

FBI, witness probe's focus

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SALT LAKE CITY -- A federal judge in Utah has assigned a magistrate to investigate claims that the FBI pressured a former government operative into backing out of testifying in a lawsuit that accused the agency of failing to adequately search its files for additional videos of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing.

U.S. District Judge Clark Waddoups said in an order issued Thursday that an FBI report to the court in November denying the accusations didn't dispel his concerns. The evidence "permits a reasonable inference" of wrongdoing by the FBI, Waddoups wrote.

The FBI referred questions to the Department of Justice. That agency wasn't immediately available for comment.

Former operative John Matthews had been set to testify about his involvement in a stealth government operation that tracked militia movements and Timothy McVeigh, said Salt Lake City lawyer Jesse Trentadue.

Trentadue filed the lawsuit that triggered the trial because he believes that the FBI has video showing McVeigh was not alone in detonating the bomb.

Trentadue believes that the presence of a second suspect explains why his brother, Kenneth Trentadue, was flown to Oklahoma several months after the bombing, where he died in a federal holding cell.

The FBI's report to Waddoups in November said Matthews called the FBI in Utah to say he didn't want to testify during the lawsuit. FBI inspectors said they listened to five recorded phone conversations between Matthews and agent Adam Quirk and determined Matthews was never intimidated or discouraged from testifying.

Waddoups said he wants to get to the bottom of what happened with the witness before ruling on the root issue in the case: whether the FBI must go back and look for more videos from the bombing.

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