

Nichols' comments tie McVeigh firmly to Elohim City

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by J.D. Cash

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During a jailhouse interview Monday in Colorado with U.S. Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, R-Calif., Terry L. Nichols admitted traveling to the outskirts of Elohim City with Timothy McVeigh in October of 1993.

The admission is the first time Nichols has confirmed McVeigh's ties to the terrorist training camp and should finally lay to rest years of speculation as to McVeigh's longstanding connections there.

After the April 19, 1995, bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building, this newspaper reported a phone call made from McVeigh's motel room in Kingman, Az., to Elohim City. That call was made only seconds after McVeigh called a Ryder truck rental, checking on truck sizes and other details.

During a subsequent investigation, it was established that McVeigh's April 5, 1995, call to Elohim City was for Andreas Carl Strassmeir, also known as "Andy the German," the camp's paramilitary expert.

Interviewed Friday by telephone, Rohrabacher said Nichols would not divulge any specifics of the camp n not even that he personally went inside there with McVeigh.

However, Nichols did tell the congressman that as they drove to the immediate area adjoining the compound, McVeigh made statements that clearly indicated he'd been to Elohim City before.

Recounting his interview, Rohrabacher said: "Terry told me that, along the drive McVeigh told him about the place and the people there. His best friend at Elohim City was Strassmeir. And Nichols said McVeigh called him "Andy the German" and that that his name came up often."

Rohrabacher also said this first trip to Oklahoma occurred during the same timeframe the pair were looking at real estate, some distance away in northern Arkansas.

Indeed, Nichols' story does find support in the records and from Nichols' friends and family members.

Several years ago, James Nichols said his younger brother was down on his luck and broke in the fall of 1993 when he and his army buddy left Decker, MI.

Interviewed shortly after the bombing, James Nichols told this reporter that the pair said they were going to Arkansas to look at a berry farm that was for sale. How the two planned to pay for the property, apparently was not discussed, James Nichols told the Gazette in 1995.

Records support story

According to the newspaper's investigation, on Oct. 11, 1993, Nichols used his real name when he checked into a room at a Motel 6 in Fayetteville, Ark.

Three years later the manager of the budget motel said that the only reason he recalled the event was because the FBI came to the chain motel after the bombing and asked to review the registration records. When they found Nichols' name, they picked up all the records for that time period and left. The manager said he never got them back.

Also supporting Nichols' comments to Rohrabacher: A traffic ticket issued by an Arkansas state trooper places McVeigh quite close to Elohim City during the same time period.

The day after Nichols and McVeigh spent the night in Fayetteville, McVeigh was stopped on a winding two-lane highway just outside Van Buren, Ark. The ticket reflects that the highway patrolman issued McVeigh a citation for making an illegal lane change. McVeigh never paid the ticket and a warrant was eventually issued for his arrest.

The evidence places McVeigh only six miles from Elohim City that day. And with Nichols' admissions on Monday that McVeigh's statements established he'd been to the terrorist training camp before, the FBI's longstanding argument that the agency has no information linking McVeigh to Elohim City, and other conspirators, might finally end. But will it?

Reached on his cell phone Saturday morning, Special Agent Gary Johnson said his agency could not comment on the Rohrabacher inter-view, as he was unaware it had even taken place until the newspaper called.

The public affairs spokesman for the Oklahoma City FBI office said he would ask for a copy of the in-terview notes of the agent attending the Rohrabacher/Nichols interview and respond after that.

Longtime Nichols' family friend, Bob Popovich of Snover, MI., said Saturday he did not know for certain that Nichols ever went inside Elohim City with McVeigh, but, "I suspected that happened when I heard McVeigh was ticketed so close to that place. I knew about their trip to Arkansas. I'm sure if he (Nichols) went there with Tim, he wasn't happy to be there."

Popovich also said Nichols told his mother and sister last month that he was fearful for his life and for the lives of his family.

"Terry is scared," said Popovich. "He's not so much scared of the Tim's old friends, he's more scared of the FBI and scared for his family."