

The Canberra Times

As his book climbs up the sales charts, a retired Canberra public servant finds there's strong interest in the story from Hollywood

By [Peter Brewer](#)

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Flashback to 1982, and author Sandi Logan visiting the prison where American "drug grannies" Vera "Toddie" Hayes, left, and Florice "Beezie" Bessire were being held.

A former Canberra senior public servant is poised to have his first literary effort adapted for film, with his true crime tale of two unlikely drug "mules" attracting strong US interest as a potential Hollywood feature.

It's an exciting late career turn for retired journalist, ministerial advisor, police spokesman and senior immigration department official Sandi Logan, whose revelatory true crime story *Betrayed* appears destined to be adapted for the big screen.

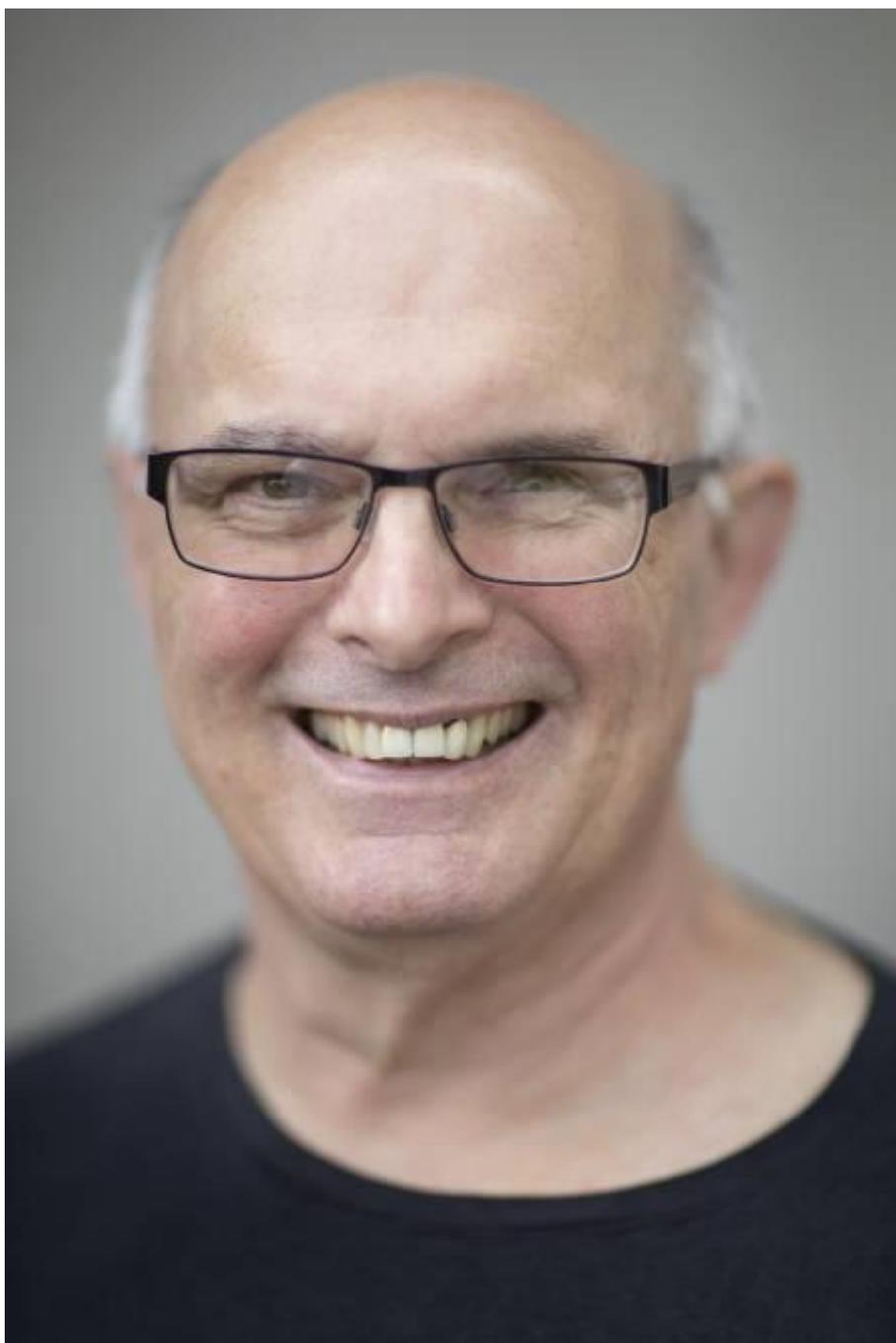
Australian film director Phillip Noyce, responsible for cinematic successes such as *Rabbit Proof Fence*, *Dead Calm* and *Patriot Games*, is firmly in the frame to direct.

