

BORDER DISPUTES

ARMED VIGILANTES

IN

ARIZONA



1913-2003



OUR 90TH YEAR

1913 - 2003



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Vitriol and Vigilantes

On October 16, 2002, 13 members of Ranch Rescue, an extreme anti-immigration group, launched a "patrol" of the Arizona-Mexico border near Lochiel, Arizona. Dressed in camouflage military uniforms and carrying rifles and other weapons, the members of the patrol (somewhat self-importantly dubbed "Operation Hawk") trudged across the desert, allegedly looking for "armed drug smugglers." On this occasion, it actually found some smugglers, though not armed ones, who dropped the marijuana they were toting and fled into the desert.

Ranch Rescue allegedly conducts its activities on private property with the consent of property owners. However, the Nature Conservatory, which owns the land where Ranch Rescue was conducting its activities, mistakenly assumed that the vigilantes were from the U.S. Border Patrol. When it found out the group was not the Border Patrol, it asked Ranch Rescue to leave and also subsequently installed locks on gates to the property (previously, it had left the gates unlocked for the benefit of the Border Patrol).

Although Ranch Rescue did not themselves try to apprehend the alleged smugglers during the operation, local law enforcement and customs officials were unhappy with the encounter. The incident comes at a time of increasing activity by extremist vigilante groups along the Arizona border in recent months, which have created tension and fear on both sides of the border. Undaunted, Ranch Rescue is now planning "Operation Thunderbird" along the Arizona border for the spring of 2003, in order to document "the threat to Arizona Citizens from armed cross-border incursions by armed drug smugglers and foreign military and paramilitary units operating on US private property."

Historically, hate groups and other extremist groups have tried to exploit immigration, legal and illegal, as an issue to gain support and publicity. Anti-Semite and former Klansman David Duke organized Klan border patrols in the late 1970's. In the early 1980's, White supremacist Louis Beam conducted paramilitary activities to intimidate immigrant Vietnamese fishermen in Texas. Beam, then head of the Texas Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, urged Klansmen to reclaim their country "by blood." More recently, in October 2002, New Jersey white supremacist radio talk show host Hal Turner encouraged his shortwave audience to "kill every single one of these invaders."

Turner's remarks reflect a new radicalism. The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks gave extremist groups an opportunity to exploit the fear and anger that the attacks raised in the United States. Extremists sought to direct those emotions against immigrants. Racist groups such as the Council of Conservative Citizens blamed the attacks on a lack of American vigilance against immigrants. Just months after the attacks, the neo-Nazi National Alliance distributed fliers in the Chicago area that featured the World Trade Center and the phrase "Close our Borders!" In March 2003, a number of white supremacist groups, including White Revolution, the National Socialist Movement, Aryan Nations, the Celtic Knights of the KKK, and the Creativity Movement (formerly World Church of the Creator), joined to hold an anti-immigration rally in San Antonio, Texas, to speak out against the "tide of illegal brown wretched refuse steadily darkening our land."

Given these sentiments, it is no surprise that the effort of right wing extremist groups to take the law into their own hands and administer their own form of "justice" coincides with a wave of border violence in Arizona. Several extremist groups are spearheading an effort to mobilize armed vigilantes to "patrol" the Arizona border and stop what they view as a Mexican "invasion." By appealing to xenophobic fears and creating a menacing atmosphere in the communities in which they are active, they could detonate an already volatile situation.

The most organized of these groups openly invite people to "patrol" the borders using technology and weapons. Meanwhile, they promote an ideology that is often not one of immigration reform or immigration control, but simply of hate and intolerance. Their hope is to capitalize on recent alarm over a rising tide of illegal immigration in Arizona that naturally followed increased U.S. Border Patrol presences at once-popular crossing points such as San Diego and El Paso.

American Border Patrol

The border crisis in Arizona has attracted many anti-immigration ideologues seeking to capitalize on the wave of anti-Mexican rhetoric at the border. Foremost among them is 65-year-old Glenn Spencer, head of the American Border Patrol. Spencer, a retired California businessman, moved the headquarters of his virulently anti-Hispanic group to Sierra Vista, Arizona, in August 2002 in order to be, in his words, "on the front lines," claiming that "nothing more could be done for California."

