

MURDER AT PORT ARTHUR

WAS IT A CONSPIRACY ?

By

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Outline

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MURDER AT PORT ARTHUR WAS IT A CONSPIRACY?

First reports

A newspaper report on the morning after the Port Arthur massacre said, "A Gunman who shot dead at least 33 [actually 35] people and injured 18 others was holed up with three hostages in a guesthouse in Tasmania last night [Sunday 28 April 1996]. In what is believed to be the world's worst massacre by a lone gunman,..."¹

A conspiracy theory

There are many conspiracy theories in the world today. One conspiracy theory alleges that the massacre at Port Arthur was planned and carried out by a Government agent so that people would be persuaded to hate firearms as a first step in a political process to remove firearms from the public. Those who promote the conspiracy theory make the claim that overseas interests, along with the support of the Government (perhaps unwitting support), are trying to disarm Australians.

Several prominent people have given support to the theory. Pauline Hanson, founder of the 'One Nation' party initially held to the theory. The credit for giving up on the theory probably goes to her handlers. Also, Dorothy Pratt, the Independent State member based in Kingaroy Queensland gave support to the conspiracy theory in 2004 when an article supporting the claim appeared in one of her political newsletters that year. Ron Owen, who is based in Gympie has given his support through his publication, "Lock Stock and Barrel". Email letters in support of the theory have been widely distributed. I received a copy early in 2005. Finally, Joe Vialls, through his book "Deadly Deception at Port Arthur" gives support to the theory.

Firstly, let me reveal to you something of my background. I am not a lawyer, police officer or even a journalist. My particular interest is in apologetics (the defence of the Christian faith), so why get involved in a murder mystery? It has become clear to me that the mistakes people made in judging the Azaria Chamberlain case in the 1980s, and this case, are the same mistakes that are usually made when people come to a false view of Christianity. In the 1980s people used faulty reasoning to convict Lindy Chamberlain, in this case, people are using faulty reasoning to try and set Martin Bryant free. I will come back to the Lindy Chamberlain trial and the defence of the Christian faith later, but first, I will deal with the massacre at Port Arthur.

There are three versions of the conspiracy theory:

1. Martin Bryant was not the gunman. A Government agent was the gunman. He made sure all of his victims died by shooting them through the head to prevent any report of his true identity.
2. Again, Martin Bryant was not the gunman. Someone who had the support of government officials was the real gunman. Some of his victims survived, but not all agree that the assailant was Martin Bryant.
3. The gunman was Martin Bryant, but Government agents took advantage of his unbalanced mental state, and set

him up to murder the people at Port Arthur.

The gunman left no survivors

It is claimed in this view that the assailant was a well trained government agent who shot everyone in the head to ensure no person could identify him. Those who hold to this view just haven't checked the facts. One of the survivors described his ordeal on national television. Several others survived also. As this view is simply based on 'pub talk', I will quickly move on to the next version of the events.

The gunman was not Martin Bryant

A widely distributed Email says in defence of this second position:

"The gunman was never properly identified. A young woman who ate her lunch near the gunman just before 1.30, said his face was freckled. The wounded Graham Collyer, who had the best opportunity to observe the gunman, said his face was pock-marked or acne-marked. Neither description fits Martin Bryant whose complexion was clear and smooth. Graham Collyer says that it was NOT Bryant who shot him."²

This Email makes the claim that the police investigation was not thorough because no finger prints were taken from the drinking glass, Solo can or fork which had been used by the murderer just prior to the shooting.

Another claim is that, "Just before the shootings, the only two policeman stationed some miles away were called even further away on a wild goose chase. They were sent to the Coal Mine at Salt Water River, to investigate a drug stash removing them from any possibility of getting to Port Arthur in a hurry."

Also, adding suspicion to the official story is the fact that ex-NSW Premier, Barry Unsworth predicted the possibility of a massacre in Tasmania. One conspiracy theorist puts forward that possibility quite clearly when he says, "... maybe ex-NSW Premier, Barry Unsworth let the cat out of the bag when he issued a warning about a massacre in Tasmania long before the event happened."³

Then there is the claim that a mortuary truck was in a nearby town when the tragedy struck. Several other problems of a less serious nature are presented by conspiracy theorists.

Perhaps the man who has worked the hardest to present the conspiracy case is Joe Vialls from Western Australia. The main argument that he brings to bear on the case is the claim that the gunman exhibited extraordinary shooting skills, killing or wounding his victims in the Broad Arrow Café in the remarkably quick time of just ninety seconds. Joe argues that the speed and accuracy of the shooter on that fateful day is far beyond the capability of the intellectually impaired Martin Bryant. He believes the real assailant was probably a well-trained agent from the Middle East who wore a blonde wig to disguise his true identity and put the blame on the unsuspecting Martin Bryant.

As Joe Vialls has put forward the most thorough conspiracy theory case with his book, 'Deadly Deception At Port Arthur', I will deal primarily with the points he raises in his book. My copy of his book was purchased in April 2005. The section before the foreword states that it is the sixth printing. It further states that: "This printing includes a new prologue ..." I suspect that Joe has made minor changes to each printing he has put out, in which case, it is his sixth edition, not sixth printing. A new printing refers to a new print run without changes. Page numbers quoted in this paper in reference to Joe's book refer to the sixth edition (2001). His first edition came out in 1997.

The credentials of Joe Vialls

Joe does not list any formal qualifications. He describes himself as an independent investigative journalist. He claims to have had thirty years direct experience of international military and oilfield operations, but does not spell out what that experience was. The book carries no recommendations from police, journalists, lawyers or anyone else for that matter. The book is primarily his own view of the events at Port Arthur. One of the many problem I have with this book is that it doesn't even have the official support of those in the gun lobby who support the conspiracy theory.

What Others say:

The editor of 'Shooters News' says, "Joe persists in sticking to the 90 SECONDS IN THE CAFÉ lie claiming only a professional anti-terrorist gunman could have done it and only those type of guys are in the Middle East. In recently published articles he cites an Isreali (sic) group. This is despite the fact Wendy who was there has told him it was not 90 seconds but 5 minutes yet Joe still pushes this line." ⁴

If Joe is not listening to Wendy, we must wonder who else he is not listening to because their witness does not support his story. Mick Sargent who had the best view of the gunman, and who was shot and wounded in the café, does not state that the shooting was fast. Nor is the fast shooting story supported by any other witness.

If you read some of the many pages that Joe has posted to the Internet, you will find he has made some amazing discoveries, which again, are not supported by other journalists. For instance:

Plane crash conspiracy

Another of Joe Vialls conspiracies involves a plane crash. The editor of "Shooter's News" says in response to this conspiracy theory: "... he [Joe Vialls] claims that the Bijlmer crash is an example of a crash where the width of the impact hole was less than the width of the wingspan. The wingspan of a Boeing 747-200F is 212 feet and he claims that the hole in the apartment block is less than half that. This claim is false, and once again Joe has produced an article full of discrepancies, misleading statements and outright lies. Both of Joe's articles (with comment) are repeated below. But first, we will deal with one of the outright lies. Joe states that:

"We know from the official accident reports that

although now fatally under powered, El Al Flight 1862 remained under control while descending into the building, and thus was horizontally orientated at the point of impact".

This is a bald-faced lie, premised on the fact that the reader is unlikely to read the official accident report, which is in Dutch. If you can read Dutch, the official report (which was finally published in 1998) is to be found at

<http://www.luchtvaartbeleid.nl/nr/dglresource/upload/rapport.pdf>

Even if you cannot read Dutch, the pictures and graphics still tell a story. Even without reading the report, it is easily established that El Al Flight 1862 did NOT crash horizontally into the apartment block.

Also, consider how desperate one has to be to make the absolutely ridiculous statement:

"El Al Flight 1862 remained under control while descending into the building".

In a feeble attempt to back up his (frankly, quite ridiculous) assertion, Joe also states that:

"What Henk Prijt Junior saw was Israeli El Al Flight 1862, a massive 747 Jumbo freighter with a wingspan of 212 feet, crashing horizontally into the apartment block".

Here, Joe avoids the direct lie. He just implies that (Dutch citizen) Henk Prijt Junior stated that a massive 747 Jumbo freighter with a wingspan of 212 feet, crashed horizontally into the apartment block. In fact, Henk Prijt Junior, said nothing of the sort. Joe just deceptively implies that he did. And, just in case you do not yet believe this lie, Joe repeats it again. "El Al Flight 1862, a Boeing 747-200, had a wingspan of 212 feet, is known to have crashed with its wings level" ⁵

Quite clearly, Joe does not have the respect and support of those who are well informed about this crash. Another subject on which he does not have wide support is that of the shooting of Yvonne Fletcher.

