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Three men charged after protesters shot at following Richard Spencer speech

Tyler Tenbrink and brothers William and Colton Fears charged in Florida

All three white nationalists were also present at Charlottesville rally



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After an incident that occurred less than two hours after the white nationalist Richard Spencer finished speaking at the University of Florida on Thursday, three white men were arrested and charged with attempted homicide.

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White supremacist Richard Spencer faces barrage of protest at Florida speech

According to the Gainesville police, the men chanted "Hail Hitler!", gave Nazi salutes and fired a gun at a group of protesters about a mile south of Spencer's venue.

The three men were photographed and seen in media interviews outside the venue, police spokesman Ben Tobias said, and at least two were known to have links to extremist groups.

Tyler Tenbrink, 28, of Richmond, Texas, fired the gun, according to the police. The Gainesville Sun reported that Tenbrink was interviewed by one of its reporters hours earlier, and said he had driven from Houston to see Spencer speak.

"This is a mess," Tenbrink reportedly told the Sun about the protests. "I'm disappointed in the course of things. It appears that the only answer left is violence, and nobody wants that."

According to a researcher at the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), Tenbrink has attended at least seven white supremacist events. He is also a convicted felon, according to the police.



This photo provided by the Alachua County sheriffs office shows Tyler Tenbrink. Photograph: AP



William Fears. Photograph: Handout/Reuters



Colton Fears. Photograph: Handout/Reuters

Brothers William Fears, 30 and Colton Fears, 28 of Pasadena, Texas, "encouraged [Tenbrink] to shoot at the victims", police said. William Fears has been affiliated with Vanguard America and the Patriot Movement, according to Carla Hill, a researcher with the ADL Center for Extremism. He was seen jabbing a flag at counterprotesters in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August, she said, "and screaming the whole time".

All three men were present at the Charlottesville Unite the Right rally, Hill said. That weekend, a car attack after clashes in the streets left at least 19 counterprotesters injured and killed a 32-year-old woman, Heather Heyer. James Alex Fields, 20, who was photographed with Vanguard America at the rally, was charged with second-degree murder.

Spencer has repeatedly said that he and his supporters are not violent and those who protest against him are the real threat. At his speech to hundreds of people at the University of Florida's Phillips Center on Thursday afternoon, he rejected accusations from the audience that he was responsible for violence carried out by followers of the "alt-right" movement.

The majority of the audience stood, chanted, booed and raised their fists throughout his hour-long speech. When he mentioned Heyer, the crowd chanted: "It's your fault! It's your fault!"

Asked how it felt to have a roomful of people accusing him of being responsible for a young woman's death, Spencer said: "I just don't take those people seriously. It's a joke to say something like that, so it doesn't touch me." He did not respond to a request for comment on the charges following his Gainesville event.

The Florida incident could have broad repercussions for Spencer's campaign to use public universities across the country as a venue for his white nationalist ideas and as a recruiting platform.

Ohio State University announced on Friday night that, despite the threat of a lawsuit from Spencer's supporters, the school was denying a request to have him speak on campus. In a statement, the university said it was issuing the denial "due to substantial risk to public safety, as well as material and substantial disruption to the work and discipline of the university".

Michael Carpenter, a lawyer representing Ohio State, wrote Friday that "the university values freedom of speech" but that it had denied the request to have Spencer speak after reviewing "the information currently available" including "yesterday's events at the University of Florida".

At 5.30pm on Thursday, about an hour and a half after Spencer left the stage, three men in a silver Jeep pulled up to a bus stop and yelled "Hail Hitler" and other chants at protesters, according to the police report.

An argument ensued and a protester used a baton to hit the rear window of the vehicle. The car pulled forward, then stopped. Tenbrink emerged and pulled out a handgun. According to the report, the Fears brothers were yelling "Kill them!" and "Shoot them!" Tenbrink fired a single shot, which hit a building. Then the men drove away.

They were stopped and arrested about 20 miles north of Gainesville. Tenbrink admitted to being the shooter, according to the police report. All three men are being held in the Alachua County jail.

Gainesville police recovered a gun in the vehicle. Tobias, the police spokesman, said the victims were in their early to mid-20s and were carrying signs. Following department policy, he said, the victims were not identified to protect their safety.

"I am amazed that immediately after being shot at, a victim had the forethought to get the vehicle's license number," Tobias said. "That key piece of information allowed officials from every level of multiple agencies to quickly identify and arrest these persons."

In September, the Dallas Morning News quoted 30-year-old William Fears as denying belonged to any white supremacist group but saying: “Nazi is like the N-word for white people,” he said. “And I just embrace it.” He was identified by the paper as having protested against the removal of a statue of Confederate general Robert E Lee from a park in the city.

The Gainesville Sun quoted William Fears on Thursday as saying: “We’re starting to push back, we’re starting to want to intimidate back. We want to show our teeth a little bit because, you know, we’re not to be taken lightly. We don’t want violence; we don’t want harm.

“But at the end of the day, we’re not opposed to defending ourselves.”

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