

Colorado school shooters identified

Up to 16 dead, including suspects

April 21, 1999

Web posted at: 7:30 a.m. EDT (1130 GMT)

LITTLETON, Colorado (CNN) -- Authorities early Wednesday identified Eric Harris, 18, and Dylan Klebold, 17, as the two teen-agers in black trench coats who laughed and hooted as they opened fire on classmates in their suburban Denver high school, killing 15 or 16 people, including themselves, in America's worst instance of school violence.

Steve Davis, a spokesman for the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department, also told reporters that police found "about 10 to 11 explosive devices" in both Columbine High School and in the parking lot of the Littleton, Colorado, school.

After a grim night of identifying victims and notifying next-of-kin, Colorado authorities are expected to release the names of some, if not all, of the dead on Wednesday.

At least 24 others were wounded in Tuesday's shooting spree that moved from the school cafeteria, through first-floor hallways and up to the second-floor library. They were hospitalized with gunshot and shrapnel wounds, and four of them were listed in critical condition.

The two teen-age shooters, both juniors at Columbine, were found dead in the library -- victims of what Jefferson County Sheriff John Stone called a "suicide mission" that involved booby trapping the school with pipebombs -- as well as at least one of the suspect's cars that had a device "set to detonate the gas tank."

Live explosive devices were on their bodies, Stone said on Tuesday.

"We've got ordnance on the bodies of the suspects that needs to be deactivated before we can move those bodies," he said.

Stone said an explosive, apparently on a timing device, went off in the school late Tuesday as bomb squads were combing the school, but no one was injured in the blast.

"This was not triggered by the bomb squad," he said.

Undetonated explosive devices lay near their bodies, investigators said.

The two gun-toting teens were dressed in black trench coats, students said, often laughing as they gunned down their victims and, according to some reports, singling out athletes, sports fans and minority group members.

'Trench Coat Mafia'

Several students said the shooters were members of a small group of "outcasts" at the school known as the "Trench Coat Mafia."

"You could hear them laughing and running upstairs," said one student, who broke down in tears as she recounted the killing spree. "They didn't care who it was and it was all at close range."

Davis said he had no information on a possible motive, but added, "I heard speculation that this had something to do with Adolf Hitler's birthday." Tuesday would have been Hitler's 110th birthday.

Davis said the number of fatalities is still unconfirmed.

"We have a very massive crime scene," he said -- a scene he said SWAT team members described as "grisly and gruesome, sad and tragic."

Davis said SWAT teams were still combing the premises for victims and clues, and that bodies were not being moved because live pipebombs were still inside. He said the bodies would most likely begin being removed from the school sometime Wednesday morning.

Davis said the bodies of most of the victims were found in either the cafeteria or library. Others were found in hallways and some outside, he said.

Stone said guns and suspected explosives were found inside and outside the school and at one of the suspect's homes. Davis said pipebombs exploded inside the school and that there was at least one explosion outside that may have been staged as a diversion.

Worst school violence in U.S. history

It was the deadliest outbreak of school violence in the nation's history, surpassing the mass killings last year at Jonesboro, Arkansas, Paducah, Kentucky, and Pearl, Mississippi, that left a total of 10 dead.

President Bill Clinton said he and the first lady were "profoundly shocked and saddened" by the tragedy and he said a Justice Department crisis team had been dispatched to Colorado.

The middle-class community which places a premium on school athletics was stunned and grief-stricken by the shootings. Student survivors wept openly. Evening prayer vigils were held at local churches.

The shootings began around lunchtime in the school cafeteria, through school hallways, the library and possibly on the school roof where two students said one young man was tossing grenade-like explosives.

Survivors hid in closed classrooms, under desks and tables and in rooms the size of closets to escape gunfire and explosions they could hear amid shouting and screaming in chaotic school corridors.

The bodies of some of the victims, either shot or killed by shrapnel, were found curled up under desks, Davis said.

Stone said the two young men found dead in the school library were among three whose names police had as suspects.

A third youth was taken into custody during the standoff. Davis said investigators at this time do not believe he was involved in the shooting but was a close associate of the two dead suspects.

Parents of students rushed to the scene as heavily armed SWAT teams surrounded the school.

Third suspect detained

One group of three young men dressed in dark clothing was detained for some time by police and later released. Another young man, apparently the so-called third suspect, was later seen being led away in handcuffs.

The school, located in a relatively affluent suburb of 35,000 immediately southwest of Denver, completed a \$13.4 million remodeling and expansion program in 1994 -- including numerous athletic fields, sports facilities, computer and science labs and a state-of-the-art auditorium.

The incident happened on the eve of a state legislative debate over proposals that would allow sheriffs to grant permits for concealed weapons, but create gun-free zones in schools, government buildings, bars and sporting events.

Hours after the drama began, several groups of students who had been trapped inside were evacuated from the school by police SWAT teams, while the suspected shooters remained inside, along with other students hiding elsewhere in the school and a number of gunshot victims.

One male student said he and three friends grabbed "all the kids we could" and hid in a very small room -- as many as 60 of them in all. "Then, after that, we just had to walk out over all the dead bodies."

Another student described seeing one victim whose "face was blown off."

About four hours after the incident began a young man who appeared to have blood on him propelled himself out of a second-story window where officers below tried to catch him.

A short while later several groups -- several dozen in all -- fled the building and were taken away by officers. They did not appear to be injured.

The school has an enrollment of 1,870, according to the school's Web site. The mammoth, sprawling complex was recently renovated. It has numerous playing fields and sports facilities as well as "state of the art auditorium/cafeteria, computer and science labs."

The incident began shortly after 11:15 a.m. MDT (1:15 p.m. EDT).

Littleton, population 35,000, is located southwest of downtown Denver.