Now based on the NSW South Coast, the author will be a producer for the film adaptation of *Betrayed*, in which Mr Logan tells the true story of two American "grannies" - Vera Hays and Florice Bessire, both aged in their 60s at the time - who became the unsuspecting drug mules in a major hashish importation plan.

With unrivalled access to the victims at the centre of the story, Logan tells how in 1977 the two older women became ensnared in a devious plan hatched by their nephew Vern Todd, who arranged to secrete 1.9 tonnes of high-quality Afghan hashish in a Mercedes campervan and bring it to Australia.

Thinking they were embarking on the trip of a lifetime, the women drove the campervan across Europe and into the Asian subcontinent, where the 4000 half-kilo packages of hashish were stuffed into the underbody without their knowledge, then landed with the van in Australia, where they were placed under surveillance by local narcotics agents, arrested and jailed.

During his time as a Sydney-based journalist, Mr Logan became fascinated by the story and compiled a massive collection of material - including photographs and taped interviews with the two women in prison - which he had kept boxed up in storage.



Author Sandi Logan was a journalist before joining the Canberra public service. He is now retired on the NSW South Coast.

When the COVID-19 lockdown hit, Mr Logan found himself unable to travel and with plenty of spare time on his hands, he finally pulled the boxes out of storage and began to write *Betrayed*.

