Beat: Travel

Prosecutors: Conn. school gunman was obsessed; with Columbine...

-, 27.11.2013, 04:33 Time

USPA News - Adam Lanza, the man who murdered his mother before killing 27 others at an elementary school in western Connecticut, was obsessed with the infamous Columbine High School massacre and other mass murders, according to the results of a year-long investigation. The findings were made public on Monday in a 44-page document that summarizes an extensive Connecticut State Police case report that runs into the thousands of pages.

It concludes that Lanza, who was 20, acted alone when he killed his mother at their home and opened fire at a nearby elementary school, but a motive will probably never be known. "The purpose of the investigation was to determine what crimes had been committed and whether anyone will be prosecuted as a result of those crimes," said Stephen J. Sedensky III, the State`s Attorney for the Judicial District of Danbury. "Based on a painstaking investigation it is determined that there will be no arrests or prosecutions." The December 14, 2012, massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, a town about 7 miles (11 kilometers) east of Danbury in Connecticut, resulted in the deaths of 20 young children and six adults, making it the second-deadliest mass shooting in U.S. history. The gunman, after earlier having killed his mother, then took his own life. According to the report, Lanza used a .22 caliber Savage Mark II rifle to shoot and kill his mother in her bed at their residence in Newtown. He then went to Sandy Hook Elementary School, parking his vehicle outside the building before approaching the front entrance just after 9:30 a.m. while armed with a Bushmaster rifle, a Glock 20, 10 mm pistol, a Sig Sauer P226, 9 mm pistol and a large supply of ammunition. As the doors to the school were locked because the school day had already begun, Lanza forced his way into the building by shooting at a window near the front lobby doors. He then fired his rifle down the hallway, as reported by school employees whom described Lanza as quiet and walking normally. Principal Dawn Hochsprung and school psychologist Mary Sherlach, who were holding a meeting with a parent and other school staff members, left their conference room and walked further down the hallway to investigate what they described as `loud banging.` Soon after leaving the room, Hochsprung was heard yelling "Stay put!" As another staff member exited the conference room, the staff member saw Hochsprung and Sherlach fall down in front of him or her before he or himself was shot in the leg. Once down, the staff member was struck again by other gunshots, but laid still before crawling back into the room when Lanza was no longer in sight. The staff member then made a call to 911 and accidentally put it through on the school-wide intercom system, giving teachers in other parts of the building notice about what had happened moments earlier. As Lanza continued firing in the hallway, another staff member was struck by a bullet in the foot before fleeing into a nearby classroom. After shooting the four staff members, of whom Hochsprung and Sherlach would eventually succumb to their injuries, Lanza entered the school`s main office where employees had taken shelter. The staff members described hearing the door opening, a person walking inside the office before leaving, and then hearing the door open a second time. It is unclear where the gunman went next, but evidence and witness statements established that Lanza walked down the hallway before entering 1st grade classrooms 8 and 10, although the order is not definitively known. While in the classrooms, Lanza killed four adults and 20 children with the Bushmaster rifle. Twelve children survived, one from classroom 8 and eleven from classroom 10. At approximately 9:40 a.m., according to the report, which is about five minutes after the gunman first entered the building and only a minute after three Newtown police officers arrived outside the school, Lanza killed himself in classroom 10 with a single gunshot to his head from a Glock 20, 10 mm pistol. When officers entered classroom 8, they found only one child unhurt. The bodies of fourteen children were also inside the classroom and a fifteenth child that was injured was pronounced dead after being rushed to Danbury Hospital. Their 30-year-old substitute teacher Lauren Rousseau, along with 29-year-old behavioral therapist Rachel D`Avino, were found dead close to the children. Nine children in classroom 10 had run out of the room during the shooting, and two other children who were unable to escape were later found uninjured by officers. But 27-year-old teacher Victoria Soto and 52-year-old behavioral therapist Anne Marie Murphy were found dead, with Murphy`s body partially covering one child. Four children were also found dead, while a fifth child was later pronounced dead at Danbury Hospital. Throughout the rest of the school, staff and students hid themselves wherever they happened to be at the time of the shooting, the report said. The staff used various ways to keep their students calm, from reading to having them color or draw pictures. Those hiding in rooms closest to the shooter kept quiet, although some people were able to escape from the building before police arrived and sought help at nearby buildings. Early on during the rampage, one staff member who had heard a "loud crashing noise" ran toward the front lobby where he smelled gun powder and saw bullet holes. Realizing what was going on, the staff member immediately called 911, turned and went back down the hall from where he or she had come from, and told other staff members to stay in their classrooms before locking their doors. According to the detailed report, a Newtown Police Department dispatcher received the first 911 call at 9:35 a.m. and broadcast a radio message about 25 seconds later, informing officers there had been a shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Connecticut State Police were dispatched for an "active shooter" at the school about 1.5 minute later. it took less than four minutes from the time of

