
APRIL 2025

First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs:

A CASE STUDY ON THE
LINK BETWEEN DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE AND MASS
ATTACKS

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

UNITED STATES SECRET SERVICE

NATIONAL THREAT ASSESSMENT CENTER



This report was prepared by the staff of the U.S. Secret Service
National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC)



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**THE U.S. SECRET SERVICE ADVISES THAT THE FOLLOWING CONTENT
MAY BE DISTRESSING TO CERTAIN AUDIENCES, INCLUDING SURVIVORS OF TRAUMA.**

Readers should be aware that this case study addresses a number of sensitive topics, including rape and sexual assault, multiple forms of abuse of women and children, animal cruelty, suicide, and graphic violence. The Secret Service encourages any readers who might experience trauma related to these topics to seek assistance through available local and national resources.

Introduction

On November 5, 2017, a gunman arrived at the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs in Sutherland Springs, TX, armed with a semi-automatic rifle and two handguns. He wore all black clothing, as well as tactical body armor and a black mask painted with a skull design. He fired over 200 rounds into the church from outside before entering the church and firing hundreds of additional rounds. In total, he killed 26 people, including his wife’s grandmother who regularly attended the church, and wounded 22 others. After exiting the church, the gunman was shot and critically injured by a local resident but was able to escape the scene. He later died by suicide with a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head. For years prior to the attack, the gunman engaged in severe domestic violence perpetrated against his wives, as well as other women and girls. For instance, the physical abuse of his wives often involved strangling, hitting, and kicking. He also emotionally and psychologically abused women by threatening to kill them, their family members, or himself, sometimes while brandishing a firearm. The attacker also engaged in numerous sexual assaults of several women and underage girls, with behaviors ranging from sexual coercion of minors to forcible rape. All of these behaviors, among others described in the following pages, were enacted to dominate and control the women in his life.

About Domestic Violence

Domestic Violence is a pattern of abusive behaviors used by one partner to maintain power and control over another partner in an intimate relationship. Domestic violence can include physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, economic, or technological actions or threats of action that influence another person within an intimate partner relationship.¹

According to the CDC’s 2022 National Intimate Partner Violence Study²:

- » **Over 61 million women** and **53 million men** have experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner
- » About **41% of women** and **26% of men** have experienced sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner

The reported impacts of domestic violence on victims include, but are not limited to, physical harm and death, heart and cardiovascular issues, sexual and reproductive challenges, mental health issues including depression and anxiety disorders, substance abuse, self-blame, self-harm, suicidal behaviors, and other issues.

If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic violence, help is available via the National Domestic Violence Hotline.



National Domestic Violence Hotline
1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
Text “START” to 88788



This case study offers a detailed summary of the background, thinking, and behaviors of the individual who perpetrated the shooting at the First Baptist Church. In preparing this report, researchers with the U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) utilized information obtained from open sources, including media reporting, court records, and publicly released investigative files. The information presented herein is intended to assist communities in identifying, assessing, and managing individuals of concern before they engage in acts of targeted violence.

In addition to educating public safety practitioners on the warning signs of mass violence more broadly, this case study is specifically intended to highlight the link between domestic violence and mass casualty violence. Like some other mass attackers, the perpetrator of the First Baptist Church shooting had a long history of committing domestic violence. In a study of mass attacks in public spaces that occurred within a five-year period, NTAC found that 41% of the mass attackers had a history of domestic violence.³ While these histories included violence against children or parents, the majority involved violence against intimate partners. For example, on May 12, 2017, a 43-year-old man took two hostages outside a medical facility where his girlfriend worked as a nurse. The attacker killed a responding law enforcement officer, then entered the facility and fatally shot his girlfriend, one of her co-workers, and himself. The girlfriend had obtained three protection orders against the attacker in the months before the incident because of his escalating violence and threats to her life. The attacker had a lengthy criminal history consisting of multiple charges for domestic violence and a variety of other crimes. On one occasion eight years prior to his mass shooting, the attacker kidnapped an ex-girlfriend and held her overnight in a wooded area, where he beat and strangled her. Despite the attacker's criminal history prohibiting him from firearm possession under federal law, he was able to purchase firearms at gun shows without being subject to a background check.

NTAC's research examining mass attacks in public spaces also found that roughly 16% of the attackers were specifically motivated, at least in part, by a grievance related to a domestic issue. In some of these cases, the attacker targeted random persons unrelated to the domestic situation. For example, on October 8, 2016, a 36-year-old man driving against traffic at high speeds on the interstate intentionally crashed his vehicle into another vehicle, killing all five passengers. After a responding officer exited his vehicle to render aid to the victims, the attacker stole the cruiser and initially drove off. He then turned around, driving in the opposite direction of traffic, and used the stolen cruiser to crash into his own disabled vehicle, causing it to crash into seven other vehicles on the interstate and injuring 11 more people. In the two years prior, the attacker had assaulted his girlfriend on multiple occasions and threatened to drive into a lake with her and their young daughter in the vehicle. After the relationship ended, he threatened to kill the woman or shoot everyone that he saw if he lost custody of their daughter. Less than two weeks prior to the mass attack, the child's mother was temporarily awarded full custody.



These cases, like the mass attack at the First Baptist Church, underscore that domestic violence does not only impact a single victim. Rather, these acts of violence can also harm the broader community and must be addressed appropriately with a community-based approach. NTAC’s research has revealed numerous patterns of behavior and life circumstances that are common across mass attackers and those who plotted to perpetrate these types of attacks. These key **Assessment Themes** are important to consider when conducting a behavioral threat assessment, namely, when evaluating whether an individual poses a risk of harm to others. The Assessment Themes highlighted in this case study represent a sample of contextual and behavioral factors that should be considered by those tasked with community violence prevention. Exploring these themes may provide important information about a subject’s motivations, propensity for violence, and avenues for intervention or treatment.

ASSESSMENT THEMES IN THE ATTACKER’S BACKGROUND	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Access to Weapons ➔ Behavior Changes ➔ Concerning or Threatening Communications ➔ Criminal History ✗ Desperation or Despair ➔ Elicited Concern in Others ✗ Extreme Beliefs ➔ Fixations ➔ History of Violence ✗ Home Life Factors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Inconsistency ➔ Intense Anger or Aggression ➔ Interest in Violent Topics ➔ Interpersonal Difficulties ➔ Lack of Consequences ➔ Mental Health History ➔ Motive ➔ Planning and Final Acts ➔ Stressors ➔ Stalking, Harassing, or Bullying
<p>The factors in this table reflect NTAC’s 20 Assessment Themes as defined in <i>Behavioral Threat Assessment Units: A Guide for State and Local Law Enforcement to Prevent Targeted Violence</i>. These themes are based upon frequently observed or particularly noteworthy factors in the backgrounds of those who have engaged in acts of targeted violence. Items marked with a green arrow represent those identified in this attacker’s background. The themes and behaviors listed here should not be viewed as predictors of violence but rather as factors that should be evaluated in context when conducting a behavioral threat assessment.</p>	



Childhood through High School

For the purpose of this case study, the attacker will be referred to using his initials, DK.

In 1991, DK was born into a two-parent household in San Marcos, TX. When DK was young, the family moved into a home on a 28-acre lot where they raised cows, horses, and chickens alongside cats and dogs. His father was an accountant who ran a billing software company from the family home. DK’s mother homeschooled DK through fifth grade due to his reading difficulties. He had two sisters, one older and one younger. One relative described the household as loving and a “place of joy and solid Christian values.”⁴

While homeschooled, DK engaged in various social activities in his early childhood. He was active in both the Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts, earning badges and participating in the scouts’ soapbox derbies. He also played flag football for four years and participated in church youth services. At age 11, he met a boy at a skate park, and they became best friends for seven years. They both enjoyed video games and attended the same church. They were also both taking medication for attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). According to this childhood friend, DK had a short temper and authority issues when growing up. DK responded aggressively to perceived injustices and would yell and hit others.

AGGRESSION

...short temper and authority issues... and would yell and hit others.

In 6th grade, DK was enrolled in a private Christian school. He felt the school had a positive impact on his religiosity and later reported that he “finally felt alive” during his time at this school.⁵ However, this experience was short-lived. His enrollment ended that same year, and he transferred to a public school — a transition he would later describe as a “rude awakening.”⁶

STRESSOR: BULLIED BY PEERS

They called him names and threw footballs and pencils at his face.

In public school, DK was bullied by other students. They called him names and threw footballs and pencils at his face. In response, he signed up for Tae Kwan Do. His instructor noted that he was a good athlete and student, but not a great one, and that he struggled. Others who knew DK later recounted that, around this time, DK had become troubled and treated others poorly. Despite these difficulties, by 7th grade, DK had adapted, and had formed friendships with peers and was viewed as religious, caring, and happy.

When DK entered high school, he joined the football team. There, he was bullied again, causing him to quit the sport after receiving his father’s permission to do so. He later described how quitting the team dramatically reduced his life stress. He also participated in the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) and dreamt of joining the U.S. Air Force.



Violence Toward Women and Girls as a Teen

Throughout his high school years, DK preyed on 13- to 14-year-old girls. He threatened to kill himself if the girls left him, coerced them into sexual activities they were not ready for, and forcibly raped them. DK would also tell the girls he abused that he had deviant sexual fantasies and engaged in aberrant sexual behaviors.

