

This is a chapter from veteran journalist and news anchor Jeremy Thompson's 2017 autobiography, [Breaking News](#), about his friend Mick Deane. Thompson and Deane first worked together when both were at ITN. Many thanks to Thompson and Biteback Publishing for allowing us to share this with you.

CHAPTER 37 MICK DEANE

A sniper's bullet. A cold, calculated, cowardly way to end the life of one of the warmest, bravest, kindest and funniest men I ever knew.

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Mick Deane died as he lived – doing his best. Doing his best to open the eyes of the world to injustice. Doing his best for his mates. And he never did less than his best. An indefatigable warrior of the TV news business, he was the ultimate professional, delivering quality pictures and intuitive editorial judgement whatever the place, whatever the pressure. He was a big man in every way. A rock for those around him. The heart of every team he worked with. Mick was full of wicked wit and wonderful wisdom.

Sage, sane and humble, he was the man we all wanted to work with, whatever the assignment. Not just a great cameraman-editor, but a brilliant bloke too. His death sent shock waves through the television news industry.

I was on holiday in Spain when I heard the news. My boss John Ryley rang to tell me Mick had been shot and seriously wounded while working in Cairo. When he called back a couple of hours later to inform me that Mick had died, tears ran down my face. My two young granddaughters, Bella and Sophia, aged thirteen and ten, had never seen me cry before. They looked shocked but, sweet girls that they are, they just gripped my hands a little tighter.

I'd first met Mick in Manila twenty-seven years earlier when we were covering the frantic politics of the Philippines. He was editing for NBC. I was ITN's new Asia correspondent. We hit it off right away. Within a year Mick and his wife, Daniela, a news agency reporter with UPI and then Reuters, moved to Hong Kong. I soon persuaded him to join me at ITN.

He was just the man I needed – an excellent cameraman who could edit too. But he was also a great travelling companion – unflappable, grounded, worldly-wise and above all, funny. You needed a lot of humour to gather news in strange and faraway places.

The third member of our team, Andy Rex, now ITN's cameraman in Africa, remembered the weeks we spent covering the student uprising in Tiananmen Square in 1989: 'Mick called it the Long March or at least the ten-kilometre march' as we filmed the daily walk with the students from the university to the square. Mick soon became a familiar figure among the students and was fascinated by their cause and their courage.

All of the international media in China at the time were stunned and humbled at how the regime could crush this bid for democracy before our very eyes. The cameras of the world had proved to be no protection against a ruthless authoritarian government. And like the rest of us, Mick felt the injustice.

When Mark Austin, who would later become an ITN newscaster, took over the bureau from me, it was his first stint as a foreign correspondent and he was for ever grateful for Mick's experience:

*He was my guiding hand through the forbidding news jungle of Asia. He would know when to go, when not to go. He would know which airline to fly, where to stay, who to talk to, who to rely on and who to ignore. He would know drivers, local fixers and people you could trust. He was an 'everything will be fine' man and when you're an insecure, uncertain novice trying to make your way in this game he was indispensable.*

Austin recalled how they went undercover in North Korea, posing as teachers:

*Mick put geography teacher on his form and maths teacher on mine, knowing full well it was my worst subject at school. And how he laughed when the headmaster of a school in Pyongyang invited me to take a lesson. On day three of a five-day trip he sensed they'd rumbled us and pushed me to leave. I resisted, but he didn't fancy being banged up in a North Korean jail and found a way to get us out via Beijing. We left and later found out they had discovered we were journalists and had planned to lock us up.*

Certainly Mick wouldn't have wanted a North Korean cell or anything else to keep him from his beloved family. Mick was always itching to get home to Hong Kong to be with Daniela and their boys, Patrick and Benny.

Andy Rex recalled Mick telling him: 'Andy take it from me, family first, then the job and you'll always be happy.'

My Sky News colleague Ian Woods told me about a story they'd filmed together of an American father who had lost his soldier son in Iraq and had written to President Bush. 'Mick filmed it all, including shots of the dad tending his son's grave, and when he was finished he just put down his camera and sobbed his heart out because he was thinking of how he'd feel if his sons died.'

Mick made a positive mark wherever he worked. No wonder he was in such high demand – filming for CNN, NBC, ITN, BBC and Sky News. A generation of young cameramen and women learned their trade from Mick, his mentoring all the more meaningful for his integrity, his energy and his boundless sense of humour.

The more any of us worked with Mick, the more we realised how special he was. He had an uncanny knack for seeing the pictures that would make the story and could salvage a news package with the quality of his camerawork.

As we say in the trade, he could turn a shambles into the Shalimar Gardens. Or as Sky correspondent Stuart Ramsay put it even more vividly: 'Mick made shite packages usable on TV. He'd say "Stuart, we just made chicken salad from chicken shit."'

Deano, as he was known to his mates, had more editorial nous than almost anyone I ever met in forty years of TV news. He not only shot the footage and cut the pictures, he could pretty much write the story too. As he sometimes quietly said to me: 'Hey JT, if you could just turn that sentence upside down the pictures would really appreciate it!'

He was also unfailingly funny and resilient, keeping spirits up when others were flagging. Nobody ever had a bad word to say about him.

And that was a rare thing in such a cutthroat business.

Another cameraman pal Allen McGreevy, who I worked with in the US, told me how Mick lost the coin toss and became pool camera alone on Capitol Hill during Bill Clinton's impeachment hearings. Not too bad until the ice storm swept in and left Mick frozen in like the abominable snowman. 'When I reached Mick there he was standing next to his camera with a thick layer of ice all over him from head to toe; he had been outside for thirteen hours,' McGreevy told me. 'We chipped free the tripod and camera and left everything else there as it was frozen solid to the ground. On the drive back to the office, Mick said to me, "Hey Al, any chance we can skip the coin toss tomorrow and I could do the editing."' "

From freezing to sweating, Mick just kept working. I fondly remember him carrying on filming all covered in ash as we reported live on the volcanic eruption on the Caribbean island of Montserrat in 1997. He handed me his shirt for a piece to camera in Cambodia because mine was wet through from the humidity. When I pointed out that his shirt was just as sweaty as mine, he replied: 'Yes, but my sweat has joined up, so the viewers won't notice!'

Hardly surprising then that Mick had the will, the strength and the stamina to fight cancer and win a few years ago and return to work as keen as ever.

How tragic, how unjust that a man courageous enough to beat cancer should be felled by a remote round fired by someone he never knew, someone who never even looked him in the eye. He was shot on 14 August 2013 by an Egyptian army sniper during the conflict in Cairo. There was no earthly reason why he fired at a man armed only with a camera.

Mick's death was a brutal reminder that reporting from the world's trouble spots has become ever more dangerous. Yet all those who knew and loved Mick were certain that he would never want risk to be a reason for retreat. Like all of us, he went to tough places because he believed the world needed and deserved to know the truth.

He died filming. His dramatic footage led the news. The men with guns couldn't stop his pictures exposing the horrible reality of war. Mick was a man we were all proud to call a friend and a comrade in news. Daniela and her sons asked me to conduct the non-religious funeral service for Mick. It was one of the most daunting yet proudest things that I have ever done.

Mick had been planning to retire the following May to the house he and Daniela had built together, which overlooks the beautiful Lake Bracciano, north of Rome, the city where they'd met.

Peace was so near. It all seemed so unfair.

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