

# COUNTER-GANGS:

A history of undercover  
military units in Northern  
Ireland 1971-1976

**Margaret Urwin**



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'The Murder of Charles Daniel Boyd' in *Hanging Crimes*, (2005), Mercier Press;

'The Effects of the Great Famine (1845-9) in the County Wexford Parish of Bannow/Ballymitty' in *The Journal of the Wexford Historical Society*, 1996.



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## Foreword

**It is now widely acknowledged that state collusion and violence played a significant role in the Northern Ireland conflict.\* The findings of the Saville Inquiry into Bloody Sunday represent an important acknowledgement of one crucial episode. Nevertheless, a full accounting for state violence in the Troubles appears some way off.**

Given the British Government's decision to rule out a Truth Commission, the prospects for a comprehensive process to deal with the legacy of the Troubles remain uncertain. In the absence of official will to address the issue, victims' families, investigative journalists and support groups such as Justice for the Forgotten and the Pat Finucane Centre have been at the forefront of uncovering the past.

In this pamphlet, Margaret Urwin of Justice for the Forgotten presents the results of this research in relation to one key actor in the early Troubles, undercover British Army units such as the Military Reaction Forces and their successor, the Special Reconnaissance Unit.

Her findings have implications for many incidents of the Troubles in the 1970s, including the most lethal, the Dublin-Monaghan bombings. They also have

a contemporary significance beyond Northern Ireland given the renewed influence of counter-insurgency theory in the era of the War on Terror, not only on the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also on domestic counter-terrorism.

This pamphlet inaugurates a wider State Violence and Collusion Project, being pursued as a collaboration between Spinwatch and the Pat Finucane Centre, and made possible by an initial grant from the Scurrah Wainwright Charity.

The project aims to use the internet to collate and disseminate research on the role of state violence and collusion in the Troubles. To this end a dedicated portal has been established at Spinwatch's PowerBase wiki (at [http://powerbase.info/index.php/State\\_Violence\\_and\\_Collusion\\_Project](http://powerbase.info/index.php/State_Violence_and_Collusion_Project)).

While the project does not aspire to be a comprehensive account of the issues raised by the Troubles, it does aim to facilitate the valuable research currently being done, which we believe will make a comprehensive truth and reconciliation process for all the victims of the Troubles inevitable.

**Tom Griffin,**  
Spinwatch

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\* See Stevens Inquiry: Overview and recommendations, 17 April 2003, Sir John Stevens QPM, DL., Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/collusion/stevens3/stevens3summary.htm>; British Irish Rights Watch (1999) *Deadly Intelligence: State Involvement in Loyalist Murder in Northern Ireland* (summary). London: British Irish Rights Watch. <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/violence/birw0299.htm>; Amnesty International (2000) *United Kingdom – Patrick Finucane's killing: Official collusion and cover-up*, 1 February, [www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR45/026/2000/en/83f047ba-dfc0-11dd-8e17-69926d493233/eur450262000en.pdf](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR45/026/2000/en/83f047ba-dfc0-11dd-8e17-69926d493233/eur450262000en.pdf) (accessed 24 October 2012).

## Counter-gangs: a history of undercover military units in Northern Ireland 1971-1976

**In the aftermath of World War Two the British state was involved in as many as fifty major colonial counter-insurgency campaigns where they confronted subversion and insurgency by using covert, undercover methods or 'low intensity operations'.<sup>1</sup> Examples of these campaigns include Malaya, Palestine, Kenya, Cyprus, Oman and Aden.**

The British Army's General Sir Frank Kitson<sup>2</sup> did not invent concepts of counter or pseudo-gangs<sup>3</sup> and pseudo operations, but he and Brigadier Richard Clutterbuck<sup>4</sup> undoubtedly brought the issues to a wider audience through their academic publications on low-intensity techniques and methods. Kitson served in several of the colonial campaigns, which convinced him that conventional



*Counterinsurgency in Malaya*

warfare was on the way out, partly because of the nuclear stalemate, and partly because the covert kind was proving to be so effective.<sup>5</sup> He is credited with introducing the pseudo-gang technique into Kenya, using defectors to great advantage.

