

Columbine shootings -- the unanswered questions

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LITTLETON, Colo. -- Day after day, Columbine High investigators step before the mob of cameras and reporters to answer questions about what they know, which is quite a lot. It often seems like nothing compared with what they still want to find out.

A week after Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold rampaged through Columbine with bombs and guns and killed 13 people, investigators are still swarming through the school and fanning out across the region. As of Wednesday, they were following 600 leads -- each another unanswered question.

Did Harris and Klebold act alone? Authorities have named no other suspects. What, if anything, did the pair's parents know? How did they obtain their guns? How did they get their bombs into the school?

"We're so busy trying to confirm what we already do know. It's a little early to try to figure out all that we don't know," said Pam Russell, a spokeswoman for Jefferson County District Attorney Dave Thomas.

An investigation that has produced 500 interviews and 2,000 pieces of evidence -- including hundreds of backpacks abandoned by fleeing students, each backpack a potential bomb -- will naturally produce questions with answers still unclear. When, and how, did Harris and Klebold bring explosives into the school? Did they have help from someone aware of their plans before the attack? That's a real possibility, Sheriff John Stone says.

“There’s too much stuff in there,” he said. “You can’t walk in there blazing with more stuff than you can carry.” Where did they get all the materials to make their explosives? Some apparently came from area hardware stores. “It’s a good possibility that all of the bombs were built out of legal stuff,” sheriff’s spokesman Steve Davis said. --Were the three youths taken into custody near the school involved? Stone was “highly suspicious” of them, but his office said Wednesday that, although they knew the suspects, they had been cleared. --Was Robyn K. Anderson, 18, a Columbine senior identified as Klebold’s girlfriend, involved? Investigators questioned and released her, calling her a witness. But they said Wednesday that she bought three of the guns used, and they want to know if she knew what was planned. How many students were absent from Columbine that day? How many could have been involved? Investigators are checking attendance records.

There are questions about Harris and Klebold themselves Was Eric Harris taking -- or not taking -- psychiatric medication? A family friend told The New York Times that he had been taking something, but a coroner’s toxicology report found no drugs or alcohol in Harris’ system. Authorities wouldn’t discuss the matter Wednesday, but they said any such medication could be a factor in the investigation. What did their parents know? Many people across the country have blamed the Harrises and the Klebolds. But investigators have provided nothing specific to suggest that the parents were forewarned in any way.

“Both boys’ parents at this point have been cooperative with us,” Thomas said. Did they kill themselves simultaneously or at different times? The coroner hasn’t said, and Davis on Wednesday cited a “small possibility” of a murder-suicide.

Dr. Chris Colwell, the responding physician, pronounced them dead at 445 p.m. the day of the shooting, the earliest he could get into the library. then, it’s estimated, they had been dead for hours. How long had they been planning the attack? A diary found at Harris’ house, which referred to himself as “Rebel” and Klebold as “Vodka,” indicated

the plot was hatched a year ago. But it's unclear when they started actually making preparations. What made them so angry? The diary, and things they told acquaintances, appear to blame the students who made them outcasts. But did other issues contribute to their deep rage? Could they have pulled off their grand plan of killing 500 people, hijacking a jet and crashing it into New York City? Investigators doubt it. Why New York? "Maybe the density of the population, for all I know," sheriff's spokesman Steve Davis said. Were warning signs ignored?

Then there are questions about the attack itself, and the environment in which it occurred. How many Columbine students belonged to the "Trenchcoat Mafia"? Was it an organized group or just a flight of fancy? Reports have indicated the possibility of both. What does the cafeteria security videotape contain? "Good footage," the sheriff's office says -- enough to learn more about how events unfolded. What did teachers know about the group?

As for the weapons, how did Klebold and Harris obtain them? They possessed additional guns beyond the ones authorities say Ms. Anderson helped them obtain.

And another, less pressing question is whether students will ever return to the current Columbine High building. Administrators say yes, but some students have already balked at the notion.

"Would you send your child back into that building? I'm sure I would not," Denver Rocky Mountain News columnist Mike Littwin wrote Tuesday. "If it's me, I build a new Columbine."

Columbine students return to class Monday to finish the school year at Chatfield High School, a few miles away.

Finally, there is the most vexing issue, the one on everyone's mind in Littleton and around the country. Why?

That, however, is one question that the most thorough of investigations may never answer.