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Living in dark times

By [Al Fonzi](#)

Since August, Americans have suffered under the blows of multiple hurricanes and a firestorm that left uncounted homeless, and now a third mass murder in as many months. Natural disasters are traumatic enough, but most people understand that they are not malevolent events, however tragic they can be on an individual basis. We reach out to our fellow citizens with helping hands and assist them in restoring their lives.

When evil manifests itself in violence, our ability to understand a root cause is frustrated by first, a lack of accurate information and second, the realization that the victims were totally innocent and simply at the wrong place at the wrong time. The question of "why?" is all too often left unanswered or given an inadequate explanation.

Twenty-two years ago I was stationed at Fort Hood, Texas, and lived in Killeen, Texas. Our family frequented a local restaurant called Luby's and we knew more than a few of the employees who served their customers in a cafeteria style setting. We normally sat at a particular table near the front, convenient for a family of six. In September of 1991 I was transferred overseas. Days after our arrival, I was shocked to learn from news accounts of a massacre that occurred at Luby's during the lunch hour. The attack had a personal impact as our neighbor and the mother of my son's best friend was known to regularly frequent Luby's for lunch with her employer. For some reason that day, they decided to deviate from their routine and ate someplace else.

A man drove his pickup truck through the front wall, landing on the table where our family normally sat. He then proceeded to shoot 26 people at random with only a few customers escaping through an emergency exit. One young woman witnessed the killer execute her parents point-blank as she fled outside. Her story was poignant as she previously carried a concealed firearm until told by a friend that she lacked permits for concealed carry and she could be prosecuted if ever confronted by law enforcement. Accordingly, she left her weapon at home.

Local police officers attending a conference in a second floor room in an adjacent building heard the gunshots. They responded immediately but had to retrieve their firearms first from their vehicles; the conference had requested they not take their weapons into the meeting room.

The event was over within 15 minutes with the murderer killed by police. The man had illegally obtained his weapons, driving from Nevada to Killeen. His motive was never clearly identified nor the reason he selected Luby's at lunchtime for his murder spree.

This year we've witnessed multiple mass murder attacks on innocents with little explanation for the most deadly attack that occurred in Las Vegas. In this case, the killer obtained his arsenal legally, using legal loopholes to modify his weapon to dramatically increase the rate of fire. A month after the event we know less about his motives than we likely know about the Sutherland Springs, Texas, killer the day after his Nov. 5 massacre. The Vegas shooter also didn't fit any of the most clearly identified profiles of mass murderers; revenge against the casinos is emerging as a possible motive.

A few weeks after the Las Vegas massacre a terrorist carried out a murderous rampage in New York City in the name of his god, killing eight and injuring many more. Coping with this type of attack is easier to mentally process as part of an ongoing conflict but questions always remain, why them and not others? That question is never satisfactorily answered.

The killer of churchgoers on a Sunday morning in a rural, Texas village seems to defy answers, but quite a bit is already known as I write this one day after the event. The man had a violent history with a felony conviction for domestic violence while serving in the Air Force. He was imprisoned for a year and given a bad-conduct discharge from the service. He wasn't a combat veteran, serving in a logistics specialty at his base in New Mexico.

Under current state and federal laws, having been convicted of domestic violence bars him from possessing or owning firearms, but he still managed to purchase them in 2016. How this happened has yet to be determined. As to motive, he was a militant atheist and his Facebook page is alleged to contain numerous anti-religious and anti-Christian rants. His connection to the rural church is tenuous with his in-laws reported to be members. This massacre appears to be an extension of ongoing domestic violence. It ended at the church when local civilians used their personal firearms to engage the killer, causing him to flee the scene.

I don't have any words of wisdom as a commentator on these events other than to say that all of us should love those we have at the moment and never fail to hold them tight. Δ

Al Fonzi is an Army lieutenant colonel of military intelligence who had a 35-year military career, serving in both the Vietnam and Iraq wars. Send comments through the editor at clanham@newtimeslo.com.