

German teacher among victims

Los Angeles Times

Monday's session of the class in introductory German was nearly an hour old when the shooter entered the classroom in Norris Hall and fired dozens of rounds.

One of the first was aimed at the head of the teacher, Christopher J. Bishop, who wore his hair long, rode his bike to campus and worked alongside his wife in the foreign languages department at Virginia Tech.



Christopher Bishop

Authorities had not publicly identified any victims as of late Monday, but colleagues confirmed that Bishop, 35, was among those killed during the rampage.

His friends said they were struggling to comprehend the violent death of an instructor who was known for his gentle manner and generosity toward students.

"I don't think he was the type of person who had an enemy," said Troy Paddock, a close friend whose wife also teaches in the German program. "He was a very friendly person. He did weekly gatherings for students out of class to practice German where they could talk about anything. He was a nice and helpful person."

On the Web sites where he posted samples of the art he created with his digital camera, Bishop described himself as "mild-mannered" and "bespectacled." He was an avid hiker and movie fan, a Georgia native who paid close attention to the wins and losses of the Atlanta Braves.

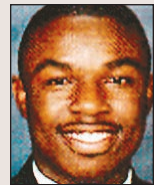
Richard Shryock, the chair of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, said he was with Bishop's wife, Stefanie Hofer, when authorities informed her that her husband was among those dead.

"She was as composed as I think a person could possibly be," Shryock said.

Coroner confirms student's death

A student from Georgia was one of the first victims shot to death.

Ryan "Stack" Clark was shot in the neck in West Ambler Johnston Hall, where the gunman started



Ryan Clark

his rampage, said Vernon Collins, the coroner in Columbia County, Ga.

Collins said the Virginia State Police asked him and a deputy sheriff to notify Clark's family in his hometown of Martinez, Ga.

His mother, Letitie Clark, "was in shock and disbelief that her son was gone," Collins said. Collins said he didn't know whether Clark died at the scene or at the hospital. He said an autopsy will be conducted by a medical examiner in Roanoke.

According to Virginia Tech's Marching Virginians Web site, Clark was a fifth-year member of the marching band program and a resident adviser at West Ambler Johnston. He expected to graduate in December 2006 and planned to pursue a doctorate in psychology with a focus in cognitive neuroscience.

— John Cramer

Tech's response questioned



STEPHANIE KLEIN-DAVIS | The Roanoke Times

Virginia Tech President Charles Steger (from left), university spokesman Larry Hincker and Tech Police Chief Wendell Flinchum faced tough questions from the media after Monday's massacre.

Officials were bombarded with questions about campus security at news conferences. Tech President Charles Steger defended the university's response.

Associated Press

BLACKSBURG — On a university campus of 2,600 acres, with more than 26,000 students, ironclad security is not a practical goal. Even so, tough questions swiftly surfaced as to how effectively Virginia Tech authorities responded to Monday's horrific massacre.

Why were campus police so sure the threat was a "domestic dispute" contained in one dormitory, when most of the killings occurred two hours later in a classroom building?

Why were they interviewing a "person of interest" off campus in regard to the first shootings at the very time the classroom killings were unfolding?

Why was there a lag of more than two hours after the first shootings before an alarm was e-mailed campuswide — around the time the second, more deadly burst of carnage occurred? And more generally, some security experts wondered, was the school's crisis planning and emergency communications system up to the task?

Bombarded with security questions at afternoon and evening news conferences, Virginia Tech President Charles Steger said authorities believed the shooting at the West Ambler Johnston dorm, first reported about 7:15 a.m., was a domestic dispute and thought the gunman had fled the campus after killing two people.

"We had no reason to suspect any other incident was going to occur," he said.

The dormitory was locked down immediately after the shooting, Steger said, and a phone bank was activated to alert the resident advisers there so they could go door-to-door warning the 900 students in the dorm. Security guards surrounded the dorm, he said, and others began a sweep across campus.

Asked why he didn't order a lockdown of the entire campus, Steger noted that thousands of nonresident students were arriving for 8 a.m. classes, fanning out across the sprawling campus from their parking spots.

