

Four dead following hostage situation at Northern California veterans home

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A hostage situation in Northern California ended Friday evening with the discovery of four people dead, after a gunman armed with a rifle entered an employee going-away party at a state-run veterans' home and took three staff of a private nonprofit hostage earlier in the day.

Police told reporters that the bodies of the gunman and three women were found when law enforcement entered the room where the hostages were being held. Repeated attempts to make contact using the cell phone number of the suspect did not yield any results in the hours leading up to the discovery of the bodies.

Around 10:20 a.m. local time, law enforcement responded to a report of shots fired in the small, affluent Napa Valley community of Yountville, in Northern California. Napa County Sheriff John Robertson told a press conference that a deputy responding to the incident exchanged "many shots," though he said that no injuries had been sustained. Police radio transmissions indicated that as many as 30 shots were fired during the exchange between the gunman and the deputy.

The hostages were employees of the nonprofit organization Pathway House, which provides services to veterans of the so-called "War on Terror" in Afghanistan and Iraq who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Pathway House operates as a private entity on the campus of the Veterans Home of California-Yountville, which is a public housing facility administered by the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet).

According to the CalVet website, the Veterans Home of California-Yountville was opened in 1884 and is the largest veterans home in the United States, with 300 employees and approximately 850 residents who are veterans of World War II, Korea, Vietnam,

Afghanistan, and Iraq.

The facility is funded in large part through grants from the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), which in recent years has faced numerous scandals over long wait times for medical treatment, decrepit facilities, and poor services.

Local resident Larry Kamer told the Associated Press that his wife, Deveraux Smith, was attending a going-away party for a coworker when the gunman arrived, armed with a rifle. The suspect allowed most of the staff in the room to leave but refused to release three of the employees. Smith, a fundraiser for Pathway House, was among those who were not permitted to leave.

By the afternoon, hundreds of police and federal agents had descended on the area, including a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) tactical unit and agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF).

Police radio communications described the suspect as five feet and six inches tall and armed with a rifle with an attached scope and a stash of bullets around his neck. Law enforcement told the press that the identity of the suspect is known, though they have not released any additional information on the identities of either the suspect or the hostages.

While the identity and motive of the suspect have not been released to the public, California state senator Bill Dodd told local news station NBC7 that the gunman was a veteran of the wars in the Middle East who was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Dodd also reported that the suspect had been asked to leave the home earlier in the week.

This tragic incident again highlights the deep psychological trauma suffered by those recruited to fight in America's imperialist wars. A 2008 study by the US government-funded RAND Corporation found

that nearly 20 percent of veterans who had returned from deployments in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan suffered from PTSD or depression. According to the latest government figures an average of 20 veterans take their lives every day, adding up to more than 7,000 suicides per year.



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