



## NIGHTCLUB MASSACRE

## RECOUNTING THE HORROR

“You ever seen how Marine guys hold big weapons, shooting from left to right? That’s how he was shooting at people. - Jon Alamo, who witnessed gunman Omar Mateen opening fire

“I was thinking, ‘Are you kidding me?’ So I just dropped down. I just said, ‘Please, please, please, I want to make it out.’ And when I did, I saw people shot. I saw blood. - Christopher Hansen, who was in the VIP lounge when he heard gunshots

“I saw bodies on the floor, people on the floor everywhere; it was a chaos, everybody trying to get out. - DJ Ray Rivera, who was playing reggae music at the venue at the time of the shooting

“Please keep everyone in your prayers as we work through this tragic event. Thank you for your thoughts and love. - Pulse Orlando on its Facebook page

“It wasn’t until you could start smelling that ammunition that people actually got the hint, and they heard it repeated (the gunshots) — and that’s when everybody dropped to the floor. - Witness Janiel Gonzalez

“I guess the shooter was shooting at the ceiling because you could see all the glass from the lamps falling. - Clubber Ricardo Negron

“If you are alive, raise your hand. - A bartender recalling what police said when they stormed the building

“This is an incident, as I see it, that we certainly classify as domestic terror incident. - Orange County Sheriff Jerry Demings

# Their phones rang.

## At least 49 dead in worst US shooting

AARON LANGMAID

IN the silence that followed America’s worst shooting massacre, the only thing police could hear inside Orlando’s Pulse Nightclub was the ringing of mobile phones.

They rang constantly. From devices scattered on the dancefloor or in the pockets of the dead.

Minutes before, SWAT teams had blasted their way through the back wall of the nightclub, bringing an end to the bloody siege that had started three hours earlier and became the worst mass shooting in America’s modern history.

Omar Mateen, a homophobic Islamic State sympathiser who wanted to be a police officer and had twice been investigated by the FBI, had shot more than a hundred people and at least 49 would die. Others were last night clinging to life in hospital.

The wounded toll last night stood at 53 and one hospital alone had performed 50 surgeries in 14 hours. Dozens of bodies were slowly removed from the club, four at a time on stretchers, and loaded into white vans.

An off-duty cop had been the first to realise something terrible was about to happen early on Sunday morning, Florida time.

Standing at the entrance to the popular venue, he saw Mateen pacing across the carpark, a high-powered assault rifle firmly in his grasp.

The 29-year-old had just pulled off South Orange Ave and neatly parked his rented black SUV at the back of the building. He emerged from the shadows, the .223 calibre AR assault rifle raised and ready for a fight.

The pair exchanged fire just before 2am, but the shooter managed to scramble through the front entrance.

There were 320 people inside. In the madness that followed, almost half of them would be killed or seriously injured. Jam-packed with revelers enjoying a special Latin music night, those standing closest to the entrance didn’t stand a chance.

Mateen used 30-round magazines in the sick assault, taping them together at the

base so he could flip them and reload faster.

“I’ve got plenty of bullets,” he screamed amid the carnage. At 2.02am, the club’s DJ later said, the slaughter began.

“I thought it was firecrackers,” he said. “I thought, maybe it was a joke. But then (the gunfire) was real fast, constant, like bap bap bap bap. I saw bodies on the floor, people on the floor everywhere.” As the music continued, the victims were mowed down. Others ducked for cover. Some scrambled behind the bar.

Panicked patrons headed for an outdoor area off the main dancefloor. A brave few played dead among the bodies, as police sped to the scene.

Others sent panicked phone messages to friends and loved ones. One, Eddie Justice, told his mother that the gunman was coming for him and he was about to die. He would later be found among the dead.

As SWAT teams closed in, the operational police chief confirmed there had been “some communication” with the killer.

But by 5am police seized on an opportunity to save the remaining hostages, reportedly detonating two explosives to distract the gunman before blasting through the rear wall with an armoured vehicle.

Armed officers stormed into the building, shooting the killer dead and dragging 30 survivors to safety.

Orlando police used social media to announce that Mateen had been killed. Police chief John Mina faced the media and said that “It is with great sadness we are informing that it is not 20, but 50 casualties,” he said. Thirty nine people had died inside the club, he said. Two outside. Nine on the way to hospital.