By 1970, when Kitson was posted to Northern Ireland as commander of 39 Brigade in Belfast, Britain had accumulated significant experience and had developed methods and tactics that they were able to bring to their new theatre of conflict. Counter-insurgency methods were introduced as early as 1971 including psychological warfare and the use of black propaganda with the creation of the Information Policy Unit at Army Headquarters, Lisburn. In 1972, the British Army took overall responsibility for security in Northern Ireland.<sup>6</sup>

Tony Geraghty claims that, in Northern Ireland by the spring of 1971, the British authorities were desperate to penetrate 'the terrorist network and they did so by adopting the counter-gang tactics developed by Kitson during Kenya's Mau Mau campaign.<sup>7</sup> His claim was confirmed in a defensive brief from NIO to the Prime Minister, dated 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1974, that plain-clothes teams, initially joint RUC/Army patrols, began operating in Northern Ireland around Easter 1971.<sup>8</sup>

In a military appreciation document prepared by Army General Staff in October 1971, under the heading: 'Tougher Military Measures and their implications' the following suggestion is included:

*'More aggressive tactics against gunmen [are required] such as the formation of Q squads in special areas, to mystify, mislead and*

*destroy the terrorists'. The IRA has the initiative and is causing disruption out of all proportion to the relatively small numbers engaged. This is not to credit the IRA with any unusual skill; it is the normal pattern of urban guerrilla activity when the guerrillas are not opposed by a ruthless and authoritarian governmental machine.<sup>9</sup>*

'Q squads' was the description given to the mobile undercover unit of the Palestine Police and 'Q patrols' were used in the Cyprus conflict whose members were used to hunt and capture or kill members of EOKA.<sup>10</sup>

### **Military Reaction Forces**

In late 1971 the plain-clothes teams that had been formed at Easter were reformed and expanded as Military Reaction Forces (MRFs) without RUC participation.<sup>11</sup> They were divided into units of around 15, assigned to a particular area, and worked in squads of two to four travelling in a single unmarked vehicle.

Martin Dillon describes their purpose as being 'to draw the Provisional IRA into a shooting war with loyalists in order to distract the IRA from its objective of attacking the Army.'<sup>12</sup>

The MRFs were similar to the 'Q' patrols described above. It is not known how widely these units were dispersed, but we have incontrovertible evidence that they operated in Belfast and Derry. Ian Hurst (Martin Ingram) was asked at the Saville Inquiry whether MRF was operating in Derry in January 1972. His reply was that he wasn't sure if MRF was operating but a unit that had a similar capability undoubtedly was.<sup>13</sup> One of their activities was to drive 'defectors'

from nationalist areas around their districts so that individuals they believed to be members of the IRA could be pointed out. However, the majority of those killed and injured by the MRFs had no involvement with the IRA.

These defectors are described by Geraghty as follows:

*'Ten proven IRA activists, including one who was a recently demobilised soldier of the Royal Irish Rangers, were arrested and given the choice between long terms of imprisonment or undercover work for the British Army. They opted to join the British. Commanded by a Parachute Regiment captain they were known as the Special Detachment of the MRF (or more colloquially as "Fred's"). Their guard were ten volunteers for plain-clothes duty from the British Army. The "Fred's" lived in one half of a semi-detached married quarters in the heavily-guarded Holywood Barracks, while their British guard occupied the other half'.<sup>14</sup>*

The MRFs operated out of Palace Barracks, Holywood and their activities went far beyond surveillance operations such as the Four Square Laundry and Gemini massage parlour, and included the shooting from cars at prominent IRA members, Catholic Ex-servicemen's Association (CESA) members and ordinary Catholics (and in at least one case Protestants), the 'turning' of IRA suspects through intimidation and blackmail and using them to inform on their former comrades or to point them out from passing cars.