the first 911 call being received until the first police officer arrived at the elementary school. Two other Newtown police officers arrived at the scene about 13 seconds later and were able to hear gunshots in the background, but the last gunshot was heard at 9:40 a.m., before officers were able to enter the building. About half a minute after the first officer arrived at the scene, he informed dispatch that he had seen an unknown man running along the east side of the school with `something` in his hand, after which all responding law enforcement operated under the belief that there may have been more than one shooter. The possibility of multiple shooters remained under consideration throughout the day, causing K-9 units to be brought in to search the area for possible suspects. Police officers were also posted at various locations to act as lookouts to ensure the safety of those being evacuated from the school building. The search of the area led to several people who were initially treated as suspects and taken into custody, but all were eventually cleared when their identities and reason for being there could be determined. The unknown male observed by the first officer at the scene turned out to be a parent with a cellphone in his hand. Other people detained included a man from New York who had entered the crime scene surrounding the school after being alerted to the shooting through an application on his cellphone. Also detained were two journalists found in the woods around the school and they were briefly held at gunpoint by Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) police officers. But the subsequent investigation revealed there were no additional shooters, a conclusion which was based upon searches of the area and a review of surveillance videos from nearby businesses. Witnesses also indicated they had not seen anyone other than Lanza with a firearm, and officers were able to explain both suspicious persons seen in the area and possible evidence indicating multiple shooters. "Stopping the active shooter was the first priority. Once that occurred, the location and treatment of the victims, the search for additional shooters, and the safe evacuation of the school were of primary importance," the report said. "The collection of evidence and the preservation and documentation of the crime scene, while important, came second." After no other gunmen were found and the scene was declared safe, investigators began documenting the crime scene and collecting evidence, a process that took an entire week. The scene processing included extensive written documentation as well as taking videos and thousands of photographs and measurements. As part of the investigation into the killing of Lanza`s mother, police spoke with a person who reported hearing "two or three" gunshots in the neighborhood between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m., but dismissed them as being from hunters in the area. When interviewed, the person indicated the shots did "sound unusually close." When investigators searched the mother`s house, they found the gunman`s second-floor bedroom windows were taped over with black trash bags. The second-floor computer room also had its windows covered, and investigators found a computer hard drive that appeared to have been intentionally damaged. Because of the extensive damage, forensic experts have been unable to recover any information from the hard drive, and experts believe this is unlikely to happen in the future. "Given the improbability of any information being recovered from the damaged hard drive, this outstanding piece of evidence is not preventing the closure of this case," Sedensky said, adding that the case will be reopened in the event relevant information is ever recovered from the hard drive. Investigators also found a large number of firearms and related items inside the Newtown residence, but all firearms involved in the killings were legally purchased by the gunman`s mother over the years. The house also contained many edged weapons, knives, swords and spears. Additionally found inside the house were photos of a dead human wrapped in plastic and a New York Times article covering the February 2008 shooting at Northern Illinois University that resulted in the deaths of 6 people. Also found were photocopied 1891 newspaper articles pertaining to the shooting of school children and a book relating to the mass shooting at an Amish schoolhouse in Pennsylvania in October 2006. "While the vast majority of persons interviewed had no explanation for the shooter`s actions, a review of electronic evidence or digital media that appeared to belong to the shooter, revealed that the shooter had a preoccupation with mass shootings, in particular the Columbine shootings, and a strong interest in firearms," the report said. "For example, there was a spreadsheet with mass murders over the years listing information about each shooting." The Columbine massacre happened in April 1999 when 18-year-old Eric Harris and 17-year-old Dylan Klebold went on a killing spree at Columbine High School in Colorado, killing 12 students and one teacher before committing suicide. It was the deadliest high school massacre in U.S. history, prompting changes in school security across the United States. The investigators also discovered other, equally disturbing, electronic evidence such as two videos showing suicide by gunshot, commercial movies depicting mass shootings, a computer game titled "School Shooting" in which the player enters a school and shoots at students, photos of Lanza holding a handgun and rifle to his head and photos of Lanza with a rifle, shotgun and numerous magazines in his pockets. Other electronic evidence included a 5-second video dramatization depicting children being shot, a document describing the prerequisites for a mass murder, a spreadsheet listing mass murders by name and information about the incident, and a large amount of materials relating to the Columbine massacre as well as other mass murders. In addition, investigators also found materials regarding the topic of pedophilia and advocating for rights of pedophiles. "No child pornography was seen on any of the digital media," the report stated, although it will never be known if child pornography may have been on the hard drive. As part of the investigation, to determine if anyone had conspired with or aided the shooter before the shootings, investigators examined social contacts, writings, e-mails, internet blogs, telephone records and Lanza`s general internet presence. He was found to have exchanged emails with others who were interested in the topic of mass shootings, but none of the emails were found to have suggested that Lanza intended to commit a mass shooting himself. Investigators also learned that Lanza`s mother had expressed concern about her son because he had not left the house in three months and would only communicate with her by e-mail, even though they were living in the same house. But the mother never expressed fear of the shooter, either for her own safety or that of anyone else. During the investigation and interviews with persons who knew Lanza, investigators were unable to find any motive for him to specifically target

