

FBI reviews McVeigh case for any likely accomplices

By John Solomon
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WASHINGTON (AP) — The FBI agents given the unexpected job of reanalyzing evidence nine years after the original Oklahoma City bombing investigation have plenty of places to look.

Their mission is clearly stated in orders given Friday: determine if the years-old whispers that Timothy McVeigh had more accomplices can be cor-

roborated or disproved from a small body of documents that apparently never reached the original Oklahoma City investigation.

The outcome may not be as clear.

A trail of hotel and car sale receipts, surveillance videos and interviews with convicted felons awaits the agents, offering them tantalizing but at times contradictory clues.

The starting point will be hundreds of miles away from the devastation of McVeigh's deadly 1995 bomb

— in FBI files originally gathered in Philadelphia, Cleveland, and Omaha, Neb., where agents helped solve one of the most famous banking robbery sprees of the 1990s.

The Associated Press reported last week that agents in that white supremacist bank robbery case collected witness statements, blasting caps and even a driver's license that raised questions of whether the Aryan Republican Army bank robbery gang might have assisted McVeigh's plot. But they did not share all the information with their colleagues in Oklahoma City.

In a few instances, agents even allowed some evidence to be destroyed.

The disclosures shook the FBI veteran who oversaw the massive Oklahoma City investigation. For years, Dan Defenbaugh had insisted every legitimate lead was pursued.

But Defenbaugh says he did not know about some of the evidence unearthed by the AP in the robbery case and he no longer could say for sure his investigation saw everything it needed.

The FBI responded Friday by asking its inspection division to review some of that evidence and determine if more needs to be done. The inspection division is a unit of senior agents that routinely reviews the work of the bureau.

Ironically, the review will be conducted in the shadows of a related event — the Oklahoma state murder trial of McVeigh conspirator Terry Nichols. It begins Monday and may also shine light on the question of other accomplices.

Nichols faces the death penalty if convicted. Any evidence of additional, unpunished conspirators could mitigate his fate.

For Oklahoma City residents, old wounds are certain to be reopened. But at least some welcome a second look at a case that has spawned countless rumors



Timothy McVeigh
FBI reviewing case files

and theories of wider conspiracies.

"I have prayed and asked God this time let the truth come out," said Jannie Coverdale, whose two grandsons were killed in the bombing. "I did not believe what the federal government had said. I had talked to too many people that had seen Tim McVeigh in Oklahoma City that morning and not one saw Tim McVeigh by himself."

The initial FBI review will be narrow, officials say. It will be limited to a review of documents from the bank robbery investigation that both included references to Oklahoma City and were not shared with the original investigation.

Those most familiar with the case predict the new review will run into a handful of old questions.

For instance, the FBI was unable to determine McVeigh's whereabouts or activities on some dates in the Oklahoma bombing chronology.

Agents in the bank robbery case documented several instances through interviews and hotel receipts in which the bank robbers were in the same general vicinity as McVeigh when some of those gaps occur.

Also, there is the unanswered question of who robbed Arkansas gun dealer Roger Moore, a crime that the government argued raised the money for McVeigh's bomb. Moore said the men who robbed him did not resemble Nichols or McVeigh.

The bank robbery investigation turned up a tantalizing clue. The robbers had in their possession an Arkansas driver's license in the name of Robert Miller, the alias used by Moore in his dealings with McVeigh.