

Hunt for McVeigh gang ended within weeks Accomplice of McVeigh appeals over FBI blunder

By Andrew Gumbel in Los Angeles | The Independent | 15 May 2001

The Federal Bureau of Investigation dropped its search for suspects who may have helped Timothy McVeigh bomb the Oklahoma City federal building less than a month after the attack, an internal FBI memo obtained by The Independent shows.

Despite witness sightings of accomplices with McVeigh in Oklahoma City on the morning of the bombing in April 1995, and despite a nationwide hunt for a man the authorities called "John Doe 2", the memo suggests that the search was quietly dropped, at least temporarily, in mid-May 1995.

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 jargon as "Unsub (for "unidentified subject") #2".

"In view of the fact that the Oklahoma Command Post has directed all offices to hold Unsub #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 3 May 1995 and clearly abandoned shortly afterwards.

Why the FBI would have dropped its interest in John Doe 2 so quickly 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 after 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 tomorrow.

It is believed that the new documents contain witness statements on John Doe 2 and possibly other suspects. Defence lawyers have accused the US government of holding back evidence pointing to a wider conspiracy. Yesterday, Nichols' lawyers said they had asked the Supreme Court to reopen his case.

McVeigh's execution has been put back to June 11, but many legal experts expect a much longer delay.