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Crime Problems

# Outlaw Motorcyclists A Problem for Police

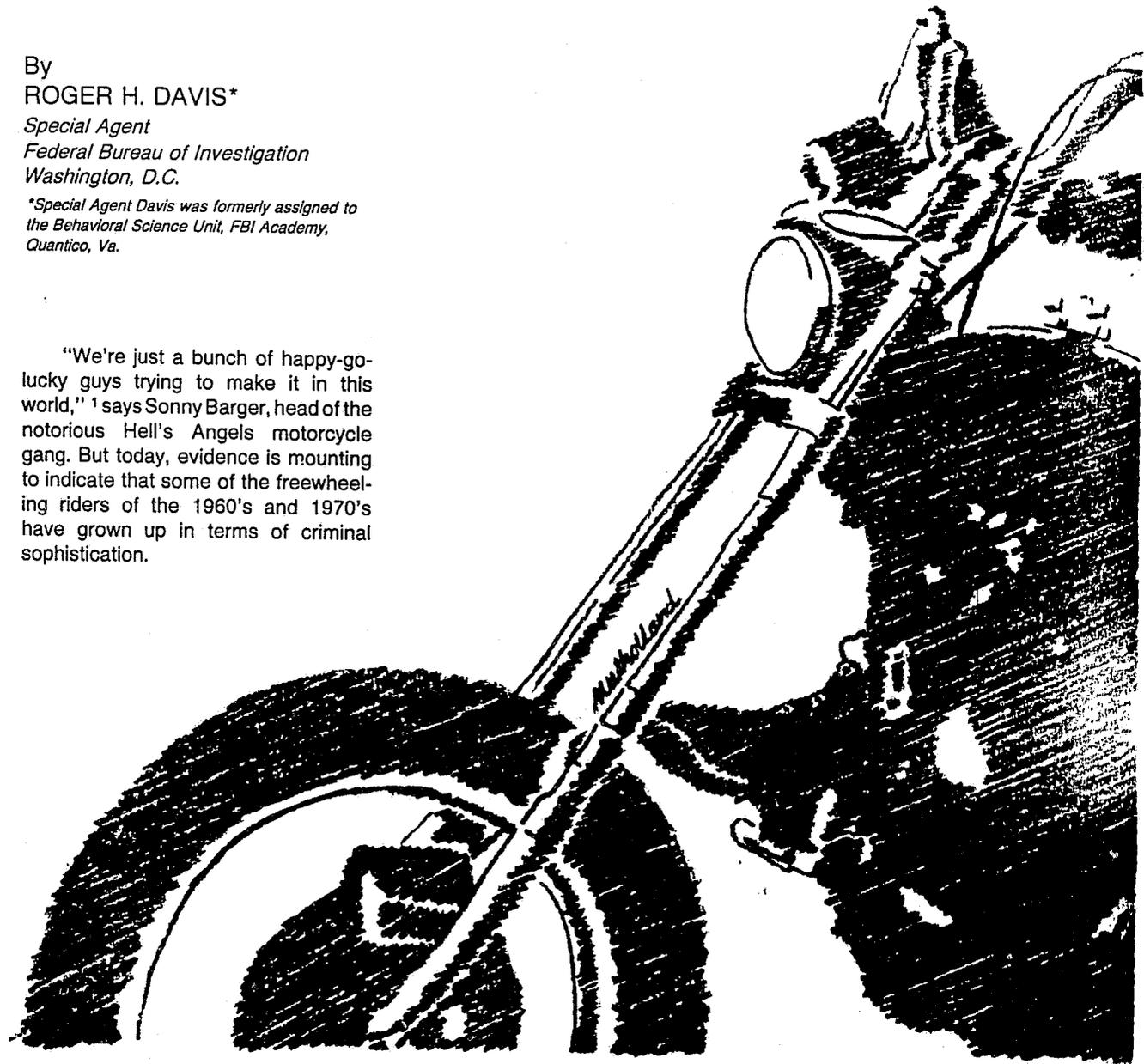
(Part I)

By  
ROGER H. DAVIS\*

*Special Agent  
Federal Bureau of Investigation  
Washington, D.C.*

*\*Special Agent Davis was formerly assigned to  
the Behavioral Science Unit, FBI Academy,  
Quantico, Va.*

"We're just a bunch of happy-go-lucky guys trying to make it in this world," <sup>1</sup>says Sonny Barger, head of the notorious Hell's Angels motorcycle gang. But today, evidence is mounting to indicate that some of the freewheeling riders of the 1960's and 1970's have grown up in terms of criminal sophistication.



**"The level of criminal involvement of persons connected with these adult gangs in the United States and Canada has influenced law enforcement officials to take a harder look at organized gang involvement in crime."**



With a national law enforcement focus directed more and more toward criminal violence, outlaw motorcycle gangs have gained increasing national attention in recent years. According to Pennsylvania Congressman Robert Walker, "The problem of motorcycle gangs is pervasive and growing. They pose a serious threat to our society. . . ." <sup>2</sup>

The level of criminal involvement of persons connected with these adult gangs in the United States and Canada has influenced law enforcement officials to take a harder look at organized gang involvement in crime. FBI investigations of the activities of some members of major motorcycle gangs in the United States have confirmed a deepening gang involvement in narcotics manufacturing and distribution, prostitution, weapons-related violations, extortion, murder, arson-for-hire, pornography, protection rackets, loan sharking, interstate transportation of stolen property and stolen motor vehicles, insurance fraud, and obstruction of justice.

