

Consultant says he doesn't have images of Oklahoma City bombing

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McALESTER, Okla. — The presiding judge in the trial of bombing conspirator Terry Nichols ordered a former congressional aide to search items seized from his home for material connected to the deadly explosion.

Judge Steven Taylor told John Culbertson during a pretrial hearing Wednesday to look through the nine computers, hundreds of disks and other items before they're returned to his home in Virginia.

"I want it done as quickly as possible," Taylor said.

Culbertson earlier presented a series of photographs that merely show a cloud of smoke, apparently unrelated to the April 19, 1995, bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building.

Taylor had ordered that Culbertson appear to discuss any previously unreleased images he may have of the bombing. Although he presented the photographs to the court, Culbertson said he does not believe they were taken at the time of the deadly blast.

"I did some digging around," Culbertson said. "I found some frames."

Two weeks ago, an Oklahoma City police detective seized items from in an attempt to find video or photographs of the bombing.

An affidavit filed in support of the search warrant said Dallas attorney Thomas W. Mills Jr. saw images on Culbertson's computer on Aug. 26, 1998, showing the Murrah building before the bombing, then with a "small glow" at its base, then with a "ball of fire rising from the building."

Culbertson has said he does not have what prosecutors want.

A federal judge has ordered the seized items returned to Culbertson, ruling the search was overly broad. Prosecutors are appealing the ruling.

Taylor said he's trying to comply with that judge's ruling but still wants to know if there's any information relevant to the case.

He ordered that Culbertson's search through the computers and other items be supervised by representatives of the prosecution and defense teams.

It was the second day in the pretrial proceeding for Nichols, 48, who was moved Sunday from the Oklahoma County jail to McAlester, where his trial is set to begin March 1.

Security around the courthouse has been tight. Nichols wears a bulletproof vest and is under heavy guard when he goes in and out of the building.

Concrete barriers block a traffic lane in front of the courthouse, where uniformed guards and a bomb-sniffing dog are present. Visitors must pass through a metal detector and have their bags X-rayed.

The judge moved the trial out of Oklahoma City because of pretrial publicity.

Nichols is serving a federal life sentence without the possibility of parole for the deaths of federal agents in the Oklahoma City bombing.

The state murder trial is for the other victims of the bombing, which killed 168 people. Prosecutors intend to seek the death penalty.

Authorities said Nichols helped Timothy McVeigh pack the bomb inside a truck the day before the attack. McVeigh was executed in 2001.

Prosecutors have refused to comment publicly on the state case, citing a gag order.

Culbertson was a consultant in the investigation of the bombing and served as chief of staff for convicted former Ohio Rep. James Traficant. He is now a journalist with a publication called the Arkansas Chronicle.