

## Casino Guards, Used to Handling Drunks, Confront Greater Dangers

Written by Administrator  
Thursday, 05 October 2017 21:22 -

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Photo



The lobby of the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino in Las Vegas this week. Casino security guards generally deal with mundane issues on most days, but they must be prepared much greater threats.

Credit  
Eric Thayer for The New York Times

LAS VEGAS — Gunfire crackled, hotel guests called in noise complaints, and just like that, Jesus Campos, armed with little more than the handcuffs on his service belt, was facing a situation on Sunday that he had never encountered before as a security officer at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino.

[Stephen Paddock](#) , a longtime gambler who had amassed an arsenal of weapons, was [firing down on thousands of people](#) at an outdoor country music festival from his suite on the 32nd floor of the hotel.

As Mr. Campos approached the door of the suite, Mr. Paddock fired several shots through it, striking Mr. Campos in his right thigh, David L. Hickey, the president of the union representing security officers at the hotel, said on Thursday. Even after Mr. Campos was wounded, Mr. Hickey said, he helped the police locate Mr. Paddock, who did not resume his barrage of fire.

On most days, unarmed security personnel like Mr. Campos, who wears a black uniform at work, are dealing with much more mundane problems. Medical emergencies. Drunks. Arguments.

But they have to be ready for much worse. The mass shooting on Sunday night, which killed 58 people and wounded hundreds more, highlighted the dangerous side of working security in a casino hotel. Serious criminal violence is rare, but when it happens, many in the industry say, coping with it demands extensive training and preparation.

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Casino security guards in Las Vegas do not fit the stereotype of whistle-blowing mall cops who chase shoplifters. Many are former police officers or military veterans who work now in plain clothes. They go through special training programs. Their forces are often led by people with experience at the highest levels of law enforcement, and they cooperate closely with the local police.

“The security in Las Vegas is tremendous,” said Don Campbell, a Las Vegas lawyer and former casino executive. “These aren’t rent-a-cops, by any stretch of the imagination.”

Even so, the mass shooting on Sunday raised new questions about how best to provide safety in a city visited by tens of millions of people a year who may be susceptible to a host of dangers. Many casino security officers are unarmed, and in many situations they are only a stopgap until the police arrive.

While a police officer typically gets around 500 hours of academy training before joining the force, most security officers at major Las Vegas casinos get 40 to 80 hours’ initial training, according to Lenny Davis, a security consultant here.

“Some of them are your normal unarmed security guards,” Mr. Davis said. “Most of the big hotels have special security units. I think you’re going to see more of that, in light of Sunday’s incident, and those guys are very well trained.”

As investigators continued to piece together what drove Mr. Paddock to kill, security officers were as visible as ever at Mandalay Bay on Thursday. They were posted at each of the three elevator banks leading to guest rooms, making sure that only those who had key cards got through. They rode around the perimeter of the property on bicycles, and guarded the barricades at the driveway to the front entrance, which remained closed. One officer was dispatched to a room occupied by reporters to tell them that interviewing employees on the property was forbidden.

Generally, the security officers in black uniforms working inside the building do not carry guns, while those patrolling outside in neon green polo shirts do, Mr. Hickey said.

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Mandalay Bay is the only casino hotel in Las Vegas whose security force is unionized, he said; the management signed a three-year contract last month with the International Union, Security, Police and Fire Professionals of America.

David Shepherd, former executive director of security at the Venetian Las Vegas, said that when he was in charge there a decade ago, recruits to the security force had to go through the hotel's 48-hour training program. Many other resort operators, including MGM International, which owns the Mandalay Bay, have their own programs, he said.

The training includes de-escalation tactics, self-defense, water rescue and first aid, Mr. Shepherd said. Once officers are on the job, they receive periodic retraining.

Casino security forces have worked with the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department on issues like how to interact with bomb-sniffing dogs. They take part in active-shooter drills with the police, and conduct walk-throughs in preparation for major events.

In one instance, Mr. Shepherd recalled, there were intelligence reports that a group of pickpockets was coming to Las Vegas to prey on attendees at a convention. Casino security officials met with the police to plan a response, resulting in 11 arrests during the convention.

"I don't care what your marketing is, your media is, what your theme is," Mr. Shepherd said. "When it comes to security, that shows we work together."

Mr. Shepherd, who wrote a book about responding to active-shooter situations, now runs a crisis management organization called Readiness Resource Group. He also belongs to the Las Vegas Security Chiefs Association, a group that meets monthly and includes representatives from most of the major casinos and law enforcement agencies, local and federal. The association provides casino security forces with a connection to the Southern Nevada Counter Terrorism Center, one of many hubs across the nation that allows authorities in a particular region to share information on security threats, Mr. Shepherd said.

The association also frequently reassesses casino security protocols, as it is certain to do now

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in the wake of the mass shooting on Sunday.

One aspect of casino security that has evolved over the years is the use of armed security officers. Before 2001, casinos were moving away from their old practice of posting uniformed armed guards, out of concern that gunfights could erupt on their busy floors. But the terror attacks of Sept. 11 prompted them to add more armed plainclothes officers, said Mr. Davis, the security consultant, and that trend may strengthen now.

Still, he said, the role of security officers will remain to keep guests safe and to supplement law enforcement. While Mr. Campos, the Mandalay Bay officer who was wounded, has been the focus of much attention, Mr. Davis said, there were many other security officers who made important contributions that night, evacuating guests and keeping order in the hotel.

“I have trained some units that are armed, and they will go to the threat,” Mr. Davis said. “But the majority of those guys are there to get the guests out of there, get them to safety. That is their primary mission, to make sure that the guests are safe.”

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