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U.S. raises security after 4 Marines killed in Tennessee

7/16/2015

Four Marines were killed and one wounded Thursday when a gunman opened fire at a military base and a separate recruiting center in Chattanooga, Tenn., the Marine Corps and the Pentagon said.

The gunman was killed, according to local news reports.

The shooting was the deadliest criminal attack at a domestic military base since an Army psychiatrist shot and killed 13 soldiers and wounded 29 others in November 2009 at Fort Hood, Texas.

The psychiatrist, Nidal Malik Hasan, was later sentenced to death and is awaiting execution pending appeals at the Fort Leavenworth, Kan., military prison. At his August 2013 court martial, Hasan, an American-born Muslim, said the shootings were an act of jihad against the United States.

The Tennessean newspaper identified the shooter as Muhammad Youssef Abdulazeez, 24, and reported that he was believed to have been born in Kuwait.

Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson cited “many unconfirmed and possibly false reports” about the tragedy in urging that people not jump to conclusions about the motives behind it.

Johnson said that “out of an abundance of caution,” his department had beefed up security at “certain federal facilities.” He did not name them.

The Marines slain Thursday were at the Navy & Marine Corps Reserve Center on the Tennessee River on the northeastern outskirts of Chattanooga, the state’s fourth-largest city.

About 30 minutes before the fatal late-morning shooting at the reserve center, a Marine Corps recruiting officer sustained a gunshot wound in the leg at the service’s main Chattanooga recruiting office about six miles south of the joint reserve base. That officer was treated at a nearby hospital and released, the Marine Corps said.

Maj. Paul Greenberg, a Marine Corps spokesman, said the Marines were investigating whether the shootings were acts of terrorism.

An FBI spokeswoman in Washington said the bureau’s Knoxville, Tenn., office was taking the lead in the criminal investigation. That office did not respond to several phone calls.

“Our priorities are focused on supporting the families of our Marines involved and assisting local investigators,” the Marine Corps said in a statement.

In a separate statement, the Defense Department said: “We can confirm that four DOD service members were tragically killed and one wounded in two separate shootings in Chattanooga, Tennessee today.”

Chattanooga Mayor Andy Berke told the New York Times that a police officer and other individuals were wounded in the episode.

Sen. Bob Corker, a Tennessee Republican who was Chattanooga mayor from 2001 to 2005, said he and his aides were working with federal, state and local officials.

“I am heartbroken by the tragic shootings that have taken place in my hometown,” Corker said.

Republican Rep. Mac Thornberry, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, also expressed sadness.

“Our Marines don’t flinch when they take on our enemies abroad,” Thornberry said. “It is heartbreaking when they are attacked here at home.”

The Chattanooga tragedy was similar to an earlier shooting in Arkansas.

On June 1, 2009, an American-born convert to Islam named Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammad opened fire from a car at soldiers outside a military recruiting center in Little Rock. Army Pvt. William Long was killed and Army Pvt. Quinton Ezeagwula was wounded.

Muhammad, whose name at birth was Carlos Leon Bledsoe, later pleaded guilty and was sentenced to life in prison in July 2011.