



The Fat Mexican: The Bloody Rise of the Bandidos Motorcycle Club

By Alex Caine

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Editorial Review

Review

“Chilling and gritty.”

— *Publishers Weekly*

“A remarkable story.”

— *Ottawa Citizen*

“From start to finish [Caine’s] story is a compelling one. His powerful account ... is a fascinating study.”

— *The Vancouver Courier*

From the Hardcover edition.

About the Author

Alex Caine has retired from his career as a contracted agent, infiltrating criminal and terrorist organizations on behalf of police forces in Canada and abroad. He acts as a consultant in high-level cases and provides the media with background information on biker investigations.

From the Hardcover edition.

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CHAPTER ONE

The People Our Parents Warned Us About

The summer of 1965 found Elvis singing in the chapel and the Beach Boys chasing California girls. The days of "peace" and "the Summer of Love" had not yet arrived, but change was in the air. It was an unlikely time for the birth of a group dedicated to violence and mayhem. But in the little fishing village of San Leon, on the Gulf of Mexico, such a beast was born.

Initially this collection of roughnecks didn't seem so bad, just a small group of dockworkers, the majority of them veterans of Vietnam, who started getting together after work and on weekends to party. Early in the spring of 1966, Donald Chambers began to organize the group into a motorcycle club. Chambers had been a member of other motorcycle clubs but had found them too tame for his tastes.

Chambers had the classic '60s biker look; he was lean and wiry, with hair down to his shoulders, long sideburns and the clothes to match. In his mid-thirties when he founded the Bandidos, he had a taste for Canadian whisky and a reputation for being quick with his fists and his knife, especially when he had been drinking. He wanted real outlaw bikers for his club, and he quickly got some. The Hells Angels had recently acquired national prominence, largely due to Hunter S. Thompson's book about them; Chambers and his cronies were certain they could do a better job, and set out to prove it.

Chambers chose the name "Bandidos" for his new club. He revered Pancho Villa and Emilio Zapata, and felt that the Mexican bandits and revolutionaries had lived as free men, answering to no one. In fact, one of Zapata's sayings became part of the Bandidos creed: "Better to die on your feet than live on your knees!" The Bandidos logo, known as "The Fat Mexican," depicts a big-bellied bandit wearing a sombrero; he is smiling and brandishing a gun and a dagger. Chambers welcomed Hispanic members into the Bandidos, in direct contrast to the "whites-only" policy of the Hells Angels. The club also used Spanish for the titles of its national officers, and still does; the president is *el presidente*, the secretary-treasurer is *el secretario*, and so on. The club logo bears a striking resemblance to the "Frito Bandito" cartoon character, launched in 1967 to promote Frito corn chips; though the club was founded and named well before this character first appeared, the Fat Mexican and Frito Bandito came into use within months of one another, and it's likely that one influenced the other.

The red and gold colours used on the logo and on Bandidos patches are believed to be drawn from the colours of the U.S. Marine Corps—Chambers was a former Marine. The Mexican theme is interesting given the reverence the Bandidos have for the Alamo and the story connected with it. (I quickly learned that contradictions are rampant when you're dealing with bikers.) At one point, Chambers had business cards made up for members of the club. The cards were gold, with the words "We are the people our parents warned us about" in red letters across the top. At the bottom on the left were the initials "FTW," which stand for "Fuck the World." In the middle were the words "Bandido by profession, Biker by trade, Lover by choice[.]" You have just had the honor of meeting—followed by a blank line where the biker could write his name.

The club was a perfect place for veterans to find the brotherhood they had lost when they left the services, and also the hierarchy they had become used to. The jaded view of society they'd developed in the killing fields of Southeast Asia, coupled with the rejection they'd faced when they came home, reinforced their feelings of alienation and marginalization. They came back to a country that no longer seemed to want them, trained in skills that had no place in civilian life. It was only natural that they would seek each other's company. (It's interesting to note that many of those in law enforcement working against the bikers are also veterans. Having done my own tour of Nam, I can count myself among their number.)

The Bandidos soon moved beyond simply riding and partying together. They began stealing motorcycles, chopping them up and selling the parts whenever they needed extra money, or using them when their own machines broke down. Although the club never stopped hawking stolen bike parts, the job of stealing them was soon relegated to prospects (prospective club members, who have to go through a probationary period before being "patched" as full members) and hang-arounds. Theft was too much like work.

Delegating criminal activity is common practice in the outlaw biker world. Law-enforcement estimates suggest that at any given time, full-patch members of the outlaw clubs have anywhere from five to thirty prospects and hang-arounds at their disposal to do everything from menial housework to running their criminal enterprises. This latter activity keeps the bikers insulated from the threat of prosecution, while the ever-present threat of violent retaliation keeps any prospect or hang-around who is arrested from talking.

The club quickly found easier and more entertaining methods of making money: sex and drugs, though not necessarily in that order. Since it was a beach town, San Leon offered a plentiful supply of attractive young women. They loved to ride on the backs of the Bandidos' Harley-Davidsons and to attend their wild parties. Drugs were plentiful at these gatherings, and getting these girls addicted would not have been difficult. Once hooked, they would be put to work for the club as strippers, escorts and prostitutes.

