

Many unanswered questions remain more than a week after Trump assassination attempt

Jacob Crosse
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More than a week after former President Donald Trump was nearly assassinated by a 20-year-old amateur shooter, there are multiple unanswered questions concerning the complete security breakdown at the campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania where the shooting occurred.

The shooting left one member of the rally audience dead and critically injured two other people. Trump himself, according to his former White House doctor, now congressman, Ronny Jackson, suffered a “2 cm” bullet wound. The gunman has been identified as Thomas Matthew Crooks, a recent graduate of Community College of Allegheny County, who was employed at a local nursing home.

As of this writing, no political motivation has been offered by authorities or family members. A search of his cell phone by police turned up images of Trump and Biden, House Speaker Mike Johnson and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, along with Attorney General Merrick Garland and FBI Director Christopher Wray. In addition to registering for Trump’s Butler, Pennsylvania rally, Crooks looked up the dates of future Trump events as well as those for the Democratic National Convention.

In the last week, no plausible explanation has been given by the US Secret Service, one of several agencies under the purview of the Department of Homeland Security, as to how the shooter was able to scale a roof with a rifle and shoot Trump from a relatively short distance, even after having been identified by police and attendees as a threat hours before.

In an interview with ABC on Monday, the director of the Secret Service, Kimberly A. Cheatle, claimed that agents did not secure the roof of the building where Crooks had an unobstructed view of Trump because “that building in particular has a sloped roof at its highest point, and so, you know, there is a safety factor that would be considered there, that we wouldn’t want to put somebody on a sloped roof.”

In congressional appearances, television interviews, and even the Republican National Convention, Cheatle has faced intense scrutiny. Dozens of Republicans, including Speaker Johnson and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, have called on Cheatle to resign.

Cheatle took over the agency from the previous director, James M. Murray, after Murray oversaw the purging of text messages on Secret Service agents’ cell phones in the wake of Trump’s failed coup.

Cheatle began working at the Secret Service in the 1990s. According to a biography on the agency’s website, she specialized in financial crimes in Detroit. After five years in Detroit, she was transferred to Washington D.C., where she was assigned to work on the protective detail of then-Vice President Dick Cheney. On September 11, 2001, Cheatle was one of the agents who escorted Cheney to a bunker as planes crashed into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

Cheatle also worked on Biden’s security detail when he was vice president under Obama. In a statement announcing her appointment as director of the agency in 2022, Biden wrote that he and Jill Biden “came to trust her judgment and counsel... She has my complete trust, and I look forward to working with her.”

Faced with a congressional subpoena, Cheatle is expected to appear before the House Oversight and Accountability Committee on Monday.

Previewing the hearing on *Face the Nation* Sunday morning, Rep. Mike Turner, chair of the House Intelligence Committee, reiterated his demand for Cheatle to resign, saying the “failures are absolutely outrageous and incredible.”

Turner said that according to a timeline presented by the agency to lawmakers earlier this week, the Secret Service knew of a “particular threat” nine minutes before Trump took the stage. Citing the same timeline provided by the Secret Service, Turner said that the agency’s counter snipers did not fire at the would-be assassin until *after* Trump had already been shot.

“Every aspect of their failure,” Turner said, “leads right to giving an opportunity to shoot Donald Trump.”

Turner said Trump campaign officials had previously asked for more security and been turned down by the agency. Press reports confirmed this, while noting that such was not the case at the Butler, Pennsylvania rally.

Anthony Guglielmi, a spokesman for the agency, had previously

issued a blanket denial that the organization ever rejected requests for additional security from the Trump campaign. However, in response to detailed questions from the *Washington Post*, Guglielmi confirmed over the weekend that the agency's headquarters "may have, in fact, denied some requests for additional security from Trump's detail and was reviewing documentation to understand the specific interaction better," the newspaper reported.

On Sunday, Rep. Brendan Boyle (Pennsylvania) became the first Democrat to call on Cheatle to resign. In his statement, the ranking member of the Budget Committee wrote: "The evidence coming to light has shown unacceptable operational failures. I have no confidence in the leadership of the United States Secret Service if Director Cheatle chooses to remain in her position."