Yvonne Fletcher

On 17 April 1984 Yvonne Fletcher, a policewoman, was watching over demonstrators outside the Libyan Embassy when suddenly there was the burst of gunfire and she fell to the pavement and died. In regard to this incident, Joe says, "The bullet entered WPC Fletcher's upper right back at sixty degrees then sliced down through her rib cage, ... It was an absolute scientific impossibility for that shot to have been fired from the Libyan Embassy, and the steep angle of entry of the bullet limited the firing point to one floor of only one building: the top floor of Enserch House, an American multinational building staffed by personnel with documented links to the international intelligence community." ⁶

In light of the revelation that Joe got the angle of the aircraft wrong, we should look critically at Joe's claim that Yvonne Fletcher was shot from an angle of sixty degrees. Did the bullet really pass through her body at an angle of sixty degrees? If so, did it hit bone and deflect to an angle of sixty degrees, or was Yvonne leaning forward at the time of the bullet strike? We simply don't know, therefore we

can't look at the sixty degree angle claim as hard evidence.

In writing his report, Joe counts on the fact that most readers will not be able to check what he is saying against what others have reported. 'Time' magazine says regarding this incident, "... a political demonstration was taking place outside the Libyan embassy. Only about 70 opponents of Libyan Leader Muammar Gaddafi were on hand, chanting slogans like 'Down with Gaddafi' and carrying placards declaring 'Gaddafi kills students'. Many of the demonstrators wore stocking caps and masks to conceal their identities, since they had good reason to fear retaliation by agents of the Libyan dictator. ... Among the police on duty was Constable Yvonne Fletcher, 25, who stood facing the protesters..." The magazine further reports, "Outside the Libyan embassy on Tuesday morning, spectators had noted the direction from which the hail of bullets had come. 'Someone stuck a submachine gun out an upper window of the embassy and began to fire,' said one eyewitness. 'It was quite a short burst.' ... Eleven people were hit by the machine-gun fire, and fell like stones." ⁷

Joe doesn't tell you that there was a large group of witnesses directly outside the embassy who "noted the direction from which the hail of bullets had come". Also, those who investigated the shooting would have been able to establish the direction of the fire from the bullet marks left on the ground. Joe informs the reader of his book that the BBC would not support his story that Yvonne Fletcher was shot from another building. I for one am not surprised. I don't think the BBC would want to insult the intelligence of the many witnesses outside the embassy who heard the sound of gunfire come from the direction of the embassy and not from any other building. Also, the people at Enserch House did not hear any small-arms fire come from their building.

I believe Joe has confused himself with not very good scientific evidence. That reminds me of a conversation between my uncle who managed a farm some years back, and a scientist. The scientist informed him that some trees on his farm were very old and that he should look after them. My uncle was able to tell him that the trees he referred to grew up after he bought the property back in the early 1960s. Here again, eyewitness evidence wins over alleged scientific evidence.

Joe does not inform the reader that the actions of the Gaddafi government in firing upon its own nationals demonstrating outside the Libyan embassy is in keeping with the past history of the government. Time magazine gives a more thorough report. It says regarding the incident, "For four years now, the Gaddafi government has committed a series of assassinations of Libyan nationals in at least four European cities. Last week's attack was the latest and the most brazen." ⁸

Joe's ability to see conspiracies in major events is not limited to the murder of Yvonne Fletcher, mass shootings and plane crashes. Lets move on to the Boxing Day Tsunami.

Boxing Day Tsunami

If you believe all the discoveries Joe Vials has published, then you would have to conclude that he is the

world's best reporter. Among the many discoveries he has made - but other reporters have missed - is the nuclear explosion near Sumatra discovery. He claims the boxing day Tsunami (26 January 2005) was not a natural disaster, but a planned event. He believes the Americans placed a nuclear bomb in the Sumatran Trench. When the bomb exploded, it triggered the Tsunami. He says:

"Did New York Orchestrate The Asian Tsunami? With Afghanistan and Iraq already lost, the Wall Street bankers were all desperately looking for other ways to control our world, when suddenly and very conveniently, the Sumatran Trench exploded. Trick or Treat?" ⁹

There are two issues here, first, a banking conspiracy that Joe obviously believes in, and the bomb in the trench. I will deal firstly with the banking conspiracy.

It is clear from the above statement that Joe Vials believes in what I call the 'World' or 'Banking' conspiracy in which it is alleged that a group of wealthy bankers - mostly Jews - are trying to control the world. Sometimes sections from 'Revelation' - the last book of the Bible are woven into the conspiracy. At first glance, this theory can look very convincing. Those who do think it is convincing are encouraged to read my paper on the international bankers conspiracy theory (Bank Consp.pdf). See also Conspiracies.htm available from my home page at: www.defenceofthefait.org

As for the Tsunami, sensitive instruments can detect volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and nuclear explosions on the other side of the earth. Good instruments and a well-trained staff can usually detect the difference between the three.

Joe Vials makes the claim that seismologists in India detected a nuclear explosion rather than seismic activity from an undersea earthquake. I suspect (if the claim is true) the Indians initially thought it was a nuclear explosion and Joe has decided to make capital on their initial error. It stretches the bounds of credibility to believe the Indians would not protest to the world that the devastation was manmade rather than natural if that is what they truly believed.

A problem for his theory is that the Tsunami had the force of thousands of atomic bombs. Joe thinks only one bomb was used. Another problem is that a nuclear explosion is easy to detect. Apart from the unique seismic activity, the explosion would leave traces of nuclear radiation in the water. The Indonesians would certainly lead a worldwide condemnation of this type of action.

Another problem for Joe's claim is that there was a second quake in the region and it was different from the first. The quake struck on Tuesday 29 March 2005 with a magnitude of 8.7. It caused a great deal of panic, but no large fast moving wave. It was different because on that occasion, the earth moved downwards rather than upwards. On Boxing Day, it was the sudden upward movement of the earth which caused the devastating Tsunami. ¹⁰

If atomic bombs had been used on both occasions, the results would have been similar, rather than different.

Finally, the claim that any US government official would allow an atomic bomb to be used in such a reckless manner is simply absurd.

Is Joe Vialls anti-Semitic?

When Prince Harry hired a German army uniform complete with swastika, and wore it to a party, he was condemned by the media for his insensitive action and he later apologised. For most people, that is the end of the matter, but not for Joe Vialls. Joe has attacked the media through his home page, describing the media comments as a 'massive worldwide Jewish attack'. He says:

"I do not normally comment on actions by religious groups or cults of any persuasion, but the recent massive worldwide Jewish attack on 20 year-old Prince Harry, son of Prince Charles and third in line for the British throne, cannot be allowed to go unchallenged and unanswered. Believe me, if this obscene attack had been orchestrated by Christians, Hindus, Muslims or Buddhists I would be equally scathing, but it was not."

Those are rather strong words for such a small incident, but it doesn't stop there, he also seems to be troubled by the fact that in films, Hitler's Nazis party (National Socialists) do not get favourable coverage. He is also upset by the fact that in Germany, you can not deny the holocaust (the deliberate slaughter of six million Jews in Hitler's death camps). Joe says on his web site:

"In brief, Prince Harry wore a hired WWII German Army Afrika Corps uniform complete with a swastika to a private fancy dress party. You think this is a big deal? Not at all, because over the last thirty years I have watched successive Jewish stage and film producers use identical uniforms and swastikas in multiple attempts to denigrate the German people in general, and so-called German 'Nazis' (National Socialists) in particular.

This deliberate western media demonization of the German people has been so successful, that nowadays in Germany itself it is impossible to deny 'The Jewish Holocaust' without being automatically thrown in prison for two years [no appeals considered], and the swastika has been outlawed, despite its humble ancient origin representing the revolving sun, fire, or life."¹¹

It seems that Joe Vialls needs to study modern history. The holocaust did take place. As testimony to that fact, there are holocaust museums in both Israel and Germany. It is also well reported in encyclopaedias and history books. Because of the conflict between the Arabs and Israel, some of the Arab nations have engaged in a programme of disinformation in which they have tried to propagate the lie that the holocaust did not take place. It seems that Joe has swallowed that lie. A very helpful book on the situation in the Middle East is titled, "Facts on the Middle East Conflict" by Dr. Randall Price. He has a Ph. D. in Middle Eastern Studies. His book was published (2003) by 'Harvest House Publishers', unlike Joe's book which is published by himself, probably because he can not find someone who is prepared to publish his outrageous claims which lack any real

substance.

Much of the above is a summary of what I have been able to discover about the confusing 'conspiracy' world of Joe Vialls by simply logging onto the Internet and entering 'Joe Vialls' into the search engine. The reader is invited to try that exercise himself if he wants more information on the views of Joe Vialls.

