

School clerk credits God with preventing shootout

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Associated Press/Photo by John Bazemore

A child peers out the window of a school bus as busses arrive with students after an incident at Ronald McNair Discovery Learning Academy.

On Tuesday, Antoinette Tuff, a clerk at Ronald E. McNair Discovery Learning Academy in Atlanta, persuaded 20-year-old Michael Hill not to fire the 500 rounds of ammunition he brought into the school in his duffel bag. Officials credit her with helping save 870 elementary students

from what could have been another school massacre. But she points to God as the hero.

Tuff met Hill when he entered the building carrying an AK-47. "He had a look on him that he was willing to kill," she said. "He said that he didn't have any reason to live." Tuff managed to prevent Hill from entering the main hallways and called 9-1-1. She stalled him by striking up conversation.

According to the dispatch transcript, she told Hill her life story, including how she's struggling through a painful divorce after 33 years of marriage. She encouraged him not to despair: "All is going to be well."

Meanwhile, police escorted teachers and students out of the building and onto school buses that brought them to their parents at a nearby Walmart.

Hill shot into the floor and exchanged gunfire with officers who surrounded the building, but no one was injured. Tuff eventually convinced him to surrender his gun and ammunition.

"We're not gonna hate you, baby," she told him. "It's a good thing that you're giving up." She said she loved him and promised to pray for him. "He's laying on the floor," she told the police dispatcher. "He's got everything out of his pockets. There isn't anything. Everything is sitting here on the counter ... they can just come in."

Hill is charged with aggravated assault on a police officer, terroristic threats, and possession of a firearm by a convicted felon. The DeKalb County Public Defender's office said in a statement that the Mental Health Division was representing Hill, calling him "a young man with a long history of mental health issues."

DeKalb County Police Chief Cedric Alexander praised Tuff for her courage: "She was a real ally. She just did a stellar job. She was cool, she was calm, very collected ..."

The transcript recorded Tuff breaking into tears and prayers as the ordeal ended. "I was terrified," she said.

"I give it all to God," she told *The Washington Post*. "I'm not the hero."

The Associated Press contributed to this report.