

DATA ON MCVEIGH DESTROYED

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WASHINGTON -- FBI agents destroyed evidence and failed to share other information that raised the possibility that a gang of white supremacist bank robbers may have assisted Timothy McVeigh during 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, includes documents showing the Aryan Republican Army bank robbers possessed explosive blasting caps similar to those McVeigh stole and a driver's license possibly stolen during the bombing plot.

"If the evidence is still there, then it should be checked out," said Dan Defenbaugh, the now-retired FBI chief of the McVeigh investigation who reviewed the documents at the request of AP. Danny Coulson, the FBI scene commander for the Oklahoma bomb site, agreed.

The investigative documents also shed new light on evidence the Justice Department did not introduce at McVeigh's 1997 trial, including that McVeigh may have sought to recruit additional help around the time he called a white supremacist compound in Oklahoma where several of the bank robbers stayed.

For instance, an FBI headquarters teletype stated McVeigh called the compound on "a day that he was believed to have been attempting to recruit a second conspirator to assist in the OKBOMB attack."

The April 19, 1995, bombing killed more than 160 people and McVeigh was put to death for it in 2001.

His co-defendant, Terry Nichols, will stand trial in Oklahoma next week on state charges that could carry the death penalty.