

Theater Gunman Killed With Handgun He Bought Legally

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LAFAYETTE, La. — A man who lost his family, home and businesses as he spent years angrily espousing right-wing extremism on television, the Internet and to anyone else who would listen did not say a word as he opened fire on strangers in a darkened movie theater, authorities said Friday.

John Russell Houser, 59, stood up about 20 minutes into Thursday night's showing of "Trainwreck" and fired on the audience, killing two people and wounding nine

with a semi-automatic handgun.

"That was a horrific scene in there — the blood on the floor, sticks in the seats (showing the trajectory of the bullets), the smell,"

state police Col. Michael Edmonson said after top officials got an inside look at the theater.

"He took his time, methodically choosing his victims," Gov. Bobby Jindal added. "One of the surviving wounded victims actually played dead to stay alive."

Houser then tried to escape by blending into the fleeing crowd after one of his victims pulled a fire alarm and hundreds poured out of the theater complex. But he turned back as police officers approached, reloading and firing into the crowd before killing himself with a single shot inside the theater, police said.

"This is such a senseless, tragic action," Lafayette Police Chief Jim Craft said. "Why would you come here and do something like this?"

Investigators recovered Houser's journals, were studying his online postings and trying to reconstruct his movements to identify a motive and provide what Edmonson called "some closure" for the victims' families.

Craft said Houser bought the weapon legally at a pawnshop in Phenix City, Alabama, last year, and that he had visited the theater more than once, perhaps to determine "whether there was anything that could be a soft target for him."

He had only been in Louisiana since early July, staying in a Motel 6 room littered with wigs and disguises. His only known connection to the Lafayette area was an uncle who died there three decades ago.

Details quickly emerged about Houser's mental problems, prompting authorities in Louisiana and Alabama to bemoan the underfunding of mental health services in America.

Court records describe erratic behavior and threats of violence that led to a brief involuntary hospitalization in 2008 and a restraining order preventing Houser from approaching family members. Houser "has a history of mental health issues, i.e., manic depression and/or bi-polar disorder," his estranged wife told the judge.

Educated in accounting and law, he owned bars in Georgia — including one where he flew a Nazi banner out front as an anti-government statement. He tried real estate in Phenix City, Alabama. But Houser's own resume, posted online, says what he really loved to do was make provocative statements at local board meetings and in the media.



LESLIE WESTBROOK/THE ADVOCATE/TNS

Flowers are left against the marquis sign at the Grand 16 movie theater on Friday, July 24, 2015, in Lafayette, La. A gunman opened fire inside the theater Thursday night killing three people, including himself, and injuring nine others.

On an NBC television affiliate's call-in show in the 1990s, Houser encouraged violent responses to abortion and condemned working women, host Calvin Floyd recalled. He was an "angry man" who spoke opposite a Democrat and really lit up the phones, he added.

Houser wrote that he was a weekly guest for 60 episodes on "Rise and Shine WLTZ" in Columbus, Georgia, where he "invited political controversy on every one of them, and loved every minute of it."

In recent years, Houser turned to right-wing extremist Internet message boards, where he praised Adolf Hitler, and advised people not to underestimate "the power of the lone wolf," according to the Southern Poverty Law Center, whose hate-group watchdogs spotted Houser registering to meet with former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke in 2005.

What prompted Houser to kill people Thursday night remains unknown.

He seemed like just another patron as he entered Lafayette's Grand 16 theater, one of 25 people who bought tickets to the romantic comedy starring feminist jokester Amy Schumer as a boozing, promiscuous reporter.

Police believe he hoped to escape his deadly ambush before police closed in. Inside a Motel 6 room he rented, they found wigs, glasses and other disguises. Houser also swapped the license plates on his 1995 Lincoln Continental before parking it by the theater's exit door. He stashed the keys atop one of its wheels.

Once inside, he sat by himself and gave others in the theater no reason for concern before he began shooting, firing first at two women who were sitting in front of him, then wounding nine other people.

"He wasn't saying anything," Katie Domingue told

The Advertiser. "I didn't hear anybody screaming either."

Randall Manning's 21-year-old daughter, Emily, and a friend were sitting in the same row as the gunman, and saw the flashes from his gun barrel.

"She hit the floor immediately," Manning said of his daughter, who escaped along with her friend but was "traumatized."

Jeanerette High School English teacher Ali Martin and librarian Jena Meaux were credited with helping save lives amid the chaos. Meaux, who was shot in the leg, told her colleagues that Martin, who was shot in the kneecap, still managed to pull a fire alarm, their former principal Heath Hulin said.

The lights came as the siren sounded, with a message urging everyone to leave. Outside, a woman was laying down, shot in her leg, said Jacob Broussard, who heard the gunshots from another theater across the hall.

"She was bleeding on the grass, in the front of the theater," Broussard said. "A man had actually dragged her out."

Theatergoers didn't panic, police said, but they left in a rush, leaving behind purses, keys and even shoes. Officers found 15 spent shell casings.

