

# Terry Nichols reveals involvement in blast

By Nolan Clay, The Oklahoman | 07/03/05

The Oklahoman Terry Nichols has admitted to the FBI and his family for the first time that he was involved in the Oklahoma City bombing.

The convict, 50, started speaking to the FBI about his role in April and told his mother, sister and first ex-wife in June at the federal prison in Florence, Colo.

"I didn't like it. Oh, God, I said, 'No way,'" his mother, Joyce Wilt, said. "I told him, 'You tell me the truth. I want the truth and I don't want anything else.'"

Nichols told the FBI he first thought bomber Timothy McVeigh was going to blow up a monument to get back at the federal government, The Oklahoman has learned.

His statement to the FBI was much more detailed than the written admission he made to state prosecutors during secret, failed plea negotiations in 2003. The existence of the 2003 confession stayed secret until last November.

Nichols, for instance, told the FBI he alone robbed gun collector Roger Moore in Arkansas in November 1994 -- reluctantly -- at McVeigh's urging, sources said. He also told his family about the robbery. Wilt recalled that Nichols told them, "Tim says, 'You're too much involved to back out now.'"

Using Nichols' statement, the FBI this spring recovered a custom-built, .50-caliber sniper rifle taken in the robbery, sources said. The gun was found near a Kansas creek, where Nichols had said he hid it. Moore said he has not been told about his gun's recovery.

The April 19, 1995, attack on the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City left 168 dead.

Nichols described his role to the FBI and family as uninformed and reluctant. His mother said McVeigh threatened Nichols with a gun "all the time."

His account contrasts with how prosecutors portrayed Nichols at his federal and state trials.

Prosecutors called Nichols an active and willing participant. Prosecutors at both trials pointed out Nichols once wrote McVeigh, "Go For IT!!" and "As Far As Heat -- None That I Know."

The FBI would not comment on Nichols' statement. Danny Defenbaugh, the retired FBI agent who oversaw the investigation, said he has heard that Nichols spoke to the FBI.

"The statement was relatively self-serving. ... There were some admissions, yes," Defenbaugh said.

One defense attorney, W. Creekmore Wallace II, confirmed Nichols talked this year to the FBI. Lead state defense attorney Brian Hermanson said, "This is the first time he's not facing the death penalty and he can say things without fear of someone killing him." Nichols' family contends he has Asperger Syndrome, a developmental disorder that can make a sufferer especially vulnerable to manipulation and peer pressure.

Nichols spoke to FBI agents after the FBI discovered hundreds of blasting caps and other explosives buried beneath his former house in Herington, Kan.

Nichols admits thefts, sources say Sources said Nichols admitted to the FBI that in 1994 he helped McVeigh steal explosives from a Kansas rock quarry at night, buy fertilizer for the bomb from a Kansas farm store and buy nitromethane racing fuel from a Texas racetrack.

Nichols admitted he robbed Moore, taking guns and other valuables wrapped in a bedspread.

He also admitted he picked up McVeigh in Oklahoma City on Easter 1995, three days before the bombing. McVeigh drove from Kansas to Oklahoma City to park a getaway car, while Nichols followed in a truck.

Sources said he admitted helping McVeigh build the bomb in the back of a rented Ryder truck next to a Kansas lake the day before the attack. He said they kept the fertilizer and racing fuel in a storage shed in Herington.

Nichols said he cleared out the storage shed in Herington after the bombing, burying blasting caps beneath his house and hiding the gun near the creek. He said he tossed a license plate McVeigh took off the getaway car in Oklahoma City into the Kansas creek to get rid of evidence. McVeigh was arrested by an Oklahoma Highway Patrol trooper who noticed his car did not have a licence plate.

Nichols described to the FBI that he acted only with McVeigh in gathering the bomb's ingredients and building it. But he indicated he suspected McVeigh, who was very secretive, had accomplices.

He told the FBI he kept quiet about his involvement because he feared others might retaliate against him or his family.

Nichols' family blames Asperger Syndrome Nichols' mother said the family only recently concluded Nichols has Asperger Syndrome.

"People take advantage of them," Wilt, 74, of Lapeer, Mich., said of sufferers. "That's what happened to him. They took advantage of him and conned him into everything. ... They manipulated and used Terry like you wouldn't believe.

"Tim gave an order and Tim says, 'Do this and do that,' ... These people with this syndrome -- they do. ... This is not Terry at all. This is not him at all. He's a good guy. It's sad."

Nichols' ex-wife, Lana Padilla, said, "He was not in his right mind."

Padilla confirmed she learned details of Nichols' role during the prison visit in June. "I said, 'What did you think, Terry? What did you think?' And I just sat back and looked at him and thought, 'Wow,'" she said.

Padilla, of Las Vegas, also said, "He did not know what McVeigh was going to target. He did not know -- at least if he is telling me the truth."

Nichols' mother said she still thinks others are involved in the bombing and the FBI is covering that up. She alleges McVeigh and Moore, who knew each other, staged the robbery to set Nichols up.

"The truth will come out but ... it's going to take a lot of time on this and it goes very, very, very deep," Wilt said. "Tim was not that smart. I knew him. He had orders from somebody else."

Moore, who now lives in Florida, denies any involvement in the bombing. He said Friday that McVeigh "hated me."

This year is not the first time the FBI interviewed Nichols.

Nichols spoke to agents in Herington two days after the attack, after hearing his name on news reports.

He told agents then he did not do anything wrong, that he had never built any bomb and that he doubted McVeigh was involved.

"I cannot believe it was him," Nichols said in the 1995 interview.

Nichols did disclose in the 1995 FBI interview that he picked up McVeigh in Oklahoma City. He said then that he did so because McVeigh was stranded with car problems.

Nichols was convicted at his 1997 federal trial of the bombing conspiracy and manslaughter of eight federal agents.

He was convicted at his 2004 state trial of arson, conspiracy to commit arson and 161 counts of first-degree murder. The state case focused on the 160 other casualties, as well as the loss of a fetus.

Nichols was sentenced to life in prison with no possibility of release in both cases. He avoided the death penalty because jurors each time could not agree on that punishment. He never testified but apologized at his sentencing in the state case.

In interviews for a biography published shortly before his 2001 execution, McVeigh claimed Nichols scouted out targets in Kansas City, Mo. Nichols denied that this year in notes to another inmate.

Nichols has revealed to some that he spoke to the FBI.

"I ... have talked with the FBI recently but have come to the conclusion that they are not really wanting to reveal all the truth because it hits too close to home," Nichols wrote Jannie Coverdale, the Oklahoma City victim who lost two young grandsons in the bombing.

"In fact, I believe they will soon begin, if they haven't started to already, to spin their own story of the facts.

"I believe that it's essential to have a separate congressional investigation into the matter because it's the FBI that's the problem."

Nichols also apologized to Coverdale.

"And though I certainly don't deserve it, I do ask your forgiveness for my actions and wrongs I did which contributed to all your pain and suffering and loss of your precious grandchildren."

Nichols was brought before a federal grand jury in Denver on June 9 but declined to testify.

He met Monday in prison with U.S. Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, R-Calif., the congressman's spokeswoman confirmed.

Rohrabacher is considering holding a congressional hearing on the bombing.

Oklahoma County District Attorney Wes Lane, who made the decision to go ahead with a state trial for Nichols, said: "He has already spun his tale to multiple people. The only thing he is truly afraid of is that people will stop paying attention to him and he will be left all alone in his Colorado prison cell."