

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Mark J. McLaughlin

(818) 903-9587 / mjm@cf-intl.com

Social Media and Messages Are Key In Showing Charlottesville Attacks Were Intentional, Says Expert Mark McLaughlin

Los Angeles, CA (August 14, 2017) It was reported that accused Charlottesville attacker James Fields was scared for his life as the reason why he plowed his car into a crowd of anti-Nazi and KKK protesters last Saturday. According to analysis by Computer Forensics International, to refute that claim, prosecutors will need to show that he acted intentionally for a jury to convict on the initial charges of second degree murder and malicious wounding. This applies to additional federal charge of domestic terrorism, where a subject would have intended to intimidate or coerce the public. And it's difficult to show someone acted intentionally, unless there were incriminating statements, a confession, or overwhelming circumstantial evidence.

That's why prosecutors will undoubtedly obtain search warrants to retrieve social media posts, email and text messages, photos and video from any computers and mobile devices he may have used. "Those sources of electronic evidence could clearly show he intended to injure any protesters opposing his cause. And also reveal if he conspired with any others to injure those people," said Mark McLaughlin of Computer Forensics International.

Investigators first need to know which social media sites are involved. Public Internet searches could reveal clues to a subject's Facebook, Twitter or Instagram profile. But collecting his devices through search warrants, and then forensically examining them, is the best way to locate specifics for sites visited. Investigators would then obtain search warrants for each online account profile and have authenticated copies returned for further examination.

However, not all social media sites are alike when it comes to providing help to investigators. Some will simply provide the profile information, while others have a history of not giving it up without a fight. "A private message or post merely acknowledging his disdain for people who

oppose his views, or that he'll fight back at all costs, may be enough to show he acted willfully," says McLaughlin.

Aside from content, the location of where that communication was made would bolster a prosecutor's argument. When a user makes an online post, their IP address, or unique physical Internet Protocol address, is captured and can be tied back to the general area where the user was when the post was made. And some sites will record the actual map coordinates of where the post was made. "This is helpful because if the postings were made in the general vicinity of the incident, then it would show the crime was on his mind. Suffice it to say, electronic evidence will play a pivotal role in this prosecution," McLaughlin added.

Over the last 21 years, McLaughlin has handled over 500 criminal, civil and internal investigations, examined over 2,000 digital items and is also a 3rd year law student with the goal of practicing criminal law and civil rights. McLaughlin testifies in court as an expert and even trains attorneys on how to enhance their case outcomes by using digital evidence.

#