



Warnings Unheeded: Twin Tragedies at Fairchild Air Force Base

Andy Brown , Massad Ayoob (Foreword)

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The true story of two separate mass-casualty incidents that occurred within days of each other at a US Air Force base. Using the words of the people who lived and died during the tragedies, the book provides an in-depth look at the before, during and after of an avoidable “active shooter” incident and a preventable fatal plane crash.

Warnings Unheeded follows an "active shooter" as he progresses toward his crime and dispels the myth that incidents of mass public murder are random acts of violence committed without warning by otherwise normal individuals.

In a parallel account, *Warnings Unheeded* tells the story of a talented pilot who was known to exceed the maneuvering limits of his B-52 bomber. His reckless flying not only put the lives of his crew at risk, but also the lives of the air show spectators who gathered to watch him perform. When attempts to ground the pilot were unsuccessful, several aviators refused to fly with him and "predicted the worst air show disaster in history."

Warnings Unheeded is authored by Andy Brown, the man who ended the gunman's killing spree, and is a result of more than seven years of writing and research. Brown “masterfully weaves” the stories together and intersperses them with chapters that reveal the preparations he made that enabled him to end a pistol-versus-rifle gunfight with a 70 yard shot from his handgun. Brown also writes of his experience with the aftermath of the shooting and encourages others to learn from his mistakes when it comes to dealing with the effects of trauma.

These empowering stories are thoroughly researched and presented in an objective, narrative style that shows what can happen when authorities become complacent, when the precursors of violence are ignored and when the lessons from history are forgotten.

Warnings Unheeded: Twin Tragedies at Fairchild Air Force Base Details

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Janine Fraser says

A well researched well thought out read, kudos to Andy Brown for organizing his huge amount of research in an organized manner. I hope that through this book, specific elements of military practice will change for the better. Thank you Andy Brown for an excellent read!

Michael Connick says

Simply amazing book in how well it's written, and the breadth and depth of the coverage of its topic.

As the title indicates, the book is about Warnings Unheeded - primarily about warnings regarding a mentally ill Air Force airman, but also warnings about a B-52 pilot's recklessness in flying his aircraft. Written by the Air Force Security Police Officer who shot and killed the mentally ill airman during his mass murder rampage at an Air Force hospital, it covers in detail the lives of the two key figures in this story and how the tragedies for which they were responsible could have been averted, if only the multiple warnings regarding their behavior would have been heeded.

Wonderful book that's hard to put down. The author shows incredible humility and goes to great lengths to avoid portraying himself as any type of hero. In fact, he's quite honest about the PTSD symptoms he suffered for many years following the shooting. He also takes care not to place blame, but rather to show what might have been changed to avert the two terrible tragedies outlined in the book. The author, Andy Brown, seems like an extraordinary individual and he's written an extraordinary book.

Jennie says

Andy Brown wrote this book about his experience as the military police officer who stopped a shooting rampage at Fairchild Air Force Base in 1994. I am giving it my heartfelt best recommendation. At times, I read it through tears. It is well-written, heart-breaking, and informative.

Greg says

In 1994, Fairchild Air Force Base in Washington state was the location of two horrendous tragedies. One was the crash of a B52 bomber during an air show practice session. The second was when an active killer targeted the base's hospital, killing five people and wounding 22 more. Andy Brown, an Air Force Security Police Officer, stopped the active shooter attack by killing the gunman. Now, more than 20 years after these events, Andy Brown has written a book detailing the events leading up to both tragedies.

Andy goes into incredibly deep detail in this book about the events leading up to both disasters. He details all of the problems identified with the bomber pilot that continued without intervention. He then details the

background of the active shooter and all of the psychiatric symptoms he displayed. No one intervened significantly in that case either. The lack of substantial intervention in both cases caused a predictable escalation that led to needless death and suffering. This book tells the story of how that happened and how it might be prevented in the future.

You'll like this book if you have any interest in active killers. Andy truly did his research here. The shooter's problems starting from the day he enlisted are described in extensive detail. The reader watches the events occur like a runaway train, knowing tragedy is the only possible outcome while simultaneously being unable to alter the course of history. In addition to gaining an incredible amount of insight into the mental processes of a killer, the shooting itself is described in tremendous detail. Andy provides a step-by-step description of every action the killer took that day and how each victim was killed or injured.

