The lawyers asked the Supreme Court to grant the appeal and direct a US appeals court to send the case back to a federal trial judge in Denver for further proceedings.

"In a case of this magnitude, where the defendant's life and liberty were at jeopardy and, at the Oklahoma state level continue to be so, it is essential that the defence has the opportunity to review and assess the withheld materials and then take the appropriate action," they said.

In the state case, an Oklahoma judge on Monday postponed a scheduled May 21 preliminary hearing of the state charges to give lawyers from both sides time to study the new FBI documents. - The Independent and Reuters