

Jonesboro. Sadler's message stack by then was 1 1/2 inches thick, reflecting 285 media calls.

Sheriff Haas was so shaken by the shootings that he broke down in tears in the early media briefing. He, too, was overwhelmed by the number of journalists.

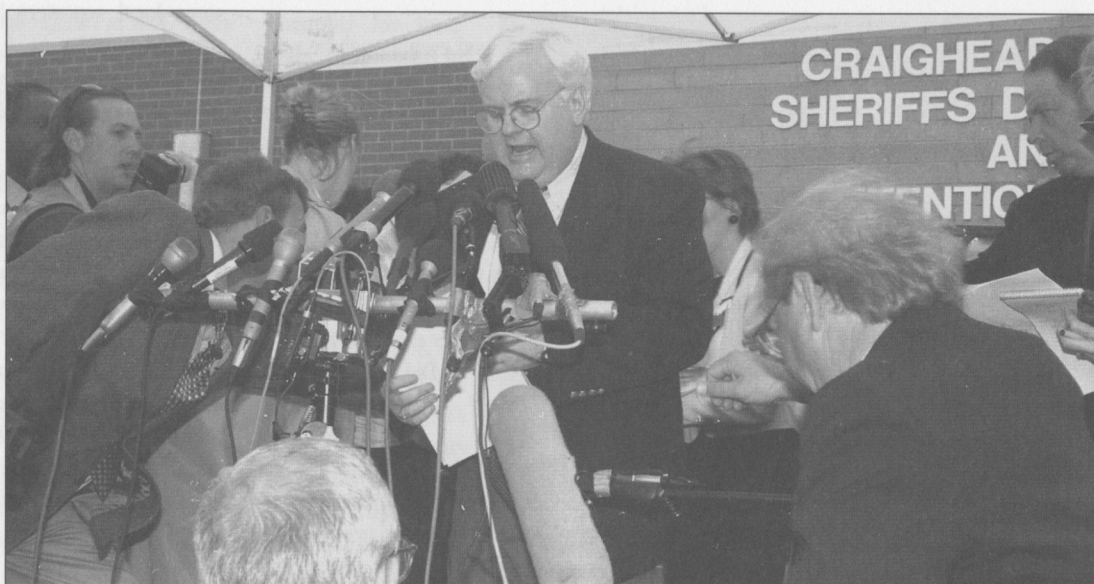
"They set up closest to the scene (that) afternoon. ...We let them stay that night, but the next day, we encouraged them to move their equipment to the school-bus yard (across from the school) or move it here to the county jail," Haas said. "We had to assess and investigate the incident, and the media became so overwhelming that I contacted other officials ... for assistance."

Chief Johnson says Haas should have moved to control the media even sooner. "He didn't know what to do, he didn't want to offend anybody, and ... he let the media run over him, take advantage of him, trying to be nice," Johnson said. "You've got to just get tough with them."

Haas said the idea to get help with the media actually came from some of the reporters. "I asked some of them what would you do to control the situation," Haas recalled. "I think it would be safe to say that one of the older media people gave me the idea of contacting someone professional to handle them."

Early Wednesday morning, Haas asked Sadler to handle the media, and Sadler, a former television journalist who also had worked for *The Jonesboro Sun* early in his career, quickly agreed. He set up shop at the sheriff's office, which also was where Andrew Golden and Mitchell Johnson were being held.

"At that point in time, all of us knew that this was going to be a long, drawn-out affair, and it was only going to get worse



Bill Sadler, media specialist for the Arkansas State Police in Little Rock, briefs the news media.

David Stout, *The Jonesboro Sun*

as far as the amount of media that we were going to be dealing with," Sadler said. "My main concern was to be out there in front of those reporters and make them aware that I was available at least on an hourly basis. And if I could do that on an hourly basis, at least no one could say that we were stonewalling or that we had a closed-door mentality. I was going to get out there and try to answer every question I could answer, down to and including, 'Where are the boys right now? What's the color of the brick outside the cell? Describe the cell block for us.' That kind of thing."

Meanwhile, preparations were under way for the first judicial hearing for the suspects before juvenile court Judge Ralph Wilson. As he waited for information about when the hearing would be, Sadler began to hear rumors that the judge might allow some local media coverage of the proceeding, something that John Troutt says to his knowledge had never happened before.

When Judge Wilson arrived for the hearing, Sadler asked Wilson to provide "some texture to your reasoning" to help

1:47 PM AP Little Rock files a "first add" to its story. The bureau is told by a secretary in the school superintendent's office that shots were fired at 12:55 p.m., between eight and 13 have been injured, all females, and that a fire alarm preceded the shots. Two of those "facts" are wrong: The secretary has the wrong time, and she does not know that a boy is among the wounded. Later updates from AP correct the errors.

1:50 PM As more local journalists gather at the school, students and others informally identify the two boys who have been arrested. By the next morning the names of Mitchell Johnson, 13, and Andrew Golden, 11, are broadcast worldwide. KAIT, which has a policy against using names of juveniles until they are charged as adults, verifies the identities "within an hour ... from a yearbook," but does not use them until the next morning, when the names also appear in *The Jonesboro Sun*.

2:00 PM Sadler works from the plane, calling "every media representative I could think of." He schedules a 4 p.m. news conference. Hundreds of media calls are coming into city and county police offices, St. Bernards and the *Sun*.

2:02 PM KAIT's Davis returns to the air with a live interview with Sheriff Dale Haas, who is talking with reporters for the first time.

2:30 PM Sadler's plane lands in Jonesboro. He goes directly to the state police headquarters for a briefing from officers there. He continues to field calls from news organizations.