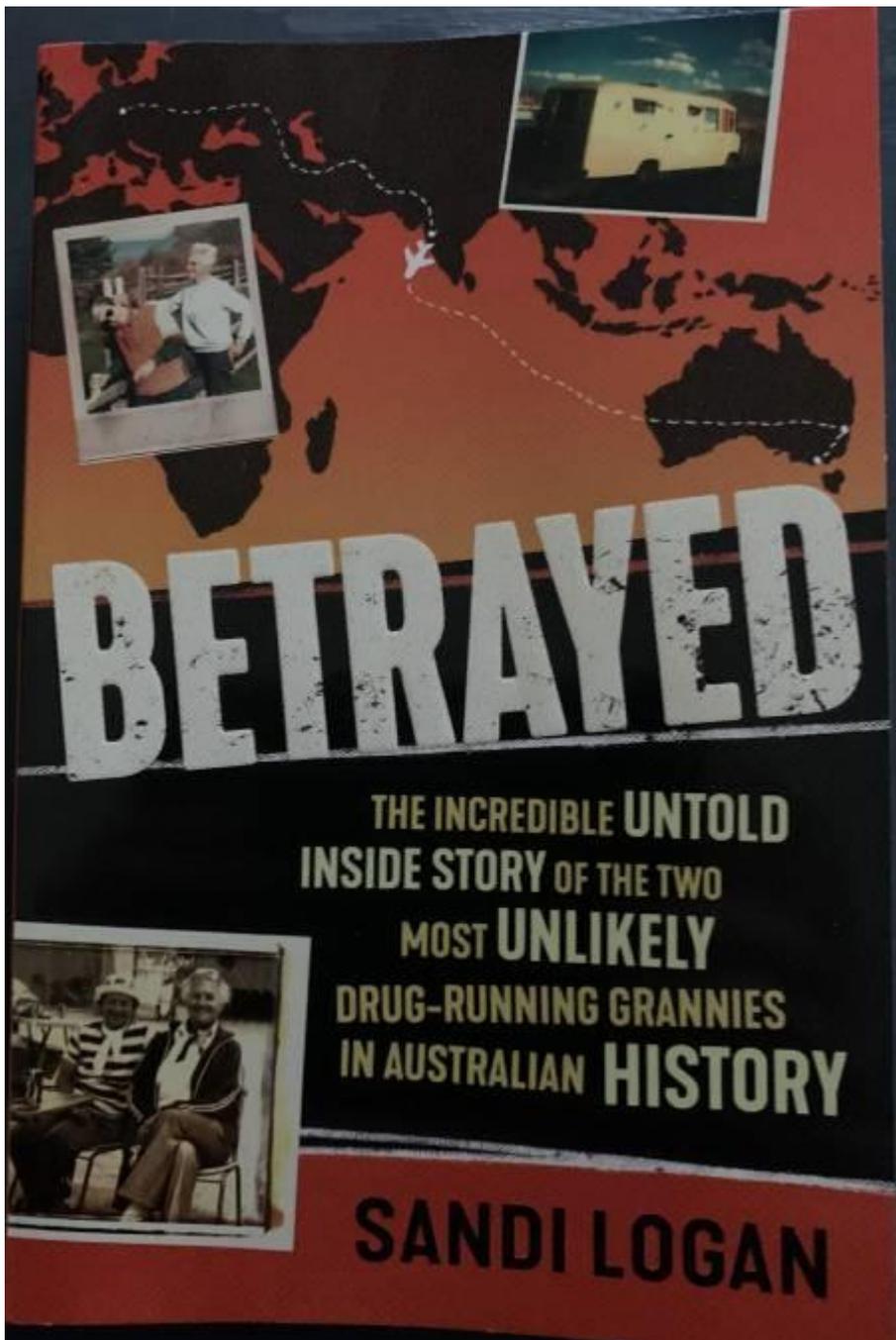
The enthralling true crime story - well-written and comprehensively researched - has sold strongly in Australia and is due for its UK literary release in December.

However, Mr Logan, a former head of the ACT Policing media department whose Canadian twang became familiar to thousands of people in Canberra as he talked every weekday morning about overnight crime on ABC radio, said he was unsure as to the timing and process involved in a film adaptation.

"As a first-time author, this feature film space is all pretty new to me, to be honest," Mr Logan said.

"They [the studio] have to come up with a script, they have to come up with producers, they have to develop a treatment, and then put all that together as a package.

"So whether it's an Australian film, or an American one, or a co-production, I don't know.



Hollywood beckons for former ACT public servant's hot-selling true crime tale.

"It could even be one of these streamed productions, or a series on something like Netflix."

He said that from what he understands, it will most likely be a feature film and not a documentary.

"The arc of the narrative, as I'm told, is that whatever the best story line is and keeps the audience engaged, is what will make it work best as a feature film," he said.

He's even unsure as to whether the proposed film treatment may even skew part of its focus toward a possible gay relationship between the two women, which is an element to the story which Mr Logan didn't explore in his book.

"I think, and most people would agree, it's such a great yarn just in terms of the possibilities of what could come out of it on film," he said.

"Especially with so many unresolved questions like did they know [about the drugs]? How much did they know? Why did they do this, and not that? There are so many possible ways the story can be retold on film."

- **Sandi Logan will be a panellist in a true crime discussion at the upcoming Canberra Writers Festival on Saturday, August 13.**



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Reporter



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Telling the truth and holding agencies accountable must matter to us all. It's also important to tell the truth well, and factually. Contact me at peter.brewer@canberratimes.com.au