

Fired Reporter Kills 2 Former Co-Workers On Live TV

BY STEVE HELBER
Associated Press

MONETA, Va. — He planned it all so carefully — a choreographed execution of two former colleagues, broadcast live to a horrified television audience. Hours later, he shared his own recording of the killing worldwide on social media.

Vester Lee Flanagan's video shows him approaching WDBJ reporter Alison Parker and cameraman Adam Ward, gun in hand, as they conduct an interview. He points the gun at Parker and then at Ward, but he waits patiently to shoot until he knows that Parker is on camera, so she will be gunned down on air.

TV viewers heard about the first eight of 15 shots. They saw Parker scream and run, and heard her crying "Oh my God!" as she fell. Ward fell, too, and the camera he had been holding on his shoulder captured a fleeting image of the suspect holding a handgun.

That man, authorities said, was Flanagan — a former staffer who used the on-air name of Bryce Williams and was fired by WDBJ, a man who always was looking for reasons to take offense, colleagues recalled. He fled the scene but then posted his own 56-second video of the murders on Twitter and Facebook. He later ran off a highway while being pursued hundreds of miles away and was captured; he died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Wednesday's on-air murders reverberated far from central Virginia because that's just what the killer wanted — not just to avenge perceived wrongs, but to gain maximum, viral exposure. He used his insider's knowledge of TV journalism against his victims — a 24-year-old reporter who was a rising star and a 27-year-old cameraman engaged to a producer who watched the slaughter live from the control room.

Flanagan's planning may have started weeks ago when, ABC News said, a man claiming to be Bryce Williams called repeatedly, saying he wanted to pitch a story and needed fax information. He sent ABC's newsroom a 23-page fax two hours after the 6:45 a.m. shooting that was part-manifesto, part-suicide note — calling himself a gay black man who had been mistreated by people of all races, and saying he bought the gun two days after nine black people were killed in a June 17 shooting at a Charleston church. The fax also included admiration for the gunmen in mass killings



Television journalists Alison Parker and Adam Ward were killed in an attack Wednesday morning by a disgruntled ex-employee of the Virginia station at which all three worked.

PHOTO: WDBJ

at places like Virginia Tech and Columbine High School in Colorado.

He described himself as a "human powder keg," that was "just waiting to go BOOM!!!!"

Parker and Ward were a regular team, providing stories for the station's "Mornin'" show on everything from breaking news to feature stories on subjects like child abuse. Their live spot Wednesday was nothing out of the ordinary: They were interviewing a local official at an outdoor shopping mall for a tourism story before the shots rang out.

As Parker screamed and Ward collapsed, Ward's camera kept rolling, capturing the image of the suspect pointing the gun. WDBJ quickly switched to the anchor back at the station, clearly shocked, who told viewers, "OK, not sure what happened there."

Parker and Ward died at the scene. Their interview subject, Vicki Gardner, also was shot, but emerged from surgery later Wednesday in stable condition.

Flanagan, 41, who was fired from WDBJ in 2013, was described by the station's president and general manager, Jeffrey Marks, as an "unhappy man" and "difficult to work with," always "looking out for people to say things he could take offense to."

"Eventually after many incidents of his anger coming to the fore, we dismissed him. He did not take that well," Marks said. He recalled that police had to escort Flanagan out of the building because he refused to leave when he was

fired. Tweets posted Wednesday on the gunman's Twitter account — since suspended — described workplace conflicts with both victims. He said he filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission against Parker, and that Ward had reported him to human resources.

Marks said Flanagan alleged that other employees made racially tinged comments to him, but that his EEOC claim was dismissed and none of his allegations could be corroborated.

"We think they were fabricated," the station manager said.

Dan Dennison, now a state government spokesman in Hawaii, was the WDBJ news director who hired Flanagan in 2012 and fired him in 2013, largely for performance issues, he said.

"We did a thorough investigation and could find no evidence that anyone had racially discriminated against this man," Dennison said. "You just never know when you're going to work how a potentially unhinged or unsettled person might impact your life in such a tragic way."

Court records and recollections from former colleagues at a half-dozen other small-market stations where he bounced around indicate that Flanagan was quick to file complaints. He was fired at least twice after managers said he was causing problems with other employees.

Both Parker and Ward

grew up in the Roanoke area, attended high school there and later interned at the station. After Parker's internship, she moved to a smaller market in Jacksonville, North Carolina, before returning to WDBJ. She was dating Chris Hurst, an anchor at the station and had just moved in with him.

