

Nine wounded in mass shooting by a Houston, Texas lawyer

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Nathan DeSai, 46, a Houston, Texas lawyer, opened fire in the early morning darkness on Monday near his home in the Bellaire-West University area, taking aim at people passing by, wounding nine. None were killed, but six were sent to local hospitals for treatment. One is reportedly in critical condition.

Police arrived shortly after the shooting began. At first, they were confused about DeSai's exact location and direction of fire. They took up positions slowly, according to neighbors who witnessed the event, but soon had DeSai surrounded. After he had discharged some dozens of bullets, the police shot and killed him. There are no reports of police injuries.

The shooting occurred at the corner of Wesleyan and Law streets, where DeSai lived. A black Porsche automobile parked nearby turned out to belong to DeSai. It was said to have been full of weapons, ammunition, and "Nazi materials" of an unspecified kind. A bomb squad was called out as a precaution to examine the car, but no explosives were found.

An autopsy of DeSai's body was scheduled for Tuesday.

Three of the victims were driving by in their automobiles, narrowly missing death when DeSai shot at them through their car windows. They were treated at the scene for cuts caused by shattered window glass and released. Photographs published later in the day showed several shot-out car windows.

Kevin Chap was less fortunate; as he passed by in his car he was hit by a bullet in the neck. He was able to stop his car and seek help. An EMS ambulance took him to Ben Taub Hospital for treatment. He is expected to recover.

A shelter-in-place order was posted at 8:13 a.m. for West University, the enclave of Houston where the shooting occurred. It was lifted several hours after

DeSai had been killed. West University Elementary School held normal classes despite the shelter-in-place order.

The area where the shooting occurred is a mix of residential single- and multifamily housing and commercial shopping centers.

As the gunfire broke out early in the morning, many of the neighbors were startled out of their beds. It appears that many people made cell-phone recordings of the events. Some eyewitnesses say they could not see the shooter at all because it was such a dark and cloudy morning, and there is much foliage along the streets, including broad, low live oak trees.

Desai had apparently taken up a position underneath one of the trees behind the trunk. But witnesses could see the muzzle flashes and could clearly hear that the shots were coming from directly across the street. The gunfire was described by one local journalist as a "constant flow."

As a practicing lawyer, DeSai had an unusual resume for a mass shooter. He had a Bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Houston, and received his law degree from the University of Tulsa in 1998. He was in good standing with the Texas State Bar Association, having no complaints or disciplinary actions on his record. For about twelve years DeSai shared a law office with law partner Kenneth McDaniel.

According to DeSai's father, his son was "upset" that the law office did not have enough clients to sustain the business, and it was therefore closed sometime during the past year. DeSai's father said his son had been extremely worried about the business for a long time. DeSai continued to represent clients while working out of his home.

McDaniel, contacted by reporters, confirmed that he

and DeSai had been partners in the firm, but said he had no idea what his former partner was doing on the morning of the shooting. There have been some media reports characterizing DeSai as “disgruntled,” and that McDaniel and DeSai had some kind of bad blood between them. McDaniel denied this, saying the office closure was “simply a matter of economics.”

Questions remain about the significance of reports that DeSai’s Porsche was filled with “Nazi materials” of an unspecified nature, in addition to multiple firearms and thousands of rounds of ammunition. This brief assertion was repeated numerous times on the air by reporters with local ABC News station KTRK, Channel 13. However, there was absolutely no follow-up on this aspect of the story as of Tuesday.

A fuzzy photograph posted on the television station’s web site shows a policeman removing from the car what appears to be a red notebook or binder with a black-and-white swastika on the front cover. Whatever else may have been in the car has not yet been described by police.

Houston mayor Sylvester Turner said that authorities were being cautious in characterizing DeSai’s assault as a terrorist attack until they had more information. The FBI is working with Houston Police to evaluate the possibility.

Among DeSai’s weapons and military paraphernalia were also some artifacts from the US Civil War. It remains to be seen if the “Nazi materials” indicate any form of ideological commitment to the extreme right, or if he was simply a collector of historical military objects.

However, some questions about DeSai’s personal behavior have been brought forward by a neighbor, Cliff Saunders, a KTRH radio reporter. Saunders said he avoided DeSai, saying, “I knew enough to stay away.” He said that DeSai had “anger issues” and drove too fast through the parking lot they both shared as neighbors. Worse, Saunders’ wife called him last summer to warn him, “Don’t go home, there is a guy walking around with an AR-15.” Saunders asked who it was. “The guy with the black Porsche,” she replied.

Whether DeSai had any connections to extreme right-wing groups or to national-security forces is unknown at this time. But it must be borne in mind that the combination of quantities of firearms, thousands of rounds of ammunition, fascist propaganda literature,

and mass shootings conforms to an often-seen pattern of right-wing violence.



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