

American Convert to Islam Dies Fighting for Islamic State

An American who lived in Minnesota and San Diego and had recently converted to Islam was killed in Syria, where he had gone to fight alongside terrorists, officials say.

A national-security spokeswoman at the White House, Caitlin Hayden, confirmed the death of Douglas McCain, 33, and said U.S. officials had been aware of his presence in Syria.

McCain had traveled to Syria to join a militant group, believed to be the Islamic State, The Associated Press reported, citing a U.S. official who spoke only on condition of anonymity.

A relative, Kenneth McCain, said the State Department had called his family to report that Douglas McCain had been killed in Syria, the AP reported.

McCain lived in San Diego in recent years and was a 1999 graduate of Robbinsdale Cooper High School in Minnesota, the *Star-Tribune* reported.

Kenyata McCain, a cousin, said she was in touch with Douglas McCain as recently as Friday, and “he was telling all of us he was in Turkey.”

“I know that he had strong Muslim beliefs,” she said, “but I didn’t know that he was in support of ISIS. I didn’t think he would be.”

NBC cited an activist linked to the Free Syrian Army who saw the photos and said McCain was among three foreigners fighting with Islamic State who died in Syria.

Ken McCain told CNN the family was “devastated” and “just as surprised as the country” to learn of his nephew’s participation with ISIS, which is short for Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Ken McCain said his nephew converted from Christianity to Islam several years ago.

Islamic State, sometimes called ISIL for the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, is waging a war aimed at building a Sunni state across a swath of Syria and Iraq. The group made global news last week with a video showing the beheading of American photojournalist James Foley. (The Levant is basically a large chunk of the eastern Mediterranean region that includes Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel.)

President Obama urged Muslim nations to band together to stop the Islamic State.

McCain was born in Chicago and worked in San Diego for “Dawah—Calling to Allah,” which describes itself as a nonprofit dedicated to spreading the word about Islam and inviting people to join the faith.

There are many posters on McCain’s own Facebook photo page with a Muslim theme, including an “I (heart) Allah.” Another is called “Soldiers of Allah” and shows what appear to be desert warriors striding toward the light under the headline “They are coming back.”

There are also playful entries on his Facebook page, noting that he is a fan of both the Chicago Bulls and comedian Dave Chapelle.

Much of the information on the Facebook page was stripped away sometime Wednesday.

John Bacon and Doug Stanglin write for USA Today. Oren Dorell and William M. Welch contributed to this report.

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