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# Vladislav Roslyakov

## *A Profile*

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The attack at Kerch Polytechnic College occurred in Crimea, a region of Ukraine which was annexed by Russia in 2014; the region remains unstable. The attack received minimal coverage in English-speaking media, and official reports were inconsistent. For example, officials originally reported a gas explosion before acknowledging that the blast was actually the result of an explosive device. Terrorism was blamed until witnesses began reporting that the dead had all been killed by gunshots, at which time authorities acknowledged that the attack was a school shooting. Initial reports also claimed there were possible accomplices, though the Russian Investigative Committee has strongly insisted that is not the case. As a result of the inconsistent, limited reporting, conspiracy theories spread, alleging that the attack was performed by a group of individuals, perhaps professionally trained. Despite these constraints, there appears to be adequate information provided to conclude that Vladislav Roslyakov was the sole individual responsible for this massacre.

### *The Attack*

At approximately 11:46 in the morning, on 17 October 2018, a fourth-year student named Vladislav Igorevich Roslyakov (Владисла́в И́горевич Росляко́в) entered Kerch Polytechnic College in Kerch, Crimea.<sup>1</sup> Video surveillance recorded him entering the college through a rear entrance, avoiding a metal detector.<sup>2</sup> He was wearing black boots, black pants, and a black jacket over a white T-shirt inscribed with “ненависть,” which is Russian for “hatred.”<sup>3</sup> He had two backpacks with him that were later determined to contain two nail bombs, a shotgun, ammunition, pipe bombs, and a Molotov cocktail.<sup>4</sup>

Roslyakov set off at least one large explosive in the school’s canteen before proceeding to the second floor, where video surveillance shows him approaching the office of the college’s director.<sup>5</sup> However, she had left the school minutes earlier.<sup>6</sup> Upon dis-

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## VLADISLAV IGOREVICH ROSLYAKOV

### *Perpetrator Dossier*

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Attack date	17 October 2018
Attack site	Kerch Polytechnic College
Location	Kerch, Crimea, Ukraine
Age at incident	18
Killed	20
Wounded	70
Outcome	Suicide
Shooter population	College
Psychological type	Unknown
Attack type	Random

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covering that her office was empty, Roslyakov, now without the black jacket and donning a black glove on his shooting hand, began indiscriminately shooting at teachers and classmates as well as computers, locked doors, and fire extinguishers.<sup>7</sup> Witnesses describe him as walking up and down the hallways of the second floor, firing randomly and never speaking a word.<sup>8</sup>

Reports state that the attack may have lasted as long as twenty minutes; reports of police response times varied from five to twenty minutes, despite a police station's being located across the street from the college.<sup>9</sup> Approximately two hundred members of the Russian Security Force responded, fueling the narrative that the attack was a terrorist incident.<sup>10</sup> The shooting came to an end when Roslyakov committed suicide. His body was discovered on the second floor, in the school library.<sup>11</sup>

Police released photos showing that the shooter had additional ammunition, as well as ten pipe bombs and a Molotov cocktail. Investigators discovered evidence that Roslyakov had planned the attack. He had superimposed photos of the college into the game *Doom*, and the plans suggest he had intended to burn the school to the ground.<sup>12</sup>

Nineteen people, not including Roslyakov, were found deceased at the college. A twentieth victim died at the hospital.<sup>13</sup> The Russian Health Minister, Veronika Skvortsova, reported that a total of seventy people were wounded; ten were in critical condition, including five in comas.<sup>14</sup> Russia's Investigative Committee reported that all the deceased had died as a result of gunshot wounds, while the injuries were attributed to both gunshot wounds and explosions.<sup>15</sup>

In a sad twist of fate, Roslyakov's mother, a nurse, helped those wounded in the attack; when she discovered that her son was the perpetrator, she attempted to commit suicide.<sup>16</sup>

### *Roslyakov's Background*

Vladislav Roslyakov was born in Kerch on 2 May 2000.<sup>17</sup> He grew up in the rural exurb of Kerch known as Arshintsevo. As a child, his family called him Vladik. He was raised in the home of his paternal grandparents by his father, Igor, and mother, Galina. A

quiet, thin woman, Galina was a low-paid orderly at the hospital in Kerch. Igor was a former soldier who had served in Afghanistan for several years. After he returned, he was assaulted. This resulted in brain damage; he began collecting disability payments.<sup>18</sup>