When people today think of what the typical biker community is like, their ideas are usually based on

something that's come out of Hollywood— like Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda in *Easy Rider*—and is therefore wrong; but back in the '60s, it was right on the money. The Bandidos lived to ride, drink and party. They became an antisocial force to be reckoned with, quickly becoming feared and respected by those they derisively referred to as "citizens." They clearly saw themselves as the equals or betters of any other outlaw biker gang. In one instance at the end of the '60s, according to a story told by the Bandidos themselves, the Angels tried to set up a Houston chapter. Chambers and a few of his fellow Bandidos went to visit them and suggested they leave. Very shortly afterwards, the Hells Angels did. And Angels don't scare easily.

In 1968, the club began moving their base of operations to Corpus Christi, Texas, which was a larger, more popular resort town. There they found an even greater pool of women to draw from. Women became an integral part of the club structure, though they have never been treated as equals. Even "old ladies," as wives and girlfriends are known, are considered the property of their husbands or boyfriends and will wear patches that make their standing in the club clear. The Bandidos are adept at pimping, but it also uses women as a source of intelligence. Their strippers keep an eye on drug dealing and police presence in clubs; other women might work in government and law enforcement and pass confidential information back to the bikers.

The Bandido drug-distribution network also expanded as the club grew. By 1970, they had around twenty full-patch members in the Corpus Christi area alone, and within the next year, the Long Island chapter of the Pagans Motorcycle Club, having heard about these Texas tough guys, decided to check out the Bandidos firsthand. There are rumours that the Pagans had some intention of patching the Texans over, but apparently the Bandidos had no interest, though they were friendly enough to their northern cousins. At that time the Pagans were not a group to take lightly. Their later failure to expand may have ultimately limited the scope of their influence, but in the 1960s and '70s they were definitely one of the big four clubs, and are still major contenders in the eastern U.S. But powerful and influential as they were, to the boys in Texas they were still carpetbaggers from the north. Southern attitudes were alive and well in the Bandidos psyche, though they didn't let that get in the way of a lucrative relationship.

The Pagans were experienced in the manufacturing of methamphetamine. Lou Dobkins, one of the founders of the club in 1959, was a biochemist at the National Institutes of Health. It was a match made in hell. They shared their manufacturing techniques with the Bandidos and, in return, the Bandidos supplied the Pagans with girls for their strip clubs. A brotherhood patch was made to seal the friendship, combining the "Zutar," the Pagans' symbol, with the Fat Mexican.

On a later visit, however, some Pagans stole money and drugs from the Bandidos. This reinforced the Bandido belief that Yankees were not to be trusted; the two clubs have not gotten along since, though there are signs that they have recently put aside their differences to unite against the Hells Angels. In 1977, two members of the Bandidos executed a prospect for the Pagans simply because he was wearing Pagan colours on what they considered Bandidos turf. According to law-enforcement sources, the order came directly from Ronny Hodge, at that time national president of the Bandidos; no one was ever convicted for this murder.

The Bandidos, like every other outlaw club, claimed from their inception on that they were only about motorcycles, partying and the open road. The facts tell a different story. In 1972, Bandidos Donald Chambers, Jesse Fain "Injun" Deal and "Crazy" Ray Vincente abducted two drug dealers from El Paso, Texas. The dealers— brothers named Marley Leon and Preston LeRay Tarver— had made the mistake of selling the Bandidos some baking soda, claiming it was methamphetamine. The Bandidos first tortured these two for a couple of days, with help from their old ladies, then drove them into the desert north of the city. There, the dealers, who were seventeen and twenty-two years old, were forced to dig their own graves. The bikers then blasted them with shotguns and set fire to their bodies. Clearly, the club had now moved well beyond just partying and riding their motorcycles.

Chambers, Deal and Vincente were all convicted of these murders; an informant was an eyewitness to the events. Chambers was sentenced to life in prison. The bikers were represented in court by Joe and Lee Chagra, brothers of Jimmy Chagra, whom we'll meet later. There were later attempts from within the club to reduce the use of meth (or "speed"), both as a recreational drug and as a source of revenue; but the truth is that the Bandidos built their club on drug revenue, and still depend on it. In that regard, the Bandidos have not changed at all since their early days, particularly in the southern U.S., where the old-school, traditionalist faction of the club is strongest. Their fierce reputation and the relative ease of drug dealing made it a natural choice for them then, as it does now. The fact that they were so close to Mexico, a major source for illegal drugs, certainly didn't hurt either.

By the mid-'70s, the club had grown tremendously, with membership estimated to be as high as seven hundred. Chapters had been established throughout Texas and in Alabama, New Mexico, South Dakota and Washington State; they also had chapters in Indiana and Montana.

With Chambers in prison, Ronny Hodge, another ex-Marine, who was known as "Mr. Prospect" because he had earned his full colours in only a month, was elected the club's new national president. Hodge was considered the meanest Bandido in the gang. Once elected, he went by the street name "Stepmother"; Chambers had been known as "Mother."

Hodge, who seems to have been even more hard-core than Chambers, reshaped the club by purging it of members he considered not truly dedicated to the Bandidos way of life. He completely shut down the Montana and Indiana chapters for this reason. (The Bandidos would later re-establish their presence in Montana.) Despite this culling of the membership, the club continued to flourish and expand in power and influence—and quickly, finding many willing recruits to replace those found wanting.

