

Police hunt killers' helpers

Authorities suspect accomplices may have aided Denver school killing spree by building bombs

By Michael Ellison

22 Apr 1999

A number of pupils could be charged with helping to mount the US's bloodiest school massacre in which two teenage members of an outcast clique dubbed the Trenchcoat Mafia shot dead 13 people, police said yesterday.

Officers, who found two more 35lb propane gas bombs in the kitchens of Columbine high school yesterday, find it hard to believe that Eric Harris, 18, and Dylan Klebold, 17, managed to make and plant more than 30 explosive devices without help.

'I think there is some evidence to suggest that other people were at least aware of what was going on, there are an awful lot of devices and this took a lot of time,' the district attorney Dave Thomas said.

The Trenchcoat Mafia is thought to have about 12 members. Two of Klebold and Harris's friends were questioned after the siege started.

Police used the discovery of more explosives to counter criticism that they should have moved into the school earlier in the siege.

It was not until 36 hours after the shooting began in the prosperous [Denver](#) suburb of Littleton that the bodies of the two killers and their victims - eight boys, four girls and a 42-year-old male teacher - were removed from the school.

'Our priority was public safety,' Mr Thomas said.

There was more evidence yesterday that Harris and Klebold had long planned the massacre. A note found in Klebold's house yesterday stated: 'We don't blame anyone else for our action. This is the way we want to go out.'

A former classmate revealed yesterday that one of several videos that Harris and Klebold made as part of school projects last autumn showed two teenagers firing weapons as they stalked the school hallways.

'It represented what really happened,' Chris Reilly said. 'They had their friends pretend to be jocks and they pretended to be gunmen shooting them. It was disturbing to everyone who saw it.'

Eric Veik, 16, who made several films with Klebold and Harris, said that the two were 'constantly insulted and harassed' by other students. 'I guess they finally decided not to take any more crap and to get back at people.'

Garrett Talocco, who taught the class, and the Jefferson County school district refused to comment on the existence of the video.

The shootings have forced the US's powerful pro-firearms group, the National Rifle Association to scale down plans for its annual convention in Denver next weekend.

The veteran actor Charlton Heston, who is president of the NRA, said that seminars, and a 'world class gun show' had been cancelled. Only the meeting and a reception would go ahead.

'Our spirits must endure this terrible suffering together and so must the freedoms that bring us together,' said Mr Heston. But his solution to violence in schools was not warmly received.

'If there had been even one armed guard in the school he could have saved a lot of lives and perhaps ended the whole thing instantly,' Mr Heston said. 'I'm afraid you have to blame their parents.'

Yesterday both sets of parents apologised to the community for their sons' actions.

Klebold's parents, who live in a \$390,000 (£242,000) house in Jefferson County, said in a statement: 'We cannot begin to convey our overwhelming sense of sorrow for everyone affected by this tragedy.'

'Our thoughts, prayers and heartfelt apologies go out to the victims, their families, friends and the entire community. Like the rest of the country we are struggling to understand why this happened.'

It emerged yesterday that Thomas Klebold, a geophysicist, contacted police during the siege, before victims or suspects were identified, to say that his son might be involved.

Harris's parents live six miles away and his father is understood to have retired from the military recently. They also issued a statement expressing their 'heartfelt sympathy' to the victims' families.

Meetings and church services were staged across Denver yesterday as the country attempted to come to terms with the tragedy.

One of the biggest, held at an amphitheatre in the city centre, attracted thousands who heard religious leaders and politicians appeal for understanding and practical change. One protester's banner read: 'Hey NRA, 15 kids dead, are you feeling guilty yet?'

But stories about the victims and survivors continued to command media attention.

Michael Shoels said his son Isaiah, 18, had been targeted because he was black and an athlete. 'When they came into the school they were actually hounding him - he was liked by far too many people, that was his demise.'

But amid the grief and desire for change, two events struck a discordant note.

Two teenagers living in the Columbine high school area were arrested on suspicion of stealing four handguns from a glass display case in a shop; and four pupils in Colorado Springs staged a mock massacre by dressing in long black coats and Hallowe'en masks and setting off fireworks outside their high school.