Joe, in the foreword to his book says, "Those still in doubt, are invited to look at the new startling photographic evidence on page sixty-one." I looked at the evidence on page sixty-one and found it to be very much less than startling. On that page, Joe presents the reader with two photographs which he claims were taken at the same time. He claims that three men standing at the front of the café are the same in both photos. Unfortunately for his argument, they are not the same. The man on the left in the top photo is wearing a short-sleeve shirt, while the man on the left in the bottom photo is in a long-sleeved shirt and is wearing a tie (image quality is poor).

The professional shooter

Joe says, "Whoever was on the trigger that fateful day demonstrated professional skills equal to some of the best Special Forces shooters in the world."¹² As someone who has had plenty of experience as a shooter and who qualified as a marksman during my combat training in the Air Force in 1969, I would rate the shooting skills of the mass murderer at somewhere between average and poor.

Mike Bingham who gives a very thorough report of what happened at Port Arthur in his book, "Suddenly One Sunday" reports that "Martin shot an Asian woman, then he spun round and aimed for Mick's head. Mick dived for the floor. The bullet grazed the top of Mick's head. He was bleeding, and at first, he thought he was going to die, but later realised the wound was not serious, so he would live."¹³

I could hit tin cans from a free-standing position at a distance of 20 metres. Thankfully, Martin Bryant only grazed the head of a much larger target at less than half the distance. Mick Sargent was not the only person to witness Martin shooting people,

Mike Bingham further reports that "Kingston, an unarmed security officer was in the car park when he heard loud banging coming from the Broad Arrow Café. He looked in and saw twelve people shot before he escaped out a door, he realised he had no chance of overpowering the man and warned others to keep clear of the Café."¹⁴

Neither Mick Sargent who was in the café the whole time, or the security officer who saw twelve people shot, reported anything particularly skilful about the shooting on that day, also, they were able to identify the man as Martin Bryant. It must be remembered that Martin has fairly distinct features with his smooth fair complexion and blond hair.

Joe reports that 22 people were injured (page 9), that's 22 people who can report to the police what happened, and that's not counting the many others who saw what happened and were not injured.

Martin Bryant shot 57 people on that Sunday (35 killed, and 22 injured, using Joe's figures on p. 11.). 35.5% were left injured, that's more than one in three, and in most cases, at close range. Those figures dash any claim that the shooter was a remarkable marksman; a claim that Joe harps on throughout his book. None of the eyewitnesses or the police investigating the shootings claim that the killer was a remarkable marksman.

Intellectually impaired

Joe makes much of the fact that Martin Bryant is intellectually impaired to the extent that he was awarded a pension. He relates an incident in which it is alleged that Martin went to 'Guns and Ammo' in New Town with a rifle wrapped in a towel. He then "... muttered that 'something was wrong with it' and promptly handed the package muzzle-first across the counter. ... 'Martin' had absolutely no idea how to load, cock, aim, fire, or unload, assault weapons of any kind."¹⁵ The above claim loses sight of the fact that any person who can drive a car - Martin did drive a car - is smart enough to use a rifle after just five minutes of instruction. The fact that Martin drove a car is reported towards the middle of Joe's book.

Joe says with regard to the questioning of Martin's mother just a few hours before his capture, "The officer went on to ask [Carleen] whether her son owned a yellow Volvo with roof racks, which she said he did. He then asked whether it had a surfboard on top. Carleen responded 'I don't know'."¹⁶ After giving us the impression that Martin is too intellectually impaired to operate a rifle, he now has to admit that Martin is actually smart enough to own and drive a car.

The confirmation from the mother of Martin that he owns a yellow Volvo is deeply embarrassing to Joe's argument, so he suggests to the reader the police had no right to question her. He says, "This activity [the questioning of Carleen] outside the direct chain of command then provided 'corroborative evidence' that Martin Bryant was the shooter at Seascope, ..."¹⁷ It would actually be highly unusual for police to not question a close relative of a murderer who was still at large.

Martin loved shooting

"Barry Featherstone, a farmer who lived nearby, [Bryant] says Bryant liked to roam the countryside late at night, firing bullets at who knows what, while neighbours locked their doors."¹⁸ Martin's mother did not know about her son's shooting activity, and Joe uses her ignorance as evidence that Martin was not a shooter. The police knew because they were informed by the scarred neighbours about his shooting activities at night. There was little the police could do because he had not broken any gun laws. At that time, Tasmania had the weakest gun laws in Australia. It is not surprising that Martin's mother did not know he was firing shots at night. He was not living with his mother, and the police are not obliged to report to mothers on what their mature-age sons are up to. Martin knew his neighbours did not approve of his shooting activities, so it is unlikely that he would tell his mother.

It will take a massacre in Tasmania

Back in December 1987, former NSW premier Barrie Unsworth said, "It will take a massacre in Tasmania before we get gun law reform in Australia."¹⁹ That statement - reported in several media outlets - has been taken out of context by some in the gun lobby to support the claim that some in the government wanted a massacre, or even engineered the Port Arthur shootings in order to disarm Australians.

The above statement is in the context of the Victorian Cain government attempting to get a quorum on uniform gun laws in Australia following the Hoddle and Queen Street shootings. In frustration at the lack of progress in gun control reform, Unsworth "... stormed out of the meeting and declared on the steps of the old Parliament House in Canberra: 'It will take a massacre in Tasmania before we get gun law reform in Australia'". But why did Unsworth mention Tasmania? He could hardly be planning a massacre in Tasmania. His statement would give the game away. He quite logically mentioned Tasmania and not NSW or any other State because Tasmania was well-known by those seeking gun control reform to have the weakest gun control laws in the country.²⁰

Regarding Tasmania's gun laws back in 1996, "The Bulletin" says, "... Tasmania is generally regarded as having Australia's least stringent legislation; there is limited gun registration, licences are for life, and automatic and semiautomatic weapons are readily available."²¹

Further problems

Joe reports, "On the day of the massacre, an anonymous caller reporting a big stash of heroin decoyed the only two policemen on the Tasmanian Peninsula to a remote location at Saltwater River."²² Their placement at Saltwater River meant they could not respond quickly to calls for help.

Without knowing who made the call to the police, it is difficult to come to any firm conclusion regarding this incident. It may have been Martin Bryant himself. Joe does not know the identity of this person.

Joe makes the claim that the shooter at the Broad Arrow café fired from the right hip. He then states that "... Martin Bryant always fired his Webley air rifle from the left shoulder, because he is and has always been a left-handed shooter." The problem with this argument is that military style semiautomatic firearms do not come in left-handed configuration. That means the hot shell, when it is ejected from the rifle, is ejected from the right hand side of the weapon. It is possible that Martin felt comfortable shooting from the right hip or that he simply wanted to avoid being hit in the right arm with a hot shell. Also, Martin did not shoot everyone from the hip, he actually aimed the rifle at Mick Sargent.²³

Joe complains that Wendy Scurr was not called upon to give evidence at Martin Bryant's trial. He says, "... Wendy [Scurr] made that first critical telephone call and then entered the Broad Arrow Café to help the injured ... She offered the police additional information about the sequence of events

but says her interview was abruptly terminated. On 15th October 1966 Wendy received a letter from the Director of Public Prosecutions stating she would not be required to give evidence at the trial of Martin Bryant, though it is hard to imagine anyone better placed to provide an accurate account of events that day".²⁴

At this point, it is clear that Joe has lost sight of the facts. It was Mick Sargent who was inside the café - along with several others - who were able to report in detail what happened, not Wendy Scurr. Of those outside the café, it was Kingston, an unarmed security officer who raced up to the café when he heard loud banging, looked in and witnessed twelve people being shot, not Wendy Scurr.²⁵

Wendy didn't witness anyone in the café get shot. Her role on that day was to phone the police when she was informed that people in the café were being shot. Wendy did not enter the café until it was clear that the gunman had left. When she did enter the café, she simply saw what everyone else who entered the café afterwards saw. Apart from phoning the police, her other important role was to give medical assistance to the injured. Because she did not witness any of the shooting in the café, it is logical that she would not be called to be a witness at the trial. Her statement to police, and the witness of others would be sufficient to cover what she saw and did. Mick Sargent was the best witness, because he stared at Martin Bryant from close range before the shooting started.

In his efforts to convince the reader that a professional gunman was the real culprit, he says, "Only a professional would wait until the coast was clear before leaving the Café. About the last thing that any professional would do is risk being tripped over outside the Broad Arrow Café by a large crowd of nervous tourists blocking his escape route."²⁶ Joe conveniently forgets that people were warned to keep away from the café by Kingston, the security guard, after he discovered what was happening.

Joe claims Martin must have been set up because of the third-degree burns he received when he left the fire at 'Seascape'.²⁷ However, Martin is not frightened of fire. He poured petrol over himself when he was a teenager and set it alight. His teenage acquaintances - he had very few friends - rolled him in the sand and extinguished the flames. He also set fire to a car with a man trapped inside during his rampage. Quite clearly, Martin likes to play with fire. Without a contrary story to the official line as to how Martin received the burns from his lawyer or his mother, it is pointless to use this as evidence that he is innocent.

