

# Synagogue Shooter: 'I'm Defending Our Nation Against Jews'

A judge was expected to rule Friday whether a 20-year-old former college student should stand trial on charges of firing an assault rifle inside a synagogue, killing one woman and injuring three, including a rabbi and an 8-year-old girl.

The man suspected of opening fire on the Southern California synagogue last spring told a 911 operator in the moments after the shooting that he did it to save white people from Jews, according to a recording played Thursday at a preliminary hearing to determine if the case should proceed to trial.

The shooting took place at the Chabad of Poway synagogue on the last day of Passover.

"I'm defending our nation against the Jewish people, who are trying to destroy all white people," John T. Earnest is heard saying on the 911 call. He told the operator he believed he had killed people and gave detailed descriptions of the San Diego intersection where he was parked shortly before he was taken into custody.

The recording was played at the hearing, where witnesses also included a combat veteran who confronted the suspect and a medical examiner who described the wounds of the woman who was killed.

Earnest, 20, has pleaded not guilty to murder, attempted murder and an unrelated arson charge at a mosque. The murder charge, classified as a hate crime, would make him eligible for the death penalty if convicted, but prosecutors have not said what punishment they will seek.

## **'People Were Falling Over Each Other'**

Oscar Stewart, an Iraq combat veteran, testified that as the gunfire erupted, he moved toward the suspect and screamed at him. The shooter dropped his rifle and fled.

"People were falling over each other. It was chaos," Stewart said. "I screamed (to everyone) 'Get down! Get out here.'"

He said he saw Earnest in the lobby fire two rounds and then walked toward him.

"He was firing in front of me ... I was paying attention to the rifle," Stewart said.

As the gunman struggled to reload, Stewart said, he relied on combat training to yell at the assailant to try to rattle him.

"I told him I was going to kill him ... I screamed it out really loud. I kept screaming at him," Stewart said, before the suspect dropped the rifle and fled.

During the 911 call, Earnest said, without prompting, that he would leave his AR-15 rifle on the passenger seat and step out of the car once law enforcement arrived. He became agitated that police had yet to arrive.

"You guys are taking a long-(obscenity) time," he is heard saying.

San Diego Police Officer Jonathan Wiese testified that when he arrived, Earnest got out of the car, knelt to the ground when ordered and allowed himself to be handcuffed.

"His first statement was, 'How's your day going?'" Wiese said. He said Earnest then asked if he knew "what the Jews have done to our race."

Weeks earlier, Earnest tried to burn down a mosque in Escondido, where seven people on a spiritual retreat were

sleeping, according to an affidavit. They awoke to flames and managed to extinguish the fire.

Outside the mosque, the suspect had allegedly scrawled the name of the man suspected of carrying out shootings at two mosques in New Zealand that killed 51 people earlier this year.

Authorities said Earnest frequented dark corners of the web that often post extremist, racist and violent views. In one posting, he said, "As an individual, I can only kill so many Jews."

The day before the synagogue shooting, Earnest bought a Smith & Wesson AR-15 rifle from a San Diego gun shop, according to federal charges. Officials have said he bought the gun legally.

Dr. Steven Campman, the San Diego County chief deputy medical examiner, earlier testified about the autopsy of Lori Gilbert-Kaye, 60, who was struck and killed by two shots from the rifle. {eoa}

This article originally appeared at World Israel News.