The Aramoana Massacre  
On November the 13th, 1990, the innocence of the small seaside settlement of Aramoana was violently destroyed, destroyed by the crazed actions of a single man, David Gray. During the course of twenty four hours, David Gray rampaged through Aramoana on an insatiable killing spree, with witnesses claiming he was intent on “killing everyone”. Gray not only slaughtered the innocence of Aramoana, but he also slaughtered thirteen men, women and children, indiscriminately firing at “anything that moved” with his semiautomatic assault rifle. The Armed Offenders Squad sealed off the town and waited for the morning, when they decided to move in, unaware of Gray’s location, but knowing that he must be stopped, after a search, he was found and shot dead. The massacre caused hurt, distress and anguish among those who had lost loved ones and family members to Grays rampage and a change of gun laws within New Zealand at a political level. However, the facts and figures about what happened during that violent period of time are easily found, what is not so easy to understand is why someone such as David Gray, who was seen by those around him as “a loner” and other such alienations, would suddenly snap, and start randomly murdering anyone in sight, however, only speculations on why that happened can be made, as any certainty as to the exact causes followed him to the grave.

Causes

The exact causes of David Gray’s rampage through the small, isolated seaside town of Aramoana on the 13th of November, 1990, remain mere speculations. It is highly possible that the combination of isolation and alienation caused David Gray to develop schizophrenia and paranoia, which when combined with an argument with his neighbour, Garry Holden, caused him to violently explode into an insatiable rampage of death and destruction. It is said that in the days and weeks leading up to the tragic massacre, David Gray’s appearance became more and more rugged and dishevelled. This could have been due to a gradual decline in his mental state, which is also further revealed by how it is claimed that in the days before the shooting, he alienated his few friends with inexplicable accusations, which sources state, and is also evident by his argument with Garry Holden minutes before the shooting. At the time of the massacre, there were no laws in New Zealand that stopped a mentally ill person from possessing firearms, which allowed David Gray to not only form a large gun cache, but for his large gun cache to not only contain rifles and shotguns, but also semi-automatic assault rifles such as the Norinco AK47 look alike. By possessing such an arsenal, Gray would have had the temptation to not just own the weapons, but to use them and the argument with Garry Holden combined with his progressive mental decline in the previous days and weeks, allowed Gray to finally let loose and use his arsenal. Although, speculation is all that can be made, as Gray was never psychologically assessed before the massacre, and obviously not afterwards, so it is impossible to truthfully state whether or not Gray was mentally ill, but it was not just one element that lead to the massacre, it was a gradual build up of tension and probable mental decline that eventually lead to his violent rampage, the true and honest causes of this tragedy were possibly not even known by the man that committed them, if he was mentally ill, but if he did, the true causes followed him to the grave.

Events

On the fateful night of the 13th of November, 1990, one man destroyed the small, quiet lifestyle of a seaside town called Aramoana. Following an argument with his neighbour, Garry Holden, David Gray went into his home and retrieved a gun. He then went back outside and shot Garry Holden. Hearing the shots, Chiquita and Jasmine Holden (Garry’s daughters) and Rewa Bryson hide inside the Holden family home. Gray entered the house and shot Chiquita Holden, who then ran outside to see the body of her father before running to Julie Ann Bryson’s home, at which point the events at the Holden residence are unknown. Mrs Bryson then dialled 111 and then drove with Chiquita back to the Holden residence in her van, only to discover that the house was burning and that Gray was standing ready for them when he then fired shots at the van. In such a quiet, friendly place that Aramoana was, the sight of the fire caused the locals to rush to the building in aid, however Gray shot at anything that moved, as it has been said. Vanessa Percy was ruthlessly shot while running down the street and Leo Wilson and Dion Percy were also shot and killed, but their sister, Stacey, survived with severe wounds, after their father, Ross Percy stopped his ute after seeing the fire along with Aleki Tali, a family friend of the Percy’s. Locals, James Dickson, Vic Crimp and Tim Jamieson, were also shot and killed by Gray. Eva Dickson (James Dickson’s mother) and Chris Cole were both badly injured and could not walk. Sergeant Stewart Guthrie, a police officer from Port Chalmers was the first law enforcement officer onto the scene. He confronted Gray at Aramoana and was heartlessly gunned down. Sgt. Guthrie had been commanded to order Grays surrender first, and only after that had been denied was he allowed to shoot Gray, which put Sgt. Guthrie at a major disadvantage that probably cost him his life. Afterwards, the Armed Offenders Squad blocked the road into and out of Aramoana. Early the next morning, members of the Armed Offenders Squad moved into Aramoana and began searching each building, hunting for Gray. They passed the numerous bodies of Grays victims, the young and the elderly, until they finally discovered his location. Gray only left the building he had chosen to hide in after a tear gas canister was thrown in through a smashed window. The squad members watched as the doors of the building opened to reveal Gray, with his Norinco AK47 look alike hidden behind his back, preventing them from shooting, he then raised the gun, revealing it and was shot several times by members of the squad, however he also shot, injuring one member who was shot in the ankle. Squad members then rushed to restrain Gray who is said to have been much stronger than expected, due to the adrenaline coursing through him. Once he was restrained they attempted to sustain his life but were unable to. The precise times of certain points within the massacre are unknown, but what is known that on the 13th of November, 1990 thirteen people lost their lives as David Gray rampaged through Aramoana.

Consequences and Significance to New Zealand

Three days after the massacre, David Gray’s house on Muri Street was set on fire and burnt down to ashes under the watch of the Port Chalmers Fire Brigade, and also approximately fifty citizens of Aramoana watched the house burn. The police were contacted by David Gray’s relatives and asked to stop any investigation of arson. The massacre however did not only set David Gray’s house alight, it also sparked political reforms revolving around gun controls, in particular Semi-Automatic weapons, which Gray had used throughout the massacre. Two years later, in 1992, an amendment to New Zealand firearms was put in place, which generally tightened gun controls and created a new category of firearms, the Millitary-Style Semi-Automatic weapons. This amendment caused it to be harder to acquire weapons and to require a higher ranked licence to be able to obtain and use the new category, Millitary-Style Semi-Automatic weapons, such as the Norinco AK47 look alike that David Gray had used during his massacre. Many of the police officers that were actively involved with trying to find and stop David Gray were awarded gallantry awards, including Sergeant Guthrie, the last person to fall to Gray and the victims of the massacre were honoured with a memorial. This event significantly impacted upon New Zealand as it gripped the nation, being the largest massacre in New Zealand history, as it was not just at the scene, but in the media and on the news. The massacre was not quiet and controlled by the police, but everywhere throughout New Zealand, although journalists were kept well back by the police cordon, the massacre still carried the impact of shock and horror through the televisions in New Zealanders homes, through the radios. The event was significant because it was unique, because it was and still is unchallenged in New Zealands history and the most ruthless and horrific massacres in modern times, because it is one of the only massacres to take place in modern day New Zealand.  
  
Samuel Patten