Spencer's group first achieved infamy under the name it had been known since its founding in Sherman Oaks, California, in 1992, Voices of Citizens Together (Spencer has also used the name American Patrol). Spencer began organizing meetings and holding rallies with like-minded residents, and writing letters to newspapers about alleged threats posed by immigration.

Spencer's rhetoric departed sharply from that of legitimate immigration reform groups; Spencer did not target immigration so much as he targeted Hispanics, particularly those of Mexican origin, regardless of whether they were immigrants or not. Many of his writings and comments were simply thinly veiled diatribes against "Mexicans" (like many anti-Hispanic activists, Spencer rarely differentiated between Mexicans and Americans of Mexican descent). In a 1996 letter to the *Los Angeles Times*, for example, Spencer said that "the Mexican culture is based on deceit." Spencer denied the letter was racist. "It has nothing to do with race," he said. "It has to do with culture...there's no way to pass enough laws to protect yourself from a deceitful culture."

Many anti-Hispanic haters fear, above all, a loss of Anglo cultural dominance to people who look different, perhaps speak differently, and who are likely to be Catholic. In 1995, Spencer claimed that "we're reacting today to an invasion of the United States, and, in my judgment, a subversion not only of the culture of the United States, with an inability to assimilate these people, but possibly a subversion of our political system." Two years later, Spencer told a reporter that "unless we stop [Mexican immigration], we're going to lose control of our culture and eventually our political culture in the Southwest."

For more than a decade Spencer's group has warned of a plan by Mexicans to "invade" and "conquer" the Southwestern United States. Spencer claims to have proven his conspiracy theory that the Mexican government is "sponsoring the invasion of the United States with hostile intent" in a documentary called "Conquest of Aztland." Sales of Spencer's documentary and video series "Bonds of Our Union," along with appeals to his mailing list of 26,000 people, help cover organizational costs. He also operates a Web site and hosts a weekly radio show.

Spencer blends anti-Mexican bigotry with anti-government rhetoric in order to tap into deeply embedded fears and to encourage citizens to take the law into their own hands. He has asserted that the

Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) "is working against the American People and we have said so over and over again." The American people, according to Spencer, "are beginning to realize that we were right all along. We intend to give 'em hell."

Although Spencer now operates in Arizona, he claims that his group has never been on patrol on the Arizona-Mexico border. However, he admits that his group has "accompanied others" on patrol, an odd distinction. Spencer says that members of his group have never held anyone at gunpoint, nor threatened to shoot anyone. According to Spencer, the group does not carry "high-powered weapons."

Despite Spencer's assertions, he has been a friend and ally of Roger Barnett, a rancher from Cochise County, Arizona, whose controversial activities have attracted attention and concern.

Barnett, a member of Spencer's group and a former Cochise County sheriff's deputy who later started a towing and propane business, has received considerable publicity for his confrontations with Mexican immigrants. An October 2000 officer safety bulletin from the Department of Justice alerted law enforcement officers that Barnett and his brother Don, "usually armed with pistols and assault rifles, have captured more than 1,000 illegal alien trespassers, holding them against their will until U.S. Border Patrol Agents arrive to take custody of them."

Barnett maintains that he and his brother have caught more than 2,000 illegal immigrants on their 22,000-acre ranch in Douglas, Arizona, just two miles north of the border. In November 1999, the brothers detained seven immigrants at gunpoint east of Highway 80 outside of Douglas. They loaded the group—six men and one woman—into the back of their pickup truck and drove them to a Border Patrol agent. Barnett says that if the U.S. continues to let "these people" run over them, "they are going to take this country over."

Barnett works closely with Glenn Spencer, who has said that the U.S. needs "more patriots like Roger Barnett who will take a stand for America." He is prominently featured on Spencer's Web site, which includes pictures, articles and video interviews with Barnett. In 1999 Barnett formed a group called Cochise County Concerned Citizens that consisted of approximately 30 ranchers who supported making citizens' arrests of immigrants who trespass on their land along southeastern Arizona. Members of Spencer's group joined the Concerned Citizens for a meeting and rally on Barnett's property in May 2000.