"Where do you lock them down?" Steger asked.

He said security on campus will be tightened now, but offered no details.

"We obviously can't have an armed guard in front of every classroom every day of the year," he said.

Overall, Steger defended the university's response, saying: "You can only make a decision based on the information you know at that moment in time. You don't have hours to reflect on it."

Virginia Tech Police Chief Wendell Flinchum said there were no surveillance cameras in place that recorded the gunman entering Norris Hall, the classroom building where 31 people were killed. Among the dead was the gunman, who killed himself before police could break through a chained door and reach the second-floor room where the massacre occurred.

Some students were upset that the gunman was able to strike a second time, saying the first notification they got of the shootings came in an e-mail at 9:26 a.m. The e-mail mentioned a "shooting incident" at West Ambler Johnston, said police were investigating, and asked students to be cautious and contact police about anything suspicious.

Student Maurice Hiller said he went to a 9 a.m. class two buildings away from the engineering building, and no warnings were coming over the outdoor public address system on campus at the time.

"I was troubled with the fact that two hours elapsed from the first shooting," said Brant Martel, 23, a junior.

But Edmund Henneke, an associate dean

of engineering who was in the building where the second round of shootings occurred, said criticism of authorities' response was unfair.

"We have a huge campus," he said. "You have to close down a small town and you can't close down every way in or out."

Security experts not connected with Virginia Tech said their immediate questions focused on whether the university had adopted and practiced a plan to handle such dire crises, and whether its system of emergency communications was state-of-the-art.

"It is critical for them to have solid emergency plans in place to deal with crisis situations," said Kenneth Trump of National School and Safety Services in Cleveland. "The key is to have a solid communications component in place to deal with notifying students, parents, faculty, staff and the media what is going on."

"The most critical element that falls apart in any type of emergency, especially at educational institutions, is often communications," Trump said.

University officials acknowledged that crisis communication is a challenge on such a large campus. They said they have been working on creating an alert system that would send text messages to staff and student cellphones, but the system is not yet ready.

Michael Dorn of Safe Havens International in Macon, Ga., which has advised many universities on security measures, said campus emergency plans can be ineffective unless staff and students are trained on how to cooperate.

"They can make the difference between one or two people being victimized and larger numbers," Dorn said. "But it's a lot harder to do that in higher education than in a K-12 school. A lot of higher ed officials don't have the basic things in place that our K-12 schools have."

"We obviously can't have an armed guard in front of every classroom."

Charles Steger, Virginia Tech president

'He didn't say anything,' sophomore says

Derek O'Dell estimated that 10 to 15 of the students in his class of 20 were shot.

By Reed Williams
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The gunman in the black leather jacket came into the classroom shooting and did not leave until everything was still, said Virginia Tech sophomore Derek O'Dell.

"He didn't say anything; that's the weirdest part," said O'Dell, who was shot in the arm during Monday's massacre at Virginia Tech. "No screaming, no yelling. He just shot people."

O'Dell, a 2005 graduate of Cave Spring High School in Roanoke County, said he was in German class on the second floor of Norris Hall when he heard what he thought was a hammer banging on the wall of a nearby room.

Suddenly, the door swung open and the shooter, described as an Asian man wearing a jacket and a maroon baseball cap, mechanically opened fire, reloaded his handgun and then

started shooting again, O'Dell said. "He was very quick in reloading, so it looked like he'd been trained," said the 20-year-old biological sciences student.

O'Dell said he crouched under his desk while some of his classmates, and possibly their professor, were shot around him.

"No one was really moving," he said.

O'Dell estimated that 10 to 15 of the roughly 20 students in his class were shot. He did not know how many were killed.

At least 33 people were killed in Monday's shootings at Norris Hall, a classroom building, and earlier at West Ambler Johnston Hall, a dormitory. Authorities had not identified the gunman late Monday night.

After the shooter left O'Dell's classroom, O'Dell said that he and a man who appeared uninjured shut the door and barricaded it with their feet, fearing the gunman would return.