The amount of criminal activity is alarming. Gang members are thriving on illegal profits reaped from their involvement in criminal enterprises. Law enforcement officers conducting gang investigations see these groups as posing complex criminal problems. Motorcycle gang members are now investing money gained from illegal enterprises into legitimate business ventures. Working relationships with other criminal groups have surfaced, and instances have been reported of motorcycle gang members accepting murder contracts, strong-arming business competitors, and being used as enforcers in collecting gambling debts.



Special Agent Davis

Complex violations committed by motorcycle gang members demand a deeper knowledge of group behavior. In order to be effective in gang investigations, law enforcement agencies must not only commit resources to intelligence analysis but also understand the structure and characteristics of the motorcycle gang.<sup>3</sup>

#### History

To understand the changing nature of law enforcement problems involving motorcycle gangs, it is important to know a brief history of these gangs in America. Many of the outlaw groups started as recreational groups, but all have drawn status and structure from the Hell's Angels. Hunter Thompson, who has written much about the Hell's Angels, traced the beginning of the gang to groups like the POBOBS<sup>4</sup> and the Market Street Commandos. Both groups were said to include persons drawn together in loosely knit gatherings of individuals sharing a comparatively rare interest in motorcycles.<sup>5</sup>

The early group of Hell's Angels was only one of several motorcycle clubs active between the late 1940's and the 1960's. Several key media events brought the Angels to public attention and provided the media boost which propelled them toward a national reputation.

In the summer of 1947, in Hollister, Calif., and later in the fall in Riverside, Calif., thousands of motorcyclists gathered for motorcycle runs which ended in rioting, destruction of property, and in Riverside, two deaths. The events posed an awesome crowd control task for the small number of police officers in these two communities. In the summer of 1948, again in Riverside, Calif., 5,000 cyclists gathered, and again, the event turned into a riot. The Riverside police chief blamed this occurrence on visiting "outlaws," and the term "outlaws" began to be applied to individuals connected with some motorcycle clubs. Later, movies were made based upon incidents simi-

lar to the Hollister and Riverside events. Probably the most publicized of the movies was "The Wild Ones," in which bikers were portrayed as modern-day Robin Hoods seeking revenge on a world that did them wrong. This and several other similar movies romanticized motorcycle club behavior and sparked an interest, drawing others to motorcycle clubs.

Through the 1950's and early 1960's, police problems with motorcycle groups were primarily connected with controlling large gatherings. In July 1965, however, a rape incident occurred that changed the future role of the Hell's Angels. The gang held their annual rally at Bass Lake in California. Although the incident was relatively typical of problems connected with large gatherings of motorcyclists, media coverage primed the public for an incident and provided an "orgy of publicity that gave long dormant Hell's Angels eighteen years worth of exposure in six months and it naturally went to their heads."<sup>6</sup>

This creation of a national interest in motorcycle gangs in the 1960's was, in large part, a media phenomenon. Social scientists have identified the impact the media has upon behavior. The effects include not only changes in attitudes and values but also imitative behavior.<sup>7</sup> The media boost given the Hell's Angels encouraged similar behavior in other motorcycle gangs.

Many gang members are now in their midthirties,<sup>8</sup> and as the gangs matured, gang problems also changed. Police problems posed by outlaw gangs can be categorized into a number of areas, including crowd control, community fear, territorial battles, club dominance, rivalry over the control of narcotics and vice trade, and crime conspiracies.

#### Crowd Control

The frequent migration of gang members to rallies, such as annual Labor Day and Fourth of July runs, continue to draw police attention. Police agencies are spending valuable man-hours, both in planning and control of these large gatherings and in applying preventive measures to limit

problems with the groups. Additionally, there is a need for specific police intelligence-gathering activities, including identifying fugitives occasionally connected with some groups. Incidents occasionally occur in spite of police planning efforts.<sup>9</sup>

### Community Fear

A more pervasive problem is the perception citizens have of the danger posed by gangs in their communities. Reports of the presence of an active gang, though legitimate cause for citizen anxiety, are difficult for police to deal with until an incident occurs. Incidents in various parts of the country have caused citizen action against gang presence in the community.<sup>10</sup> In two cases, citizen concerns stirred action by city and county boards, precipitating charges that the police were afraid to deal with the gangs.<sup>11</sup>

### Territorial Battles

Battles for "turf" are a continuing law enforcement problem. Often, the rivalry results in violence confined between gang members.<sup>12</sup> Gang war deaths have resulted, however, in battles in public parking lots,<sup>13</sup> attacks upon gang clubhouses,<sup>14</sup> and firebomb and shotgun raids against homes.<sup>15</sup> Frequently, outsiders are injured by gang violence. In New York, 5 people were killed and 22 injured in a vengeance war,<sup>16</sup> and an innocent newsboy in Wisconsin was killed when he moved a bomb that was planted during a gang feud.<sup>17</sup>

### Rivalry for Crime Dominance

Because of a reluctance by group members to cooperate, it is often difficult to sort out the motivations for violence between gangs. Frequently, the feuds begin over another altercation. As time passes, a cycle of retaliation continues until either its momentum weakens or an incident demanding police attention develops. In other cases, however, disagreements are for much larger stakes. Charlotte, N.C., is one such example. Problems with

Hell's Angels, Outlaws, and other gangs continue as the gangs struggle to dominate the area's lucrative vice and narcotics trade.<sup>18</sup> Incidents in North Carolina have resulted in an intensified law enforcement effort against gang-related crime problems, including execution-style slayings.<sup>19</sup>

### Crime Conspiracies

In the 1970's, another problem surfaced which served as an indicator of deepening gang involvement in criminal activity. A complex interstate network of associations developed between rebel gangs, and this "brotherhood" provided links for more sophisticated criminal activities. Crime territories were determined, and fixed roles and characteristic ways of doing business evolved. Particularly worrisome to law enforcement officers were the characteristics of organization that

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---

made these groups so difficult to penetrate. The following components of organization similar to those seen among traditional organized crime groups were apparent among many outlaw gangs. These characteristics are perpetuated in gang activities today and warrant closer examination.

