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## Inside the mind of Hoddle Street killer Julian Knight



John Silvester

These are words you thought you would never read in a mainstream media publication. Mass killer Julian Knight is right. The decision to ban him from applying for parole is unjust and has left him the victim of political populism.

On Wednesday, August 9, it will be 30 years since Knight took three firearms to Hoddle Street on a quiet Sunday night with a plan to hunt down and kill as many innocent people as he could.



The car of a victim in the 1987 Hoddle Street shooting.

19-02-2012 Dear Craig ... I have been following the Prue Bird investigation. I will send you the articles and 3CR transcript in due course. In the meantime, I have it on good authority who the prison source is...

In just 38 minutes the 19-year-old failed (and bullied) army officer candidate fired 200 rounds of high-grade ammunition, killing seven people, wounding a further 19 and nearly shooting the police helicopter out of the sky.



Hoddle Street: a victim lies on the road.

When police closed in on him he threw down his guns and surrendered, later telling detectives he intended to shoot himself but misplaced his last bullet.

19-2-2012 Dear Les ... I have it on good authority who the prison source is. If you have a lawyer you might want him or her to visit me...

Knight pleaded guilty and was sentenced to multiple life sentences but because of his age was given a minimum sentence of 27 years – meaning he should have been eligible to apply for parole in 2014.

The thing is the outrage about Knight's sentence has grown over the years. Back then the headlines shouted "Life" and there was little emphasis on the bottom end of his potential jail term.



Craig Minogue was sentenced to life in prison.

Indeed, sentencing judge Justice George Hampel made it clear Knight needed to reform to be freed telling him the 27 years was just the minimum he could serve and was not a guaranteed release date.

Many thought Knight would die in prison – either by his own hand or from the career crooks who would show him less sympathy than Justice Hampel. But Knight had the instincts of a survivor – first shown when he meekly surrendered the moment he saw anyone who could return fire at Hoddle Street.



Prue Bird was abducted from her home and murdered.

26-02-2012 Dear Peter ... I have written to [Les] and let him know that we're mates and that you might approach him in the gym... I predict no-one else will get charged and that the case against Les will collapse. We'll wait and see.

Slight but fit, Knight went to prison and taught himself to box, hitting the heavy bag at every opportunity and – more importantly – used the sound military tactic of developing strong allies including some of the worst killers Australia has known.



Scenes from the shooting in Hoddle Street in 1987.

But there were other heavyweights who didn't warm to him. In 1993 prison authorities discovered a mass escape plot involving up to 30 inmates in Pentridge's notorious H Division. The plan included attacking Knight in his cell.

26-02-12 Dear Ashley ... I predict the case against Les will collapse. A gaolhouse informant has 500,000 reasons to make up stories. Say no more. Anyway mate, I hope you're taking care of yourself.





Julian Knight, left, being taken away by police after the Hoddle Street shooting. *Photo: John Lamb*

While Knight was not a model prisoner (there were a few minor assaults and discipline issues) he was usually well behaved. "He quickly learned to fly under the radar and keep a low profile," a veteran Pentridge officer said. "He didn't steal anything and didn't try to stand over anyone."

"He has a huge ego," another prison officer said of Knight, who was once assessed as intelligent but a "chronic under-achiever".



Before the horror: Julian Knight in 1986.

"He always believes he is the smartest in the room," a prison source said.

In one conversation Knight talked of an international mass killing then added that if you wanted to create maximum casualties, "you would just fly a plane into the MCG".



Mr Julian Knight  
Port Phillip Prison  
DX-39334  
PORT MELBOURNE  
26-2-2012

Dear Ashley,

I received your letter dated 13th February and attachments on 18 February. I trust this reply will find you and Micky fit and well.

I have enclosed the current education courses at PPP brochure for your perusal. All courses are offered at certificate I-III levels. If you come here, you would no doubt be placed in Alexander North Unit (home of 'Paula', Ray and many others). Their education time is Tuesday afternoons and they also get library access on weekends. You might also want to re-consider asking for a move to the mainstream. If you have to serve years and years in maximum, then there's no better unit than the one I'm in. Think about it.

I'm pleased Beau is still coming in. Let him know that I'm still training and please give him my regards.

I predict the case against Les will collapse. A gaolhouse informant has 500,000 reasons to make up stories. Say no more.

Anyway mate, I hope you're taking care of yourself.

Best wishes,

Jul

Julian Knight talks of an alleged police informer to triple murderer Ashley Coulston. *Photo: Supplied*

"It chilled me to the bone," said the officer.

His cell has always been maniacally ordered and he even lined up his soft drink bottles "like little soldiers". Sometimes uninvited guests would sneak in to rearrange his possessions. "He would be furious," a source said.

