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Factory Killer Had a Known History of Anger and Racial Taunts

By DAVID M. HALBFINGER

MERIDIAN, Miss., July 9 — When he overheard a black man complimenting a white woman a couple of years ago on the factory floor, Doug Williams stepped up to the man and, using a racial slur, angrily told him blacks had no business being with blond women, witnesses recalled today.

When a black colleague complained last month that the white protective shoe-covering Mr. Williams was wearing on his head looked like a Ku Klux Klansman's pointy hood, and his boss at the Lockheed Martin aircraft parts plant a few miles outside of Meridian told him to take the bootie off his head or go home, Mr. Williams went home, company officials said today.

On Monday, Mr. Williams, 48, told his father he was ticked off that he would have to attend an ethics and sensitivity training course the next morning, the authorities say. A few minutes after it began, Mr. Williams left the room, returned from his pickup truck armed to the teeth, and began blasting away at close range at people who had known him, and known of his quick temper and simmering hatred, for years.

In less than 10 minutes, the authorities said, five people were dead, including at least one who had been offended by the bootie stunt three weeks earlier. An additional nine were wounded, at least one trying to wrest a shotgun away from Mr. Williams, as he stalked through the plant floor, shooting at some people, letting others live, following no discernible pattern.

At last, he came upon Shirley J. Price, the girlfriend he lived with, who begged Mr. Williams to stop, the authorities said. He did, but only after turning his shotgun around and firing one last shot, at his own upper left chest. He fell and died before her.

Co-workers said Mr. Williams's racial prejudice, along with his short temper, were well known inside the plant, which makes parts for C-130J Hercules transports and vertical stabilizers for F-22 Raptor jets.

Tonight, the president of Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Company, Dain Hancock, provided what few details were held in Mr. Williams's personnel file, dating to his hiring in 1984. From those details and interviews with the authorities and co-workers, a picture emerged of a hard-working but troublesome, troubled employee who had already come to the attention of officials at the company's headquarters in Fort Worth, Tex.

In December 2001, when co-workers say Mr. Williams confronted the black male co-worker for complimenting the white woman, Mr. Hancock said the incident was recorded in Mr. Williams's personnel file. He was described as making threatening remarks to the man. He was suspended and sent for professional anger-management counseling for two weeks at a psychological facility in Meridian, Mr. Hancock said.

Mr. Williams was then cleared for work and was monitored for a year afterward. "By all indications, he had changed remarkably," Mr. Hancock said.

The incident on June 12 involving Mr. Williams's protective gear did not get written up, Mr. Hancock said, because the man who complained to a supervisor wanted to remain anonymous. Mr. Hancock said that Mr. Williams, in a "playful mood," had denied meaning anything racially inflammatory by wearing the bootie, and claimed instead that he had been "hazing" a new employee, also white, by making him also wear one on his head.

But when Mr. Williams refused to comply with the supervisor's order to remove it, he was told to leave until he was ready to follow instructions. He did not come back for five or six days, Mr. Hancock said.

Janice Jenkins, a senior shop steward of the plant's machinists' union, which Mr. Williams elected not to join, said workers at the plant wore the white Tyvek gear to protect their clothing and hair from paint, dirt and sprayed lubricant. She said no head coverings were available, so Mr. Williams put a shoe covering on his head. Some workers laughed, but a few black workers, among them Sam Cockrell, objected, and one went to a supervisor.

On Tuesday morning, Mr. Williams showed up at the training session reluctantly, witnesses said. But when he was seated at a table with three black men — Brad Bynum, Alvin Collier and Mr. Cockrell — "he got up and left and said, 'You all can handle this,'" said Brenda Dubose, who was wounded.

When Mr. Williams returned minutes later and began firing, a white co-worker, Micky Fitzgerald, spoke up to stop him.

"Micky Fitzgerald was in the wrong place at the wrong time," Ms. Jenkins said. "He stood up and he says, 'Doug, you really don't want to do this.' Doug says, 'Yeah, I want to do this.'"

He then shot Mr. Fitzgerald fatally in the face, she said.

After Mr. Williams shot up the training room a first time, he walked onto the factory floor, where he killed three people and wounded two, said Sheriff Billy Sollie of Lauderdale County. At some point Mr. Williams returned to the training room, but those who had not been killed now played dead. Mr. Williams left again — and this time, the survivors barricaded the door.

One co-worker, Pete Threatt, tried to stop Mr. Williams but was thrown aside "like a rag doll," Sheriff Sollie said. And as Mr. Williams was reloading, Mr. Collier, already shot in the left midsection and right shoulder, grabbed for his shotgun, according to Mr. Collier's relatives.

Struggling for control of the gun, Mr. Williams finally pulled the trigger and blew a hole in Mr. Collier's hand. By today, Mr. Collier had been through three operations and lost two fingers, but doctors were trying to save his hand, said one of his 22 sisters and eight brothers, many of whom had driven down in a convoy from Tunica, Miss., to take turns by his side.

Mr. Williams left a son and daughter, both in their early 20's, from a marriage that ended in divorce in the 1980's. Several of his relatives declined to be interviewed, as did Ms. Price, with whom he shared a double-wide mobile home nestled against the woods along a two-mile-long dirt road just east of Meridian.

Sheriff Sollie said Mr. Williams, who had taken to working Sundays and frequent overtime shifts, had not always been sleeping there lately, but he did not know why. This morning, chickens roamed the yard, five old cars were parked under the pine trees out back, and a kiddie pool and jungle gym lay unused in the shade. A man who did not identify himself came outside only to ask visitors to leave.

Many of the workers at the plant were religious people, and through them, it seemed, nearly everyone in this tight-knit city of 40,000 was touched in one way or another by the shootings. Charlie Miller, 58, who was killed, owned his own masonry company but had returned to the plant full-time in March. He was also the pastor of the First Tabernacle Church of God. Charles Scott, 54, who was wounded, is a deacon at 31st Street Baptist Church. And Mr. Cockrell, 46, who was killed, was a part-time chaplain at the county jail.

This afternoon, disbelieving co-workers and their relatives were still comparing notes about Mr. Williams. The family of Lynette McCall, 47, who was killed, said she had felt she was a target of Mr. Williams because she was black. But she put up a brave face, her daughter, Sharita, said.

"She had told my dad, 'Don't worry about me, because I work in an area with a lot of metal, and if anything happens I can jump behind that,' " she said.