

NICHOLS TRIAL: Defense calls Salinan to testify - McVeigh tried to rent minivan from Avis days before bombing

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Kim Adams remembers the pair of men in April 1995 who wanted to rent a minivan from her Avis counter at Salina Municipal Airport, where she was a regional manager.

One was tall, thin, blond and, she said, "agitated," "scary" and "threatening."

She recognized him instantly a few days later when his face was all over television. It was Timothy McVeigh.

McVeigh had been arrested for his role in the April 19 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City. One hundred and sixty-eight people died in the bombing.

But as for the other guy -- he didn't make as much of an impression, and Adams can't say with any certainty at all that it was Terry Nichols, a former Herington resident now on trial in McAlester, Okla., on 161 counts of first-degree murder.

That's why Nichols' defense wants her as a witness.

Adams, Salina, said she called the FBI after seeing McVeigh's picture and was interviewed about his attempt to rent a minivan in Salina. She was not called as a witness in McVeigh's federal trial. But she said Nichols' lawyers have read a transcript of that FBI interview and know she can't place their client with McVeigh in Salina.

Here's what happened

"Two guys came in and wanted to rent a minivan," Adams said Friday. "The tall, blond guy that I later found out was McVeigh did all the talking."

No minivans were available, but McVeigh didn't want to take no for an answer, she said.

"He became very agitated," she said. "He was pacing around. He said he could see vans in the parking lot."

The vans were owned by people who had parked before flying out, Adams said.

"He acted like if he waited long enough, I'd change my mind," she said. "It's pretty deserted down there except when an airplane arrives, and I was getting worried he was going to come around the counter."

Throughout the encounter, she said, the second man stood back, stayed quiet and looked at the floor.

"It was clear McVeigh was running the show," she said.

"I thought it was odd that they wanted a van -- two guys alone like that."

She said the pair ran out when she started to call security.

Later that day, McVeigh rented a Ryder truck in Junction City. That truck was filled with fertilizer and used as a bomb to destroy the Murrah building.

As for McVeigh, a soldier who at one time was stationed at Fort Riley, he was executed for his role in the mass murder.

If Nichols is convicted, he could face the same fate.

Her testimony

A few days ago, Adams, now an advertising sales representative at the Salina Journal, was notified by mail that Nichols' defense wanted her to come to McAlester to testify "on or about April 26."

"I was planning a vacation in early May, so I don't know if I'll be able to go (on the vacation)," she said.

But she doesn't have much choice.

"If I didn't agree to come, they'll subpoena me," she said.

The defense will pay either plane fare or mileage to and from McAlester, as well as hotel and meal expenses and lost wages, she said.

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