



Photographs by A. J. Wolfe

Officials survey the scene at the back of the Family Dollar store on North Watkins Tuesday. An arson investigation is under way.



Memphis firefighters, including David Britt (left foreground) and Rich Hartfield, sit in on a press conference Tuesday at the Memphis Fire Department training facility. "We've got to get healed and move on," said Fire Department Director Chester Anderson.



Driver Paul Brooks and other firefighters and civilians collect money for the families of fallen firefighters Lt. Trent Kirk and Pvt. Charles Zachary Tuesday on Union Avenue.

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## Store manager charged

Started fatal fire to cover up theft, officials say

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A young store manager firefighters were trying to save lit the fire that killed them, investigators said Tuesday.

Federal prosecutors charged Anthony Paul Shaw, manager of the Family Dollar store in Frayser, with starting the Sunday night fire that killed two Memphis firefighters to hide his theft of several thousand dollars from the store safe.

Authorities said Shaw, 21, admitted to the crime during a second interview late Monday.

Lt. Trent Kirk and Pvt. Charles Zachary, both 39, died of injuries suffered when the store roof collapsed.

If convicted, Shaw could face life in prison or the death sentence, U.S. Atty. Terry Harris said.

The U.S. Department of Justice will determine whether the government should seek the death penalty, Harris said.

The International Association of Fire Fighters, which represents 260,000 firefighters around the country, sent a letter to U.S. Atty. Gen. John Ashcroft Tuesday, urging him to seek the death penalty.

Shaw was named in a criminal complaint Tuesday morning and appeared before U.S. Magistrate Judge James Allen mid-afternoon.

Wearing sandals, knee-length shorts and a dark T-shirt, Shaw sat in a jury box surrounded by U.S. marshals. He told Allen his family was trying to hire an attorney.

He was held without bond and will have a hearing later this week.

The fallen firefighters, and others who escaped safely, thought the store's manager was trapped and went in to get him, Harris said.

However, Harris would not say how firefighters got that information.

The night of the fire, Shaw told investigators he was the last to leave the store, according to a sworn statement by federal Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms (ATF) special agent Brian Weeks.

Shaw also told investigators in the initial interview that he hadn't deposited Saturday's receipts and that he had trouble closing the safe door because of the amount of cash.

"Shaw was the last person to leave the store prior to the fire," according to Weeks's affidavit.

"Shaw stated that prior to leaving the store he had to apply pressure with his foot to get the safe door locked due to the large amount of cash."

The door was open when the safe was recovered, according to investigators.

There was no money inside and no burned paper or ashes. All that remained in the safe, they said, were a few rolls of pennies.

In a second interview Monday night, according to the charges, Shaw said he stole the money and set the fire. Shaw said he then locked the front door and left, according to the charges.

Shaw admitted to taking several thousand dollars from the safe, Harris said. He wouldn't say whether the stolen money was found.

Federal authorities, however, executed a search warrant of Shaw's home Tuesday.

Shaw has no known criminal record.

The fire "was designed to cover a theft," said Memphis Fire Department Director Chester Anderson, but led to the deaths of the two firefighters.

"This is an arson investigation . . . that will turn into a murder investigation," Anderson said.

Anderson commended rescuers who located four firefighters who, like Kirk and Zachary, were caught inside the building after the ceiling collapsed.

Many of the firefighters who responded to the Dollar Store fire attended a press conference at the Fire Department training campus, Anderson said.

"We've got to get healed and move on," he said.

Lt. Mark Hudgins, a member of the first company to arrive at the fire, and a friend to both victims said "valiant (rescue) efforts were made . . . we did all we could."

Fellow firefighters are "talking about the good times, the good, not the bad," he said.

Though authorities have Shaw's statement, much remains to be done to build a case, said Jim Cavanaugh, special agent in charge of the Memphis and Nashville ATF offices.

A team of federal, city and state forensic experts and accelerant-sniffing dogs will sift through the debris for evidence of how and where the fire started.

Cavanaugh hailed firefighters' heroism and backed the decision to enter the building.

"Firefighters were told there was a person inside . . . there was no other decision to be made," Cavanaugh said.

As soon as structural engineers deem the burned building safe, investigators will begin gathering evidence, according to Joe Riehl, agent in charge of the ATF National Response Team, a group of highly trained arson and explosives experts.

Investigators brought heavy equipment to the burned-out building Tuesday to begin pulling away the roof and a large air-conditioning unit that hung precariously.

"We are going to go down to the floor and clean everything out . . . with a fine-toothed comb," Riehl said.

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