Andy goes on to describe his preparation for the event and how he trained to prevail against a crazed assassin. He also describes how the actions he took that day led to depression and psychological problems that haunted him for years.

As he tells the story of the killer, he parallels it with the story of a reckless pilot who crashed a B52 four days after the shooting. The career track of the pilot was shockingly similar to the path of the killer, with problems being constantly noted, yet never seriously addressed by supervision. If you've been in the military or are interested in bureaucratic inefficiencies, you'll also like the book. You will truly feel the frustration of those who reported the conduct of both the pilot and the killer, only to be ignored by superiors more interested in promoting their own careers than doing the right thing.

I found the book educational from both the standpoint of a researcher interested in active killer events and as a government employee who deals with constant bureaucratic nonsense. It was a compelling read and I truly enjoyed it. I think you will too.

Michael White III says

I served as an Air Force cop for ten years. I lived in Spokane, WA at the time of these events and remember them well. With this book written by a fellow AF cop, I was expecting time stamps and bullet points...not even close. Andy's narrative is exceptionally well written and easy to read. He takes the time to explain military speak where it is used in the book and paints two parallel timelines that lead up to each of these tragic and avoidable events. His background of Air Force training and the Security Police career field brought back many memories of my own time in the USAF and his meticulous attention to details shed light on questions that have been in my mind since each of these events took place. Additionally, this book serves as notice, that terrible events continue to happen because of politics...bureaucracy...arrogance...or simple inattentiveness...This book is about events that took place over 20 years ago, and while reading it, several events came to mind that could have been avoided that happened since. Major KUDOS to Andy Brown for a superbly written book that will hopefully force a spot light on those in authority, who simply let bad things happen...

Terry Tyler says

I'll start by saying that this book is a terrific achievement by the author. The painstaking and intricate work that has clearly gone into it is to be admired, as is its purpose.

The 'warnings unheeded' of the title refer to two mass-casualty accidents that occurred within days of each other on a US air base. "Using the words of the people who experienced the tragedies, the book provides an in-depth look at the before, during and after of a preventable "active shooter" incident and an avoidable fatal plane crash." A shooter terrorised the base hospital, and, in a parallel account, a veteran pilot, known for his reckless flying put the lives of both his crew and spectators at risk.

Andy Brown was the hero who ended the hospital killing spree, and intersperses chapters about the build up of fears about Mellberg and Holland with information about his own life and what led him to the position by which he was able to act as he did. He also writes about the aftermath of the shootings, and PTSD.

I found shooter Mellberg's story the most interesting, and read almost open-mouthed that the people who could take action did not appear to see that he was a tragedy waiting to happen, with the professionals who predicted this swamped by bureaucracy. Most chilling was Dr Brigham's instruction to his wife to keep firearms in the house, because he recognised the sort of patient who would see those who helped him as friends, though could just as easily turn on them. Although non-fiction, the character of Mellberg, in particular, came across most clearly. The book is well-written throughout, and the amount of planning that has gone into it is apparent. For a non-military person (with no particular interest in or experience of the military), I thought that the factual detail was clear and well-explained, though sometimes too detailed, adding facts (and many initials, military terms and the explanations of) that were perhaps not necessary to the story for a layman's point of view, and made one glaze over a little. However, for its target audience, I imagine such detail will be admired.

For that target audience, I would say that this should probably be required reading.

Crime Traveller says

In the last week of June 1994, Fairchild Air Force base in Washington State found itself at the centre of two devastating tragedies which took the lives of nine individuals and injured twenty-two. The rage of a single gunman with a history of mental health problems followed by a daring manoeuvre in a B-52 bomber by an experienced but daredevil pilot whose desire for showmanship outweighed his respect for safety. *'Warnings Unheeded'* is the insightful, honest and admirable book written by Andy Brown, the man who stopped gunman Dean Mellberg in the height of his shooting spree. It is a book which reflects on these two events

and the two men who caused them, leading the reader through their histories and the clear mistakes that were made in both cases.