US President Barack Obama, from the White House, described the shooting as an act of terror and grimaced as he announced another string of deaths in another bloody massacre.

“We have to decide if that’s the kind of country we want to be,” said the President, whose eight years in the White House have featured frustrated attempts to tighten gun controls in a country where firearms ownership is a constitutional



right. In Australia, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said the shooting attack was motivated by a “murderous hatred of gay people”.

“This is a vile attack on freedom ... an attack on every single one of us,” Mr Turnbull said. He said he offered condolences to US ambassador John Berry, who has friends in Florida whose safety is yet to be confirmed.

Opposition Leader Bill Shorten also offered his condolences, extending his sympathy to people in the gay community.

“It was an attack on the right to be proud of who you

are and who you love,” Mr Shorten said.

Greens leader Richard Di Natale said that “violence and hate have no place in our communities and now more than ever we must stand together against these hateful acts”.

In Sydney, Tony Abbott’s sister, Christine Forster, and her partner Virginia held hands as they joined others who surrounded a nature strip at Taylor Square.

A disturbing picture of father-of-one Omar Mateen emerged yesterday, as agents combed his Florida apartment.

Authorities revealed he had been investigated twice by the

FBI for possible connections to terrorism, but cleared.

During the atrocity, the American citizen called 911 and professed his allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and referred to the 2013 Boston Marathon bombers, Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev. ISIS yesterday claimed responsibility for the bloodbath, saying in a bulletin on Al-Bayan radio that it was carried out by “one of the soldiers of the caliphate”. US officials said there was no evidence directly linking Mateen to the group.

His former wife, Sitora Yusufiy — who had not contacted him since 2011 when she walked out on him because of his temper — said he was “mentally unstable and mentally ill and he was obviously disturbed, deeply”.

Adelaide Oval last night beamed rainbow colours and a vigil was held at Elder Park. “When they look around the world and they see us express our heartfelt sorrow, it gives them strength,” Premier Jay Weatherill told the vigil.

## INSIDE TODAY

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## ONLINE AT Advertiser.com.au

