

## **Fortier set for release**

by Nolan Clay, The Oklahoman | January 18, 2006

Michael Fortier will be released Friday, the Federal Bureau of Prisons has told victims of the Oklahoma City bombing.

Fortier, 37, is completing a 12-year prison sentence for crimes tied to the 1995 attack on the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. Victims said they got a form letter Tuesday about his release.

"I'm not pleased," said widow Donna Hawthorne, whose husband, tire worker Thomas Hawthorne, 52, died visiting the Social Security Administration office in the federal building.

"I hope he learned in jail to have better choices," said Hawthorne, 63, of Choctaw. "He could have saved a lot of lives but choose not to. That's not very much time, compared to like my husband, who is dead forever."

Fortier was an Army buddy of bomber Timothy McVeigh and knew of the plot to blow up the Oklahoma City federal building. McVeigh pointed out the Murrah Building to him as the target in December 1994.

Fortier was punished for never warning anyone, for helping McVeigh move and sell stolen guns and for lying to FBI agents after the April 19, 1995, attack.

He pleaded guilty in August 1995 after striking a deal with prosecutors and was imprisoned immediately. He was not sentenced, however, until after he testified against McVeigh and co-conspirator Terry Nichols at their federal trials.

He was first sentenced in May 1998. He had to be resentenced in October 1999 because of a judicial mistake. The judge, brought in from Kansas City, Kan., to hear the case, gave him 12 years each time but did reduce Fortier's fine from \$200,000 to \$75,000.

Fortier also testified in 2004 for the prosecution at Nichols' state trial.

McVeigh was executed in 2001. Nichols is serving life sentences without the possibility of release.

Fortier is from Kingman, Ariz. He is still married to Lori Fortier, who also was a federal witness in the bombing case.

Michael Fortier has been held at an undisclosed location for the last part of his sentence. The Federal Bureau of Prisons told victims in the form letter that Fortier will be under supervision for three years after his release.

Victims were not told where Fortier intends to go upon his release. His attorney, Michael McGuire of Tulsa, also would not say.

“I expect him to go forward into some productive effort - him and his family - in re-establishing himself,” McGuire said Tuesday. “And I expect him to do well. He’s done what he needed to do. He’s grateful he’ll get a chance to prove himself.”

Fortier has apologized repeatedly for his crimes and said he did not think McVeigh would go ahead with the plot.

“I was terribly wrong,” he said at his first sentencing. “I deeply regret not taking the information I had to the police. ... I sometimes daydream that I did do this and became a hero, but reality is that I am not.”

Fortier is getting out a little early, apparently because of credit for good behavior. The federal prison system does not have parole.

Some victims called The Oklahoman to complain about his release.

“He should have gotten life in prison, like Terry Nichols did. He really should have,” said Jannie Coverdale of Oklahoma City whose grandsons, Aaron, 5, and Elijah, 2, died in the day-care center inside the federal building. “I’m just upset.”