Throughout this journey, he has not only tried to uncover the lessons that can be learnt but also provide some healing to himself and others after battling his own feelings and emotions in understanding what it means to suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. It is a detailed and moving account of these two tragedies telling their stories as they unfold while equally serving as a solid reference for how two individual men on entirely different life courses when left to their own devices, caused so many deaths and impacted so many people.

Both Dean Mellberg and pilot Lt. Arthur 'Bud' Holland exhibited behaviour in the preceding years which raised red flags, and both were enabled to continue with no intervention. The success of *Warnings Unheeded* lies in Brown's engaging and heavily researched accounts of these cases and his reflections and understandings of the aftermath for himself, the survivors and families wrapped up in these two events. Through diligent research and rare honesty, Brown has provided a true insight into the aftermath of both these tragedies, a part of the story so many books do not explore. An in-depth and moving read telling the untold story with an important message to give.

Read my full review of *Warnings Unheeded* on Crime Traveller at: <https://www.crimetraveller.org/2017/0...>

Olga Miret says

Tragedies that should be remembered and never repeated Thanks to the author for providing me with a free copy of his book that I review as part of Rosie's Books Review Team.

I am a psychiatrist and have worked in forensic psychiatry (looking after patients with a history of dangerous behaviour and, on occasions, criminal records) and therefore when I was approached by this writer about the book, my interest was twofold. Although I'm not currently working as a psychiatrist, I wanted to read the book to see what lessons there were to be learned, especially from the incident of mass shooting, as it was particularly relevant to the issues of mental health assessment and treatment. I was also interested, as a reader, a writer and a member of the public, in how the author would write about the incidents in a manner that would engage the readership. More than anything, I was interested in reading about his personal experience.

As a reader (not that I'm sure I can take my psychiatrist hat off that easily), the book intertwines both incidents, that coincided in the same setting, Fairchild Air Force Base, within a week period. We are given information about previous concerns about the flying acrobatics of Holland, whose antics had worried a number of people at the time, although in his case we don't get to know much about the person (the information is more about those who reported concerns and the way those were ignored or minimised), and, in much more detail, about the past history and behaviours of Mellberg, that read as a catalogue of unheeded warnings and missed opportunities.

Concerns about Mellberg follow him from school, where he was a loner, suffered bullying, never made friends and showed some odd behaviour and continue when he joins the Air Force. He becomes paranoid, starts harassing his roommate and despite concerns and assessments, he is simply moved from one place to the next, and the mental health assessments are either intentionally ignored or missed. Later on, when somebody decides to take action, there is no evidence of follow-up or organised system to check what happens when somebody is discharged for mental health reasons (some changes ensue, thanks mostly to the efforts of Sue Brigham [the wife of Dr Brigham, one of Mellberg's victims], after the fact) and readers can feel how the tension builds up to the point where it's only a matter of time until a serious incident happens.

Brown, the author, shares his background and his career progression to that point, his interest in policing and security from a young age, and he happens to coincide in time and space with Mellberg, being the first to respond to the calls for assistance when Mellberg starts shooting, first the people he blames for his discharge from the air force, and later, anybody who crosses his path. Although we know what's going to happen, and, in a way, Brown has always been preparing for something like this, the reality is no less shocking.

Brown's description of events, what the victims did, and what he did is exemplary, and it shows his experience in crime scene investigation. We can clearly reconstruct what happened minute by minute (almost second by second). As the description is interspersed with witness statements and personal detail I didn't find it excessive, although that might depend on what readers are used to (I know from personal experience of writing reports that accuracy and details are prime, but that's not what readers of fiction are used to, for example). The book also includes photographs of the scenes of both incidents, diagrams of the sites, etc.

As I said above, although the reader gets the same sense of impending doom when reading about the dangerous and reckless flight manoeuvres Holland does, we don't get to know much about Holland as a man, only about his experience flying. The issue of warnings not being acted upon is highlighted, but we don't know if anything else might have been behind Holland's behaviour, and we're therefore less personally invested in the case. I must also confess to having little understanding of acrobatics and individual planes capabilities, so I found some of the details about that incident more difficult to follow and perhaps unnecessary for the general reader (the message is clear even if we don't know exactly how the fuselage can bear might be determined).

