

Friends say gunman showed no sign of trouble before W. Orange spree

By JAY McDANIEL
and KEVIN DILWORTH

The West Orange gunman killed after slaying a child and wounding three other persons Saturday had not displayed emotional problems in recent years, several acquaintances said yesterday.

However, authorities investigating the deadly rampage of George Proctor on Watchung Avenue noted that the 60-year-old man had been treated for manic depressive psychosis at a Georgia mental hospital in the 1950s.

West Orange Police Chief Edward M. Palardy said Proctor, a Union County College maintenance worker, did not inform New Jersey officials of his men-

tal health history when he successfully applied for a State Police firearm identification card in 1970.

"The identification card entitles the bearer to purchase ammunition, rifles and shotguns, but not handguns," according to Detective Sgt. James Drylie of the West Orange Police Department. Proctor used a handgun, an unregistered .32-caliber revolver, to kill Ivory Smith, 9, and critically injure Joshua Valse, 12, and Kareem Davis, 8, all of Watchung Avenue. He also fired a number of shots at Orange Police Officer Thomas Smith, 25, and one bullet grazed the officer's forehead.

Drylie said Proctor apparently became enraged after some teenagers pelted his "prized" 1983 Cadillac with

But Essex killer spent nine years in a Georgia mental hospital

rocks as he drove by Alden and High streets in Orange, a few blocks from his Watchung Avenue apartment.

Proctor drove home, went into his second-floor residence, came out with a silver-plated handgun and began threatening people he met. He randomly shot the three children in the head and fired on Smith when he arrived at the shooting scene in a patrol car.

Returning the fire with his 9mm service weapon, Smith shot Proctor once in the chest and then several more

times as the gunman continued to move toward him with his revolver raised.

Funeral services for Ivory Smith, a fourth-grader at the Washington Street School in West Orange, will be held 10 a.m. tomorrow at the Woody Home for Services on Oakwood Avenue in neighboring Orange.

Valse, a seventh-grader at Edison Junior High School in West Orange, remained in critical but stable condition yesterday in the pediatric intensive care unit of the Children's Hospital of

New Jersey in Newark. Deborah Rizzi, a hospital spokeswoman, said the boy, who lost vision in one eye, was "alert and talking to his parents."

Kareem Davis, a second-grader also at Washington Street School, remained in critical condition, unconscious and on a respirator at University Hospital in Newark. Doris Ortiz, a hospital spokeswoman, said the youngster was in the neuro intensive care unit.

Officer Smith, who was released from the Hospital Center at Orange on Sunday, is on sick leave, according to Police Director Charles Cobbetti.

"It was clearly a situation where, because of stress and pressure, George crossed over that thin line between sanity and insanity," said the Rev. Leon-

das B. Young, Proctor's pastor at the New Hope Baptist Church in West Orange.

Since Proctor joined the church six years ago, Young said, "he has never exhibited, in the congregational setting, any signs of mental disorder."

"He was compassionate, committed and he was the kind of individual who you would trust your children with," Young continued.

"From the pieces I've been able to piece together, the illness of his mother (confined to a nursing home), the death of his sister and his constant aggravation from the young men in the neighborhood who were taunting him led to his complete breakdown," said the minister.

"George would never have harmed any of the victims had he been of sound mind," Young maintained. "I'm totally convinced that he didn't even know who he was shooting."

The pastor concluded, "Our concern, as a congregation, is for the family and even more so for the families of the other victims who were involved."

Proctor's family and friends yesterday echoed Young's remarks. They said it was Proctor's grief over the unexpected death of his sister, Rochell Williams, that caused the outburst of violence. They said he had been in Atlanta this month to attend her funeral.

"Since he got back, he's been grieving," said Jacqueline Smith, Proctor's fiancée, with whom he lived on Watchung Avenue. "When he was attacked by the boys, it just set him off. I don't think at that moment that he really saw the children, but something else."

Proctor's daughter, Gayle Proctor Howard, said, "We're sorry for the family of the children—for everyone. That was not him. He was not a violent man. He loved people."

Family members declined to discuss the reports that Proctor had been hospitalized for mental illness. Smith said in the six years she had known him, Proctor had never exhibited signs of mental instability.

Proctor was born in Springdale, Ga., and lived in West Orange for nearly 30 years, family members said. They said Proctor was a member of the men's choir at New Hope Baptist.

Charles Jenkins, a friend of the family, described Proctor as a religious man. "He got me involved in the church," Jenkins said. "It was his invitation and counseling that brought me to the church."

Jenkins, retired director of campus police at Kean College in Union, said he frequently hunted and fished with Proctor.

According to Police Chief Palardy, Rell and Ralph Proctor, brothers of the gunman who live in Somerset and New York, respectively, told police their mother, Lillian, placed George in the Central State Hospital in Milledgeville, Ga., nearly 28 years ago.

When West Orange police checked with officials there, a state mental hospital spokeswoman "indicated that a George Proctor, age 22 at the time (and a resident of Atlanta), was admitted on Aug. 10, 1951, and discharged on July 20, 1960," for treatment of manic-depressive psychosis.

Yesterday at Union County College in Cranford where Proctor had worked since 1984, co-workers could offer no explanation for the violent outburst.

"I know he was a nice man and a good worker," said Charles Comegys, who had spoken with Proctor Friday evening. "God knows, I don't know why he did this."

Before Proctor went to work at the college, he was employed for about 18 years at what was then the Westinghouse Electric plant in Kearny.

Relatives said Proctor worked at the college briefly during a strike at the Westinghouse plant. When the plant closed in 1984, he took a permanent job at the college, they said.

Acting College President Roy Smith said there had been no incident on the job indicating that Proctor was unstable.

"I always thought he was a good worker and a cooperative guy. There wasn't a single thing in his file," Smith said. "He was just one of those guys that came to work every day and did his job. We never had any problems with the guy whatsoever."

Nicholas Brandt, a maintenance foreman at the college, said Proctor "was a hard-working man. I can't say anything bad about him."

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