

## DEATH IN DANGAR PLACE

When Warren Lanfranchi went to a meeting with Detective-Sergeant Roger Rogerson on 27 June 1981 in Dangar Place, Chippendale, he knew he might never return. A heroin dealer, Lanfranchi, 22, had served five years in jail for stealing colour TV sets and was hoping to bribe Rogerson to avoid arrest on charges of armed robbery and attempted murder. Sgt Rogerson of the Armed-Hold-up Squad had previously shot one criminal dead and had a reputation as Sydney's most feared detective. Dismissed in 1986 for bringing discredit on the police force, Rogerson would later serve three years in jail in 1990 for conspiring to pervert the course of justice.

There are several versions of what happened at 2.50 p.m. on that windy Saturday afternoon twenty years ago. The version that Rogerson told the coronial inquest in November 1981 is as follows. The meeting had been arranged by his informant, Arthur 'Neddy' Smith at a venue chosen by Lanfranchi who had wanted to offer Rogerson a \$30,000 bribe. Acting as a decoy, Rogerson met Lanfranchi in Beaumont street, just off Cleveland Street, and as they walked side by side a few centimetres apart into Dangar Place, Lanfranchi said, 'Look I can't do any more jail. Are we going to do business?' Rogerson replied, 'There is no business, we are here to arrest you.' On spotting a white Volvo containing Sergeant Brian Harding and Constable Rod Moore driving towards them, Lanfranchi backed away, reached down the front of his trousers and pulled out a silver-coloured revolver which he pointed at Rogerson. Without hesitation, Rogerson drew his service revolver from behind his back, where it was tucked into his belt, and shot Lanfranchi in the chest. Lanfranchi continued to back away and thinking he had not incapacitated him, Rogerson fired a second shot. The bullet struck Lanfranchi in the side of the neck and he fell into the gutter. Rogerson stated it all happened very quickly.

Yet two students, Mary McElhone and Jane Healy, living in Cleveland Street heard two bangs like a car backfiring and estimated the time interval between the two shots as 11 to 14 seconds.

No fingerprints were found on Lanfranchi's alleged weapon, an 80-year-old Harrison and Richardson .38 revolver with a defective trigger return spring. This defect meant the hammerless revolver was incapable of firing more than one shot at a time. A strange choice of weapon for a young man whose father was a licensed pistol dealer who kept firearms in his Camperdown safe.

Lanfranchi's older brother, Darrell, remembers Warren telling him two nights before he was shot dead that 'Rogerson might murder me or accept the money'. Twenty years later, Darrell, 45, is convinced his brother was killed in cold blood. 'Warren used to go shooting with me and Dad,' Darrell explains. 'He wasn't stupid. Who'd carry a heap of junk — a gun with a broken trigger — to meet an armed hold-up detective?'

Lanfranchi's lover, Sallie-Anne Huckstepp, stated at the inquest that she had never seen this antique revolver before. In a taped interview with Ian Barker QC, she described how only days before his meeting with Rogerson, Lanfranchi had purchased a new 9 mm automatic Smith and Wesson pistol to protect them, but he was given specific instructions by Neddy Smith that he was to go unarmed to the meeting.

'It didn't seem right to me,' Huckstepp said. 'I couldn't understand why Ned was doing all this for Warren, you know.' Not only was Lanfranchi not to wear a coat, but Smith and Rogerson didn't want him to wear a jumper. The deal was that Smith would frisk both Lanfranchi and Rogerson to see that they weren't armed. Huckstepp said she pleaded with Lanfranchi to take his gun. 'Leave it in the car just in case something happens.' But Warren told her, 'As long as I stick to my bargain, Ned'll make sure they're not armed. Ned's fixed it all up.'

Five and a half hours after his death, Huckstepp grabbed Lanfranchi's loaded pistol from a drawer in their bedroom, hailed a cab to Milson's Point and threw the pistol into the harbour. Huckstepp said that she didn't want the police to plant the gun on her dead lover's body.

In Ian David's dramatised version, *Blue Murder*, (partly based on Smith's autobiography *Neddy* and interviews David conducted with Smith at the National Crime Authority), Smith relieves the agitated Lanfranchi of his pistol in Smith's car, frisks Lanfranchi in full view of Rogerson by lifting his shirt front and back and then escorts the unarmed Lanfranchi across Cleveland Street. Immediately Rogerson greets him with a bullet to the heart followed by a second shot to the head. The police drag the body around the corner where a detective removes a roll of cash from under Lanfranchi's belt.

At the inquest, however, Smith gave evidence that he didn't witness the shooting. And if Smith had procured Lanfranchi's weapon only minutes earlier, why didn't Rogerson use that as the drop gun?

'Smith is a dog,' Darrell Lanfranchi says. 'He was a paid informant.'

