

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

for the

Southern District of Ohio

United States of America
v.

Case No. 1:25-mj-338

James River PHILLIPS
Defendant(s)

CRIMINAL COMPLAINT

I, the complainant in this case, state that the following is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

On or about the date(s) of January 2024 - Present in the county of Warren in the
Southern District of Ohio, the defendant(s) violated:

Code Section

Offense Description

26 U.S.C. 5841, 5861, and 5871

Possession of an Unregistered Firearm (Destructive Device)

This criminal complaint is based on these facts:

See Affidavit

☒ Continued on the attached sheet.

Tyler Johnson
Complainant's signature

Tyler Johnson, Special Agent, FBI
Printed name and title

Sworn to before me and signed in my presence.
via FaceTime video

Date: Apr 16, 2025

City and state: Cincinnati, Ohio

Karen L. Litkovitz
Karen L. Litkovitz
United States Magistrate Judge



**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF OHIO**

UNITED STATES

V.

JAMES RIVER PHILLIPS

Case No. 1:25-mj-338

Filed Under Seal

AFFIDAVIT IN SUPPORT OF A CRIMINAL COMPLAINT

I, Tyler Johnson, being first duly sworn, hereby depose and state as follows:

1. I make this affidavit in support of a criminal complaint against defendant James River Phillips.

2. I am a Special Agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and have been since August 2023. I am currently assigned to the Cincinnati Field Office in Cincinnati, Ohio. My duties with the FBI include the investigation of alleged violations of federal criminal statutes involving terrorist activities and national security threats. I have received training and experience in numerous methods of investigation, including, but not limited to, searches and seizures, electronic and visual surveillance, witness interviews, and the use of confidential sources. As a result of my experience, I am familiar with the tactics, methods, and techniques of criminal and terrorist networks and their members, including their use of computers, cell phones, social media, email, and other forms of electronic communications, in relation to their criminal activity.

3. The information set forth in this affidavit was obtained during the course of my employment with the FBI, through personal observations, the statements of other law enforcement officials, and analysis of records. Since this affidavit is being submitted for the limited purpose of obtaining a criminal complaint, I have not included every fact known to me concerning this investigation. I have set forth only the facts necessary to establish probable cause that federal crimes have been committed.

4. As set forth in this affidavit, there is probable cause to believe that, beginning in at least January 2024 and continuing to the present, in the Southern District of Ohio and elsewhere, the Defendant, James River Phillips, possessed an unregistered firearm (destructive device) on more than one occasion in violation of 26 U.S.C. §§ 5841, 5861, and 5871.

PROBABLE CAUSE

5. On September 22, 2024, Lebanon Police Department (LPD) discovered an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) at approximately 12:30 a.m. in a far parking lot of a large

soccer complex in Lebanon, Ohio (“soccer complex”). The soccer complex was closed and the area where the IED was discovered was dark and remote.

6. Prior to discovering the device, a LPD Officer encountered two white males in their early twenties driving a silver SUV. The silver SUV was parked in a parking lot of the soccer complex and began to move towards the exit when the LPD Officer saw it. The driver of the silver SUV had long curly hair. The LPD Officer intercepted the silver SUV and told the males to leave because the park was closed. After the two males left, the LPD Officer continued through the parking lot and discovered the IED in the location where the silver SUV was originally parked.

7. The IED had wires running from a pile of white powder to a control switch. The control switch had a red light on when the LPD Officer discovered the IED. After encountering the device, the LPD Officer attempted to locate the two males but could not. The officer contacted Butler County Bomb Squad (BCBS) to seize the IED. Photos were taken of the device at the scene by the LPD Officer who discovered it. The LPD Officer laid his flashlight next to the device to illuminate it for the photos.



IED



Detonator



White Powder

8. BCBS tested residue that was found on the IED. BCBS testing revealed that the IED detonator contained Nickel Hydrazine Nitrate (NHN), and the white powder contained Erythritol Tetranitrate (ETN). BCBS used a handheld chemical identification device to test the IED detonator. The IED detonator exploded while it was being tested, breaking the chemical identification device.

9. BCBS submitted deoxyribonucleic (DNA) samples taken from components of the IED to the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation Laboratory (BCI). The lab report indicated two of the tested items developed a DNA profile of an unknown male. The male profile was submitted to the national DNA database, with negative results.

