

Beat: Miscellaneous

Suspected Los Angeles airport gunman charged with murder

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USPA News - The man accused of opening fire at Los Angeles International Airport this week was charged on Saturday with one count of murder in the death of a federal security officer, prosecutors said, detailing the chilling chain of events that took place. Paul Anthony Ciancia, 23, was charged in the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California with one count of Murder of a Federal Officer and one count of Violence at International Airports.

If convicted, he would face life in prison without the possibility of parole or possibly a death sentence, although the state has not carried out executions since January 2006. In court documents released on late Saturday, Special Agent Stephen Khoobyarian of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) described the events that took place at the nation's third largest airport on Friday morning. The shooting resulted in the death of 39-year-old Transportation Security Administration (TSA) officer Gerardo I. Hernandez and injured 7 others, including Ciancia. "At approximately 9:20 a.m., Ciancia entered Terminal 3 at LAX and approached the TSA checkpoint," Khoobyarian wrote in the court documents. "Ciancia pulled a Smith & Wesson .223 caliber M&P-15 assault rifle out of his bag and fired multiple rounds at point-blank range at a TSA officer who was then on duty and in uniform, wounding the officer." Investigators said Ciancia left the first shooting scene and began walking up an escalator before looking back at Hernandez, who appeared to be alive and moving in video surveillance footage. "[Ciancia] returned to shoot the wounded officer again," Khoobyarian said. "The TSA officer was fatally wounded." After killing Hernandez, Ciancia allegedly fired his weapon on at least two other uniformed, on-duty TSA employees and one civilian passenger, all of whom sustained gunshot wounds. "Ciancia was pursued and shot by a sergeant and an officer of the Los Angeles Airport Police," Khoobyarian said, adding that multiple terminals were evacuated which disrupted flights across the world. Ciancia, who was also carrying five magazine clips of ammunition for his assault rifle, was found to have a handwritten letter with him that stated he had made "the conscious decision to try to kill" multiple TSA employees. Addressing TSA employees, Ciancia wrote he wanted to "instill fear in your traitorous minds." Previously, investigators had disclosed that Ciancia was carrying a note that expressed "anti-government" views, although the exact contents have not yet been made public. An unidentified law enforcement official, speaking to the Los Angeles Times on Friday, said Ciancia had expressed his "disappointment in the government" in the letter and said he had no interest in hurting "innocent people." Also on Saturday, TSA Administrator John Pistole traveled to the Los Angeles area to meet with the family of Hernandez and to personally express his condolences. He also met with the two TSA officers who were injured in Friday's shooting, and both officers have since been released from hospital to recover from their injuries at home. "No words can explain the horror that we experienced [Friday] when a shooter took the life of a member of our family and injured two TSA officers at Los Angeles International Airport," Pistole wrote in an email to TSA employees on late Friday. "Together, we will get through this. Our faith will guide us and our professionalism will ensure our ability to carry out our mission." Friday's shooting was the first incident in which a TSA officer was killed in the line of duty. The last attack at Los Angeles International Airport happened on July 4, 2002, when Egyptian-American Hesham Mohamed Hadayet opened fire at an El Al ticket counter, killing two people and injuring four others. Hadayet himself was killed in the attack, which officials said was over the U.S. support for Israel.

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