

American Nazi kills guard in attack on Holocaust Museum

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12 June 2009

An 88-year-old neo-Nazi was charged with murder Thursday, the day after he killed a security guard at the US Holocaust Memorial and Museum and then was shot in turn by other guards. James Von Brunn could face the death penalty if convicted on federal charges of murder and killing with firearms at a federal facility. The District of Columbia has no death penalty under local law.

A veteran of decades of activity in white supremacist and neo-Nazi circles, Von Brunn maintained a filthy anti-Semitic web site where he appears to have hinted at his plans for a murderous rampage in advance, placing a notice to his readers that he would no longer be in a position to continue posting on his site.

The security guard, 39-year-old Stephen Johns, an African-American, opened the door for Von Brunn, thinking him an elderly visitor to the museum. The gunman was concealing a .22 rifle that he used to shoot Johns once in the chest. He fired at least two more shots at other guards, who responded with nearly a dozen shots, hitting the gunman in the face.

Von Brunn was in critical condition at George Washington University Hospital, the same facility where Johns was pronounced dead. Hundreds of visitors were in the museum at the time of the attack, many of them children, but there were no other injuries due to the rapid response of the guards.

A police affidavit reported that anti-Semitic messages were found in a notebook in Von Brunn's car, double-parked outside the museum. One note declared, "The Holocaust is a lie. Obama was created by the Jews." More ammunition was found in the car and in his apartment in Annapolis, Maryland; investigators also seized various "ledgers, journals and manuscripts."

The notebook in Von Brunn's care also contained a

list of District locations, prompting the dispatch of police bomb squads to at least 10 sites, although nothing was found. There was also a list of congressmen. Both lists suggest that Von Brunn had been mulling over possible targets before selecting the Holocaust Museum.

Considerable information has been published in the past 24 hours on Von Brunn's lengthy career as a white supremacist, and the vile rants that he regularly posted on his own and other Internet sites, mainly focused on his hatred of Jews. His obsession was further exacerbated by the election of Obama, who was the target of many of his most recent postings.

Particularly significant is the fact that Von Brunn had already engaged in a violent attack on a federal government target in the capital more than a quarter-century ago. He was arrested in 1981 inside the headquarters of the Federal Reserve Board, armed with a revolver, a sawed-off shotgun and a knife. He confessed to planning the kidnapping of then-Fed chief Paul Volcker and other members of the board, which was in session when he entered the building, and he served six years in a federal prison in New York state.

After his release from prison he returned to his anti-Semitic activities and was able to obtain firearms, despite his record as a convicted felon who had served time in prison for attempted violence against federal officials.

This treatment contrasts sharply with the systematic persecution of immigrants and Muslims as part of the "war on terror" declared by the Bush administration after 9/11 and continued, albeit with slight alterations in rhetoric, under Obama.

Even after Von Brunn's deadly assault on one of the most prominent cultural institutions in the capital, which commemorates the 6 million Jews killed in the

Holocaust and documents the Nazi genocide, federal officials downplayed the political significance of his actions.

The Department of Homeland Security said that the shooting did not appear to have a connection to terrorism, labeling him a “right-wing extremist.” Joseph Persichini, assistant director of the Washington FBI field office, told a press conference, “We know what Mr. Von Brunn did yesterday at the Holocaust museum. Now it’s our responsibility to determine why he did it,” although he conceded that it could be characterized as “domestic terrorism.”

The investigation has already included searches of Von Brunn’s home and car, interviews with relatives and neighbors, and a review of his cell phone and computer records. Several associates of Von Brunn in his anti-Semitic activity have already come forward to give press interviews in which they embraced his views while attempting to distance themselves from his murderous action.

Persichini said Von Brunn was known to the FBI before the assault. “We were aware of him,” he said. “He is known as an anti-Semite and a white supremacist who had an established web site that espoused hatred against African Americans, Jewish, and others.” But he added, “No matter how offensive to some, we are keenly aware that expressing views is not a crime and that the protection afforded by the Constitution cannot be compromised.”

These are fine democratic words, but they have not been applied to Muslim-Americans persecuted because they donated to the relief programs aiding the Palestinian people in Gaza and the West Bank or voiced their opposition to Israeli tyranny. Many Islamic charitable organizations have had their assets seized and their officers arrested and prosecuted without regard to the constitutional rights that the FBI now claims to uphold.

Largely unexplored in the media coverage of the attack on the Holocaust Museum is the extensive network of political links connecting the 88-year-old killer to much more officially “respectable” right-wing circles.

He has long-time connections to two prominent American fascists: Willis Carto, founder of the Liberty Lobby, and William Pierce, leader of the National Alliance, whose novel of race war in America, *The*

Turner Diaries, is one of the main white supremacist texts, frequently cited as an inspiration by individuals such as right-wing mass murderer Timothy McVeigh.

Both Carto and Von Brunn backed the 1968 presidential campaign of George Wallace, the Alabama Democrat who ran as an independent pro-segregation candidate. Carto later founded the Populist Party, which ran national presidential campaigns in the 1990s, and supported the political campaigns of former KKK leader David Duke, who won the Republican nomination for governor of Louisiana during that period.

According to a report in the *Washington Post* Thursday, Von Brunn regularly associated with a former Reagan White House aide, Todd Blodgett, in the 1990s and early 2000s. Blodgett was a co-owner of Resistance Records, which distributed racist music, but also worked as a paid informant for the FBI, an indication that the agency was well aware of Von Brunn’s return to fascist circles after his release from prison. One recent activity bringing Blodgett and Von Brunn together was a fundraiser in Arlington, Virginia to benefit the fascist organization in Britain, the British National Party.



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