

Texas Gunman Had Troubling Past Filled with Violence



Summary: The man responsible for shooting to death 26 people would never have been allowed to own a handgun if the proper steps had been taken.

A history of very violent behavior didn't stop the Texas church gunman from buying four guns and using them against his mother-in-law and other churchgoers. Devin Patrick Kelley is responsible for the deadliest mass shooting in Texas history but the Air Force must take some of that responsibility for failing to report his conduct to the proper authorities, which would have prevented him from legally buying a firearm.

Kelley, a former airman, was discharged from the Air Force after serving 12-months in a military prison for beating up his then-wife and stepson. President Donald Trump called the shooting a "mental health problem at the highest level" not a "guns situation." While his mental history has not been released, his violent tendencies have to be an indicator of a mental problem, although not perhaps a specific mental illness.

Domestic violence prohibits someone under Texas law from buying a gun. However, Texas was not aware of his domestic assault conviction because it was a military issue. The Air Force has acknowledged that they did not properly pass down his conviction to civilian law enforcement so that the information could be included in the federal database that licenses gun dealers to run background checks on those looking to buy firearms. They said, "Had his information been in the database, it should have prevented gun sales to Kelley."

The Air Force is now conducting an investigation into why the information was not handed over to the proper law enforcement agencies. Former Air Force chief prosecutor Col. Don Christensen told CNN, "Somebody really dropped the ball."

Kelley ended up buying four firearms – two in Texas and two in Colorado – between 2014 and this year. There were two handguns found in his vehicle and a Ruger AR-556 rifle was found outside the church where he had dropped it when a neighbor to the church opened fire on Kelley, shooting him twice. Kelley fled the scene and was found dead a few miles from his car of a self-inflicted gunshot to the head.

A recent family dispute that occurred weeks before the shooting in Sutherland Springs seems to have set him off. He had sent threatening text messages to his mother-in-law, who attended the First Baptist Church but not on that day. His wife's grandmother was one of the victims though.

Kelley had applied for a license to carry permit in Texas but was declined. Buying a gun and having a license to carry one are two different processes that do not rely on each other.

He had served in logistics readiness at Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico from 2010 until 2014 when he was kicked out of the service for bad conduct. The attacks on his then-wife and stepson happened in 2011 and 2012. In his 2012 court-martial, he was charged with assault and battery against his spouse, aggravated assault against his stepson, four charges involving firearms in which two were for pointing a loaded firearm at his wife and the other two for pointing an unloaded firearm.

The Air Force dropped the firearms charges in exchange for Kelley pleading guilty to the assault charges. As part of the agreement, he admitted to hitting his stepson "with a force likely to produce death or grievous bodily harm." The young boy suffered a fracture to his skull and internal bleeding. He also admitted to hitting and kicking his wife, choking her and pulling her hair.

Police answered a domestic violence call in 2014 involving his girlfriend, who eventually became his second wife. He was also charged with animal cruelty in Colorado for punching a dog when a neighbor at an RV park in Colorado Springs saw his harm the dog. He was ordered to pay \$500 in fines and restitution plus a deferred sentence of 18 months of unsupervised probation. Once he met the terms, the guilty plea was withdrawn and the case dismissed.

As Kelley was going through the church, targeting those with crying babies, he was eventually confronted by the neighbor Stephen Willeford, who had run out of his house barefoot shooting at Kelley. The two exchanged gunfire, prompting Kelley to flee but Willeford was not going to stop there. He said, "I know I hit him." Willeford flagged down a pickup truck which then led to a high-speed chase. The two called 911 while they were chasing Kelley to inform them of where he was heading. Kelley made his own phone call to his father saying he had been hit and wasn't going to make it. His car soon after crashed and flipped in a ditch.

Police have recovered around 450 rounds.

When questioned if “extreme vetting” for gun purchases should be implemented, just like his call for “extreme vetting” of those entering the country, President Trump responded that if that was the case, then there would have been even more victims because Willeford would not have been able to stop Kelley. He said, “If he didn’t have a gun, instead of having 26 dead, you would have had hundreds more dead.”

Do you think violent behavior is a mental illness? Share your thoughts with us in the comments below.

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