"The only offence Martin committed on 28 April 1996 was that of being gullible enough to be lured to Seascape by others under false pretences."²⁸

If Martin really was lured to Seascape, then why doesn't he give a description of the people? Particularly to his defence lawyer and mother. If Martin is keeping this part a secret, then how does Joe know that he was lured? This is another area where the whole conspiracy theory falls flat. This is one area of the story where we should have some

basic facts such as the number of people who lured him to 'Seascape', whether any were women, did they have a car? If so, what was the make of the car? Joe seems to know so much up to this point, but all of a sudden, he knows so little. He doesn't even tell us whether or not this mysterious party had guns! If they did have guns, then Martin was not lured, but rather, taken by force.

If Martin was the victim of at least, manipulation by others, then he had plenty of opportunity to complain about his treatment to people with whom he made contact; from the reporter who initially contacted him at 'Seascape', the police who arrested him, the ambulance officers who took him to the hospital, the staff at the hospital, his lawyer, the police who conducted the interview, the prison guards, the psychiatrists, his mother, his sister, and anyone else who visited him in prison.

A further difficulty for this part of the story arises when we examine the statements and demeanour of Martin after the shooting. Alison Smith from the ABC rang several places around Port Arthur in order to find out what was happening and eventually rang the 'Seascape' guesthouse which is situated about 2.5 kilometres from the scene of the shootings, and got Martin Bryant. She reports that "The voice at the other end of the line was laughing when he answered the phone. She asked what was happening. Martin replied, "What's happening is that I'm having lots of fun, but I really need to have a shower. And if you try to call me again, I'll shoot the hostage."²⁹

That is clearly not the sort of statement you would expect from a person who is under the control of someone else. Martin is in full control and enjoying himself. His enjoyment does not stop there. Martin was able to have a chuckle while in court. A behaviour which raised the anger of some of the reporters following the case. You can sense the anger in one of the reports which says in summing up the trial of Martin Bryant, "The child-like mutant responsible for the world's worst one-man killing spree will giggle out the last breath of his life term without ever having felt the slightest trace of pity for his 35 victims or an inkling of remorse"³⁰

You won't read in Joe's book that Martin said while at 'Seascape', just hours after the massacre, "... I'm having lots of fun..." Nor will you find a description of Martin having a giggle in court. I suspect that Joe didn't even bother to attend the trial of Martin. We know that Joe did conduct an interview with Martin's mother, Carleen.³¹

Joe praises Carleen Bryant for making a trip all the way from Tasmania to Western Australia to talk with him in 1999. If Joe is a thorough reporter, he should have gone to Tasmania back in 1996 and spoken with Carleen. It leaves me wondering, 'Can we trust our stay-at-home reporter?' It is no wonder some of the finer details are missing in his book.

Joe covers Carleen Bryant's side of the story under the title, 'Martin Bryant's Mother Speaks Out'. It occupies pages 36-42. Given the report that Joe has ignored Wendy Scurr's claim that the shooting in the café took about five minutes, not ninety seconds, I for one wonder how much of

Carleen's report is missing or misrepresented in this section.

This chapter for me raises more questions than it answers. Joe states that "Carleen's last visit to her son was during November 1997, when she was told by prison officials and psychiatrists that 'Martin no longer wants to see you, which is his right'".³²

His detachment from his mother should not surprise us when we consider the fact that he preferred the company of Mrs Harvey - while she was alive - to that of his mother.

On page sixty-two of his book, Joe has a copy of a letter sent from Carleen Bryant to the general manager of Risdon prison dated 21st June 1999 in which she begins by saying, "You are aware that I have been denied access to my son Martin Bryant since late 1997." It is significant to note that Joe is not able to publish one letter from Carleen to a politician or a media outlet outlining why she believes her son is innocent. The best he can do is provide us with a copy of a letter complaining of lack of access to her son. We learn from her letter that she had access to her son up to 'late 1997' (actually November 1997, see page 39). That's more than one year of access to her son in which she could have found out who lured her son to 'Seascope'. How many were involved? What did they look like? Was there a woman in the group? What make of car if any did they have? All of this basic information which would help to establish the claims Joe is making is strangely missing. One of the other many strange parts to this conspiracy theory is the fact that Martin is still alive. Why didn't the conspirators shoot and kill Martin at 'Seascope'? That way he would not be able to identify the people who took him there. After fatally shooting thirty-five people, shooting one more would not make much difference. Dead men can't talk. If Martin Bryant had been killed in the riot in Risdon Prison in May 2005, conspiracy theorists would have claimed that the riot was a cover for the real objective of killing a witness. The riot came and went and Martin is still very much alive.

Joe says of Carleen, "Tasmanians are a hardy breed and Carleen Bryant is probably one of the hardiest of them all."³³ To back up this statement, Joe gives a partial description of Carleen's trip all the way from Tasmania to Western Australia alone in a campervan to talk with him.

Joe claims that Carleen would not contact the 'Ray Martin' show or any other media outlet because she was annoyed by the media who had their trucks parked at the end of her street for a week. Also, a female reporter tapped on her windows and called out her name.³⁴

Carleen is certainly a hardy and determined lady to drive a camper van across the Nullarbor to give her side of the story. Also, Carleen has a right to be annoyed by that female reporter, but why doesn't she contact an opposition media outlet and give her side of the story? The claim that a determined mother could be put off just because media trucks were parked at the end of her street and a woman tapped on her window is just absurd. Her non-action makes sense if she believes the official story is true.

Simon Chapman, in his book, "Over Our Dead Bodies" reveals the belief of Coleen regarding her son. He says, "When Bryant changed his plea to guilty before the trial set

to begin on November 19, the Sydney Morning Herald reported that his counsel and his mother had worked for weeks to help him understand that his denials of guilt were not defensible."³⁵

No wonder Joe Vials did not travel to Tasmania to get Coleen's side of the story, but rather, she had to travel to Western Australia to talk to him. Not only is it apparent that Joe is not listening to Wendy Scurr regarding the time that the assailant was in the Café. It is apparent that he is not listening to Coleen Bryant either.

Joe makes the claim that there is evidence "...the gun control proposals accepted by Police Ministers in May 1996 were prepared before the massacre, by an ideological senior bureaucrat with United Nations connections."³⁶

At this point, Joe tries to imply that there is something sinister about having gun controls. Australia has had gun controls in one form or another long before the massacre in Tasmania. Many in the community were pushing for tighter and uniform controls long before 1996. Whether or not a bureaucrat who was assisting in the framing of the controls had a connection with the United Nations or any other organisation is irrelevant. The clear majority of Australians wanted stronger controls, and that is what we gained. Joe predicted a backlash against coalition and Labor Mps, but that has not eventuated.

The last part of Joe's book deals with an interview of Martin Bryant by two police officers, Police Inspector Payne and Police Inspector Warren (pages 69-107). It appears to be a faithful copy of a section of the interview, complete with every Umm and Ahh. Joe makes the claim that Martin Bryant is being set up in the interview process to accept the police view of events. Joe claims that Martin initially admitted he had met the wife of the gun shop owner, then soon later contradicts himself and claims that he has not met her. In Joe's eyes, that is evidence that Martin is under pressure to give a story that is contrary to the facts.

Joe reports that Bryant says in answer to the question, 'have you met?' That is, the wife of the gun shop owner. "No I haven't met her." At this point, he inserts his editors note and says, "[Editor's note: Bryant admits he has never met Mrs. Hill, thereby contradicting his early statement]."

If Joe checks what he has written in his book (middle of page 72), he will find that it is Martin Bryant who asks the question "have you met?" It is Inspector Payne who answers, "No I haven't met her." So there is no contradiction.

Martin denies in the interview that he went to Port Arthur on the day of the massacre. Joe then accepts his denials as evidence that he was not there when the shootings took place. This is where the reader needs to keep in mind that people who commit evil acts do tell lies.

In Australia, probably the loudest protest of innocence came from James Richard Finch and John Andrew Stuart, the convicted "Whisky Au go go" fire bombers who killed fifteen people in 1973 when they set fire to the nightclub. To emphasise their protest of innocence, Finch got Stuart to hack off one of his fingers and Stuart engaged in a hunger strike. After six days without food, Stuart was found dead in his cell in 1979. Finch managed to win several people

over to his campaign to be released alleging that police had acted corruptly. He was finally released on the condition that he be immediately deported to his home country, England. From the apparent safety of England, he stunned his many supporters by announcing his guilt - He wrongly assumed it was safe for him to do so. He even described the 'whoopph' when the fire was lit.³⁷

Australian police began the long process to have Finch brought back to Australia and gaol, but Finch died of a heart attack in England before their efforts finally bore fruit.

