

Border Near San Diego Is Home to More Violence

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Body

Along the ripped and sagging wire fence that forms the country's southern **border** here, small white crosses mark the spots where people have died trying to enter the United States illegally.

In the no man's land along the frontier, death or injury can come in encounters with United States **Border** Patrol agents, who have shot a number of immigrants, with Mexican bandits or with packs of young Americans who prey on immigrants for sport.

Responding to a joint statement of concern issued last November by President Bush and President Carlos Salinas de Gortari of Mexico, officials of both nations are taking steps to address what they describe as an increase in **violence**.

A unit of the Mexican police in Tijuana has been formed to coordinate operations with the **San Diego** police, and the **Border** Patrol has begun a review of its procedures in an effort to reduce **violence**.

'Afraid to Cross'

Such incidents have been spreading north into **San Diego** County as the increasingly visible migrants who are attracted to affluent communities in search of work have found themselves targets of abuse.

For would-be immigrants perched atop the wire fence waiting for nightfall one recent afternoon, the **border** crossing is like a battle. "Everyone is afraid to cross; everyone is nervous," said Jimmy Y., a 22-year-old carpenter who said he was afraid to give his full name. "But we'll do what we have to do to cross to the United States."

Like others crossing the **border**, he said that even the irregular, low-paid work available in the United States allowed him to send back money that would give his family a much higher standard of living.

Another man who negotiates the **border** frequently, charging \$200 a head to escort illegal immigrants into the United States, said the crossing had become **more** violent because of increased patrols and lighting. "Here you have to run faster, and with all these nooks and crannies people can jump out and catch you," said the man, who said the alias he gave when caught was Carlos Garcia Mendoza.

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Peril of Mexican Bandits

Roberto Martinez, who compiles reports of violent incidents along the border for the American Friends Service Committee, said three immigrants were shot to death and three wounded by the Border Patrol last year, and two were killed and one wounded by the San Diego police.

Another danger lurking in the gullies and canyons is Mexican bandits, said Ted Swofford, a spokesman for the Border Patrol. The bandits killed nine people from January to August last year in the San Diego area. But he said rape, robbery and other crimes by bandits had decreased since last summer, when the Mexican police formed a special unit to combat them.

Some immigrants have been killed by local residents. Two teen-agers were sentenced last year to prison for the shooting deaths of a young man and woman they had found near the border while they were "hunting for Hispanics," in the prosecutor's words.

Early this year, another such hunter was himself a victim. The local police, patrolling the scrub land along the border, shot and killed a 22-year-old San Diego man who was among a gang harassing immigrants.

Officials said the group was armed with two tire irons, a large hammer, a baseball bat, a nightstick, a knife and two toy replicas of M-16 assault rifles.

Lieut. Dan Berglund, a homicide investigator for the San Diego Police, said the incident called to mind similar attacks on immigrants last year by a group of teen-agers calling themselves the Metal Militia who dressed in military style and fired paint pellets sometimes used in combat games.

The Immigration and Naturalization Service, which oversees the Border Patrol, issued a statement last December that said, "Escalating violence on the southern border has resulted in injuries and even deaths." It said a review of Border Patrol procedures would begin immediately.

Agents Feel the Pressure

Meanwhile, Mr. Swofford said violence against the agents by immigrants or bandits had risen sharply, from 60 assaults in the fiscal year 1989 to 217 the next year. He said one reason might be the growing number of urban criminals crossing the border.

The Mexican Consul General in San Diego, Enrique Loaeza, said the special Mexican unit to combat bandits had detained 550 people in its first six months of operation, curtailing violence involving Mexicans against Mexicans.

"Now what we are concerned about is violence on this side of the border," he said. He said he was concerned that American officers who have been involved in violent incidents were not being prosecuted.

The Mexican authorities have demanded the extradition of a Border Patrol agent who shot and wounded a 15-year-old vendor, Eduardo Garcia Zamores, last November. The boy was shot as he was halfway over the fence, one foot in Calexico, Calif., and one foot in Mexicali, Mexico, and he fell into Mexico with gunshot injuries to his lung, liver and spleen.

The agent, whose name has not been disclosed, said the boy had been about to throw a rock at him; the boy said he had simply been a spectator at a melee inside the United States and was scrambling to get out of the way.

Chief Gives a Prediction

The Calexico Chief of Police, Leslie Ginn, said the shooting did not seem to have been justified, but he said, "I'll bet you 100 bucks that that agent is never extradited."

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Mr. Loaeza, the Mexican Consul General, said that in the nine months since he took up his post here he had been confronted by incidents of **violence** that had not been adequately prosecuted. He cited the still unsolved fatal sniper shooting of a 12-year-old boy, Emilio Jimenez, last May.

In another case in September, Mr. Loaeza said, Victor Mandujano Navarro, a 17-year-old migrant trying to make his way back to Mexico, was pulled from the sagging **border** fence by a **Border** Patrol agent, thrown to the ground and killed with two gunshots to the chest. As in the other cases involving law-enforcement officers, no one has been prosecuted.

Graphic

Photo: Increasing **violence** along the fenced **border** of the United States and Mexico has made would-be immigrants nervous, but each day they wait at the fence for nightfall and a chance to cross to a better life. (Seth Mydans/The New York Times)

Map of California and Mexico showing location of the Mexican-American **border**.

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