

# Deranged killer on the loose

By PETER MICKELBROUGH and KAMAHL COGDON

A DERANGED killer is on the loose in the city after giving his carers the slip while on a day outing in busy Southbank.

Neville Colin Garden shot dead milk bar owner John George Valiottis, 50, and attempted to murder his wife, Paula, outside their Mildura store on New Year's Day in 1994.

A paranoid schizophrenic, who believed ASIO and the CIA had planted transmitters in his teeth to track him, Garden was ordered to be confined to a mental hospital for 18 years and nine months in 1995.

When Garden disappeared on Sunday, he had just two days medication. Police fear he may again become violent if not found and treated.

Detectives from the Armed Offenders Squad are co-ordinating the hunt for the killer, who is fat with a goatee beard.

Last night police warned members of the public not to approach the killer but to immediately call 000.

It is believed Garden escaped by feigning an upset stomach after one of the two unarmoured female nurses accompanying him went to get a cup of coffee.

Garden, who lives at the Thomas Embling psychiatric hospital in Fairfield, escaped about 2.30pm. He was wearing a green T-shirt, black/grey shorts, white runners and a brown hat.



**Captured:** Neville Garden is arrested on a murder charge in 1995.

**WANTED: HAVE YOU SEEN THIS MAN**  
**Neville Colin Garden**  
**AGE:** 45  
**HEIGHT:** 165cm  
**WEIGHT:** obese  
**HAIR:** light brown, goatee

**EYES:** blue  
**LAST SEEN:** Southbank  
**WEARING:** green T-shirt, black/grey shorts, white runners and a brown hat

In 1995, a Supreme Court judge said Garden believed the Catholic Church was trying to get him, and that Mr Valiottis, who had never met and did not know, was persecuting him.

Garden claimed he had been shooting at the milk bar's windows and had not meant to hit anyone. He pleaded not guilty on

the grounds of insanity. Garden went to the milk bar with a rifle and telescopic sight hidden inside a guitar case. He lay down outside and shot Mr Valiottis in the neck as he closed up that night.

Garden fired twice at Mrs Valiottis as she ran to help her husband. As she cradled her



**Shot dead:** John Valiottis.

Thom said the taxi driver told him he had driven a passenger the previous night who was wearing and carrying a guitar case.

After killing Mr Valiottis, whom he believed was stopping him getting access to his children, Garden noted in his diary that he was "feeling very pleased". He wrote "human nature's good side - revenge".

His diary also indicated his attention was drawn to Mr Valiottis by his "unusual car".

Medical evidence showed Garden had been mentally ill for eight to 10 years. He sometimes believed people were trying for murder.

to kill him and once tried to lay attempted murder charges against 15 people.

Garden's father, Mr Colin Garden, told the court his son's personality had changed after he suffered head injuries and unconsciousness in two car accidents and a work accident.

Collin and Jean Garden tried desperately for years to find help for their son. They had just driven from Broken Hill to a Mildura motel, to meet a doctor who had arranged for Garden to be treated at a psychiatric hospital, when they heard their son had been arrested for murder.

## Sniper death mystery

*[Small inset image showing a newspaper clipping with the headline 'Sniper death mystery']*

**Tragedy:** the Herald Sun on January 3, 1994.

*Herald Sun* police reporter Greg Thom gave evidence that on the day after the shooting, he was sitting in the front seat of a taxi outside Mildura police station.

He said the *Herald Sun* photographer, sitting in the back seat, found a .22 bullet on the floor and a second bullet under the rear floor mat.

## HUNT FOR DAY-TRIP ESCAPEE

# WARNINGS I CAN KILL



By PETER MICKELBROUGH  
KAMAHL COGDON and TANYA GILES

DERANGED escapee Neville Garden had been allowed on 40 day-release trips despite admitting to psychiatric staff he would kill again.

The *Herald Sun* learned yesterday that Garden was the ninth inmate to escape in the past year while on an outing from the Thomas Embling Hospital, which houses the state's worst insane criminals.

Garden's threat to kill again was detailed in a memo issued to policy yesterday.

And the memo says Garden – who shot dead a Mildura milk bar owner in a random attack in 1994 – could become uncontrollably violent if he mixed alcohol with medication.

“Treating psychiatrists indicate that if he remains off his medication he is capable of committing crimes of this magnitude (murder) in the future.” the police memo says.

“Garden has a documented hatred for authorities, including police, ASIO, AFP (Australian Federal Police) and, if confronted in a non-controlled environment, will be extremely aggressive toward police.

“Garden has indicated to staff at the psychiatric hospital that if in possession of firearms he will use them.”

“Garden has the propensity for extreme violence and due care and attention must be exercised in approaching him.”

But the Thomas Embling Hospital yesterday stood by its claim that the paranoid schizophrenic posed not risk unless cornered or his medication wore off.

Following *Herald Sun* revelations yesterday that Garden had escaped while on an outing to Southbank, it emerged that: STAFF at Thomas Embling told police they held grave fears for anyone who came into contact with Garden.

