

# Screams on the intercom. Then children hid in closet, as gunman banged on door yelling: 'Let me in'

From **Tom Leonard** in New York and **Daniel Bates** in Newtown

AN EIGHT-YEAR-OLD boy was in the gym with his class when they heard the first shots. They thought the school caretaker was 'knocking stuff down', he said. Then they heard screams and realised there was a far less innocent explanation for the loud bangs echoing through the corridors of Sandy Hook Elementary School. The boy said: 'The police came in and were like "Is he in here?" and somebody yelled "Get to a safe place".' 'So we went to the closet in the gym and we sat there for a little while and then the police were knocking on the door saying "We're evacuating people".' Running down to a nearby fire station as policemen shooed them out of the school building, the children passed a man spreadeagled on the ground in handcuffs and went inside. 'We sat down in our classes all happy to be alive,' said the boy. He might have been aware of the fate he was spared but many of his fellow pupils clearly didn't know how lucky they were to have survived a day that has horrified a country one might have thought was inured by now to gun massacres. The school day had barely started in



Face of a killer? US news network ABC said this photo showed a young Adam Lanza



No connection to killings: A man thought to be Ryan Lanza with a police officer

## It wasn't me - I was at work, brother cries on Facebook

ADAM Lanza's older brother Ryan, 24, issued a furious online denial that he was involved in the massacre after initial reports named him as the gunman. 'Everyone shut the f\*\*\* up it wasn't me,' he wrote on his Facebook page. 'I'm on the bus home now it wasn't me. IT WASN'T ME I WAS AT WORK IT WASN'T ME.' The confusion is believed to have come about after an official mistakenly transposed the brothers' first names in the frantic aftermath of the killings. Another suggestion was that Adam was carrying Ryan's ID, according to one New Jersey reporter. Detectives were last night questioning Ryan Lanza, as well as the gunman's father, both of whom live in New Jersey. A police source said last night that Ryan was being 'extremely co-operative' and was not under arrest. The official said that he was still being quizzed but was not in custody and was not believed to have any connection to the school killings.

### 'She saved their lives'

this sleepy New England town when the shooting began shortly before 9.30am. One mother, who was in a meeting room with half a dozen others including the school's headmistress Dawn Hochsprung, recalled the 'pop, pop, pop' in a hallway outside. Mrs Hochsprung, her vice-principal and the school psychologist went into the hall, said the mother, but only one - the vice-principal - came back, crawling from a shot in the leg or foot. The others hid under the tables as the shots continued to ring out - some 100 in all, by the mother's count. There was yelling in the hallway and she couldn't tell whether it was the police or the gunman. Later, they were marched out of the meeting room by police right past the bodies of the two dead school staff, lying in pools of blood where they had fallen. Witnesses said the gunman even banged on a closet where 15 children and their teacher were locked inside, shouting: 'Let me in! Let me in!' A parent said a music teacher called Maryrose Kristopic was a 'hero' as she herded the children in and barricaded the door. Alberta Bajraliu, 41, got a call from a friend who heard a gunshot at the school and told her to check it out. Mrs Bajraliu's nine-year-old daughter Venesa was one of the survivors. She said: 'I was one of the first there and they were bringing children out, carrying them out. One girl came out and her face was covered in blood. It was terrible.' Venesa's brother Mergim, 17, heard the gunshots from his home and ran to the school. He said: 'She heard gun shots and screams on the

intercoms. 'She heard screams. They were hiding in a tiny closet all bundled up. They were hearing screams and it was horrible.' First-grade teacher Kaitlin Roig, 29, locked her 14 students in a class bathroom and listened to 'tons of shooting' until the police came. 'It was horrific,' she said. 'I thought we were going to die.' She said the terrified children were saying, 'I just want Christmas... I

don't want to die. I just want to have Christmas.' 'I don't know if [the gunman] came in the room... I just told them we have to be absolutely quiet,' she said. 'If they started crying, I would take their face and tell them, "It's going to be OK". I wanted that to be the last thing they heard, not the gunfire in the hall.' When a voice was heard at the door claiming to be police, she

made them slide their badges under the door first as proof. Many children were too young to understand what had happened even as they were led out. 'They were told to walk out of the 625-pupil school with their eyes closed, and emerged walking with one hand on the shoulder of the child in front of them. Mergim Bajraliu said: 'They were told to hold hands and close their

eyes. What was in there must have been very gruesome.' Police said they received the emergency call just after 9.30am, rushed into the building and began an 'active shooter search', checking 'every crack and crevice' as the children were evacuated. Parents arrived almost as quickly as the police after being alerted via an automated call from the education superintendent saying there had been a shooting. The entire town - a sleepy, quaint community in suburban Connecticut - was plunged into panic as the automated call did not make clear which school had been hit. One woman was seen walking up the street, simply shouting: 'Why? Why?' Parents who lost children were informed of the tragedy at the fire station where bereavement counselors were sent to try to help them cope with their unimaginable loss. Richard Wilford, the father of a pupil who was not shot, said it was a 'powerless and terrifying experience' as he attempted to sum up the shock and confusion. He said: 'I could try to explain it, but I'm sure I would fail. "There's no words that I could come up with that would even come close to describing the sheer terror of hearing that your child's in a place where there's been violence.'

## Worst classroom massacres in history

**BESLAN - 386 DEAD** Pro-Chechen rebels took more than 1,200 children and adults hostage on September 1, 2004, in Beslan, North Ossetia. Victims died in gun battle between hostage-takers and Russian security forces.

**VIRGINIA TECH - 32 DEAD** Two separate attacks by student Seung-Hui Cho on April 16, 2007, at Virginia Tech campus in Blacksburg.

**MA'ALOT - 26 DEAD** Members of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine murdered 22 religious high school stu-

dents in Ma' a lot, Israel, on the 26th anniversary of Israeli independence on May 15, 1974.

**DUNBLANE - 18 DEAD** Unemployed Scout leader Thomas Hamilton killed 16 children and a teacher after walking into Dunblane Primary School in Scotland armed with four pistols on March 13, 1996. The massacre led to the banning of handguns in Britain.

**ERFURT - 18 DEAD** Expelled pupil Robert Steinhauser killed 14 teachers, two female students and a policeman at his school in the German city of Erfurt on April

26, 2002, before shooting himself.

**TEXAS UNIVERSITY - 18 DEAD** After killing his wife and mother, Charles Whitman fired from the Clock Tower of the University of Texas in Austin for more than an hour and a half on August 1, 1966. He was finally shot by police.

**COLUMBINE HIGH - 15 DEAD** Students Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold went classroom-to-classroom gunning down students and a teacher at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado on April 20, 1999 before shooting themselves.



Too much to bear: A woman waits for news of her sister, a teacher



Terror: Outside the school, a boy is comforted. Inset, murdered headmistress Dawn Hochsprung



Emergency response: Armed police descend on Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut



You're safe: A distraught pupil is carried away from the scene of carnage