This use of 'turned' suspects, who were given the name 'Fred's' by the British Army, is straight out of Kitson – one of his recommendations was the cordoning

of a community and the examination of occupants by informers concealed in hoods.<sup>15</sup>

Here is what an internal source has to say about the establishment of the MRFs:

*'Their setting up was technically the Army's first move into an aggressive intelligence role, where soldiers were operating in plain clothes as members of the public, but could fire on and engage with terrorist groups, if necessary. That changed the nature of the war quite considerably because, instead of soldiers being identified as such, suddenly there were people who were not, from the viewpoint of the general public, anything other than civilians, but they were in fact armed. The plain-clothes operation could be entirely passive, in terms of keeping surveillance on targets, or they could, where a situation merited it take aggressive action by shooting at a particular individual or group of individuals. The MRFs were run without any proper training because soldiers were borrowed from other areas and put into these units. It was done as an experiment and in some ways worked well but it also had great weaknesses, which were exposed by the Four Square Laundry incident. They were eventually, after a couple of developmental stages, replaced by 14<sup>th</sup> Intelligence.'<sup>16</sup>*

While defectors from the nationalist community were used by the British intelligence agencies, the loyalists were their natural allies. Just as the use of the Turkish Cypriots was an important element in British victory in Cyprus, and tribes unsympathetic to the Kikuyu in Kenya played a major role in the defeat of the 'Mau-Mau', so the loyalists of

Northern Ireland were the allies of the British in their war against the IRA. They, in fact, had a higher claim than any of the friendly forces used in the colonies. They were, after all, British citizens who wanted Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom. They shared a common identity and political aims.

Such empathy with loyalists is borne out by a decision that was taken in late 1971 to treat their vigilantes in a different manner from nationalist or Republican vigilantes, e.g., Catholic Ex-Servicemen's Association (CESA). The UK Representative in Belfast, Frank Steele, a senior MI6 officer<sup>17</sup> sent a telegram to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and Home Office (HO), enclosing instructions to troops serving in Northern Ireland 8, 9 and 39 Brigades as well as to HQ Ulster Defence Regiment from the Commander of Land Forces (CLF). The telegram stated that, in relation to vigilantes willing to help the security forces, in reality loyalist vigilantes, Army units were instructed to 'effect informal contact with unofficial forces in order that their activities and areas of operation can be co-ordinated and taken into account in the security plans for the area concerned. The directive referred to 'unofficial unarmed bodies ... working in the public interest.'

Sir Harry Tuzo, General Officer Commanding (GOC) Northern Ireland wrote to Mr. William Whitelaw, SSNI in July 1972 enclosing a position paper on possible action to be taken in the event of a renewed IRA campaign. Under the heading of 'UDA threat' he wrote:

*'It will be even more necessary to acquiesce in unarmed UDA patrolling and barricading of Protestant areas. Indeed it is arguable that Protestant*

*areas could almost be entirely secured by a combination of UDA, Orange Volunteers and RUC. It may even be necessary to turn a blind eye to UDA arms when confined to their own areas.'*<sup>18</sup>

Set out below is a series of murders, attempted murders and other incidents involving the MRFs during 1972.

### **The shooting of the Conway brothers**

On 15<sup>th</sup> April, the first evidence of plain-clothes patrols emerged with the shooting of two brothers in Ballymurphy Road. Gerry and John Conway were walking to the Falls Road to catch a bus when, at the gates of St. Thomas' School near the junction of Ballymurphy and Whiterock Roads, a car pulled up in front of them. Three men wearing sweaters jumped from the car and fired automatic pistols at the two brothers who fled up Ballymurphy Road. One of the men pursued them, firing as he went, and succeeded in wounding both of them. An eyewitness observed the man who had carried out the shooting return to his car and speak into a microphone. Two Saracens arrived on the scene and a uniformed soldier conferred with the 'civilian' gunman. The Saracens then left the area accompanied by the civilian car. A statement issued from the Army press office claimed that a 'mobile patrol' had come under fire from the Whiterock Road and that they had returned fire wounding one man who had dropped his pistol and escaped. Despite the fact that the Conway brothers were treated immediately after the shooting in the Royal Victoria Hospital and made statements to the Association for Legal Justice, which were released to the press, neither of them was ever charged, or even questioned, about the pistol,



which the Army claimed was dropped and which would, presumably, have had fingerprint evidence on it.<sup>19</sup>

