

# THE ASPEN TIMES

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## Hostage: 'I thought of myself as a dead man'

Man accused of taking hostages defends his actions during bizarre court appearance

Jason Auslander  
The Aspen Times

The most bizarre moment in the first court appearance Thursday by the man charged with holding three other men at gunpoint Wednesday occurred when one of the hostages addressed the court.

"After I saw the gun at my face, I thought of myself as a dead man," Mark Meredith, 23, told Aspen District Judge Chris Seldin.

"I told you I was going to kill you," said Brolin McConnell, 30, the Colorado Springs resident who was sitting in jailhouse orange and shackles, next to where Meredith stood, and who has been charged with the crime.

"He told me he was going to kill me and put a bullet through my temple," said Meredith, a Vermont native and current Aspen resident.

"If ..." McConnell said.

"The 'if' was if the cops showed up," Meredith said.

"Well, they did show up and I didn't kill you," McConnell said.

"Because I ran," Meredith said.

The nearly hour and a half-long hearing contained many such moments.

At one point, when Seldin attempted to explain the legal definition of first-degree kidnapping — which will require a mandatory minimum of 16 years in prison if he's convicted of the charge — McConnell protested.

"Your honor, I didn't kidnap

anybody," he said. "I just held him hostage."

McConnell repeatedly told the judge, "I fear for my life." He asked for and received a book of Colorado statutes so he could read along with the judge. He refused to sign mandatory protection orders forbidding his interacting with the 12 victims in the case. He asked why he wasn't charged with possessing marijuana and guns together, because that's "not legal," he said.

"I don't feel safe in this town, or anywhere really," McConnell said. "I'm all alone in this world."

In addition to the kidnapping charge, McConnell also is facing felony menacing and misdemeanor false imprisonment and prohibited use of a firearm. Seldin ordered him held in lieu of a \$500,000 cash-only bond.

After the hearing, McConnell told a reporter he's a real estate agent in both Colorado and Florida, though he said he lives in Colorado. He also admitted he didn't know any of the men he held at gunpoint.

An employee at a Florida real estate firm listed on McConnell's LinkedIn profile said Thursday he didn't work there anymore.

A woman who said she was McConnell's mother answered the phone Thursday at a Colorado Springs real estate agency listed in the LinkedIn profile. She was crying and said she knew what had occurred in Aspen on Wednesday.



JEREMY WALLACE/THE ASPEN TIMES

Brolin McConnell gets escorted into court in Aspen on Thursday.

"I don't have any comment," she said. "Things are very overwhelming right now." She then hung up.

In an interview after court Thursday, Meredith said he and a friend from Aspen had gone up to the Lincoln Creek area to go bouldering, drink beer and camp. They first passed McConnell about 200 feet after the initial bridge. His gray Toyota Tacoma was parked at an angle in the road, though they were able to make it past, he said.

They went another 400 feet or so, and ran into two large, "military-type" guys in a white

truck who told them soft-sided tent camping wasn't allowed in the area because of recent bear incidents, according to Meredith and police reports. So they turned around, but had to get around McConnell's truck again.

"He gets out and I thought he was going to help us," Meredith said. "He walks around the front of the car, ... then he looked back, pulled the gun out and pointed it at us."

"He said, 'You guys are in on this.' He had this whole idea he was being watched by cameras."

He asked for Meredith's friend's iPhone and appeared to listen to

it, he said. He made statements about the FBI and that drones were "all over the place," Meredith said. At one point crows flew by and McConnell shot at them.

"He thought they were drones," he said.

McConnell had a 9mm handgun and a .38-caliber and was pointing them at Meredith and his friend's heads, he said.

"He was going back and forth whether he was going to shoot us," Meredith said. "He said, 'I'm going to put this bullet in your temple.'"

HOSTAGE, A7

## Security forum: Nothing clear on Russia's role in hacking

Rick Carroll  
The Aspen Times



James Clapper

High-ranking officials at the Aspen Security Forum on Thursday shied away from saying Russia was behind the hack

of Democratic National Committee emails.

"I don't think we are quite ready yet to make a call on attribution," James Clapper, director of National Intelligence, told Jim Sciutto, chief national security correspondent for CNN. "I mean, we all know there's just a few usual suspects out there, but in terms of the

“The bottom line is nothing should be assumed as safe.”

Vinny Sica

Lockheed Martin, vice president of defense and intelligence space ground solutions

process that we try to stick to, I don't think we're ready to make a public call on that."

Journalists who moderated

several discussions tried, with little success, to unearth new information from security pundits.

"We are told that the federal government believes with a high degree of confidence that Russia is behind the theft of emails from the Democratic National Committee that were subsequently released by

Wikileaks, causing disarray at the first day of the Democratic National Convention and forcing the resignation of the DNC's leader, Debbie Wasserman Schultz," said Massimo Calabresi, deputy Washington bureau chief and senior correspondent for Time magazine.

HACKING, A5

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