Border area ranchers, some of which are members of the American Border Patrol, use motion sensors, infrared tracking devices, global positioning systems, radar and other equipment to observe the movements of migrants on their land, according to *Wired* magazine. Roger Barnett reportedly uses \$30,000 worth of sensors on his property. Glenn Spencer commended Barnett for demonstrating "that we have the technology to stop the invasion" during a November 2002 appearance on MSNBC's Donahue program. Barnett also appeared on the program.

Spencer says he plans to set up a new Web site, which will produce and update maps from reports gathered by electronic sensors. The American Border Patrol Web site is already sending live video of border crossers near the Arizona-Sonora border on the Internet. The technology could make it easier for vigilante groups to track and kidnap illegal immigrants.

While Spencer occasionally tries to downplay his extremist message by claiming that he is not a racist, racist and anti-government extremist groups across the country have embraced his rhetoric. He himself has appeared at events sponsored by white supremacists and racists. In February 2002, Spencer spoke at the white supremacist American Renaissance Conference, in Herndon, Virginia. The conference, named for the monthly newsletter edited by its white supremacist founder Jared Taylor, brought together many racist speakers. Spencer made a presentation predicting a Mexican-American war in 2003. "We have on our hands a Mexican border civil war that could happen tomorrow," Spencer said.

Ranch Rescue

American Border Patrol, although perhaps the most prominent of such groups, was not the first extremist organization to encourage citizens to take the law into their own hands on the Arizona border. That dubious honor goes to Ranch Rescue.

Ranch Rescue, based in Arlington, Texas, was formed in June 2000 by Jack Foote and a small group of people inspired by news reports about Roger Barnett's activities in Arizona. The group organizes armed "patrols" of the border and fully supports "the Second Ammendment [sic] to the Constitution as guaranteeing firearms ownership and

possession as being a personal, individual, God-given right of all Citizens.”

Jack Foote, a software consultant and former U.S. Army officer, heads the group and acts as its Webmaster and volunteer coordinator. In a June 14, 2000, press release announcing the group’s formation, Foote publicized his intention to recruit members to “help ranchers on the Arizona / Mexico border cope with the damage to their property caused by thousands of criminal trespassers.”

To Foote, illegal immigration is not the result of social or economic problems in Mexico, it is a phenomenon deliberately encouraged by the Mexican government to undermine the United States. He has repeatedly said that the Mexican government is making a “coordinated effort” to encourage criminal immigration, once comparing the situation to “Rome when the Goths came in.”

Ranch Rescue members conduct armed patrols on private property, over which they claim the federal government has no jurisdiction. The group’s Web site claims that when “government fails or refuses to act, individual citizens are obligated to act on their own.” Members and volunteers are encouraged to bring firearms and participate in “missions.”

Foote accepts the use of the word “vigilante” to describe his group’s actions and acknowledges that it has detained people and handed them over to law enforcement agents. During “Operation Owl,” described by the group as “a traveling fact-gathering mission,” which took place from July 13 to 21, 2002, host ranchers “carried arms for their own personal protection.” Some of the ranchers, the group claimed, “have already had gunfights with the armed border bandits and drug smugglers that have come onto their property.”

Since organizing its first “mission” in Arizona in the fall of 2000, Ranch Rescue claims to have set up chapters in six states - California, Illinois, New Mexico, Texas, Washington, and in Tucson, Arizona. So far, Ranch Rescue has organized at least five missions on private property along the southern border.

According to Foote, six people took part in the “first field mission.” That number increased to 40 in October 2002, and Foote expects “over 100” people to take part in future missions. “We are coming to the border, and we are coming in increasing numbers,” Foote said. Its latest

activity in Arizona was "Operation Hawk," described above, which concluded on October 28, 2002. According the group's Web site, volunteers came from "all over the USA, Canada, and even from the People's Republic of China."

