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Motive unclear in Alabama shooting spree

Wed Mar 11, 2009 3:01pm EDT

By [Verna Gates](#)

MONTGOMERY, Alabama (Reuters) - Authorities struggled on Wednesday to understand why an Alabama man shot dead 10 people, including his mother and four other relatives, before killing himself after a gunbattle with police.

Michael McLendon's rampage, the worst in the southern state's history, bore the signs of a planned attack but lacked a clear motive, J. Christopher Murphy, director of the Alabama Department of Public Safety, told reporters.

"He was not fired (from his job). There was no girlfriend breakup. He had no criminal record and no history of mental illness, all the things we normally look for," Murphy said.

The 28-year-old gunman, who lived with his mother, was armed with two military assault rifles, a handgun and a shotgun in the shooting spree, which started at a home in Kinston in southeastern Alabama. He fired more than 200 rounds.

McLendon killed his mother, grandmother, an uncle and two cousins as well as the wife of a local deputy sheriff and her 18-month-old daughter who were visiting family members.

The woman's four-month-old baby was wounded along with five others.

Three others, including a motorist at a gas station, were killed as McLendon drove through nearby Samson, apparently firing randomly.

Harri Anne Smith, an Alabama state legislator who was in the town after the attack, said the gunman wore ear plugs.

"NICE QUIET KID"

Robert Preachers, the coroner in neighboring Coffee County, said he knew most of the victims including the killer. The area, which borders Florida, is a largely agricultural area with many low-income families.

"He (McLendon) was a nice quiet kid, no trouble. He was always polite and nice," Preachers said. Asked about a possible motive, he said: "He carried it with him to the grave."

The shooting spree ended after a car chase and gun battle, authorities said.

Describing the chase, Wynnton Melton, the mayor of nearby Geneva, said: "Officer Ricky Morgan rammed his car to distract him and was rewarded with a hail of bullets One bullet grazed the shoulder of police chief Frankie Lindsey."

A police officer in Geneva said the gunman "shot at several vehicles on the highway and then he shot at Wal-Mart and Piggly Wiggly," a grocery store.

McLendon also shot his family's dogs, Preachers said. "He killed her (his mother) and her dogs. He shot the dogs in the head. Then he piled them up and gassed them (poured gasoline on them and lit it). He laid the dogs next

to her," he said.

Mass shootings have become more frequent in recent years in the United States, where guns are widely available for purchase and the right to own weapons for self defense and hunting is defended by many.

In one of the worst recent shooting incidents, a gunman dressed as Santa Claus killed nine guests at a Christmas Eve party, before taking his own life in Covina, California, a suburb of Los Angeles.

On April 16, 2007, Virginia Tech, a university in Blacksburg, Virginia, became the site of the deadliest rampage in modern U.S. history when a student gunman killed 32 people and himself.

In Germany on Wednesday, a 17-year-old gunman went on a shooting spree at his former school in the southwest of the country, killing up to 15 people before dying in a shootout with police, authorities said.

(Writing by Matthew Bigg; editing by Pascal Fletcher and Paul Simao)

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