

Authorities at Last Reveal Motive of Texas Church Massacre Gunman

A man thrown out of the U.S. Air Force for beating his wife and child shot and killed 26 people in a rural Texas church where his in-laws worshipped before fatally shooting himself, officials said, in the latest in a string of U.S. mass shootings.

Gunman Devin Patrick Kelley, 26, walked into the white-steepled First Baptist Church in rural Sutherland Springs carrying an assault rifle and wearing black tactical gear, then opened fire during a Sunday prayer service. He wounded at least 20 others, officials said.

After he left the church, two local residents, at least one of whom was armed, chased him in their vehicles and exchanged gunfire, and Kelley crashed his car and shot himself to death, Wilson County Sheriff Joe Tackitt told CBS News in an interview on Monday morning.

"At this time we believe that he had a self-inflicted gunshot wound," Tackitt said. He later told CNN, "We know that his ex in-laws or in-laws came to church here from time to time ... They were not here (Sunday)."

The attack came a little more than a month after a gunman killed 58 people in Las Vegas in the deadliest shooting by a sole gunman in U.S. history.

The initial death toll matched the number of dead in the December 2012 massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, where a man shot and killed 26 children and educators. Those attacks now stand as the fourth deadliest in the United States.

Republican Texas Governor Greg Abbott told CBS there was evidence that Kelley had mental health problems and that he had been denied a Texas gun permit.

"It's clear this is a person who had violent tendencies, who had some challenges, and someone who was a powder keg, seeming waiting to go off," Abbott said.

Abbott and other Republican leaders were quick to say that the attack did not influence their support of gun ownership by U.S. citizens – the right to bear arms protected under the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

"This isn't a guns situation. I mean we could go into it but it's a little bit soon to go into it," U.S. President Donald Trump told reporters while on trip to Asia. "But fortunately somebody else had a gun that was shooting in the opposite direction, otherwise ... it would have been much worse. But this is a mental health problem at the highest level."

Democrats renewed their call to restrict gun ownership following the attack.

"How many more people must die at churches or concerts or schools before we stop letting the @NRA control this country's gun policies," Democratic U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren said on Twitter.

The victims in Sutherland Springs, a community of fewer than 400 people, located about 40 miles (65 km) east of San Antonio, included the 14-year-old daughter of church pastor Frank Pomeroy, the family told several television stations.

One couple, Joe and Claryce Holcombe, told the Washington Post they lost eight extended family members, including a pregnant granddaughter-in-law and three of her children.

In rural areas like Sutherland Springs, gun ownership is a part of life and the state's Republican leaders for years have

balked at gun control, arguing that more firearms among responsible owners make the state safer.

At the suspect's home located in an isolated area of New Braunfels, about 35 miles (56 km) north of Sutherland Springs, a Comal County Sheriff vehicle blocked the entrance. A "beware of dog" sign was affixed to the gate where a dented mailbox bears the address.

Kelley served in its Logistics Readiness unit at Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico from 2010 until his discharge in 2014, according to the U.S. Air Force.

Kelley was court-martialed in 2012 on charges of assaulting his wife and child, and given a bad-conduct discharge, confinement for 12 months and a reduction in rank, Air Force spokeswoman Ann Stefanek said.

Kelley's Facebook page has been deleted, but cached photos show a profile picture where he appeared with two small children. He also posted a photo of what appeared to be an assault rifle, writing a post that read: "She's a bad [expletive]." {eoa}

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