The two women killed were 21-year-old Mayci Breaux and 33-year-old Jillian Johnson. Breaux's body was brought to the same hospital where she was preparing to become a radiology technician. Johnson ran clothing and art boutiques, played in a rootsy rock band and planted fruit trees for neighbors and the homeless.

The wounded ranged in age from teenagers to their late 60s, Craft said. Five were treated at Lafayette General Health Center. Three patients had been stabilized, including one who remained in intensive

care. Two others were released Thursday night.

Russell County Sheriff Heath Taylor said his office denied Houser's request for a concealed weapons permit in 2006 because he had been treated for mental illness and arrested for arson in Georgia.

"He was pretty even-keeled until you disagreed with him or made him mad," said Jeff Hardin, the former mayor of Phenix City, Alabama, just across the state line from Columbus. "Then he became your sworn enemy."

Hardin said he once partnered with Houser on a real-estate project, but they had a falling out and hadn't spoken since around 2007.

Houser was evicted from his home in Phenix City last year, then returned to throw paint, pour concrete down the plumbing and tamper with a gas line, Taylor said.

Houser's wife filed for divorce in March, saying their differences were irreconcilable and his whereabouts were unknown. His mother recently lent him \$5,000, but "It just seems like he was kind of drifting along," Craft said.

Houser's only known relative in Lafayette, an uncle, died 35 years ago.

After detailing each victim's wounds, David Callecod, president of Lafayette General Health, pleaded Friday for society to provide as much funding for mental health services as it does for other medical problems.

Pressed to explain why Houser wasn't arrested before, Sheriff Taylor also blamed cuts in the safety net.

"There's cuts being made all over," Taylor said. "What should be scary for the community is that the cuts being made in mental health around the state are allowing these people, who should not be walking around, to be out in the community."

Turkish Jets Hit Its Targets In Syria

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — Turkish jets flying from a base in Turkey's southeast have struck Islamic State group targets across the border in Syria for the second straight night, Turkish news reports said Saturday. The fighter jets also hit camps of Kurdish PKK militants in northern Iraq, the reports said.

There was no immediate official confirmation of the airstrikes reported by the state-run TRT television and other media. If confirmed, it would be the first time Turkey has struck Kurds in northern Iraq since a peace deal was announced in 2013 between Ankara and the rebel group, the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK.

The private Dogan news agency said the Turkish jets were targeting PKK training facilities, shelters and anti-aircraft batteries in northern Iraq.

Tensions have flared with Kurds in recent days after an IS suicide bombing in the southeastern Turkish city of Suruc on Monday killed 32 people. Kurdish groups blame the Turkish government for not combatting IS.

On Wednesday, the PKK claimed responsibility for the killing of two Turkish policemen near the Kurdish majority city of Sanliurfa, near the Syrian border.

Obama Returns To Kenya For First Time

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Fulfilling the hopes of millions of Kenyans, Barack Obama returned to his father's homeland Friday for the first time as U.S. president, a long sought visit by a country that considers him a local son.

The president spent the evening reuniting with his Kenyan family, including his elderly step-grandmother who made the trip to the capital of Nairobi from her rural village. U.S. and Kenyan flags lined the main road from Nairobi's airport, and billboards heralding Obama's trip dotted the city.

"I don't think that Kenyans think of Obama as African-American. They think of him as Kenyan-American," said EJ Hogendoorn, deputy program director for Africa at the International Crisis Group.

Obama's link to Kenya is a father he barely knew, but whose influence can nonetheless be seen in his son's presidency.

Obama has spoken candidly about growing up without his Kenyan-born father and feeling "the weight of that absence." A White House initiative to support young men of color who face similar circumstances has become a project dear to Obama, one he plans to continue after leaving the White House.

AT&T Is Now The Biggest TV Supplier

NEW YORK (AP) — Even as TV watchers increasingly go online, AT&T has become the country's biggest traditional TV provider with its \$48.5 billion purchase of DirecTV.

It got its regulatory approval Friday from the Federal Communications Commission after more than a year. The Justice Department had already cleared the deal on Tuesday.

AT&T Inc. now has 26.4 million cable and satellite TV subscribers.

That's more than Comcast as well as a bigger Charter, which is seeking government approval to buy Time Warner Cable.

Suppliers of TV are buying one another as video from Internet competitors like Netflix gets more popular and costs rise for channels.

Convicted Spy Could Be Freed

WASHINGTON (AP) — Jonathan Pollard, an American who was convicted of spying for Israel in a sensational espionage case that inflamed public sentiment, could be released from federal prison within months, his lawyer and the Justice Department said Friday.

Pollard becomes eligible for parole in November, on the 30th anniversary of his arrest on charges of selling classified information to Israel. He will be presumptively eligible for release unless the U.S. Parole Commission determines that he has a record of bad behavior in prison or is likely to commit new crimes.

U.S. officials say they're unlikely to oppose his parole. But the Justice Department says it expects Pollard to serve out his entire sentence.

"The Department of Justice has always and continues to maintain that Jonathan Pollard should serve his full sentence for the serious crimes he committed, which in this case is a 30-year sentence as mandated by statute," said spokesman Marc Raimondi.