He told them he had fantasies about one of his sisters, including claims that he liked to watch his sister shower, that he had touched her breasts, and that he had masturbated into her shampoo bottle. He also claimed to have installed hidden cameras in his parents' shower to record them, though his father later indicated that he found no evidence of such a camera.

VIOLENCE TOWARD WOMEN AND GIRLS

...coerced them into sexual activities they were not ready for, and forcibly raped them.

DATING VIOLENCE

...abuse of these girls often occurred during relationships...

DK's abuse of these girls often occurred during relationships with them, but the abuse would sometimes continue after the relationships ended.

In an early instance, during his freshman year, DK dated a 7th grader. Throughout their eight-month relationship, DK verbally, psychologically, and sexually abused her. He told her that she was ugly and that her parents did not love her, touched her without consent, and forced her to perform sexual acts. Criminal investigators later reported that the girl "described [DK] as a manipulator and control freak."⁷

LACK OF CONSEQUENCES

Some of the assaults were not reported to the proper authorities, while those that were may not have been thoroughly investigated.

Some of the assaults were not reported to the proper authorities, while those that were may not have been thoroughly investigated. In one instance, while in high school, DK routinely made sexually inappropriate comments about a female peer, slapped her on the buttocks, and shoved her and groped her in the school hallways. The girl and her mother reportedly informed school administrators about his assaults but later told the media that, despite their concerns, they were not aware of anything ever being done to address it. In another instance, DK developed a relationship with a 13-year-old girl while he was 18, took pictures of her naked body, and coerced her into having sex. Even after the two-month relationship ended, he continued to harass her for years, repeatedly calling her and offering her money to see him. The girl changed her phone number and reported the harassment to the police, though no follow-up was noted.

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HARASSMENT

...continued to harass her for years, repeatedly calling her and offering her money to see him.



CRIMINAL HISTORY

...arrested for marijuana possession, suspended, and transferred to an alternative school...

ELICITED CONCERN

...aggression and crudeness caused some friends to distance themselves from him.

During his sophomore year, DK was arrested for marijuana possession, suspended, and transferred to an alternative school for two months. In his junior and senior years, DK was suspended at least five more times, largely for misconduct and insubordination. His friendships also suffered as his aggression and crudeness caused some friends to distance themselves from him. One student reported that DK threatened to punch him after the two got into an argument, while another grew uncomfortable after DK shared explicit details of his sexual encounters. His grades also declined around this time, and he failed several classes.

When he was 17, DK began a sexual relationship with a 13-year-old girl he met through friends. This girl would later become DK's second wife. As with other girls, DK took advantage of the struggles she had shared with him about abuse she had suffered as a young child. At the age of four, the girl had been removed from the custody of her birth parents, who had abused her, and was adopted by another couple. Around the age of nine or ten, when her adoptive parents were getting a divorce, she told her adoptive mother and staff at her school that her adoptive father had been sexually abusing her. According to her later testimony, her adoptive mother took her to two different police departments but police did not take a report and instead treated her as if she were making it up. This experience took a toll on her mental health, resulting in her attempting suicide on at least one occasion. Within a few years, her abusive adoptive father remarried, and she grew close to his new wife, who became a second mother figure to her. The girl spent weekends at their house, and it was during these visits that DK would drive over to the house and she would meet him outside. In the years following high school, DK joined the military and married another woman but continued to communicate with the girl despite her requests for him to stop.

HARASSMENT & FIXATION

...continued to communicate with her, despite her requests for him to stop.

Entry into the U.S. Military & First Marriage

In 2009, DK graduated from high school at age 18. That summer, he enlisted in a branch of the U.S. military. On his application forms, he reported that he had no history of drug use despite his prior use and drug charge. Upon entry into active duty on January 5, 2010, DK recertified this claim and later blamed a recruiter when his drug use was discovered, claiming that he was told to lie on his application.



Just two days before he entered active duty, DK was accused of indecency with a child in an incident that had occurred one week prior. At that time, DK was walking with a minor around her neighborhood. When they returned to DK's vehicle, which was parked at the end of a street near a field, DK exposed himself and forced her to touch him. The girl then pulled her hand away, exited the vehicle, and ran home. Though reported, the investigation was terminated two months later when the victim withdrew her participation. The investigators never interviewed DK.

VIOLENCE TOWARD WOMEN AND GIRLS
...exposed himself and forced her to touch him.

Despite his abhorrent behavior, DK received favorable assessments at the start of his military career, began training as a network intelligence analyst, and was deemed eligible for access to classified information. However, within six months, DK failed four examinations, was terminated from the analyst training program, was reassigned to traffic management, and relocated to Virginia for additional training.

STRESSOR: WORKPLACE
...terminated from the analyst training program...

In February 2011, while stationed in Virginia, DK reconnected with a woman whom he had met during the summer before his senior year of high school. When DK reconnected with her, she was a single mom with an 8-month-old son from a prior relationship. The two began to date, and approximately two months later, they married. DK's parents had not met the bride prior to the wedding ceremony.

In April 2011, around the same time he married, DK was assigned to logistical operations at a military base in New Mexico. His primary function was to enter supplies into a computer log. However, he had a reputation of being combative and defiant with other personnel at the base. He received numerous memorandums and reprimands for poor performance

INTERPERSONAL DIFFICULTIES & ELICITED CONCERN
...had a reputation of being combative and defiant with other personnel at the base.
...emotionally volatile...
...became enraged, screamed, and cried.
...supervisor cautioned other personnel to tread carefully around DK.
...she was concerned he might "shoot the place up."

shortly after his transfer to New Mexico. According to his supervisor, he completed only the bare minimum at work and often got into trouble. DK's supervisor further described him as emotionally volatile and noted that whenever he was tasked with cleaning duties as punishment for his misbehavior, he became enraged, screamed, and cried. This supervisor cautioned other personnel to tread carefully around DK, including warning them to back off of him, as she was concerned he might "shoot the place up."⁸



On at least one occasion, DK even stated, “I want to kill them,” referring to his superiors.⁹ He expressed his rage at home as well. He told his wife, “My work is so lucky I do not have a shotgun because I would go in there and shoot everyone.”¹⁰

Domestic Violence & Child Abuse

In at least one instance before their marriage, DK struck his wife’s infant son, though she was not aware of this abuse. Once DK was assigned to the military base in New Mexico, he, his wife, and his stepson all moved into base housing. Through June 2011, DK continued to hit and shake his 10-month-old stepson.

On May 30, 2011, DK’s stepson was taken to the emergency room for what was diagnosed as a fever-induced seizure. He was then hospitalized days later for vomiting and diarrhea. On June 6, 2011, the boy was seen as part of a follow-up and found to be doing well. However, two days later, he was vomiting again and falling over, so he was taken to the emergency room. The physician, who had just seen the boy during his prior visit, noted facial bruising in the shape of a handprint that was not there before. Suspecting abuse, the child was admitted, and further tests revealed that he had hemorrhaging of his brain and a fractured clavicle. The hospital called social services.

The U.S. Military subsequently launched a special investigation into these child abuse allegations. When DK was interviewed, he denied responsibility for the boy’s injuries and instead claimed that they were sustained while the boy was playing by himself.

CONCERNING COMMUNICATIONS

“My work is so lucky I do not have a shotgun because I would go in there and shoot everyone.” — DK

About Child Abuse

Child abuse is characterized by deliberate and intentional maltreatment of a child perpetrated by a parent, caregiver, or other person in a custodial role, and can include physical, psychological, and sexual abuse.¹¹

In the United States in 2021¹²:

- » It is estimated that **600,000 incidents of child abuse** occurred, although the actual number of abuses is likely higher
- » An estimated **1,820 children died from abuse and neglect**
- » **77% of children** were victimized by a parent in substantiated child abuse cases

The impacts of child abuse can be far-ranging and severe, including physical injuries; emotional and psychological problems; substance abuse; delayed brain development; post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms; learning, attention, and memory difficulties; and other issues.¹³



If you or someone you know is experiencing child abuse, help is available.

Childhelp® National Child Abuse Hotline
Text or call: 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453)

CHILD ABUSE

The U.S. Military subsequently launched a special investigation into these child abuse allegations.



Despite his denials, the investigation into DK's conduct continued. During this investigation and court-martial process, the military took DK's fingerprints but failed to register them with the FBI's national fingerprint database — an action required by military policy that was never taken.

On June 24, 2011, following its investigation into suspected child abuse, the state of New Mexico took custody of DK's stepson and placed him into foster care. On this same day, DK physically abused his wife for the first time after he learned she intended to leave the house to visit someone. DK assaulted her in the bathroom, put his hands around her throat, pushed her against the bathroom door, and strangled her for approximately 15 to 20 seconds. Afterwards, DK's wife told her sister, who was also a member of the military, who then reported it to her own military leadership. Investigators responded to the family's residence and questioned DK's wife, but she declined to volunteer information about the assault due to her fears for her own safety and the safety of the military investigators.

