

Conspirator Details Allegations About Oklahoma Bombing

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BY RICHARD A. SERRANO | MAY 6, 2005 12 AM PT

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WASHINGTON —

In new letters from prison, convicted Oklahoma City bombing conspirator Terry L. Nichols says Timothy J. McVeigh crisscrossed the country seeking explosives and chose an Arkansas gun collector as his supplier for equipment such as detonators and distress flares that were converted into exploding devices.

Nichols also alleges that the gun dealer, Roger Moore, helped McVeigh “scout out federal buildings in other cities” before Oklahoma City was selected as McVeigh’s target.

The Oklahoma City bombing, 10 years ago last month, killed 168 people when it tore the front off of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in the heart of the city.

McVeigh, the bombing mastermind, was executed. Nichols, convicted in federal and state courts as a conspirator, is serving multiple life sentences without the possibility of parole at the federal Supermax prison in Florence, Colo.

Now a series of letters, written by Nichols from his prison cell, is surfacing. In them, the 50-year-old onetime farmhand, who has maintained his silence for the last decade, is slowly explaining his version of how the bomb plot came together. He also says he wants Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-Huntington Beach), who heads a Capitol Hill investigative panel, to open formal hearings on unanswered questions about the bombing -- specifically, whether others were involved.

“I certainly hope that that congressional committee ... will not try to cover up the truth.... ,” Nichols wrote.

“I just want the truth to be revealed.”

The Times this week obtained copies of 10 letters written by Nichols, most in the last two months.

Five were sent to the grandmother of two young boys killed in the bombing. He told her that Moore provided McVeigh with components used to detonate the bomb.

The other five letters, slipped to fellow inmates in Supermax, provide a rich description of McVeigh roaming the nation in search of explosives and allege that McVeigh ultimately used Moore as his chief conduit for bomb components.

Moore, now living in Florida, denied this week that he ever gave bomb materials to McVeigh or had any role in the Oklahoma City bombing. He said he was not familiar with the kind of explosives that Nichols said were provided to McVeigh and used in the bombing.

However, Moore did acknowledge having an acquaintance with McVeigh, saying that the two had met at gun shows around the country and that McVeigh had visited his Arkansas ranch.

He also said he knew McVeigh to be a violent man. But, Moore said, "if I'd known he was going to bomb that place, I would have killed him."

Moore came under suspicion from the FBI in the days after the April 19, 1995, blast because he had known McVeigh and shared his antigovernment views. But Moore has never been charged in the bombing.

Nichols' letters to two fellow prisoners, written in his distinctive hand and sometimes addressed to a "neighbor" in a nearby cell, said McVeigh first met Moore at a 1992 gun show in Florida "where Moore had a table selling his wares."

Nichols said that as McVeigh continued to drive around the country, sometimes visiting the Nichols family farm in Michigan, he would tell stories about running into Moore at shows or "stopping into [his] home."

McVeigh turned up at the Nichols farm in the summer of 1993, Nichols wrote, not long after the federal raid at the Branch Davidian compound near Waco, Texas -- an event that enraged McVeigh and motivated him to strike back against the government.

"One of the things Tim showed me and that he later experimented w/ was hand held distress flares," Nichols wrote. "He told me he got them from [Moore] and that [Moore] had purchased 1 or 2 55-gal. barrels full of these flares.

"And [Moore] had showed McV how to convert these flares into an exploding device w/ the use of gunpowder. It would explode once it reached its destination. It was also modified w/ green canon fuses which Moore supplied McV with."

Nichols said this was at the same time that McVeigh showed him other explosives that he said Moore had provided and that McVeigh used in Oklahoma City. In addition, Nichols wrote that "McV also got high-powered ammunition of the armor-piercing and incendiary type from Roger, which McV called 'specialty items.' "

Nichols said McVeigh would be "very cautious when he would talk about Moore."

He added, "McV did say that one could get just about anything at a gun show. You just had to ask the 'right person' & the 'right question.' And one of those people was" Moore.

He said McVeigh had told him that Moore kept his bomb components, described as “goodies,” in a back room of his Arkansas home. By “goodies,” Nichols said, McVeigh meant Kinestik binary explosives, which contain two components: fuses and blasting caps.

“Moore was clearly a gov’t provocateur!” Nichols wrote. “Someone who the gov’t enlisted to encourage others who are disgruntled w’ gov’t to act out their frustrations and to supply them w/ any necessary items to accomplish their tasks. But I believe McV was more than a disgruntled person.”

Nichols said McVeigh never asked him to scout out various federal buildings to be destroyed, instead turning to Moore for that task.

“Moore had the perfect opportunity to do such as [he and a female friend] travelled to various cities doing gun shows,” Nichols wrote. “Only one person is needed to tend a table [at a gun show] while the other slips out to scout for buildings.”

The letters made it out of the prison in a roundabout way.

Stephen P. Dresch, who runs a forensic intelligence company in Hancock, Mich., said Thursday that he was contacted last month by Gregory Scarpa Jr., a Supermax inmate convicted on mob-related charges in New York.

Dresch said Scarpa told him that he and another inmate, Emilio “Tito” Bravo, convicted in San Diego as an armed career criminal, had gained Nichols’ confidence and encouraged him to write the letters.

Supermax is the federal government’s maximum-security facility, home to 379 of the most hardened criminals in America. The prisoners live in almost total lockdown, communicating with each other by shouting through drainpipes and tossing letters to one another through the bars of their cells.

Dresch said he went to Supermax to talk with Scarpa, and learned that he and Bravo wanted reductions in their sentences or transfers to prisons near their families for turning over the information from Nichols. Some of what Nichols wrote has proved to be true; for instance, he enabled federal agents to find explosives in a crawl space at his old home in Herington, Kan.

FBI officials said about 300 blasting caps found there were “consistent with” items stolen by McVeigh and Nichols from a Kansas quarry for use in the bombing, and FBI lab experts were examining other material found in the crawl space to determine its origin.

Nichols made it easy for the material to be found, giving a precise location in one of his letters to Bravo. Making it something like a treasure map, he wrote instructions in beginner Spanish.

As translated, Nichols wrote:

“The house has two basements, one faces north and the other faces south. Go by the stairs on the one that faces north. You will find on the wall a hole shaped like a square. Enter through that hole. You will see while facing north a pile of rocks, which underneath contains a box with the bomb components. Facing south you will see another pile of rocks with other materials.”

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