

## Two Important Conclusions in the Aftermath of the Naval Yard Shootings

Following any senseless act of violence, the immediate reaction is one of grief and shock. Once the understandable feelings of anger and bewilderment subside, though, a number of questions are raised. Specifically, policymakers and observers alike want to know how the tragedy could have been prevented and, just as importantly, what can be done to prevent similar events from occurring in the future.

Sometimes, there are no clear answers. It's an unfortunate fact of our world that some things can't be predicted or foreseen. They are random and literally "senseless" by nature, and so the best thing to do is grieve and move on.

In other instances, though, tragedies can also become teaching moments. That's certainly been the case with the Naval Yard shootings that grabbed the attention of the nation. As dark as that day was, the aftermath has led to a re-examination of the processes that allowed the shooter to carry out his plan... and has exposed some key deficiencies in the way so many organizations, our government included, typically handle things like background screening and identity verification.

Before we get to the actual conclusions, a quick recap of the facts is in order. On September 16, a lone gunman named Aaron Alexis gained entry to a U.S. naval base in Washington, D.C., and opened fire, killing 12 people and injuring three others. Alexis was a discharged veteran working as a civilian contractor just days before the event, but had recently been dismissed.

In reviewing the details of the incident through the lens of added time, two important themes emerge right away:

**First, traditional background investigations failed in a dramatic way.** Although Alexis had been honorably discharged from his military service and worked as a contractor with security clearance in the past, there were numerous signs that he might be a ticking time bomb – including written reprimands, signs of mental illness, and numerous complaints to superiors and coworkers.

The fact that he had been detained for illegally discharging a weapon in the past, and had admitted to "blackouts" of anger, was never going to show up on an instant background check or database search. Still, a live investigator could have discovered these important clues and asked follow-up questions that might have saved lives.

**And second, it is imperative for organizations to have up-to-date ID systems.** Alexis had previously gained entry to the naval base using a valid ID issued as part of the subcontracting work. However, he was fired from his job three days before the shooting. Because there was no system to instantly deactivate his pass – and alert security when he tried to reenter the premises without valid credentials – he was readmitted on the day of the shooting without delay.

Network computerized identity verification systems like the one CrimShield uses can be updated to reflect status changes and expired credentials within moments. The fact that a secure military installation wasn't using the system or a similar one is both surprising and heartbreaking in retrospect. Upon being dismissed from his company, a simple keystroke could have kept the shooter off the base and out of the news.

No amount of speculation or second-guessing will bring back the lives that were lost in the Washington Naval Yard shooting. But, by studying what happened, and the steps that led up to the event itself, we can see a number of ways in which the right preparation could have led to a happier outcome.

If you're still holding on to outdated or inadequate screening and identification tools, now is the time to make a change. As we often see in unfortunate situations like the Washington Naval Yard shooting, it's too late to look into these kinds of protection when you actually need them the most.

**About The Author:** J. Denton (Denny) Dobbins is Nationally and Internationally recognized as the world's leader in Premises Liability Protection and has been featured across North America sharing the stage with Political Leaders, Police Celebrities, Administrators and Business Leaders. Since 1978, Denny has been involved with the detection and deterrence of Criminal Activity in properties and employment of all types.