DK repeatedly engaged in physical, psychological, emotional, and technological forms of abuse against his wife for the duration of their relationship. These incidents included strangling her, pulling her hair, striking her with an open hand, pushing her to the floor,

ELICITED CONCERN & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Other people in her life noticed some distressing signs of the abuse she experienced.

kicking her side and stomach, dragging her by the hair, and threatening to waterboard her using a showerhead. Other people in her life noticed some distressing signs of the abuse she experienced. Her hairdresser noted that clumps of her hair were missing, and friends witnessed

DK threaten and physically assault her on at least one occasion. DK also threatened the lives of people that she loved, including her aunt and her cousin, and threatened to kill law enforcement officers if they were ever called. He also installed cameras in their living space so that he could keep tabs on her activities in the home.

In September 2011, DK began mental health counseling at a military base clinic, reportedly due to stress from losing custody of his stepson and being yelled at by his supervisors at work. He attended 17 counseling sessions through February 2012 and received treatment for antisocial personality disorder, anxiety, depression, agitation, sleeping difficulties, and attentional issues. Despite receiving treatment, DK continued a pattern of criminal behavior, including abusing his wife. In one instance on Christmas Eve 2011, when DK's wife informed him that she did not wish to visit his family over the Christmas holiday, he shoved her into a wall, strangled her, threatened her, dragged her by her hair, and punched her.

MENTAL HEALTH

...received treatment for antisocial personality disorder, anxiety, depression, agitation, sleeping difficulties, and attentional issues.



VIOLENCE & HARASSMENT

...forced himself upon her...and raped her on several more occasions...called her repeatedly and begged her to run away with him.

DK also continued to prey on younger girls. DK befriended a 16-year-old girl with a shared love of cars, and the two began to see each other socially. However, in winter 2011, DK forced himself upon her despite her protestations while in a parked vehicle near the girl's home. Over the next several days, DK met with the girl and raped her on several more occasions. While the girl

disclosed these incidents to her friends and family, it was not reported to the police. DK later called her repeatedly and begged her to run away with him. These calls persisted until she changed her telephone number.

Around the start of 2012, DK and his wife attended couple's counseling sessions. Before one session, DK told his wife, "Your [sic] 90 percent of our problem and if you repeat what I say I'll kill you and drag your dead body and desert it."¹⁴

CONCERNING COMMUNICATIONS

"Your [sic] 90 percent of our problem and if you repeat what I say I'll kill you and drag your dead body and desert it." — DK

In January 2012, DK visited his brother-in-law's house and sexually assaulted his brother-in-law's girlfriend, including putting his hands down her pants despite her objections and masturbating in her presence. He also grabbed her thigh while she slept. The next morning, DK's brother-in-law confronted DK about the assault, but DK denied responsibility. Later, DK told his wife about the incident but threatened to kill her if she told anyone.

First Inpatient Treatment & Marital Dissolution

In February 2012, DK experienced some symptoms of depression, including a depressed mood, low energy levels, a loss of appetite, and difficulty sleeping. At one point, DK's wife overheard him crying in a locked bathroom and repeating the phrases, "I'm so sorry," and, "I'm sorry I did this to you," along with the name of his stepson.¹⁵ She subsequently tried to confront DK about this, but he refused to respond. On February 12, 2012, while DK and his

ACCESS TO WEAPONS

...purchased a .38 Special revolver...

wife were driving together, she informed him that she believed they should get a divorce. In response, DK told his wife that she was bipolar, and then he pulled her hair and slapped her.

While doing so, he lost control of the vehicle, and the passenger side of the car collided with a guardrail. That same day, which was also his 21st birthday, DK purchased a .38 Special revolver from the military base exchange and started to carry a weapon on his person at all times.

On base, DK continued to engage in inappropriate and defiant behavior. On February 16, 2012, he received a written reprimand for the disrespect of a supervisor and loss of military



bearing. Specifically, while leaving a female supervisor’s office, DK stated, “I know, you told me three times already,” and then called her a derogatory name.¹⁶ He then refused to return to the office to address the matter.

Fearful after the assault days earlier and knowing that DK was always armed, DK’s wife fled their home and traveled back to Texas. Once there, on February 17, she reported the abuse she endured from DK to the military security forces. She provided investigators with photographic evidence of the bruises and injuries she sustained and described threats that DK had made about attacking or killing his colleagues and supervisors. At the same time, DK found a note left by his wife and reported her missing to base security.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

A no-contact order was established
...and he was ordered to turn over the
.38 handgun to a supervisor...

A second domestic violence investigation was opened into DK’s conduct. Investigators attempted to interview DK, but he refused to participate and requested a lawyer. A no-contact order was established between DK and his wife, and he was ordered to turn over the .38 handgun to a supervisor — with which DK complied.

MENTAL HEALTH

...admitted himself to an acute
inpatient psychiatric hospital...
planned to shoot himself
after his wife informed him that she
was filing assault charges...

On February 23, 2012, after going to the mental health clinic on base twice over the two previous days, DK admitted himself to an acute inpatient psychiatric hospital not connected to the military. Hospital staff reported that DK was suicidal and planned to shoot himself after his wife informed him that she was filing assault charges against

him. While he was hospitalized, in his therapy sessions, DK shared that he wished to improve his marriage and lifestyle and claimed to have learned to better manage his anger and stress. At the same time, he kept a journal that evidenced both suicidal and homicidal ideations, including suspicions that his wife was cheating on him with another man and that he would kill any man she was with. In this journal, he wrote:

“I just found out [my wife] is hanging out at some guy named [redacted]’s house. It enrages me...If I was there, I would kill him. She told me to stop harassing her. I don’t feel that I was... Unless she proves to me that she loves me, I’m going to do whatever it takes to destroy all of this. I’ll play along and wait out my time here...But if things don’t go as planned, I will kill myself because there is no way I can go back to a place like this or jail. I would rather die. I don’t want to hurt anyone. I just want to be reunified with my wife. And nobody better get in the way of that...I’m seriously going over it in my mind, what it would be like if I actually did

CONCERNING COMMUNICATIONS

“Unless she proves to me that she loves me, I’m going to do whatever it takes to destroy all of this... I’m seriously going over it in my mind, what it would be like if I actually did suicide/homicide.” – DK



*suicide/homicide. I don't want to but if this doesn't work out, I have no other alternative for myself. Until death do us part."*¹⁷

On March 8, 2012, after 14 days of inpatient treatment, DK was discharged and directed to continue outpatient services at the mental health clinic on base. DK resumed this treatment over the next month and a half. In the meantime, DK's wife moved back into base housing with him for the purpose of regaining custody of her child. That same month, DK loaded a single bullet into a revolver, placed the gun to his head, and threatened to shoot himself if the couple could not resolve their problems. DK pulled the trigger three times while the gun was to his head, but no bullets were fired because of the empty revolver chambers. He then pointed the gun at his wife and threatened her. At this point, she agreed not to end their marriage.

In the first week of April 2012, DK was given the Domestic Violence Inventory Short Form (DVI-SF) screening test as part of a pre-sentencing procedure.

The results of the DVI-SF indicated DK was in the maximum risk range for violence and controlling behaviors in his relationships, and he was referred for a mental health evaluation. He also was given a personality assessment that found he endorsed extreme and bizarre thoughts. Later, on April 12, 2012, DK purchased a SIG Sauer P250 9mm semiautomatic handgun and one box of ammunition from the military base exchange in New Mexico.

ABOUT THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INVENTORY SHORT FORM (DVI-SF)

The **DVI-SF** is a self-report instrument that assesses risk of domestic violence. The instrument is composed of six measures that evaluate a respondent across a number of characteristics, including measures of **violence (lethality) and control**.¹⁸

The **Violence (Lethality)** subscale captures whether respondents pose a danger to themselves or others, including the respondent's tendencies to express rage and hostility through physical force. High scores suggest that respondents are demanding, sensitive to perceived criticism, and lack insight into how they express their anger and hostility. Individuals with high scores can be threatening and very dangerous.

The **Control** subscale measures a respondent's need to control others. Scores at or above the 90th percentile suggest the respondents exhibit extreme and/or pathological controlling behaviors, including intimidating, pushing, hitting, or even battering others.

DK scored at or above the 90th percentile on the **Violence (Lethality)** and **Control** scales when he completed the DVI-SF in April 2012. Respondents who score highly on both the **Violence** and **Control** scales are of particular concern given their tendencies to exhibit rigidly hostile behaviors in which they punish others to maintain control.



STRESSOR: WORKPLACE

...continued to receive written reprimands for his poor work performance and behavioral misconduct.

INCONSISTENCY

...[he wrote that he had] greater control over his actions. However, just six days later, DK would again threaten his wife's life with a firearm.

Consistent with his ongoing issues at home and work, DK continued to receive written reprimands for his poor work performance and behavioral misconduct. One such letter, dated April 17, 2012, was in response to DK assaulting his wife. In response, DK wrote that his stay at a mental health facility allowed him to exert greater control over his actions. However, just six days later, DK would again threaten his wife's life with a firearm. On April 23, 2012, while they were driving to pick up her mother at the airport, DK's wife asked him to slow down. After yelling at her and failing to

slow down, DK was pulled over and ticketed, which he blamed on her. Soon after, while still in the car, DK put a gun to his wife's head and asked her if she wanted to die. She began to cry and pushed the weapon away. DK then placed the barrel of the gun into his own mouth. He called her stupid for staying with him. DK then confessed to hitting her son on multiple occasions, including incidents which resulted in the boy's hospitalization. He then threatened to kill her if she reported his abuse to the authorities, and for the rest of the day, he kept a gun on his hip.