The MRF operatives mistook the Conways for two very prominent IRA members, Jim Bryson and Thomas Tolan, who had escaped with five others from the prison ship, HMS Maidstone, on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1972. According to a witness, Noel O'Reilly, he heard one of the MRF men say: 'Bryson got away' and also to have heard the name 'Tolan' mentioned.<sup>20</sup> Both Bryson and Tolan had addresses in Ballymurphy Road.<sup>21</sup>

In 1978, a former soldier who had served with MRF spoke about his experiences in Belfast. He described himself as having been 'an infantry NCO with considerable experience of internal security in aid of the civil power, having carried out police actions in six different territories, as well as having served three tours of duty in Ireland'. He detailed his experiences in Belfast:

*'During early 1972 I was posted away from my battalion to a unit in Ireland called MRF. I was based at the army HQ, 39<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Group, Lisburn. We operated in plain clothes, in civilian vehicles, in teams of from two to four members, each with a senior NCO or subaltern... We were instructed in the use of the Russian AK47 assault rifle, the Armalite and a Thompson machine gun. All these weapons are favoured by the Provos. I will leave it to your imagination why Brigadier Kitson thought this was necessary, as these weapons are not standard issue for the British army.*

*One day in April 1972 I was on plain-clothes surveillance duties with two other soldiers. We drove along the Whiterock Road, Upper Falls. We had*

*a death list with names and photos, with the orders 'shoot on sight'. One of the soldiers saw James [Bryson], a man on the list, and another man whose name I forget [Thomas Tolan]. We swerved our car in front of them and leapt out, drawing our pistols, and opened fire. They tried to run down an alley. We ran after them and the patrol commander gave the order 'bullets'. I scored several hits myself – both men were severely wounded. We radioed for a uniformed patrol. When it turned up, their commander said to ours, 'You stupid bastards, you've shot the wrong fuckers'. The army issued a statement alleging that the men had shot at us and that the army had a pistol to prove it. This was a lie.*

*In May 1972, another MRF patrol assassinated a man called McVeigh with the intention of blaming the Protestants and taking the heat off the army. A month later the MRF shot three taxi drivers in Andersonstown. A Thompson was used.'*<sup>22</sup>

### **The murder of Patrick McVeigh**

Patrick Joseph McVeigh was indeed murdered on 12<sup>th</sup> May at the junction of Riverdale Park South and Finaghy Road North by members of the MRF who opened fire from a car with sub-machine guns on a group of vigilantes who were members of CESA. McVeigh, an ex-serviceman but not a member of the vigilante group, was chatting to them when they were fired upon. His four companions were all wounded – Gerard and Patrick Donnelly, Bernard McGribben and Patrick McCormick.<sup>23</sup> The car continued along Riverdale Park for 100 yards, made a three-point turn on the narrow roadway and drove at high speed past the scene of the shooting

and down Finaghy Road North to a military checkpoint at a railway bridge. The driver of the car showed a document to the soldiers and was allowed to proceed. It was six weeks before the RUC informed the injured survivors of the attack that they had been shot by plain-clothes soldiers. The soldiers claimed at the inquest of Patrick McVeigh that they had been fired upon by six armed men with rifles and revolvers and were not cross-examined. However, forensic evidence given at the inquest showed that neither the dead man nor any of his companions had fired weapons.<sup>24</sup> According to Ed Moloney the real target of the MRF was a leading Republican but the bullets missed him killing Patrick McVeigh and wounding his four friends.<sup>25</sup> Just minutes before Patrick McVeigh was shot, another shooting incident occurred in Slievegallion Drive, Andersonstown in which a man was wounded by shots from a passing car. It was believed that the same car had been involved in both attacks.<sup>26</sup>