Rob Krott, a writer for *Soldier of Fortune* magazine, took part in Operation Hawk and has written extensively about it in *SOF*. Like Jack Foote, Krott suggests that American civilians and law enforcement officers face a "growing threat of encountering heavily armed Mexican Army units." Krott says that "a number of *SOF* advertisers contributed gear" for the operation and that many of the participants are connected to *SOF*. According to Krott, "*SOF* helped recruit, organize, and support a 30-man tactical team of military veterans and law-enforcement professionals for the "operation."

Ranch Rescue organizers claim that their group provides a public service, such as fighting drug smugglers. Operation Hawk's "rescue effort" focused on observing and documenting "the passage of armed drug smugglers over private property." During the operation, members reportedly found around 280 pounds of marijuana abandoned by drug smugglers near Lochiel, Arizona, 65 miles southwest of Tucson.

Ranch Rescue did not apprehend the alleged smugglers during the operation. Foote said that among the 13 members that scared off the smugglers were a "former Special Forces soldier, a former Navy SEAL and two Canadian light infantry soldiers." Customs officials and local law enforcement were not pleased with the encounter or the fact that the Ranch Rescue called the media before notifying them of the incident some eighteen hours later.

Foote asserts that by conducting missions the group is "standing shoulder to shoulder with the border county landowners in saying to the state and federal governments, 'either you will keep these criminals off private property, or you will accept the fact that we are going to do so.' We are not going to offer them any other choices but those two." His vigilante actions have irritated law enforcement officers and public officials alike. Paul Berg, the Border Patrol Sector Chief for Del Rio, complained to a Houston reporter in 2001 that armed groups taking the law into their own hands would be a hindrance, not a help.

While Ranch Rescue organizes missions in several states, volunteers often travel to other border states to take part in specific missions. The group's Texas team "traveled from Texas to New Mexico, Arizona,

and California” and obtained video interviews “with many of the landowners who have been dealing with the border crime wave,” according to one of their press releases. In addition, the “research team” conducted “extensive reconnaissance of those properties that are experiencing cross-border incursions by armed drug smugglers and the Mexican military.”

A recent incident involving Ranch Rescue volunteers in Texas illustrates the danger of such vigilante tactics. Two Ranch Rescue volunteers were arrested on March 20, 2003 for allegedly detaining a pair of Salvadorans and allegedly beating one with a pistol. The incident occurred during “Operation Falcon” on Joe Sutton’s 5000-acre ranch near Hebronville, Texas.

The volunteers, Henry Conner Jr., of Lafayette, Louisiana, and James Casey of La Mirada, California, were arrested by Texas Ranger Doyle Holdridge on charges of aggravated assault and unlawful restraint. According to Holdridge, who took a statement from the Salvadorans, one of the complainants “has a knot on the back of his head about half the size of your fist.”

Holdridge considers the Ranch Rescue patrols dangerous and unhelpful to law enforcement. “If you’re a police officer, out there in the darkness, and someone raises up out of the brush in full camo[uflage] with an assault rifle, what are you going to think? It’s a disaster waiting to happen.”

The two men are being held in Jim Hogg County jail by Sheriff Erasmo Alarcon. Alarcon told the *San Antonio Express-News* that, according to the complainants, “they got them to their hands and knees at gunpoint, and all he remembers is someone hitting him on the back of the head with the butt of a gun.” Alarcon added, “We’ve never seen anything like this before...the way they are treating these people is inhumane. It won’t be tolerated.”

Jack Foote, however, asserts the incident “never happened.” The Ranch Rescue Web site claims that its volunteers are “being held on false charges by a corrupt county Sheriff and District Attorney” in Jim Hogg County, referring to them as the “Texas Taliban.”

Ranch Rescue seeks to become more paramilitary in nature, even to the extent of obtaining armored vehicles. Foote told John Stadtmiller, a former Michigan militia leader and extremist shortwave radio talk show

host, that his group will give a "lifetime membership to anyone who brings an armed tactical vehicle" to the border.