In 1978, under Hodge's leadership, the Bandidos attended Bike Week in Daytona Beach for the first time; there they formed an alliance with Florida's dominant biker gang, the Outlaws. An enduring collaboration between the two clubs began, and a close relationship still exists to this day, even as both clubs have expanded. Like the gangs themselves, the relationship was built on drugs; soon after forging their bond, the Outlaws were supplying the Bandidos with cocaine and the Bandidos were returning the favour with meth. This relationship would also help the Bandidos achieve their status as one of the "big four" outlaw motorcycle gangs.

In 1978, Assistant U.S. Attorney James Kerr was shot at in San Antonio, Texas. Shortly afterwards, Federal Judge John J. Woods was assassinated, shot in the back outside his San Antonio home. Woods was known as "Maximum John"; the nickname came from the sentences he handed down in drug cases. Kerr, who often prosecuted cases before Woods, was also known to be especially harsh on drug dealers.

A van matching the description of the one used in the shooting of the assistant U.S. attorney had been found parked at the residence of a member of the Bandidos. Further, Kerr identified three Bandidos in a police lineup as his possible assailants. Members of the club became prime suspects in both shootings, and intense pressure was put on the club by both federal and state law-enforcement agencies. They were harassed, followed, photographed and recorded; dozens of Bandidos were called for questioning before a grand jury.

In the end, the man charged and convicted of the judge's murder was Charles Harrelson, father of actor Woody Harrelson. Harrelson was paid \$250,000 for the killing by a member of the Chagra family of El Paso, a drug dealer who did not want to face Woods in court. Jimmy Chagra was indicted on a number of charges related to the killing of the judge. He managed to avoid conviction on all but one of the charges, receiving a

ten-year sentence for obstruction of justice for interfering with the investigation. He also pled guilty to the attempted assassination of James Kerr, for which he received a life sentence. His third wife, Elizabeth, who delivered the \$250,000 to Harrelson, was also convicted for her role in the criminal conspiracy; she received thirty years. She died in prison before the end of her sentence. Jimmy, despite receiving an additional thirty-year sentence in another case, was paroled in 2003. He remarried shortly after his release and according to reports lived a quiet life until his death from cancer in 2008.

Before all this, the club had moved its headquarters to Houston; now, faced with the sudden increased pressure from the authorities, they shifted their base back to Corpus Christi, a move that some in law enforcement saw as a retreat. Hodge was arrested for aggravated assault in October 1980, and though there is no record of his conviction on these charges, he stepped down as national president, naming Alvin Frakes as his replacement. Hodge then moved to Rapid City, South Dakota, where he was originally from. However, law enforcement officials believed that Hodge was, in fact, still making all the major decisions for the club. Frakes was not a Bandido of any particular distinction; further, he was appointed by Hodge rather than elected, implying that he was under Hodge's control and was only made president of the club to deflect attention from its real leader. The ease with which Hodge later resumed his reign as *el presidente* lends credence to this theory as well. But if this was all an effort to avoid police pressure, in the end it was for naught.

Streetwise as the Bandidos were supposed to be, after the shootings they were just not ready for what the cops were about to throw at them. Once the outlaw motorcycle gangs were given the status of criminal organizations, money and resources began to flow into the hands of law-enforcement agencies. It was at this time that many police departments established special biker squads, dedicated exclusively to investigating the one-percenter gangs. Though bikers had not actually pulled the trigger in the two San Antonio cases, they were originally believed by the authorities to be responsible. The fact that the Bandidos had nothing to do with them seems to have made no difference.

The American media took up the cops' new interest and across the country bikers made headlines and news stories, which almost always portrayed bikers in a negative light. No less a figure than Ronald Reagan, the president of the United States, went on television and declared war on the four major gangs in the country. An executive order added the outlaw motorcycle gangs to the list of criminal organizations that could be prosecuted under the RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations) Act. The Pagans, the Outlaws, the Hells Angels and the Bandidos were all now on the national target list. No doubt some of the Bandidos were pleased to get official confirmation that they were now in the big leagues. Meanwhile, law-enforcement agencies were under pressure to produce some solid cases against the bikers, and now they had resources that had been previously unavailable. The coming operation, for example, had a budget in excess of three million dollars.

The FBI and the Drug Enforcement Administration decided that the assault on the Bandidos should begin in the Pacific Northwest. The Bellingham, Washington, chapter was geographically isolated from the core of the gang in Texas, so the agencies figured they could make a few mistakes in Washington State without fatally affecting operations elsewhere. Furthermore, in the north west the riding season was so short and the weather so bad that most of the year the guys tended to hang in small groups, not with the whole chapter. Lack of interest in the club got so bad that one night a month was selected as a "church" night, and attendance by the entire club was mandatory. "Church," in the world of outlaw bikers, means a members-only club meeting at which club business is discussed; though usually followed by parties, "churches" are serious matters. The Bellingham Bandidos all had independent lives, and a fractured and vulnerable brotherhood was the result. They were ripe for the picking.

I don't mean to say that these bikers were lightweights. Several members of the Bellingham club were individuals to be feared and respected. Jack "Dr. Jack" Sekora, Mongo and George Wegers in particular were intelligent, cunning men, as I soon learned first-hand; Mongo and Wegers would later rise to national prominence. I was chosen to spearhead the police operation by going undercover. At the time I was a contracted police agent, but with no biker experience. At first I was reluctant; I had another job pending and the biker world was not my milieu— my specialty was Asian gangs. In the end, though, I was persuaded, and began the slow process of infiltration.

