

Gunman Was Army Dropout Who Studied Mass Shooters

BY JEFF BARNARD

Associated Press

ROSEBURG, Ore. — The 26-year-old gunman who opened fire on fellow students in his community college English class, killing nine people, was an Army boot camp dropout who studied mass shooters before becoming one himself.

A day after the rampage in this Oregon timber town, authorities said Christopher Sean Harper-Mercer wore a flak jacket and brought at least six guns and five ammunition magazines to the school. Investigators found another seven guns at the apartment he shared with his mother.

Officials on Friday also released the names of the dead, who ranged in age from 18 to 67 and included several freshmen and a teacher. They were sons and daughters, spouses and parents.

One of the students was active in the Future Farmers of America and loved to play soccer. Another was on only his fourth day of college. One was a 59-year-old student whose daughter was enrolled in the same school but not injured the shooting. Grieving families began sharing details of their loved ones.

"We have been trying to figure out how to tell everyone how amazing Lucas was, but that would take 18 years," the family of Lucas Eibel, 18, said in a statement released through the Douglas County Sheriff's Office.

Eibel, who was studying chemistry, volunteered at a wildlife center and animal shelter.

Quinn Glen Cooper's family said their son had just started college and loved dancing and voice acting.

"I don't know how we are going to move forward with our lives without Quinn," the Coopers said. "Our lives are shattered beyond repair."

Seven other people were wounded in the attack in Roseburg, about 180 miles south of Portland.

Harper-Mercer, who died during a shootout with police, was armed with handguns and a rifle, some of which were military grade. The weapons had been purchased legally over the past three years, some by him, others by relatives, said Celinez Nunez, assistant field

School shootings this year

The shooting at Umpqua Community College is the 45th this year. A map of shootings at schools K-12 and colleges in 2015:



Locator map of school shootings in the U.S. this year.

agent for the Seattle division of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

Oregon's top federal prosecutor says the shooter used a handgun when he opened fire on classmates and stashed a rifle in another room and did not fire it. He says it's impossible to know what the shooter had planned for the rifle.

Those who knew the shooter described an awkward loner.

At a different apartment complex where Harper-Mercer and his mother lived in Southern California, neighbors remembered a quiet and odd young man who rode a red bike everywhere.

Reina Webb, 19, said the man's mother was friendly and often chatted with neighbors, but Harper-Mercer kept to himself. She said she occasionally heard him having temper tantrums in his apartment.

"He was kind of like a child so that's why his tantrums would be like kind of weird. He's a grown man. He shouldn't be having a tantrum like a kid. That's why I thought there was something — something was up," she said.

Harper-Mercer's social media profiles suggested he was fascinated by the Irish Republican Army and frustrated by traditional organized religion. He also tracked other mass shootings. In one post, he appeared to urge readers to watch the online footage of Vester Flanagan shooting two former colleagues live on TV in August in Virginia, noting

"the more people you kill, the more you're in the limelight."

He may have even posted a warning. A message on 4chan — a forum where racist and misogynistic comments are frequent — warned of an impending attack, but it's unclear if it came from Harper-Mercer.

"Some of you guys are alright. Don't go to school tomorrow if you are in the northwest," an anonymous poster wrote a day before the shootings.

On Thursday morning, he walked into Snyder Hall at Umpqua Community College and began firing, shooting many victims repeatedly. Survivors described a classroom of carnage, and one said he ordered students to state their religion before shooting them.

Students in a classroom next door heard several shots, one right after the other, and their teacher told them to leave.

"We began to run," student Hannah Miles said. "A lot of my classmates were going every which way. We started to run to the center of campus. And I turned around, and I saw students pouring out of the building."

An aunt of an Army veteran hit by several bullets said he tried to stop the gunman from entering the classroom.

Wanda Mintz said her 30-year-old nephew, Chris Mintz, a student at the college, fell to the floor and asked the shooter to stop. But, she said, he shot Mintz again and went inside.

Portland Fire and Rescue Lt. Rich Chatman, who is

serving as a spokesman for the criminal investigation, said investigators were still processing the crime scene.

Several years ago, Harper-Mercer moved to Winchester, Oregon, from Torrance, California, with his mother, a nurse named Laurel Harper. His father, Ian Mercer, originally from the United Kingdom, told reporters outside his Tarzana, California, home, "I'm just as shocked as anybody at what happened."

