

# Diary reveals minute details of plot to kill

## Teenage gunman's notes show Denver massacre was a year in the making

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The Guardian/ April 25, 1999

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The Columbine high school massacre which claimed the lives of 12 students and a teacher, appears to have been a year in the hatching.

A diary believed to have been kept by Eric Harris, 18, one of the two gunmen responsible for the shooting, recorded daily, meticulous planning of the event from April last year.

The sheriff of Jefferson county, John Stone, said the preparations and details outlined in the diary extended to: hand signals between Harris and Dylan Klebold, 17, for ease of communication when they attacked the school; areas of poor lighting inside the building which could serve as hiding places; and the timing and location of the maximum number of students in a specific area.

'They were going for the big kill,' the sheriff told a press conference on Saturday. 'It was basically a time line.'

There were also references to wanting to burn the school down. A 20lb propane gas bomb was found in the kitchen of the school cafeteria last Thursday, two days after the shooting.

The handwritten diary is said to contain German words and phrases, references to Nazi Germany and racial slurs, despite the fact that Klebold's mother, Susan, grew up in a prominent Jewish family in Ohio.

The sheriff said Nazi paraphernalia had been found in Harris's bedroom - prompting him to add to speculation that April 20 was chosen for the shooting because it was the 110th anniversary of Hitler's birth - as well as the barrel of a sawn-off shotgun.

'A lot of this stuff was clearly visible,' Mr Stone said, clearly disturbed. 'I think the parents should be accountable for the kids' actions.'

In the first public statement by a legal representative of either parents, a Denver attorney, Richard Kornfeld, speaking for the parents of Klebold, described the comments as inappropriate.

Mr Stone said he could not comment on whether there were any other names in the diary apart from Klebold's. A Denver television station has reported that two friends of the pair have hired lawyers.

From a synopsis of the diary that he had seen, the sheriff's account also offers some motivations for the actions of the gunmen.

'The whole thing was hate - 'We want to be different. We want to be respected. We don't want jocks pushing us around' - The whole thing was this German Nazi theme: 'We are going to punish you', Mr Stone said.

He did not say the exact date in April 1998 that the diary began. But the formalisation of the deadly plans coincided with five students from Columbine high school, four of them athletes, having charges of felony burglary dropped or reduced - yet another example to the Trenchcoat Mafia of a select few getting privileged treatment.

The charges arose from an incident outside an apartment complex earlier in the year. A resident of the complex, noticing a group of students around a friend's car, had ordered them away from it. The students set upon the resident, who was stabbed repeatedly with a pocket knife.

After the resident contacted police, but while he was still hospitalised, five friends of the students - including the four athletes - broke into his apartment and wrecked it.

In four of the five cases, the felony burglary charges were reduced to less serious misdemeanours. The fifth student, Rocky Hoffschneider junior, a dual state wrestling champion and member of Columbine's football team, pleaded guilty to a second-degree felony and was sentenced to what amounts to a form of probation. If Hoffschneider's record remains clean for four years, the felony will be expunged.

Hoffschneider, expelled from another Denver high school for fighting, came to Columbine in 1997. He, too, was allowed to remain in school and win his second consecutive state wrestling title, which in turn earned him a college scholarship.

To those at the bottom of the social hierarchy at Columbine high school - the so-called Trenchcoat Mafia - this turn of events proved that jocks could get away with anything, including the verbal and physical harassment they routinely visited upon their schoolmates.

'He got away with it,' a former student and member of the group told the Guardian in an interview last week. 'A lot of jocks assumed they could get away with anything at the school because they were on the sports teams.'

'A lot of them,' the student said of his former classmates, 'were outraged that the school had ignored policy.'

At the same time, Harris and Klebold had begun a 12-month 'diversion programme' and community service sentence after being charged with a felony for breaking into a car and stealing electronic equipment.

The pair were released early from the programme. The supervisor who dealt with them wrote glowingly of their intellectual capacity and future prospects.

And the rest is bloodied history. In the school parking lot, what began as flowers and messages left on the car of one of the murdered students, Rachel Scott, has become a shrine spread across 60m (195ft) of adjoining parkland.

Flowers, candles, toys, photographs, inflatable butterflies and thousands of handwritten messages have been attached to makeshift stands.

The shrine has grown among a satellite village of trucks and hastily erected television studios. The world's media have descended upon Littleton, trying to explain the cause and effect of an event America is still trying to come to terms with.

On Saturday there were traffic jams on the two-lane road leading into the park as the community came to offer its respects.

A crowd of 30,000 was expected later today at a memorial service for the victims of the massacre.