### Codes of Silence

"A Hell's Angel is an honor society, man. We live by some of the strictest rules going and if you break one, you might not have the chance to break another."<sup>20</sup> Attributed to a Hell's Angel member, this quotation describes the rules by which outlaws live.

A Hell's Angel member, turned Government witness, provided evidence of a code of silence by describing the killing of two probationary members over the mere suggestion that one was a police informer.<sup>21</sup> A Pagan gang member gave similar testimony. "'I just killed a snitch,' Boyd announced as he returned to the party. 'Is there any more?' As a Pagan prospect, Boyd had demonstrated his loyalty to the club."<sup>22</sup>

Because of a strictly enforced code, there are few discussions with outsiders about gang-related criminal activities. The code appears to be imposed upon nonmembers as well. Witness intimidation by gang members, both directly and indirectly, is an extension of this code and a problem officers frequently face in gang cases. The Margo Compton case is an example of what happened to one person who testified against Hell's Angels. Not only was she slain, following her court disclosure about a club member's involvement in drugs and prostitution, but also killed were her 6-year-old twin daughters and the 19-year-old son of her boyfriend.<sup>23</sup>

Motorcycle gang members' efforts at intimidation have also made police officers the target of gang violence. Police in New York arrested a gang member with a bomb, a revolver, and ammunition who said he wanted to blow up the police station.<sup>24</sup> A detective from Solano County, Calif. was crippled by a bomb blast in 1977 during his investigation of the Hell's Angels.<sup>25</sup> In Maryland, a deputy sheriff was shot and killed when he interrupted a Pagan gang member and an associate in a burglary.<sup>26</sup> In Garden Grove, Calif., a Hessian gang member shot his way out of a bar, killing one policeman and wounding four others.<sup>27</sup> In Portland, Oreg., an officer was killed in a raid on the Outsiders motorcycle gang headquarters.<sup>28</sup> These incidents, only a few of many, testify to officers' personal concern about working gang cases.<sup>29</sup>

### Mobility

The high degree of mobility of outlaw gangs is a hinderance to police agencies attempting to keep track of

and sort out the complex criminal connections among gangs and gang members. Outlaw rallies and funerals are attended by gang members from various parts of the country, making it difficult to identify individuals of police interest. These gatherings also provide opportunities for gang members to extend their criminal, as well as their social, networks.<sup>30</sup>

The connections between members of diverse gangs are being used to perpetuate and extend the flow of contraband and to further other criminal activity. The mobility of many individuals connected with motorcycle gangs is well-documented in police files. In fact, some gangs have formed chapters, called nomads, where members do not belong to clubs based in a specific city but are members of a chapter of transients.

### Security Networks

The extensive security precautions used by gang members also hinder law enforcement efforts. Police have discovered radio scanners in members' possession, and gang members and probates have been observed conducting surveillance of police officers and local prosecutors. Instances of attempted infiltration of Government and law enforcement agencies by gang members and associates have also been reported.<sup>31</sup> There are also reports of occasional gang efforts to obtain information from law enforcement agency employees.

### Criminal Enterprises

With an increasing level of criminal competence, gangs are committing more sophisticated crimes. The FBI and police departments throughout the United States are becoming more involved in investigations of outlaw gang members. In Indianapolis, Ind., police reported that gangs were "solidifying their ranks to form a national criminal network."<sup>32</sup> Reports of gang infiltration into legitimate businesses in the

South and West are being linked with an enormous increase in vice activities.<sup>33</sup> In North Carolina, gangs are being referred to as "the new mafia," a result of the movement of some members into drugs and prostitution connected with businesses such as "photo and art studios and dating services."<sup>34</sup> In various parts of the country, authorities have identified gang-dominated crime networks, including millions of dollars of narcotics, stolen property, firearms, and explosives, as well as the harboring of fugitives.<sup>35</sup> Reports have also surfaced indicating gang members have now graduated to "murder-for-hire" enterprises.<sup>36</sup>

The categories of gang problems law enforcement authorities face are numerous, and the nature and diversity of criminal enterprises associated with

**"With an increasing level of criminal competence, gangs are committing more sophisticated crimes."**

gang members are beginning to tax law enforcement resources. It is increasingly important, therefore, that law enforcement officials understand the behavior and characteristics unique to motorcycle gangs. The conclusion of this study will provide the reader with a psychological profile of outlaw motorcyclists. **FBI**

(Continued next month)

#### Footnotes

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- <sup>2</sup> John W. Howard, "Report of the Activities of Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs by the Task Force on Welfare Reform, hearings held October 12, 1979, in Washington, D.C." House Republican Research Committee, Washington, D.C., October, 1979.
- <sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the need for effective intelligence analysis to include studies of crime groups and their operations, see Peter A. Lupsha, "Steps Toward Strategic Analysis of Organized Crime," *The Police Chief*, May 1980, pp. 36-38.
- <sup>4</sup> POBOBS is an acronym for "Pissed Off Bastards of Bloomington."
- <sup>5</sup> Hunter Thompson, *Hell's Angels* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975), p. 85.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.
- <sup>7</sup> George Gerbner, School of Communications, University of Pennsylvania, in a presentation before the FBI National Executive Institute, Quantico, Va., December 2, 1977.