His attorney, Eliot Lauer, told The Associated Press on Friday that he hoped his client would be released, but said he had received no commitment from the Obama administration.

Clinton Denounces 'Systemic Racism'

GREENVILLE, S.C. (AP) — In her second bid for the presidency, Hillary Rodham Clinton is discussing "systemic racism" and making the issue a hallmark of her campaign, as she looks to connect with the black voters who supported rival Barack Obama in 2008.

At multiple stops in South Carolina this week, Clinton bemoaned "mass incarceration," an uneven economy, increasingly segregated public schools and poisoned relations between law enforcement and the black community.

She praised South Carolina leaders, including Republican Gov. Nikki Haley, for removing the Confederate battle flag from statehouse grounds after a white gunman's massacre of nine people at a historic black church in Charleston, but she warned that the act is only symbolic.

"America's long struggle with racism is far from finished," the former secretary of state said before a mostly white audience at a Greenville technical college. Hours earlier, with a majority black audience at a West Columbia church, she declared, "Anybody who says we don't have more progress to make is blind."

At both stops, she added symbolism of her own, trumpeting the mantra "Black Lives Matter" that has become a rallying cry of and name for activists who organized protests in several cities amid high-profile cases of black citizens being killed during encounters with police.

Jail Death Focuses On Inmate Suicide

DALLAS (AP) — When Sandra Bland died in a small Texas jail last week, she became just the latest name on a long list of inmates whose deaths were determined to be suicides.

Bland's death following her arrest for a minor traffic violation added fresh fuel to the national debate over police use of force on blacks. It also focused new attention on the longstanding problem of inmates who take their own lives.

The traffic stop "is one issue and that will be dealt with," Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick said earlier this week. "But she lost her life in the jail. And that's what we have to look at." If the correct procedures had been in place, "maybe she would be alive today."

Suicide is the leading cause of death in jails after natural illness. In fact, inmates take their own lives three times more often than the average population, according to a 2010 study cited in the National Study of Jail Suicide.

Since 2000, the total number of jail suicides has remained fairly constant — around 300 a year, according to the federal government's Bureau of Justice Statistics. Improved awareness and monitoring have helped make suicides far less common than in the 1980s or 1990s.

Donald Trump's Exposes Deep Divisions

LAREDO, Texas (AP) — Thursday Trump's visited Laredo, Texas, a small city on the U.S.-Mexico border where the Republican presidential candidate spent less than an hour touring the border, bragged to reporters about the danger he faced, proclaimed Hispanics love him, and stopped traffic with a presidential-sized motorcade.

Yet beyond the spectacle The Donald seems to create wherever he goes, the billionaire businessman's visit exposed evidence of a divided community whose overwhelmingly Hispanic population both decried Trump as racist and cheered his headline immigration views. Interviews underscored the danger Trump represents to the GOP's relationship with Hispanic voters and his appeal to a vocal segment of frustrated voters, many Hispanics among them, who see a glaring problem on the nation's southern border that requires attention.

California To Review Video Targeting Planned Parenthood

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California Attorney General Kamala Harris said Friday that she plans to review two undercover videos released by anti-abortion activists aimed at discrediting Planned Parenthood's procedures for providing fetal tissue to researchers, to see if any laws were broken.

Harris announced the move in a letter to four Democratic members of Congress who had requested an investigation, saying she'll use her office's authority to regulate charity organizations to see if the organization that made the videos violated registration or reporting requirements, or broke any other rules. Harris, a Democrat, plans to run for the U.S. Senate in 2016.

"We will carefully review the allegations raised in your letter to determine whether there were any violations of California law," Harris said in the letter to four members of the U.S. House of Representatives.

She said her office will look into "allegations that individuals impersonated corporate officials from a fake biologics company, resulting in the release of secretly filmed videos of Planned Parenthood physicians without their consent."

The videos show Dr. Mary Gatter, a Planned Parenthood medical director in Southern California, meeting with people posing as potential buyers of intact fetal specimens. The conversation focuses largely on how

much money the buyers should pay.

After-hours phone and email messages left with the Center for Medical Progress, which made the videos, were not immediately returned.

In a statement released earlier this week, the previously little-known group said Planned Parenthood's denial of engaging in the sale of fetal parts is "a desperate lie."

The videos have brought investigations of Planned Parenthood's policies on aborted fetuses by three Republican-led congressional committees and three states.

Federal law prohibits the commercial sale of fetal tissue, but it allows the not-for-profit donation of tissue if the women who underwent

abortions give their consent. Planned Parenthood says the payments discussed in the videos pertain to reimbursement for the costs of procuring the tissue — which is legal.

Gatter says in the second video, which was released on Tuesday a week after the first, that "We're not in it for the money," while also discussing whether a payment of \$100 per fetal specimen would be adequate.

Planned Parenthood spokesman Eric Ferrero said in a statement after the release of the second video that the organization behind the videos "is a group of extremists who have intimidated women and doctors for years in their agenda to ban abortion completely."