Over the next six days, DK again told his wife that he had abused her son. She appealed to DK, telling him that God would want him to report what he had done as it was the right thing to do. In reply, DK told her he had already told a base chaplain and would report himself to child protective services. Two days later, at his wife's request, DK recorded a 20-minute video confessing to slapping, hitting, and shaking his stepson on multiple occasions. That same day, DK's wife's mother reached out to his military unit, expressing fear for her daughter's safety. By April 29, 2012, DK's wife gave his recorded confession to the military and indicated that she and DK would be separating.

Second Inpatient Treatment & Incarceration

On April 30, 2012, DK again voluntarily admitted himself to a hospital for inpatient mental health treatment and began receiving therapy. His intake forms indicated that he was violent, suicidal, and homicidal, and that he had told his wife that he would shoot his sergeants. While he was hospitalized, military investigators interviewed DK's wife regarding her reports of abuse. This time, she acknowledged the abuse she received from DK on multiple occasions and shared her fears that DK would have killed her if she had reported it earlier.

MENTAL HEALTH

...intake forms indicated that he was violent, suicidal, and homicidal, and that he had told his wife that he would shoot his sergeants.



On May 14, 2012, a High Risk for Violence Response Team from the military convened and determined that DK should be kept in treatment until he could be placed in pretrial confinement for child and spousal abuse charges. Hospital staff also confronted him about social media posts he had made with suicidal content, which DK denied writing. The next month, on June 6, hospital staff again confronted DK when he was discovered viewing websites related to firearms and body armor. Staff noted that DK’s “insight and judgment were so impaired that he does not make the connection about how that does not look good on him.”¹⁹ The next day, on June 7, 2012, the military base exchange in New Mexico informed investigators that DK had called and placed an order for a Diamondback DB9 9mm semiautomatic handgun, claiming that he would pick it up in a week.

ELICITED CONCERN

...military personnel implemented lockdown procedures, moved DK’s wife into a safe house, and enlisted aid from a federal law enforcement agency to help in a manhunt.

That same evening, on June 7, 2012, DK jumped a fence and escaped from the treatment facility. Concerned that DK might attempt an attack, military personnel implemented lockdown procedures, moved DK’s wife into a safe house, and enlisted aid from a federal law enforcement agency to help in a manhunt. DK was found the next day at a bus station in El

Paso, TX, about 12 miles from the hospital from which he escaped. Although he did not offer physical resistance, he told police during the arrest that he would go for their guns if given the chance.

On June 8, 2012, DK was discharged from the hospital and transferred to pretrial confinement. His diagnoses included depression, panic disorder, attention-deficit disorder, and antisocial traits. Clinicians noted various stressors DK experienced related to his pending divorce and social environment, as well as economic, occupational, and legal problems. Following his discharge, DK was interviewed by investigators. He denied planning an attack against his military branch and instead said that something tragic had happened and that he wanted to kill himself. According to DK, his wife had a miscarriage and wanted a divorce. He told investigators that he wished to cooperate but could not due to his request for legal counsel.

STRESSORS

...his wife had a miscarriage and wanted a divorce.

CONCERNING COMMUNICATIONS

“I frequently feel there’s nothing inside me. Like I’m empty and hollow.” — DK

DK spent approximately five months in pretrial confinement — an experience he described as agonizing. He was placed in lockdown multiple times due to concerns he might harm himself. During this time, he underwent mental health examinations that identified various possible

diagnoses, including antisocial personality disorder, borderline personality disorder, and negativistic and antisocial personality traits. In response to one item on a test, DK wrote, “I frequently feel there’s nothing inside me. Like I’m empty and hollow.”²⁰



In other notes taken during a psychiatric evaluation, a clinician noted that DK remarked that he was somewhat fearful of how violent he could be.

CRIMINAL HISTORY

...accepted a plea deal and admitted to assaulting both his wife and her son.

On October 17, 2012, the divorce between DK and his first wife was finalized. In early November 2012, DK accepted a plea deal and admitted to a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence against his wife and a felony assault of her son.

He was sentenced to a reduced rank, twelve months of incarceration, and a bad conduct discharge. Given that both misdemeanor crimes of domestic violence and felonies prohibit the purchase or possession of firearms, each of these convictions prohibited DK from legally purchasing or possessing a firearm. These convictions should have been entered into a federal database that would have precluded DK from purchasing a firearm from licensed dealers — another action required by military policy that was never taken. While incarcerated, DK participated in treatment and education classes. He also made phone calls to the woman he had met years prior in Texas when she was 13 and he was 17. By March 2013, just five months after sentencing, DK was credited with time served and good behavior and was released. He was banned from his military base indefinitely after a commander indicated he believed DK was a threat to himself and other service members as evidenced by his prior threatening communications and behavior.

Second Marriage

Once released in spring 2013, DK moved back to his hometown of New Braunfels, TX. He was not yet processed out of the military and therefore was still considered to be on active duty. DK stayed with his childhood friend for one week. He lied to others about the reason for his imprisonment, alleging that his ex-wife had lied about being abused. Once DK moved out, his friend withdrew from him and blocked him on social media, ending the friendship.

ELICITED CONCERN

...his friend withdrew from him and blocked him on social media, ending the friendship.

DK then moved into an apartment within a barn on his parents' property. Around this time, DK also exhibited an interest in violence and began to follow and associate with members of a violent motorcycle gang, reportedly aspiring to join the gang himself. At some point soon after his release, he purchased a gun from a friend despite his prior felony and domestic violence convictions that prohibited his possession of such a weapon.

DK also reconnected with the woman he had known as a teenager and had spoken to both during his incarceration and during his first marriage. According to the woman, the contact from DK was unwanted and she eventually agreed to go on a date with him in hopes it would deter any further harassing contact. To explain his incarceration, DK lied to her, claiming it was his ex-wife who had hit her son, not him, and that he was imprisoned only after putting a gun to his commanding officer's head after finding him engaging in intercourse with his ex-wife.



VIOLENCE TOWARD WOMEN AND GIRLS

...he again [sexually assaulted her], this time strangling her to ensure compliance.

DK continued his pattern of assaulting women. By late May 2013, just months after his release, a 20-year-old woman went to DK's residence. While there, DK tried to kiss her against her will and she resisted. DK then ripped her shorts off and forcibly penetrated her while holding her down. In June, when the woman was at his residence another time, he again held her down and forced her to perform oral sex, this time strangling her to ensure compliance. When the woman resisted, DK hit her face and threatened to hurt her further if she did not comply. Days later, this woman told DK's ex-wife and then the local sheriff's office about these incidents. An investigation was opened but paused after several months as the victim did not follow up with detectives. DK was never interviewed.

The same month as these assaults, DK cast himself online in a drastically different light. He claimed in an online profile that he was a teacher's aide at a vacation Bible school, assisting children aged four to six. In reality, it was the woman with whom he had reconnected who had worked at the school. He also presented his interests as animal welfare, arts and culture, children, civil rights and social action, the environment, health, and human rights. He wrote, "I am a hard working dedicated person. I live by the core values on which the [military] go by."²¹

INCONSISTENCY

The same month as these assaults, DK cast himself online in a drastically different light.

In late December 2013, the woman with whom DK had reconnected moved into his barn apartment. Within months, she became pregnant, but she experienced a miscarriage after DK kicked her in the stomach. On at least one occasion in February 2014, a woman she had texted about DK's abuse called police to make a report. When police

LACK OF CONSEQUENCES

...an unidentified witness claimed that the domestic abuse report was...teenage drama, and the police left without further investigation.

arrived at DK's residence to investigate, however, an unidentified witness claimed that the domestic abuse report was a misunderstanding, calling it teenage drama, and the police left without further investigation.

Despite these instances of abuse, DK, 23, and this woman, 19, married on April 4, 2014. Throughout their marriage, DK continued to abuse her psychologically, sexually, and physically. As part of DK's pattern of abuse, he systematically controlled many aspects of his wife's life, including her finances, communications, social life, access to technology, employment, and more. DK controlled the couple's finances and credit card, and he even took money that was owed to her from a settlement she received when she was 18 from her experiences as a victim of child abuse at the hands of her birth parents. DK drained



the funds from his wife’s settlement to avoid working himself but insisted that she work to financially support the family. He also insisted on driving her to and from her jobs and called her constantly during her shifts, which resulted in her termination from at least one job – for which he smashed her face into the car’s dashboard.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

DK’s control over his wife saturated all aspects of her life...

DK’s control over his wife saturated all aspects of her life and how she interacted with others. He used a system of hand signals to covertly communicate with, control, and threaten her while they were in public. He prohibited her from making eye contact with him, and instead forced her to look down when speaking to him. He forbade her from looking at other people, especially men, and restricted her access to a phone and the internet, even surveilling her use of these technologies. He would hold the phone for her when she spoke and end the call if something was said that he did not like. DK harmed a dog that she owned in order to control her, often kicking or throwing the dog whenever he felt his wife misbehaved, then blaming her for the dog’s injuries. DK’s physical abuse included hitting and punching her in the ribs, kicking her in the back, making her beg for her life, pulling her around the house by her hair, throwing her to the ground, hitting her with the butts of his guns, demeaning her, threatening her, and strangling her countless times, often until she lost consciousness.

