

Editor pushed boundaries

PATIENCE THOMS

Journalist

Born: Sydney, September 13, 1915

Died: Brisbane, March 2, 2006

FROM 1956 until her retirement in 1976, aged 60, Pat Thoms — or Miss Thoms as most *Courier-Mail* journalists addressed her — served as this newspaper's women's news editor.

But the first Australian president of the International Federation of Business and Professional Women (1968-1971) did not settle into a soft retirement at her home in Canopus St, Coorparoo where she cared for her father, Charles (who pre-deceased her).

Miss Thoms, who regarded herself as a feminist, "but not a radical one", applied for admission to the Bachelor of Arts program in the School of Modern Asian Studies at Griffith University to satisfy her thirst to learn about China and its language. She graduated in 1980 but kept her connection with the university working as a part-time public relations consultant for that school from 1982 until 1986 before being elected to the University Council as a member of the Convocation and an appointee of the Governor-in-Council.

In 1981 she became first chair of the new Brisbane College of Advanced Education Council. In 1988, she was elected deputy Chancellor of Griffith University and was re-elected to that position in 1989 and 1990.

She was admitted to the degree of Doctor of the University in April 1990 for her work in Griffith University's interests. Patience Rosemary Thoms got her early education at Koyong

homestead, Moss Vale, NSW and served with the Department of the Army in Brisbane from 1940 to 1945. She entered journalism in 1945 with *Queensland Country Life* as social editor and assistant advertising manager.

In 1950, (Sir) Theodor Bray recruited her to join *The Courier-Mail* at its Queen St offices as deputy women's news editor and she became women's news editor in 1956.

She badgered Mr Bray to be admitted to the daily news conferences previously off limits to anyone from "the hen's coop" as the women's section was irreverently dubbed.

In the early 1960s, there was one graded female journalist in the general news room with female staff generally confined to reporting women's news.

Male and female journalists got equal pay but Miss Thoms recalled after her retirement that she'd never been promoted to a senior journalist (A-grade level). This was an era when "women's news" generally consisted of soft lifestyle stories, articles on gracious living, recipes, and lists of Brisbane weddings. Coverage was sub-edited by a male for Miss Thoms.

Female journalists' duties involved writing wedding blocklines while avoiding information on the honeymoon — "not nice" — and referring to the bride as "the former Miss Whoever".

As well as gaining access to the news conferences, Miss Thoms successfully lobbied for a woman to edit her pages.

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DOGGED ... Patience Thoms.

She travelled widely and filed stories from Thailand, Romania, Paris, London and New York and interview subjects included the king and queen of Thailand (met during a 43-day journey around the world).

Miss Thoms wrote her report of the interview on a Qantas typewriter at Bangkok Airport and gave the copy to a KLM pilot who passed it on to *The Courier-Mail*'s Sydney representative.

It appeared on the front page of *The Courier-Mail* and Melbourne's *Sun-Pictorial* in 1962.

Her lifelong interest in languages and her passion for Asia saw her influence the newspaper to respond to the debate on teaching Asian languages in Queensland schools in 1963 by publish-

ing a series of 12 lessons in simple Malay. She wrote these, with assistance of the Malay Indonesian Language Study Society.

A monarchist, Miss Thoms covered the 1963 royal visit, telling *Courier-Mail* readers in a report filed from Canberra, "A creased skirt is a fashion hazard for any woman and it's a problem Queen Elizabeth has to cope with, too."

Her interest in advancing women led her to serve as president of the Australian Federation of Business and Professional Women from 1960 to 1964, and from 1968 to 1971 she was International president and the first Australian to hold the position.

After leaving that post, she wrote a history of the first 25 years of the Australian Federation of Business and Professional Women's clubs, 1947-1972.

For 11 years from 1974 she was a member of the Queensland Films Board of Review (before a national film classification system was in place), and served on the ethics committee of the Australian Journalists' Association, the National Drug Advisory Council and the Council of Queensland Women.

In an interview with a female journalist in 1995, she recalled: "the changes over the years since 1946 when I first became associated with the business and professional women's organisation are really quite extraordinary". She added, "Today's feminists don't think it's changed enough, and it hasn't. There are many things that still need to be done."

— Des Partridge

Rocket expert at forefront

EDWARD HALL

Engineer

Born: New York, August 4, 1914

Died: Los Angeles, January 15, 2006

COLONEL Edward N. Hall, as director of the Minuteman intercontinental ballistic missile program helped develop America's solid-fuel rocket technology, putting the US decades ahead of other superpowers.

His immense knowledge of rocket propellants helped the US Air Force create its first solid-fuel ICBM in the late 1950s. The switch from liquid fuel to solid made missiles smaller, easier to deploy and less expensive.

The Minuteman became the country's premier missile defence system. It took countries such as the former Soviet Union and China decades to create similar programs.

Col. Hall received a bachelor's degree in engineering in 1935 and later earned a master's in aeronautical engineering.

After enlisting in the Army Air Corps during World War II, he was deployed to England where he repaired US aircraft. Near the war's end he was assigned to acquire intelligence on Germany's rocket propulsion equipment and studied parts recovered from V-2 rockets. After the war, he was assigned to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, where he worked on liquid-fuelled rocket engines. While there, he built a rocket that had a thrust of 135,000 pounds — more than double the power exerted by the German V-2.

Colonel Hall left the Air Force in 1959 and spent 14 years as an engineer at United Aircraft Corp.

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