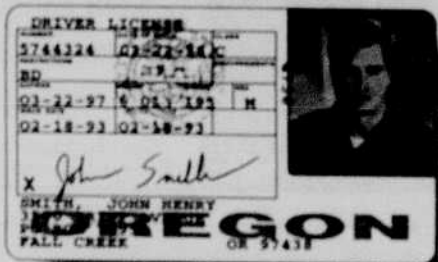


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BOMB

Continued from Page 1

to have carried the explosives. An axle of the vehicle was found about two blocks from the scene, the source said.

Their clothes torn off, victims covered in glass and plaster emerged bloodied and crying from the building, which looked as if a giant bite had been taken out of it, exposing its floors like a dollhouse.

Cables and other debris dangled from the floors like tangled streamers in a scene that brought to mind the car bombings at the U.S. Embassy and Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983.

"I dove under that table," said Brian Espe, a state veterinarian who was giving a slide presentation on the fifth floor. "When I came out, I could see daylight if I looked north and daylight if I looked west."

Mayor Ron Norick said the blast, which left a crater 30 feet long and 8 feet deep, was caused by a car bomb. He said the vehicle had been outside, in front of the building.

"Obviously, no amateur did this," Gov. Frank Keating said. "Whoever did this was an animal."

Police Sgt. Bill Martin said that 12 of those killed were children.

Earlier in the day, paramedic Heather Taylor said 17 children were dead at the scene, a figure later disputed by police. Dr. Carl Spengler, one of the first doctors at the scene, said the children, all at the day-care center, ranged in age from 1 to 7, and some were burned beyond recognition.

About 20 of 40 children in the day-care center were missing late in the day.

The search continued after nightfall, with about 100 Oklahoma Army National Guard soldiers activated to help with rescue and security operations in the downtown area.

The explosion, similar to the terrorist car bombing that killed six people and injured 1,000 at New York's World Trade Center in 1993, happened just after 9 a.m., when most of the more than 500 federal employees were in their offices.

The blast could be felt 30 miles away. Black smoke

streamed across the skyline, and glass, bricks and other debris were spread over a wide area. The north side of the building was gone. Cars were incinerated on the street.

People frantically searched for loved ones, including parents whose children were in the building's day-care center.

Christopher Wright of the Coast Guard, one of those helping inside the building, said rescuers periodically turned off their chainsaws and prying tools to listen for pleas for help, "but we didn't hear anything — just death."

"You're helpless really, when you see people two feet away, you can't do anything, they're just smashed," he said.

Doctors had to amputate one woman's leg to free her.

"She was lying underneath a beam. It was obvious that she could not be extracted alive," said Dr. Andy Sullivan. "The attempt to remove the concrete beams would have caused the rest of the building to collapse. So at that point there was no decision made other than to crawl into the space and perform the amputation to get the patient out."

The building, which opened in 1977, has offices of such federal agencies as the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, Social Security, Veterans Affairs, the Drug Enforcement Administration and Housing and Urban Development, and a federal employee credit union and military recruiting offices.

The bomb was perhaps 1,000 to 1,200 pounds, said John Magaw, ATF director. As for whether his agency suspected terrorists, he told CNN: "I think any time you have this kind of damage, this kind of explosion, you have to look there first."

Bob Ricks, agent in charge of the FBI in Oklahoma, said that there were hundreds of leads and that the bureau was treating them all seriously. "At this point we do not speculate as to who is responsible," he said.

The government received calls from six people saying they were from different Muslim sects, asserting they were responsible, a Justice Department official said.

"But there is no way to know if the calls are genuine," said

this official, who declined to be identified by name.

Keating said he was told by the FBI that authorities were initially looking for three people of Middle Eastern descent in a brown pickup truck.

The Oklahoma Highway Patrol put out an all-points bulletin for the three, but Keating later downplayed the report, saying it was one of many leads being checked.

Keating also said they were checking whether the rental of a vehicle in the Dallas-Fort Worth area was tied to the explosion. Dallas is about 200 miles south of Oklahoma City.

The explosion heightened U.S. fears of terrorism. Federal buildings in several cities were evacuated because of bomb threats, and the government ordered tightened security at federal buildings throughout the country.

In 1920, a bomb blast in New York's Wall Street area killed 40 people and injured hundreds. Authorities concluded it was the work of "anarchists" and came up with a list of suspects, but all had fled to Russia.

After Wednesday's blast, emergency crews set up a first aid center near the federal building, and some of the injured sat on the sidewalks, blood on their heads or arms, awaiting aid.

Carole Lawton, 62, a HUD secretary, said she was sitting at her desk on the seventh floor when "all of a sudden the windows blew in. It got real dark and the ceiling just started coming down." She then heard "the roar of the whole building crumbling." She managed to crawl down some stairs and was not injured.

The explosion occurred on the second anniversary of the fiery, fatal ending to the federal siege of the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas. That siege began with a raid by ATF agents a month and a half earlier.

Oklahoma City FBI spokesman Dan Vogel wouldn't speculate if there was a connection. The FBI's offices are about five miles away.

In the World Trade Center bombing in February 1993, a rented van blew up in a parking garage beneath the twin towers. Four Muslims were convicted.



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