

Man Charged in Hoax Threat to Blow Up Statue of Liberty

Federal authorities charged a West Virginia man with making a hoax threat to blow up the Statue of Liberty in April, prompting the evacuation of thousands of tourists from Liberty Island in New York harbor.

Jason Paul Smith, 42, was accused of making the threat in an April 24 call in which he identified himself as an "ISI terrorist" named Abdul Yasin, and said "we" were planning to "blow up" the landmark.

Authorities suspect a fugitive named Abdul Rahman Yasin of involvement in the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center in Manhattan.

Smith, of Harts, West Virginia, made the threat by placing a call from his iPad to New York City's emergency 911 system, using a service for the hearing-impaired, authorities said.

The defendant has attended a school for the deaf and blind, authorities said, citing Smith's page on Facebook. He is believed to be deaf, a federal public defender said.

U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara in Manhattan said Smith was arrested on Wednesday in Lubbock, Texas, and charged with one count of conveying false and misleading information and hoaxes. The charge carries a maximum five-year prison

Authorities said the iPad registered in Smith's name was also used to make two 911 calls in May, when a user identified as "isis allah Bomb maker" threatened to attack Times Square and kill police officers at the Brooklyn Bridge.

ISIS is short for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, a group also known as the Islamic State and ISIL.

Smith was taken into custody after briefly appearing on Wednesday before U.S. Magistrate Judge Nancy Koenig in Lubbock.

He is scheduled to make another appearance in her courtroom on Friday afternoon.

Helen Liggett, a federal public defender appointed to represent Smith, declined to comment.

More than 3,200 people were evacuated from Liberty Island on April 24 after officials learned of a bomb scare at around 11 a.m. local time. Officials sounded an all-clear about four hours later.

The Statue of Liberty, a gift to the United States from the people of France, formally opened in 1886. Liberty Island attracts about 4 million visitors a year.

The case is U.S. v. Smith, U.S. District Court, Southern District of New York, No. 15-mag-02871.

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