As a Canadian I had no ties to anyone in the Bellingham area. So I presented myself as a regular crook and let the Bandidos change me into a biker. That method was not without risk; initially, the club had no reason to respect or court me. In fact, they might have seen me as competition and therefore a threat. Even if that didn't happen, bikers are notoriously suspicious of new faces. Getting into their good graces took time and patience.

At one point early on I learned that some of the club members suspected me of being a cop. My only choice, if I was going to maintain my cover, was to respond by confronting them over the rumour. Standing in a parking lot by myself yelling at a bike gang is not an experience I'd care to repeat, but to my great relief it worked. Apparently the gang was impressed by my "balls," as they put it.

I began hiring the bikers as muscle for drug deals that, being fake, inevitably went smoothly. It was easy money for them, and they began to see me as a reliable asset. As my value to them increased, I acquired a Harley and began to go on short runs with them, getting to know them better and meeting members from other states. Over a period of several months, I made my way from citizen to hangaround to prospect to full member.

Wegers and Mongo both stand out in the world of bikers. During my time as a Bandido I got to know them well; Wegers himself gave me my "one-percenter" patch. The club patch designating full membership was given by the whole chapter; the one-percenter patch was bestowed later by an individual, once the new member's actions and attitudes had demonstrated he was truly an outlaw biker.

The term "one-percenter" refers to outlaw bikers regardless of affiliation; it derives from an incident in Hollister, California, in 1947. A motorcycle race held there was attended by hundreds, including members of the Pissed Off Bastards of Bloomington, one of the first biker clubs. One member was arrested at the track, and the other gang members tried to prevent the police from taking him away; the result was a riot that nearly destroyed the town. At a press conference later, a spokesman for the American Motorcyclist Association claimed that 99 percent of all motorcyclists were law-abiding. A local sheriff also described the troublemaking bikers as "outlaws." The gangs seized this term and the designation "one-percenter" as badges of honour. Incidentally, the Pissed Off Bastards of Bloomington later changed their name and became the Hells Angels, taking their name from the title of a Howard Hawks film.

The following is an excerpt from what is known as "The One-Percenter Creed." Though it seems likely a Hells Angel came up with it, all outlaw clubs adhere to its ideals.

A 1%er is the 1% of 100 of us who have given up on society and the politicians one-way law. This is why we look repulsive, we are saying we don't want to be like you or look like you, so stay out of our face. Look at your brother standing next to you. Ask yourself, would you give him half of what you have in your pocket, or half of what you have to eat? If a citizen hits your brother, will you be on him without asking why? There is no why. Your brother isn't always right but he is always your brother. It's one in all and all in one. If you

don't think this way, then walk away because you are a citizen and don't belong with us.

There are reports that the practice of a senior member vouching for a newer member by giving him the one-percenter patch has changed in recent years, with both the club patch and the onepercenter being given to new members as soon as they qualify for full status.

But back to Bellingham. George Wegers was funny, highly intelligent and well read, but if crossed could slip instantly into a violent and unpredictable psychotic rage. Mongo was six-foot-four and well over three hundred pounds, with flaming orange hair, the result of a botched dye job. His thinking on certain subjects was irrational to say the least; for example, he loved the colour yellow, but only on his own possessions. At the same time, he worked in jet engine development at Boeing, and regularly meditated. The two of them made a powerful if curious team, just another example of the contradictions you find with bikers.

The operation progressed quickly once I was a member. After a series of deals where I bought drugs and guns from all the local Bandidos, the law-enforcement agencies I was working with decided to expand the operation. As a full-patch member of the club I had little difficulty setting up deals with Bandidos from out of state. Soon my activities led to secret indictments pending on over ninety-three members of the gang, spread across nine states.

In February 1985, law enforcement acted on the indictments, arresting ninety-three Bandidos and dozens of prospects and hangarounds, including most of my "brothers" from Bellingham, even Wegers, though oddly not Mongo. Police also seized major caches of drugs and weapons. In one case an armoured personnel carrier was used for a bust at a fortified Bandidos clubhouse in Texas. Meanwhile, the club hierarchy was in flux. In April of that year Alvin Frakes died of cancer. Hodge resumed the position of national president and was again firmly in control. However, he did not wear the official *el presidente* patch, but instead wore the patch of the president of the (Bandidos) Nomads chapter. By this time the Nomads had become the ruling clique within the club; the chapter was exclusively made up of seasoned members, all with long histories as Bandidos.

"Nomads" chapters are the enforcer chapters of the big clubs, usually made up of the toughest and meanest members. Each club has these chapters; there are Bandido Nomads, Hells Angels Nomads and so on. Unlike other chapters of an outlaw club, they are not restricted to a specific territory but can travel and do business anywhere in the country without needing the permission of the locals; this is why they're known as Nomads. They answer only to the national officers of their club, and often provide bodyguard and security services to these men, who together form the club's national chapter.

Over a period of about a year, the national headquarters of the Bandidos had shifted from Corpus Christi to Rapid City, South Dakota. Rapid City was Hodge's hometown, and he began running a bar there. The National Chapter remained there for the next three years, until the bar burned down. Hodge then moved to Memphis, Tennessee, taking the Bandidos headquarters with him.

Donald Chambers, the club's founder, was paroled in 1983 and retired from the club. He settled in El Paso, Texas, where he lived out his life in relative peace, his Bandidos tattoos all covered or removed.