After the brain injury, Igor became aggressive toward his family. He reportedly beat his wife and son, as well as his own parents.<sup>19</sup> He was also an alcoholic; neighbors said Igor was more often drunk than sober, and he became more violent when intoxicated. On at least one occasion he had taken a sword into the front yard and threatened neighbors, challenging them to duel. Igor and his father were, at one time, both Cossacks, a people of southern Russia and Ukraine noted for their horsemanship and military skill.<sup>20</sup>

Neighbors remember Roslyakov as a hyperactive child who displayed sadistic tendencies. He reportedly was once seen hanging cats by their tails in the basement of the family home and laughing as the cats howled. He was caught trying to capture wild kittens, and many neighborhood cats began to disappear. Neighbors were so concerned that they asked his paternal grandmother to have a child psychiatrist examine him. She dismissed their concerns, believing Vladik's behavior to be normal. His mother was reportedly unable to stop him as well.<sup>21</sup>

When Roslyakov was ten, his parents divorced.<sup>22</sup> Galina brought him to live with her in a rundown apartment not far from his father's home. The conditions in the house were horrendous, and they could not afford amenities. It is unclear what sort of relationship Roslyakov had with his father from this point. Most reports state that he had minimal contact with Igor; however, he did visit his paternal grandparents from time to time.<sup>23</sup>

Sometime after divorcing Igor, Galina joined Jehovah's Witnesses, a religious sect banned under Russian law. Neighbors described her as a very devout follower who spent much of her time in prayer. Some neighbors felt Galina showed no concern for what Vladik did because she was too focused on her new faith. However, this conflicts with stories that Galina would frequently punish her son for disobeying the rules of her faith.<sup>24</sup>

At school, she did not allow him to engage in hobby classes, participate in amateur activities, or even watch movies, because these activities are not allowed in Jehovah's Witness practice. Though Roslyakov often joined Galina at Jehovah's Witness services, he did not consider himself a member of the congregation. He publicly disavowed Jehovah's Witnesses as "some kind of fools who dance and sing."<sup>25</sup> One friend said, "Vlad and I were making fun of [Jehovah's Witnesses], he made a lot of jokes about [them]." Despite these differences, Roslyakov appeared to care for his mother. He understood that she was a single mother with no relatives or friends to talk to, so he specifically made sure to spend time with her.<sup>26</sup>

Roslyakov attended a local public high school and was described by one teacher as a normal, sociable child who smiled often but struggled in school, receiving poor grades.<sup>27</sup> He was reportedly popular with girls but avoided them. Roslyakov was "sports-obsessed" and preferred the company of male athletes — many of whom were twenty years older than he. He would often practice with them, but eventually quit due to undisclosed health issues.<sup>28</sup> In the seventh grade, he got into a fight in the middle of class, but otherwise he was not considered an aggressive person.<sup>29</sup>

Roslyakov spent extended periods of time after school in the library, using the school computer. He became interested in punk rock and began dressing and acting in ways his mother disapproved of. Despite punishment, he continued to disobey her.

On the advice of a teacher, Galina bought him a computer, in hopes that it would solve the problem; it did not.<sup>30</sup>

Roslyakov began attending Kerch Polytechnic College in 2015. He received free tuition to major in “installation, commissioning and operation of electrical equipment of industrial and civil buildings.”<sup>31</sup> He traveled forty minutes by bus to attend.<sup>32</sup> Approximately a year prior to the attack, he began living in the dormitories on campus with a roommate, despite his being ineligible to live on campus.<sup>33</sup>

Roslyakov began displaying an interest in firearms and weapons around the time he began college. According to a media report, he began seeking out military veterans online, pestering them for information about firearms and explosives.<sup>34</sup> This also matches with reports that neighborhood children began avoiding Roslyakov after they once saw him carrying the bayonet of a machine gun on the bus.<sup>35</sup> One friend reported that Roslyakov always carried a hunting knife with him, even when he had to pass through the school’s metal detector.<sup>36</sup> At some point he joined an airsoft team; it is unclear whether this was during high school, when he was “sports-obsessed,” or after he began college.<sup>37</sup> Investigators have discovered that Roslyakov’s interest went beyond weaponry; his internet history revealed a vast interest in violence and violent ideologies, including neo-Nazism, ISIS, and serial killers.<sup>38</sup>