Although Ranch Rescue describes itself as a "volunteer network" dedicated to "defending private property rights for all Americans, regardless of race, color, creed, or religion," its activities enjoy wide support among extremist groups across the county--support welcomed and encouraged by Foote. In early January 2001, Foote made his first appearance on the Alex Jones Show, an Austin, Texas, based radio program hosted by anti-government conspiracy theorist Alex Jones. Jones, a popular figure in the far right-wing "patriot" movement, has said that the "cultures" in Mexico, "quintessentially put a new height on evil."

As a result of Foote's appearance on Jones' program, members of the Republic of Texas, an anti-government "sovereign citizen" group that believes Texas is an independent country and that engaged in an armed standoff with state police in 1997, contacted Foote about possibly joining forces for future missions. "During and after that show," Foote told the *Houston Press*, "We talked about combining their planned rescue mission to the Texas border area ranches with ours, as a joint rescue effort." According to Foote, "the Republic of Texas' desire to see private property rights upheld is certainly a parallel to that of Ranch Rescue." According to Daniel Miller, the Republic of Texas' president, members engaged in operations with Ranch Rescue on the Texas-Mexico border in February 2001.

Foote not only promotes Ranch Rescue with extreme anti-government groups; he has also reached out to a variety of white supremacists. Foote's interview with the neo-Nazi National Alliance was recently posted on the Resistance Records Web site, which is devoted to the promotion and sale of the white power hate music. In the interview, Foote directs readers to Ranch Rescue's Web site.

Foote has also promoted his organization on the shortwave radio program of Clay Douglas, the editor of the *Free American*, a Bingham, New Mexico-based anti-government and anti-Semitic publication. Foote told Douglas during an October 2002 interview that he is frustrated about the fact that border issues rarely make national news. Douglas responded by saying that readers of his *Free American* know "who controls the news," a veiled anti-Semitic reference.

Foote also appeared, in February 2002, on the shortwave radio show of Hal Turner, a New Jersey white supremacist known for incendiary anti-Semitic and racist rhetoric, who has caused concern by explicitly encouraging extreme violence against Jews, other minorities, and government officials.

Civil Homeland Defense

Among those whom Foote has inspired to take action is Chris Simcox, head of the Civil Homeland Defense, a newly formed militia group, which, like Ranch Rescue, supports armed "patrols" of the border. Simcox told John Stadtmiller that "Jack [Foote] helped me quite a bit with trying to figure out what were going to do."

A former elementary school teacher in Los Angeles, California, Simcox moved to Tombstone, Arizona, in November 2001. In May 2002, he purchased the *Tombstone Tumbleweed*, the local newspaper.

It didn't take long before Simcox began using the editorial page of his paper to promote his extreme views. In October 2002, Simcox published an editorial titled "Enough is Enough! A Public Call to Arms! Citizens Border Patrol Militia Now Forming," which called on citizens to defend against an "invasion" of illegal immigrants and to volunteer for a militia group that Simcox called the Civil Homeland Defense. Simcox encouraged citizens "to organize, pool supplies and equipment, train responsibly and move out in groups to protect" the border. Simcox subsequently claimed to have received more than 1,000 e-mails in support of his editorial.

The Civil Homeland Defense, primarily funded by Simcox, is made up of local ranchers from Cochise County. Volunteers are encouraged to arm themselves for "patrol" operations (Simcox himself has declared that he carries his pistol everywhere, even into the bathroom to take a shower). Its only membership requirement is an Arizona concealed carry weapons permit. In a December 5, 2002, shortwave radio interview with John Stadtmiller, who provides a forum for border vigilantes, Simcox claimed that a majority of his volunteers have military and police experience. Simcox further noted that six pilots have volunteered aircraft to help his patrols.

Simcox boasts of a cadre of around 50 people who "have pledged their patriotism to actually give service to their country." He claims that his

group has already deterred 500 illegal immigrants from entering the country since it started conducting security patrols on private property with the permission of landowners. On January 5, 2003, about 10 volunteers joined Simcox along the Mexican border in one of its first "patrols." Another six people were on hand to observe the group. Some of those observers said they are members of American Border Patrol and Ranch Rescue.

