

Who Was (Is?) Matthew Livelsberger?

By Bruce Bawer

Because of the deadly act of vehicular jihad in New Orleans on New Year's Eve, the New Year's Day explosion of a rented Tesla outside of the Trump International Hotel in Las Vegas received less media attention



than it might otherwise have done. To be sure, there was a good deal of speculation that the two incidents might be connected, especially after it emerged that both the perpetrator in New Orleans and the man who had rented the Tesla, and whose purported remains were found inside of it, had connections to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, now called Fort Liberty. Both rented their vehicles from a company called Turo. The former, Samshud Din-Jabbar, was an Army veteran; the latter, Matthew Alan Livelsberger, was a Green Beret.

Din-Jabbar's motive was obvious, at least to those who were willing to see what was plain before him. As he leapt out of

his car and began shooting – he killed a total of 15 people – he shouted “Allahu akbar!” The reason for the explosion in Las Vegas is murkier. It seemed relevant that the hotel bears the name of Trump and that the car was manufactured by Elon Musk, who has become a close advisor to the president-elect. But what exactly was the point of this action? As noted, the dead body of a man was found in the car. He had been killed by a single bullet to the head. The body was identified as Livelsberger’s and the wound was described as self-inflicted. And authorities suggested that Livelsberger killed himself because he had been suffering from PTSD. But were these things true? Records showed that Livelsberger – who, according to his family, was a strong Trump supporter – had rented the car in Denver and then drove it to Las Vegas. One strange detail was that authorities, supposedly in order to identify the body in the car, compared its DNA to that of Livelsberger’s recently born son. Their DNA didn’t match – a fact that led to speculation that Livelsberger had committed suicide after discovering that his son, in fact, wasn’t really his. But did the lack of a DNA match mean, rather, that the body in the car wasn’t Livelsberger’s?

These and other questions were still up in the air when, on January 3, [Shawn Ryan](#), a former Navy SEAL and CIA contractor who is now a popular and widely respected podcaster, aired an hour-long [show](#) on which his guest, Sam Shoemate, a retired Army intelligence officer with an Instagram account on which he has advocated for military veterans for the last four and a half years, discussed a message that he had allegedly received on January 30 from Livelsberger stating that “what I’m going to send you is going to change the course of humanity,” telling him that he (Livelsberger) was being watched by the FBI and/or Homeland Security, and asking to be put in touch with Ryan, Fox News, and/or Pete Hegseth. After Shoemate replied that he didn’t have the contact information for Ryan, Hegseth, or anyone at Fox News, Livelsberger sent him on New Year’s Eve a document that Shoemate described as a

“manifesto.” It turned out that Livelsberger had in fact written to Ryan, but Ryan’s inbox was so full that he hadn’t noticed it.

In his e-mail to Shoemate, Livelsberger wrote that the mysterious drones that were seen recently over the U.S. were in fact “gravitic propulsion systems powered aircraft” (sic) that China has been launching for years from submarines in the Atlantic as “a show of force.” Asked by Ryan what a “gravitic propulsion system” was, Shoemate said that it was a “fancy term that you will find in science fiction” but that didn’t appear, to his knowledge, in any scientific literature or technical manuals. According to Livelsberger, these Chinese aircraft represented “the most dangerous threat to national security that has ever existed,” since they “basically have an unlimited payload capacity” and could be parked “over the WH [White House]” if the Chinese wished to do so. “It’s checkmate.” Livelsberger went on to reveal that he had conducted targeting for U.S strikes in Nimruz province in Afghanistan in 2019 that had “killed hundreds of civilians in a single day” and that he had also participated in the cover-up that followed. He said that he wanted Shoemate to help bring media attention to the American and Chinese aircraft “so we avoid a world war because this is a mutually assured destruction situation.”

