

Alleged shooter of Hatch police officer pleads guilty to federal firearms, carjacking offences

Written by Gallupsun Staff
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Faces life in prison

ALBUQUERQUE – Acting U.S. Attorney James D. Tierney and Special Agent in Charge Terry Wade of the FBI's Albuquerque Division announced May 30 that Jesse Denver Hanes, who allegedly shot and killed Hatch Police Officer Jose Chavez on Aug. 12, 2016, has entered a guilty plea to federal firearms and carjacking offenses arising out of his efforts to evade arrest following the shooting.

Hanes, 39, of Columbus, Ohio, entered the guilty plea before U.S. District Judge Robert C. Brack in federal court in Las Cruces, N.M., under a plea agreement that stipulates to a sentence of life imprisonment without the possibility of release.

Third Judicial District Attorney Mark D'Antonio, Chief James Gimler of the Hatch Police Department, Chief Pete N. Kassetas of the New Mexico State Police, and Doña Ana County Sheriff Enrique Vigil joined Acting U.S. Attorney Tierney and FBI Special Agent in Charge Wade in announcing the guilty plea.

In announcing the guilty plea, Acting U.S. Attorney Tierney said, "The U.S. Attorney's Office has made a commitment to prosecute those who seek to harm the courageous officers who put their lives on the line to protect us and safeguard our communities whenever there is federal jurisdiction to do so. This federal prosecution is part of that commitment, and today we begin the process of holding Jesse Denver Hanes accountable for the federal crimes he committed during his extremely violent crime spree on Aug. 12, 2016."

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“Whenever a brave police officer like Jose Chavez dies in the line of duty, everyone in the law enforcement community feels the loss,” said Special Agent in Charge Terry Wade of the FBI’s Albuquerque Division. “Officer Chavez’s sacrifice has inspired all of us who wear the badge to renew our resolve to serve and protect our nation. I am grateful to the many FBI agents and staff, along with our law enforcement partners and prosecutors, who worked tirelessly on this case to make sure justice was done.”

During the change of plea hearing, Hanes pled guilty to a five-count superseding indictment that charged him with attempted carjacking; brandishing a firearm during a crime of violence; carjacking resulting in serious bodily injury; discharging a firearm during a crime of violence; and being a felon in possession of a firearm. Hanes admitted committing the five crimes on Aug. 12, 2016, in Doña Ana County, N.M. At the time, Hanes was prohibited from possessing firearms or ammunition because of his status as a convicted felon.

Hanes was arrested Aug. 16, 2016, on a federal criminal complaint charging him with being a felon in possession of a firearm, carjacking, and discharging a firearm during a crime of violence. According to court filings, on Aug. 12, 2016, Officer Chavez executed a traffic stop in Hatch, N.M., on a vehicle driven by Hanes and in which two other men were passengers. During the traffic stop, Hanes allegedly shot Officer Chavez in the upper torso; Officer Chavez later died as the result of the gunshot wound.

After fleeing from the scene of the shooting, Hanes and his passengers parted company and Hanes traveled to a rest area near Radium Springs, N.M., where he attempted to carjack two individuals by brandishing a firearm at them. Shortly thereafter, Hanes carjacked a man at the same rest area by shooting him in the leg and drove away in the injured man’s vehicle. When deputies of the Doña Ana County Sheriff’s Office arrested Hanes later that day, they found the handgun Hanes used to shoot the carjack victim and allegedly used to shoot Officer Chavez.

In addition to the federal charges to which Hanes pled guilty today, Hanes is charged in the state with first-degree murder of Officer Chavez and related crimes in the Third Judicial District Court for the State of New Mexico in Doña Ana County. Hanes also is facing an unrelated state murder charge in Ohio. Hanes has entered a not guilty plea to the state charges in New Mexico and has not yet been arraigned on the charges in Ohio. Criminal charges are merely accusations, and defendants are presumed innocent unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. Under the terms of the federal plea agreement entered into by Hanes and the U.S. Attorney’s Office, Hanes’ federal sentence of life imprisonment will run concurrent to any sentence Hanes may receive on a conviction on the state charges in the New Mexico case.

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Third Judicial District Attorney Mark D'Antonio said, "The best approach to deterring criminal activity is when the federal government and local law enforcement agencies work together closely. This is a fine example of that cooperation in action, and what we are able to accomplish when we work together."

"The cooperative effort between law enforcement agencies has made our communities safer," said New Mexico State Police Chief Pete Kassetas. "This case is a great example of how local, state and federal law enforcement agencies are working with State District Attorneys and the U.S. Attorney to prosecute violent criminals. I cannot express my gratitude enough to all the agencies involved."

"From the moment this tragic incident first hit our police radios on August 12, we knew the Doña Ana County Sheriff's Department wasn't alone," said Doña Ana County Sheriff Enrique Vigil. "The efforts of every responding agency reinforced what our deputies do every day – ensure the safety of our residents. The collaboration of those efforts is what ensures criminals like Jesse Hanes receive the maximum sentence possible for their actions."

Chief James Gimler of the Hatch Police Department said, "I am very pleased that justice is being served in this case and that the victims of Mr. Hanes' crimes will be spared the emotional difficulty of sitting through his trial. Mr. Hanes' crimes have forever changed the lives of his victims and their family members, and I am extremely grateful for all of the support from my fellow law enforcement officers and the entire community."