**Interactive timeline:** How America’s worst mass shooting unfolded

**Gallery:** The Orlando shooting victims

**Video:** Former wife says gunman was ‘mentally ill’

**Audio:** Terrifying audio captures the moment police stormed the Pulse nightclub

**Audio:** Radio interview of Pulse’s DJ describing the horror of the shooting



## EVIL STRIKES ORLANDO

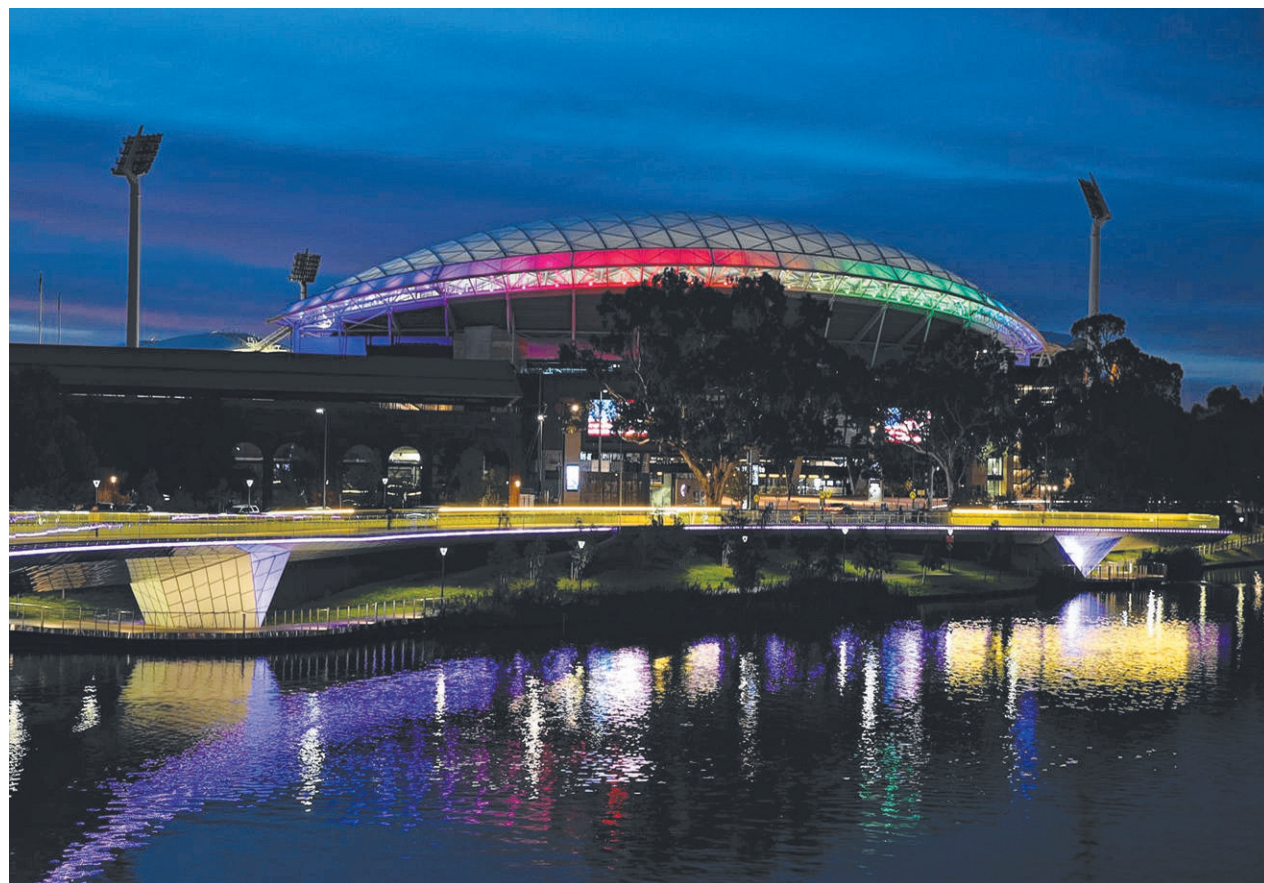
# Nobody answered



**SHOCK:** Clockwise from left, a victim is comforted, an FBI agent investigates the damaged rear wall of the Pulse Nightclub, gunman Omar Mateen, who aspired to be a police officer and friends embrace.



**BELOW:** Adelaide Oval is lit up in the colours of the rainbow to show the city's solidarity with the victims.  
Picture: DEAN MARTIN



## THE LEADERS SPEAK OUT

“ This is a sobering reminder that attacks on any American, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation, is an attack on all of us.  
- US President Barack Obama

“ This is an attack on our people. An attack on Orlando. An attack on Florida. An attack on America. An attack on all of us.  
- Florida Governor Rick Scott

“ Appreciate the congrats for being right on radical Islamic terrorism, I don't want congrats, I want toughness & vigilance. We must be smart!  
- Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump

“ The gunman attacked an LGBT nightclub during Pride Month. To the LGBT community: please know that you have millions of allies across our country. I am one of them.  
- Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton

“ Terror and hate will not change who we are. NATO allies stand united in the fight against terrorism and in defence of our open societies.  
- NATO Secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg

## SHOCKING HISTORY

- **At least 50 dead, 2016** — Omar Mateen opens fire on revellers at gay club in Orlando, Florida
- **32 dead, 2007** — Student Seung-Hui Cho massacres students at Virginia Tech university
- **27 dead, 2012** — Adam Lanza kills 20 six and seven-year-old children and six adults before killing himself at Sandy Hook, Connecticut
- **23 dead, 1991** — George Hennard drives through the wall of a cafe in Killeen, Texas, before opening fire and committing suicide
- **14 dead, 2015** — Syed Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik open fire at a staff gathering in San Bernardino
- **13 dead, 2009** — Maj Nidal Malik Hasan opens fire at army base in Fort Hood, Texas
- **13 dead, 2009** — Jiverly Wong shoots people at a New York immigrant centre before killing himself
- **13 dead, 1999** — Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold kill fellow students and a teacher at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado

“ I know that I speak for all Australians when I say that we stand in solidarity with the people of the US as they stand up to this terrorist, violent, hate-filled attack.  
- Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull

“ Australia grieves with the loved ones of the dead. Our thoughts too are with the injured. These murders are despicable, and cowardly. We condemn them, utterly.  
- Opposition Leader Bill Shorten



