



Fort Hood Shooting Victims Had Different Reasons for Enlisting in Army

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The 13 people killed when an Army psychiatrist allegedly opened fire on fellow soldiers at Fort Hood, Texas, included a pregnant woman who was preparing to return home, a man who quit a furniture company job to join the military about a year ago, a newlywed who had served in Iraq and a woman who had vowed to take on Usama bin Laden after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Here is a look at some of the victims.

Francheska Velez

Velez, 21, of Chicago, was pregnant and preparing to return home. A friend of Velez's, Sasha Ramos, described her as a fun-loving person who wrote poetry and loved dancing.

"She was like my sister," Ramos, 21, said. "She was the most fun and happy person you could know. She never did anything wrong to anybody."

Family members said Velez had recently returned from deployment in Iraq and had sought a lifelong career in the Army.

"She was a very happy girl and sweet," said her father, Juan Guillermo Velez, his eyes red from crying. "She had the spirit of a child."

Ramos, who also served briefly in the military, couldn't reconcile that her friend was killed in this country just after leaving a war zone.

"It makes it a lot harder," she said. "This is not something a soldier expects — to have someone in our uniform go start shooting at us."

Capt. John Gaffaney

Gaffaney, 56, was a psychiatric nurse who worked for San Diego County, Calif., for more than 20 years and had arrived at Fort Hood the day before the shooting to prepare for a deployment to Iraq.

Gaffaney, who was born in Williston, N.D., had served in the Navy and later the California National Guard as a younger man, his family said. After the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, he tried to sign up again for military service. Although the Army Reserves at first declined, he got the call about two years ago asking him to rejoin, said his close friend and co-worker Stephanie Powell.

"He wanted to help the boys in Iraq and Afghanistan deal with the trauma of what they were seeing," Powell said. "He was an honorable man. He just wanted to serve in any way he can."

His family described him as an avid baseball card collector and fan of the San Diego Padres who liked to read military novels and ride his Harley-Davidson motorcycle.

Gaffaney supervised a team of six social workers, including Powell, at the county's Adult Protective Services department. Ellen Schmeding, assistant deputy director for the county's Health and Human Services Agency, said Gaffaney was a strong leader.

He is survived by a wife and a son.

Pfc. Aaron Thomas Nemelka

Nemelka, 19, of the Salt Lake City suburb of West Jordan, Utah, chose to join the Army instead of going on a mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, his uncle Christopher Nemelka said.

"As a person, Aaron was as soft and kind and as gentle as they come, a sweetheart," his uncle said. "What I loved about the kid was his independence of thought."

Aaron Nemelka, the youngest of four children, was scheduled to be deployed to Afghanistan in January, his family said in a statement. Nemelka had enlisted in the Army in October 2008, Utah National Guard Lt. Col. Lisa Olsen said.

Pfc. Michael Pearson

Pearson, 21, of the Chicago suburb of Bolingbrook, Ill., quit what he figured was a dead-end furniture company job to join the military about a year ago.

Pearson's mother, Sheryll Pearson, said the 2006 Bolingbrook High School graduate joined the military because he was eager to serve his country and broaden his horizons.

"He was the best son in the whole world," she said. "He was my best friend and I miss him."

His cousin, Mike Dostalek, showed reporters a poem Pearson wrote. "I look only to the future for wisdom. To rock back and forth in my wooden chair," the poem says.

At Pearson's family home Friday, a yellow ribbon was tied to a porch light and a sticker stamped with American flags on the front door read, "United we stand."

Neighbor Jessica Koerber, who was with Pearson's parents when they received word Thursday their son had died, described him as a man who clearly loved his family — someone who enjoyed horsing around with his nieces and nephews, and other times playing his guitar.

"That family lost their gem," she told the AP. "He was a great kid, a great guy. ... Mikey was one of a kind."

Sheryll Pearson said she hadn't seen her son for a year because he had been training. She told the Tribune that when she last talked to him on the phone two days ago, they had discussed how he would come home for Christmas.

Spc. Jason Dean Hunt

Hunt, 22, of Frederick, Okla., went into the military after graduating from Tipton High School in 2005 and had gotten married just two months ago, his mother, Gale Hunt, said. He had served 3 1/2 years in the Army, including a stint in Iraq.

Gale Hunt said two uniformed soldiers came to her door late Thursday night to notify her of her son's death.

Hunt, known as J.D., was "just kind of a quiet boy and a good kid, very kind," said Kathy Gray, an administrative assistant at Tipton Schools.

His mother said he was family oriented.

"He didn't go in for hunting or sports," Gale Hunt said. "He was a very quiet boy who enjoyed video games."

He had re-enlisted for six years after serving his initial two-year assignment, she said. Jason Hunt was previously stationed at Fort Stewart in Georgia.

Michael Grant Cahill

Cahill, a 62-year-old physician assistant, suffered a heart attack two weeks ago and returned to work at the base as a civilian employee after taking just one week off for recovery, said his daughter Keely Vanacker.

"He survived that. He was getting back on track, and he gets killed by a gunman," Vanacker said, her words bare with shock and disbelief.

Cahill, of Cameron, Texas, helped treat soldiers returning from tours of duty or preparing for deployment.

Often, Vanacker said, Cahill would walk young soldiers where they needed to go, just to make sure they got the right treatment.

"He loved his patients, and his patients loved him," said Vanacker, 33, the oldest of Cahill's three adult children.

