

Details emerge about Northern California veterans home shooting suspect

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More information has emerged in recent days shedding light on the man accused of shooting three employees of a nonprofit after taking them hostage at a veterans home in the affluent Napa Valley town of Yountville, in Northern California on Friday.

Albert Cheung Wong, a 36-year-old veteran of the war in Afghanistan, has been identified as the man who entered a going-away party for an employee of the nonprofit Pathway House on the campus of the Veterans Home of California-Yountville Friday morning armed with a rifle.

Pathway House operates as a private entity providing services to veterans of the post-9/11 wars who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI). The Yountville facility, operated by the state of California, is the largest veterans home in the nation with over 1,000 veterans of World War II and the wars in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq.

Wong allowed most of the staff to leave but demanded that three women remain behind. When sheriff's deputies arrived on the scene around 10:30 a.m. local time, there was an exchange of gunfire between one of the deputies and the suspect in which "many shots" were fired, according to Napa County Sheriff John Robertson.

Law enforcement attempted to contact Wong by cell phone for several hours but were unsuccessful. During this time, hundreds of officers and agents of various federal law enforcement agencies descended on the area, including agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF).

When police entered the room where the hostages were being held around 6:00 p.m., they found Wong and the three women dead of gunshot wounds. The

three hostages have been named as Pathway House director Christine Loeber, 48, clinical director Jennifer Golick, 42, and clinical psychologist Jennifer Gonzales, 29. Gonzales was seven months pregnant at the time of her death.

Cissy Sherr, who began caring for Wong when he was eight years old following the death of his father and his mother's development of medical issues, told *SFGate* he had trouble readjusting to civilian life after service in Afghanistan. "He was starting to feel like he was in a hopeless circle after a while. You can only think about that for so long without snapping," Sherr noted.

Sherr and her husband raised Wong for four years but their jobs would not allow them to spend enough time with him. Wong was sent to foster care as a teenager and spent the rest of his childhood with an adoptive family in the San Francisco area. Those who knew him during this time say that he had always wanted to serve in the Army, as his father had.

One of his adoptive brothers, Tyrone Lampkin, told the *Press Democrat* that Wong was prone to violent outbursts and that an incident involving another adoptive brother resulted in Wong having to live elsewhere at one point.

Wong enlisted and served four years in the Army Reserve from 1998 to 2002. In 2008, he began working as a security guard and obtained a license to carry a 9mm firearm as part of the job. His license was canceled in October of last year for reasons that have not yet been released to the public, according to the *Press Democrat*.

In 2010, Wong enlisted for active duty in the Army. He was deployed to Afghanistan for two years beginning in 2011. Wong was given an expert marksmanship award and served as a specialist on

various operations during his deployment.

Sherr told the Associated Press (AP) that Wong would often call her before going on operations and said it seemed like they singled Wong out for dangerous missions because they knew he did not have a family. Wong received several commendations and was honorably discharged in 2013.

Wong returned from Afghanistan in 2013 and, like many soldiers, had great difficulty returning to civilian life due to the trauma he experienced during his deployment. Sheer explained to the AP that Wong experienced a number of symptoms characteristic of PTSD. These symptoms included difficulty sleeping and hyper-vigilance of his surroundings.

Lampkin told the *Press Democrat* that Wong increasingly obsessed over perceived slights against him by family and friends, whether it involved money owed or others failing to “pull their weight.”

The death of Wong’s mother last year had reportedly caused him even further emotional distress and both Sherr and Lampkin told reporters that Wong was excited when he was accepted into Pathway House. However, about two weeks ago, Wong was reportedly expelled from the program for making threats against staff and having several knives in his possession. State Senator Bill Dodd told reporters that Wong was given “numerous chances” but that he required more help than the program was able to provide.

Lampkin told the *Press Democrat* that Wong was angry with the Pathway House staff and wanted to get back at them, though he did not think Wong intended any harm. He described Wong as a “good person” who seemed happy, though he may have also suffered from bipolar disorder and substance abuse.

Golick is reported to be the one who made the final decision to expel Wong from Pathway House, though all three women were likely involved in the process to some degree.

The tragic incident in Yountville is a further indictment of the woefully inadequate resources offered to those recruited to fight in America’s imperialist wars, who often suffer deep psychological trauma as a result of their time in the military, and the devastating impact that more than a quarter century of unending imperialist wars abroad is having at home.

Like Wong, many of those who have fought in the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere around the

world are economic conscripts recruited from among the most vulnerable layers of society. Notably in the weeks before the shooting Wong had expressed anxiety that he would not be able to attain his college degree before his veterans education benefits expired, a “perk” which is dangled in front youths who would not otherwise afford a college education in order to entice them into enlisting.

A 2008 study by the Pentagon-funded RAND Corporation found that nearly 20 percent of veterans who had returned from deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan suffered from PTSD or depression. According to the latest government figures, an average of 20 veterans take their lives each day in the United States, adding up to over 7,000 annually.



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