On July 19, the *Wall Street Journal* first reported that Crooks was able to fly a drone over the Butler Farm Show grounds the day of Trump's rally. The *Journal* reported that law enforcement officials confirmed that the drone flew on a pre-programmed path, suggesting Crooks had previously gathered intelligence on the grounds.

The *Journal* confirmed that Crooks first signed up for the rally on July 7, four days after it was announced by the campaign, and that he "visited the farm show grounds a few days later to scope it out."

Recent advances in technology and production techniques have led to an explosion in the use of drones by workers, students and youth for leisure, photography and film-making. At the same time, police and military forces in the US and internationally are adopting the technology for surveillance and combat operations. In Gaza, the US-backed Israeli military has used quadcopter drones to assassinate healthcare workers and fleeing civilians.

The Secret Service is comprised of some 8,000 employees and has a budget of over \$3.1 billion. Within the agency there are several divisions, including the Special Operations Division (SOD). Within the SOD there are specific branches that specialize in different aspects of security, including the Airspace Security Branch, which "develops and implements security plans to monitor and control the airspace surrounding locations visited by the president and vice president of the United States.... and other designated major events."

Another specialized branch within the SOD is the Counter Unmanned Aerial Systems Branch (C-UAS). In the agency's own words, C-UAS members "use a variety of technologies to screen the area around a protective venue and coordinate defensive responses in the event of an unauthorized UAS intrusion."

Despite these specialized branches existing within the agency, following a closed-door meeting between Cheatle and lawmakers on Wednesday it was reported, and has since been confirmed, that the agency did not fly its own drones prior to or during the rally.

On his podcast, *Verdict*, Texas Senator Ted Cruz claimed that one senator asked Cheatle during Wednesday's meeting, "Were there drones, yes or no?" Cruz said the reply from "the head of the

Secret Service was, 'We determined that the risk from that rooftop was mitigated by countersnipers.'"

In addition to his AR-15 rifle, Crooks was armed with a remote detonator. It appears the detonator was linked to a pair of homemade bombs and a receiver in Crooks' car, which was parked near the rally grounds. Police say they also found body armor and three 30-round magazines inside his car.

In a search of Crooks' residence, police claim to have found a bulletproof vest, another remote-controlled bomb and a 3-D printer.

According to multiple reports, on July 12, the day before the Butler rally, Crooks visited the Clairton Sportmen's Club, a gun range to which he and his father are members. The next day, the morning of the rally, he purchased a five-foot ladder at Home Depot and 50 rounds of ammunition at the Bethel Park ammo shop. Crooks then drove to the rally and apparently made himself known to authorities by attempting to enter the secured area with a rangefinder, a device used primarily by hunters to measure distances to remote targets.

After being allowed to enter the secure area—with the rangefinder—at around 3 p.m., a little more than three hours before the shooting, Crooks was allegedly tracked by police agents. Crooks eventually left the secure area and was recorded shortly after 5 p.m. walking near the American Glass Research International building. The building is located roughly 400 feet from where Trump spoke. Crooks used its roof to line up his shot. It appears that at that time he did not have the rifle on his person.

At 5:45 p.m., Crooks was spotted by a Beaver County cop who was looking at the same AGR International building. Ten minutes later, Secret Service agents were warned by local police that there was a "suspicious person" in the area that posed a "threat." Ten minutes after that, at 6:05 p.m., Trump walked out onto the stage.

Four minutes later, Crooks was observed using an outside air conditioner unit to scale the roof with his father's rifle. At 6:10 p.m., multiple police and bystanders were around the building pointing toward Crooks. In several videos, people are heard shouting, "He's got a gun!"

At that point, two cops attempted to scale the roof, with one cop using the other as a "boost" to lift himself up. As the cop attempted to ascend the roof, Crooks noticed him and pointed his gun at him. The cop retreated and fell to the ground.

At 6:11 p.m., Crooks began shooting at Trump, firing up to eight times, hitting Trump once in the ear before he was shot and killed by a Secret Service counter-sniper team.



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