Martin Bryant loudly protested his innocence. Inspector Warren says to Martin, "Well what would you say if I told you that you were seen going into Port Arthur and in fact you were at the toll gate?" Martin replies, "I could've been." This is a half-hearted admission that he went into Port Arthur. A slip of the tongue that Joe seems to miss. However, at every other point in the interview, he denies going into Port Arthur. Inspector Payne says, "And more than that, that you did complain about the price of admission." Martin replies, "Mmm, I don't remember going in, into Port Arthur or going through the toll gate at all."³⁸

Inspector Payne asked Martin to describe the clothing of the hostage. Martin replies, "Ahh, just a sports jacket, a shirt, jeans."³⁹ Martin would not be able to give that description if he had not seen his victim.

Joe thinks the gunman came from the Middle East, and that he wore a blond wig. A major problem with that idea is that people in the Middle East typically have a light brown complexion, brown eyes and dark hair. Someone with those features would look ridiculous wearing a blond wig.

Joe makes several other claims that can be dealt with under the third conspiracy view.

The assailant was Martin Bryant

This view claims the assailant was Martin Bryant. Conspirators allegedly took advantage of his unbalanced mental state to have a large number of people murdered in order to have gun laws tightened. This view has the advantage of not having to refute the evidence that Martin Bryant was the gunman. It only has to prove that conspirators set Martin Bryant up to do their work.

A web site which puts forward the argument that Martin Bryant was the killer - used by conspirators - offers the following arguments in support of the claim that he was mentally unbalanced.

"Bryant's neighbour, Jim Featherstone, said this about Bryant, 'We knew in our minds there was something wrong about the fellow. He had three or four personalities.'"

Also, "Bryant was known for sleeping with a pet pig. On one of his frequent overseas trips, it was reported in the Sydney Sun Herald that he had brought back videos from Scandinavia featuring animal sex acts and bestiality." And, "His favourite video was 'Child's Play 2' concerning a doll that comes to life and commits serial murder."⁴⁰

We will now look at the evidence that Martin was the gunman.

The people in the 'Broad Arrow' Café' had a good view of the gunman. None of those who survived the attack will ever be found banging on the doors of the media complaining that the police have grabbed the wrong man. The man who got the best view of the attacker just before he began firing was Mick Sargent.

Mike Bingham says Mick Sargent saw a blond young man put a bag on a table. "The man suddenly realised he was being watched, and the two held eye contact for about fifteen seconds. Something wasn't right, Mick felt. It seemed like the fellow was hassling him, that he didn't like the look of him. So Mick held his stare to show that he wasn't scared. The duel was interrupted when Kate [his girlfriend] asked Mick a question."⁴¹ Mike Bingham goes on to report that, "Martin shot an Asian woman, then he spun round and aimed for Mick's head. Mick dived for the floor. The bullet grazed the top of Mick's head. He was bleeding, and at first, he thought he was going to die, but later realised the wound was not serious, so he would live."⁴² Martin then shot Kate. Mick slowly moved over to Kate, being careful not to be observed. He put his arm on her, but there was nothing he could do. She was dead.

Mick wanted to dive out of one of the windows, but the risk of being shot was too great. He decided to remain on the floor until the gunman left.

In addition to obtaining a good view of the gunman, several people heard his voice. In some instances, the sound of a person's voice can be just as helpful as visual identification. Back in about 2002 - when I was in my early fifties - I met up with someone I hadn't seen since High School. It was hard to connect his features with what I could recollect of him as a teenager. However, one thing did stand out; it was his voice. His voice had matured, but the inflections in his voice, and the way he expressed himself had not changed.

Among those who not only saw Martin Bryant, but heard him speak were the person at the toll gate with whom he voiced his complaint over the price of admission. He also had a discussion with the security guard who told Martin to not park his Volvo in a certain spot. Rob Atkins of Sydney was able to report that Bryant said to him, "'There are a lot of WASPs [White Anglo Saxon Protestants], not many Japs here, are there?'" He then went inside the building and, at about 1.30pm, started shooting."⁴³ Also, as already mentioned, the ABC reporter phoned the 'Seascape' guesthouse and heard the voice of Martin Bryant when he answered the phone.

So far we have visual identification and voice identification. We will now look at the character and mental state of Martin Bryant to see if it matches that of a person capable of murdering thirty-five people, one of them by means of incineration in a car fire.

Mike Bingham reports that during his childhood, Martin Bryant could not cope with a normal school, so he had to be placed in a special school for those who were a bit slow, or

had behavioural problems. His ex-teacher noticed that Martin could not relate properly with other people. When Martin left school, he was placed on a pension because there was no prospect of his gaining permanent full-time work.

Martin initially lived with his parents, but after a time there was conflict with his father. At this time, Martin had contact with Mrs. Helen Harvey, an elderly rich lady. She took a liking to Martin, so about the middle of 1990 when Martin was twenty-three he moved into her large home. Because they were often seen together, strangers usually concluded he was her son.

After Martin Bryant learnt that he would inherit the wealth of Helen Harvey after her death, she died in a car accident under suspicious circumstances. Her car hit another vehicle, and was found on the wrong side of the road. Martin was in the car and had to be cut from the wreck.

People are suspicious of Martin's role in the accident. Helen was said to have told neighbours that "... she always drove slowly because Bryant would sometimes yank the steering wheel."⁴⁴ Martin inherited her wealth, valued at more than one million dollars.

Suspicious of foul play are not limited to the death of Helen Harvey. Maurice Bryant, the father of Martin came to an unfortunate end. Mike Bingham reports that "... Maurice's body was found, at the bottom of a deep dam. It had a weight belt strapped across it like a bandolier." Immediately after Martin came over to identify his father's body, "... the searchers were amazed to see Martin walking back from the dam, laughing. The young man must suffer from some form of mental illness they decided."⁴⁵

That incident had the neighbours worried. "John Featherstone, for one, remained deeply suspicious of the circumstances surrounding Maurice Bryant's demise..."⁴⁶

This is another incident from which Martin profited financially. This time he gained just over \$100,000 from the inheritance his father left to him.

Mark Ragg, a psychologist, believes Martin does have the right psychological profile to commit mass murder. In an article in a prominent magazine he mentions two chief reasons why mass murderers like Martin Bryant commit their crime. The first is emotional. He says, "The emotional conflict arises from their feeling of failure, combined with their feeling of entitlement. They feel the world owes them a lot, although the world doesn't necessarily feel the same in return. From that conflict arises anger that is kept in until the point of release. The other element is that they don't really care about others. They feel at liberty to expend others as a means of venting their own feelings."⁴⁷

It is quite clear that Martin didn't care about the death of his father, he continued to laugh and joke when the water carrier came to fill the tanks on his property that day. A possible worst case scenario is that Martin actually murdered his father.

A conspiracy?

I believe conspiracies do occur from time to time. Some conspiracies are safe - from the point of view of the

perpetrators. Others are not so safe. A safe conspiracy might be where a group plans to overthrow a government which is unpopular with the people. Or, it is certain it can overthrow a government then use the police and the army in an oppressive way so that they - the perpetrators - don't face justice for their actions. In both of the above examples, those who carry out the conspiracy are safe from reprisals.

The problem for the Port Arthur massacre conspiracy theory is that there is no point at which the perpetrators can arrive at a place of safety and security. They would always be living in the danger that someone would expose what really happened with full details - I don't mean write a book with vague accusations. The other problem with this theory is that if a conspiracy was exposed to the public, the reaction would bring about the very opposite to what the conspiracy was trying to achieve. Apart from marches in the street, people would want to arm themselves more heavily than before in order to protect themselves from further conspiracy type massacres. A sensible person who was approached with the idea would simply warn that the risks of achieving the very opposite to the desired outcome would be too high. A major problem for the conspiracy is what would you do with the people you had approached for help and who had declined to take part? Would you just hope they keep quiet? Would you shoot them? These are some of the tough questions for which you would need answers before you could begin.

Our hypothetical conspirator would have to find a partner who had an IQ which is lower than the 66 IQ score of Martin Bryant before he could possibly think it was a good idea.

Some are of the opinion that people can be very easily fooled by the Government or a group of people with a secret agenda, but many events in recent history indicate otherwise. One such event is the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961.

Bay of pigs invasion

The plot was to have a small force of Cubans land in Cuba and make the claim that they are a government representing the true wishes of the majority of the people, and who are under attack from the communists. The United States then sends in a military force to rescue what is claimed to be the legitimate government.

