

Tales of heroism and tragedy

New Zealand mourns massacre victims

Hero charged attacker during massacre: witness

Christchurch, New Zealand

A survivor of the Christchurch massacre has described how a heroic worshipper at one of the targeted mosques seized an empty rifle discarded by alleged gunman Brenton Tarrant and then used it to chase their attacker away.

Alabi Lateef said he was praying with others inside Linwood Masjid, the second mosque attacked on Friday by self-confessed white supremacist Tarrant, when he heard the sound of gunfire.

"Straight away I stopped my prayer, I peek through the window and I found a person with, you know,



Lateef Alabi at the entrance to Christchurch hospital

machine gun and heavy dress," he told news website Stuff.

"By the time I peeked on the floor I see two, three dead bodies. Then realised

he and a "brother" decided to confront the attacker during a lull in the gunfire.

"By the time he got there (outside the mosque) the bullets were finished and the gun was used," Lateef recounted.

The pair noticed Tarrant had left the spent rifle on the ground as he returned towards his car.

So Lateef's unnamed fellow worshipper seized the initiative and grabbed the rifle, following the attacker to his car and using it to smash the vehicle's back window before running away.

The pair's actions may have saved further casualties, as Tarrant was ap-

prehended by two armed police officers not far from Linwood mosque soon afterwards while driving his car with a visibly smashed back window.

Tarrant used Facebook to live broadcast his initial assault on the Noor Mosque, where at least 40 worshippers were murdered and dozens more wounded.

In that opening attack, footage from his broadcast showed Tarrant mercilessly spraying bullets inside the mosque and then returning to his car to fetch a new rifle.

He then walked back inside and started shooting again.

Footage from the attack

also shows at least one worshipper at the Noor Mosque who was gunned down while trying to charge Tarrant during his rampage.

Lateef was photographed soon after the attack by local media wearing a grey shalwar kameez tunic that was covered in blood.

He told Stuff that as soon as the attacker had left he ran back inside the mosque to help those who had been shot.

"I'm very sad for what has happened but I believe this country is a peaceful country and I hope something good will happen after this," he said, fighting back tears.

New Zealanders flocked to memorial sites to lay flowers and mourn the victims of the twin mosque massacres yesterday, as testimony emerged of epic heroism and harrowing suffering in the gun attack that has claimed 50 lives.

As the bodies of some victims were released to their families, a list circulated by relatives showed they ranged in age from three to 77 and included at least four women.

The list also documents the international scale of the tragedy, with those killed hailing from across the Muslim world and including members of two generations of the same family.



Workers dig grave sites at a cemetery in Christchurch



A family stands across the road from the Dean Street mosque

Quran bookshelf saved me

Christchurch, New Zealand

As the bullets tore into worshippers during Friday prayers, taxi driver Abdul Kadir Ababora threw himself to the floor and wedged himself under a bookshelf used to hold Qurans, praying he would see his wife and kids again.

Somehow that decision saved his life and he emerged from the carnage unscathed.

"It's just a miracle," he said yesterday as he revisited the scene. "When I woke up to the left and right of me it was just dead bodies."

Like so many who attended weekly prayers at Christchurch's Al Noor mosque, Ababora had come to New Zealand from a troubled overseas homeland hoping to find peace and prosperity.

The 48-year-old said he arrived from Ethiopia in 2010 and made a life for himself in the placid city of Canterbury.

Two weeks ago he and his wife celebrated the birth of their third son.

Then on Friday a self-professed white supremacist, wielding an armory of semi-automatic rifles scrawled with racist ideology, walked into the Al Noor mosque and unleashed a rampage that left at least 50 dead and dozens more with

life-changing injuries.

Sermon then gunfire

Ababora said the mosque's imam had just started delivering the English translation of the khutbah -- the sermon during Friday prayers -- when the gunfire erupted outside.

The first person he saw struck was a Palestinian, a man who was an engineer by training but who, like Ababora, also drove a taxi in the city.

"He walked up just to see what is going on and then he saw the attacker. When he tried to run he shot him somewhere here," Ababora recalled, pointing to his side. "I saw him falling down."

Soon Brenton Tarrant, the 28-year-old Australian police say carried out the massacre, was inside the prayer hall, pumping round after round into the defenceless worshippers.

Ababora said he instinctively fell to the ground and managed to squeeze himself against a bookshelf that held the Qurans worshippers used during prayers. Crucially, it made his body a slightly smaller target.

"I just pretended as if I am dead," he said.

Ababora said he was sickened at how methodical the killer was, firing round after round into the crumpled pile of bodies in a well-planned attack

he later learned was broadcast on Facebook.

"This guy started to shoot randomly, left and right, automatic. And then he finished the first box (magazine) and then he changed it, again automatic. Then he finished the second one, he put the third box, again start automatic in the other room again."

He could feel the shockwaves from the bullets pass by his body.

"I was waiting (for) my moment, when every second (a) shot comes I was saying 'This is for me. This is for me'. And I lost hope," he said.

He began to silently pray and think of his family.

'Blood everywhere'

The horror was far from over when the gunman departed after emptying a fourth magazine before driving across town to commit a second atrocity at the Linwood mosque.

For an agonising number of minutes afterwards, no one at the Al Noor mosque dared make a sound. But as the pain got too much for the wounded, people started crying out.

The scene in front of Ababora was hellish.

"There was blood everywhere," he said. A friend called out, saying he had been shot in the leg. He tried to help him up but the leg was shattered by

the bullet. Ababora staggered outside to find another worshipper -- whose son is friends with his eldest son -- alive but with horrific injuries. He had been shot in the jaw, his hand and his back.

It was only after laying the man down he noticed two more bodies -- two women lying in a pool of blood.

"They were late comers," he explained. "When he (the gunman) finished everyone in the mosque and he came out to escape, these ladies were late, and he shot them. Bang. Bang."

Close by was one of the gunman's discarded rifles and Ababora said he instantly recognised "Nazi" symbols written on it as well as historic places and dates celebrated by the far-right such as the Battle of Vienna in 1683.

"He wrote all the places where Muslims were attacked on the gun, all over the gun."

Like most of Christchurch's inhabitants, Ababora said he never believed such hatred would arrive on his doorstep. "We used to say New Zealand is safe, especially in Christchurch we say we are safe, it's a trusting system here. The Muslims here, we are the most quiet people," he said, adding the mosques in the city don't even broadcast the call to prayer.

"New Zealand is not safe anymore," he concluded. "This is brutal."



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ABDUL KADIR ABABORA