Shortly after Chambers' release and retirement, the Bandidos decided to expand overseas. No doubt they had seen the Hells Angels doing the same, but the decision to act seems to have been prompted by an overture from the other side of the world. Australia was already home to several bike clubs, spread around the country, with the heaviest concentration in New South Wales. One of the largest of these was the

Comancheros. The club was founded in 1966, the same year the Bandidos were born.

Some of the Comancheros, including Sydney "city" chapter president Arthur "Snodgrass" Spencer, had travelled to the U.S. While they were there, they met with the Bandidos. The Australians had easy access to P2P (phenyl-2-propanone), a chemical used in the manufacture of methamphetamine and available legally in Australia. They were interested in supplying the Americans. In the U.S., P2P was a controlled substance.

Snodgrass was impressed by the American bikers, and the Bandidos seem to have liked the Australians. They hung out and partied, to the point that in some cases charges were actually laid, though none seem to have been serious. During this visit, the Australians came up to Bellingham, Washington, for a few days. I was a member of the Bellingham Bandido chapter at the time. We partied with the visiting Comancheros for a couple of days; I remember that we weren't as impressed by them as the Texas Bandidos were. We had never heard of the Comancheros, and we thought our visitors looked like Hollywood bikers, not real ones.

In 1983, the Comancheros had two chapters: the city chapter in downtown Sydney run by Snodgrass and another based in Parramatta, a suburb just a few kilometers west of Sydney. This chapter was run by William "Jock" Ross, who was the national president of the club and who had brought Snodgrass into the Comancheros in the first place. Ross, a Scot who originally hailed from Glasgow, had begun to make changes within the club, apparently trying to make it into more of a paramilitary organization. Snodgrass did not agree with this direction; he wanted to be a biker (or "bikie," as they are known in Australia), not a soldier. He and several other Comancheros resigned from the club, burning their colours in a ceremonial bonfire. Snodgrass then approached the Bandidos in the U.S., seeking approval for an Australian Bandidos chapter. He had felt a kinship with the Americans and their ways, and found their approach matched his ideas, much more so than those of his former Comanchero brothers.

Australia was a good choice for the Bandidos because of its vast unregulated territory—and because they could acquire P2P easily and legally. After their American visit, Snodgrass and his associates were also a known quantity. Hodge, clearly more impressed by them than we had been, gave the Australians the go-ahead. In 1983 the first Australian chapter of the Bandidos was created in Sydney. They lived the biker lifestyle to the hilt, and quickly became famous for their wild parties, among other things.

The surviving chapter of the Comancheros, led by Jock Ross, took great exception to what they characterized as an American invasion. They were already angry with Snodgrass and his associates for leaving the club. This new alliance with a foreign club only made it worse. The new Bandidos in turn wanted nothing to do with any Comancheros who wouldn't patch over to them. An intense rivalry developed between the two groups, with the inevitable minor clashes and flashes of violence. There was also ongoing conflict with the other Australian outlaw gangs (like the local Hells Angels and the Rebels) for control of the drug trade, along with other criminal activities like prostitution and gun running. It was the formula for disaster that the Bandidos thrived on. And, as you'd expect, within a year these conflicts came to a head.

On Father's Day 1984 (September 2 that year in Australia) in Milperra, a southwestern suburb of Sydney, the British Motorcycle Club, a tough but unaffiliated bike club, organized a swap meet—a family day, complete with a lamb roasting on the spit—to celebrate the move of their headquarters to the Viking Tavern. They clearly didn't expect that the new Bandidos and the remaining Comancheros would show.

Tensions between the two clubs had been ratcheting up. In August of 1984 war was officially declared, reportedly after a telephone conversation between Snodgrass and Jock Ross. This meant that members of the two clubs would now be attacking their rivals whenever and wherever they could.

Several Bandidos turned up at the home of Glen Eaves, a member of the Comancheros, on the morning of the swap meet and told him that they would be at the Viking Tavern later, effectively throwing down the gauntlet. The Comancheros were more than willing to respond to this challenge; by one o'clock that afternoon, a heavily armed group of them were waiting in the parking lot. The Bandidos arrived shortly afterwards on their bikes, also armed to the teeth, and followed by a van carrying extra weapons. Both gangs had turned up equipped with a variety: baseball bats, knives, chains, iron bars and both shotguns and rifles.

The two gangs lined up on either side of the parking lot, bristling and posturing across the asphalt. Then Comancheros leader Jock Ross, brandishing a machete, gave the order to his men to "Kill 'em all!" and it began. As terrified bystanders scurried for cover behind cars and trees, the bikers attacked each other, shotgun blasts and rifle fire ringing out through the noise and confusion.

Over 200 police officers were called to the scene, but they arrived too late to prevent the carnage. In the melee, which lasted only about ten minutes, twenty people were injured and seven were killed: four Comancheros, two Bandidos and a teen aged girl who was shot in the face. The Milperra Massacre, as it has come to be known, made it clear that the Bandidos were in town, and that they would be a force to reckon with.

Curious rumours quickly surfaced about the teenager who was shot, specifically that the murdered girl was not, as the ID she was carrying indicated, Leanne Walters, but someone else with Leanne Walters' ID. Post-mortem dental examinations have proven this theory completely wrong, yet versions of it continue to circulate online. It seems to have its origins in a simple error; a published photo, supposed to be of Leanne, was later found to be a photo of another woman altogether.