1.59am

Omar Mateen and off-duty policeman exchange fire outside the Pulse nightclub before the gunman scrambles through the front entrance

2.02am

"I thought it was firecrackers ... I saw bodies on the floor, people on the floor everywhere."  
Pulse DJ describes the scene as the shooting starts

2.06am

"Mommy I love you ... I'm going to die. In club they shooting. Trap in bathroom" (sic)  
Pulse patron Eddie Justice in texts to his mother

# HORROR OFFERS

AARON LANGMAID

IN the quiet that followed America's worst shooting massacre, the only thing police could hear inside Orlando's Pulse nightclub was the sound of mobile phones.

They rang constantly, an endless soundtrack from devices scattered on the dancefloor or lodged in the pockets of the dead.

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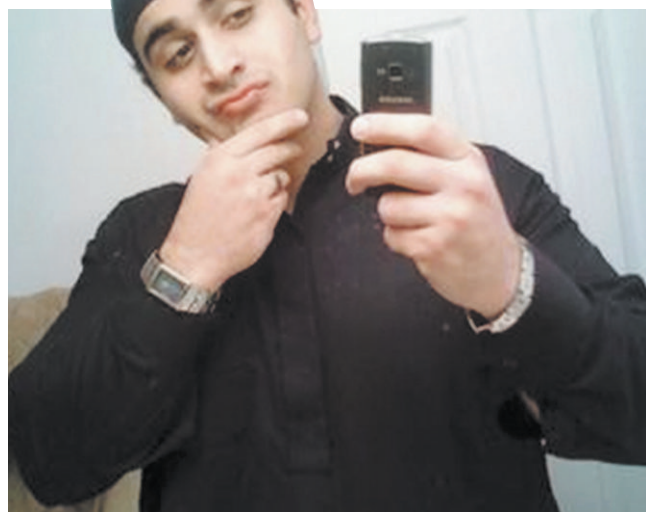
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Jam-packed with revellers enjoying a special Latin music night, those standing closest to the entrance would not have stood a chance.

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**HATE CRIME: Gunman Omar Mateen killed 50 nightclubbers in the country's worst massacre.**  
Picture: AP

so he could flip them and reload faster.

"I've got plenty of bullets," he screamed as the carnage began.

At 2.02am the DJ said he heard the initial gunfire ring out in rapid succession.

"I thought it was firecrackers. I thought, maybe it was a joke," he said. "But then [the gunfire] was real fast, constant, like bap bap bap."

"I saw bodies on the floor, people on the floor everywhere."

As the music continued, the victims were mowed down one by one. Others ducked for cover. Some scrambled behind the bar or headed for an outdoor area off the main dancefloor. A brave few lay among the bodies and played dead.

"People were trampling over each other," survivor Jillian Amador said.

"I didn't believe it, then I saw people on the ground and people running."

Another described the sheer panic.

"People on the dance floor and bar got down on the floor," said one.

"Some of us who were near the bar and back exit managed to go out through the outdoor area and just ran."

At 2.06am clubber Eddie Justice was already hiding in the women's bathroom when he sent a text to his mother.

"Mommy I love you," he wrote. "In club they shooting. 'Trap in bathroom' (sic)"

At 2.09am, management used Facebook to send a message warning everybody to flee.

"Everyone get out of Pulse and keep running," it read.

Investigators believe as many as 15 people were inside the bathrooms as Mateen moved through the building.

In a final haunting text message at 2.39am, Mr Justice wrote: "He's coming. I'm going to die."

At some point in the three



hour siege that followed, Mateen returned to the entrance and started firing at the police who had surrounded the club and cordoned off the street.

The volley of gunfire could

be heard in raw footage shot by witnesses.

"Oh my God, people are getting shot dude," said one bystander.

"They are shooting back and forth," said another. "This

is crazy. Look at this. Oh my God."

As SWAT teams closed in, the operational police chief confirmed there had been "some communication" with the killer. But by 5am police

## Two FBI probes but shooter walked free

AMERICA'S worst mass shooter was investigated twice by the FBI for potential links to Islamic extremism.

But Omar Mateen was allowed to keep his gun permits and security guard licence — even legally buying a deadly AR15 assault rifle and handgun just days before he entered an Orlando gay nightclub on Sunday morning.