DK’s harassing and threatening behavior was not just directed toward his wife. At some point in their relationship, he threatened his wife’s stepmother and her husband. The stepmother was concerned enough that she attempted to conduct a background check through an online service, but her search was described as unsuccessful. In addition, at some point after he married his second wife, DK harassed one of the girls he had assaulted years prior. At that time, he had taken naked pictures of her and continued to harass her over the years. This time, he threatened to post naked photos of her online, created a fake profile on a popular social media platform to trick her into talking to him, and asked her to move in with him and his wife as their topless maid. When DK’s wife found out this young woman was talking to DK, she confronted the woman. But when the girl shared screenshots of what he was saying to her, DK’s wife apologized. She then blocked the woman from communicating with her any further.

HARASSMENT

...harassed one of the girls he had assaulted years prior... threatened to post naked photos of her online...

On May 9, 2014, DK’s military discharge for bad conduct became permanent, and he officially separated from the military. Over the next couple of years, DK’s identification was used in multiple attempts to access the base where he had been assigned. The attempts failed because he had been banned from accessing the base.



Colorado, Criminality, & Child Abuse

Over the next four years, DK and his wife moved at least five times between Colorado and Texas — often living in a trailer while in Colorado or in rented apartments while in Texas. According to his wife, they moved to Colorado typically because DK wanted access to marijuana, which was legalized in that state, or because he wanted to get away from his

BULLIED OTHERS

...bullied his wife's disabled brother...

in-laws. At one point, they lived with his in-laws for several weeks while in transition between Colorado and Texas. During that time, DK bullied his wife's disabled brother and quarreled with his in-laws because DK refused to look for employment.

In 2014, DK became increasingly interested in firearms while living in Colorado. DK bartered online for a shotgun that he used to shoot animals, including birds and bats. However, he did not like the quality of the shotgun and subsequently traded it for a dog. In August 2014, while living in a recreational vehicle

VIOLENCE: ANIMAL CRUELTY

...neighbors saw DK chase after and beat the dog with his fists, and then pick it up by the neck and throw it to the ground before dragging it away.

(RV) park in Colorado Springs, CO, neighbors saw DK chase after and beat the dog with his fists, and then pick it up by the neck and throw it to the ground before dragging it away. When police responded to calls from the neighbors, there was a resulting hour-long standoff between DK and officers when he refused to exit his trailer. He claimed that he prevented the dog from attacking another animal and denied abusing the dog. Police eventually issued DK a summons on a charge of animal cruelty and neglect and took the injured and underweight dog to a veterinary clinic. Weeks after the incident, the family moved out of the RV park. DK was ultimately fined and given a deferred probationary sentence in exchange for completing a course on animal cruelty. Once he completed the course, the charge would be dismissed.

On December 22, 2014, DK purchased a Glock Model 19 9mm semiautomatic handgun from a store in Colorado.

The couple's first biological child — a boy — was born in March 2015 while the family was living in Colorado. According to his wife, DK did not help with childrearing. Instead, he often told her what to do and did drugs. DK smoked marijuana, inhaled nitrous oxide ("whippets"), and stole his wife's prescriptions (e.g., pain medication and muscle relaxers), which he took in excess. By May 2015, when their son was six weeks old, DK and his wife moved back to Texas so they could enlist the help of DK's parents with their newborn son.

Meanwhile, DK's abuse of his wife was taking a heavy toll. At times, he abused her in the same room as their child, and she would instruct their son to close his eyes. As the abuse continued over time, she also lied to calm the child, insisting to the boy that DK's abuse did not hurt her. However, her mental health deteriorated over time. She became depressed, cried every day, and attempted suicide on multiple occasions.



In summer 2015, DK and his family moved into an apartment in Colorado with a female roommate whom his wife had befriended from her job at a restaurant. While living together for a few weeks, DK's wife confided to this friend that she suspected DK might be abusing their infant son. Later, she sent this friend a text message with a photo of a handprint on their son's leg. DK had denied hitting the child, and instead claimed he had held the baby's leg too tightly while changing him. However, his wife's friend suggested that she could help get her out of the marriage. DK soon discovered these text message exchanges while reviewing his wife's device activity. He then punched his wife in the ribs and forced the family to pack up and move out in the middle of the night and return to Texas. The next day, upon discovering that DK and his family moved out overnight, this roommate filed a police report for suspected child abuse. However, police did not locate DK's wife in their jurisdiction and took no further action. Months later, DK sent text messages to the same woman, soliciting sexual favors in exchange for money.

LACK OF CONSEQUENCES

...roommate filed a police report for suspected child abuse. However, police did not locate DK's wife in their jurisdiction and took no further action.

By November 2015, DK's wife contacted her stepmother and shared photographs of the abuse she endured from DK. She indicated she wished to speak with a lawyer in order to leave DK and secure exclusive custody rights for their son. However, due to DK's control tactics, she was only ever able to contact her stepmother or other relatives after she had earned technology privileges from him — typically by doing chores or granting him sexual favors. After seeing photos of her abuse, her stepmother encouraged her to flee the house and seek refuge at a relative's house or at a women's shelter. At one point when their son was approximately one year old, she informed DK that she wanted a divorce. In response, DK hit her and took her electronic tablet away from her. She would tell DK she wanted a divorce several more times during their relationship.

CONCERNING COMMUNICATIONS

"He said...the only way of leaving this marriage was one of us was going to end up in a body bag." — DK's wife

However, DK threatened that he would harm or kill her if she ever tried to leave him. According to her, "He said if I ever left him, I would have to pay for it. That the only way of leaving this marriage was one of us was going to end up in a body bag."²²

Increased Fascination with Mass Attacks and Firearms

Beginning around 2015 and continuing for the ensuing years, DK researched mass attacks and school shooters, including details about the background of the Columbine High School attackers. DK also became fascinated with the mass attack perpetrated in a majority African American church in Charleston, SC by a white supremacist in June 2015. This fascination was evidenced by messages he sent via social media to his former military supervisor. According to his former supervisor, DK was excited about news of the attack. When she told him that



his reaction to the attack was not normal and that he should seek help, DK indicated he wished he had the nerve to kill people; he had only killed animals. It was also in 2015 that he applied for a concealed carry permit in Texas. Officials initially denied his request, citing the animal cruelty and neglect charge still pending in Colorado. Once cleared, the permit would have been issued; however, DK never responded to the letter denying his permit.

In 2016, DK continued to research firearms extensively. He researched the makes and models of firearms online, the manufacturing of silencers, and the weights of tactical accessories. He frequently attended gun shows and, despite his prior felony and domestic violence convictions, spent what little money the family had on ordering firearm parts and tactical gear both online and offline. After poor experiences with guns purchased from the secondhand market, DK told his wife that he preferred new guns purchased from stores because they were more reliable. He took an interest in adding designs to weapons and took care in disassembling and cleaning his guns. DK also told his wife that he wanted to create his own school where he would instruct people how to use firearms. He told her that he wished to teach people that guns were not at fault for bad deeds, but rather that the people who used guns for these activities were to blame.

In April 2016, despite his prior felony and domestic violence convictions, DK bought a Ruger AR-556 semiautomatic rifle with an additional 30-round high-capacity magazine and ammunition from a store. This would later be the primary weapon that DK used in his attack at the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs. DK modified the weapon and increased its accuracy, firing rate, and reloading speed. He regularly purchased large quantities of ammunition for the weapon and boasted about these enhancements online and in messages sent to his former supervisor.

In June 2016, DK's wife was asked to testify in a new trial against her adoptive father who had abused her as a child. DK was unhappy about this development, claiming that he feared for his wife's mental health. However, his wife later reported that DK was actually concerned because he could not control what she said in court, and feared she might reveal information about his own abuse of her.

ACCESS TO WEAPONS

...despite his prior felony and domestic violence convictions, DK bought a Ruger AR-556 semiautomatic rifle...the primary weapon that DK used in his attack...

INCONSISTENCY

...[Despite claims otherwise], his wife later reported that DK was actually concerned because he could not control what she said in court...



MENTAL HEALTH

...severe anxiety, regular panic attacks, depression, paranoia, and fear.

BEHAVIOR CHANGE

...he became more reclusive...and rarely left the house.

From June through August 2016, DK participated in 23 counseling sessions to contend with severe anxiety, regular panic attacks, depression, paranoia, and fear. DK had become withdrawn, and had trouble sleeping, concentrating, and managing stress and anger. Several times during these sessions, he alleged that his wife had cheated on him and said he did not trust her. He also discussed financial difficulties, past family issues involving his sisters, and employment concerns. DK eventually terminated these

counseling sessions when he lost access to Medicaid and refused to pay for the sessions out-of-pocket. By late 2016, DK’s wife noticed that he became more reclusive during this time and rarely left the house. At times, she encouraged him to leave their apartment so that their young son could socialize with other children. Despite these efforts, the family had no friends.

