

U.S. Had Vague Data About Okla. Bombing

By **JOHN SOLOMON**

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Two federal law enforcement agencies had information before the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing suggesting that white supremacists living nearby were considering an attack on government buildings, but the intelligence was never passed on to federal officials in the state, documents and interviews show.

FBI headquarters officials in Washington were so concerned that white separatists at the Elohim City compound in Muldrow, Okla., might lash out April 19, 1995 — the day Timothy McVeigh did choose — that a month earlier they questioned a reformed white supremacist familiar with an earlier plot to bomb the same Alfred P. Murrah federal building McVeigh selected.

"I think their only real concern back then was Elohim City," said Kerry Noble, the witness questioned by the FBI on March 28, 1995 — just a few weeks before McVeigh detonated a truck bomb outside the building and killed more than 160 people.

Noble told The Associated Press that his FBI questioners appeared particularly concerned about what Elohim City members might do April 19 because one of their heroes, Wayne Snell, was being executed that day and another, James Ellison, was returning to Oklahoma after ending parole in Florida.

FBI officials confirmed Noble's account, including concerns the group at Elohim City might strike April 19.

Snell, Ellison and Noble had plotted to attack the Murrah building in 1983 with plastic explosives and rocket launchers, according to Noble and FBI officials. The plan never reached fruition, and the group was arrested after a siege with law enforcement in 1985.

The FBI wasn't alone in its concerns, according to thousands of pages of federal investigative memos and handwritten notes obtained by the AP.

In the days before he was executed for a 1980s murder of a pawn broker, Snell began making threats from his Arkansas prison that there would be a bombing or explosion April 19 to avenge his death, according to prison and FBI officials. He also had contact in his last days with members of Elohim City, who later took his remains back to their compound.

"Some of the corrections officers heard (Snell) in a visitors' room talking with people, saying there would be a large explosion or event of some type. He said the immediate reaction would be to blame it on Middle Eastern types. This was prior," said Alan Ables, a former Arkansas corrections official.

Jeff Rosenzweig, Snell's death-row attorney, said Tuesday he does not think his client knew of McVeigh's plot beforehand but that "Snell tended to talk in apocalyptic terms and certainly, frankly, I wouldn't doubt if Snell said something bad is going to happen."

Separately, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms had an informant inside Elohim City who had disclosed before the bombing that white supremacists were "preparing for a war against the U.S. government." The government also had information suggesting that compound members had detonated a 500-pound fertilizer bomb like the one McVeigh would use and had visited Oklahoma City several times. The FBI could never verify the detonation.

Federal investigators said that while they had concerns, they had no information before April 19 about a specific target and had not even heard of McVeigh until his arrest, making it impossible to issue a useful warning.