At school in Oregon, "he was a typical Roseburg kid, kind of nerdy, kind of out there. Just himself," said Alex Frier, a stage manager at the college who said Harper-Mercer built sets for theater performances last semester.

A neighbor, Bronte Harte, said Harper-Mercer "seemed really unfriendly" and would "sit by himself in the dark in the balcony with this little light."

Harte said a woman she believed to be Mercer's mother also lived upstairs and was "crying her eyes out" Thursday.

The Army said Harper-Mercer flunked out of basic training in 2008.

Army spokesman Lt. Col. Ben Garrett said Harper-Mercer was in the military for a little over a month at Ft. Jackson, South Carolina, but was discharged for failing to meet the minimum standards.

Garrett did not say which standards Harper-Mercer failed. Generally, the Army requires recruits to pass physical fitness tests and to be in generally good physical and mental health. Recruits must also pass a multiple-choice test covering science, math, reading comprehension and other topics.

In Washington, President Barack Obama lamented the government's inability to pass stricter gun laws even after attacks like the one in Oregon.

At a news conference Friday at the White House, Obama said he plans to keep talking about the issue and "will politicize it" because inaction is itself a political decision the U.S. is making.

He said it's impossible to identify mentally ill people likely to perpetrate mass shootings ahead of time. The only thing the U.S. can do, he explained, is ensure they don't have an arsenal available "when something in them snaps."

Obama Won't Sign Another Spending Bill

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama said Friday he won't sign another temporary government funding bill after the current one expires Dec. 11, insisting that congressional Republicans and Democrats work out a long-term budget deal with the White House.

Obama said such a deal should lift a freeze on the budgets of both the Pentagon and domestic agencies. Speaking at a White House news conference, he said he "won't sign another shortsighted spending bill" and asserted that the U.S. can't cut its way to prosperity.

"Congress has to do its job. It can't flirt with another shutdown," Obama said.

On the so-called debt limit, which needs to be raised above the current \$18.1 trillion cap by early November, Obama said he won't repeat a 2011 negotiation over companion spending cuts that brought the nation to the brink of a first-ever default on its obligations.

"We're not going back there," he said, adding: "Historically, we do not mess with it. If it gets messed with, it would have profound implications for the global economy and could put our financial system in the kind of tailspin that we saw back in 2007 and 2008. ... It has to get done in the next five weeks."

France Tells Putin To Confine Airstrikes

PARIS (AP) — With Russian warplanes bombing Syria for a third day, French President Francois Hollande told President Vladimir Putin on Friday that Moscow's airstrikes must be confined to attacking Islamic State militants, not other rebels opposing the Damascus government.

Hollande used a meeting on Ukraine to address Western concerns that Russia's airstrikes would serve to strengthen Syrian President Bashar Assad by targeting rebels — perhaps including some aligned with the U.S. — rather than hitting IS fighters it has promised to attack.

Allies in a U.S.-led coalition that is conducting its own air campaign in Syria called on Russia to cease attacks on the Syrian opposition and to focus on fighting the Islamic State group. A joint statement by France, Turkey, the U.S. Germany, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Britain expressed concern that Russia's actions will "only fuel more extremism and radicalization."

The Russian Defense Ministry released images showing that its jets hit an Islamic State-held area near its de facto capital of Raqqa in northern Syria on Thursday. It said there were 14 new missions Friday, including targets in Idlib and Hama provinces.

Hollande said he told Putin that only one of Russia's strikes in three days hit at the Islamic State, also known as ISIL, ISIS and Daesh. The other strikes, Hollande added, were on areas controlled by the opposition.

Pope Met With Gay Former Student

VATICAN CITY (AP) — The Vatican turned the tables on the Kim Davis affair Friday: Not only did it distance Pope Francis from her claims that he endorsed her stand on same-sex marriage, it said the only "real audience" Francis had in Washington was with a small group that included a gay couple.

The revelations, doled out during the course of the day, put a new twist on Francis' encounter with Davis after she and her lawyers insisted that her invitation to meet the pope on Sept. 24 amounted to an affirmation of her cause.

The Davis case has sharply divided the United States, and news of Francis' meeting with the Kentucky clerk, who went to jail after refusing to issue same-sex marriage licenses, had upended his six-day U.S. tour. During the visit, Francis had tried to steer clear of such hot-button issues, only to see the Davis affair dominate the post-trip news cycle.

The Vatican spokesman, the Rev. Federico Lombardi, sought to give the Vatican's take of events in a statement early Friday, saying Francis had met with "several dozen" people at the Vatican's embassy before leaving Washington for New York.

