

Suspect in apparent assassination attempt camped outside Trump's golf course for 12 hours, prosecutors say

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WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — The man suspected in an apparent assassination attempt targeting Donald Trump camped outside a golf course with food and a rifle for nearly 12 hours, lying in wait for the former president before a Secret Service agent thwarted the potential attack and opened fire, according to court documents filed Monday.

Ryan Wesley Routh, 58, faces charges of possessing a firearm despite a prior felony conviction and possessing a firearm with an obliterated serial number. The Justice Department did not allege that he fired any shots. Additional and more serious charges are possible as the investigation continues and prosecutors seek an indictment from a grand jury.

Shackled and wearing a blue jumpsuit, Routh appeared briefly in federal court in West Palm Beach, kickstarting a criminal case in the final weeks of a presidential race already touched by violence and upheaval. Though no one was injured, the episode marked the second attempt on Trump's life in as many months, raising fresh questions about the security afforded to him and prompting Republican allies and even some Democrats to demand to know how a would-be shooter could get so close.

Routh was arrested Sunday afternoon after authorities spotted a firearm poking out of shrubbery on the West Palm Beach golf course where Trump was playing. He was spotted by a Secret Service agent assigned to Trump's security detail who opened fire, prompting Routh to speed away before being captured by law enforcement in a neighboring county, the authorities said.

Body camera footage posted Monday on Facebook by the Martin County Sheriff's Office showed Routh's arrest. The video shows him walking backward with his hands over his head on the side of a road before being handcuffed and led away by law enforcement.



Ryan W. Routh, suspected of attempting to assassinate Republican presidential nominee and former U.S. President Donald Trump at his West Palm Beach golf course, stands handcuffed after his arrest during a traffic stop near Palm City, Florida, U.S., September 15, 2024. Martin County Sheriff's Office/Handout via REUTERS

Underscoring the level of planning involved, Routh is believed to have been positioned at the tree line of the golf course from about 1:59 a.m. to 1:31 p.m. Sunday, according to an FBI affidavit that cites cellphone data. A digital camera, a loaded SKS-style rifle with scope, and a plastic bag containing food were recovered from the area where Routh had been standing, according to the affidavit.

Authorities did not immediately reveal any new details about Routh or allege a particular motive. But he left an online footprint that reveals shifting political views and intense outrage about global events.

"You are free to assassinate Trump," Routh wrote of Iran in an apparently self-published 2023 book titled "Ukraine's Unwinnable War," which described the former president as a "fool" and "buffoon" for both the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol riots and the "tremendous blunder" of leaving the Iran nuclear deal.

Routh wrote that he once voted for Trump and must take part of the blame for the "child that we elected for our next president that ended up being brainless."

He also tried to recruit fighters for Ukraine to defend itself against Russia, and he had a website seeking to raise money and recruit volunteers to fight for Kyiv.

One of the two counts he faces alleges that he illegally possessed his gun in spite of multiple felony convictions, including two charges of possessing stolen goods in 2002 in North Carolina. The other charge alleges that the serial number was obliterated and unreadable to the naked eye, in violation of federal law.

Routh was ordered held after prosecutors argued that he was a flight risk. He spoke in a soft voice as he answered perfunctory questions from a federal magistrate, saying that he was working and making around \$3,000 a month, but has zero savings.

Routh said that he has no real estate or assets, aside from two trucks worth about \$1,000, both located in Hawaii. He also said that he has a 25-year-old son, whom he sometimes supports.

The arrest focused fresh attention on the challenges of protecting Trump, the Republican presidential nominee, not only during campaign events but also when he is off the trail, often at his own clubs and properties.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, one of Trump's rivals in the GOP primary, said his state will conduct its own investigation into how Routh was able to get so close.

Palm Beach County Sheriff Ric Bradshaw noted at a briefing that because Trump is no longer in office, security protocols around the course had loosened.

"He's not the sitting president. If he was, we would have had this entire golf course surrounded. But because he's not, his security is limited to the areas that the Secret Service deems possible," he told reporters.

On July 13, a bullet grazed Trump's ear after a 20-year-old gunman was able to gain access to an unsecured roof during a rally in Butler, Pennsylvania. Eight days later, Democratic President Joe Biden withdrew from the race, giving way for Vice President Kamala Harris to become the party's nominee.

Tucker, Durkin Richer and Long reported from Washington.