- <sup>8</sup> A sample by the author of 373 confirmed Outlaw gang members disclosed a median age of 34 years.
- <sup>9</sup> "Motorcycle Gangs Received Blame for Trouble Midwest Festival," *Corpus Christi Caller*, August 4, 1980.
- <sup>10</sup> Kathy O'Dell, "Cycle Gang Terrorize Neighbors," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, St. Louis, Mo., August 21, 1980.
- <sup>11</sup> J. Stryker Meyer, "Cycle Gang, Hostile Youths Breed Fear and Loathing in Morrisville," *Trenton Times*, Trenton, N.J., February 22, 1981. See also "Residents Threatened," *Washington Post*, July 21, 1973; "Town Worried Over Party for 5,000 Motorcyclists," *Houston Star*, August 28, 1980.
- <sup>12</sup> "Four Accused of Attempted Murder," *New York Times*, February 11, 1976, p. 6. See also Bill McKelway, "Area Slayings Most Bizarre of Long Series," *Time-Dispatch*, Richmond, Va., January 12, 1981, and Jon Slandefor, "Bikers Lie Low But Fears of War Mount," *San Diego Union*, San Diego, Calif., October 9, 1977.
- <sup>13</sup> "Fourteen Hurt at Camden Stadium as Gangs Exchange Gunfire," *New York Times*, November 23, 1979.
- <sup>14</sup> Patrick T. Morrison, "Fusillade Fells Gang Member," *Indianapolis Star*, Indianapolis, Ind., March 6, 1980.
- <sup>15</sup> Larry Ciko and Butch Badon, "Sidell Attack Gang-Inspired, Police Claim," *The Times-Picayune*, New Orleans, La., September 18, 1980.
- <sup>16</sup> "Fourteen Indicted in Four Murders," *Newsday*, April 2, 1971, p. 5.
- <sup>17</sup> "Bomb Kills Newspaper Carrier," *New York Times*, November 6, 1974.
- <sup>18</sup> Robin Clark and Tex O'Neill, "Bikers Survival Code Based on Bloodshed," *The Charlotte Observer*, Charlotte, N.C., August 17, 1981, p. 7A.
- <sup>19</sup> "Five Gang Members Slain in Clubhouse," *Houston Post*, Houston, Tex., July 5, 1979. See also "Slain Men Called Hell's Angels Pair," *Greensboro Record*, Greensboro, N.C., September 28, 1981, p. B3.
- <sup>20</sup> George Wetherm and Vincent Colnett, *A Wayward Angel* (New York: Richard Marck), p. 222.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.
- <sup>22</sup> Allen Davis, "The Last Ride of Amos Moses," *Pennsylvania Illustrated*, October 1979, p. 37.
- <sup>23</sup> James Long and James Duncan, "Hit Man Got \$10,000 for Oregon Murders," *The Oregon Journal*, Portland, Oreg., August 12, 1977, p. 1.
- <sup>24</sup> "Head of Cycle Gang is Accused of Possessing Bomb and Pistol," *New York Times*, August 15, 1973.
- <sup>25</sup> Howard Kohn, "Hell's Angels" *Rolling Stone*, April 5, 1979, p. 59.
- <sup>26</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Uniform Crime Reports*, "Law Enforcement Officers Killed," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979), p. 25.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, (1980), p. 33.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, (1979), p. 64.
- <sup>29</sup> For additional similar incidents, see "From the Police Blotter," *New York Times*, June 19, 1973, p. 43; *Los Angeles Times*, July 8, 1973, p. 25; *New York Times*, May 18, 1980, p. 29; *Tampa Tribune*, June 7, 1980.
- <sup>30</sup> Dan Lohwasser, "150 Hell's Angels Assemble at Slain Member's Funeral," *News and Observer*, Raleigh, N.C., October 2, 1981, p. 22. See also Michael Weinsain, "Police Going Over Who, What They Saw on Thursday," *Charlotte News*, p. A-6.
- <sup>31</sup> Dave Casey, "Threats Keep Outlaws in Business," *Sun Sentinel*, Ft. Lauderdale News, Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., March 4, 1978, p. 14A.
- <sup>32</sup> Patrick T. Morrison, "Local Outlaws Gang Getting Involved in Network of Crime," *Indianapolis Star*, Indianapolis, Ind., December 2, 1979, p. 11.
- <sup>33</sup> Rich Kurte and Henry T. Vogt, "Cycle Gangs on Move Here, Police Say," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, St. Louis, Missouri, March 30, 1981, p. D2. See also Kurte and Vogt, "Infiltration of Bars Called Part of Nationwide Trend," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, St. Louis, Mo., March 30, 1981, p. 2. and *Los Angeles Times*, April 19, 1977, p. 1.
- <sup>34</sup> Robin Clark and Tex O'Neill, "Shadowy Businesses Revolve Around Drugs, Theft," *The Charlotte Observer*, August 18, 1981, p. 6A.
- <sup>35</sup> Casey, *supra* note 31, p. 14. See also Jerry Kinser, "Nine Held in Motorcycle Thefts," *Daily Herald*, Gulfport, Miss., January 12, 1979, p. 1 and W.C. Johnson, "Motorcycle Gangs and White Collar Crime," *The Police Chief*, June 1981, p. 32.
- <sup>36</sup> "Ohio Gangs Ride Herd," *Dallas Morning News*, March 11, 1980.