POSSIBLE sightings of Garden in the city and Hawthorn areas were reported by the public.

PREMIER Steve Bracks said he was disturbed by the latest escape, and the Government cancelled all day leave for inmates at the Fairfield Hospital.

Garden escaped on Sunday while on a four-hour trip to the city with two nurses, a part of his routine since October last year.

# Warning: escapee can kill

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In 1995, Garden was ordered confined to a mental institution for 18 years and nine months, with a minimum of 13 years, after killing John Voliotis, 50, and trying to kill his wife, Paula, outside their Mildura milk bar on New Year's Day 1994.

Garden had never met Mr Voliotis but wrongly believed he was the head of the Mildura mafia, a drug dealer and was stopping him seeing his children.

He also believed ASIO and the CIA had planted transmitters in his teeth to track him.

Police were informed of the escape, which occurred at 2.30pm on Sunday, about 3.35pm.

But a spokesman said it

was decided not to issue an immediate public warning after advice from the hospital that Garden "was not a danger to the public and not a danger to police while he was on medication, which was expected to last a week".

Police issued a public warning at 5.30pm on Monday after learning Garden was less stable than first reported.

The Armed Offenders Squad was called in to lead the manhunt early that afternoon.

Professor Paul Mullen of Forensicare, which runs Thomas Embling Hospital, said Garden had taken escorted leave into the community about 40 times since October. Sunday's South-

bank outing was part of an approved program of weekly leave with two staff at all times.

He said the leave was approved after Garden was deemed by senior hospital staff to be stable, of no danger to the public and of low risk of escape.

"Obviously we have made a wrong assessment on this occasion because he has escaped," he said.

Police say the effects of his medication are expected to wear off in the next day or so, while the hospital says it could be up to a month. Garden is also on medication for diabetes.

Crime Victims Support Association president Noel McNamara called for a judicial inquiry into how

someone with Garden's history was allowed in public.

"Just imagine if the wife happened to be sitting down at Southbank having a cup of coffee and this guy happened to wander past. It's disgraceful."

Professor Mullen said the two nurses who were escorting Garden when he escaped were not tasked to guard him.

Their role was to accompany him so that he could experience "ordinary public situations" in preparation for his eventual release. His outings had included using public transport, shopping and going to cafes.

Professor Mullen said Garden's medical state would deteriorate within

several weeks to a month without his medication.

He said up to 20 patients — about a quarter of the hospital's inmates — were on various forms of escorted leave every day, from highly supervised release for treatment to community outings.

He said about eight other inmates, including some with a history of violent crime, had escaped during leave in the past year. But Professor Mullen said all had returned by themselves within 24 hours and before any public statement needed to be made.

Health Minister John Thwaites said no more patients would be given day leave at the hospital until a review of hospital procedures was done.

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# Public outrage as escapes escalate

## Victims group urges inquiry

By TANYA GILES

PRISONERS locked away to protect the community have repeatedly caused harm while on day release.

In the wake of Neville Garden's escape, the *Herald Sun* has learned of several incidents where potentially dangerous prisoners have escaped and re-offended while on release.

And an outraged crime victims advocate has called for an urgent judicial inquiry into the prisoner release policy.

Crime Victims Support Association president Noel McNamara said killers such as Neville Garden and other violent criminals had no right to walk among the community when they still had long sentences to serve.

"It's absolutely amazing that someone with his track record is allowed to wander around the shopping centres with a couple of unarmed persons," Mr McNamara said.

"He is a proven killer. It's not as if he might be or he might do it.

"It's a fact that he has done it before and he could probably do it again if he is not caught.

"We are absolutely appalled that this is going on. You wonder how many others have escaped and been caught that we don't know about, just how often it goes on.

"I know these people have to be rehabilitated eventually but he is only five or six years into an 18-year sentence and there is no excuse for him to be out wandering around in the public."

Mr McNamara said Garden's escape would horrify the frightened family of his 1994 shooting victim, John Vliotis.

"They would be terrified. How do you tell the wife of the man he shot that this bloke has been wandering around for a few days after being let out?" he said.

"There should be a judicial inquiry into the whole bloody thing. We are horrified and we think there should be a



On the loose: convicted killer Neville Garden.

review of the criteria which allows these people out on the street."

Mr McNamara called for greater supervision of inmates on day outings, saying it was a disgrace that a pair of unarmed female nurses were in charge of Garden when

of Ervin Apinis and trussed him up with his own braces.

Mr Apinis suffered breathing problems and spent a month in hospital recovering from the attack.

Last year, a serial escapee in custody on

In 1998, a country prisoner spent six weeks on the loose after escaping from a supervised fishing trip at the Ninety Mile Beach.

A teenage killer on day release in 1993 came face to face in a supermarket with the husband of a

### INTERNAL POLICE MEMO



NEVILLE Garden is on heavy daily medication in relation to schizophrenia and diabetes, and his last dose of medication was in the evening of March 24, 2001.

The effects of this medication are expected to wear off with the next day or so.

If mixed with alcohol this medication will also have an adverse effect on Garden, promoting violence and uncontrollable behaviour.

