

Evidence hints at FBI coverup

Others may have assisted McVeigh in 1995 bombing

By JOHN SOLOMON
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — FBI agents destroyed evidence and failed to share other information that raised the possibility a gang of white-supremacist bank robbers may have assisted Timothy McVeigh in the Oklahoma City bombing, according to documents never introduced at McVeigh's trial.

Both the FBI supervisor who ran the Oklahoma City investigation and the veteran agent who was in command at the bombing scene say the new evidence, detailed in documents obtained by The Associated Press, is serious enough to warrant reopening the inquiry nine years later.

The evidence, never shared with Oklahoma City investigators or defense lawyers, involves several possible links between McVeigh and the Aryan Republican Army.

"If the evidence is still there, then it should be checked out," said Dan Defenbaugh, the now-retired FBI chief of the McVeigh inquiry who reviewed the documents at a reporter's request. "If I were still in the bureau, the investigation would be reopened."

Danny Coulson, the FBI scene commander for the Oklahoma bomb site, agreed.

"I think it needs to be reopened, but I don't think it should be reopened by the FBI," he said. "It needs to be a special investigator, a lawyer, totally independent. He needs to have subpoena power and the ability to use a grand jury."

The April 19, 1995, bombing killed more than 160 people, and McVeigh was put to death for it three years ago. His co-defendant, Terry Nichols, will stand trial in Oklahoma next week on state charges that could carry the death penalty.

Nichols is a native of Lapeer County. He and McVeigh, who were Army buddies, lived together in the mid-1990s in northwestern Sanilac County.

Peter Langan, one of the Aryan Republican Army bank robbers, is scheduled to testify



HEARTLAND TERROR: The bomb-blasted Oklahoma City federal building is seen in this file photo from April 19, 1995, when a terrorist bomb killed 168 people and wounded more than 500.

at Nichols' trial. He said federal prosecutors offered and then withdrew a plea deal for information he had about the Oklahoma City bombing.

Langan, who is serving life sentences for robbing nearly two dozen Midwest banks in the 1990s, said at least three fellow gang members were in Oklahoma around the time of the bombing. He said one of the men later told him they had been involved.

McVeigh's defense lawyer, Stephen Jones, said government officials "simply turned their backs on a group of people for which there is credible evidence suggesting they were involved in the murder of 160 people."

FBI and Justice Department officials declined comment, citing the upcoming trial.

Agents who worked both the McVeigh bombing and the bank-robbery spree — two of the FBI's highest priority cases of the 1990s — said they suspected a link between the two because of physical evidence as well as statements made by the robbers and a girlfriend.

The agents said they ruled out a connection when the bank robbers provided an alibi showing they left Oklahoma three days before the April 19, 1995, bombing.

That alibi, however, was contradicted by information Langan offered prosecutors and by car-sales records showing the bank robbers were still in Oklahoma after they claimed to have left, FBI documents show.

Defenbaugh said investigators in Oklahoma City never

learned of the possible links.

In 1994, McVeigh stole hundreds of blasting caps from a quarry. He used some of the caps to explode the Oklahoma City bomb. The FBI spent months unsuccessfully trying to locate the other stolen caps.

Witnesses said McVeigh put some of the extra caps in two boxes wrapped in Christmas paper in the back of his car along with mercury switches and duffel bags.

Six blasting caps were found in the Aryan Republican Army robbers' Ohio hideout in January 1996, along with mercury switches, a duffel bag and two items described as a "Christmas package," FBI records show. The FBI allowed firefighters to destroy the caps at the scene.

The destruction "in itself



Terry Nichols



Timothy McVeigh

was in total violation of the FBI's regulations and the rules of evidence," Defenbaugh said. "If there was Christmas wrapping paper, that should really have been a key to people ... and caused them to be compared by the laboratory to see if these were from McVeigh."

Defenbaugh said he also was concerned his investigation was not told the bank robbers had a driver's license in the name of Robert Miller, the alias used by Arkansas gun dealer Roger Moore.

At McVeigh's trial, prosecutors contended Moore was robbed at his Hot Springs, Ark., home in November 1994, and the proceeds were used to fund the Oklahoma bombing.

McVeigh was in Ohio the day Moore was robbed, staying in a hotel near a bank the robbers would hit a month later.

FBI agents suspected McVeigh participated in the robbery, but an analysis of the bank-surveillance video was inconclusive. That video was destroyed in 1999 by the FBI despite rules to the contrary.

A few months after Moore's robbery, McVeigh and the gun dealer exchanged letters in which Moore went by the name Robert Miller, the same alias on the license the bank robbers possessed when they were arrested in 1996.

"If the license is the same as our Roger Moore, then I'm really concerned," Defenbaugh said.

Separately, a death-row inmate who met McVeigh in prison said McVeigh told him the bank robbery gang assisted the bombing plot.

David Paul Hammer, a convicted murderer set to die in June, said he kept notes from his conversations.

"He (McVeigh) knew they were involved because he said he planned it with them," Hammer said. "He said they were part of what he called his security detail."