The shootout put an end to the undisputed reign of the Comancheros and to their dominance in the Sydney drug trade, and accelerated the rise of the Bandidos in Australia. Their only other serious rivals in size and prominence were the Rebels; the Hells Angels, though they had been active in Australia since the late '70s, had relatively few chapters and a much smaller membership. They had not become the dominant biker presence Down Under they had almost everywhere else.

In the aftermath of the massacre, police charged forty-three people. None of the accused from either side were willing to testify. Jock Ross was singled out by the judge in the trial as being primarily responsible for the violence; he was sentenced to life imprisonment. Seven other Comancheros also received life sentences. Sixteen of the new Bandidos received fourteen years for manslaughter. At the end of the three-year trial, there were a total of 63 convictions for murder, and 147 for manslaughter. The trial itself was the largest Australia had ever seen.

The massacre also prompted swift changes to Australian fire arms legislation. Semi-automatic weapons, for instance, were banned; one had been used during the clash. This measure was extremely unpopular with Australian gun owners in general; it would seem there were a lot of them. The Labour Party, who had passed the legislation in question, suffered their worst defeat in decades in the next election, primarily because of this backlash. The new government quickly rescinded the ban. However, it was eventually reinstated, in 1997, and remains on the books today.

There were only two bikers involved in the massacre who managed to escape conviction. One was Philip "Knuckles" McElwaine. He was a Comanchero, as were his two brothers, Mark "Gloves" and Greg "Dukes" McElwaine; the three were enforcers within the club. Philip, again like his brothers, was a boxer and had won a gold medal as a middleweight at the Commonwealth Games held in Edmonton in 1978. His boxing career was later ended by a motorcycle accident. He was acquitted of charges from the massacre and freed.

The other to avoid conviction was Arthur "Snodgrass" Spencer, the leader of the new Australian Bandidos, though he didn't share McElwaine's good fortune. Snodgrass was arrested for his part in the massacre, but killed himself in prison before he was brought to trial. The Australian Bandidos website includes a brief history of the club that mentions this suicide, and then describes Snodgrass in terms of veneration. This is odd, given that the Bandidos hold suicide in contempt; the club bylaws state that any member who commits suicide "will NOT receive a Bandido funeral."

Some twenty years later, despite the dominance of the Bandidos, the Comancheros continue to maintain a serious presence, frequently challenging their rivals for a share of the Australian drug market. The conflict has been fuelled by another mass defection: in 2007, over sixty members of two Nomads chapters patched over to the Bandidos. (These Australian Nomads are a distinct club, not a Nomad chapter in the North American sense; though they are frequently linked with the Comancheros, it is not clear if they are a puppet club or in an alliance as equals, though the latter seems likeliest.) This led to a series of brutal attacks by the gangs on each other, and seems to have led to the formation of yet another gang, known as Notorious. A police operation created to deal with this wave of violence resulted in more than three hundred arrests on over eight hundred charges. The defection may have been sparked by a change in Comanchero leadership. In 2006, Raymond "Sunshine" Kucler, a Milperra survivor, took over as the club's president. He replaced Jock Ross, who seems to have remained in control even while he was in prison, and after he was paroled.

It seems that biker clubs are like weeds—they just keep growing back. And like weeds, they keep spreading: the Outlaws arrived in 1994; more recently, the Black Pistons, their primary support club, opened their first Australian chapter in 2007. Besides all the aforementioned gangs, Australia is also home to several smaller clubs, like the Finks, the Gypsy Jokers and the remaining Nomads. And of course, there remains a small but powerful contingent of everybody's favourites, the Hells Angels.

Before we leave Australia, I have to make note of another wrinkle in the Milperra story; every biker tale, it seems, has its variations and contradictions. According to a recent report, the original split in the Comancheros was not about ideology or lifestyle. It was precipitated by two members catching Jock Ross in the act with another member's wife. This was in direct violation of the club rules, rules that had been created by Ross himself. When other officers in the club learned of this, Ross was called to a meeting to face discipline. After twice failing to show up, he appeared at a third meeting only long enough to declare that he was splitting the club into two chapters. Those loyal to Ross remained with him in Parmatta, the club's original base; those who opposed him, including Snodgrass, moved into central Sydney and established the city chapter, later becoming the first Australian Bandidos.

During this period of international expansion the Bandidos found themselves in an unusual position. They were asked to broker a peace between the Outlaws and the Hells Angels. The Outlaws, whose national headquarters are in Chicago, are actually older than the Hells Angels or any of the other outlaw clubs; the club was originally established in Illinois in 1935.

The Angels and the Outlaws had been at war with each other for ten years or more, fighting for the control of new turf as they both expanded their territories in the U.S. The hostilities became international when the Outlaws followed the Angels into Canada, taking over a chapter of an Ontario club, the Satan's Choice, in the late '70s. Both sides had suffered in the ongoing war; and both had finally agreed to sit down and talk.

The summit was to take place at Sturgis, South Dakota, during the yearly Bike Run. This event is the single biggest gathering of bikers held anywhere; once a year, they converge from all over North America, regardless of affiliation, outlaws and law-abiding citizens alike. For the summit, each gang would be allowed

to bring a maximum of fifty members, plus, of course, all their national officers.