"On April 15, 1961, three U.S.-made aeroplanes piloted by Cubans bombed Cuban air bases. Two days later the Cubans trained by the United States and using U.S. equipment landed at several sites. The principal landing took place at the Bay of Pigs on the south-central coast. The invasion force was unequal to the strength of Castro's troops, and by April 19 its last stronghold had been captured, along with more than 1,100 men."⁴⁸

A major problem for the invaders was the change in initial plans. President Kennedy decided not to back the Cuban invaders with US military support.

The problem with this conspiracy - and many like it - is

that a lot of people have to know about the conspiracy, because the troops have to be paid, fed, supplied, transported, and the casualties need medical attention. At least one of the staff in the Kennedy government didn't like the plot, and it was leaked to the Washington Post, so it was printed for all to see. Kennedy read the plot in the paper, the story was out, but he decided to go ahead with the invasion anyway.

Castro learnt of the plot, so he determined to keep the force from advancing inland. The invaders were easily defeated because they did not have the element of surprise.

Any plot by a government in a democratic country to have some of its citizens murdered has no hope of succeeding because someone will certainly leak the scheme to the media.

Lies will be exposed

Liddy Clark, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy Minister in 2004-05 became involved in a scandal which became known as 'winegate' with intentions of allusion to the scandal of 'watergate' in the 1970s. Her error was to fly in a government aircraft to a non-alcohol aboriginal reserve with a bottle of wine on board. Liddy did not take the wine off the aircraft, but someone at the airport looked in through the window and noticed the bottle of wine and it was reported. Liddy claimed she did not know the bottle of wine was on the aircraft. The opposition parties and most of the media and public thought it was incredulous that she could not know that there was wine on the aircraft. If Liddy had told people that she brought the wine onto the aircraft, then I think the scandal would have passed very quickly, but Liddy stuck to her story that she did not know the wine was there. That bought allegations of lying to the public and to the parliament.

A second scandal developed when she gave some people a free ride in a government jet. Again, she was hounded by opposition parties and the media. That resulted in her becoming a liability to her party, so she resigned from her position.

Professor Neil Ryan, head of Queensland University of Technology's School of Management and a specialist in Queensland politics made some comments on the ministry of Liddy Clark after her then recent resignation. He had this to say about the danger for politicians in telling lies.

"In an age of active auditors-general, misconduct commissions and media scrutiny, it is more often the case that telling fibs will be exposed. It is probably fair to say that there are some recent instances where the public has been forgiving of politicians deceiving the public, but there should be a reasonable expectation by political officials that lies eventually will be exposed."⁴⁹

The above comment exposes the difficulty that someone would have in trying to organise a conspiracy which did not have the support of the public.

A pro-gun lobby makes the following claim: "Gun owners are the victims of repression through a world-wide conspiracy. Put simply: the U.N., IMF and World Bank are scared stiff about how freedom loving people might react if

subjected to extreme provocation. Therefore, they have influenced governments (Canada and Australia) to make measures to restrict the availability of highly lethal weapons among citizens. this makes us much less of a threat to a foreign take-over — the New World Order."⁵⁰

It seems that some in the pro-gun lobby, in a desperate attempt to get their much loved high-powered semiautomatic rifles back again are trying to create a monster on which they can heap blame for all their troubles. All we need to do is believe in this monster and we will all rush out and arm ourselves with all manner of weapons, preferably the much loved semiautomatic rifle, and we will be able to take pot shots at the monster as soon as it raises its ugly head.

Disarming Australians?

The claim that the Government is trying to 'disarm' Australians is an exaggeration, it is semiautomatic firearms which have been removed from the general public because of their firepower. A bullet is fired every time the trigger is pulled. Repeaters (e.g. bolt action, pump action or lever action) are still allowed but under strict circumstances which include possessing a current firearms licence and a firearms safe into which the firearm must be placed when not in use. The firearm owner must also belong to an approved sporting shooters club. The above are the main points, but other conditions may apply also.

One area of threat for Australia comes from Islamic terrorists who believe that the best way to earn a place in paradise is to - in some cases - bring death and destruction to others and blow themselves up in the process. I will hasten to add at this point that most Muslims condemn that view.

I don't think most Australians want the police to go to a suspected terrorist hideout and find several high-powered semiautomatic rifles and a large amount of ammunition and then have to walk away and do nothing because it is legal to possess lethal weapons.

Gun Control

Politicians saw the need for gun control, not because of the Port Arthur massacre alone. The number killed on that day is small in comparison to the number killed by guns every year in Australia.

Simon Chapman who is Associate Professor in Public Health and Community Medicine at the University of Sydney says in his book, "Over Our Dead Bodies", "Between 1990 and 1995, an average of 560 people died from guns each year. Of all gun deaths, 81% were suicides; 14% resulted from violence, 4% were unintentional (accidents), 1% were of unknown intent."⁵¹

The pro gun lobby wants us to believe the government has thoughtlessly decided to disarm Australians because of thirty-five deaths at Port Arthur in 1996. The true facts of the case are that many responsible politicians have been concerned for a long time about the hundreds of deaths from firearms in Australia each year. The thirty-five deaths represent only 6.25% of the annual total between 1990 and 1995.

The higher the number of guns in a community, the

higher the number of deaths from guns. On that point Simon Chapman says, "The most striking feature of the distribution of firearm mortality in Australia is that the two States with the most permissive laws, Tasmania and Queensland, have gun death rates significantly above the average."⁵²

The United States has the highest level of gun ownership in the world. It also has the highest number of deaths from guns. "A comparison of homicide rates between the US and Britain found that the non-gun US homicide rate (per 100,000) population was 3.7 times higher than the British rate, while the rate of handgun homicides was 175 times higher. This suggests that, even if Americans were inherently somewhat more murderous than the British, the easy availability of handguns has produced a massively disproportionate number of homicides."⁵³ In 1991, deaths from guns in America was 38,317. In some states in America, deaths from guns was higher than deaths from motor vehicle accidents.⁵⁴

In 1991 the US had a population of 249 million that means they had an annual gun death rate per 100,000 of 15.3. That rate is very high. The chief reason for the high rate of deaths is the high gun ownership rate in the US.

Gun deaths in Australia between 1990 and 1995 averaged 560. Australia's population at that time was about 18 million. That gives a gun death rate per 100,000 per annum of 3.11 (less than one quarter of the US terrible toll).

Gun control in Japan is very strict, even by Australia's new standards, with good results. "Japan has nearly seven times Australia's population, yet has nearly six times fewer gun deaths and nearly three times fewer gun homicides."⁵⁵

Some in the gun lobby have put forward the rather absurd proposition that if you increase the number of guns in the community, it will decrease the number of homicides and robberies. Sweden has a high level of gun ownership and a low number of deaths from guns. That statistic is used by the pro gun group to advance their claim. However, the citizens military force in that country is issued with rifles with strict regulations as to how the weapon is to be stored and used.

When I was a recruit in the Air Force I was issued with a high-powered semiautomatic rifle as was every other recruit, so the gun ownership among the recruits was 100%. Gun deaths among the recruits that year were nill and have been nill every other year as far as I am aware.

Zero gun deaths did not come from the fact that we all had guns. It came from the strict regulations which were imposed. We were all issued with a strong padlock and key. The rifle had to be locked in place in our rooms until needed in part of our training. Ammunition was only supplied to us when on the shooting range. Any rounds which were not fired had to be surrendered. Any person found to have taken ammunition off the range faced severe disciplinary action.

In an undisciplined environment, the powerful weapon placed in a cupboard can be viewed a powerful solution to difficulties which humans face from time to time as many of the 38,000 annual gun deaths in America show.

Thankfully, Prime Minister John Howard was determined to make sure Australia did not adopt the American gun culture with its high death toll. Since the

imposition of better controls on the ownership of firearms, the number of gun deaths per year has declined. Many in Australia now owe their lives to the strict and sensible gun laws that we now have.

The claim that strict gun laws were somehow forced upon Australians is quite false. An AGB-McNair national phone poll of 2,058 people (3-5 May 1996) showed that 90% were in favour of a ban of semi-automatics.

A Morgan national poll of 526 voters in June 1996 on the question, "Do you agree or disagree with John Howard's new gun control laws?" 80% said they agreed, while 18% said they disagreed.⁵⁶

The defence of Australia

The claim is sometimes made that we need a high gun ownership in order to adequately defend the country. Those who make such claims fail to appreciate the advances in military firepower and strategy since WWII and the Vietnam war. A good modern army has the advantage over a rag-tag citizens force in the following areas:

Good training and discipline. Good lines of communication. Heavy calibre weapons and heavy armour. In some cases, night vision goggles and night scopes fitted to rifles. Sophisticated communications interception equipment. Aircraft and satellite surveillance.

Not only would a civilian person lack the above. He may also need to rob from the very people he is trying to protect in order to meet his own needs; real or perceived.