There was a development in relation to the murder of Patrick McVeigh in March 1994, more than twenty years later. It was reported that two RUC detectives had travelled to Australia to interview a former soldier about the fatal shooting after a dossier of evidence was submitted to the DPP by Mr. Paddy McGrory, the solicitor acting for the McVeigh family.<sup>27</sup> However, this did not lead to a prosecution.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Shankill Road shooting**

On the afternoon of Friday, 26<sup>th</sup> May, four men from the Shankill Road were travelling by car along Silvio Street, which runs between the Crumlin and Shankill Roads when a blue Ford Cortina, which had been driving

towards them, stopped at the junction of Silvio and Upper Charleville Streets. A man in civilian clothes jumped from the car and fired an automatic pistol at the car containing the four men. He then returned to his car, which attempted to drive off at speed. What happened next is disputed. The Army claimed that local people prevented the car from getting away but local eyewitnesses claimed that the car crashed as it made off. What is not disputed is that the car was later removed from the scene by a military mobile crane. The three men who were in the car were seized and badly beaten. Local community leaders claimed that one of the gunmen was in possession of a military identity card and inside the damaged car an Army pocket phone radio and three nylon masks were found. The Army's version of events was that the 'mobile patrol' had spotted a suspicious car in Jaffa Street, which they managed to stop in Upper Charleville Street. They claimed that two men in the car produced pistols and escaped up the Shankill Road. However, the men actually drove into the yard of Tennent Street RUC station where they reported the incident.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Glen Road shooting**

On 22<sup>nd</sup> June, shortly after midday, three men were shot and seriously wounded at a bus terminus on the Glen Road, Belfast – outside St. Oliver Plunkett's Primary School. They were Hugh Kenny, Joseph Smyth and James Patrick Murray. A fourth man, Thomas Gerard Shaw, who was lying in bed in his own house nearby, was shot and wounded when a stray bullet entered his bedroom. A blue Ford Cortina car (same make and colour as

the Shankill Road car) driving away from the scene was stopped by police and Captain James Alistair McGregor (29) and Sergeant Clive Graham Williams (25) were arrested. These were members of the Military Reaction Force, Williams' parent Corps being the RMP (Royal Military Police).<sup>30</sup> The Army issued the following version of the incident at the time:

*'Shortly after midday a mobile patrol wearing plain clothes and on surveillance duties was driving eastwards on Glen Road. A group of men standing on the bus turnabout opened fire on the patrol shattering a rear window and narrowly missing a soldier. The patrol immediately fired back and men were seen to fall. Since the incident we have heard that four men have been admitted to the R.V.H.'*<sup>31</sup>

The particularly sinister aspect to the shootings is that within a couple of hours of the attack, the Provisional IRA announced that a ceasefire would commence from midnight on 26<sup>th</sup> June in advance of talks with the Secretary of State, William Whitelaw. The purpose of the shootings would appear to have been an attempt to scupper the initiative before it had even begun.<sup>32</sup>

When Captain James Alistair McGregor, a veteran of Aden, for which services he was awarded the Military Cross in 1968<sup>33</sup> and Sergeant Clive Graham Williams first appeared in court on 27<sup>th</sup> February 1973, McGregor was charged with unlawfully possessing a Thompson sub-machine gun and ammunition on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1972 at Holywood, Co. Down. He is alleged to have said: 'That ammunition has nothing to do with me. It belongs to the police at Castlereagh and was issued by the Special Branch'. McGregor was listed

as a member of the Parachute Regiment while Williams' parent unit was not disclosed at their first appearance.<sup>34</sup> They were stationed at Army Headquarters, Lisburn.<sup>35</sup> McGregor, who later attained the rank of Colonel, was awarded a CBE in June 1992.<sup>36</sup>