Brown's own reaction to the shooting and his difficulties getting his PTSD acknowledged and treated form the latter part of the book, and they come to illustrate a side of these tragedies that is hardly ever commented upon or discussed in detail, as if sweeping things under a carpet and not talking about them would make them disappear. (As he notes, people don't know how to react: they either joke about the incident or avoid talking about it completely). He honestly shares his struggle, how long it took him to understand what was happening to him, the less than helpful behaviours he engaged in, and his self-doubt and guilt feelings, not helped by the reluctance of the Air Force to share the information he requests. He had the added difficulty of being removed from service every time he tried to get help, something that he, understandingly, saw as a punishment. He eventually decided to leave active service to try and find peace of mind, but it was a lengthy and difficult process, that might vary from individual to individual. It is always helpful, though, to know that one is not alone and it is not just a matter of getting over it, and that's why personal accounts are so important.

Brown offers conclusions and lessons on how to keep safe. Although I don't necessarily agree with some of the comments (the right to bear arms and use them for self-defense is a very controversial subject and I currently live in a country where not even the police carry them regularly), I agree with the importance of being aware of the risks, with the need to be more sensitive to the mental health needs of the population, with the importance of providing follow-up and support to those who experience mental disorders and also the need to see human beings in a holistic way, rather than only treating their bodies and ignoring their minds. This is an important book that should be read by people who work in law enforcement (either in the military or in a civil environment), provide security to organisations, and of course by psychologist and psychiatrists alike. It is not a book to read for entertainment, and it is definitely not a light read, but I would also recommend it to people who research the subject and/or are interested in real crime and PTSD. I wonder if a shorter version of the book, dealing specifically with the PTSD experience of the author might be useful to other survivors of trauma who might find the rest of the book too difficult to read.

Patricia Reidinger says

So we'll written

This is a well written book. I'm from the Spokane area, but was out of the country when these disasters occurred. The mass murders were a forerunner of what we experience routinely these days. It's so sad, but like Andy Brown advised, we need to be aware all the time.

Christopher Gerrib says

This is a fascinating book. The author was personally involved in two tragedies in short order at Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane Washington. He tells the story of both, and it's not a spoiler to note that neither tragedy should have been a surprise. Well worth the read.

Paul says

I can't remember why I ordered this book. There must have been some sexy teaser. At any rate, it's a blow-by-blow narrative of two events that took place within days of each other at Fairchild Air Force Base in Washington state. At first I thought it was just a pretty good account of two bizarre men flipping out, but by the time I finished it, I felt that it was written by a noble, patriotic author who wasn't that excited to write it, because he was the one that killed one of the bizarre men, and he was a real patriot and a thoughtful man, but he was urged to write it by his colleagues, since he was the one who shot the first crazy person.

The things that I was left with was the almost-standard incompetence--or at least obliviousness--of the Air Force when it came to designating a complete loon as someone who shouldn't be in the Air Force, or else batting him around from department to department without addressing his psychosis. The man was clearly off his rocker, to put it technically. He would openly masturbate when his roommate brought his girlfriend into their dorm room; everyone was terrified to be around him because of what they thought he might be capable of (which in the end he was), and it was obvious that he was missing a major screw the whole time he was in the Air Force. One psychologist decided he should be separated from the service, but somehow another one just thought he should be sent back. Either way, his obvious and profound mental illness was never dealt with until he "went postal" with a shooting spree that killed five people and wounded dozens of others, until the author, who was with the Air Force military, felled him with a pistol from a fairly long distance, after first asking him to drop his weapon (then being shot at by the man instead of his dropping the weapon). Any passerby could have seen that the shooter was completely psychotic (or autistic or paranoid, acc. to various diagnoses), but no one stopped him before he "went postal." The fact that the Air Force just bunted him around without making a definite clarification and separating him reminds me of all the Roman Catholic bishops who, when hearing that a priest in their diocese was a pedophile, just transferred him to another parish instead of acknowledging the problem. The church took a huge financial hit from this perpetual problem never being addressed until it was sued by any number of ex-acolytes who reported that Fr. Handsy had been abusing them for years.