"He just felt his job was important."

Cahill, who was born in Spokane, Wash., had worked as a civilian contractor at Fort Hood for about four years, after jobs in rural health clinics and at Veterans Affairs hospitals. He and his wife, Joleen, had been married 37 years.

Vanacker described her father as a gregarious man and a voracious reader who could talk for hours about any subject.

The family's typical Thanksgiving dinners ended with board games and long conversations over the table, said Vanacker, whose voice often cracked with emotion as she remembered her father. "Now, who I am going to talk to?"

Spc. Frederick Greene

Greene, 29, of Mountain City, Tenn., was assigned to the 16th Signal Company, Fort Hood, Texas.

Staff Sgt. Justin M. DeCrow

DeCrow, 32, was helping train soldiers on how to help new veterans with paperwork and had felt safe on the Army post.

"He was on a base," his wife, Marikay DeCrow, said in a telephone interview from the couple's home at Fort Gordon, Ga., where she hoped to be reunited with her husband once he finished his work at Fort Hood. "They should be safe there. They should be safe."

His wife said she wanted everyone to know what a loving man he was. The couple have a 13-year-old daughter, Kylah.

"He was well loved by everyone," she said through sobs. "He was a loving father and husband and he will be missed by all."

DeCrow's father, Daniel DeCrow, of Fulton, Ind., said his son graduated high school in Plymouth, Ind., and married his high school sweetheart that summer before joining the Army. The couple moved near Fort Gordon about five years ago, he said.

About a year ago, his son was stationed in Korea for a year. When he returned to the U.S., the Army moved him to Fort Hood while he waited for a position to open up in Fort Gordon so he could move back with his wife and daughter, Daniel DeCrow said.

DeCrow said he talked to his son last week to ask him how things were going at Fort Hood.

"As usual, the last words out of my mouth to him were that I was proud of him," he said. "That's what I said to him every time — that I loved him and I was proud of what he was doing. I can carry that around in my heart."

Sgt. Amy Krueger

Krueger, 29, of Kiel, Wis., joined the Army after the 2001 terrorist attacks and had vowed to take on Usama bin Laden, her mother, Jeri Krueger said.

Amy Krueger arrived at Fort Hood on Tuesday and was scheduled to be sent to Afghanistan in December, her mother told the Herald Times Reporter of Manitowoc.

Jeri Krueger recalled telling her daughter that she could not take on bin Laden by herself.

"Watch me," her daughter replied.

Kiel High School Principal Dario Talerico told The Associated Press that Krueger graduated from the school in 1998 and had spoken at least once to local elementary school students about her career.

"I just remember that Amy was a very good kid, who like most kids in a small town are just looking for what their next step in life was going to be and she chose the military," Talerico said. "Once she got into the military, she really connected with that kind of lifestyle and was really proud to serve her country."

Pfc. Kham Xiong

Xiong, 23, of St. Paul, Minn., was a father of three whose family had a history of military service.

Xiong's father, Chor Xiong, is a native of Laos who fought the Viet Cong alongside the CIA in 1972; Chor's father, Kham's grandfather, also fought with the CIA; and Kham's brother, Nelson, is a Marine serving in Afghanistan.

"I very mad," Xiong's father said Friday. Through sniffles and tears, he said his son died for "no reason" and he has a hard time believing Kham is gone.

Kham Xiong was preparing to deploy to Afghanistan, and his sister Mee Xiong said the family would be able to understand if he would have died in battle.

"He didn't get to go overseas and do what he's supposed to do, and he's dead ... killed by our own people," Mee Xiong said.

Xiong was one of 11 siblings and came to the U.S. when he was just a toddler. He grew up in California, then moved to Minnesota with the family about 10 years ago, Chor Xiong said.

He was married and had three children ages 4, 2 and 10 months. He and his wife had moved to Texas in July, Chor Xiong said.

Xiong attended Community of Peace Academy, graduating in 2004, said high school principal Tim McGowan.

"His greatest attribute was his ability to make people smile and make people laugh. Looking back, that's the fondest memory I have — is that smile of his and that smile that he brought to my face," McGowan said.

For his father, the death of the little boy who followed his dad everywhere was hard to take. "I don't think he's dead," Chor Xiong said, then whispered, "I don't think he's dead."

Juanita Warman

Warman, 55, was a military physician assistant with two daughters and six grandchildren.

Her sister, Margaret Yaggie of Roaring Branch in north-central Pennsylvania, told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette that her sister attended Pittsburgh Langley High School and put herself through school at the University of Pittsburgh. She said her sister spent most of her career in the military.

Major L. Eduardo Caraveo

Caraveo, 52, arrived in the United States in his teens from Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, knowing very little English said his son, also named Eduardo Caraveo.

He earned his doctorate in psychology from the University of Arizona and worked with bilingual special-needs students at Tucson-area schools before entering private practice.

His son told the Arizona Daily Star in Tucson that Caraveo had arrived at Fort Hood on Wednesday and was preparing to deploy to Afghanistan. Eduardo Caraveo spoke to the newspaper from his mother's Tucson home. His father's Web site says he offered marriage seminars with a company based in Woodbridge, Va.

Russell Seager

Russell Seager's uncle said he joined the Army a few years ago because he was a psychiatrist who wanted to help soldiers returning from war adapt to civilian life again. He taught at Bryant & Stratton College in Milwaukee.