Sandy Hook Elementary School. "Apart from having attended the school as a child, he appears to have had no continuing involvement with Sandy Hook Elementary School," the report said. People who knew the gunman described him in contradictory ways to investigators, with some describing Lanza as having above-average intelligence while others believed it was below-average. Some recalled that Lanza had been bullied, but others - included many teachers - had no such recollection. "He was undoubtedly afflicted with mental health problems; yet despite a fascination with mass shootings and firearms, he displayed no aggressive or threatening tendencies," according to the report, based on the interviews. "With some people he could talk with them and be humorous; but many others saw the shooter as unemotional, distant, and remote." Lanza`s mother, who volunteered at Sandy Hook Elementary School when her son was a student there, was no longer working because of her son`s condition and took care of all of his needs. She was worried what would happen to her son if anything happened to her, but Lanza had told his mother he would `not feel bad` should that happen. The report goes on to describe how Lanza`s mother would prepare food for her son, who did not drink alcohol or use drugs. Lanza required his food in a specific arrangement in relation to other foods on the plate, and certain types of dishware could not be used for particular foods. The mother would shop and cook to Lanza`s instructions, even doing laundry on a daily basis as he often changed clothing during the day. "She was not allowed in the shooter`s room, however, even to clean. No one was allowed in his room," the report described. "The shooter disliked birthdays, Christmas and holidays. He would not allow his mother to put up a Christmas tree. The mother explained it by saying that shooter had no emotions or feelings. The mother also got rid of a cat because the shooter did not want it in the house." Lanza often played video games, both violent and non-violent, but one person described the shooter as spending the majority of his time playing non-violent video games, with his favorite being "Super Mario Brothers" at one point. He would sometimes not respond to e-mails for weeks, and he frequently formatted the hard drive of his computer as a way of "staying of the grid" and minimizing his internet trace. In conversations with one acquaintance, Lanza indicated that he had an interest in mass murders and serial killers. "They never spent a lot of time discussing them, but it would be a topic of conversation," the report states, adding that Lanza also wrote about these topics, as well as subjects that included morality, lack of control, suicide, mental illness, and existential crisis. Over the years from the late 1990s into the 2000s, Lanza had evaluations of various types, some of which were available to the investigators. For instance, in the late 1990s he was being monitored for seizure activities and described as having speech and language needs. In preschool, Lanza`s conduct included repetitive behavior, temper tantrums, smelling things that were not there, excessive hand washing and eating idiosyncrasies. In 2005, the shooter was diagnosed with Asperger`s Disorder and was described as presenting with significant social impairments and extreme anxiety. It was also noted by doctors that he lacked empathy and had a very rigid thought process, which included a literal interpretation of written and verbal material. In a school setting, Lanza had extreme anxiety and discomfort with changes, noise, and physical contact with others. "His high level of anxiety, Asperger`s characteristics, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) concerns and sensory issues all impacted his performance to a significant degree, limiting his participation in a general education curriculum. Tutoring, desensitization and medication were recommended," the report said, adding that Lanza refused to take medication or engage in suggested behavior therapies. But investigators emphasized that it is unknown if, and to what degree, the shooter`s mental health problems contributed to his attack on Sandy Hook Elementary School. "Those mental health professionals who saw him did not see anything that would have predicted his future behavior," the report states. As part of the investigation, investigators also received a large number of calls purporting to provide information on the shootings and the shooter. One of those tips concerned a posting on the imageboard website 4chan, where a user had posted a message that something would happen on December 14, 2012, the day of the Newtown shootings. "I`m going to kill myself on Friday and it will make the news. be watching at 9:00 a.m.," the anonymous posting read, according to the report. Another user then asked where it would happen, to which the anonymous user replied: "I live in Connecticut, that`s as much as I`ll say." Although the report provides no specific details, it said the lead was investigated by federal law enforcement but were found to have "no validity and no relation to Newtown." In conclusion, Sedensky wrote no one will be prosecuted as either an accessory or co-conspirator and that the investigation is now closed, even though no motive has been established. "There is no clear indication why Sandy Hook Elementary School was selected, other than perhaps its close proximity to the shooter`s home," he said. "The evidence indicates the shooter planned his actions, including the taking of his own life," Sedensky added. The prosecutor said school staff acted "heroically" in trying to protect the children and he praised police officers for entering the school building with the knowledge that a gunman was perhaps waiting to take their lives. With the release of Sedensky`s report, authorities are now in the process of redacting information that is required by law to be redacted from the extensive Connecticut State Police case report. State police expect the redaction process will be completed before the anniversary of the school shooting, after which it will be released.

Article online:
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