Even in prison the military-obsessed Knight ranked inmates – referring to career criminals and murderers as "long termers" while those serving shorter sentences were "shit-kickers".

By 2012 Knight started to prepare to apply for parole telling people he would "make a mark" on release. "He wasn't talking about crime – he just thought he was special and a natural high achiever."

But in 2014 the then Coalition state government brought in one-off legislation shutting the cell door – effectively banning him from parole.

"This is guaranteeing that he remains in jail until he's dead, or so seriously incapacitated he's no risk to other people in Victoria or indeed in the community," then premier Denis Napthine said.

Knight recently wrote: "The Victorian state government changed the law to keep me in prison not because I pose a threat to the community, but because they believe I did not deserve to be given a minimum non-parole term.

"The fact is a minimum term was not opposed by the prosecution and the minimum term that was set was not appealed against. They didn't think I would survive to see the end of my 27-year minimum term and when I did they brought into law retrospective legislation that rewrote history to suit their views as to what they thought my sentence should have been."

Knight is right. In reality he has been re-sentenced by politicians with a law designed to trump the courts entrusted with the job of setting prison terms and the parole board that should decide release dates.

If Knight has reformed he should be able to apply for parole in the same way as any other inmate.

If.

So we know what Knight did 30 years ago but what has he become? Let's not ask those traumatised by his actions nor look at the image Knight would like to portray. Let us look at the real Knight – the one he shares with the killers and the crims who have been his friends and allies for decades.

To do so we must reach back to an investigation that does not directly relate to Knight but shows his actions are at odds with his claims to have reformed.

In February 1992, schoolgirl Prue Bird was abducted from her Glenroy home and murdered. Her body has never been found. Police believe the 13-year-old was targeted as revenge against her grandmother's partner who gave evidence against the men responsible for the 1986 Russell Street bombing.

One of those convicted of the bombing was Craig Minogue (a Knight ally) who is alleged to have said, while warning people not to talk, "It would be a shame if anything happened to your sweet little Prue, wouldn't it?"

In February 2012 police charged Bega schoolgirl killer Les Camilleri with Prue's murder. Camilleri, who was already serving life with no minimum for the 1997 murders of Lauren Barry, 14, and Nichole Collins, 16, eventually pleaded guilty to the Bird murder. He refused to implicate anyone else in the crime and gave a clearly bogus account of what happened.

There was never any incentive to tell the truth as his papers have been marked never to be released over the Bega double murder.

Within weeks of the charges being laid Knight involves himself, identifying a fellow prisoner he claims was the police informer. He claims the prison source was paid \$500,000 for information – an allegation that put the man's life in danger.

Two years earlier, drug boss Carl Williams was bashed to death in Barwon prison because he had been identified as a police informer. The man Knight repeatedly claimed was the



informer in the Bird case was an old enemy – one of the inmates from Pentridge who had planned to attack him in 1993 during a prison break-out.

On March 19, 2012, Knight wrote to Minogue saying, "I have been following the Prue Bird investigation ... I have it on good authority who the prison source is.

"On a completely different subject, [names prisoner] is on the loose after being sentenced in a closed court. I hear he is hoping to invest \$500,000."

In another letter he tries to organise another inmate who is a Minogue associate to connect with Camilleri to compare notes, implying police will not be able to link the Russell Street bombers to the Bird murder. "I predict no one else will get charged and the case against Les will collapse. We will wait and see."

In a letter of support to Camilleri he sends him media transcripts on the case before ending, "Take care of yourself Big Boy". In another letter he names the suspected informer asking Camilleri to remember where he met him. "Mate, think hard."

In a note to triple murderer Ashley Mervyn Coulston, Knight says, "I predict the case against Les will collapse. A gaol-house informant has 500,000 reasons to make up stories. Say no more."

Knight says he has changed. In his latest plea he writes: "Thirty years have passed since the Hoddle Street shootings and I am far from the immature disturbed, desperate teenager who committed them."

There is something else in Knight's letters that remains deeply concerning. This mass killer who says he is no longer violent has chosen to use as his personalised letterhead the image of two armed soldiers on patrol with the caption "Call of Duty2".

He says he wept for his victims but when it came to the murder of the innocent Prue Bird he shows no compassion at all – preferring to use the crime to even an old score and curry favour with killers.

Knight should be able to apply for parole and there can be no doubt the Parole Board would reject any such submission – not because his initial sentence was inadequate – but because he would be judged as still being too great a risk.

Julian Knight went to jail for what he did then and should remain there for what he is now. He stands condemned by his own words.

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