



Gabriel A. Romero

- Machinist Mate Auxiliary Fireman
- Assigned to the Fast Attack Submarine USS COLUMBIA (SSN 771)
- 22 year-old active-duty Sailor
- Killed two civilian employees and wounded a third
- Committed suicide immediately afterward



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CASE STUDY

Kinetic Violence – Murder/Suicide

WHAT HAPPENED

- On December 4, 2019, at 1404 2:02 a.m., Machinist Mate Auxiliary Fireman Gabriel A. Romero reported for duty as the Topside Roving Patrol aboard the Fast Attack Submarine USS COLUMBIA (SSN 771) in Dry Dock at Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard.
- The sailor who Romero relieved described the watch turnover and Romero as “ordinary.” Romero took possession of an M-4 rifle with 90 rounds of ammunition and M-9 pistol with 45 rounds of ammunition and began his first roving patrol on Dry Dock 2, walking from left to right.
- Around the same time, three civilian employees left their workstations between Dry Docks 2 and 3, and began walking along the right side of Dry Dock 2.
- Romero turned around on the right side of Dry Dock 2 and approached the three civilian employees from behind. The Petty Officer of the Deck saw Romero chamber a round, raise his M-4 rifle, and begin firing at the civilians.
- While the victims lay on the ground and before first responders arrived on the scene, Romero used his M-9 pistol to shoot himself.
- Two of the victims succumbed to their injuries and were declared deceased at local hospitals. The third victim was transported to a local hospital and later released. Romero died at the scene.
- The shooting only lasted a few seconds from beginning to end.

INDICATORS

- **Access Attributes** – Romero was qualified for armed Topside Roving Patrol, which involves continuously walking the area around the submarine, and therefore had access to weapons.
- **Professional Lifecycle and Performance** – Romero had been formally disciplined for repeated tardiness and dereliction of duty. He also had been passed over for promotion due to his failure to pass the Naval Advancement Exam.
- **Judgement, Character, and Psychological Considerations** – Prior to the incident, Romero had not been diagnosed with a mental disorder, but, the Force Psychologist did assess him with a “Phase of Life Problem” and an “Unspecified Problem Related to Unspecified Psychosocial Circumstances.” After that, Romero was only seen by the Embedded Mental Health Program (eMHP) staff behavioral health technician, who focused on issues related to Romero’s physical health and taught Romero coping skills. Romero also had two motor vehicle accidents within a year and a bad family situation.

Findings

- The Department of the Navy conducted an extensive investigation into the December 4, 2019, fatal shooting incident on the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard.
- Romero demonstrated several potential risk indicators that may not have been significant enough to report through established insider threat reporting procedures or to law enforcement, but each and every one should have been reported to supervisors. These indicators included Romero complaining to a shipmate that he was tired of work and people calling him stupid, punching a locker in anger, and yelling at a shipmate when he suggested Romero seek counseling to deal with stress. If shipmates had reported these indicators to supervisors, the chain of command may have aggregated them and seen the need for rescreening Romero for armed patrols.
- USS COLUMBIA'S chain of command and medical department representative did not share information regarding Romero's disciplinary issues, medical and mental condition, and family situation effectively. With information sharing and collaboration on Romero's long-developing problems, the chain of command may have taken more intrusive actions to direct additional mental health evaluation or remove Romero from armed patrols.
- Romero was not rescreened for armed patrols despite known risk factors, including his mental health; his concern over his issues; two motor vehicle accidents within a year; general isolation from his shipmates; delinquent qualifications; repeated counseling; a disciplinary review board; a failure to advance to E-4; and an executive officer inquiry the day before the shooting.

ADDITIONAL INFO

- Investigators still don't have a specific motive for the shooting, but the investigation paints a picture of a troubled young man struggling with his mental health and angry at the world around him.
- The report ultimately concluded that no one could have predicted Romero would be a threat. He never expressed suicidal thoughts or homicidal intent toward anyone.
- The investigation did find that a Navy psychologist "under-diagnosed and did not properly manage Romero's mental health condition" likely in an effort to keep him from getting pulled from duty and that medical providers failed to share information with commanders

Consider the following questions:

- Would you report similar concerns about a co-worker?
- Where does responsibility lie for preventing incidents like this? Do you have any responsibility?

Resources for further exploration:

- [Fatal Shooting Incident - Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard on December 4, 2019](https://www.secnav.navy.mil/foia/readingroom/HotTopics/PHNSY%20INV/PHNSY%20INV%20-%20FINAL%20REPORT%20and%20Endorsement%20(Redacted%20for%20Release).pdf#search=romero)
[https://www.secnav.navy.mil/foia/readingroom/HotTopics/PHNSY%20INV/PHNSY%20INV%20-%20FINAL%20REPORT%20and%20Endorsement%20\(Redacted%20for%20Release\).pdf#search=romero](https://www.secnav.navy.mil/foia/readingroom/HotTopics/PHNSY%20INV/PHNSY%20INV%20-%20FINAL%20REPORT%20and%20Endorsement%20(Redacted%20for%20Release).pdf#search=romero)
- [Insider Threat Indicators Job Aid](https://www.cdse.edu/Portals/124/Documents/jobaids/insider/INTJ0181-insider-threat-indicators-job-aid.pdf?ver=_HedcDtQk9sSEZItNMLQzA==)
https://www.cdse.edu/Portals/124/Documents/jobaids/insider/INTJ0181-insider-threat-indicators-job-aid.pdf?ver=_HedcDtQk9sSEZItNMLQzA==
- [Foreign Intelligence Entity Targeting Recruitment Methodology](https://www.cdse.edu/Portals/124/Documents/jobaids/foreign-intelligence-entity-targeting-recruitment-methodology.pdf?ver=GfH1Vc0aqz7FqtcnQ86LTg==)
<https://www.cdse.edu/Portals/124/Documents/jobaids/foreign-intelligence-entity-targeting-recruitment-methodology.pdf?ver=GfH1Vc0aqz7FqtcnQ86LTg==>

IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING!

Contact the appropriate POC to report any observed potential risk indicators:

Name: _____ Agency/Department: _____
Title: Supervisor/Security Officer/ITP Senior Official/ITP Manager