

Nichols says bombing was FBI op

Detailed confession filed in S.L. about Oklahoma City plot

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The only surviving convicted criminal in the April 19, 1995, bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City is saying his co-conspirator, Timothy McVeigh, told him he was taking orders from a top FBI official in orchestrating the bombing.

A declaration from Terry Lynn Nichols, filed in U.S. District Court in Salt Lake City, has proven to be one of the most detailed confessions by Nichols to date about his involvement in the bombing as well as the involvement of others. However, one congressman who has investigated the bombings remains skeptical of Nichols' claims.

The declaration was filed as part of Salt Lake City attorney Jesse Trentadue's pending wrongful death suit against the government for the death of his brother in a federal corrections facility in Oklahoma City. Trentadue claims his brother was killed during an interrogation by FBI agents when agents mistook his brother for a suspect in the Oklahoma City bombing investigation.

The most shocking allegation in the 19-page signed declaration is Nichols' assertion that the whole bombing plot was an FBI operation and that McVeigh let slip during a bout of anger that he was taking instruction from former FBI official Larry Potts.

Potts was no stranger to anti-government confrontations, having been the lead FBI agent at Ruby Ridge in 1992, which led to the shooting death of Vicki Weaver, the wife of separatist Randy Weaver. Potts also was reportedly involved in the 51-day siege of the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas in 1993, which resulted in a fire that killed 81 Branch Davidian followers.

Potts retired from the FBI under intense pressure and criticism for the cover-up of an order to allow agents to shoot anyone seen leaving the Weaver cabin at Ruby Ridge.

When contacted, the FBI's main office in Washington, D.C., said it could not provide immediate comment on Nichols' claims Tuesday.

Nichols claims that, in December 1992, McVeigh told him that "while he was serving in the U.S. Army, he had been recruited to carry out undercover missions."

In the next few years, the two men hatched the bombing plot. In October 1994, "McVeigh and I stole explosives from a quarry in Marion, Kansas consisting of 8 1/2 cases or boxes containing 229 (2-inch by 16-inch) sticks of the gel type explosive known as Tovex," Nichols wrote, adding that only a small amount was used in the actual bombing.

It was while traveling the gun-show circuit that Nichols claims the two obtained bombmaking knowledge and the materials used in the bombing. One example is that McVeigh allegedly attended a gun show in Knob Creek, Ky., in 1993.

"At this gun show, McVeigh had the opportunity to make contact with about 20 people who were bomb experts. McVeigh told me that he himself had no knowledge about how to construct a bomb, but that he always wanted to gain more knowledge about how to construct bombs," Nichols stated.

Nichols says he knew McVeigh was building the bomb, and in November 1994 he left for the Philippines to get away from the area to avoid being implicated.

"I did not want to be present when and if McVeigh did explode a bomb. Consequently, I left for the Philippines to be out of the country," he wrote.

That statement contradicts findings of Congressman Dana Rohrabacher, R-California, whose study on the bombing was made public last December. It indicated Nichols had traveled to the Philippines to receive bombing training by a possible foreign terrorist.

Having not heard of any bombing, Nichols said he returned to the U.S. in January 1995. It was later that, in a fit of rage, McVeigh mentioned Potts' name, Nichols wrote.

"McVeigh said he believed Potts was manipulating him and forcing him to 'go off script,' which I understood meant to change the target of the bombing," Nichols stated.

It wasn't until April 18, 1995, that Nichols said he helped McVeigh construct a bomb at Geary Lake. The bomb was comprised of "metal and white plastic" barrels which were filled with ammonium nitrate fertilizer and mixed with nitromethane. In all he estimates between 90 to 92 fifty-pound bags of fertilizer went into the barrels and explosive sticks were placed in the holes of each barrel.

Nichols said he had no further role in renting the Ryder truck and claims he did not know the target, only that McVeigh "wanted to make a statement" by "targeting some structure."

After hearing about the bombing of the federal building, which killed 168 adults and children, Nichols said he panicked when his name came up on the radio and he wanted to turn himself in — but not before hiding evidence, including explosives used in the bombing.

The claims made in the declaration have added yet more twists to the mystery surrounding the bombings. Some familiar with the bombing's history say Nichols' claims seem to indicate the FBI put McVeigh up to the plot as a draw for radicals, but that the situation got out of control and McVeigh became a runaway informant.

After reviewing the declaration, Rohrabacher told the Deseret Morning News that Nichols' claims should be investigated but treated with extreme skepticism.

"I need to caution people to remember that Terry Nichols is a mass murderer," Rohrabacher said. "But if Terry Nichols is beginning to reveal some of the information that's been kept from the public, I'd be very happy about that."

Rohrabacher also expressed disappointment with the FBI and the Department of Justice for not adequately following up on indications there were others who helped Nichols and McVeigh.

The congressman said he no longer is chairman of the subcommittee that conducted the investigation and is "dismayed" that no one else in Congress seems interested in the matter.

Nichols said he has much more information, which he offered to former U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft in 2004, but is willing to divulge only under sworn video deposition. Trentadue said he plans to seek that deposition of Nichols, but "I expect one hell of a fight with the Department of Justice."

Nichols is serving life in prison without parole after being convicted by a jury for his role in the bombing. McVeigh also was convicted and on June 11, 2001 was executed in Terre Haute, Ind.

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