Roslyakov became more aggressive in his behavior as well. Per one report, Roslyakov was often forced to sit in the “chair of shame,” a punishment introduced by the college’s director.<sup>39</sup> On one occasion, he reportedly sprayed pepper spray in a classroom for no apparent reason.<sup>40</sup> Roslyakov purportedly made numerous comments to friends and acquaintances that he hated his classmates and “would gladly gun down everyone at the school.”<sup>41</sup>

Accounts suggest that as a teenager, Vladik became sullen and withdrawn. His paternal grandmother said he was “kind and helpful,” but also “withdrawn and reserved.”<sup>42</sup> This seems to have been true at school as well. His few friends described him as a loner, quiet, and not sociable. He reportedly avoided former friends, and when he did speak to them, he would incessantly discuss violence in general, and Columbine in particular.<sup>43</sup> He expressed support for Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the perpetrators of the Columbine massacre; similarities between the Kerch attack and Columbine have led many to conclude that Roslyakov was inspired by them.<sup>44</sup>

At college, Roslyakov appeared to have no intimate relationships. His conversations in the run-up to the shooting show a young man with no certain future. He acknowledged he only attended school because he was forced to by his parents.<sup>45</sup> He expressed apathy regarding his life and the lives of others. He openly contemplated committing suicide and performing a shooting on social media.<sup>46</sup> According to an ex-girlfriend, Roslyakov expressed anger toward his classmates for ridiculing him because of his differences.<sup>47</sup> He told one friend that he would seek revenge against “evil teachers.”<sup>48</sup> He did not see a future for himself in the impoverished region, and he felt there was no way to escape. Despite previously considering joining the military, Roslyakov expressed disdain at the prospect of joining the armed forces.<sup>49</sup>

### *Preparing for the Attack*

The process for legally acquiring a firearm is difficult and expensive in Russia. In order to get a firearm license, one must pass a mental health evaluation and receive training on the use of firearms, both of which Vladislav did. Evidence reveals Roslyakov graduated from the Egida+ private shooting school on 18 July 2018. His license was issued on 18 September 2018, allowing him to purchase the weapon used during the attack, an eight-shot 12-gauge Hatsan Escort Aimguard pump-action shotgun with a pistol grip.<sup>50</sup> He reportedly hid the gun in an abandoned building near his home so that his mother did not find out about it; the Jehovah's Witness faith forbids the taking up of arms and rejects violence.<sup>51</sup> He also purchased 150 cartridges for the shooting four days prior to the attack.<sup>52</sup>

To finance these purchases, Roslyakov stole money from his paternal grandmother. He also took all the family photos from her home.<sup>53</sup> On the eve of the attack, Roslyakov burned many of his personal belongings: electronics, a bible in which he had highlighted verses, family photos, notebooks, and a knife. He also may have buried a safe. This would have occurred in the woods near his home, where it is believed he practiced shooting.<sup>54</sup> Shortly before the attack, his mother reportedly noticed him watching videos of school shootings. When she inquired why, he simply responded, "No reason." Roslyakov skipped school the two days prior to the attack. He stayed at home with his mother. He did not leave on the day of the massacre until his mother had left for work.<sup>55</sup>

In the days leading up to the attack, Roslyakov had been speaking with a girl in whom he appeared to have a romantic interest. On the day of the attack he had arranged to meet her at a location on campus away from the site of his rampage. Some speculated that this was done in an effort to spare her life, though the attack occurred hours before their date was scheduled, giving less weight to this theory.<sup>56</sup>

### *Similarities to Columbine*

Though the Columbine massacre is not particularly well known in Russia, the similarities between the Kerch attack and that shooting immediately led news outlets to label the attack "Columbine 2.0."

Roslyakov's appearance drew comparisons to Eric Harris: the black pants, shooting glove, and white shirt inscribed in a similar manner. Roslyakov also chose the same weapons as Harris: a shotgun, large bombs, and pipe bombs. The placement of a large explosive in the cafeteria was another parallel, as was the decision to commit suicide in the school library.<sup>57</sup>

Roslyakov was familiar with Columbine and appeared obsessed. He expressed his support for massacres and specifically referenced Harris and Klebold as "awesome gone."<sup>58</sup> He also reportedly used the nickname *Vodka* online; *Vodka* was the nickname of Dylan Klebold.<sup>59</sup> It seems quite likely that Roslyakov had come across the Columbine shooting online and had adopted Eric Harris as a role model.

