

# Lawrence's Men in Black

## These security guards don't play by the same old rules

Story by Todd Halstead

Derek Spain, co-owner of Mil Spec Security, watched as two guards tried to pacify an intoxicated reveler who had bothered his girlfriend's neighbors during a party at a Lawrence apartment complex.

When the drunk man persisted with slurred insults, the guards escorted him off the premises.

"If you look around it was probably one of the smaller parties, which doesn't seem fair to these guys," Spain said. "But they're the ones that actually disturbed anybody."

Mil Spec is a private security force of ex-military personnel reinforced by current and

Mil Spec security guards, left, Wes Stewart, center, Geoff Lutz and right, Bill Bradford stand guard outside of Tremors Night Club, 729 New Hampshire St. Tremors is one of more than 70 establishments that use Mil Spec's services.

former football players. It tries to fill a niche in the city by monitoring the clients of the city's bars, apartment complexes and hotels.

But some students at the University of Kansas view Mil Spec as overzealous thugs dispensing their own brand of street justice.

Spain said that Mil Spec had the authority to remove a person from a client's property for any reason the guards deemed necessary.

Mil Spec guards are not pudgy security guards in brown polyester uni-

forms stationed under the glaring fluorescent lights at all night grocery stores.

Mil Spec agents resemble Brad Pitt's Space Monkeys in the movie *Fight Club*.

Sporting military haircuts and wearing black fatigues and tight shirts that reveal massive torsos they patrol for parties and conduct security checks.

Amario Griffin, Lawrence junior, attended a party at the Holiday Inn, 200 McDonald Drive, one of more than 70 establishments patrolled by Mil Spec

in Lawrence, Kansas City, Kan., and Omaha.

When the party ended, Griffin said the two guards began to aggressively corral the revelers. When they did not disperse, the guards used pepper spray.

"I was coming out of the party, and there were a couple of guys pushing everybody back," he said. "I didn't want to be pushed, so I came back and asked what was going on, so they pepper sprayed me again. I didn't have my hands raised like I was fighting. They just sprayed me for no reason."

Zack Marrs, Spain's partner, said that pepper spray only had been used in isolated incidents, and was an alternative to physical contact — which could cause injury.

Spain said that crowd situations in which a person was belligerent it was best to isolate that person and deal with them decisively.

"Whoever is there at the time, it's going to be in their best interest to shut that person down right away," he said. "That may or may not be in the most polite manner. When you are in a crowd situation, people start getting courageous. That person has to be dealt with right away, otherwise you are going to be spending the next hour or two

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getting everybody else not to take on the same tone."

Spain said that Mil Spec guards did not have arrest power in Kansas, but they did have the right to detain and press charges against individuals who have committed a crime on a client's property.

"If there has definitely been a crime like a felony, where charges are going to be pressed, then we'll go ahead and handcuff them and wait for the police," Spain said.

Although Spain cited incidents where Mil Spec had assisted the Lawrence Police Department, Sgt. George Wheeler, a representative of the police department, said, "Basically, we don't have much of a relationship, except that they call the police when they find something that needs our presence," he said. "Mil Spec is a private security agency, and our function is to simply license those folks — just like we license door-to-door salesmen."

## Keeping the Peace

Sean Mongey, St. Louis sophomore, said that he had seen the aggressive nature of Mil Spec guards.

"I understand they have a job to do," Mongey said. "But sometimes they go beyond what is necessary. I've seen them intimidate people by threatening to throw them off the third floor balcony of Jefferson Commons."

Marrs said it was usually the resident who was at fault and that alcohol blurred their image of reality.

"You have to take what the ignorant masses have to say with a grain of salt," he said. "Their stories are always that they were reading the Bible, and we came up and picked on them. If you talk to an apartment manager that has been around for a while, they will tell you that most tenants are full of shit."

Mongey said the most intimidating

aspect about Mil Spec was not their size or empty threats, but the 9mm pistols they carry.

Sgt. Wheeler said that a person needed to be 21 years old and qualify on the law enforcement range to be licensed to carry a firearm.