While DK became more reclusive, he threatened others through social media and shared increasingly concerning content online. These threats were sent both to people he knew, as well as strangers. In late September 2016, DK sent messages to a former superior from his days in the military with whom he had a contentious relationship. He wrote, “Hey you stupid bitch. You should have been put in the ground a long time ago. Better hope I don’t ever see you. You can’t face facts, you fat piece of shit.”²³ Though she saved screenshots of the threats and sent them to her former supervisor, she later declined to pursue legal action out of fear DK might discover her home address. As for threats he made to strangers, at some point after the 2016 presidential election, DK sent online messages to two women who had different political views than him. To one, he sent a screenshot showing her own personal information and threatened that he would shoot her. He threatened the other woman in a similar manner. In further examples, in November 2016, he posted a threatening reply to another user on social media and shared his own views on the motives of mass attackers:



“come too [sic] my house and I’ll be more than willing too [sic] pump you full of lead if you step 1 foot on my property. 600 rounds per minute from a high powered assault rifle with a hair trigger will end your pathetic existence.”²⁴



“Mass murderers don’t do it because of video games. They do it because they are tired of the fucking bullshit in the rigged system and the hate that breeds in all 90% of humans. And it’s time for payback. Most of them anyway. Serial killers do it because they are addicted too [sic] the rush of killing and get bored with killing animals.”²⁵



Animal Cruelty and Threats of Violence

By 2017, DK and his family had moved back to his parents' property in Texas, where they lived in the barn apartment. His wife was pregnant with the couple's second child because DK regularly took away her birth control as a form of punishment for her perceived misbehavior.

VIOLENCE: ANIMAL CRUELTY

...he used the dogs who did not listen to him for target practice before dismembering their bodies.

DK's communications continued to cause concern in others. In spring 2017, after the settlement funds awarded to his wife were depleted, DK began to breed and sell dogs to support the family financially. He told his former supervisor that he used the dogs who did not listen to him for target practice before

dismembering their bodies. After this message, DK's former supervisor told him that he needed help that she was not able to provide and encouraged him to seek help elsewhere. She then instructed him to call her if he ever considered hurting himself or someone else and unfriended him on social media.

In March 2017, DK's other former superior, whom he had threatened 6 months earlier, submitted a threatening message she received from DK to the social media platform. The message, which was then deleted by administrators, stated that his only regret was "not ending [her]" when he had the chance, and that she deserved a "nice long dirt nap."²⁶ In May 2017, she obtained a photograph from social media of DK wearing a black tactical mask with a skull painted on it. The skull was modeled after the logo for a popular comic book vigilante. DK would later wear this mask during his attack. Also on social media, DK posted to one of his profiles:



"You learn to shoot by doing it... a lot of the mass shooters are impossible to detect. I'm pretty sure they don't go around acting crazy screaming to the world but they are very careful. Just like serial killers. So they pass psych evals anyway."²⁷

During this same period, DK engaged in troubling communications and behaviors with relatives. In March 2017, he instigated a physical fight with in-laws at a birthday party for his brother-in-law. After this confrontation, he sent a series of aggressive messages to his mother-in-law. Also in 2017, DK sent sexually graphic images of himself to his wife's former stepmother and asked for suggestive pictures back. She encouraged DK to seek mental health treatment and counseling and recommended specific options to pursue, including seeking help from his parents who had the financial resources to do so. However, DK refused because he did not think his parents would believe he needed help and did not want them involved.

ELICITED CONCERN

...sent a series of aggressive messages to his mother-in-law...[and] sexually graphic images of himself to his wife's former stepmother...



In late spring 2017, DK’s wife reported that he became more depressed, short-tempered, and less tolerant, and began to shut down. She felt he was abusing his anti-anxiety medication and was slowly changing from the man she knew. At the same time, tensions between DK and his wife’s family began to boil over. In late May 2017, his wife went into labor. However, while her mother and grandmother were traveling to the hospital for the birth, DK texted them and told them that they were not welcome. During this exchange, DK became enraged and reportedly threatened to eliminate the whole family. He further warned them, “I suggest you don’t test my resolve. If for any reason [you] attempt to insert yourself between [my wife] and I again I will personally make it my mission to destroy your entire life.”²⁸

In May 2017, DK’s wife gave birth to his second biological child — a girl. It would be months until his wife’s relatives would meet the baby. That same month, DK posted on social media about his wife’s family:



“All I know is if any of my wife’s family are going to heaven I deff [sic] don’t want to spend eternity with them.”²⁹



“I’m an atheist and they are ignorant self righteous Christians or so they claim in public. But behind closed doors its [sic] drug addiction and domestic violence. My wife was the right person to marry but the rest of them could get shot in the face and I’d laugh.”³⁰

Behavioral Changes and Attack Planning

In summer 2017, DK sought employment as a seasonal unarmed security guard at a water park — a job he obtained after lying on his job application about both his bad conduct discharge and his felony conviction. DK worked overnight shifts, and whenever he left the home, he placed cinder blocks against the apartment door so that his wife and their children could not leave. He also provided his wife with an iPad that could only communicate with him, and he forced her to use it to check in with him multiple times a day. If she did not check in, DK would leave work and return home. DK was terminated from this security guard position for being a poor fit after fewer than six weeks of employment.

ATTACK PLANNING

...compiled specifications of his rifle [and] a list of equipment that he planned to purchase, [and] bought a bullet-proof vest online.

Around July 2017, the same month he was terminated, DK documented some of his thoughts and planning efforts in notes on his phone. In one, he wrote, “I am the angel of death. No one can stop me.”³¹ In another, he compiled specifications of his rifle, including the weight of various

firearm modifications that he had made and comparisons between the weights of certain pieces when wet or dry. He also compiled a list of equipment that he planned to purchase. In August, he bought a bullet-proof vest online.



DK's History and Interest in Violence

In addition to his history of violence toward women and girls, domestic violence, and child abuse, DK engaged in other types of violence and showed inappropriate interest in violent acts.

- » Shot small animals, such as birds and bats, and told others he killed animals and enjoyed it
- » Physically assaulted two pet dogs, with one incident resulting in a criminal charge
- » Told an acquaintance that he purchased dogs online, used them for target practice, and dismembered their bodies
- » Began to follow and associate with members of a violent motorcycle gang
- » Told an acquaintance about his fascination and enthusiasm for a June 2015 attack against a predominantly African American church in South Carolina
- » Researched past mass shootings, including the attack that occurred at Columbine High School
- » In response to the mass attack perpetrated at the Route 91 Harvest Music Festival in Las Vegas, NV, told his co-workers, "If you're going to do it, do it big."³²
- » Posted online about the motivations and behaviors of serial killers and mass murderers
- » Told a family friend that he liked to watch television shows about mass murder and cults

In late August 2017, DK got another job as a security guard working overnight shifts at an RV park. Soon after, on September 1, 2017, DK attended one final counseling session with his former therapist after his sessions had previously been discontinued a year prior. The clinician notes recorded similar comments as before. In his session, DK discussed his new job as a security guard at the RV park and shared the belief that he might have Asperger's syndrome. He also shared that his parents were preparing to move out of state to Colorado.

DK remained active on social media at this time and continued to personally attack other users and post content related to firearms, violence, and his atheistic beliefs. On his profile, he had favorited weapons manufacturers and distributors, as well as topics related to atheism. DK shared with a religious childhood friend that he believed the world was horrible

and that he was upset he had brought children into the world. He also told his friend that he enjoyed killing animals, and that he knew he was going to hell.

VIOLENCE: ANIMAL CRUELTY

...told his friend that he enjoyed killing animals....



On October 18, 2017, DK purchased a Ruger SR22 semiautomatic handgun from a store. Days later, on October 26, he began logging to-do lists and reminders for his attack (see table on the next page).

On October 28, 2017, DK ordered two 100-round high-capacity drum magazines for his rifle and added more tasks to the list on his phone. Following this purchase, he called the store multiple times every day to check his order status and whether the magazines had arrived.

Also on October 28, 2017, DK posted to his social media, “Remember the fifth of November!!”³³ Referred to as “Guy Fawkes Night,” this date commemorates the failed Gunpowder Plot of 1605 to attack parliament in the United Kingdom. This would be the date that DK would perpetrate his attack against the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs.

On October 29, 2017, DK posted a photograph of his Ruger rifle to social media. The rifle was modified with a red dot sight and a two-stage trigger, each designed to enhance accuracy. DK captioned the photo, “She’s a bad bitch.”³⁴ The next day, DK made further notes on his phone about final preparations for his attack. As DK amassed weapons and tactical gear, he maintained his rifle on a rack in a closet and other tactical equipment inside of a black bucket near a door of the residence. DK forbade his wife from going near the container.

In late October, DK’s anxiety intensified to such a degree that he lost control of his bowels. His mother then took him to see a psychiatrist. He was prescribed clonazepam to treat his anxiety, but DK soon began to abuse the medication, including intentionally double dosing (i.e., taking two medications with the same active ingredient simultaneously) with Xanax. Both clonazepam and Xanax are in a class of medications called benzodiazepines and have sedating effects.

