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Manhunt continues for suspect in California quarry shooting

Three people are killed and seven others are injured as a truck driver at a quarry near Cupertino allegedly goes on a shooting rampage.

By Maria L. La Ganga, Lee Romney and Sam Quinones, Los Angeles Times

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Reporting from Cupertino, Calif.; Oakland and San Jose; and Los Angeles -- A truck driver for a quarry near Cupertino went on a shooting rampage early Wednesday, killing three people and wounding seven others, then leading police on a manhunt across normally placid Silicon Valley, authorities said.

Shareef Allman, 47, of San Jose remained at large late Wednesday. The search was concentrated on the border between Cupertino and Sunnyvale, where Allman was last seen. Police said they had found four weapons but believed Allman remained armed and dangerous.

Santa Clara County Sheriff Laurie Smith said Allman showed up for a scheduled 4:15 a.m. safety meeting attended by about 15 people at the Lehigh Permanente Plant, in the hills above Cupertino. He left the meeting, came back and opened fire with a rifle and handgun, she said. Smith described Allman as a disgruntled worker but did not disclose details of what preceded the shooting.

Allman was next seen in a Hewlett-Packard parking lot a mile away, where he allegedly shot an HP employee in the leg and tried to take her car. The victim was taken to a hospital, where she was listed in fair condition.

San Jose residents John Vallejos, 51, and Mark Munoz, 59, died at the quarry. Manuel Pinon, 48, of Newman, south of Modesto, died later at an area hospital. The wounded were not identified by police.

Nine law enforcement agencies, including the FBI, joined the ensuing manhunt. Sheriff's patrol cars blocked the street leading to the plant. Helicopters flew overhead in a hard rain. Search teams at times were heard on emergency radio frequencies going door to door, sometimes roof to roof. Police cordoned off Allman's San Jose apartment.

Some schools in the Cupertino area were locked down as word spread that the shooter remained at large.

Relatives of quarry workers rushed to the scene. By mid-morning, Carmen Rodriguez of San Jose stood at the roadblock holding a box of tissues and waiting for news about Munoz, her brother-in-law.

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Munoz had been at the quarry's safety meeting that morning. "I just got word that he was one of the ones shot," said Rodriguez. "He was working there like 20-some-odd years.... He couldn't wait to retire. He had maybe three years more."

About that time, officials discovered Allman's brown Mercury Cougar at a gas station in Cupertino. A surveillance camera had captured images of the suspect fleeing on foot.

Allman was known as "a real nice guy," was liked by other plant workers and seemed content, said Charles Bryan, another truck driver at the plant.

But Bryan said Allman was acting strangely Tuesday. "This is really weird," he said. "Yesterday it was like no one else was there but him. Our work is very dangerous. We're supposed to have eye contact with each other. But yesterday it was like we weren't there."

Mitchell Julien, 50, who showed up near the scene of the shootings and said he knew Allman, said the suspected gunman was "not a monster."

Bernice Beckum, a neighbor in Allman's San Jose apartment complex, described him as "a big teddy bear."

"He's a good man," she said. "Something very bad, very serious, had to happen for him to snap."

Neighbor Pat Fleming, 50, said Allman helped residents in the complex work on their cars. "He never gave the impression that he was unstable," Fleming said.

Soledad Navarro, whose brother, Francisco Martin, 22, works at the quarry, said that Francisco called her at 7 a.m. from the plant to tell her he was safe. She said her brother knew Allman and described him as a "very bad person."

Allman, a single father who friends say preached nonviolence and was a role model for young African American men, is listed on various websites as the owner of a self-publishing company, run out of his San Jose apartment. A Facebook page touts a novel he apparently wrote about domestic violence — "Amazing Grace."

A YouTube video shows him conducting a street interview with civil rights activist Jesse Jackson on a show he produced for a community-access channel. In a statement, CreaTV San Jose station manager Suzanne St. John-Crane said Allman was one of 130 community producers at the station, not an employee. "Our hearts go out to the families who were affected by this. This is not the Shareef we knew, at all," she said.

The Lehigh Permanente Plant has represented a fading way of life in this high-tech hub of Silicon Valley. Formed in 1939 to provide cement and gravel for Shasta Dam, it was the world's largest cement plant within two years, according to the company's website. The plant is owned by German conglomerate Heidelberg Cement.

Many current employees have followed other family members into the job, said Jeremi Silva, 40, whose father and grandfather each retired from the plant. "I've worked out there, my cousins worked out there, my friends worked out there."

Jeremi Silva said his father, Al Silva, was shocked when he called plant operations Wednesday morning and learned the suspect was Allman. He said Allman was widely liked and attended his father's retirement party about six months ago.

"He's got a big handshake and a big smile for you," Jeremi Silva said of Allman. "I'm just praying for him because this is not something you expect."

But on Wednesday morning, Jeremi Silva was hunkered down in the Santa Clara house where he grew up with "the doors locked and the dogs in the yard," two blocks from where the search for Allman was underway.

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