

# Quiet loners worried other students

Trench Coat Mafia spoke about violence, carried reputation for being outsiders

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Around Columbine High School, they were known as the dorks, the loners, the outcasts.

They called themselves the Trench Coat Mafia. "Reb" and "Vodka" and "Grunt," smart kids with a taste for black dusters and heavy boots and makeup.

On Tuesday, police said two members of the Trench Coat Mafia -- Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold -- shot dozens of people at their school and then shot themselves.

They were "normal kids who did normal stuff," said their friends. "Normal kids" who talked about shooting and bombing, said kids they passed in the hall.

They also were kids who spoke German to each other, listened to German techno music and were fans of Adolf Hitler, said Matthew Good, a neighbor of Harris'. Tuesday was Hitler's birthday.

Friends and classmates gave conflicting descriptions of the pair. Some described quiet, bright eccentrics. Others called them silent, threatening figures clothed in black.

They were 10 kids in a clique who built Web sites for fun. Made movies about how to cope with being a teen-ager. Drank cream soda. Practiced swordplay with bamboo sticks.

They grin from the back pages of the school yearbook. Kids in glasses and baseball caps. "Trench Coat Mafia ... Who says we're different? Insanity's healthy" read the caption next to their photo.

But on Harris' Internet profile were the words: "Quit whining, it's just a flesh wound. Kill 'Em AAALLL."

Junior Pauline Colby, who was a group member until last year, said her former friends had started to scare her.

"I knew they were capable of violence, but I just didn't know they would do it," she said. "They were just very angry, but they didn't know how to release their anger. They were angry about people not accepting them and no one knowing how smart they were."

Derek Oulton, a senior at Columbine, remembered hearing group members talk about plans for violence. "I heard Eric Harris talk about bombs. There was a bomb threat last year," he said. "They just have a hatred for everyone."

Good said he heard a lot of noise coming from the Harris garage over the weekend. "It sounded like power tools and breaking glass," Good said.

Both youths had two parents at home, and came from families neighbors described as very fine people.

Senior Alisa Owen called the group weird people with a sick sense of humor. "They were joking around saying, 'We are going to shoot you,'" she said.

No one took them seriously, said both Owen and Greg Barnes, a Columbine basketball player.

"That was a mistake," Barnes said.

"They would just sit in the back of the room," he said. "They didn't get involved. They wrote poetry, but their poems were weird.

"They seem to have their own way of doing things. People made fun of them and when I heard someone say they wanted revenge, I said, 'That makes sense.' I just stayed away from them."

Their friends say the Trench Coat Mafia was born about three years ago. No special thought went into the name, said Thaddeus Boles, a member of the group.

"We all just started wearing them to keep warm," he said. "We all pretty much got them. It was something we liked."

The group considered themselves "outside the norm," said Mark Heckler, father of group member Zach Heckler. His son, he said, was upset.

"We know these kids," Mark Heckler said. Nothing, he said, indicated that Harris or Klebold were about to explode.

Boles called Harris and Klebold two of his best friends. He said he saw them both Saturday night at the school's elaborate "New York, New York" after-prom party.

"They were both in pretty good spirits, going with the flow," he said.

They didn't seem depressed, he said.

"All of us pretty much got along with everybody," he said.

And they were very smart, said choir teacher Lee Andres, who remembers the 6'4", blond Klebold the best. Klebold, who always wore a black baseball cap backwards, ran the sound for one of last year's school musicals.

"They were extremely bright, but not good students," Andres said. "I know that two of them flunked out of school just this year, and not for the lack of brains. They disliked authority. They did not like to be told what to do."

Dominic Duran shared a creative writing class with Harris.

Last Friday, Harris wrote one of the best stories in the class and read it aloud. "It was about how his brother and him would always play war," Duran said.

"It sounded like it was taking place in the forest. They were talking about hiding under logs and shooting at the enemy."