On October 31, 2017, DK brought his family to a fall festival on the grounds of the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, where they met his wife’s adoptive mother and other relatives. This event marked the first time these relatives met the new baby, as well as their first opportunity to see DK’s wife in months. According to his wife’s later testimony, she loved spending time at the church and taking care of the children there, and she considered it a safe place for her. In contrast, at different points in their relationship, DK attended the church with her and laughed as he listened to the sermons, which made the pastor uncomfortable. This time, however, DK was unusually quiet at the gathering. He left his wife alone with her adoptive mother for a period of time — a highly unusual behavior given that he typically never left her alone with others. Instead of staying with his wife, DK walked around the church grounds. According to witnesses, his behavior was odd, and he seemed distant and hardly blinked. At least one witness claimed that DK seemed to be casing the church.

ATTACK PLANNING

...walked around the church grounds...
seemed to be casing the church.



To-Do Lists on DK's Phone³⁵

October 26th

- Trash trailer
- Oil change
- Turn off card
- Get a pack pack [sic] for more ammo
- Get more PMAGS
- Try on and reorganize gear

October 28th (list 1)

- Delete Instagram and FB
- Stuff in car
- Clear Youtube and Safari
- Block [two first names] on all social media and GoPhone
- Destroy old iPhone

October 28th (list 2)

- Put together .22 kit then put it in a backpack
- Roll a joint
- Change out all batteries
- Anti-diarrhea
- Remove all weed stuff from house
- Put mag funnel back on

October 30th

- Check the tire pressure
- Charge her GoPhone
- Add cash to card
- Make sure her card is in her pocket
- Find location for push knife
- Put gun stuff in car when [wife] doesn't notice
- Rifle into guitar case
- Put dog tags for [son] in buried location

On the same day, DK called his wife's former stepmother. In the phone call, DK alleged that he had visited his wife's adoptive mother's home that day and found photos and videos in a drawer that documented his wife's sexual abuse as a child. In the conversation, DK expressed rage and claimed he would do something to make sure that this type of event never happened again. He instructed her to meet him on the morning of Sunday, November 5 — the day on which DK would ultimately perpetrate his attack — so he could provide her with the evidence. According to his wife's former stepmother, DK also asked her if she was recording their phone conversation. After this phone call, she notified the authorities of the possible evidence against DK's wife's abuser. However, when the district attorney contacted DK, he was uncooperative and denied having any evidence. The next day, police officers responded to DK's residence to retrieve the evidence in question. DK met with the police officers near the gate of his parents' property, and during their conversation, he told the officers that he did not like speaking to police, that he was angry, and that he had a firearm. DK again denied having any evidence and instead insisted they should check his wife's adoptive mother's home. Consequently, the police left. According to his wife, she and DK had discovered the photos and videos years prior, and she destroyed them at the time because she was angry that no one had believed her reports of past abuse.

In the days before the mass attack at the church, DK began to behave differently. While DK was generally described as polite in his job as a security guard at the RV park, customers noted some problems with his demeanor in his final days. One customer had an awkward interaction with DK when they asked if children were permitted in the swimming pool. According to this witness, DK was miserable and annoyed, and he appeared to want to exert authority over customers. DK also posted on social media that a chronic neck injury he sustained from a motorcycle accident was flaring up and causing him pain. He also shaved



his beard, which he had had for years. Neighbors began hearing rapid-fire gunshots in the vicinity of DK’s home each morning.

On November 3, 2017, according to DK’s wife, he showed her a video that depicted him receiving oral sex from another woman. While she knew that DK had cheated on her previously, he appeared to derive joy from belittling her when showing her evidence of his infidelity. In response, she told DK that she was done with him and their relationship. DK then pulled her hair, threw her down against a table, punched her in the ribs, and beat her. However, she fought back vigorously — something she had rarely done before. The next day, DK again visited a firearms store to inquire about his order status for high-capacity drum magazines. He then went to work but ultimately left his overnight shift early, claiming he had a headache. When he returned home that night, DK’s wife told him again that she wanted a divorce. At this point, DK reacted calmly to this request. The two agreed that they would visit the courthouse on Monday, November 6, to file for divorce and that her adoptive mother would be there to help. Later that night, DK forced his wife to have sex with him, as he often did.

STRESSOR

...DK’s wife told him again that she wanted a divorce.

Summary of DK’s Behavior Changes Leading Up to the Attack

Leading up to his attack, a number of changes were noted in DK’s behavior, demeanor, and appearance. These changes included:

- » Within **one year**, he was more reclusive and hardly left his home. He communicated more with his wife’s former stepmother and shared increasingly inappropriate messages with her, for which she scolded DK.
- » Within **six months**, he was increasingly depressed, short-tempered, and “shutting down.”³⁶
- » Within **a month**, he had increased anxiety, causing him to lose control of his bowels.
- » Within **days**, customers at work described changes from being polite to seeming miserable and angry, and appearing to want to exert authority over them. He shaved his beard, which he had had for years; he demonstrated an unusual willingness to leave his wife alone with her family; and neighbors began to hear rapid-fire gunshots in the vicinity of DK’s home each morning.



DK communicated with one of his sisters online both the night before and the morning of the attack. In these messages, DK told his sister that he was a “shell of a person” and had to wear a “mask” in order to “hide among the sheep.” In reply to DK’s messages, his sister asked him if he had seen a therapist and indicated that she was sorry he was “struggling so much,” and that she wished he could grow to wear “less of a mask” with time.³⁷

CONCERNING COMMUNICATIONS

“Doing well. LOL. I fake everything because I am far from doing well. The more I fake, the more isolated I become. It’s become my way to survive, I’ve learned the more I blend in by pretending I have emotions or even a personality, that people don’t catch on that I am simply – I simply am not there, a shell of a person. I think some people are catching on, though, which isn’t good. I’m more comfortable around people with my mask on.” – DK³⁸

“My unusual and irrational thinking, I’m afraid, has plagued my mind constantly. I don’t know if a fake life is worth living. If I was truly free to be myself, they would hunt me down and chain me. So the only way is to hide among the sheep...” – DK³⁹

The Day of the Attack

On the morning of Sunday, November 5, 2017, DK was quiet and calm. He posted to social media, “I’m a wreck.”⁴¹ He also went to the main house on his parents’ property and asked his parents if they would be willing to watch his kids so that he and his wife could talk about their marriage. His parents offered to do so later in the day. DK and his mother exchanged text messages. In these messages, DK indicated that he and his wife might go to counseling together if he secured insurance again. DK’s mother told DK that she believed counseling was a good idea.

BEHAVIOR CHANGE

DK’s wife noted that he was acting differently.

That morning, DK’s wife noted that he was acting differently. Instead of having a large breakfast, DK requested that his wife make him only a light one. After he ate, he vomited in the bathroom. When

his wife asked him if he was alright, he responded, “We only have an hour left.”⁴² As his wife worked to change and help their children, DK approached her and put a gun to her head. He instructed her to get onto their bed and lay flat on her stomach. He then handcuffed her, taped her hands together, and tied her wrists and ankles with rope. During this experience, DK’s wife cried while their two-year-old son was in his crib within the same room, watching and screaming. DK’s wife instructed their son to close his eyes. DK then slowly removed



FINAL ACTS

DK texted his parents, “I’m sorry. I love you guys. Please go untie [my wife] in the barn.”

tactical gear from the black bucket where he stored equipment and began to assemble and equip the gear. This included body armor, a vest, ammunition, two handguns, and a Ruger AR-556 rifle strapped to his back. DK was dressed in all-black clothes, including the black mask

with a painted skull logo. DK then told his son that he would be right back, and he left the apartment. DK then drove to the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs — where his wife’s relatives, including her adoptive mother, often attended church service. On his way there, DK texted his parents, “I’m sorry. I love you guys. Please go untie [my wife] in the barn.”⁴³

At approximately 11:14 a.m., DK parked his vehicle near the front door of the church. He then exited his vehicle and began to shoot at the building with his Ruger AR-556 rifle. He shot approximately 254 rounds at the side of the church from outside, killing two people inside, and he also fired rounds at a nearby home. He then retrieved more ammunition from his vehicle before entering the church. Once inside, he shouted, “Everybody dies, motherfuckers!”⁴⁴ Then, he shot at the lights inside of the church before targeting a technical crew in the back of the building. He moved up and down the aisles and shot at the congregants — often shooting individuals multiple times. At some point during his attack, DK reloaded his weapon and exclaimed, “Man guys, it’s really smoky in here.”⁴⁵ Among those killed was his wife’s grandmother whom DK had previously threatened to kill when she attempted to attend the birth of DK’s daughter. While both his wife’s brother and her adoptive mother often attended services at the church, they were not present at the church that morning. In total, DK’s attack lasted approximately seven and a half minutes. DK then dropped his Ruger AR-556 rifle in the middle of the church floor and exited the church.

After exiting, an armed local resident, who had heard the gunshots from his nearby home, fired upon DK from behind a parked vehicle, striking him in the torso and leg. After being shot, DK drew a Glock handgun from his vest and returned fire. However, none of DK’s bullets hit the man, and eventually, DK climbed into his vehicle and fled the scene. Within moments, the armed local resident flagged down a passing car, and he and the driver engaged in a high-speed pursuit of DK’s vehicle. As the injured DK drove, he made a phone call to his father’s phone. When his parents answered, they were already in his residence untying his wife. The phone was placed on speakerphone, and DK said, “Dad, I fucked up. I just killed a bunch of people in church.”⁴⁶ He also said, “I’ve been shot and I’m bleeding out...I’m not ever going to get back to the house to see you again.”⁴⁷ DK then asked his parents to hand the phone to his wife and to take him off speakerphone. Though their conversation was private, DK reportedly told his wife that he loved her.