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# Outlaw Motorcyclists A Problem for Police

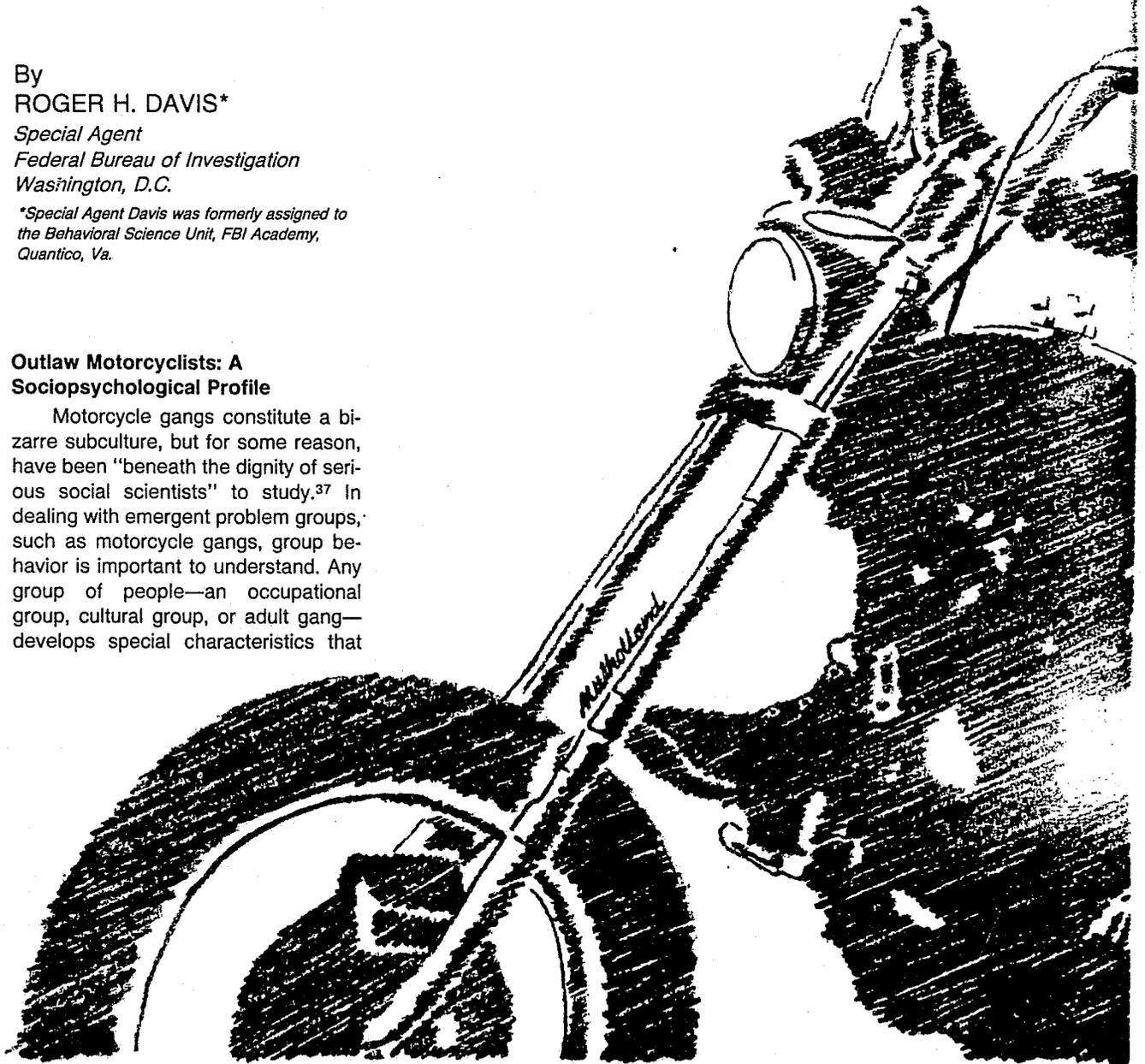
## (Conclusion)

By  
ROGER H. DAVIS\*  
*Special Agent  
Federal Bureau of Investigation  
Washington, D.C.*

*\*Special Agent Davis was formerly assigned to  
the Behavioral Science Unit, FBI Academy,  
Quantico, Va.*

### Outlaw Motorcyclists: A Sociopsychological Profile

Motorcycle gangs constitute a bizarre subculture, but for some reason, have been "beneath the dignity of serious social scientists" to study.<sup>37</sup> In dealing with emergent problem groups, such as motorcycle gangs, group behavior is important to understand. Any group of people—an occupational group, cultural group, or adult gang—develops special characteristics that



**"Motorcycle gangs constitute a bizarre subculture. . . ."**



set it apart from all others. A subculture may be based upon regional characteristics, common traits, occupations or interests, and may carry with it certain styles of dress and behavior.

A motorcycle gang subculture is based upon a number of common factors, including a mutual interest in motorcycles. Other characteristics, however, also draw people to outlaw gangs. Outlaw gangs differ from many other groups in that their behavior goes beyond the dominant characteristics that set many other groups apart. Outlaw gang members challenge dominant features of American society, not only with their criminal behavior but with overt actions intended to shock. The shocking behavior we often see is, in fact, an open break with the value system of society.<sup>38</sup>

Language can be a component of subculture, and the language of an outlaw gang member sets him apart from other groups. An outlaw motorcycle gang member's language is saturated with vulgarity and with terminology that denotes a different meaning to an outsider. Terms such as "ape-hangers," meaning high-rising handlebars, or a "fash truck," a van that follows the gang's motorcycle formation, are examples.<sup>39</sup>

Although these behavior patterns are subcultural characteristics, an understanding of the gang subculture is important because a look at the world as seen through the eyes of a gang member may aid the police officer in being more effective in dealing with motorcycle groups. Such an understanding is critical, since indications of future gang activities point toward a shift in behavior from the unruly free-wheeling individualist of the 1950's and 1960's to the older, wealthier, and more deeply connected outlaw of the present.