Identification of the defendant

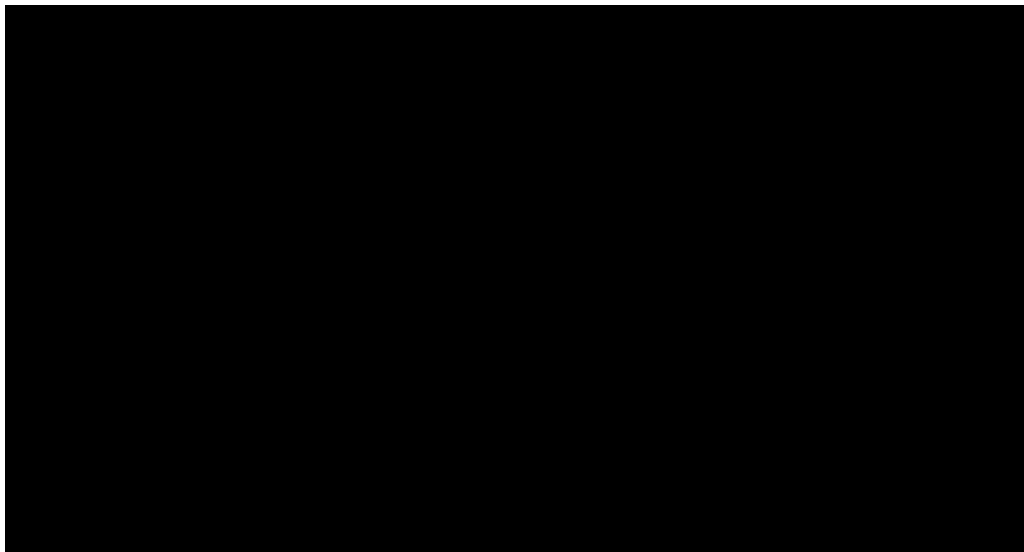
10. On November 19, 2024, the FBI Cellular Analysis Survey Team (CAST) identified an Apple SE 2nd Generation device with IMEI number [REDACTED] that is subscribed to T-Mobile. CAST identified this device to have been in the vicinity of the soccer complex at approximately 12:15 a.m. and 12:21 a.m.

11. T-Mobile records identified IMEI number [REDACTED] to be associated phone number [REDACTED] ("cell phone"). T-Mobile records for the cell phone indicated that the user of the cell phone sent two texts shortly after the encounter with LPD police officer. One text was sent at 12:36 am and the other text was sent at 12:40 am on September 22, 2024.

12. An open-source database identified the cell phone to be associated with James River Phillips, who is approximately 20 years old and lives at [REDACTED] in Mason, Ohio ("Mason, Ohio address").

13. Apple records identified IMEI number associated with the cell phone as belonging to James Phillips who lives at the Mason, Ohio address. Apple identified the device as an iPhone SE (2nd generation) that was purchased on July 26, 2021. Apple associated email [REDACTED] and the cell phone with IMEI [REDACTED].

14. Further, James Phillips, the user of the cell phone, matches the physical description of the silver SUV driver provided by the LPD Officer. Phillips is a 20-year-old white male with long curly hair. On September 7, 2024, Phillips took a driver's license photo with the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) with long curly hair. On December 2, 2024, Phillips took another driver's license photo with the Ohio BMV with the same long curly hair. The second driver's license photo was taken for his Class A driver's license.



September 7, 2024

October 2, 2024

Possession of Additional Destructive Devices

15. A federal search warrant was obtained for the aforementioned Apple iCloud account associated with Phillips. The returns from that warrant included additional evidence regarding Phillips and the soccer complex. For example, on April 5, 2024, a video shows two unidentified males in a parking lot at night under streetlights with portable restrooms and a soccer net in the background. An unidentified male can be heard counting down to “1,” and after “1” an explosive device is detonated. In a separate video appearing to be from the same incident, the unidentified male recording can be heard saying “James we gotta go” and “James come on.” The video then shows a hole in the ground that was a result of the previous explosion, and the two unidentified males proceed to pick up the debris and components that were left over from the explosion. Global Positioning System (GPS) information recovered in the metadata of this video shows that the video was taken in a parking lot at the same soccer complex in Lebanon, Ohio where LPD recovered the IED months later. A screen shot of the explosion at the soccer complex is included below.