Roslyakov played violent video games, including *Doom* and other first-person shooter games, but his vast online presence shows a broader obsession with violence. He posted under numerous pseudonyms, including “Vladik Roslyakov,” “I want to Die,” “Strange,” “Anatoly Smirnov,” and “Skinovskoe art.”<sup>60</sup>

In 2016, Roslyakov stopped using his personal accounts, though he maintained an online presence through his other accounts. Analysts discovered that he spent most of his online time in forums dedicated to serial and mass murderers.<sup>61</sup>

Here are some examples of what Roslyakov posted in such a group:<sup>62</sup>

Why write this? There are a couple of million people like me in this social network alone. I will tell you why — I have practically no empathy. I think I’m a half psychopath.<sup>63</sup>

I have little interest in talking to people like myself. All feelings are lies, deceit and bullshit. We must hide them from ourselves.<sup>64</sup>

Also, I’m surrounded by idiots, and I could shoot them all. But it’s bad to kill people. I just voiced my opinion and do not call for killing.<sup>65</sup>

Investigators analyzed Roslyakov’s search history. His most frequently queried terms included “shotgun,” “terror,” and “terrorist.” He also watched numerous videos on executions, seeking out ISIS propaganda, which is banned in Russia. Analysts also noticed Roslyakov’s interest in anarchy, punk rock, and bomb-making.<sup>66</sup>

Roslyakov’s interest in violence was evident in how he expressed himself online. On one account, his avatar was a picture of Anatoly Onoprienko, a Ukrainian serial killer who killed fifty-two people from 1989 to 1996.<sup>67</sup> Another report indicated that he used Dylann Roof’s image as his profile picture on his Steam game account; Roof was a white supremacist who killed nine people in a 2015 attack on a historically Black church (Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church).<sup>68</sup> It is possible Roslyakov held racist views, given that he was a part of several pages supportive of Ukrainian neo-Nazism, and he often posted pictures of swastikas.<sup>69</sup>

Messages between Roslyakov and several acquaintances have been leaked. Much of the conversation was mundane but confirmed previous reports about Roslyakov: he was suicidal, had a poor outlook on his future, and was interested in serial killers. Several quotations from the more interesting discussions are provided below.

R[oslyakov]: I remember few adequate people at school. We at school did nothing but booze. Still stealing. I had two alcoholic poisonings by the age of 14.<sup>70</sup>

R: I was in the 6th, I remember drinking in class. Poured beer in the juice container. Bati stole beer. We drank often. We also sold metal. We stole it from the service yard. A friend taught me. I remember that the peasant from the garage came out, the door was not closed, and Nikita stole his bag of bolts. In childhood, there was a lot of amoral shit.<sup>71</sup>

R: I studied in college for 3 years; I did not make friends. No like-minded people. All kind of wretched. And the jokes are stupid our genitals draw everywhere<sup>72</sup>

R: I have the same now. I try not to let people get too close. I look at our former class where is it heading? Drunkards, whores and suicides.

Female: Who is a suicide?

R: Nobody yet.<sup>73</sup>

R: I have very atypical views. I do not think you understand them. They have always been a barrier in personal relationships with other people. I actually have no friends. I am a degraded nihilist. Complete indifference and contempt for the world.<sup>74</sup>

These quotes are interesting for the insight they provide into Roslyakov's mind and childhood. Roslyakov acknowledges an amoral youth that involved smoking, drinking, and petty theft. However, these indiscretions appear to be firmly in his past, as he goes on to show contempt for the people around him who engage in excessive drinking and promiscuity.

This attitude of dismissal towards those engaged in "immoral" acts has been found in other school attackers, most notably Seung Hui Cho.<sup>75</sup> Also of note is Roslyakov's repeated use of the term *nihilist* to describe himself. Nihilism is often associated with Friedrich Nietzsche, whose writings were a major influence in the ideology of Eric Harris.<sup>76</sup> Whether these similarities were caused by influence or happenstance is unknown.

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