Special Agent Davis

Persons from different subcultural groups behave in ways that differ from those of the mainstream of American society. As one social scientist explained, value orientations differ among varying groups of people because the views and beliefs people have are the products of learning and group relations.<sup>40</sup> Most members of outlaw gangs are from lower or lower middle class levels of American society, and as such, bring with them their class-associated behaviors. Criminologist Walter Miller suggests that lower class people are characterized by distinctive values which not only differ from the values of the majority of American citizens but also conflict with our legal code.<sup>41</sup> As individuals with like values become more and more involved with outlaw gang members, some of these values are accentuated, reinforced, and accepted as modes of behavior within that group.

#### Gang Member Initiation

The process through which a potential member is assimilated into a gang is interesting. When a person expresses a desire to become a part of the group, he is sponsored by a member, is designated a probate, and serves a period of time in that status. The actual time period varies. With some groups it is a vague period that terminates when a group consensus is reached that the probate has met the test. Membership is gained after the process of assimilation and "testing" is satisfactorily completed. During the probationary period, the probate is required to submit to the desires of gang members, wait on them, and run errands. Some outlaw gangs have levied other requirements on probates, including the commission of felony violations witnessed by a member. These

requirements seem to vary with the confidence level the group has in any particular probate. Some groups may require probates to commit one or more criminal acts, while others have no such requirements.

The probationary period is a time of testing, but group influence on what behavior is desirable and what is undesirable is clearly taught. The probate learns that bizarre, shocking behavior is a way to "show class" and gain status. Criminal behavior may also be seen as desirable. During the probationary period, the probate comes to see deviant behavior as appropriate in his new role. Witnessed criminal behavior serves as a test to those probates whose reliability and loyalty to the group are questioned. It also serves to both filter out potential police informers and give the group some leverage over members. Outlaws believe that if some members have witnessed others commit a felonious act, the group's code of silence is more easily enforced.

Frequent close contact with group members, the teaching of group norms, and the membership requirements all mold the probate. He changes not only his behavior but his identity. The new identity is evident in the behavior that follows, which includes a symbolic attachment to the group represented by tattoos, a club logo appearing on members' clothes, especially on arms and backs.

Individual club names for some become the only names they are known by within the group and provide both a special personal identity and a group identity. Names such as Flapper, Spider, Greaser, Loser, Roach, Wild Man, and Zit are typical.

Outlaw gangs are ritualistic groups, and the importance of gang rituals in building probate loyalty and group cohesion should not be overlooked. Rituals, such as initiation ceremonies, funeral and wedding ceremonies, meetings, travel formations, and required motorcycle rallies, are significant events pulling the group together. Gangs exhibit their ritualistic nature in wearing certain patches for participation in events, in certain deviant acts, or for symbolically expressing the group position on issues such as drug usage (indicated by the patch "13") or motorcycle helmet laws.

When a probate has passed the test of acceptance, he will be formally initiated into the group. The initiation process is a ceremony that establishes a totally new identity with the group, and at the same time, serves to somewhat sever a new member's former identity with mainstream society. The initiation ceremony itself varies from club to club. Universally, however, it is

an event where the club jacket (colors) is initiated along with the new member. The person being initiated is sometimes required to lie on the ground while members pour oil or pig urine over them or while they urinate, defecate, or vomit on them. Whatever the process, the event itself provides a formal acknowledgement that the initiate is now part of a special society.

#### Hopelessness

Since outlaw gang members are primarily from the lower class, they hold values that are associated with persons at that societal level. As individuals with those values drift together and form gangs, some behavior is reinforced, and some characteristics become extreme. One class-level characteristic prevalent among gang members is hopelessness. The gang's existence seems to be the result of a need to deal with bitterness toward society. Members have little hope of succeeding in society in terms of living

up to societal expectations that require achievement and education. The gang offers an answer—it provides security for misfits in society. George Wethern, a Hell's Angel turned Government witness, identified the strong connection between his psychological needs and his gang associations when he said, "My self-esteem and my deepest friendships were bolted to my motorcycle."<sup>42</sup>

A poem in a magazine widely read by gang members typifies the hopelessness that pulls a member toward gang associations:

My dog has fleas and doesn't know  
where to scratch, my bike won't run  
and I have no place to crash, I just  
spent the day getting food from the  
trash, I think I'll go and score me  
some grass.

This o'l world ain't treating me right,  
it's the same old way from morning  
till night. I try being peaceful and end  
up in a fight, I'll just smoke a number  
and get my head right.

I go look for a job and get no place, I  
smile at my friends and get slugged  
in the face, I keep telling people I'm  
not running a race, I think I'll sit down  
and get stoned just a taste.

My chick just split with another man,  
I lie in the sun and can't get a tan,  
when I'm out in the streets there's  
always The Man, I'll go to a station  
and smoke in the can.