Simon Chapman quotes a press report which revealed the thoughts of Vietnam veteran and Victoria Cross recipient Keith Payne on the views of some who believed armed citizens could defend the country against an invading army. "Payne pilloried these elements as 'cowboys' saying that 'the idea of them defending Australia is ridiculous' and urged them 'to try to join the military reserve, that is if they are psychologically fit to join and were admitted'".⁵⁷

World conspiracy

My interest in conspiracy theories goes back to 1975 when I read a book titled, "None Dare Call It Conspiracy". Another book titled, "None Dare Call It Treason" spins the same story, namely, that governments of the world are under the control of wealthy bankers. Furthermore, the major media outlets of the world are also under the control of the wealthy bankers.

I took the book at face value and recommended it to some of my friends, but I began to have doubts, so I asked Sir Charles Aderman (formerly a parliamentarian, deceased in May 1979) after a Church service we both attended at Kingaroy about the book. He warned me that in the USA, libel laws are very weak. Those who are defamed have great difficulty in obtaining justice through the legal system. His comment caused me to look more closely at some of the statements in the book which did not seem to square with the historical facts.

I began to collect information from the media and other sources which did not support the claims the book was making. Eventually I had enough clear evidence to show that the book is wrong, so I wrote a paper exposing the failings

of the theory. The paper is in electronic (.pdf format) and can be downloaded for free from my web site.

There are other conspiracy theories. One theory alleges that the Holocaust in Germany during WWII did not occur. An academic travelled to various countries to promote the above view. To cut a long story short, there was a trial which involved a woman who has a degree in history. The court process proved that there was a holocaust in Germany. Some of the Arab nations have promoted the claim that there was no holocaust so as to deflect sympathy away from Israel.

In 2003, a TV programme documented various tactics the USA and the USSR employed against each other during the Cold War. Some of the equipment used in the area of espionage was displayed, and past employees of the CIA and the KJB were interviewed.

At one point they bought up the subject of disinformation. You and I would call it just plain lying. In this area, the Russians were less subtle than the Americans. A KJB officer confessed that he, with the help of another man, wrote a book which made the claim that the US government was behind the assassination of John F Kennedy. His stated aim was so that people would not have any trust in the United States government.

A man based in Brisbane put out a newsletter in the early 1980s alleging that the then newly built Police Headquarters in Roma Street Brisbane had secret tunnels. Nothing came out of his claims. I worked directly across the street from the headquarters in 2001 -2002 and can state that the building is not guarded by the police, it is guarded by a security firm. During my period of employment at Roma Street, the contract with the security firm expired, then another security firm took up the contract. That is a strange arrangement if the police have something to hide.

Back to Martin Bryant. His actions during the killing spree and many of his statements afterwards indicate that his motive was one of thrill or blood lust combined with a frustration at not being able to obtain everything he wanted. He also displayed a lack of concern for the welfare of fellow human beings.

Those who promote a conspiracy behind the slayings at Port Arthur are quick to point out alleged failings in police investigations, but tend to overlook other failings which do not support their case.

In every investigation, evidence has to be graded in order of importance. Of highest importance is the evidence of reliable witnesses. The value of this evidence has the backing of God himself who says, “‘Anyone who kills a person is to be put to death as a murderer only on the testimony of witnesses. But no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness.” (Numbers 35:30). So the testimony of just two reliable witnesses is enough to convict a person of murder and bring the death penalty.

An area of particular interest to me in the study of theology is apologetics. What I have found over the years is that the testimony of many witnesses is of utmost importance. The whole nation of Israel heard the voice of God at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:9, 20:22), and at least 500

people saw Christ after his resurrection from the dead (I Cor. 15:5-6).

When people attack the Bible, they use evidence which is of little value or worthless in comparison to eyewitness evidence. For instance, there is no mention of Moses in Egyptian writings, therefore he didn't exist according to this line of thinking.

When the court in Darwin wrongly convicted Lindy Chamberlain of murder, they got two important things wrong. They had no witnesses to support their case, and they had no motive for the crime they were alleging. They used low grade or worthless evidence, i.e. stains in the Chamberlain's car which were alleged to be blood stains from baby Azaria, and sharp cut marks in part of the baby's clothing. It was then claimed that the cut marks were made with scissors rather than from the teeth of a dingo. Armed with this low-grade allegedly scientific evidence, they got the verdict wrong. I wrote to Lindy Chamberlain at the Darwin prison to give my support. Many others did the same. Eventually those who gave their support were vindicated when the verdict against Lindy was quashed in a court of law.

When the court in Tasmania convicted Martin Bryant of murder, they got the verdict right because they had the evidence of eye witnesses and of motive. The police were not lacking in eyewitnesses to many of the events at Port Arthur. The Bulletin magazine reported, "... Bryant was charged with the killing of one of the Port Arthur victims, a West Australian woman. With more than 200 witnesses expected to be interviewed - many of whom have returned to their homes - it may be some time before police can lay charges concerning the other 34 dead and 19 wounded." ⁵⁸

The strategy police used was to pick one killing which had numerous good witnesses, seal their case with that one incident, then move on to others. That is standard practice where a case involves numerous killings.

Where did the conspiracy theory come from?

My guess is that it came from Gympie, 160 kilometres north of Brisbane. Gympie was once very prosperous, firstly as a gold mining town, then as the hub of a prosperous farming district, but income from farming has fallen way behind the rest of the economy, so Gympie is suffering. At the end of 1996, the national average for unemployment was 9%, the Gympie district had 19% unemployment. ⁵⁹

The sense of despair in Gympie, along with the feeling that the government was not doing enough, mixed with simplistic solutions that they should return to the good old days without any thought-out plans as to how that is to be achieved has led to a lot of anger in Gympie. The situation was of sufficient concern to the local community leaders that they arranged for the then Deputy Prime Minister, Tim Fisher to meet with the people. He arrived in town to find his effigy being hanged as 'Traitor Tim', and the streets patrolled by police.

The tension in Gympie also drew the attention of The Bulletin, a weekly news magazine which sent a reporter to investigate. He found Ron Owen, president of the Firearm

Owners Association labouring over the latest edition of 'Lock, Stock and Barrel' which featured a photo of John Howard with a Hitler moustache. The reporter published a statistic which was not helpful to Ron Owen's position. "In the past year [1996] there have been 11 murders in the Gympie district, the worst in the state".⁶⁰

My guess is that the tension in Gympie mixed with a feeling of betrayal by the government has led to the creation of a conspiracy theory which fits with the feelings of the community rather than with the cold hard facts.

Several low grade or worthless pieces of evidence have been put forward to bolster the case, but a thousand pieces of low grade or worthless evidence do not overthrow one solid piece of evidence to the contrary. This is an important point which is not always fully appreciated by some Christians when we look at the subject of the defence of the Christian faith. The consequence is that the faith is not as well defended as it should be.

The Christian faith is based on evidence of the highest order; the evidence of reliable eyewitnesses. A thousand pieces of worthless evidence to the contrary can't overthrow that witness. That means that if an archeologist discovers a piece of Chinese pottery near Mt. Sinai and states that the Bible is wrong, it was the Chinese who crossed the Red Sea, we can confidently state that he is wrong because the evidence of eyewitness stands supreme over his evidence which is worthless by comparison.

My argument regarding the conviction of Martin Bryant is the same. It is based on reliable eyewitnesses from people who have no motive to falsify their evidence. Low grade evidence, such as a finger print not being on a glass, or a cartridge case found under a body can not overthrow that witness which is of the highest order. The primary mistake that Joe Vialls has made is to discount the testimony of eyewitnesses as next to worthless. The other mistake is to grab supposedly scientific evidence and attach his own story to the various facts or fictions. On the subject of eyewitness evidence, Joe has this to say, "When investigating events like Yvonne Fletcher's murder or the massacre at Port Arthur, it is essential to adhere to scientific proof, and to avoid eyewitness accounts and media hype. Eyewitnesses do not normally lie intentionally, but as any honest psychologist will tell you the accuracy of their testimony is limited by many factors including stress, suggestive police interrogators, and peer pressure."⁶¹ Armed with the above excuses, Joe is able to ignore the testimony of Wendy Scurr and others regarding the amount of time the gunman was in the café and other important facts which do not support his argument.

Buyer Beware

Most people know they should be suspicious of a bargain which sounds 'too good to be true'. Some bargains can have hidden expenses.

People should also be wary of stories which sound too sensational to be true. Here are some basic steps to follow if you do not want to become the victim of a fabricated story.

1. Read up on basic historical facts from respected authorities who have their work published by respected publishers. Articles written in encyclopaedias and other reference works are reliable because they are checked by other academics.
2. Get the facts on important news items from reliable newspapers. Those who are well-informed are not easily led astray by false stories.
3. Be suspicious of stories which contain exaggerations or do not agree with well established fact. At least one edition of 'Lock Stock and Barrel' contained a picture of the prime minister, John Howard, with a Hitler moustache. That is hardly a balanced portrayal of a man who detests what Hitler did to others.
4. Be suspicious of sensational stories which appear on the internet. Just as some people - at the immature end of the spectrum - get their kicks out of writing viruses for computers. Some also delight in writing false stories and witnessing many people get caught in the web of deceit. Reports from reliable authors and publishers should be given highest priority when considering your news source.

