

Investigators search for motive in Las Vegas massacre

Las Vegas

Investigators worked feverishly yesterday to find out why a retired accountant gunned down at least 59 people and wounded over 500 others at an open-air concert in Las Vegas, raking the crowd with bullets from a 32nd-floor hotel room packed with weapons.

As America grappled with the deadliest mass shooting in its history, officials reacted cautiously to an Islamic State group claim that Stephen Craig Paddock, 64, had carried out Sunday night's massacre on behalf of the jihadist group.

Police said Paddock, who had no criminal record, smashed windows in his hotel room shortly after 10:00 pm on Sunday and trained bursts of automatic weapons fire on thousands of people attending a country music concert down below.

In footage of the massacre broadcast on CNN, the sustained rattle of gunfire is heard as people scream and bolt for cover with little idea of where the shots were coming from.

"We saw bodies down. We didn't know if they had fallen or had been shot," said Ralph Rodriguez, an IT consultant from Pomona Valley near Los Angeles, who was at the concert with a group of friends.

"People started grabbing their loved-ones and just strangers, and trying to help them get out of the way," he said.

In a statement on online, IS claimed Paddock was one of its "soldiers" but the FBI said it had found no such connection so far with the local sheriff describing him as a lone "psychopath."

Sheriff Joseph Lombardo said Paddock fired through the door of his hotel room and hit a security guard in the leg.

But when a SWAT team stormed the room where Paddock had been staying since September 28, they found he had killed himself.

Inside the room were 23 firearms including automatic weapons, he said.



A makeshift memorial for the victims of Sunday night's mass shooting stands at an intersection of the north end of the Las Vegas Strip

'Lone wolf psychopath'

But the gunman's motive remains unclear.

"We're hunting down and tracing every single clue that we can get on his background," the sheriff said at a late-night briefing.

So far, investigators had found no manifesto or anything else to explain Paddock's actions, he said.

"This individual is a lone wolf and I don't know how it could have been prevented," he said earlier.

"I can't get into the mind of a psychopath at this point."

As the investigation continued, details started to emerge in the media about some of the victims -- a kindergarten teacher from California who married her childhood sweetheart; a Tennessee nurse; a high school secretary from New Mexico and a cheerleader, also from California.

On Monday night, there were vigils of solidarity with the dead and the wounded.

The Empire State Building went dark, as did the Eiffel Tower -- and much of the Las Vegas strip itself.

'Premature' to discuss gun policy

President Donald Trump denounced what he called "an act of pure evil" and said he

would visit Las Vegas on Wednesday.

But the White House pushed back at calls to reopen the US debate on tighter gun controls.

"A motive is yet to be determined and it would be premature for us to discuss policy when we don't fully know all of the facts or what took place last night," Trump's spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said.

Lombardo said Paddock had apparently used some kind of hammer to smash the window of his hotel room before opening fire on the crowd of some 22,000 people.

IS, which provided no evidence for its claims, described him as a "soldier of the caliphate" saying he converted to Islam several months ago and went by the name Abu Abdel Bar al-Amriki -- "The American."

But the Federal Bureau of Investigation said it had found no such link so far. "We have determined to this point no connection with an international terrorist group," FBI special agent Aaron Rouse said.

CIA spokesman Jonathan Liu said the intelligence community was aware of the claim but advised "caution on jumping to conclusions before the facts are in."

'Not an avid gun guy'

According to his brother, Paddock was a high-stakes gambler and their bank-robbler father was once on the FBI's 10 Most Wanted list.

But Eric Paddock said his brother had led an otherwise normal life, doting on their mother.

"He liked to play video poker. He went on cruises. He sent his mother cookies," he said.

"We're trying to understand what happened," his brother said. "We're lost."

Paddock had "no religious affiliation, no political affiliation" and was "not an avid gun guy at all," his brother added. (AFP)

Weapons cache found at Las Vegas shooter's house

Las Vegas

Authorities said Monday they had recovered a weapons cache including firearms, explosives and ammunition from a house owned by gunman Stephen Paddock.

Sheriff Joseph Lombardo said officers searching the house in Mesquite, Nevada recovered "in excess of 18 additional firearms, some explosives and several thousand rounds of ammo, along with some electronic devices we're evaluating at

this point."

Lombardo said they had discovered several pounds of an explosive called tannerite at the house as well as ammonium nitrate, a type of fertilizer, in his car.

He said law enforcement were working four separate crime scenes: Paddock's room at the Mandalay Bay hotel, the concert venue, the gunman's house in Mesquite, and another house he owns in northern Nevada which a SWAT team was poised to raid.

Vegas carnage unavoidable, security experts say

Los Angeles

The deadly attack on concertgoers in Las Vegas has prompted a debate about security measures at hotels and open-air venues, but little could have been done to prevent Sunday's carnage, experts say.

The challenges lie in part in the difficulty of

imposing harsh policies on places and events meant for fun and relaxation, and foiling a perpetrator bent on bloodshed.

"This was an unpreventable incident, period," said Patrick Brosnan, a former NYPD detective who now runs a private security firm called Brosnan Risk Consultants.

Vegas shooter's 'companion an Australian granny'

Sydney

Las Vegas gunman Stephen Paddock's "regular companion" was an Australian woman who moved to the United States 20 years ago to work on the casino strip, the government confirmed yesterday.

Marilou Danley, 62, was initially said to be a "person of interest" but has since been cleared of any involvement in the shooting.

American authorities said she was out of the country at the time of shooting.

Who was the Las Vegas mass shooter?

Stephen Paddock -- named by police as the gunman who opened fire on a Las Vegas outdoor music concert from a 32nd-floor hotel room -- had no criminal record and no history of mental illness



■ Stephen Paddock lived in upmarket retirement community in Mesquite, Nevada

■ Wealthy 64-year-old real-estate investor and retired accountant liked to travel to Las Vegas to play high-stakes video poker

■ Paddock was twice divorced. His first marriage lasted from 1977 to 1979. He remarried in 1985, and divorced again in 1990.

■ Paddock lived in Mesquite with his 62-year-old girlfriend, Marilou Danley (above)

■ He had private pilots' licence since 2003, had owned two single-engine planes, and reportedly enjoyed cruises

■ Paddock bought three guns -- one handgun and two rifles -- from Mesquite store GUNS & GUITARS, in past year. All purchases were legal

■ Paddock held hunting licence in Alaska

■ Paddock's father, Benjamin Hoskins Paddock, (right) was sentenced in 1961 to 20 years for string of bank robberies. He escaped from La Tuna federal prison, Texas, in 1968 and lived in hiding until 1978. Diagnosed by FBI as "psychopathic"

■ Oct 1, 2017: Stephen Paddock unleashes deluge of bullets killing 59 people and injuring more than 500 others.

When police storm his hotel suite, Paddock lies dead from self-inflicted gunshot wound, surrounded by 23 guns. At his home police find further 19 guns and masses of ammunition

Source: Associated Press, CNN, New York Times Pictures: Associated Press © GRAPHIC NEWS



FBI investigators gather outside the Route 91 festival venue