At first Shoemate didn’t take this e-mail very seriously. Then he woke up on New Year’s Day to the news that Livelsberger had apparently died in that Tesla explosion in Las Vegas. This development left him shaken – and when he calmed down a bit, he shared Livelsberger’s e-mail with the FBI (which later confirmed that it was indeed from Livelsberger) and managed to come up with a way to get Ryan’s attention. Hence his appearance on Ryan’s podcast, where the two men discussed Livelsberger’s e-mail. At first blush, Shoemate admitted, the document had seemed “crazy” to him, but – given Livelsberger’s background and in the wake of the car explosion in Las Vegas –

it cried out to be given serious examination. During a break in his conversation with Shoemate, Ryan had one of his crew look at his inbox, which proved to contain an e-mail from Livelsberger dated December 29, identifying himself and stating that he wanted to “blow the whistle” on activities being carried out by the Army “in a certain place.” He offered to discuss the matter on Ryan’s show “before the 31st.” Ryan noted that Livelsberger’s reference to U.S. strikes in Nimruz in 2019 checked out. Apropos of the strikes, Shoemate said: “The ripple effect is going to be massive on this.”

And what about the explosion in Las Vegas – and the body in the car? Both Ryan and Shoemate were inclined to think that Livelsberger is still alive, and that the body in the car is that of someone else who was shot to death beforehand, placed in the Tesla, and then transported in the driverless car to the hotel’s porte-cochère, where the explosion was set off remotely. But why? What was Livelsberger up to? “Why Trump Hotel? Why Las Vegas?” asked Shoemate. Did he pick the Trump Hotel because he figured the explosion would get more attention if it happened there? Also, since he set the explosion in a Tesla – which he knew would largely contain the explosion – it was clear that he didn’t want to cause any damage or deaths. (Shoemate noted that Livelsberger had been described as a “stalwart patriot” and Trump fan; Ryan said that someone whose opinion he trusted had called Livelsberger an “upstanding soldier.”) Nor did he want to kill himself. What he wanted, quite clearly, was to get the message out about the high-tech U.S. and Chinese aircraft. Ryan and Shoemate agreed that there didn’t seem to be any connection between this event and the vehicular attack in New Orleans; but they also agreed that, given the newly developed military capabilities of China, Iran, and other players, and the failure of the U.S. government to take these threats seriously, there is a terrifyingly high likelihood of major terrorist attacks in the near future. “It’s going to be a bloody 2025,” said Ryan.

What did all this add up to? Comments posted by Ryan's viewers on YouTube and on his X page – which, the last time I checked, numbered over 35,000 – were all over the map. Some thought Livelsberger had “lost his mind,” perhaps as a result of “untreated PTSD.” Others feared that Ryan was being suckered in by a psyop. One declared flatly that “‘gravitic’ craft is bullshit” while another said it wasn’t “farfetched” at all, according to (unnamed) sources at MIT and the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory. A veteran EMS worker, noting that Livelsberger’s ID had been found in the vehicle and that he’d supposedly been identified by his tattoos, said that he’d never seen a body that had been burned beyond recognition but that had legible ID on it as well as recognizable tattoos; but this claim was contradicted by a viewer who professed to be a crime scene investigator, and a person who professed to be a “45-year law-enforcement investigator” maintained that Livelsberger “is definitely still alive” – although a viewer who posted his or her comment some time after the podcast noted that authorities had just announced that the body in the Tesla had been confirmed by a dental match, DNA match, and tattoo match to be Livelsberger’s. (The viewer added: “Are they lying?” Well, maybe they are. And why would that be?)

One viewer suggested that Livelsberger had chosen the Trump hotel because he feared – sobering thought – the Chinese plan to strike at Trump at the inauguration. Quite a few viewers dismissed the whole Livelsberger story as a nothingburger; many, many others found it mind-blowing. Then, at a January 7 press conference, the Las Vegas police, ATF, and FBI [confirmed](#) the authenticity of Livelsberger’s “manifesto” – and, in addition, seemed to squelch the claim that the car had been self-driving or that the explosion was triggered remotely. They also shared passages from a journal that had allegedly been found on Livensberger’s phone in which, saying that he was “high on weed and drinking,” he referred to having reached a “decision point” and to having decided to “make the final commit” to the Grand Canyon, where he planned to

“go...down fighting” by turning the Tesla into “a massive VBIED” (i.e., car bomb). He also referenced his military service, writing that there had not been a time during his two years in Afghanistan “where I had a clear understanding or rational feeling in my heart of why my brothers were fighting and dying.”

One of Shawn Ryan’s viewers commented: “The whole thing still isn’t adding up.” I agree. Although it’s not at all clear to me what we’ve got here, I’m not yet about to file this one under “close the file and move on.” Stay tuned?

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