

## Chapter 2

# Hells Angels Motorcycle Club and the One Percenters

### Introduction

Following the adverse publicity that accompanied the Hollister “Riot,” one of the veteran’s outlaw motorcycle clubs, the Pissed Off Bastards of Bloomington had disbanded. Reynolds (2000) contends that Arvid Olsen, a former squadron leader with the legendary World War II “Flying Tigers” of China suggested the name “Hells Angels” for a new motorcycle that he, Otto Friedell, and several other former Pissed Off Bastards of Bloomington members decided to form in 1948 in San Bernardino, California. The new members chose as a logo a grinning skull wearing a pilot’s helmet with attached wings. A decade later the name and logo would be adopted by a group of motorcycle riding young toughs and thugs in Oakland, California completing the outlaw motorcycle club, one percent biker, to criminal gang/association progression for the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club under the leadership of Ralph “Sonny” Barger.

The newly formed Hells Angels Motorcycle Club spread throughout California as nomadic members moved from one city to the next. The nature of the membership also changed. The 1957 Sacramento Hells Angels chapter, called charters by the HAMC, was formed out of a motorcycle club called the Hell Bent for Glory Motorcycle Club. Two teenage thugs, James “Mother” Miles and his brother Pat, started this outlaw motorcycle club. This signals that what was occurring throughout California; namely, the breaking of the connection between World War II veterans and the establishment of outlaw motorcycle clubs. Mother Miles, called “Mother” because he was considered to be a “righteous” biker, was extremely popular among the burgeoning California Hells Angels clubs and the other “outlaw” clubs popping up throughout the state. When he was killed in a head-on-crash with a truck, his funeral made *Time Magazine*, and was led to the grave by a procession of 300 + bikers, led by Sonny Barger. In addition to the Hells Angels clubs, there were representatives from other clubs such as the Hangmen, Crossmen, Gladiators, Falcons, Thunderbirds, Mofos, and Marauders (Hudson 1966). The new California HAMC chapters forming at that time were more like separate clubs operating autonomously and independent of each other, often not even

**Fig. 2.1** Hells Angels Logo.  
*Source* Department of Justice  
([www.justice.gov/criminal/orcgs/motorcycle.html](http://www.justice.gov/criminal/orcgs/motorcycle.html))



knowing of the existence of the others. On man, Ralph “Sonny” Barger is credited with bringing the chapters together and creating the largest and most crime involved outlaw motorcycle club in the world.

## Ralph “Sonny” Barger

Sonny Barger grew up in the blue-collar jungle of Oakland, California, and joined the Army in 1965 with an altered birth certificate (Barger 2000). Less than a year later, the Army discovered his actual age and discharged him, but the brief service time made Barger technically a veteran. When he returned to Oakland, there were numerous conventional motorcycle clubs and several disorganized clubs like the Oakland Panthers. Barger joined the Panthers but soon left because they were too tame and did not provide enough action.

The excitement seeking Barger found a new wild bunch of young motorcyclists with whom to ride. The wild group had no name and was searching for an appropriate identifier. One of Barger’s riding buddies “wore a modified Air Force-like patch he’d found in Sacramento, a small skull wearing an aviator cap inside a set of wings (Barger 2000, p. 230).” The young “outlaws” thought the patch was cool and decided to name their club Nomad Hells Angels after the patch. In April 1957, the newly formed Nomads Hells Angels had patches made based on the design, which later became the easily recognizable and copyrighted HAMC deaths head (see Fig. 2.1). Sometime later Barger claims to have met another biker wearing the very same Hells Angels patch. His newfound friend filled Barger in on the history of the Hells Angels club formed in San Bernardino in 1948. Barger’s indoctrination included the naming of the other California chapters, and the rules, regulations, and procedures for becoming an official chapter. Angels from the

SoCal (Southern California) visited the quasi-Oakland Hells Angels. A series of meeting later and the official Oakland Hells Angels came into being. In 1958, Sonny Barger became chapter president then he progressed to National Hells Angels Motorcycle Club president and changed the HAMC forever.

Although the basic organization of the Hells Angels model was in place when Barger became chapter president and national president, under his leadership and guidance new rules were added pertaining to prospective members, club officers, and the induction of new charter/chapters. Barger also engineered the movement of the HAMC from crimes against public order to organized crime for profit (Barker 2007). Even Barger admits that the 1960s and 1970s was the “gangster era” for the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club, he writes in his autobiography that he sold drugs and got into “a lot of shit” during that period (Barger 2000). With Barger at the helm, the Hells Angels expanded nationally and internationally and became and spread their criminal tendrils throughout the world. The first HAMC expansion outside the United States occurred in 1961 when a Hells Angels chapter was established in Auckland, Australia. The first European chapter was granted in London, England in 1969. Today, the Hells Angels have chapters on every continent, except Antarctica. The Hells Angels along with several other American-based Outlaw Motorcycle Clubs (Bandidos, Outlaws, Sons of Silence, Mongols, Warlocks, and Vagos) are transnational organized crime threats (See Barker forthcoming). The outlaw motorcycle club under Barger would complete the progression to the one percent label for outlaw bikers.

## **The One Percenters**

The Vice President of the Oakland Hells Angels Motorcycle Club at that time was George Wethern, a high school dropout who had received an undesirable discharge from the Air Force, once again showing the break in the earlier tradition of World War II veterans. Wethern reports that a meeting of outlaw bikers was called at the home of the Frank Sadilek, the president of the San Francisco Hells Angels chapter. At the meeting were Hells Angels leaders from across the state and former warring outlaw biker club members from the Gypsy Jokers, Road Rats, Galloping Gooses, Satan’s Slaves, the President’s, and the Mofos. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss police harassment but soon turned to recent comments by the AMA. According to Wethern “To draw a distinction between its members and us renegades, the AMA had characterized ninety-nine percent of the country’s motorcyclists as clean-living folks enjoying pure sport. But it [AMA] condemned the other one percent as antisocial barbarians who’d be scum riding horses or surfboards (Wethern and Colnett 1978, p. 54).” The outlaw bikers at the meeting decided to adopt the one percent label as a tribute and not an insult (Wethern and Colnett 1978). They chose a 1 % patch to demarcate them, or set the boundaries between them and the “outsiders” or law-abiding public and conventional motorcycle clubs (see Fig. 2.2). Wethern and Ralph “Sonny” Barger were the first

...We are complete social outcasts—outsiders against society. And that's the way we want it to be. Anything good, we laugh at. We're bastards to the world and they're bastards to us  
Unidentified Hells Angels member quoted in Hudson, 1966).”

**Fig. 2.2** Social Outcasts



**Fig. 2.3** OMC Colors (Bandidos and Pagans) with 1 % Diamond. *Source* Department of Justice ([www.justice.gov/criminal/orcgs/motorcycle.html](http://www.justice.gov/criminal/orcgs/motorcycle.html))

to get “1 %” tattoos. Since that time Outlaw Motorcycle Clubs throughout the world are also known as one percent (1 %) clubs and most members wear the 1 % diamond somewhere on their sleeveless denim vests and sport the 1 % tattoo somewhere on their body (see Fig. 2.3).

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