

## Sunday, Bloody Sunday.

Debra Bull was getting ready to go to Church on Sunday afternoon when EIC Doug Conway called her at home on her day off and sent her forth to a vastly different congregation.

The September 2 shoot-out between rival bikie gangs – the Milperra Massacre as it became known – which left seven dead and many injured was the biggest police rounds story Sydney had seen in several years. Debra's excellent colour story on the battleground won frontpaged byline play in newspapers all over the country and in New Zealand and Papua New Guinea. The news story was used round the world and also won Michelle Innis and Laurie Quinn joint bylined newspaper leads.

It was a \$27 taxi fare to Milperra for Debra – plenty of time to think over Doug's final words that no-one knew whether the fighting was over.

"This time I was sure I was in the wrong job," she said later. "Being caught in the cross-fire of rival bikie gangs was not the honourable and glorious end I had envisaged for myself. The taxi-driver kept chuckling to himself and telling me taxis had been warned to keep out of the area.

"Once there, looking at the still-warm corpses under their blue tarpaulins, the thing that struck me was how this was a microcosm of man's entire history: the hideous by-products of man's aggression and hatred.

"Always there are the innocent victims – anguished families sobbing beside the bodies and the still, fallen figure of a 14-year-old girl who never quite made it over the threshold of womanhood."



*Michelle Innis*

Michelle, who had only been with AAP a month at the time, was the first reporter dispatched to the scene.

"When I arrived at the Viking Tavern, local residents were surging past police barricades to get a better look at the dead bodies on the footpath, police were refusing to give out information and bikies from several other gangs were gathering at the hotel," she said.

"The bodies remained on the footpath, many uncovered, for four or five hours after the shooting, while relatives, some with their small children, came to identify the dead.

"I felt this was a further indication of the horror of the massacre but the locals seemed to thrive on it.

"The only problems I had were finding a telephone to report back to the office and finding bikies who looked friendly enough to tell me what had happened. I quickly found out not too many were thrilled with the idea of talking to the press."

Laurie Quinn takes up the story:

"We had a brief report about noon saying that one person had died in a hostage-type situation. Getting more info was difficult as police were on the scene and out of contact. The AAP car wasn't available so Michelle offered to go home, get her car and drive to Milperra.

"I called the various police

stations in and around the area and we had updates on the half-hour. By 3.30 I'd been told by Bankstown police that five people were dead. This radically changed the story dimensions.

"Michelle called in details once she got to the Viking Tavern. Bikies were spitting at her much of the time and were not exactly in a loquacious mood. She later relayed details of the 5p.m. press conference and Debbie called in some quotes before seven that I used in a newspaper wrap-up, along with Michelle's material."

## Canberra Sensations.

Another story which went all round the world was Bob Hawke's tears over his daughter's heroin addiction.

It was one of the highlights of a month of sensational stories for Canberra, including Andrew Peacock's allegation that the Prime Minister was "a little crook", and Kerry Packer's revelation that he was the alleged criminal figure codenamed "Goanna" in reports of investigations by the Costigan Royal Commission.

Canberra bureau chief Bruce Jones was the first to write that Peacock's allegations were a deliberate all-or-nothing gamble to save his political skin. It was one of the most widely and prominently used stories in the saga.

The events in Canberra made new London bureau chief Jane Eyre a reluctant TV star within weeks of taking over from Ian Dick.

Australia House apparently told both BBC and ITV that Jane, our former Canberra deputy bureau chief, was the best person in town to talk about Australian politics. She was interviewed on both channels.

The accelerated release of the Petrov papers on September 24 presented the Canberra bureau with a huge logistical headache.

Although the National Archives did a commendable job in culling the massive amount of material made available 30 years after the events, it was necessary to read through thousands of pages of at times poorly photocopied documents.

This task fell to Bruce Jones, Peter Logue, resident legal expert Bill Goff, and Patrick Lyons (who was called in specially from the middle of two weeks' paternity leave).

Included were the notorious and potentially libellous Documents J and H.

Document J was an admittedly scurrilous report on an alleged pro-Japanese circle of influence in Australia. Document H was a series of unflattering pen portraits of 45 journalists in the Parliamentary Press Gallery in the 1950s, prepared by the press secretary to Labor Leader Dr. Evatt, Fergan O'Sullivan.

Both documents presented massive legal problems, because many of the hundreds of people mentioned were alive. News Editor Les Murphy spent much of the morning on the phone to our lawyers and most of the afternoon in their Sydney offices.

Canberra staff always seem to be on the move. During September, Peter Logue went to the South Pacific Forum in Tuvalu with the Prime Minister, and Mike Lawson went to Tokyo with Industrial Relations Minister Ralph Willis.

Ian Dick returns from London as Canberra News Editor in November.



Mike Gale

Diana Plater transferred from Sydney to take over from Mark Smith as Perth Correspondent, Mike Gale, formerly of the World Desk in Sydney, was appointed Editor of the new Microwave Data Service (MDS) desk (more about the launching of that service in the next Impact), and Ron Watson is training with Reuters Economic Service in London prior to joining the Finance Desk in Sydney early next year.

## The Mouse that Roared.

The following communication was received on September 27:

The Editor  
AAP Impact  
Sir (or Madam)

Sydney seems to think it's the world of AAP. Examples:

*A message through the system informing us Jim Shrimpton was the AAP golf champion. If he can beat Richard Pullin, the Adelaide champion, he might have a claim.*

*Your September edition, trumpeting the puny achievements of the AAP Baudrunners in the City-to-Surf race. Well, Adelaide's Tim Dornin ran the South Australian marathon — yes, a full marathon, not a wimpish 14 km — in 3 hours 20. And he hasn't even received a free t-shirt.*

*We're always happy to receive a Sydney challenge. We suggest neutral ground (Bali? Honolulu?).*

AAP TD/KH/RP/IW/DW

(The Impact's Editor replies: Dear Tim, Kate, Richard, Ian and Don — Thank you for contributing to this edition. About time. What about the other bureaus out there? Any other challenges?).

## Water and Wine.

The Melbourne bureau found itself having to sit on one of the biggest stories of the month for four nailbiting days.

Victoria police called in the state's major news editors at the beginning of the week to tell them that a man was threatening to pollute Geelong's water supply unless he was paid a large amount of money.

In what was a very unusual agreement, police persuaded the editors it would not be in the public interest to print the story until the extortionist's deadline had passed on Thursday of that week.

For the rest of the week, Night Editor Ted Lambeth attended regular afternoon news conferences and had the story ready to go when police gave the go ahead on Friday.

Months of work by State roundsman John Townsley bore fruit in September when the controversy over Sir Henry Bolte's blood sample swap hit the headlines.

John was tipped off about the story early in the year, and it was only through his persistent questioning of Premier John Cain that the story ever saw the light of day.

## Oils ain't Oils, Wayne.

The Fine Cotton ring-in at Doomben and the subsequent chase and arrest of trainer Hayden Haitana in South Australia provided a rare public glimpse of the shady side of the sport of kings.

No one laid it bare more effectively than Brisbane's Wayne Heming, whose colourful and hard-hitting backgrounder on Mafia-style race rigging scored a big byline in The Australian and many other papers around the country.

As Paul Hogan says in his commercial, it's a tough job, but someone's got to do it. Brisbane's Debbie Ansell went to Great Keppel Island to report on the annual cricket test between the Keppel Cricket Klub and the Queensland side. While researching a feature on para sailing, Debbie was left stranded 70 metres off the ground when the combination of a strong breeze and a light AAP reporter meant she could not be reeled in. The attendant cricketers were last seen falling about with laughter.