"We heard more gunshots down the hall, and I realized I had been shot," O'Dell said.

He said he wrapped his belt around the wound on his upper right arm to stop the bleeding.

As they held shut the wooden door, which did not have a lock, the shooter returned and tried to muscle inside, O'Dell said.

"He got the door open maybe an inch or two and then we were able to shut it again," O'Dell recalled.

The man shot at the door from outside and then left, O'Dell said. More shots were fired outside the room, and the shooter came back again and tried the door. Again he shot at the door and walked away.

The shooter was found in Norris Hall after he killed himself, authorities said.

O'Dell said he was taken from the building after police arrived.

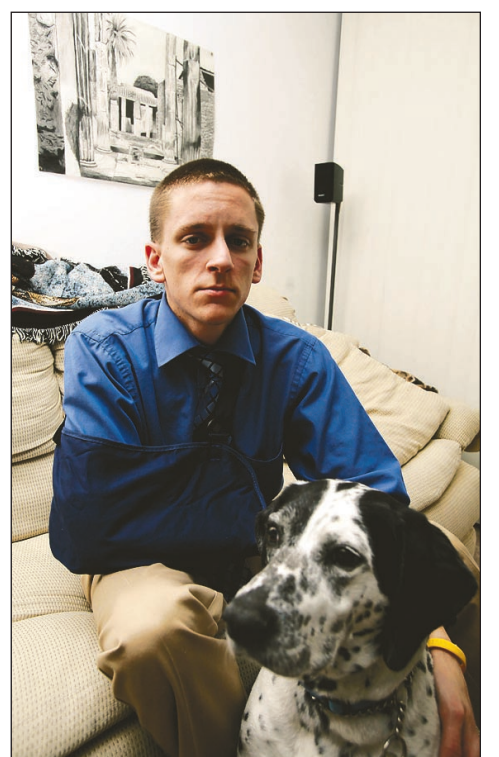
He was treated and released from Montgomery Regional Hospital.

O'Dell's father, Roger O'Dell, said he heard about the ordeal after his sister-in-law left him a message between 9:30 and 10 a.m., and his son called from the hospital about 10:20 a.m.

Roger O'Dell said he did not know if anyone from Virginia Tech tried to contact him.

"I didn't believe it at first," Roger O'Dell said.

"And the magnitude ... I didn't realize it at first."



STEPHANIE KLEIN-DAVIS | The Roanoke Times

Derek O'Dell, 20, said he and another man barricaded the door to their German class in Norris Hall as the gunman tried to re-enter. Later, O'Dell realized he'd been shot.

Text of e-mails sent to staff, students by Virginia Tech

Timeline and text of e-mails sent out Monday by Virginia Tech to students and staff after the first 911 call at 7:15 a.m. reporting a shooting in West Ambler Johnston dormitory.

9:26 a.m. Subject: Shooting on campus.

A shooting incident occurred at West Ambler Johnston earlier this morning. Police are on the scene and are investigating.

The university community is urged to be cautious and are asked to contact Virginia Tech Police if you observe anything suspicious or with information on the case. Contact Virginia Tech Police at 231-6411

Stay attuned to the www.vt.edu. We will post as soon as we have more information.

9:50 a.m. Subject: Please stay put

A gunman is loose on campus. Stay in buildings until further notice. Stay away from all windows

10:17 a.m. Subject: All Classes Canceled; Stay where you are

Virginia Tech has canceled all classes. Those on campus are asked to remain where there are, lock their doors and stay away from windows. Persons off campus are asked not to come to campus.

10:53 a.m. Subject: Second Shooting Reported; Police have one gunman in custody

In addition to an earlier shooting today in West Ambler Johnston, there has been a multiple shooting with multiple victims in Norris Hall.

Police and EMS are on the scene.

Police have one shooter in custody and as part of routine police procedure, they continue to search for a second shooter.

All people in university buildings are required to stay inside until further notice.

All entrances to campus are closed.

— Associated Press