

Suspect in Charleston Church Murders Said to Have Confessed

6/19/2015 6:53:00 AM, Dan McCue (/CNSNEWS/Search?Author=Dan%20McCue&doSearch=1)



CHARLESTON, S.C. (CN) - Dylann Storm Roof, the 21-year-old arrested for the Wednesday night massacre in a historically black church, reportedly confessed to the crime Friday, hours before his scheduled bond hearing.

Roof is currently being held in isolation at the Charleston County jail. He is scheduled to appear in Charleston County Bond Court in North Charleston via a video hookup to the jail at 2 p.m. He has been charged with nine counts of murder and one weapons possession charge.

He is accused (<http://www.courthousenews.com/2015/06/18/white-suspect-behind-slaughter-of-9-in-black-church-apprehended.htm>) of walking into the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church on Calhoun Street in Charleston during an hour-long Bible-study class Wednesday night, and shooting six woman and three men to death.

Roof confessed within moments of his arrest Thursday in Shelby, N.C., a small town about four hours northwest of Charleston, and told investigators he hoped to start a race war, law enforcement officials who asked not to be identified told reporters Friday morning.

NBC News reported that Roof told investigators he almost didn't go through with the massacre "because everyone was so nice to him."

He ultimately decided he had to "go through with his mission," the report said.

None of Roof's relatives would comment on the case when contacted by telephone by the Courthouse News. Until Wednesday night they were planning for the Sunday wedding of the alleged gunman's sister, Amber.

Officials in South Carolina are piecing together a portrait of the alleged killer, who they say was obsessed with matters of race and the Civil War. The profile picture of Roof's Facebook page, which was taken down Thursday, showed him scowling against a swampy backdrop in a jacket emblazoned with two large patches: the flag of apartheid-era South Africa and the flag of white-ruled Rhodesia.

Strangely, a large number of Roof's nearly 100 Facebook friends appeared to be black.

But friends who have been speaking with several news organizations said Roof's profile picture tells the tale.

"He was big into segregation and other stuff," a friend named Dalton Tyler told ABC News Thursday.

Tyler also said Roof was "planning something" like the Charleston massacre for at least six months, but no one took him seriously or thought to notify the police.

He said he was going to do something like that and then kill himself," Tyler told ABC.

Law enforcement officials in Charleston said Roof obtained a .45-caliber Glock handgun on or shortly after his birthday in April. However, there have been conflicting accounts of how he got it, with officials initially saying his parents bought it for him as a gift, but later saying he bought it himself at a Charleston gun store with money he

received as a gift.

More details are also emerging about how Roof was captured so quickly.

Officials said it was Roof's sister Amber who alerted them to his identity after seeing the surveillance photo from the church on television.

Among those who also saw television reports of the shooting was Debbie Dills, who was driving to her job at a Kings Mountain, North Carolina florist shop at about 10:30 a.m. Thursday morning when she saw someone who looked like the alleged gunman driving a black Hyundai with South Carolina license plates on U.S. Highway 74.

Dills called her boss, who in turn called Kings Mountain police. Meanwhile Dills began following the Hyundai, hoping to get a better look at the license plate number, officials said.

She wound up following Roof for more than 35 miles before Shelby, North Carolina police finally flagged him down.

Still unknown is whether the alleged gunman was targeting a specific individual when he opened fire Wednesday night, or whether he is a member of any organized white supremacist group.

"We don't know if anybody was targeted other than the church itself," said Charleston Police Chief Greg Mullen.

As reported by Courthouse News on Thursday, Roof had two earlier brushes with the law this year.

In February, he came to the attention of police when he approached a store employee in the Bath & Body Works at the Columbiana Centre, a regional shopping mall in Columbia, and began asking questions about the number of people who worked in the store and what time they would be leaving.

Roof initially told police he was looking for a job, but later admitted he hadn't filled out a single application. According to the police report, Roof was acting nervously as he interacted with the officer, prompting a search of his person that turned up Suboxone, a prescription drug used to treat opiate addiction.

When Roof admitted he didn't have a prescription for it, he was arrested and charged with felony drug possession. The case is still pending, but Roof's arrest led to his being barred from entering the mall for a year.

That led to his second arrest, in April, on a misdemeanor charge of trespassing at the Columbiana Centre. He was convicted of that charge last month.

Making the rounds of the morning news programs Friday, South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley said the murders of the nine people in the AME church is a hate crime, and that the gunman should face the death penalty.

"This is the worst hate that I've seen and that the country has seen in a long time. We absolutely will want him to have the death penalty," she said.

South Carolina has not put an inmate to death since 2011. State law says that prosecutors can seek the death penalty -- which is carried out by lethal injection here -- only if there certain "aggravating" circumstances are present in the case.

These include the suspect being charged with murdering two or more people during a single act.

Scarlett A. Wilson, the prosecutor for Charleston County, did not respond to a request for comment and has yet to speak publicly about the case. She has scheduled a press conference at the county jail immediately after the bond hearing.

Should she choose not to pursue the death penalty, Roof would face life in prison without the possibility of parole.

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