"We were together almost nine months," Hurst posted on Facebook. "It was the best nine months of our lives. We wanted to get married. We just celebrated her 24th birthday. She was the most radiant woman I ever met."

Ward, who played high school football, was a devoted fan of his alma mater, Virginia Tech. His colleagues said he rarely, if ever, missed a game. They called him a "happy-go-lucky guy" — even during the early morning hours that are the proving ground for so many beginning journalists.

Ward's fiancée, station producer Melissa Ott, was in the control room marking her last day on the job when the shots rang out. Ward had planned to follow her to her new job in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Marks helped lead the live coverage Wednesday after the station confirmed its two employees were dead. He said he and his staff covered the story despite their grief, to honor their slain colleagues.

"Our hearts are broken," he said. "Our sympathy goes to the entire staff here, but also the parents and family of Alison Parker and Adam Ward, who were just out doing their job today."

Saudi Arrested In 1996 Bombing That Killed 19 Americans

BY AYA BATRAWY
Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — A man described as the mastermind of the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing that killed 19 American servicemen in Saudi Arabia has been captured, a U.S. and a Saudi official said Wednesday, ending a nearly two-decade manhunt for one of the FBI's most-wanted terrorists.

Ahmed al-Mughassil was arrested in Beirut and transferred to Riyadh, the Saudi capital, according to the Saudi newspaper Asharq Alawsat. The Saudi Interior Ministry and Lebanese authorities had no immediate comment on the capture.

The 48-year-old suspect was described by the FBI in 2001 as the head of the armed wing of the once-active but shadowy Saudi Hezbollah group. The FBI had offered a \$5 million reward for information leading to his arrest.

The June 25, 1996, truck bombing at the Khobar Towers, an eight-story dormitory in eastern Saudi Arabia for U.S. Air Force personnel as-

signed to the Gulf, killed 19 Americans and wounded 372 more. It was the deadliest such attack targeting U.S. forces since the 1983 bombing of the U.S. Marines' barracks in Beirut that killed 241 American servicemen.

Al-Mughassil, also known as Abu Omran, is one of 14 people named in a 2001 indictment in Alexandria, Virginia, in connection with the bombing. Charges include murder of federal employees and bombing resulting in death.

The U.S. indictment said that elements of the Iranian government inspired, supported and supervised members of the Saudi Hezbollah group in the Khobar Towers attack, but it stopped short of naming any Iranian officials.

The Asharq Alawsat newspaper said al-Mughassil was arrested after Saudi authorities identified his whereabouts in Lebanon.

A Saudi official told The Associated Press that al-Mughassil was detained two weeks ago after arriving in Beirut from Iran. He allegedly tried to seek cover in a southern Beirut neighborhood that is a stronghold of Lebanon's

Hezbollah. The security official said Saudi intelligence believes that four others wanted in the bombing are living in Iran.

The Saudi and U.S. officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss the matter.

Saudi Arabia has never directly blamed Iran — its regional rival — for the attack, and Iran has repeatedly denied being involved.

In 2006, U.S. District Judge Royce C. Lamberth ruled the Iranian government financed the bombing, ordering it to pay \$254 million to the attack's victims.

U.S. State Department spokesman John Kirby declined to comment on the capture but said: "The United States continues to stand with the victims and families harmed by this attack, and we're going to continue working with Saudi Arabia and the international community to bring to justice all the perpetrators of it."

The U.S. Justice Department also declined to comment.

FBI Director James Comey was the assistant U.S. attorney

Ramos Came To Trump Confrontation

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump's onscreen confrontation with Univision's Jorge Ramos on Tuesday over the Republican presidential candidate's immigration plan should only be a surprise to those who don't know Ramos.

The 57-year-old news anchor has a history of sharply questioning politicians and not hiding his opinions. Days before a security guard forced Ramos out of Trump's Iowa news conference on Tuesday — he was later let back in and continued a contentious exchange — he had denounced Trump on CNN. Ramos said the immigration issue "is personal" and when Trump voices his views that include mass deportations and revoking the citizenship of children born in the U.S. to undocumented parents, "he's talking about me" and all the other American Latinos born in another country.