It is believed the guns were used in the Pulse Nightclub massacre, which left 50 people dead and 53 injured, the deadliest mass shooting in modern US history.

Survivors described seeing "bodies going down" as they



Malcolm Turnbull

scrambled to get out. Christopher Hansen crawled out of the club while Mateen fired dozens of bullets in seconds.

"When I got across the



Bill Shorten

street, there were people — blood everywhere," he said.

The horrific massacre has intensified the US gun debate and threatens to drive a wedge

across America during the Presidential election race.

The motives of the killing are still being probed but it is clear the 29-year-old shooter was known to authorities before Sunday's murderous spree, having twice been investigated by the FBI.

In 2013 they probed inflammatory comments to co-workers alleging possible terrorist ties, but could not find any incriminating evidence. In 2014, the bureau investigated him again, for possible links to Moner Mohammad Abusalha, an American who grew up in Florida but went to Syria to fight for an extremist group.

Ronald Hopper, an assistant agent in charge of the FBI's Tampa Division, said the bureau concluded that the contact between the two men was minimal, and that Mateen "did not constitute a substantive threat at that time".

Despite the previous links to extremism his father denied his son had acted out of religion but did say his son had expressed disgust at the sight of two men kissing in public, while his ex-wife said he was mentally unstable and had been violent towards her.

Police said the toll could have been even greater had a SWAT team not forced its way

in and killed Mateen about 5am, three hours after he opened fire.

President Obama described the attack as "an act of terror and an act of hate".

No Australians were inside the Pulse nightclub but Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said Australia stood united with the US "in defending our freedoms against the extremists who hate our free societies and seek to destroy it."

Opposition leader Bill Shorten said Australians were shocked at the despicable and cowardly murders and "Australia grieves with the loved ones of the dead".



**2.09am**

"Everyone get out of Pulse and keep running"  
Pulse management use Facebook to send a message to those still trapped

"Oh my God people are getting shot dude."  
"They are shooting back and forth. This is crazy. Look at this. Oh my God."  
Witnesses caught on footage after Mateen walks back to the club entrance and starts firing at police during the three-hour siege

**5.53am**

Orlando police use social media to announce the shooter is dead.

# NO ANSWERS

## Trump's political twist on slaughter

PAUL TOOHEY

DONALD Trump has broken longstanding convention by using the tragedy in Orlando to stage a political attack on Hillary Clinton.

"Please make us safe. We cannot have Hillary as president. We will be in so much trouble," Mr Trump tweeted in the aftermath of the murders.

He reiterated his view that Muslims must be prevented from migrating to the US.

Typically, political leaders in the US wait for families to grieve before using the now routine gun massacres to score political points.

While he cancelled a rally out of respect to the victims, Mr Trump was tweeting remarks focusing on the gunman's jihadist links and his opponents' perceived weaknesses on Islam even as the crime scene was being cleared.

He called for President Barack Obama to "finally mention the word radical Islamic terrorism" and said he should otherwise resign. He made the same demand of Mrs Clinton.

Mr Obama called it "an act of terror" and said the nation would not be bowed by hate.

Mrs Clinton said in a statement: "We need to keep guns like the ones used last night out of the hands of terrorists or other violent criminals."

Mr Obama has long tried to reform gun laws.



Donald Trump

AGONY: A man weeps in the arms of a friend as FBI agents investigate near the damaged rear wall of the Pulse nightclub, left.

Pictures: AFP/GETTY



seized an opportunity to save the remaining hostages, detonating two explosives to distract the gunman before blasting through the rear wall with an armoured vehicle.

SWAT teams poured into

the building, shooting the killer dead and dragging 30 survivors to safety.

As the dust settled and the full extent of the massacre became clear, the mobile phones continued ringing.

At 5.53am Orlando police used social media to announce that Omar Mateen had been shot dead. But Orlando police chief John Mina could never have imagined such a deadly roll call.

"It is with great sadness we are informing that it is not 20, but 50 casualties," he said.

Thirty nine people had died inside the club, he said, two outside, nine on the way to hospital.

Almost 12 hours after the assault began, US President Barack Obama addressed the media from the White House to respond to what had become America's worst ever mass shooting.



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