

Meriden Mosque Shooting: Shooter Gets 6 Months In Jail: Judge Aimed To Deter Others, Send Message

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ABSTRACT

U.S. District Judge Michael Shea did go below the federal sentencing guidelines when he imposed the six-month sentence, which includes time served. FBI agents delving into his computer records also found other diatribes against Muslims, including posts such as, "If we all kill just 1 Muslim each tonight it will make a dent!" When Hakey returned home from the bar he grabbed a handgun and a Springfield Armory M1A .308-caliber rifle and went outside to shoot them in his homemade target range, he told police.

FULL TEXT

HARTFORD - A federal judge Friday sentenced a Meriden man to six months in prison for firing four shots into a neighboring mosque, saying that shooting at a religious institution cannot be tolerated.

Ted Hakey Jr. received the sentence despite a plea from the president of the mosque that Hakey be spared prison time. Following the sentencing, Hakey said that the recent mass shooting in Orlando, where 49 people were killed by a man who claimed an affiliation with Islamic extremist groups, affected his case.

"Of course, a lot of this had to do with the Orlando thing. I think if my original sentencing went off in May things would have been different," Hakey said outside the courtroom. "I respect the judge's decision. I think he has a hard job to do. But obviously look at all the media attention here. What are they going to do? They can't just let me walk away."

U.S. District Judge Michael Shea did go below the federal sentencing guidelines when he imposed the six-month sentence, which includes time served. Hakey served three weeks in federal prison when he was arrested by the FBI in December.

Hakey, 48, pleaded guilty in February to one count of intentional destruction of religious property - a federal hate crime - for firing into the Baitul Aman Mosque as a response to the terrorist attacks in Paris in November. Under the guidelines, he was facing eight to 14 months. Hakey was released from custody in January and was free on \$400,000 bail and under house arrest at his mother's Shelton home.

Shea gave Hakey credit for his rehabilitative efforts including intensive alcohol treatment and the unusual and very emotional apology to the members of the mosque in April. But Shea said the seriousness of his actions warranted jail time, particularly Hakey's selection of the mosque as a target, which makes his crime even more serious.

"In this type of case, general deterrence does loom large. It has never been more essential to send that message than today," Shea said.

Shea acknowledged the extraordinary amount of forgiveness shown by members of the mosque, who not only forgave Hakey but have embraced him as "a brother."

Mohammed Qureshi, president of the mosque, spoke in favor of Hakey being spared prison during Friday's sentencing, reading from an eight-page statement.

"Based on our interactions with Mr. Hakey and our belief that he is genuinely remorseful, we ask your honor not to

impose further criminal sentence beyond time he has already served," Qureshi told Shea. "We recognize the growing concern of Islamophobia in America, but Mr. Hakey should not be made an example of to deter future actions of this kind. We have firm conviction that he will not only never commit such a criminal act in the future, he will likely prevent others from doing the same, and by doing so, he would prevent future hate crimes against American Muslims."

The mosque was formed in 2007 and currently has more than 250 members. Many of them attended a meeting in April during which Hakey apologized to the group. Since then he has posted almost daily on Facebook or Twitter supporting the peaceful message of Islam.

The shooting occurred Nov. 14, the day after the attacks in Paris by Muslim terrorists left 130 dead. Hakey, a former Marine who is a sharpshooter, posted on Facebook: "What is gonna be the breaking point to go 'weapons free' against Islam."

Hakey went out drinking at a bar in Wallingford and at some point sent a private Facebook message to a friend that said, "I hate Islam." FBI agents delving into his computer records also found other diatribes against Muslims, including posts such as, "If we all kill just 1 Muslim each tonight it will make a dent!"

When Hakey returned home from the bar he grabbed a handgun and a Springfield Armory M1A .308-caliber rifle and went outside to shoot them in his homemade target range, he told police. Hakey lives adjacent to the mosque. After firing some bullets into a woodpile in his backyard, he turned the rifle on the mosque and fired four shots into it, police have said.

One of the bullets went through a wall and passed through the prayer area at the front of the mosque before entering the kitchen. No one was injured.

When federal agents searched Hakey's home a few days after the shooting they found 24 weapons, all legally registered to either Hakey or his wife, and hundreds of rounds of ammunition. They also found a chair on the second floor by a window overlooking the mosque and binoculars nearby.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Raymond F. Miller told Shea, "the attacks in Paris didn't bring (Hakey) here today; it was hate that brought him here today."

"This is a seminal moment your honor. A sentence needs to tell others if you intentionally damage a mosque the correct punishment is you go to jail," Miller said.

During a press conference following his sentencing, Hakey said that he did not deliberately fire at the mosque but said that he would have had no chance at a jury believing him if he went to trial because of some of what he posted on Facebook.

"I was low-hanging fruit and I see why," Hakey said.

Hakey said he was trying to hit the ground in front of the mosque to send a message to terrorists. Hakey said he realized how stupid it was and immediately wanted to accept responsibility.

"I am sincere about working with my neighbors. I was very happy with the way they behaved in this whole thing," Hakey said. "They were sincere in accepting my apology and I am sincere that I am going to work with them."

After the sentencing, Qureshi embraced Hakey before leaving the courtroom. He said mosque members will respect the judge's decision to send Hakey to prison.

"Meanwhile, he remains our friend and we will do what we can for him and his wife," Qureshi said, adding that he "absolutely will visit his friend in prison."

Credit: daltimari@courant.com - - - ; By DAVE ALTIMARI

Illustration

Caption: TED HAKEY JR., left, of Meriden, speaks to reporters Friday after being sentenced to six months in prison for shooting at a Meriden mosque in November. His lawyer, Jeffrey Cohen, is at right.; Cloe Poisson | cpoisson@Courant.com

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