

GUNMAN CAUGHT AFTER WOUNDING AT LEAST 2 IN N. DALLAS NIGHTCLUB

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- Author/Byline: Joe Drape, The Dallas Morning News (DAL) + _____
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A man who apparently was ejected from a North Dallas country-western bar returned heavily armed and seriously wounded at least two people in a burst of gunfire late Wednesday night before being shot himself as he fled the scene.

The gunman was apprehended about a mile from the Belle Starr nightclub when the car he was driving crashed into a brick apartment complex sign at Northwest Highway and Fenton Drive.

Witnesses said the gunman entered the nightclub from the front with a sawed-off shotgun and a pistol at about 11:25 p.m. and fired at one bouncer -- who had ejected the man from the club earlier in the evening -- hitting him once in the side and once in the head. He then walked to the corner of the ballroom, firing twice at another bouncer and wounding him in the chest.

The two men wounded at the club were transported to nearby hospitals. They were taken to Baylor Medical Center and were listed in serious and stable condition. A third man, possibly the gunman, was taken to Presbyterian Hospital and was listed in critical condition.

Witnesses said the gunman earlier was behaving as if he were intoxicated.

A woman who makes sketches of patrons at the bar, Susie Johnson of Midlothian, said a woman accompanying the gunman was heard to say, "I've got to get him out of here because when he gets drunk, he gets mean."

The man, who threatened to return to the club, was ejected a short time later, police said.

Witnesses said the approximately 250 people in the club were at first unaware of the gunfire.

"The guy fired at least eight shots," said Shawn Shannon, 24, of Dallas.

"For the first three shots, the band was still playing, and some people were behind the tables and some were more curious and were watching," Ms. Shannon said.

Russell Logan, 27, of Mesquite, said he saw the gunman heading for the door. "He was backing out and there were about 15 people in front of him. One guy stepped out and he shot at him."

Logan said he was able to reach one of the victims and drag him to safety.

Other witnesses said the manager of the club then came from an office and fired at least four shots at the gunman, hitting him at least once, as he left the club.

Crawford McConnell said he was walking across chair tops following somebody to the bathroom when the shots broke out.

"It just sounded like balloon poppings at first, but then I stood and turned and saw the band on the floor and other people hitting the deck, and I was just stunned," he said. "I could see him firing at people who were about 8 feet away."

The gunman, described by witnesses as about 5-foot-6, was dressed in black hat, a black leather jacket and wearing a well-groomed black beard.

Police said he was driving east on an access road on Northwest Highway when his car apparently went out of control and crashed into the sign.

Police, who had been searching for the suspect, received a call concerning the crash and found the wounded man when they arrived at the scene.

Tactical officers were called to the club because of the confusion and large number of witnesses who were milling around the club and parking lot, most of them visibly shaken.

The tactical officers worked their way through the crowd, finding witnesses and bringing them back to talk with investigators.

Roxane Holmes, 21, of Dallas, said, "There were three shots and then another one, and then the guy ran out and ran back in again and then there were three or four other shots.'

"It was pretty dark. They had candles on the tables. It took awhile for people to figure out what was going on. When everybody saw what was happening they hit the floor and crawled under the tables and chairs. Everybody was crying. You could hear people crying under the tables.'

Mark Vermillion of Dallas, 25, was with Ms. Holmes and her sister, Loretta Holmes, 24. He was dancing with Loretta Holmes to Charlie Rich's You Never Cried for Me when the shots ran out.

"It was my favorite song and we were dancing. We were just about to go around toward the stage when Mark threw me off the dance floor, and then everybody got down on the floor,' Loretta Holmes said.

The Belle Starr opened in 1979 and has since become one of the most popular country-western clubs featuring live bands in Dallas.

The club, which seats about 700, has attracted such well-known acts as Del Reeves, Bill Anderson and Shelley West and David Frizzell.

Belle Starr has gained a more sophisticated reputation than other country venues in Dallas because of its valet parking and high drink prices. Staff writers James Ragland, Jeff Maclin, Curtis Rist and Thomas J. Meyer contributed to this report.

- **Caption:** Photo: Belle Starr patrons (from left) Crawford McConnell of Addison and Mesquite residents Russell Logan and Dawna James early Thursday recount the shootings. (Credit: DMN -- David Leeson); Locator map (Credit: DMN) ; LOCATION: Photo - Shootings-Metro. Map - NR.

- **Memo:** This story ran in the "H4," late Home Final edition.

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