



Andy Brown, ***Warnings Unheeded: Twin Tragedies at Fairchild Air Force Base***

(Spokane, WA: WU Press, 2016), 378 pages, \$19.99 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-0-9978-6340-6.

Reviewed by Dr. Joshua Sinai, Senior Analyst, KGH

The author of this important book, who at the time of the incident was a five-year veteran of the Air Force who, deployed as a security policeman on bike patrol, was responsible for firing what became known as “the shot” that stopped Dean Mellberg's murderous shooting rampage through the Fairchild Air Force Base hospital complex on June 20, 1994, in Spokane, Washington, killing four and wounding 23 others. Mellberg, a mentally unstable 20-year-old who had been dishonorably discharged from the Air Force as an airman some five weeks earlier, had embarked on his vengeful shooting rampage against a psychiatrist and psychologist whose diagnosis of him had finally led to his discharge from the service. In this book, the author meticulously reconstructs all the events in Mellberg's troubled life and problematic Air Force service that had led to the shooting, including the impact of the incident on his own life and subsequent military career. Tragically, for the shooting's victims and all those who had to endure associating with him during his problematic military service, as the author writes, Mellberg had always been unable to fit in, with several psychological exams revealing him as having a “generalized anxiety disorder with strong obsessive traits,” with a potential to do harm to himself and others. (p. 25). Despite these warning signs, he was able to continue his military service, because, as the author writes, “On three separate occasions, squadron leadership selected to retain Mellberg on active duty despite strong recommendations from mental health professionals to discharge him.” (p. 297). Moreover, Mellberg was also “able to affect his treatment by purging unfavorable documentation from his medical records.” (p. 297). This case had important repercussions for the Department of Defense's mental health instructions, the author adds, with new instructions including “a requirement to development treatment plans for ‘imminently dangerous’ service members before they are discharged. (p. 298). They also defined “imminent and potential dangerousness and established requirements to take precautions against threatened injury.” (p. 298). This book discusses another “warning unheeded” incident, as well, concerning a B-52 pilot at the base whose reckless aerial maneuvers had caused concern among his colleagues, eventually leading to crashing his aircraft at an air show practice mission four days after Mellberg's shooting. Also discussed is the author's own troubled recovery process in the aftermath of the shooting incident, including his eventual successful recovery and work at the Department of Homeland Security. The book also includes valuable reference materials, such as a listing of the traits of a violent person and the phased-pathway to violence of mass killers, as well as reproductions of Mellberg's psychiatric evaluations. As a meticulous reconstruction and assessment of Mellberg's pathway to violence and how his case was handled by military authorities, as well as its impact on the author's life and career, this is one of the most insightful books written on the phenomenon of active shooters and how they end up affecting the lives of others in their surroundings.

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