But what if Lanfranchi had been carrying a second weapon? Eighteen detectives from the Armed-Hold-up Squad were waiting in the vicinity of Dangar Place. The officer in charge, Senior Inspector Douglas Knight, told the inquest that officers and equipment from SWOS (Special Weapons and Operations Squad) had been used. Rogerson was a crack member of that squad.

'What amazes me,' Darrell Lanfranchi says, 'is that you have trained marksmen there. Blokes with rifles. There's no reason why they couldn't have incapacitated Warren.'

So why didn't police arrest him on sight? Why did Rogerson meet Lanfranchi alone in Beaumont Street and walk with him for some 30 seconds into Dangar Place? Rogerson was positioned on Lanfranchi's left side. They passed Detective Sergeant Graham Frazer clutching a shotgun and crouched

at the rear of a parked green Falcon. Even though the Falcon was closer to Lanfranchi, he didn't appear to spot Frazer. At the other end of Dangar Place, Moore and Harding, wearing bullet-proof vests in a white Volvo, began cruising towards them. Only Rogerson, Harding, Frazer and Moore were inside Dangar Place. All four have since been dismissed or resigned from the police service.

Dr C.H. Manock, Director of Forensic Pathology at the Adelaide Institute of Medical Science, examined specimens removed from the body of Lanfranchi on 16 October 1981. 'The bullet wound to the left side of the neck,' he wrote, 'would not have been fatal, nor would it have been incapacitating.' Unlike the Lanfranchi family's own pathologist, Professor F.R. Magarey, Dr Manock was unable to see scorching around the wound which would have clearly indicated that Lanfranchi was shot in the neck at very close range. But Manock did report that 'it was more probable that the neck wound was sustained before the heart wound. The reason being is that wounds to the right side of the heart are usually rapidly fatal.' The fatal shot went through the right ventricle of the heart and lobe of the right lung before exiting through Lanfranchi's back, shirt and jumper.

Mary McElhone originally told armed hold-up detectives who knocked on her door an hour after the shooting that the gap between the first and second shots was 30 seconds.

Whether it was 14 or 30 seconds, the question that must be asked is what occurred in the interval between those two shots?

In her interview with Ian Barker, Huckstepp described how Lanfranchi went outside shortly before he left their flat in his shirt and pants and said, 'It's too bloody cold, get me a jumper.' Huckstepp got him a jumper and they knelt on the lounge room floor and Lanfranchi tipped a manila envelope full of cash on the floor. Together they sorted the money into one-thousand-dollar lots consisting of twenty and fifty dollar notes. She secured ten of these

bundles with crossed rubber bands and Lanfranchi grabbed the money and packed it down the front of his tight-fitting pants and into his underpants and then pulled his jumper down over the top.

By the time Lanfranchi's body was conveyed to Glebe morgue two hours later on that Saturday afternoon no money was found inside his pants or pockets. 'He didn't have a zac on him,' Darrell says.

But if Lanfranchi had been dealt the coup de grâce by Rogerson as he lay bleeding in the gutter with a bullet lodged in the muscle of his neck, surely there would have been some forensic evidence?

The Lanfranchi family think so. When Darrell, his father Keith and brother Howard visited Dangar Place, they found what Keith Lanfranchi suspected was a bullet mark with lead scrapings on the sandstone kerb. They took photos to prove Warren was shot while lying on the ground. 'We notified Police Internal Affairs about it,' Darrell says, 'and the next morning the sandstone block had disappeared.'

Two months later Darrell met a new witness in a hotel. The man had been up a ladder painting a balcony in Dangar Place. His account confirmed the family's suspicions that Lanfranchi had been unarmed and shot in cold blood. When Darrell and Keith went to the witness' house the following day the man panicked and went into hiding. He did not give evidence at the inquest.

On November 19, 1981, after deliberating for four hours, the jury of four women and two men ruled that Lanfranchi had died from a gunshot wound to his chest inflicted by Detective Rogerson. When asked to give the manner of Lanfranchi's death in their verdict, they struck out Coroner Walsh's suggested phrases 'in the execution of his duty' and 'in self-defence'.

In a Supreme Court application to quash the findings of the inquest, Ian Barker acting for the Lanfranchi family submitted that Coroner Walsh had

refused to hear evidence from Sallie Huckstepp about what Lanfranchi had told her of his relationship with Rogerson. 'If the account given by Huckstepp of the events of that day were true,' Barker said, 'the circumstances do point to Homicide.'

When Justice Cantor dismissed his application, Keith Lanfranchi pressed for a Royal Commission. 'Dad did everything he could,' Darrell says, 'and it killed him.' Even when he was dying of cancer, Keith never gave up hope that one day somebody — a police officer or an eyewitness — would step forward to reveal the true circumstances of his son's death and that the family would finally find justice.

Nearly forty years on, Darrell Lanfranchi is still waiting.