I hope you find the above helpful in sorting out the facts from the fiction. My web address listed below has my paper on the international bankers conspiracy theory. See also on the web page "Conspiracies.htm".

Addendum was added to this paper in April 2006, titled, "Ten Years Later". See page 14.

www.defenceofthefait.org

Addendum

TEN YEARS LATER

In April 2006, various sections of the media ran stories on the aftermath of the massacre at Port Arthur, one decade after the event. The Bulletin magazine interviewed Roger Larner who lives a minutes drive from the Port Arthur site. Larner reports, "I talked with him for about 10 minutes; he wanted to know where my wife was but I told him she wasn't home. She was, actually, but I knew she didn't want to see him' As with the Martins, Bryant had a bizarre vendetta against Larner's wife. She had become so sick of his pestering, she had taken out an intervention order. 'I can still see him standing there,' Larner says, pointing at the gate." (The Bulletin, 04 April 2006, p. 21). This revelation is an embarrassment to the conspiracy theorists. This eyewitness testimony from someone who knew Martin well places him about one minutes drive away from the scene of the mass murder with the same car which was parked at the scene of the crime.

The mentality of Martin Bryant is revealed in a statement where he says regarding the incident, "Yes, it was, truly exciting, really exciting ... The most exciting thing I'd ever done in my life which was something different..." (The Bulletin, 04 April 2006, p. 25). Colleen Bryant stays in Tasmania, other members of the family have fled to the mainland to escape the shame and gain anonymity (p. 17). Quite clearly, they don't believe the conspiracy theorists.

The security officer

Ian Kingston, ten years later stands by his earlier evidence. He says, "I pulled Martin Bryant up as he drove up to the site," Mr Kingston says. "I didn't know him like some of the staff did and we had an argument over parking. "He wanted to park there - he got quite pissed off about it. He went to the old ticket office to get his entry pass, he was wanting a ticket on the 1.30 pm Isle of the Dead cruise and I said, 'You won't get it, it's booked out'".

Ignoring Mr Kingston's directions, Bryant parked his yellow Volvo. Mr Kingston, whose chief task as security officer was ensuring people paid their entry fee, took no further action, but kept an eye on the thin 28-year-old with long blond hair.

"He parked his car with all the coaches and then I saw him get a big black bag from his back seat,' says Mr Kingston, then aged 42. 'He set the bag down on the ground and then messed around in the boot before walking into the cafe. I watched him do it, not realising he had 1000 rounds of ammunition and a couple of rifles in that bag.'" (Courier Mail, 28 April 2006).

Terry McCarthy

Terry McCarthy was the police negotiator who made contact with Martin Bryant. The Courier Mail reports that "McCarthy made contact with Bryant six times until the battery in the killer's handset lost power. ... He [Bryant] told McCarthy he had three hostages and wanted a helicopter to

fly to Hobart Airport ..." (Courier Mail, 22 April 06, p. 65).

Another person among many who got a good view of Martin was Ms Loughton. Ms Loughton reports that Martin Bryant came so close to her, she could have touched him. She was shot in the back and lived. Her fifteen-year-old daughter was fatally shot. (Courier Mail, 28 April 2006).

In 1996, the conspiracy theory did not have any supporters from those who were in the Broad Arrow Café. Ten years later the theory still lacks support from those who clearly saw what happened, and it continues to lack the support from respected reporters who have closely investigated the events on that fateful day.

Martin Bryant

Why did he do it? I think there are several things in his situation which contributed to his actions.

- He had few friends. People avoided him because they could see that he was not "quite right".
- He had a lot of wealth. People who have a lot of money are supposed to be happy and contented. Having the money, but still having few, if any close friends must have been frustrating.
- Martin probably felt insecure and powerless; that is, until he had a rifle in his hands. Nobody's going to mess with someone who is armed with a high-powered rifle.
- Martin I suspect, failed to grasp the depth of the problem he had, and blamed most of his problems on others.

People usually like to form into groups with others who have similar interests or problems. For instance, people who have suffered in some way so as to produce a form of stress or anxiety may seek out others who have gone through the same ordeal so as to give comfort and learn from each other. The problem for those with an intellectual disability such as Martin Bryant, is that they do not possess the capability of organising a group; someone must do that for them. From my reading of the life of Martin, it does not appear that he had much, if any contact with others in his situation. The government approach in recent years has been to push mental patients out into society with little or no support base of the type described above.

God's warning to Cain was, "... sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." (Genesis 4:7). Cain failed to master the sin lurking at his door and he killed his brother Abel. Martin also failed to master the sin crouching at his door, and he killed thirty-five people. He also wounded many others, both physically and psychologically.

Perhaps society failed also, by not giving Martin the type of help that he was not able to organise for himself. If we do not help others, it can rebound back on us. We are our brother's keeper (Genesis 4:9-11).

End Notes

1. The Courier Mail, 29 April 1996, p. 1.
2. From Email distributed by Joe Bryant. No relation to Martin Bryant.
3. From "Lock Stock and Barrel" web site.
4. From Editor, "Shooter's News", under title, 'Joe Vialls - Agent of Disinformation'.
5. Editor, 'Shooters News'
6. Joe Vialls, "Deadly Deception at Port Arthur" Self published, Sixth Ed., 2001, p. 6-7.
7. "Time", 30 April 1984, p. 20.
8. "Time", 30 April 1984, p. 20.
9. www.joevialls.com, accessed in August 2005.
10. See, "The Australian", 30 March 2005, p. 1.
11. Joevialls.com, January 2005, accessed in May 2005.
12. Joe Vialls, p. 9.
13. Mike Bingham, "Suddenly One Sunday", Harper Collins, 1996, p. 74.
14. "Suddenly One Sunday", p. 72.
15. Joe Vialls, p. 14.
16. Joe Vialls, p. 46.
17. Joe Vialls, p. 46.
18. "The Bulletin", 14 May 1996, p. 64.
19. Damien Murphy, The Bulletin, 14 May 1996, p. 15.
20. "The Bulletin", 14 May 1996, p. 17.
21. Damien Murphy, "The Bulletin", 7 May 1996, p. 19.
22. Joe Vialls, p. 19.
23. "Suddenly One Sunday", p. 74.
24. Joe Vialls, p. 21.
25. "Suddenly One Sunday", p. 72.
26. Joe Vialls, p. 23.
27. Joe Vialls, p. 38.
28. Joe Vialls, p. 42.
29. Mike Bingham, "Suddenly One Sunday", p. 101.
30. "The Bulletin", 03 December 1996, p. 18.
31. Joe Vialls, p. 41.
32. Joe Vialls, p. 39.
33. Joe Vialls, p. 36.
34. Joe Vialls, p. 41.
35. S. Chapman, "Over Our Dead Bodies", Pluto Press, 1998, p. 136.
36. Joe Vialls, p. 26.
37. "Our Queensland", 'Courier Mail' magazine insert, May 2002, book 10, p. 3-4.
38. Joe Vialls, p. 100.
39. Joe Vialls, p. 89.
40. Lennard La Rouge, from web page 'Lock Stock and Barrel', accessed August 2005.
41. "Suddenly One Sunday", p. 73.
42. "Suddenly One Sunday", p. 74.
43. Damien Murphy, The Bulletin, 7 May 1996, p. 20.
44. "Suddenly One Sunday", p. 38.
45. "Suddenly One Sunday", p. 40.
46. "Suddenly One Sunday", p. 41.
47. Mark Ragg, The Bulletin, 14 May 1996, p. 16.
48. Bay of Pigs, Encyclopaedia Britannica, CD, 2004.
49. Neil Ryan, Truth uncorked, "The Courier Mail", Brisbane, 03 March 2005, p. 15.
50. www.lockstockandbarrel.com.au, accessed in August 2005.
51. S. Chapman, "Over Our Dead Bodies", Pluto Press, 1998, p. 46.
52. S. Chapman, p. 47.
53. S. Chapman, p. 44.
54. See S. Chapman, p. 49.
55. S. Chapman, p. 50.
56. Figures from Chapman, p. 61.
57. Warnock S. 'Gun lobby claim 'stupid'', Sun-Herald, July 14, 1996:25, quoted in S. Chapman, p. 145.
58. The Bulletin, 14 May 1996, p. 14.
59. The Bulletin, 03 December 1996, p. 46.
60. The Bulletin, 03 December 1996, p. 46.
61. Joe Vialls, p. 6.

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