Certified by the National Law Enforcement Training Center, Spain and Marrs subject their guards to additional training in firearm safety and self-defense tactics.

"That's not anything anybody makes us do, but it's a liability issue," he said. "Obviously if you put somebody out on the street there's a serious liability, and we do everything possible to reduce it."

Marrs said that people were less likely to pull out a gun at an establishment if they knew there were armed guards.

In addition to nightclubs, hotels and apartment complexes, Mil Spec patrols Memorial Stadium, Allen Fieldhouse and Anschutz Sports Pavilion, and also does security work for Naismith Hall, 1815 Naismith Drive.

## In the beginning

Spain got the idea for Mil Spec after he was honorably discharged from the Army, where he served as a Ranger. The Lawrence native started attending classes at the University of Kansas, with aspirations of serving in law enforcement. After a summer of working as a security guard at Coyote's, 1003 E 23rd, he decided not to become a police officer.

Since May of 1995, Mil Spec has become one of Lawrence's larger security forces with a fleet of eight vehicles and 40 security guards.

A life-size poster of Arnold Schwarzenegger greets visitors at the company's headquarters, 218 Pinecove Drive. Instead of looking like an administrative office, weight machines line the walls and a mirror stretches from floor to ceiling.

Spain said that Mil Spec gave its guards every opportunity to work out.

*"We like to start new guys off on the floor at nightclubs. It really tells us a lot about them."*

**Derek Spain**

Co-owner of Mil Spec

"Originally we had the idea of going completely ex-military personnel," Spain said. "But there weren't a lot of them around."

Spain also discovered that just because people had military experience did not mean that they had the right discipline to be members of Mil Spec. He then turned to recruiting football players.

"We like them because they tend to be pretty physically fit, good-sized guys and very trainable," Spain said. "They are used to taking orders, and they are used to being taught how to do things."

Marrs said that most of the football players were from Ottawa University but included Chad Rine, a redshirt freshman on the University of Kansas team.

Rine, Naples, Fla., sophomore, played football for Ottawa last year and learned about Mil Spec through a friend before transferring to the University.

"I've gained an addiction for solving people's problems," Rine said. "There is some danger, but we train pretty hard, and I work with a lot of good people."

Currently, Mil Spec employs about 30 percent ex-military personnel and 70 percent football players.

Spain said that new officers earned \$8 an hour and were paired with veterans and assigned as bouncers at various nightclubs.