Well, that's my story from day to day,  
it never varies in any way, so if you  
need me—I'll be away, lying  
somewhere and smoking the hay.<sup>43</sup>



**"An outlaw gang is structured to allow the group its own standards, rules, rituals, status requirements, and tests to pass."**

The outlaw code is a code of mutual support—one for all, all for one. Mutual support combats the feeling of hopelessness and provides for some individual security needs. The gang-code requires that members rally to each other's aid, and evidence is mounting to indicate that the credo of mutual support extends to an opportunity to provide for financial security, as well. According to a former Hell's Angel, "... cohesion (no longer) was strictly a matter of fraternal pride. 'It was an insurance policy protecting our livelihood and keeping us out of the slammer. . . . By the late 1960's being a Hell's Angel had become a full-time job for many and at least one income supplement for most.'" <sup>44</sup>

The profits some gang members make in crime offer ample opportunity for members who so desire to "get a piece of the action." The group supports this activity in tangible ways. Bond money is quickly obtainable from club coffers or through loans from members. When 11 Hell's Angels were indicted in San Francisco, they were able to raise more than \$3 million in bail money, and when freed, they drove away in a limousine.<sup>45</sup>

The gang also fills other voids in its members' lives. Status and recognition from society, at large, have been withheld from most persons attracted to motorcycle gangs. The gang meets those needs by offering a special status with the group which comes with bizarre and sometimes criminal behavior. Where attaining meaningful roles in life has been difficult for the outlaw biker, the club offers specific group roles and the status, responsibility, and respect that follows.



**Group Structure**

Social scientists have studied secret societies and find a remarkable variety of formal and informal group structures dependent upon the centralization of control.<sup>46</sup> Outlaw gangs have an organizational structure that includes a group president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, enforcer, and road captain. In some gangs, the structure of individuals involved in criminal activities may resemble the organizational hierarchy. This seems to be more the case among older groups, such as some Hell's Angels chapters. For other groups, however, the criminal network associated with the gang has included connections among gang members and persons only tangentially associated with the group. In some of these instances, the criminal structure bears little resemblance to the formal club hierarchy.

Groups with a hierarchical criminal structure are of particular concern to law enforcement because the structure is an indicator of a movement toward a more deeply rooted criminal organization. According to a member of the Hell's Angels, "... club structure was easily adapted to drug trafficking. All essential jobs could be filled with club members—distributors, dealers, enforcers, transporters."<sup>47</sup> With solidifying criminal organization, law enforcement efforts targeted against such groups also become more difficult. Because of this movement by some groups toward a deepening involvement in criminal activities, police officials warn of the necessity for early law enforcement intervention.

An outlaw gang is structured to allow the group its own standards, rules, rituals, status, requirements, and tests to pass. Within these outlaw subcultures, certain universal characteristics appear.

Strength or toughness appears as a universal gang requirement that seems to confer status. Members flaunt their tough image.<sup>48</sup> They seem obsessed with height, muscles, and obesity. Tattoos are particularly prevalent. Social scientists who have studied tattoos and established a relationship between maladjustment and tattoos report that persons with large numbers of tattoos tend to be more deviant, hostile, impulsive, and sociopathic than persons without tattoos.<sup>49</sup> Tattooing by gang members is not only indicative of possible maladjustment and a desire to identify with the gang but is sometimes an outlaw group requirement.

The motorcycle itself is an extension of this concern with masculinity and is used not only to attract attention out as an expression of power. Weapons are also an outlaw obsession and appear as a further extension of power and masculinity.

A sexual fertility theme is consistently present among outlaw bikers.<sup>50</sup> Sex rituals are occasionally included as part of the initiation ceremony, club meeting, or motorcycle run. Sexual "achievements" by members are rewarded by the group, are seen as conferring status, and are formally depicted by various colored jacket patches denoting witnessed sex acts. In effect, these status symbols are "merit badges" for deviant acts.<sup>51</sup>

Risk-taking behavior is also prevalent among gang members. Shocking behavior and hedonism bring status that comes with the group's distortions of society's values.

Members of outlaw motorcycle gangs, particularly those attracting police attention, frequently have dominant personality characteristics. The

sociopathic personality is not only the most common criminal personality but also the most dangerous and difficult to identify and is characterized by a lack of guilt or remorse.<sup>52</sup>

The sociopathic outlaw biker believes the world wants to be like him. He is OK—it is everyone else who is out of step. Although appearing tightly bonded to the group, the outlaw biker is a free spirit who has very little loyalty to others. His essential commitment is to himself. This characteristic makes him a potential informer, but only in those instances when there is clearly some benefit in it for him. Police officers working with this type of personality find that the gang member is seldom targetable until after he is charged with a crime and is faced with the choice of either informing or going to prison. Interestingly, the gang member exhibiting this personality needs to prove himself constantly through bizarre or criminal behavior. The group allows him an excuse to become deviant to impress his brother gang members. This type of person is self-

centered and has difficulty with interpersonal relationships. Even within the group, he has difficulty keeping close friends because of his irresponsible and cynical nature.

The sociopathic group member often has little tolerance for frustration. He externalizes life pressures by blaming others for his problems. This inclination to place blame elsewhere is combined with an impulsiveness that produces an individual who fails to think through the consequences and irrationality of his crimes. It follows, then, that a sociopathic gang member will often have a police record that appears to show no pattern of criminal specialty. Rather, because of his unpredictable nature, he is often involved in a variety of crimes and is occasionally motivated by impulse.

Police dealing with gang members know about the impulsive nature of gangs. An incident in Houston, Tex., exemplifies the dangerousness of some gang members. A member of the Conquistadors gang, reacting to the discovery that an 11-year-old boy had been fishing in a pond on the gang member's property, fired an M-2 machinegun into the boy's home, injuring the boy.<sup>53</sup>

Of concern to police is that this kind of impulsiveness is often connected with violence. Not only does this type of person act out his tensions, but he has no worry or remorse about his behavior. He feels no remorse because, in fact, he feels little guilt. He reacts, often with violence rather than worry, about what is bothering him. He does not learn from bad past experiences because he gives them little thought—he is simply reactive.

