

# Articles of Interest From American Police Beat

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## Background Unknown

### Who exactly is guarding these prisoners?

You hear a lot of people talking about the fox guarding the henhouse. Putting the Fed in charge of the Wall St. bailout certainly comes to mind.

But for an even more striking example, ask yourself this question: how do we know that the private guards supervising illegal aliens at private immigration lockups aren't illegal immigrants themselves?

According to Gene Johnson's article for the Associated Press, the answer is simple: we just don't know.

A privately run immigration lockup in Tacoma hired nearly 100 security guards without background checks, and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) didn't catch the practice for two years, court documents show.

Hiring and oversight at privately run lockups has been a crisis for years, but the Tacoma situation is a stunner. Sylvia Wong, an administrator in charge of hiring at the Northwest Detention Center, pleaded guilty in federal court in Tacoma to one count of making a false statement for lying to investigators.

In her plea deal with prosecutors, Wong admitted that soon after starting work in November 2005 she began hiring guards without background checks "because of the pressure she felt to get security personnel hired at the NWDC as quickly as possible," according to court records.

ICE auditors discovered that 92 guards had been hired without checks. The agency acknowledges that some of the

guards have been fired after subsequent background exams. But like the exact number of air marshals, and what happened to the \$15 billion DHS has shelled out in failed contracts, federal officials won't say how many of the guards have been canned or arrested.

"In response to this investigation, we have implemented a multi-thread vetting process... so that no contractor or federal employee has sole responsibility to process and approve employment documents," ICE spokeswoman Lorie Dankers said in a statement.

"We have taken proactive steps to prevent this from happening again."

The Northwest Detention Center opened in 2004 and holds about 1,000 people accused of immigration

violations, mainly detainees from Alaska, Oregon and Washington. **It's run by the Florida-based GEO Group Inc.**, with yearly reviews to "ensure the facility meets ICE standards."

When guards are hired at the detention center, they are supposed to undergo a preliminary background check.

If they pass, they are given "entry on duty" forms allowing them to begin work pending a more thorough check, which can take several months to more than a year.

The plea agreement said that when Wong hired the guards, she fabricated "entry on duty" forms, allowing them to start work without any background check.

*Reprinted courtesy of American Police Beat, Jan. 2009* ■

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## Security Guard Explosion Raises Some Serious Issues

### What are the implications of more guards and fewer cops?

Since Sept. 11, 2001, when hijackers got through airport security and struck New York and the Pentagon, the security guard industry has quite simply exploded in terms of size and influence.

In New York state, the number of legally registered security guards has increased by about 30 percent since 9/11 to 139,999 guards. The guards are found everywhere from airports and stores to nightclubs and schools.

But a recent investigation by the *New York Times* raises serious questions about oversight. Unlike certified police officers, security personnel frequently operate with little and in some cases no supervision. The study determined the following:

- The state agency charged with much of the oversight of the security guard industry has only two investigators for much of western New York, and also investigates complaints against barbers, home inspectors, appraisers, and more than 25 other occupations.

- Since 2005, the state has not conducted an on-site inspection of any of the nearly 880 state-approved schools that train security guards.

- Pending criminal charges don't always lead to the quick suspension of a security guard's registration or

security training license. The owner of one local security training school's license is currently facing charges of sexually abusing an employee, for example.

- Prospective customers of security firms have limited access to information about pending state actions against questionable security guard companies. One firm that patrolled the 2003 PGA golf tournament here was accused of employing nearly 100 unregistered guards.

The security industry has been perceived as an occupation characterized by low wages, but that fact is not expected to slow the industry's growth.

The federal Department of Labor projects a 17 percent increase in the number of security guards in the next eight years, even as the number of police officers is expected to decrease.

"The demand for security guards after 9/11, coupled with a greater dependence by law enforcement on private security, has made the field more of a mainstream employment area," said Marie Ohman, president of the International Association of Security and Investigative Regulators.

*Reprinted courtesy of American Police Beat, Jan. 2009* ■

**"We now in the United States have more security guards for the rich than we have police services for the poor districts. If you're looking for personal security, far better to move to the suburbs than to pay taxes in New York."**

*~John Kenneth Galbraith*

## Elephant Memories

In 1986, Peter Davies was on holiday in Kenya after graduating from Northwestern University.

On a hike through the bush, he came across a young bull elephant standing with one leg raised in the air. The elephant seemed distressed, so Peter approached it very carefully. He got down on one knee and inspected the elephant's foot and found a large piece of wood deeply embedded in it.

As carefully and as gently as he could, Peter worked the wood out with his hunting knife, after which the elephant gingerly put down its foot.

The elephant turned to face the man, and with a rather curious look on its face, stared at him for several tense moments. Peter stood frozen, thinking of nothing else but being trampled. Eventually the elephant trumpeted loudly, turned, and walked away.

Peter never forgot that elephant or the events of that day.

Twenty years later, Peter was walking through the Chicago Zoo with his teenaged son. As they approached the elephant enclosure, one of the creatures turned and walked over to near where Peter and his son, Cameron, were standing. The large bull elephant stared at Peter, lifted its front foot off the ground, then put it down. The elephant did that several times then trumpeted loudly, all the while staring at the man.

Remembering the encounter in 1986, Peter couldn't help wondering if this was the same elephant. Peter summoned up his courage, climbed over the railing and made his way into the enclosure.

He walked right up to the elephant and stared back in wonder. The elephant trumpeted again, wrapped its trunk around one of Peter's legs and slammed his stupid butt against the railing, killing him instantly.

Probably wasn't the same elephant.