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# Amid Mourning, Eerie Details Emerge About Connecticut Shootings

By **RAY RIVERA** and **CHRISTINE HAUGHNEY**

When **Omar S. Thornton** came to the Hartford Distributors warehouse Tuesday morning, his lunch pail contained not one but two 9-millimeter handguns that he often used at a nearby shooting range. According to investigators, Mr. Thornton stashed the lunchbox in a kitchen next to the office where, in minutes, he would learn if he was to be fired from his job as a driver for the Manchester, Conn., company.

Once inside the office, the disciplinary hearing went about as smoothly as such things could, one person who was present said. The company, it turned out, had hired a private investigator, who had been following Mr. Thornton on his delivery route for weeks. They showed him videotape that apparently showed him stealing beer along his route.

Mr. Thornton calmly remarked on the quality of the surveillance camera, signed a resignation letter and asked if he could get a glass of water from the kitchen. He got the guns instead.

He returned to the hallway and killed two of the men who had been in the hearing — one who had been defending his rights, the other who had been pressing the company's case. And over the next several minutes, at moments walking, at others in full chase, he roamed through the plant and the parking lot, shooting repeatedly.

A day after Connecticut's deadliest episode of workplace violence in recent history, new information emerged about what happened over those terrible few minutes at the beer distributorship, and what might have prompted the rampage.

Mr. Thornton, investigators and others with knowledge of his assault said, deliberately shot some of his victims — eight fatally — but appeared to purposely

spare others before ending the rampage by killing himself.

“He didn’t have a master list saying these are the people he was going to go after, but based upon some of the people that were victims, it’s probably likely that he was targeting some individuals,” said Lt. Chris Davis of the Manchester Police Department. “He passed by many individuals and did not shoot them.”

On Wednesday, Mr. Thornton’s girlfriend expanded on claims he was motivated by anger and frustration at what she said was the racist treatment he had been subjected to at the company.

Officials with the union that represents workers at the plant said Mr. Thornton never mentioned racial harassment but had indeed grown frustrated a year ago at the fact that he had not risen to become a driver of the company’s delivery trucks, and that the local union president, Bryan Cirigliano, had successfully worked to secure that promotion for him.

“Our understanding is Bryan intervened,” the union lawyer Gregg Adler said, adding that Mr. Cirigliano “assisted in getting him that training and he got the training and he became a driver, which is a preferred job for some people.”

On Wednesday, the police gave new details about the chaotic scene at Hartford Distributors, and said that, in addition to the 9-millimeter handguns used in the attack, Mr. Thornton also had a shotgun in his truck. All were legally purchased. He also had three other guns registered in his name. Meanwhile, one of the victims, Louis J. Felder, 50, was buried, and hundreds of residents and workers filled [St. Margaret Mary Church in South Windsor](#) for a memorial service.

One of the most detailed and eerie accounts of Mr. Thornton’s attack was captured on the first 911 call to the local police from the plant. Steve Hollander, a company executive who had been in the hearing with Mr. Thornton and survived the attack, made the call despite a bullet wound to his head.

“We need the cops here right away — somebody got shot; I got shot!” a frantic Mr. Hollander told the 911 operator, according to a recording of his call, which came in at 7:25 a.m. “Omar Thornton is shooting people!”

Mr. Hollander continued: “I see him running now. There’s people running. He’s running away right now. He’s shooting at somebody else. He’s still shooting. He’s shooting at a girl. He’s still running after people. He’s not leaving.”

Kristi Hannah, his longtime girlfriend, tried again to largely blame Mr. Thornton’s

bosses and union representatives for the massacre because of what she described as racist behavior and a refusal to deal with his repeated complaints about it.

Ms. Hannah, 26, wept on the front porch of her mother's two-story house in the working-class town of Enfield as she described Mr. Thornton's problems.

She said Mr. Thornton called her from the men's room at the plant last fall to let her hear his boss and a colleague he identified as a union representative say they were going to get rid of someone he thought was him, using a racial slur. Ms. Hannah said she could hear the comments clearly because of how they echoed in the bathroom. She said that even though Mr. Thornton brought the case to his union representative several times, the union never followed up.

"I know they pushed them; they did this to him," Ms. Hannah said. "I know what was said, and I know it was very hurtful, and I know it bothered him a lot."

She added that Mr. Thornton's frustration with his job had been growing for many reasons. He had been frustrated by the inability to become a driver quickly; she said workers filled his truck with so many deliveries that he often worked much later than his co-workers, sometimes until 1:30 a.m. Michael Pletscher, a longtime driver at the company, however, said it was normal for the newest drivers to get the worst and longest shifts.

Ms. Hannah's brother, Ryan Conway, 13, echoed his sister's sentiments. "Omar was a great guy," Ryan said. "This thing was brought on by people who don't treat each other as equals."

At a news conference outside the Local 1035 union hall a few blocks from the warehouse, Mr. Adler, the union lawyer, and its secretary-treasurer, Christopher Roos, said the shootings had struck at the heart of a small, tight-knit organization. "We have 70 employees," Mr. Adler said. "We lost 10 percent of our members."

Mr. Adler dismissed the accusations of racism, saying Mr. Thornton had never filed any complaints with the union, nor did he know of any complaints filed by other employees. "The allegations were news to us," he said. Mr. Adler said Mr. Thornton appeared to have gone after those who were at his disciplinary meeting. "The other people were at the wrong place at the wrong time," he said.

The Hollander family, which owns the distributorship, issued a statement on Wednesday morning expressing grief for their lost employees and saying that they had been asked by the authorities not to discuss any aspect of the shooting while the investigation was under way.

Mr. Thornton's family, after spending much of Tuesday defending him, avoided reporters on Wednesday. Wilbert Holliday, Mr. Thornton's uncle, said that only Mr. Thornton's mother would speak in the future and that she would decide when the moment was right. "We're all victims here," Mr. Holliday said.

*Liz Robbins and Nate Schweber contributed reporting.*