

Gunman kills four marines at Chattanooga Naval Reserve Center

Tom Hall
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Four marines stationed at a Naval Reserve Center were killed during a shooting rampage yesterday in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

The gunman has been identified as 24-year-old Muhammad Youssef Abdulazeez, a naturalized US citizen who was born in Kuwait to Jordanian parents. Abdulazeez was killed at the scene, although it is not yet clear whether he was shot by police or committed suicide.

The shooting occurred at two separate locations. At 10:45 AM, Abdulazeez opened fire with an automatic rifle on a military recruitment center from inside a silver Mustang convertible, firing at least 25 to 30 rounds. He led police on a high-speed chase until reaching the Navy Operational Support Center in northern Chattanooga, six miles to the northwest, where he killed four marines and injured a police officer. Police claim that Abdulazeez had multiple weapons and was wearing body armor.

Police shut down roads and highways after the shooting. Many public buildings were placed on lockdown, while “hundreds” of police cars swarmed the crime scene, according to press reports. Police later raided the Abdulazeez’s home in Hixson, a nearby suburb, and hundreds of FBI agents have been sent to the area to investigate.

SITE Intelligence group, a private company with close ties to the military-intelligence apparatus which monitors online postings by “extremists,” revealed that social media postings by Abdulazeez in the lead-up to the massacre express an increasingly gloomy outlook. He maintained a blog that was mainly focused on religion. “Life is short and bitter,” Abdulazeez declared on July 13, adding that Muslims should not let “the opportunity to submit to Allah...pass you by.” However, there were no indications from his writings that he was

connected to any Islamic terrorist groups.

More details about Abdulazeez’s personal life have begun to emerge. His family background was comfortably middle class, and his father works as an engineer for Chattanooga Public Works. Abdulazeez himself graduated from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga in 2012 with an engineering degree and had been working for the previous three months as a supervisor at a local technology firm. However, his family situation was apparently increasingly unstable, as divorce papers allege that his father beat, verbally abused and sexually assaulted his mother in front of their children.

Childhood friends described Abdulazeez as both outgoing and deeply religious, with a natural talent for math and science. “Every [class] assignment, he would put a funny or humorous spin on it. He was kind of the funny guy in that class,” one of his high school classmates told the *Los Angeles Times*. Abdulazeez was a talented amateur wrestler who trained at a local gym, but his father apparently disapproved of his participation in the sport. Abdulazeez had no criminal record aside from a single DUI arrest in April.

Neighbors expressed shock that Abdulazeez could have committed such a heinous crime. “They’re nice people, you know?” one neighbor told the *Chattanooga Times Free Press*. “He must have just snapped.”

The widespread surveillance after 9/11 directed against Muslims affected Abdulazeez’s family directly. His father was under investigation for years for allegedly donating money to an unidentified “foreign terrorist organization,” and was briefly placed on the federal No Fly List and interrogated at least once while at the airport. This apparently had some effect on the young Abdulazeez, who wrote in his high school yearbook page, “My name causes national security

alerts. What does yours do?"

Investigators are currently focusing on Abdulazeez's seven-month trip to Jordan last year, searching for any possible ties to terrorist groups. Jordan has played a major role in the US-backed war for regime change in Syria, spearheaded by Islamic fundamentalist groups such as the Al Qaeda-affiliated al-Nusra Front. The country has been used as a staging ground for these forces. Dozens of ISIS members were reportedly trained in Jordan at a joint Jordanian-Turkish-American base.

There is not yet any evidence that Abdulazeez had any contact with any terrorist groups, and it is entirely possible that he was a suicidal individual acting out of desperation. Such an act has a recent precedent. In March, a mentally ill New Orleans man attacked a TSA security line at the New Orleans airport, armed with a machete and Molotov cocktails, in an attack that was originally reported as an "act of terrorism."

Within hours of the Chattanooga incident, however, US Attorney Bill Killian told reporters at a press conference that it was an act of "domestic terrorism," despite the fact that no motive has yet been established. President Obama was more circumspect, avoiding the use of the word "terrorism" in a perfunctory statement Thursday expressing condolences for the victims. This is in marked contrast to the administration's response to the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings, when Obama immediately declared the attack to be an "act of terror" before the investigators had found any suspects or motives.

Predictably, Obama's remarks came under attack from elements of the Republican right. Bobby Jindal, the governor of Louisiana and a long-shot candidate in the Republican presidential primaries, released a statement accusing Obama of being "soft" in the so-called "war on terror."

"It's time for the White House to wake up and tell the truth... and the truth is that Radical Islam is at war with us, and we must start by being honest about that," said Jindal. "...This is grotesque. You cannot defeat evil until you admit that it exists."

Whatever facts eventually emerge about the Chattanooga shooting, the political establishment will seek to cover up the social and political conditions that led to this crime. Whether Abdulazeez was simply a demoralized individual or had definite political

motivations, or both, the authorities and media will avoid all discussion of the atmosphere of endless war and social devastation that breeds so many mass shooters in the US.



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