

Ian David Long, the Thousand Oaks, California shooter, likely suffered from PTSD

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On Wednesday night, 28-year-old Ian David Long, a US Marine Corps veteran of the Afghanistan war, shot and killed a dozen people at a dance club in Thousand Oaks, California, some 40 miles from downtown Los Angeles. He then killed himself.

The massacre has horrified masses of people, both in the US and around the world. What could have led this young man to commit such a crime?

The American media has made various attempts, most of them dishonest or superficial, to answer this question. All of them ignore the consequences of decades of militarist violence and neo-colonial war, along with the toxic social atmosphere in the US.

The following were the final words Long posted on his Facebook page shortly before he initiated his shooting spree: “I hope people call me insane ... wouldn’t that just be a big ball of irony? Yeah, I’m insane, but the only thing you people do after these shootings is ‘hopes and prayers’... or ‘keep you in my thoughts’ ... every time ... and wonder why these keep happening.”

Friends and neighbors interviewed by the media present a contradictory picture of Ian David Long.

Long, described as a frequent patron of the Borderline Bar & Grill, arrived around 11:30 pm. He proceeded to shoot the security guard outside, then entered the bar and grill and shot the young woman at the cashier’s desk. He went on to fire his handgun at the customers inside. It is not known how many bullets were fired. He apparently said nothing during the entire attack.

Ventura County Sheriff Geoff Dean described the scene inside the Borderline after the shooting as “horrific” and said there was “blood everywhere.” Police found Long, dead of what Dean believes to be a self-inflicted gunshot. The 28-year-old’s semi-automatic handgun, a modified .45-caliber Glock, was at the scene.

Long served in the Marine Corps from 2008 to 2013 as an infantry machine gunner, and was deployed to

Afghanistan in 2010-11.

In April 2018, a mental health crisis team from the Ventura County sheriff’s department was called to his mother’s home (also Long’s residence) in the Newbury Park section of Thousand Oaks because Long was acting “irrationally.” At the time, a police mental health specialist suspected that Long suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). However, after talking to him and judging that the young man represented no threat to himself or others, the crisis team decided not to detain Long for mental health evaluation against his will.

A neighbor of Long and his mother’s described the scene. “He was raving hell in the house, you know, kicking holes in the walls and stuff and one of the neighbors was concerned and called the police,” Richard Berge, who lived one block away from the home, told Reuters. “They couldn’t get him to come out, so it was like a standoff for four or five hours.”

Dean added that police believe that Ian David Long suffered from PTSD as a result of the experiences he underwent during his four-and-a-half-year stint in the Marine Corps and in Afghanistan specifically.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, PTSD is triggered by exposure to traumatic events in which the person “experienced, witnessed, or was confronted by death or serious injury to self or others and responded with intense fear, helplessness or horror.”

PTSD sufferers have described feelings of grief, depression, anxiety and anger. Many have flashbacks and nightmares and turn to drug abuse.

Very high rates of PTSD and anger have been seen in US military veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Matthew Tull at Verywellmind recently pointed to a study by a “group of researchers [who] looked at rates of PTSD and anger problems among a group of 117 Iraq and Afghanistan War veterans.

“Similar to other reports, the veterans they studied

exhibited high rates of PTSD. In fact, about 40 percent had PTSD and an additional 18 percent almost had a PTSD diagnosis, or what is often referred to as subthreshold PTSD (they were struggling with some severe symptoms of PTSD but not quite enough symptoms to meet criteria for a full PTSD diagnosis)."

Tull went on, "In addition, over half of the veterans with PTSD indicated that they had been aggressive in the past four months, such as threatening physical violence, destroying property and having a physical fight with someone. Veterans with almost a PTSD diagnosis reported just about the same amount of aggressive behavior as the veterans with PTSD."

As the number of veterans with PTSD and other forms of mental illness was increasing, a 2014 report from the Institute of Medicine (IoM) reported that treatments were inadequate, "ad hoc, incremental and crisis-driven." There was minimal planning in developing "long-range" approaches, the IoM committee argued, lengthy delays in providing treatment for those who needed therapy (only 53 percent received the minimum therapy of eight sessions in 14 weeks) and the interruption and delay of individual counseling sessions.

Thomas Burke, a pastor who served with Long in Afghanistan, said the latter's battalion had arrived during intense fighting in Helmand province, a center of Taliban resistance.

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Burke told CNN: "We train a generation to be as violent as possible, then we expect them to come home and be OK. It's not mental illness. It's that we're doing something to a generation, and we're not responding to the needs they have."

In addition to confronting Taliban forces in Helmand, US and allied troops terrorized the Afghan population. In March 2017, in a military online forum, Ian Long described some of his military experience using the nickname "doorkicker03," alluding to the repression of civilians.

The news that Long had been the shooter, and that he had posted his dark Facebook message greatly shocked one his friends, who spoke to CNN; "That does not sound like Ian to me at all. I don't know what was going through his head when he wrote this. It must have been terrible," he declared. "I don't know what the hell happened. He was always happy. I never thought this would ever come from him. We used to go snowboarding all the time. He was a good guy," said another.

"He wasn't unhinged, he wasn't violent. He was a sweet guy who served his country and was using his GI Bill to go to college and get a degree to help more people," another friend declared. "Out of our group of friends I thought the highest of him."

Curtis Kellogg, who served with Long in the Marines, told CNN that while Long had a sense of humor, "like most Marines who have seen combat it could get dark at times, just like all of us."

The official response to the Thousand Oaks massacre is a combination of banal, formulaic expressions of sorrow and bewilderment. What do such people know about the consequences of their wars and invasions?

Paul Delacourt, assistant director in charge of the Los Angeles FBI office, Reuters commented, "said it was too early to speculate on the shooter's motives but that he appeared to have acted alone. 'We will be sure to paint a picture of the state of mind of the subject and do our best to identify a motivation,' Delacourt said, adding that the FBI would investigate any possible 'radicalization' or links to militant groups."

Ventura County Sheriff Dean told the media, "Obviously, he had something going on in his head that would cause him to do something like this."

Ian Long's precise mental state November 7 will perhaps never be known. That night's cryptic and troubled Facebook entry provides a clue. Hundreds of thousands of youth have been called on to participate in an unending series of wars and occupations ("kicking in" doors); tortured by their experiences in many cases and left with no opportunities, no real help for their mental and physical injuries, nothing more than "hopes and prayers." That condition, working on the most psychologically vulnerable and susceptible, almost inevitably produces tragedies like the Thousand Oaks mass shooting.



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