After driving roughly ten miles, DK drove off the road at a sharp curve. The vehicle hit a road sign. According to DK’s wife, she was still on the call with him in his final moments. Despite having claimed he loved her moments before, DK’s wife reported that his final words to her



were, “It was your fault.”⁴⁸ Then, at the scene of his car crash, he shot himself in the head. His wife claimed that she heard the gunshot through the phone, and then hung up the call.

In total, DK’s attack at the First Baptist Church resulted in the death of 26 people and injury to 22 more.

About Motive

NTAC’s research shows that motives for acts of targeted violence are often multifaceted. For instance, when analyzing mass attacks in public spaces that took place within a five-year period, NTAC found that some attackers had three or more distinct components to their motives for carrying out an attack. The most common motive identified across mass attackers related to an attacker’s perceived grievance. While it is unclear what specifically motivated this attacker, the evidence obtained about his background reveals that:

- » he **harbored grievances** against his wife and her family, and he may have chosen to attack the church because of its importance to them and the likelihood that at least some family members would be attending church services at the time of the attack; and
- » he had a documented history of a **desire to kill**, including instances where he fantasized about homicide in journal entries, researched previous mass shootings, and expressed excitement over reports of other mass attacks. He also shared his admiration of past attackers, told an acquaintance that he wished he had the nerve to conduct a mass killing himself, and had a long history of concerning and threatening communications — including writing just months before the attack, “I am the angel of death. No one can stop me.”⁴⁰



VIOLENT BEHAVIORS PRECEDING FIREARM ACQUISITION

DK VIOLENT BEHAVIORS	DK FIREARM ACQUISITION
FEBRUARY 12, 2012	SAME DAY...
On his 21st birthday, DK assaulted his first wife after she suggested that they get a divorce.	DK purchased a .38 revolver from the military base exchange. Five days later, he was ordered to hand it over to his supervisor after his wife reported his abuse.
APRIL 2-8, 2012	A FEW DAYS LATER...
Psychological testing and risk assessments revealed that DK was a high risk for domestic violence and controlling behaviors in relationships, and he endorsed bizarre and extreme thoughts.	DK purchased a 9mm semiautomatic handgun from the military base exchange.
JUNE 7, 2012	SAME DAY...
DK escaped from a mental health facility where he was being evaluated for suicidal and homicidal ideation. Consequently, his military base was placed on lockdown and his wife moved to a safe house.	DK ordered a 9mm semiautomatic handgun from the military base exchange and stated he would pick it up in one week.

NOVEMBER 7, 2012

DK was convicted of a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence against his wife and felony assault of his stepson. He was sentenced to incarceration and a bad conduct discharge.

The following firearm purchases were federally prohibited due to his felony and domestic violence convictions.

SPRING 2013	AROUND THIS TIME...
Shortly after his release from custody, DK sexually assaulted a woman multiple times. Around this time, he married his second wife, whom he regularly abused.	DK purchased a gun from a friend and bartered for a shotgun online but got rid of them both after one jammed and he traded the other for a dog.
AUGUST 1, 2014	ON DECEMBER 22, 2014...
DK abused a dog, resulting in an animal cruelty charge. Around this time, he told his second wife that he preferred new guns from established retailers because they were more reliable.	DK purchased a 9mm semiautomatic handgun from a retail store.
2015-2016	ON APRIL 7, 2016...
DK expressed administration of mass attacks, including one attack perpetrated in a church in 2015. He continued to regularly assault his wife and also abused his child.	DK purchased a 5.56mm semiautomatic rifle from a retail store. This would later become the primary weapon used in his mass attack.
MID-OCTOBER 2017	ON OCTOBER 18, 2017...
DK told co-workers about his admiration for a mass attack perpetrated in Las Vegas, NV.	DK purchased a .22-caliber semiautomatic handgun from a retail store.

NOVEMBER 5, 2017

DK conducted the mass attack at the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, TX.



Conclusion

The horrific, decades-long pattern of violent, abusive, and threatening behaviors exhibited by this attacker underscores the critical need for effective violence prevention efforts within our communities. This case study depicts an attacker with a long history of deeply disturbing behavior that concerned others, including numerous instances of physical, emotional, and sexual violence; child abuse; animal cruelty; explicit threats; and other concerning communications and behaviors. Chief among these concerning behaviors is this attacker's long history of domestic violence perpetrated against multiple women and children. Prevention of such violence is of vital importance, and communities and law enforcement should make every effort to stop perpetrators of these devastating crimes and provide necessary assistance to victims.

For over 25 years, NTAC has studied the background, thinking, and behaviors of assassins, terrorists, mass attackers, school attackers, and others to better understand the patterns of behaviors that lead to mass and targeted violence. NTAC's body of research demonstrates that most attackers display observable behaviors of concern prior to their act of targeted violence. In NTAC's analysis of 173 mass attacks in public spaces that occurred within a five-year period, ***NTAC found that 41% of mass attackers had a history of engaging in at least one incident of domestic violence, often perpetrated against intimate partners, but also victimizing children and other family members.*** Domestic violence is often perpetrated in private, and offenders may take steps to conceal their abuse, just as the attacker in this case study did. However, the prevention of both domestic violence and mass violence requires a community effort. Collaboration across multiple community systems, including law enforcement, courts, mental health providers, and domestic violence and hate crime advocacy groups, can ensure that appropriate steps are taken to identify, assess, and manage concerns regarding the risk of violence. Each of these community stakeholders must use all the tools at their disposal to combat domestic violence and provide necessary supports to those who need help.

Further, NTAC research has shown that mass shootings have often been perpetrated by those who were legally prohibited from possessing firearms. Federal law regulates the sale of firearms from retailers and certain private sellers. When any firearm sale is attempted through a federal firearms license (FFL) dealer, a background check is conducted using the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS). NICS searches three national databases for information on criminal records, warrants, protective orders, and other information that may disqualify a particular firearms purchase. Over one-quarter of mass shooters studied in NTAC's report were prohibited by federal law from purchasing or possessing a firearm, including those attackers with a prior felony or domestic violence conviction, those who were fugitives from justice, those previously adjudicated incompetent or involuntarily committed to a mental health institution, and those who were the subject of a domestic-related protection order at the time.



From 2012 to 2017, the attacker described in this case study purchased at least five firearms and a large amount of ammunition. While two of those firearm transactions were from private sellers, three were from FFL retailers. However, when those retailers performed the required NICS check, their results did not reveal the felony and domestic violence convictions that would have disqualified the purchase because the attacker’s information had not been submitted for inclusion into NICS. In direct response to this tragedy, Congress passed the bipartisan Fix NICS Act which addresses gaps in NICS by requiring federal agencies to submit all relevant records to NICS in an accurate and timely fashion. Signed by the President on March 23, 2018, the Fix NICS Act has resulted in substantial increases in the number of records submitted to the national databases checked by NICS each year, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.

About “Red Flag” Laws

Some states have implemented extreme risk protection orders (ERPOs), also known as **red flag laws**, which allow for certain individuals (e.g., law enforcement or family members) to petition for the temporary confiscation of firearms from an individual of concern if the court agrees that the individual poses a risk of harm to themselves or others. ERPOs follow procedural due process to protect the rights of gun owners while providing an important public safety tool for communities to limit access to firearms in cases where an individual poses an articulable risk of violence.

Importantly, around the same time that the attacker purchased firearms, he engaged in other concerning, violent, and criminal behaviors that included abusing his wife, escaping from a mental health facility which prompted the lockdown of a military base, sexually assaulting women, engaging in animal cruelty and neglect for which he was criminally charged, engaging in child abuse, and researching and expressing open admiration for previous mass attackers (see table on page 32). Despite the concerns others had about his communications and behaviors, the attacker was never the subject of a behavioral threat assessment for the purpose of assessing and managing his risk of violence. NTAC’s research shows that targeted violence can be prevented when communities are equipped with the appropriate tools, training, and resources to recognize warning signs and intervene. The Secret Service uses and recommends behavioral threat assessment as a proactive approach to targeted violence prevention as described in ***Behavioral Threat Assessment Units: A Guide for State and Local Law Enforcement to Prevent Targeted Violence***. This approach is a key element of community-level efforts to prevent the mass casualty attacks that have impacted our nation. Everyone has a role to play in keeping our communities safe. It is important that individuals within the community share their concerns with those in authority, who must then take tangible steps to reduce the risk of violence.

**Behavioral Threat Assessment Units:
A Guide for State and Local Law Enforcement**

Read more about how state and local law enforcement agencies can implement behavioral threat assessment in their communities:
<https://www.secretservice.gov/ntac>



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- ⁴⁶ Transcript of bench trial proceedings before the Honorable Xavier Rodriguez United States District Judge April 7, 2021. Holcombe, et al. v. United States, Case No. 5:18-cv-00555 (W.D. Tex. Apr. 7, 2021).
- ⁴⁷ Transcript of bench trial proceedings before the Honorable Xavier Rodriguez United States District Judge April 7, 2021. Holcombe, et al. v. United States, Case No. 5:18-cv-00555 (W.D. Tex. Apr. 7, 2021).
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