A sociopathic gang member may exhibit deceitful and manipulative behavior, but be likeable on the surface. When it is to his advantage, he puts on



**"The extent of criminal involvement of outlaw motorcycle gang members is extensive, and the behavioral nature of the group is complex."**

a good front, becomes outwardly friendly, and feigns repentance and remorse. Officers experienced with gang members of this personality style know, however, that this friendly disposition is only a temporary first impression.

Motorcycle gangs are particularly attractive to persons exhibiting some of the tendencies discussed above—they are mutually supportive. To the sociopathic gang member, violence is exciting and easy, since he feels no anxiety or guilt for what he has done. The group, in turn, needs his muscle to establish and maintain its reputation and to support and enforce criminal activities. The group meets his needs in turn for his daring. Since the sociopathic personality style is frequently encountered in outlaw gangs, officers who handle gang investigations have learned to use extreme caution with the members.

#### **Gang Women**

A final important aspect of gang investigations and an aid to an understanding of gang behavior is the role of women and their association with the gang. Although women are usually not gang members, they perform an important function in many gang-related crimes. Initially attracted because of the excitement gang life offers, many women are later held involuntarily or stay out of fear.<sup>54</sup> They may be the "property" of one member only or used by several gang members. The female role is that of a servant. Women are looked upon as objects to be used for sexual, criminal, or personal purposes. The women who allow themselves to remain in this role seem to be best characterized as inadequate personality types. They have relatively poor judgment, not because they do not care but because they are inept.

Gang women feel guilty for failing to live up to the expectations of others; they are also less reactive to pressure than their male associates. They seem to internalize life's pressures rather than blaming others. Consequently, gang women are attracted to the dominant personalities of some gang members and are easily used by them. Because of fear and a relatively low level of self-esteem, and often simply because of no place to go, the gang "old lady" or "mama" feels unable to break away. Instead, she develops a strong dependency. Not unlike some battered women, she may even accept responsibility for being abused and may feel guilty for not living up to a gang member's expectations.

For many gang women, sex becomes a means to establish intimacy. The need for affection and self-esteem is strong, and exploitive sexual relations with male members and associates become confused with affection.

It is, in part, because of these behavioral dynamics that officers investigating gang activities often have difficulty developing gang women as informants. Fear and the need to depend upon gang men produces a loyalty that is difficult to overcome. Investigators often find gang women most helpful with information when their associations with gang members weaken and loyalties shift. Unfortunately, information received then is often outdated.

#### **Conclusion**

The extent of criminal involvement of outlaw motorcycle gang members is extensive, and the behavioral nature of the group is complex. There is no easy path to dealing with the criminal activi-

ties of these groups. Any law enforcement officer who has investigated crimes by outlaw motorcycle gang members knows the lengthy plodding effort these complex cases require. Techniques that are, however, essential in gang investigations include the development by a gang investigator of an understanding of the group's "culture" and the ability to apply knowledge of gang personality types and behavior characteristics for the purpose of more effective information-gathering from gang members. **FBI**

#### **Footnotes**

<sup>37</sup> Randal Montgomery, "The Outlaw Motorcycle Subculture," *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Corrections*, vol. 18, No. 4, October 1976, p. 332.

<sup>38</sup> Although the term "subculture" will be used throughout this article to refer to customs and beliefs of outlaw motorcycle gangs, a more specific term "contraculture" seems appropriate. See J. Milton Yinger, "Contraculture and Subculture," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 25, No. 5, October 1960, p. 628. In a contraculture, the value conflict with society is central. Outlaw gangs are contracultural groups in the sense they appear as "subsocieties" with emergent norms in conflict with society.

<sup>39</sup> *Royal Canadian Mounted Police Gazette*, vol. 42, No. 10, 1980, p. 37.

<sup>40</sup> Edwin H. Sutherland, *Principles of Criminology* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1947), p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> Walter B. Miller, "Lower Class Culture as a Generating Milieu of Gang Delinquency," *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 14, No. 3, 1958, p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> Wethern and Colnett, supra note 20, p. 63.

<sup>43</sup> P. Overholtz, untitled, *In the Wind* 6, No. 6, (Burbank, Calif.: Paisano Publications, 1981).

<sup>44</sup> Wethern and Colnett, supra note 20, p. 108.

<sup>45</sup> Ross, supra note 1.

<sup>46</sup> Bonnie H. Erickson, "Secret Societies and Social Structure," *Social Forces*, vol. 60, No. 1, September 1981, p. 188.

<sup>47</sup> Wethern and Colnett, supra note 20, p. 336.

<sup>48</sup> Montgomery, supra note 37, p. 336.

<sup>49</sup> Robert J. Howell, I Reed Payne, and Allan J. ... "Differences Among Behavioral Variables, Personality Characteristics and Personality Scores of Tattooed and Nontattooed Prison Inmates," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, vol. 8, No. 1, January 1971, p. 37.

<sup>50</sup> Montgomery, supra note 37, p. 336.

<sup>51</sup> *RCMP Gazette*, supra note 39, p. 21.

<sup>52</sup> Thomas Strentz and Conrad Hassel, "The Sociopath—A Criminal Enigma," *Journal of Police Science and Administration*, vol. 6, No. 2, January 1978, p. 135.

<sup>53</sup> Burke Watson, "Kill All the Kids," *Houston Chronicle*, Houston, Tex., July 31, 1980.

<sup>54</sup> *RCMP Gazette*, supra note 39, p. 18.