According to Simcox, the time has come for citizens to show the "inept HomeLand [sic] Security Department a thing or two about how to protect national security and the sovereignty of our Democratic Republic." Simcox blamed the federal government and the U.S. Border Patrol for failing "to stop the flood of immigrants funneling through Cochise County."

Preying on post-911 fears of terrorism, Simcox described illegal immigration as an "invasion" and part of a larger conspiracy against American security. Speaking at a meeting of the anti-immigration group California Coalition for Immigration Reform in Garden Grove, California, in March 2003, Simcox said, using New World Order conspiracy rhetoric common in the militia movement, "There's something very fishy going on at the border. The Mexican army is driving American Vehicles – but carrying Chinese weapons. I have personally seen what I can only believe to be Chinese troops."

Since its formation, Simcox has sought to expand the membership of his militia by assembling like-minded sympathizers to take the law into their own hands. Henry Esparaza, a 50-year-old Mexican-American and one of four members of the Civil Homeland Defense board of directors, is helping Simcox recruit civilians to serve in armed patrols along the border. Esparaza suggests that his involvement in the militia "shows the public we're not racist."

Simcox has also registered a Web site for his group, dedicated to "serving the sovereign citizens of these United States." The site includes articles and photos of his group's operations. The caption of one of the photos claims that "five members of a larger group of illegal aliens were detained and turned over to Border Patrol Sunday afternoon by Civil Homeland Defense volunteers who had just completed a two-day concealed weapons training class at the Sierra Vista Shooting Range."

Many of Simcox's positions and practices echo those of Ranch Rescue, but Simcox goes further than Ranch Rescue in embracing the notion of conducting armed patrols on public lands as well as on private land. "It's our land," he said. "I'm not afraid to step on that land and do the same thing, and I challenge my government to come and arrest me." According to *The Sierra Times*, a Nevada-based on-line newsletter edited by former Ohio militia leader J.J. Johnson, Simcox said he plans to apply for a \$400,000 Federal Emergency Management Agency grant, which is "allocated to Arizona for homeland security."

True to his word, in January 2003, Simcox was caught on federal land with a loaded weapon. The chief ranger of the Coronado National Memorial in Hereford, Arizona, issued Simcox three misdemeanor citations for carrying a loaded weapon in a national park, disorderly conduct, and conducting a special operation without a permit. Simcox said later he didn't realize he was in the national park when he was hiking and that he wasn't patrolling the area. "I think it's funny; it's more publicity," Simcox added.

The patrols continue to be Civil Homeland Defense's primary activities. In mid-March, 2003, Simcox led 34 volunteers with flashlights and night vision devices to patrol Cochise County's border with Mexico, concluding, in Simcox's words, "its most productive—yet most terrifying—weekend to date." He claimed to have seized 43 illegal immigrants and turned them over to the Border Patrol and to have frightened off another 80. Since the beginning of the war with Iraq, Simcox has said, his group has conducted daily patrols and have seized over 200 migrants.

Many Arizonans are appalled by Simcox's vigilante proclivities. Through a spokesperson, Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano said that "there isn't any place in Arizona for vigilantism." The Douglas City Council held a special session on November 19, 2002 condemning Simcox's editorial. The session, called by Mayor Ray Borane, passed a resolution stating the city's opposition to the "creation, operation and support of armed militia and vigilantes." "It's only a matter of time," Borane has told reporters, "until someone gets hurt, or worse." Simcox's rhetoric has not calmed anybody; he told a crowd in California in March 2003 that "so far, we've had restraint, but I'm afraid that restraint is wearing thin. Take heed of our weapons because we're going to defend our borders by any means necessary." Even Glenn Spencer has backed away from the more radical Simcox, claiming that he has barred American Border Patrol members from participating in Simcox's patrols.

