

Suspect in Colorado attack called recluse who left few clues

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Colorado Springs (Colo): A gunman who police say staged a deadly attack on a Planned Parenthood clinic was a recluse who stashed food in the woods, avoided eye contact, warned neighbors about government spying and passed out anti-Obama pamphlets, those who knew him said.

Authorities say Robert Lewis Dear, 57, killed three people, including a police officer, during an hours-long standoff before surrendering at the Colorado Springs clinic. Police have not disclosed a motive, but the city's mayor, John Suthers, said people can make "inferences from where it took place," referring to the clinic.

The facility provides women's health services, including abortions, and has long been the site of regular anti-abortion protests. A Roman Catholic priest who has held weekly Mass in front of the clinic for 20 years said Dear wasn't part of his group.

"I don't know him from Adam," said Rev. Bill Carmody. "I don't recognize him at all."

The attack thrust the clinic to the center of the ongoing debate over Planned Parenthood. It was re-ignited in July when anti-abortion activists released undercover video they said showed the organization's personnel negotiating the sale of fetal organs.

Planned Parenthood has denied seeking any payments beyond legally permitted reimbursement costs for donating the organs to researchers. Still, the National Abortion Federation, an association of service providers, says it has seen a rise in threats at clinics nationwide since the video's release.

At a vigil Saturday at All Souls Unitarian Church, Rev. Nori Rost called the gunman a "domestic terrorist." In the back of the room, someone held a sign that said: "Women's bodies are not battlefields. Neither is our town."

Vicki Cowart, the regional head of Planned Parenthood, drew a standing ovation when she walked to the pulpit. She promised to quickly reopen the clinic. "We will adapt. We will square our shoulders and we will go on," she said.

After her remarks, a woman in the audience stood up, objected to the vigil becoming a "political statement" and left.

Cowart said the gunman "broke in" to the clinic Friday but didn't get past a locked door leading to the main part of the facility. She said there was no armed security when the shooting began.

In the parking lot of the two-story building, one man said the gunman shot at him as he pulled his car out, blasting two holes in his windshield. Inside, one worker ducked under a table and called her brother to tell him to take care of her kids if she was killed.

At one point, an officer whispered reports into his radio as he crept through the building. Others relayed information from surveillance cameras and victims in hiding. "We've got a report of a victim texting from just east of the lobby," someone said.

In the end, a six-year veteran University of Colorado police officer was killed. Two civilians also died, though their identities weren't immediately released. Five other officers and four people were hospitalized.

Cowart said all 15 clinic employees survived and worked hard to make sure everyone else got into safe spaces and stayed quiet.

Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper said the city is mourning and praised the bravery of first responders. He said the nation is wrestling with the causes of violence but that it's too early to discuss that while the city is reeling.

"This is the kind of thing that hits the entire community in the gut," he said.

Cowart said the organization would learn from the attack. When asked if the clinic should have more security, she said the clinic's clients shouldn't have to walk through metal detectors.

The attack marked the latest mass shooting to stun the nation, and drew the now-familiar questions about a gunman's motives and whether anyone, from government to relatives, could have done anything to prevent an attack.

Those who knew Dear said he seemed to have few religious or political leanings.

Neighbors who lived beside Dear's former South Carolina home say he hid food in the woods as if he was a survivalist and said he lived off selling prints of his uncle's paintings of Southern plantations and the Masters golf tournament.

John Hood said Saturday that when he moved to Walterboro, Dear was living in a doublewide mobile home next door. Hood said Dear seemed to be a loner and very strange but not dangerous. He pointed to a wooden fence separating their land and said he put it up because Dear liked to skinny dip.

Hood said that Dear rarely talked to them, and when he did, he tended to offer unsolicited advice such as recommending that Hood put a metal roof on his house so the U.S. government couldn't spy on him.

"He was really strange and out there, but I never thought he would do any harm," he said.

Dear also lived part of the time in a cabin with no electricity or running water in Black Mountain, North Carolina. He kept mostly to himself, his neighbors said. When he did talk, it was a rambling combination of a number of topics that didn't make sense.

He tended to avoid eye contact, said James Russell, who lived a few hundred feet down the mountain from Dear's cabin. "If you talked to him, nothing with him was very cognitive," Russell said.

Other neighbors knew Dear too, but they didn't want to give their names because they said they were scared of him.

Russell and others said the only companion they saw with him was a mangy dog that looked to be in such bad shape they called animal control because they worried he was beating it.

In the small town of Hartsel, Colorado, about 60 miles west of Colorado Springs, about a dozen police vehicles and fire trucks were parked outside a small white trailer belonging to Dear located on a sprawling swath of land. Property records indicate Dear purchased the land about a year ago.

A law enforcement official said authorities searched the trailer Saturday but found no explosives. The official, who has direct knowledge of the case, said authorities also talked with a woman who was living in the trailer. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because the official was not authorized to speak publicly about the ongoing investigation.

Zigmond Post, who lives near the RV where Dear lived, said he didn't have many interactions with Dear but he said the

suspect once gave him a pamphlet opposing President Barack Obama.

"He didn't talk about them or anything. He just said 'Look them over when you get a chance,'" Post said.

Jamie Heffelman, owner of the Highline Cafe in Hartsel, said residents would occasionally see the 6-foot-4-inch, 250-pound Dear at the post office to get his mail but he never said much.

"Nobody really knows him. He stays to himself," she said.

- AP