

▼ OKLAHOMA CITY BOMBING

McVeigh interview foiled

FBI had sought death-row interview to resolve questions

By The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — As the clock ticked toward Timothy McVeigh's execution, senior FBI agents pressed behind closed doors for permission to interview the convicted Oklahoma City bomber, but the plan never materialized amid internal disagreements, officials say.

The agents wanted to resolve questions about McVeigh's whereabouts on certain dates that were left unanswered by his public statements and the evidence — essentially filling in gaps in his timeline before the bombing, the officials said. The plan was scrapped when the government couldn't resolve who would attend the interview or how it would be conducted. Officials also became distracted by the belated discovery of some 4,000 pages of documents that had not been turned over to McVeigh's defense during his trial.

That discovery prompted a dramatic one-month delay in

McVeigh's execution, during which FBI and Treasury agents continued to press unsuccessfully for access to McVeigh on death row.

The interview debate was described by several current and former officials. They said it showed the government didn't know everything it wanted about McVeigh before he was put to death.

The officials said the potential interview became a primary focus of the remaining McVeigh investigative team during the spring of 2001 and was the subject of a high-level meeting in Oklahoma City in March of that year.

The officials said the debate was documented in numerous FBI e-mails, and they were uncertain whether those e-mails should have been turned over to lawyers for the upcoming Oklahoma state murder trial of Terry Nichols, McVeigh's co-conspirator.

Besides filling in the gaps for McVeigh's whereabouts, one senior official said agents had seen instances in the past where "death-row inmates were willing to give us some of their thought processes as their execution neared and we

hoped McVeigh might do the same."

The officials would discuss the interview debate only on condition their names not be used. The Justice Department has ordered its employees not to discuss the McVeigh case as Nichols' trial gets under way.

Information still emerging

New information has been emerging nine years after McVeigh's massive fertilizer bomb killed more than 160 people at the Alfred P. Murrah building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995.

Last week, the Associated Press reported that FBI agents in another case developed some evidence suggesting a gang of white supremacist bank robbers might have become involved in McVeigh's conspiracy, but the agents failed to forward some of the information to their colleagues in the Oklahoma case. That prompted the FBI on Friday to reopen portions of the case to determine if other conspirators were involved, and the judge in the Nichols' trial warned he might dismiss the case if defense lawyers provide proof information was withheld from Nichols.