

“Gunman kills guard at memorial to WWII genocide victims”
By Joseph Weber
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(deadline story)

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/jun/10/gunman-shoots-2-holocaust-museum/>

An elderly man with virulent anti-Semitic views fatally shot a security guard Wednesday inside the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, pierced the silence around one of Washington's most somber memorials.

Witnesses said the chaotic scene unfolded shortly before 1 p.m., when the suspect, identified as 88-year-old James W. von Brunn, entered the museum lobby and fired a .22-caliber rifle at a security guard before other guards returned fire.

Mr. von Brunn, of Annapolis, Md., was well known to those who monitor hate groups as an avowed anti-Semite who also expressed hatred for non-whites and the U.S. government.

In a Web posting he purportedly made in November, Mr. Von Brunn made threats against Congress and Holocaust memorials.

Unnerved tourists inside the museum were ordered to drop to the floor and cover their heads.

"We heard five shots," said Rosemary Floccari, 43, visiting from Akron, Ohio. "We thought it was part of an exhibit. Then we realized it was real."

Police have identified the fatally shot security guard as Stephen Tyrone Johns, 39. He was a six-year veteran of the Wackenhut Services Inc. security company.

"He was a gentle giant," Gregory Bryant, Mr. Johns' direct supervisor, said of the 6-foot-5-inch, 300-pound guard. "Always with a smile on his face."

Mr. Jones, of Temple Hills, is survived by a wife and 12-year-old son.

D.C. Mayor Adrian M. Fenty said Wednesday night that Mr. von Brunn, who was shot in the head, was in critical condition at George Washington University Hospital.

Metropolitan Police Department Chief Cathy L. Lanier said the other security guards shot the gunman "immediately upon him entering the door."

A third victim received minor injuries, perhaps by flying glass, and was treated and released at the scene, said Sgt. David Schlosser, a U.S. Park Police spokesman.

Before the attack, the gunman parked his red Hyundai in front of the museum, in the 100 block of Raoul Wallenberg Place Southwest.

Chief Lanier said bomb-detecting dogs were immediately sent to the area, which is standard procedure after such an incident.

The museum, on the south edge of the capital near the Potomac River and within a block of the Mall and its monuments, is a popular tourist destination, especially during the spring.

The museum will be closed Thursday, and flags were lowered to half-staff.

Dianne Romano, 59, of Methuen, Mass., was on the museum's second floor with her husband, Danny, when they looked out a window and saw chaos outside the front doors.

"We saw people outside the building crawling under benches," she said. "Then someone walked up to us and said, 'Get away from windows. There's been shooting.' "

Mrs. Romano sent a text message to her daughter that read: "Shootings. 911. Turn on the TV."

Within minutes, SWAT teams and nearby Park Police officers arrived and helicopters whirred overhead.

Joseph Persichini Jr., assistant director in charge of the FBI's Washington field office, said the agency had no prior knowledge of the act or that such a threat had been directed at the museum.

He also said a preliminary investigation showed the shooter acted alone and that the agency has no additional information to suggest the he planned attacks at nearby landmarks.

City police also could not confirm a report the shooter had planned attacks for other sites.

However, a law enforcement source said a notebook was found on Mr. von Brunn with a list of other D.C. sites. A police bomb squad searched and secured the sites. The source said fewer than 10 sites were on the list.

Members of the FBI's National Capital Response Squad, SWAT Team and Evidence Recovery Team were sent to the museum, while other agents were sent to Mr. von Brunn's Annapolis apartment and an apartment in Easton, Md., where he used to live.

A Web site that features Mr. von Brunn states he has a journalism degree from a Midwestern university and served during World War II as a PT Boat captain in the Navy.

The site also states he was convicted of a crime in D.C. Superior Court and sentenced by a "Jew judge" to 11 years in prison. He served more than six years for attempting to enter the Federal Reserve Board headquarters with a gun, upset over interest rates.

"I am shocked and saddened by today's shooting," President Obama said in a statement. "This outrageous act reminds us that we must remain vigilant against anti-Semitism and prejudice in all its forms. No American institution is more important to this effort than the Holocaust museum, and no act of violence will diminish our determination to honor those who were lost by building a more peaceful and tolerant

world."

The museum opened in 1993 and has since had more than 30 million visitors. Guards are positioned inside and outside, visitors are required to pass through metal detectors at the entrance and bags are screened, according to the museum's Web site.

"There are no words to express our grief and shock over today's events at the museum, which took the life of Officer Stephen Tyrone Johns," said Sara J. Bloomfield, the museum's director. "Our thoughts and prayers go out to Officer Johns' family."

Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. was scheduled to visit the museum Wednesday night to see the world premiere of the one-act play "Anne and Emmett" by Janet Langhart Cohen, the wife of former Defense Secretary William S. Cohen. The play is about Anne Frank and Emmett Till, teen victims of, respectively, anti-Semitism and racism.

Joseph Rosboschil, the museum's director of security, said that museum receives occasional threats but has not received a serious one recently and had no previous dealings with the shooter.

He said the museum has "a higher level of security than any other museum in the city."