The Pagans did not take part in this summit. They are the only one of the big four clubs that has not significantly expanded, seemingly content to remain in the northeast U.S. Within their own territory they have maintained a fearsome presence, however: when Sonny Barger, who was president of the Hells Angels at the time of the Sturgis summit, later appeared to do a book signing in 2007 on Long Island, which is Pagan turf, they turned up en masse and attacked him.

The Bandidos arrived at Sturgis early and set up their camp on a large, fenced piece of land, which they owned. There was only one road in and a manmade lake at their back. Four hundred armed Bandidos positioned themselves between the front gate to their property and the Outlaws camp set up behind them on the lakeside. It wasn't that they didn't trust the Angels, they just didn't trust the Angels. This was a club whose motto was "Three can keep a secret if two are dead."

Everyone in the biker world knew that the Angels had complete disregard for any promises they made, whether to their own ranks or to enemy clubs (a terrifying example of this would occur in Lennoxville, Quebec, laying the foundation for the biker wars that ripped that Canadian province apart in the 1990s). And then of course there is the Outlaws' motto: "God Forgives, Outlaws Don't." (The Outlaws claim to have started using their version of this motto in 1969. The Bandidos also use this motto, among others; they have claimed that their version, "God Forgives, Bandidos Don't," is adapted from a similar saying by Emilio Zapata. I don't know which gang used it first. And anyone who might have ever known is probably dead by now.)

The Angels, as anticipated, ignored the fifty-member limit. Six hundred members showed up at their camp. Security details were beefed up on the Bandidos/Outlaws site, and everyone was on high alert. I was there working undercover and living as a Bandido when the Angels arrived for the summit; I'll never forget the sight of all those bikes arriving in formation at the front gates of our camp.

The national leaders were ushered into an Airstream trailer to talk while the Angels' massive escort waited outside a ring of Bandido Nomads security. Remarkably, there was only one minor incident; other wise, the negotiations proceeded with surprisingly few problems. In the end the continental United States was carved up into drug zones, with the Bandidos getting a clear path all the way up the middle to Canada. The Outlaws were given the east. The Angels got the west coast straight up to Alaska, to run their drugs and girls.

The only fly in the Angels' ointment was the Bellingham Bandidos. Even after the pact, the Bandidos were still in control of their piece of the Pacific, in Washington State. Currently, the Angels and the Bandidos share the state, maintaining an unspoken truce, each with access to the Canadian border to run their businesses.

Although the big clubs, having come to an arrangement, were slapping each other on the back, the small outlaw clubs scattered across the country were not just going to give up their turf. The major gangs felt most of these independents were cutting into their profits and disturbing the smooth running of business. The Bandidos had their share of upstarts to deal with. Some, like the Gypsy Jokers, were simply driven off U.S. soil. The Banshees, a small one-percenter club mostly made up of tough Texas boys, had been the biggest thorn in their side for some time.

In 1983 a Bandido was killed in a confrontation with members of the Banshees, at the Eastex drag strip near Porter, Texas, just north of Houston. Also killed in the melee was the Banshees' president; Bandidos member

John Batchelor cut his throat. Batchelor was subsequently shot to death with a .25-calibre automatic pistol by one of the Banshees; two other Bandidos received stab wounds.

It was offensive enough to the Bandidos that anyone would consider challenging them. Making it worse, several of the Banshees were patch-overs from the Bandidos own ranks (a "patch-over" is a person who leaves one club to join another). In fact, all of the New Orleans-based Nomad Bandidos had jumped ship and become Banshees. After such treachery there could never be peace between the gangs.

All the national officers of the Bandidos met after Batchelor's funeral. Not only had a member been killed, but the Bandidos were embarrassed that a much smaller club would dare to take them on, especially in Texas. Reputation and image are very important in the world of bikers, where allowing even a small offence to go unpunished can be seen as an open invitation to further challenges.

Ronny Hodge assigned teams to gather intelligence on the Banshees chapters in Dallas and Texarkana, Texas, and report back to him. He also instructed that one hundred dollars be collected from each Bandido member to finance the operation. He called a second meeting in Longview, Texas, on June 13 to hear reports on the progress of the intelligence gathering and to plan retaliation against the Banshees. In addition to the national officers, several other old-time members attended.

One of these, a Nomad named Keith Alan "Crash" Miller, was instructed by Hodge to set up a safe house stocked with medical supplies, in case there were any casualties. A number of options for retaliation were then put forward, including a drive-by shooting of the Banshees' Texarkana clubhouse using two MAC-10 semi-automatic machine guns that had been converted to fully automatic. This plan was never implemented.

A third meeting was held in Lubbock, Texas, in late June and included all the national officers, all chapter presidents and secretary-treasurers. The Dallas scouting team had located two Banshees residences in the Dallas area, and the leadership decided to bomb them. Ken "Crabs" Vodron, one of the national officers, was sent to Houston to obtain the explosives to construct the bombs. He stole what he needed from the back of a truck carrying demolition supplies. The plan was to build the bombs with sixty-minute kitchen timers for timing devices and place them underneath the Banshees' houses.

Two parties were planned for the Fourth of July weekend, one in Rapid City, South Dakota, and one in Corpus Christi, Texas. Since most of the Bandidos would be attending one of the two parties, they would provide alibis for the members involved in the bombings. The party in Corpus Christi was well advertised and was billed as a Fourth of July "Poker Run" to raise money for the Cerebral Palsy Foundation to "help the crippled children of Nueces County." The event was complete with a parade, a wiener roast, a swap meet and a dance, and was well attended by the general public, not just Bandidos.