While Simcox says he merely is “responding to the president’s call to stand vigil, stand watch, and be prepared for an attack at any time,” the Cochise County Board of Supervisors is concerned that his newspaper’s militant tone does not represent the county’s position. It also passed a resolution against border vigilantism, as have the city councils of Bisbee, Sierra Vista, and Tombstone itself. Cochise County Sheriff Larry Dever, long an advocate for stronger border control measures, has said that “these kinds of cries for forming posses invite fringe associations and agendas we don't need,” and has suggested that he is prepared to take action against Simcox if necessary. However, Dever spoke at an American Border Patrol sponsored rally in May 2000.

In response to the growing vigilante activity at the border, Federal authorities in Arizona have said they will investigate any group that breaks federal laws. Congressman Raul Grijalva from Tucson announced that he will push for federal hearings into the activities of the vigilante patrols. “I think this rhetoric you’re hearing from some of the leaders of these groups is very dangerous to the overall security of the region,” Grijalva said. “The potential for violence is escalating and I think the whole situation has to be investigated.”

In his first official action as a new member of Congress, Grijalva called on federal authorities to investigate vigilante groups in southern Arizona. In a letter to the U.S. Attorney's Office in Phoenix, Grijalva warned that, “An atmosphere of fear exists in southern Arizona that threatens to ignite in a flashpoint of violence...The words and actions of these groups are ample evidence of an armed racist movement intent on taking the law into their own hands.”

Violence and Victims

Exacerbating the vigilante activity along the United States border with Mexico is a string of violent acts against migrants. Violent incidents against illegal immigrants have been brutal and are occurring with greater regularity, further intensifying the atmosphere of fear and suspicion on both sides of the border.

Perhaps the most chilling of these incidents has been a series of brutal murders along the Arizona-Mexico border. Since March 2002, the dead bodies of nine immigrant men have been discovered in a 20-square-

mile area in Maricopa County, Arizona. Some of the victims were shot at close range with semiautomatic weapons.

On March 14, 2002, scavengers looking for shell casings found the dead body of Pedro Ambrosioso Ochoa-Felix. He had been shot several times and his hands were tied with telephone cord. Less than a month later, on April 7, the bullet-ridden body of Juaquin Cruz was found in the same area. On June 18, locals found Daniel Vargas-Baena's body pierced with multiple bullet wounds. Two months later, on August 21, target shooters found the skeletal remains of an unknown male.

More was to come. The bodies of Ramon Ramirez and Juan Carlos Ibarra-Munoz were discovered in September. Ramirez, found on September 7, was shot multiple times, and Ibarra-Munoz's body, found on September 22, was stabbed several times and bound with an underwear waistband. A horseback rider found the remains of another Mexican man on October 13. He'd been shot and his hands were bound by duct tape. The body, like several of the others, was discovered weeks after the murder.

The most recent killing occurred in Maricopa County in early March 2003, where an immigrant was found shot in the head and dumped in a river bottom.

At this point, no one is really sure who has committed the killings, but what is definitely true is that the killings and the rising tide of vigilantism along the border have together contributed to an atmosphere of fear, violence, and lawlessness.

Blood and Bluster on the Border

The situation on the Arizona-Mexican border is one that nobody really wants. A significant increase in illegal immigration, as well as other cross-border activities such as drug smuggling, has alarmed many citizens. Many ranchers and homeowners living on or near the border have endured problems ranging from the destruction of property to threats to their safety. Human rights activists, too, are concerned. Would-be border crossers choosing Arizona instead of better watched areas such as San Diego and El Paso face much more hostile terrain and climate. Almost 150 people trying to cross the border died from exposure, dehydration, and other causes in 2002 (45% of crossing deaths occur along the Arizona border).

As bad as this is, over the course of the past year, the situation has been greatly exacerbated. One or more people have been engaged in brutal execution-style slayings along the Arizona border, and authorities have little to go on. At the same time, a tide of armed vigilantism has risen in Arizona, adding heat and hatred to the desert state, while doing nothing to solve any of the legitimate problems. Whether proclaiming an imminent loss of American "culture" due to immigration or organizing armed patrols to hunt human prey, these anti-immigration extremists have deliberately confused border control policy with intolerance and paramilitary activity. They promote a culture of lawlessness and defiance that will only add to, not solve, America's border problems.