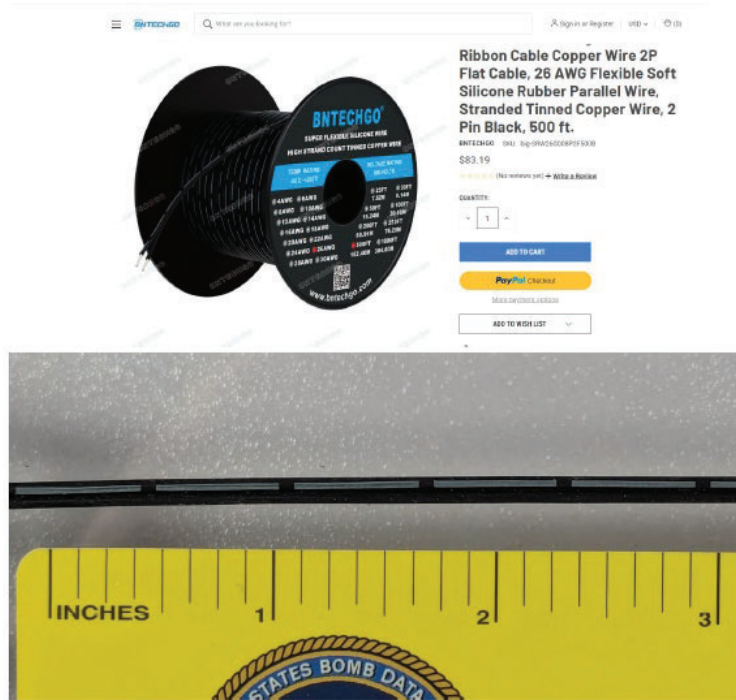


16. Additional photos and videos from the iCloud taken on July 21, 2024, show an explosion followed by photos of the destruction of a car that appeared to be destroyed from the explosion. For example, one video show Phillips wearing a grey tank top and blue shorts, holding what appears to be a detonation device with a silver antenna attached to it. An unidentified male can be heard counting down from “5” to “1,” and after “1” Phillips can be seen holding the detonation device in the air and pressing it. After Phillips presses the detonation device, a large explosion is heard in the distance and an unidentified male can be heard saying “it blew the car above the tree line.” Additional photos and videos taken on July 21, 2024, show an explosion followed by photos of the destruction of a car that appeared to be destroyed from the explosion.

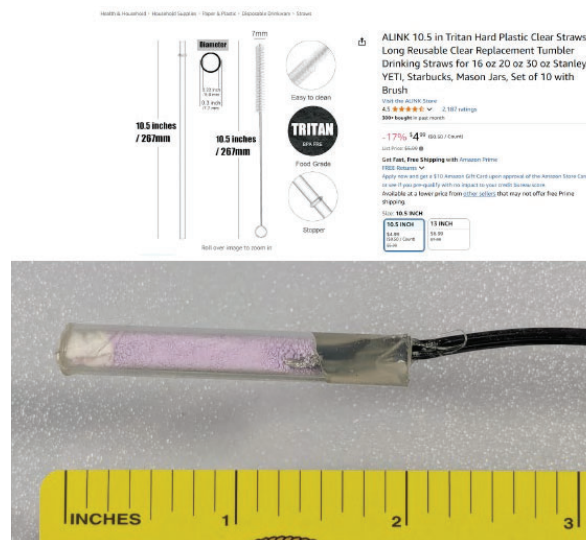
Purchase of Precursor Chemicals and Materials

17. The investigation has revealed that Phillips has purchased an array of precursor chemicals and materials for homemade explosives and shipped those materials to two locations – the Mason, Ohio address and a residence in Oxford, Ohio, where he also stays. The investigation shows that Phillips has purchased these items both before and after the September 2024 IED incident.

18. Records from an Amazon account associated with Phillips, show that Phillips purchased components from Amazon prior to September 22, 2024, consistent with the IED recovered. According to records the following items were purchased by James Phillips and shipped to the Mason, Ohio address. For example, BNTECH wire purchased by James Phillips on 06/09/2024 matches the physical description of the leg wires of the improvised explosive device recovered by BCBS a few months later on 09/22/2024.



19. Hard clear plastic straws purchased by James Phillips a few months before 09/22/2024 matches the physical description of the homemade initiator of the IED recovered by BCBS on 09/22/2024.



20. In addition to the aforementioned materials from Amazon, Phillips purchased other chemical precursors for explosives as early as January 2024. A review of bank records for an account associated with Phillips revealed transactions from multiple companies that sell chemical precursors that are commonly found in homemade explosives. The companies (Everything Skis LLC and Chemboys LLC) provided records of items purchased by Phillips. For example:

- 01/11/2024- 20lbs Ammonium Nitrate purchase from Everything Skis LLC
- 01/23/2024- 35lbs Ammonium Nitrate purchase from Everything Skis LLC
- 11/28/2024- 1 quart Ammonium Hydroxide purchase from Chemboys LLC

21. The purchases from Everything Skis LLC and Chemboys LLC were shipped to James Phillips at the Mason, Ohio address and Phillip's cell phone was listed as the phone number for each order. While these materials are not believed to be used in the IED that was discovered by LPD in September 2024, they are chemicals that could be used in another explosive device. Notably, the quantity/amount of the chemicals purchased far exceeds that which was found in the IED located by the LPD.