During the early morning hours of July 5, 1983, "Little Joe" Benavides and Crandle "Lamonte" Presnel were dropped off outside the first target. On his final surveillance of the Banshees' houses on July 2, Little Joe had spotted a baby stroller and decided not to bomb the house but rather to place the bomb under a white van parked in the driveway.

Randy Hanson, who was driving, and Dale Lynn Brewer circled the block while the other two made their way to the van in the driveway. All four men were wearing soft body armor, along with jumpsuits of the type used by the Dallas County Sheriff's Department and baseball caps with deputy sheriff's insignias. They also carried an aluminum briefcase with them, in which they'd brought two bombs.

Little Joe got under the van while Lamonte stood guard with one of those converted MAC-10 submachine

guns, complete with silencer. He placed the bomb on the rear axle so as to rupture the gas tank when it exploded. The trigger mechanism had been adjusted to detonate the bomb when the vehicle moved; the other bomb was still wired to a timer. When Little Joe was finished, Hanson pulled up and the four proceeded to the second house.

This time Hanson placed the bomb while Brewer stood guard. There was no space under the second house, so Hanson placed the bomb against the foundation and the foursome drove off. Lamonte and Brewer proceeded to Corpus Christi to report to Alvin Frakes, who was then wearing the *el presidente* patch, and Little Joe and Hanson headed to Rapid City, South Dakota, to report to Hodge.

On the way to South Dakota, Little Joe stopped several times, in Oklahoma, Nebraska and Colorado, to call Lubbock and Dallas to find out what had been reported by the media. He charged the calls to his home telephone number with his credit card, leaving a trail easily uncovered later.

The second bomb was the first to detonate. It exploded at 6:00 a.m., causing damage to the house and to the adjoining residence. No one was injured in the explosion; emergency crews responding to the explosion first thought that it was the gas meter. Investigators soon determined it actually had been a bomb, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) was called in to take over the investigation.

At 7:00 p.m., thirteen hours later, high-ranking Banshee Mackie Ladry Bonnette placed his one-year-old daughter in an infant seat in the right front passenger seat of the van. He hadn't moved the vehicle all day. He got in and started to back out of the driveway when the bomb ripped open a portion of the rear floor and the vehicle filled with smoke. Neither occupant was seriously injured. The sort of martial ineptitude that made this possible marked those years, when the Bandidos, despite being a rising force, were not yet quite ready for the scale of warfare that lay ahead.

There was a national roundup of Bandidos by the DEA, ATF and FBI in February 1985. Many of the charges brought against the Bandidos were the result of my undercover work in Washington State. During this time, Randy Hanson, one of the bombers and also a Nomad enforcer for the club, decided to quit. He moved to Las Vegas and tried to build a life outside of the Bandidos' sphere of influence. But because he knew so much about the club, they considered him a threat and put out a contract on him. The cops found him first and made him an offer. It was an easy decision for Hanson to make; he decided to co-operate with the DEA.

The real value of Randy Hanson's turning informant was the perspective his information gave the authorities. Although my work had led to charges all over the U.S., mine was an inside look at the club from a northwestern perspective. Hanson gave the cops an inside look at the core of the club in Texas, where its roots were. And the more police delved into the Bandidos nation, the more they realized how dangerous these guys were becoming.

In early 1986 Hanson told the DEA about the bombings; by then three years had elapsed. He told them he believed Little Joe still had the aluminum briefcase, the Ingram MAC-11 machine guns and even the four jumpsuits and hats with the deputy sheriff 's logo on them.

On March 26, 1986, the ATF executed a search warrant on the Benavides residence in Lubbock and all of the items Hanson had listed were recovered, along with narcotics, four hand grenades and two blasting caps. Charges were laid and the round-up began.

On March 31, 1988, twenty-three members and former members of the Bandidos were indicted, and on April

30 most were arrested. Several could not be located and became fugitives, but within a matter of months all had been apprehended. Charges were later dismissed against six of the defendants due to lack of evidence. On November 7, 1988, eight pled guilty. The trial of the remaining nine defendants ended on December 7, 1988, with seven being found guilty and two acquitted. Most received five-year sentences, with lesser sentences going to four who were not as directly involved in the conspiracy. Those receiving five years included Ronny Hodge, his national vice-president, two national secretaries named Schmick and Pruett, and two national sergeants-at-arms. Law enforcement went on record to guarantee that this was the end of the Bandidos as a criminal organization.

When most of the leadership was arrested, a meeting was held at the home of Ronnie Hodge in Memphis and a new slate of national officers was elected. The two top positions, national president and national vice-president, went to James Edward "Sprocket" Lang and Lawrence "Beaver" Borrego. Sprocket had been the vice-president of the Northwest Houston Chapter; his election as national president was a complete surprise to law enforcement. Police had never considered Beaver, though a Nomad, to be very influential in the organization either.

At first, this was seen to be a "caretaker" group, elected only to take pressure off the real ruling body; however, it appears that Sprocket took the job to heart. He started several new chapters: one in Washington State; one in Gillette, Wyoming; one in Mobile, Alabama; and one even in Paris, France. The nine new members from France attended the Sturgis run in August 1989 to get their new patches. One more chapter was also added to Australia.

So much for the demise of the club.

From the Hardcover edition.

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