Staff at the Thomas Embling Hospital have been spoken to in relation to this escapee and hold grave fears for his safety and the safety of persons likely to come into contact with Garden.

Garden has committed the offence of murder in 1994 and conversation with his treating psychiatrists indicates that if he remains off his medication, that he is capable of committing crimes of this magnitude in the future.

Garden has a documented hatred for authorities including police, ASIO, AFP and, if confronted in a non-controlled environment, will be extremely aggressive toward police. Garden has indicated to staff at the psychiatric hospital that if in possession of firearms, he will use them.

Garden has the propensity for extreme violence, and due care and attention must be exercised in approaching him.

## ‘How do you tell the wife of the man he shot that he’s wandering around’

he fled. Only this month, a "dangerous" heroin abuser was sentenced to nine years' jail for attacking an 86-year-old widow while on a two-day leave pass from a youth training centre.

The 21-year-old attacker conned his way into the Yarraville home

charges for attacking and robbing elderly women spent three weeks on the run after being allowed out of a juvenile centre to visit a motor show.

The young prisoner tried to punch a 72-year-old woman and steal her handbag before being captured by police.

woman he stabbed to death while attempting to rob their North Dandenong home.

A prisoner abducted a mother and four children at knifepoint in 1992 after escaping while on day release to visit his sister's grave and city shops.

He also punched a five-

year-old boy, tried to kidnap a woman with a pitchfork and attacked an elderly woman while on the run.

In New South Wales, a convicted rapist allegedly sexually assaulted his 14-year-old victim while on day release from jail in 1992.

And a convicted pedophile who escaped while on day leave to a children's amusement park in New South Wales was later seen hiding out at a nudist colony.

A police source said the force was only alerted to day-leave absconders when it was "panic stations".

"The only time we find out what's going on is when something like this happens," he said. "Because it's a medical centre, there's issues of privacy. I think in the

circumstances, the public has a right to know.

"It only takes a momentary act for someone to do something that lasts a lifetime."

A juvenile justice source estimated up to 10 youths a month absconded in Victoria while on day leave.

The worker said in one recent case, four of eight youths on an escorted trip to the city absconded.

Another youth with a heroin habit was taken to Footscray with money to buy clothing. Instead, he bought drugs and ran away.

"It's a joke. I feel sorry for the police with all the effort they have to put into catching these kids," Mr McNamara said.

# Killer's escape stirs fears on security

All day-leave from a psychiatric hospital has been banned.

By **PADRAIC MURPHY**  
and **ADRIAN ROLLINS**

A Melbourne psychiatric hospital, where killer Neville Colin Garden, 45, was being held before his escape while on day leave at the weekend, was urged to increase security at the facility earlier this month.

Victoria's Department of Human Services told Forensicare, which operates the Thomas Embling Hospital in Fairfield, to improve security after the escape of two other inmates in December last year.

Forensicare's clinical director, Professor Paul Mullen, said yesterday the hospital was still reviewing the recommendations "... but I have to say that many of them would turn the hospital into a high-security prison".

"The recommendations would not have prevented the incident on Sunday because (they) dealt with security at the hospital, and not day trips."

On Sunday, Garden escaped from two female minders while on a trip to Melbourne's Southbank precinct. He was last seen wearing a green T-shirt, dark grey shorts, white runners and a brown hat.

In 1995, the Supreme Court ordered he be confined to a psychiatric institution for 18 years and nine months for shooting dead Mildura shop owner John Valiotis. Garden is



**On the run: Killer Neville Colin Garden.**

on medication for schizophrenia and diabetes.

Victoria Police have investigated several possible sightings of Garden and have warned the public not to approach him.

Following the escape, the State Government has banned all day leave from the hospital and appointed a committee headed by Victoria's deputy chief psychiatrist, Dr Ruth Vine, to review leave arrangements for security patients at Thomas Embling Hospital.

A spokeswoman for Health Minister John Thwaites said the committee had been directed to examine changes to the leave approval process to include consideration of the destination, the level of escort and the date and timing of any leave.

She said that under a proposal before the committee, all leave must be approved by it in consultation with the chief psychiatrist.

Declaring the ban yesterday, Premier Steve Bracks said Garden's escape was "very disturbing".

He refused to criticise the decision to allow Garden on supervised release, saying it was "a judgment for the chief psychiatrist, based on the psychiatric condition of the patient involved and, in that case, there was a pre-history which suggested that it was appropriate".

Mr Bracks' actions were backed by the opposition, with health spokesman Robert Doyle describing them as "conservative and appropriate".

Mr Doyle said he had the "highest confidence" in Professor Mullen and decisions regarding patient arrangements were best left to clinical psychiatrists. But he said it was important to find out what went wrong during Sunday's community release and to work out ways to prevent it happening again.

Professor Mullen said the hospital would review its own security procedures following Garden's flight.

"The nurses are there to escort him and not to guard him. We make an assessment on all day releases that the patients will not abscond. On this occasion we were wrong. You have to remember that Garden had been on 39 other day trips and we never had any problems before."