22. Bomb Technicians identified additional items that could be utilized to and or support the manufacturing process for homemade explosives. These items were purchased from Amazon by James Phillips and shipped to a place where Phillips stays when he is not staying at the Mason, Ohio address - [REDACTED] Oxford, Ohio ("the Oxford, Ohio address"). For example:

- a. 11/13/2024- Short Pipette Tip, 5mL Big Diameter Pippette Tips, Polypropylene (PP), Clear, Autocable, Fit for Gilson, Rainin, CAPP etc.100pcs/bag
- b. 11/13-/2024- 26 Gauge Silicone Ribbon Cable Flexible 2P Black 50 ft Flat Cable 26 AWG Stranded Tinned Copper Wire

Recipes, Notes, Research

23. In addition to the videos and the purchase of precursor chemicals and materials, Phillip's iCloud contained notes of numerous chemicals, components, recipes, and research, which could be used for construction of IEDS. For example one of the notes reads:

Bomb amounts for [REDACTED]

Nitromethane 1,765.022g
Ammonium nitrate 6,639.844g
Aluminum powder 399.080g
Glass bubbles 266.0533g

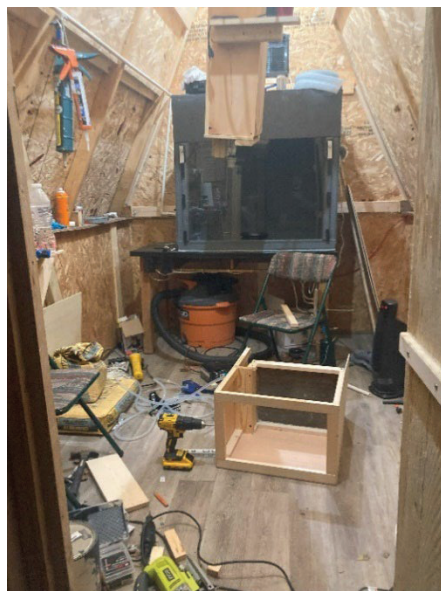
Construction of Shed for Storage and Manufacturing

24. The returns from the iCloud search warrant also contained multiple photos of what appears to be a shed made of plywood. These photos contain images of multiple chemicals that appear to be stored in the shed. GPS metadata from these photos show that the photos were taken in a patch of woods in the backyard of the Mason, Ohio address.

25. On March 28, 2025, FBI surveillance observed a structure in a patch of woods in the backyard of the Mason, Ohio address. The photographs below show the location of the woods and structure.



26. Interior photos of the shed recovered from the iCloud return appear to show that the shed contains running electricity, racks for glass beakers, heated magnetic mixers, and unknown chemicals and powders.





27. Photos recovered from the iCloud appear to show that Phillips is making explosive devices in the shed. There were three photos found in Phillips's iCloud account taken on February 26, 2024, that appear to show an explosive device that was constructed in the shed.



- Photo 1 taken at 8:26 p.m., shows a copper device with both ends crimped, with one end having a black wire coming out. The photo appears to be taken inside the shed.
- Photo 2 taken at 9:12 p.m., shows an unknown person's hand above what appears to be a crater that resulted from an explosive blast.
- Photo 3 taken at 9:46 p.m., show the same copper device in Photo 1 with both crimped ends appearing to have been blown open.

28. During the course of this investigation, FBI ascertained that Phillips does not have any firearms, including destructive devices, registered to him in the National Firearms Registration and Transfer Record. Nor does Phillips have a Federal Explosive License or Permit.

CONCLUSION


29. The above facts establish probable cause that to believe that James River Phillips has possessed an unregistered firearm (destructive device) within the Southern District of Ohio in violation of 26 U.S.C. §§ 5841, 5861, and 5871 on more than one occasion.

30. Based on the forgoing, I request that the Court issue the proposed criminal complaint, and arrest warrant for James River Phillips as there is probable cause to believe he has possessed an unregistered firearm (destructive device) within the Southern District of Ohio in violation of 26 U.S.C. §§ 5841, 5861, and 5871.

REQUEST FOR SEALING

31. I further request that the Court order that all papers related to this application, including the affidavit, be sealed until further order of the Court. These documents discuss an ongoing criminal investigation that is neither public nor known to target of the investigation. Accordingly, there is good cause to seal these documents because their premature disclosure may seriously jeopardize that investigation. Further, the subject matter of the probable cause established herein – possession of destructive devices – relates to the possession of volatile and dangerous chemicals. Premature disclosure of this affidavit and related documents could endanger law enforcement officials involved in the arrest of the defendant.

Respectfully submitted,



Tyler Johnson
Special Agent
Federal Bureau of Investigation

Subscribed and sworn to before me on Apr 16, 2025



Karen L. Litkovitz
United States Magistrate Judge

