

# Nichols' Lawyers Hint at a Wider Conspiracy

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McALESTER, Okla. -- Attorneys for bombing conspirator Terry L. Nichols questioned a prosecution witness Monday on a key element of Nichols' defense -- that executed bomber Timothy J. McVeigh had help from others as he planned the Oklahoma City bombing.

Suggestions of a wider conspiracy surfaced at Nichols' state murder trial with the testimony of Eldon Elliott, who operated the agency where McVeigh leased the Ryder truck later packed with explosive material.

The homemade bomb destroyed the Oklahoma City federal building on April 19, 1995, killing 168 people.

Elliott said McVeigh was accompanied by another man when he picked up the truck two days before the bombing. He said the man was not Nichols.

Prosecutors have suggested that McVeigh walked about a mile to Elliott's shop, but Elliott said it was raining the day McVeigh picked up the truck and neither man appeared wet.

He said the second man's skin "was a little darker" than McVeigh's.

Descriptions of the man were used to create a composite sketch known as John Doe No. 2, a shadowy figure that people reported seeing with McVeigh before the blast.

Nichols' defense attorneys maintain that McVeigh had substantial help from co-conspirators while collecting components for the homemade bomb and that Nichols was set up to take the blame.

Prosecutors have said the man in the sketch was an Army soldier not involved in the bombing who rented a truck the day after McVeigh rented one.

Elliott said the FBI tried unsuccessfully to convince him that his memory was incorrect.

Nichols is already serving a life sentence for the bombing, after being convicted on federal involuntary manslaughter and conspiracy charges for the deaths of eight federal law enforcement officers.

In Oklahoma, he faces 161 counts of first-degree murder for the deaths of the other 160 victims and one victim's fetus. Prosecutors are seeking the death penalty.