That was one issue. The other was with the second out-of-control airman who flew B-52s wildly at air shows to the point that other airmen refused to fly with him until, inevitably, he crashed a B-52 at an air show by flying it at dangerous heights and making spectacular turns until his last turn ran his wing into the ground and killed him and the men aboard the plane with him. This incident, which occurred a day or two after the shooter, was also an example of a man who was clearly not safe as a pilot, who was also bunted around and never separated from the service for various reasons, because of his rank and reputation and no one could seem to pull the trigger on the fact that he needed to be removed.

In the last several chapters of the book, the author gets into an earnest discussion of PTSD and how it affected him for years after he shot the crazy shooter. It's very moving and sincere, and he really makes himself vulnerable to readers. He makes strong points about the insufficient state of mental care in the Air Force. The only thing I disagreed with him on was his belief that more "good guys" should have guns to stop the "bad guys" with guns. That creeped me out, because if the Air Force couldn't determine how to handle a psychotic shooter, how was it going to be able to distinguish "good guys?" A lot of guns floating around does not make me feel a bit safer, but rather that my chances of becoming a victim have greatly increased.

Other than that, the book is well-written and good and a real cautionary tale.

Fishface says

This was a really good read, written in a clear, no-frills style, with hardly a single typo to jolt me out of the narrative. Even the appendices are good reading. This is a case I never heard of before, about a double disaster -- a mass shooting and a plane crash -- happening in the space of less than a week in 1994 on the same airbase. The author was right there for it and was directly involved, and I have to say this book includes one of the finest verbal renderings of an epic adrenaline rush -- and the crash that follows -- that I've ever read. He makes a point of letting the reader see the long-term aftereffects of events like these. There is a lot packed into these 354 pages. Brown paints a picture of very concerned experts doing everything they can to get the brass to make the right decision, swimming in neck-deep paperwork and bureaucratic stamping of forms, and absolutely nothing coming of it until it's far too late. He only lost me when he started using terminology that only someone who understands aviation would know -- what's an aileron roll!?! Illustrated with crime-scene photos, charts, graphs and maps.

Pete Buswell says

Wow.

Mike Brewer says

I had the opportunity to read an advance copy of "Warnings Unheeded", and the author hit it out of the park. I was expecting much less from a first-time author, and would not have been disappointed had it been much less than it has proven to be. The author, Andy Brown, is the police officer who stopped the Fairchild Air Force Base mass shooter.

The research going into the work has been meticulous. The treatment of all parties involved has been objective, fair, and non-judgmental. There were people who deserved nothing but wrath and disdain, but Andy Brown avoided going there with it. Similarly, there were many who faced the challenges presented with courage and professionalism. Again, this was a fair, objective and informative read. Beyond that, it is presented in such a way as to make it an enjoyable one. There are some tear-jerking moments, to be sure, but all in all, a marvelous, enjoyable account of two incidents which displayed real people at their absolute worst, and others at their absolute best, presented in such a way as to allow readers to draw their own conclusions.

For law enforcement, government officials, first responders, gun enthusiasts, and anyone who carries a gun for personal protection, there are valuable lessons here. It will validate some doctrine and dogma, and will dispel some others.

The author, and the others who responded to the shootings and their aftermaths exemplified the best that humanity has to offer, along with the weaknesses that come along for the ride. Read this book.

Emily G. Thompson says

This book details two tragedies that occurred within days of each other at a US Air Force Base. It provides an in-depth look at what happened before, during and after these tragedies and highlights the issues with mental health assessment and treatment. It shows how very easily preventable the mass shooting, which occurred at Fairchild Air Force Base, could have been had people listened and paid attention to the evident warning signs.

Additionally, this is written by a man who physically stopped the mass shooting by shooting the perpetrator dead. He provides an extremely unique insiders look into a shocking crime and also manages to humanise the mass shooter who completely turned his life upside down and forced him to kill another human being. It's an insightful book in which the author tries to uncover lessons that could be learnt from both tragedies and he makes it quite evident to see where it all went wrong and how it could have been easily avoided.
