

Louisiana Shooting Leaves Police Looking for Answers

An Alabama drifter opened fire inside a crowded movie theater, killing two women in Lafayette, Louisiana, on Thursday evening, police said, in the latest act of random gun violence to shock the United States.

The gunfire erupted during a showing of the film "Trainwreck" before the 59-year-old suspect, identified as John R. Houser, killed himself with a .40 caliber handgun as officers rushed to the scene, police told a morning press conference.

The shootings took place almost three years to the day after 12 people were killed at a cinema in Aurora, Colorado, and follows several mass shootings in the United States in recent weeks.

Authorities said seven people were wounded, three of them critically. One person underwent surgery and "was not doing well," police said.

"This is a normal movie theater in a normal part of a normal town. This is Anywhere, USA," said Republican Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal, who went to Lafayette to meet with law enforcement and victims.

"This just shows these senseless acts of violence can literally happen anywhere."

The two victims were identified as Mayci Breau, 21 from Franklin, La. and Jillian Johnson, 33, from Lafayette.

Police did not immediately offer a motive.

"The shooter is deceased. We may never know," Lafayette Police Chief Jim Craft said, adding that the man had criminal history that he described as "pretty old."

Craft told the press conference that the gunman tried to sneak out of the theater with the crowd after the shooting. He was forced back inside by the quick arrival of police, before shooting himself.

"It is apparent that he was intent on shooting and escaping," he said, noting that Houser's car, a blue Lincoln Continental, was parked outside the theater near an exit.

Houser was "kind of a drifter" who had moved to Lafayette recently from Phenix City, Alabama, and had no recent criminal record, Craft said.

"We don't know why he chose to stop and stay in Lafayette."

Police found disguises, including wigs and glasses in his motel room, he added.

Craft said records indicated that Houser, who is white, had no arrests in the last 10-15 years, but previously had an arson and a misdemeanor arrest, possibly involving the sale of alcohol to a minor.

"Other than that we haven't really found anything else on him, he seems to be estranged from his family," he said.

Houser was denied a pistol permit in 2006, the Russell County Sheriff's office in Alabama told The Advocate newspaper.

Houser appeared to describe himself on a LinkedIn profile as an entrepreneur with a specialty in investment management. Most recently, he worked in Phenix City as a real estate developer for eight months in 2006. Reuters could not immediately confirm that the page belonged the man identified by police.

A police search of the motel room found signs of alcohol consumption, but no drugs.

Gunman Silent

Witnesses said the gunman abruptly stood up in the darkness of the Grand 16 Theater about 20 minutes into the movie and began shooting.

"He wasn't saying anything. I didn't hear anybody screaming either," Katie Domingue, who was watching the film with her fiancée, told the local Advertiser newspaper.

The bullets sent people scrambling from the theater, situated on a main thoroughfare in Lafayette, a city of about 120,000 people roughly 55 miles (90 km) southwest of Baton Rouge, police said.

President Barack Obama, who was traveling to Kenya on Friday, received a briefing about the shooting during a refueling stop in Germany, said White House spokesman Josh Earnest.

"The thoughts and prayers of everyone at the White House, including the President and First Lady, are with the community of Lafayette, Louisiana, especially the families of those who were killed," a statement said.

Trainwreck's actress and writer, comedian Amy Schumer tweeted, "My heart is broken and all my thoughts and prayers are with everyone in Louisiana."

Two of the wounded victims were teachers, said Jindal, one of whom told him that she survived the attack because her friend rolled over her as bullets rang out. That teacher then managed to pull a fire alarm in the theater, he said.

The shooting came three years after a gunman opened fire at a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado, during a midnight screening of the Batman film, "The Dark Knight Rises", killing 12 people and wounding 70 others.

James Holmes, a former neuroscience graduate student at the University of Colorado, was convicted last week on 165 counts of murder, attempted murder and explosives in the July 20,

2012, rampage.

Jurors in that case were trying to determine if Holmes should face the death penalty or life in prison.

The United States has witnessed several mass shootings in the last two months.

A gunman is accused of a racially motivated shooting at a black church in South Carolina that killed nine church members in June. More recently, a gunman attacked military offices in Tennessee last week, killing five U.S. servicemen.

Jindal, who last month announced his candidacy for president, said he had ordered National Guard members at offices and other facilities to be armed in the wake of the Tennessee attack.

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