Ramos is generally considered the most influential television journalist among Latinos living in the United States. He and Maria Elena Salinas co-anchor a weeknight newscast on Univision, the country's most-watched Spanish-language network. A syndicated columnist, he also hosts a Sunday morning political panel for Univision and a weekly newsmagazine on Fusion, an English-language network geared to Latinos.

A Mexican native who came to the United States as a young journalist when the Mexican government censored one of his reports, Ramos said that Trump's immigration plan was full of "empty promises. What he's trying to sell the American public simply doesn't work. It's impossible," he told CNN.

Univision said Ramos had earlier requested an interview with Trump, which the candidate rejected before distributing Ramos' cell phone number on social media. So the Miami-based Ramos traveled to Iowa for the news conference.

Obama To Seek Unity With Pope Francis

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sweeping into office in 2009, President Barack Obama captured near rock-star status around the world among millions who saw him as the embodiment of a new sense of social purpose. Now, that baton has largely been passed to Pope Francis, whose visit to the White House next month will put his common cause with Obama on vivid display.

Obama has made no secret of his affection for the outspoken pope, calling him a "transformative leader" whose influence has transcended the Roman Catholic community. The pope has embraced many of the issues Obama has sought to advance, including global warming, poverty and diplomacy with Iran and Cuba.

Vice President Joe Biden, a Catholic, said the pope's Sept. 23 visit will mark an important moment not only for Catholics but for all Americans.

"Pope Francis has breathed new life into what I believe is the central mission of our faith: Catholic social doctrine," Biden said in a statement to The Associated Press. Invoking key elements of Obama's agenda, Biden added that Francis "has become a moral rudder for the world on some of the most important issues of our time, from inequality to climate change."

The pope's brief visit to the White House is part of his highly anticipated trip to the U.S. and Cuba. It's a reunion of sorts for Obama and Francis, who first met when the president visited the Vatican last year.

Fliers See Bargain Flights As Fare Wars

ABOARD AMERICAN AIRLINES FLIGHT 1223 (AP) — Airline fare wars are making a comeback.

Don't expect widespread sales or cheap flights home for Thanksgiving. But a number of cities are seeing ridiculously low prices at off-peak hours — prices the industry has spent the years trying to eliminate.

Fliers have been able to fly Chicago to Boston for \$80 roundtrip, San Francisco to Las Vegas for \$67 roundtrip and New York to Los Angeles, with a connection, for \$150 roundtrip.

"This is the big break consumers have been waiting for in response to lower fuel prices," says Seth Kaplan, managing partner of industry newsletter Airline Weekly.

The price of oil is at the lowest level in six and a half years and the industry is saving billions of dollars on fuel, giving airlines leeway to cut fares but still post healthy profits. Airlines have also added larger, more efficient planes to their fleets while packing more seats into existing jets. So, while the number of domestic flights is down slightly over the past 12 months, there are now 3.4 percent more seats for sale — too many to meet the demand in all cities. To fill those extra seats, airlines have had to offer discounts.

Student Helped Thwart Terror Attack

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — An American student who helped stop a terror attack on a Paris-bound high-speed train said Wednesday it's been a "crazy few days" and he is happy to be home.

Anthony Sadler spoke briefly during a news conference with Sacramento Mayor Kevin Johnson, who presented him with a basketball jersey.

"I'd just like to thank everybody for coming out," Sadler said. "After such a crazy few days, it feels good to be back on American soil, but especially in Sacramento. This is my home, and I'm just glad to be back here to see everybody."

It was the first time the 23-year-old Sacramento State University student has spoken publicly since he returned to the U.S.

Sadler arrived in Sacramento on Tuesday after first taking a private jet to Portland, Oregon. Columbia Sportswear CEO Timothy Boyle had made the jet available to fly the Americans' mothers to France.

Clinton Emails Consistent With Pattern

WASHINGTON (AP) — The transmission of now-classified information across Hillary Rodham Clinton's private email is consistent with a State Department culture in which diplomats routinely sent secret material on unsecured email during the past two administrations, according to documents reviewed by The Associated Press.

Clinton's use of a home server makes her case unique and has become an issue in her front-running campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination. But it's not clear whether the security breach would have been any less had she used department email. The department only systematically checks email for sensitive or classified material in response to a public records request.

In emails about the 2012 attack on a U.S. diplomatic facility in Benghazi, Libya, department officials discuss sensitive matters in real time, including the movement of Libyan militias and the locations of key Americans. The messages were released last year under the Freedom of Information Act and are posted on the State Department's website.

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