Davis was among them and had a "brief meeting," he said. Lombardi said such meetings are common during papal trips and are due to the pope's "kindness and availability."

Bush Backers Argue Governor Judgement

WASHINGTON (AP) — Jeb Bush's challenge in the first half of the year was daunting yet simple. To be considered a fund-raising success, the Republican presidential candidate had to hit the magic number of \$100 million, an ambitious goal set by some in his campaign. And he did.

As another fundraising period ends, what now constitutes success for Bush isn't as clear cut. No longer the front-runner in preference polls, Bush won't repeat as the champion at raising money in the GOP's 2016 field, topped in the past three months by retired surgeon Ben Carson and perhaps by Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, too.

"They created such a high bar," said Spencer Zwick, a top Republican donor who was 2012 GOP presidential nominee Mitt Romney's finance chief. "Now anything less than \$100 million in a quarter seems small."

But Bush's financial team and strategists argue that he should now be judged by a different benchmark. Their mantra: He's built to last. Using phrases like "go the distance," "marathon" and "long haul," they argue that the former Florida governor is uniquely positioned to outlast other candidates, regardless of the fundraising number he posts for the third quarter.

"If we were frozen with just the resources we have right now, he could still be in the game right to the very end," said Kenneth Lipper, a New York financier and top fundraiser for Bush. "Longevity is the right word."

Chaffetz To Seek Speaker Bid Against McCarthy

BY ERICA WERNER

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republican Rep. Jason Chaffetz of Utah plans to run for House speaker in a surprise longshot challenge to House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, three Republican aides said Friday, injecting new turmoil into an unsettled House Republican conference.

Chaffetz chairs the Oversight and Government Reform Committee and has led high-profile hearings on the Secret Service, Planned Parenthood and other issues. His candidacy would offer an outlet for Republicans reluctant to coronate McCarthy to replace House Speaker John Boehner, who shocked Capitol Hill a week ago by announcing his resignation under conservative pressure.

Yet it's not clear the hardliners who ousted Boehner and view McCarthy with suspicion would flock to Chaffetz instead.

In recent days Chaffetz has been highly critical of McCarthy over comments the majority leader made suggesting political motives for the House committee investigating the 2012 attacks on U.S. diplomatic facilities in Benghazi, Libya. The attacks killed four Americans, including Ambassador Chris Stevens.

Chaffetz's office did not respond to multiple requests for comment, but Chaffetz plans to appear on "Fox News Sunday" to "announce his decision to run for House speaker," according to that network.

The aides with knowledge of his plans demanded anonymity to confirm them ahead of a public announcement. The news was first reported by Politico.

Chaffetz's entry into the race would come less than a week before the Oct. 8 leadership elections, giving him little time to build support. McCarthy is seen as the commanding favorite, despite Republicans' discomfort over the Californian's boast this week that the Benghazi committee could take credit for Hillary Rodham Clinton's lagging poll

numbers. Clinton is the front-runner for the Democratic presidential nomination and was secretary of state at the time of the Benghazi attacks.

McCarthy subsequently said he regretted the comment and did not mean to imply the committee is political because it is not. But Democrats pounced and said the remarks revealed the Benghazi committee is a political witch hunt.

In an appearance Friday on conservative host Sean Hannity's radio show, Chaffetz pledged a strong fight for conservative goals.

"Speaker Boehner, bless his heart, has done some good stuff — he got rid of earmarks.

But I'm tired of not actually getting to the end zone. I want to actually change the trajectory, I don't want to say we coulda, woulda, shoulda. I want to score touchdowns."

Chaffetz, 48, and in his fourth term, arrived in Congress with hardline conservative backing, but as a committee chairman is now seen by some as an ally of leadership. He angered some conservatives by briefly revoking Rep. Mark Meadows' subcommittee chairmanship when Meadows and others Republicans defied party leaders in a vote on a trade bill, and some are still smarting.

"It would be hard to

replace John Boehner with someone who also kicks people off committees for their votes," sniped Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky., who is backing another candidate, Rep. Daniel Webster, R-Fla.

Earlier this week Chaffetz said McCarthy should apologize for "a total mischaracterization" of the work of the Benghazi committee, but at the time Chaffetz said he still supported McCarthy's bid for speaker.

And Chaffetz also tried earlier this week to push his friend Rep. Trey Gowdy, R-S.C., who chairs the Benghazi committee, to run for majority leader, but Gowdy declined.

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