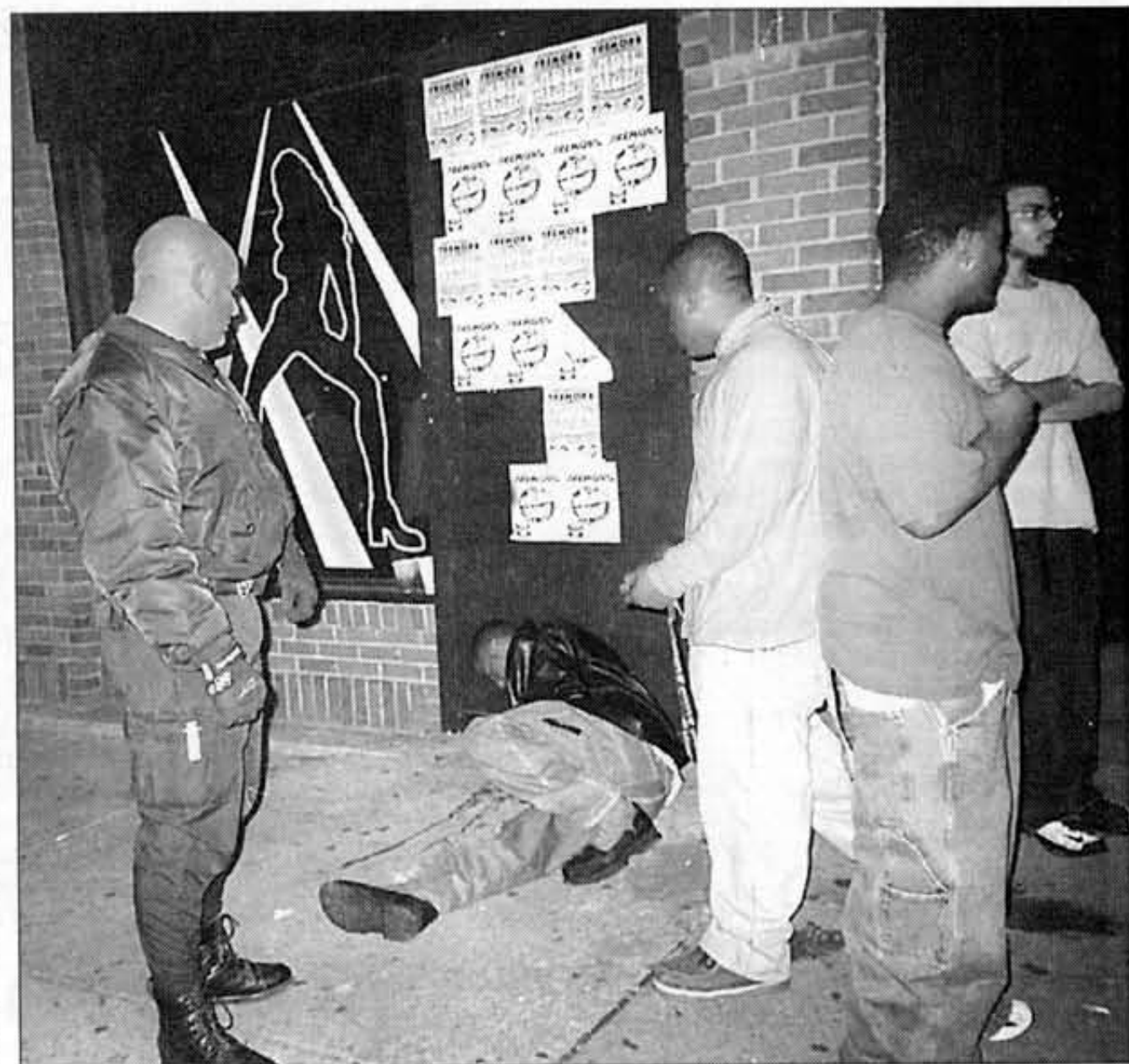
"We like to start new guys off on the floor at nightclubs," Spain said. "It really tells us a lot about them. It gets kind of rough in there. If somebody has a hot head, you identify it very quickly."

Spain said Mil Spec's market called for better training and higher pay for employees when compared to other security companies.

"It all comes down to pricing," he said. "We can't compete on the level of those guys you see at Dillons, who bid their contracts out for less than what we pay our guys on an hourly basis. Which is why we've settled for a more high intensity market. You can charge more."

Marrs said that many clients were reactive and not proactive when employing Mil Spec's services.

"I've dealt with nightclubs that wouldn't talk to us until somebody got shot dead," he said.



Zack Marrs, co-owner of Mil Spec Security, 218 Pinecove Drive, assists an intoxicated man in front of a local nightclub. Marrs and his partner, Derek Spain, started Mil Spec in May of 1995 to provide trained security guards for establishments. Photo by Todd Halstead/KANSAN

## On the streets

After last call at Tremors last Friday, a flood of late night revelers poured out of the club. The breeze did not sway people from clustering around the club before migrating to the parking lot across the street. The bass from car stereos began to boom as tiny pockets of people engaged in drunken conflicts.

Like clockwork, five Mil Spec officers corralled the clientele away from the club and toward their cars in order to secure the area.

One of the revelers, Mike Crawford, Kansas City, Mo., junior, said that the Mil Spec guards were too aggressive in subdu-

ing the crowd.

"I'm just trying to make my way out of the club, and they tried to push me to the side," Crawford said. "I guess it's all good, but they just don't respect us."

Spain said that the goal was to get the crowd dispersed as quickly as possible, but that they never made an attempt to be disrespectful.

After about 20 minutes only a few stragglers remained before they too left without incident, leaving Mil Spec's agents in pursuit of further disturbances in the city.

— Edited by Mike Loader

— Designed by Anne Robertson