In an Information Policy briefing dated 16<sup>th</sup> May 1973, almost a year after the attack and shortly before the Court case was due to take place, it was noted that charges against Captain McGregor, 'leader/commander of the MRF in Belfast' had been dropped and that the likely charges against Sergeant Williams would be (a) the attempted murder of Hugh Kenny, Joseph Smyth and James Patrick Murray (b) the wounding of these three men with intent to cause them grievous bodily harm contrary to Section 18 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 and (c) unlawfully wounding Thomas Gerard Shaw contrary to Section 20 of the same Act. It was noted that John Creaney QC, a Territorial Army Volunteer Reserve (TAVR) Lt. Col., who commanded the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Royal Irish Rangers (RIR) would be the defence counsel for Sergeant Williams and that Brian Hutton QC would be prosecuting. The involvement of these particular lawyers in the case was regarded positively by the most senior Army officers. In fact, the trial judge in the case was Ambrose McGonigal, a former member of the elite British Special Boat Squadron who, according to Dillon, had a reputation for favouring the evidence of British Army witnesses.<sup>37</sup> The document refers to the fact that Captain McGregor had been named as head of the Army spy-ring involved in the Four Square Laundry 'intelligence gathering operation' and Information Policy believed that the

IRA would 'try to resurrect the Four Square Laundry operation'. (The Four Square Laundry operation will be dealt with later on in this paper). The document goes on to reveal that Army Public Relations initially covered up the involvement of the MRF in the shooting and then changed their statement. The author feared that the IRA would exploit the use by the unit of a Thompson sub-machine gun even though specific charges in respect of the weapon had been dropped.<sup>38</sup>

During the trial, Sergeant Williams stuck to his story that he had been fired upon by gunmen while on patrol. When he was asked about the Thompson sub-machine gun with which he fired the shots, he said it was held by the MRF to familiarise the NCOs with weapons used by extremists and, on the morning of 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1972, he had taken the gun 'to use it for demonstrations'. He also told the court that he was on patrol in a civilian car to familiarise new recruits with operational areas of the city.<sup>39</sup>

In a report on the trial in the *Irish Times*, Williams was described as a Squad Commander in the Military Reaction Force. He claimed in court that he received two messages that a gunman had been seen at the bus terminus and, when he went to investigate, he saw three men talking together, one of whom had a revolver. He said that, as the Army car passed them, another man opened up with what appeared to be a M1 carbine. He claimed that a bullet hit the rear window and he then leaned out the passenger window and fired seven shots with the Thompson submachine gun. He saw two men fall. However, all three men denied they or anyone else in the vicinity had firearms.<sup>40</sup>

On 28<sup>th</sup> June 1973, a jury acquitted Sergeant Williams on all charges after two hours of deliberation.<sup>41</sup>

### The case of William Black

Professor Kennedy Lindsay tells the full incredible story of William Black in his book, *Ambush at Tully-West*, which was published in 1980. Only a brief synopsis will be included here.

Lindsay, a Canadian, was a founder member of the Vanguard Unionist party and a member of the Northern Ireland Assembly in 1973. In October 1972 he was actually advocating that methods used by the British in Malaya should be introduced into Northern Ireland 'to defeat the terrorists' and was, therefore, an unlikely candidate to complain about the activities of British undercover units. However, like some other Unionist politicians, when such methods were used against members of their own community, he did a complete *volte face*.

William Black was a member of the Plymouth Brethren Church and a non-drinker who had no involvement in politics. He was 40 years old and married with a family of five. He was a skilled fitter employed by Short Brothers and Harland and was a part-time member of the Ulster Defence Regiment.<sup>42</sup>

In the early hours of 18<sup>th</sup> August 1972, Black and his wife, Margaret, witnessed what they assumed was the attempted theft of two vehicles by the IRA outside their house on Black's Road, Belfast. They called the police and Black intervened. He succeeded in preventing the escape of one of the thieves. The police arrived on the scene backed up by the Army. Black was asked to accompany the police and he was taken to Garnock House, an army centre

located a short distance from his home. There he discovered that the would-be thieves were, in fact, Army personnel. He was taken to the commanding officer who explained that the men were members of the Army's Special Investigation Branch (the detective branch of the Royal Military Police). One can only wonder why those employed to police service personnel would engage in such activities. Were they really military police detectives or were they on secondment to an MRF unit? As stated above, Sergeant Clive Williams' parent corps was the Royal Military Police.

Rather bizarrely, the men (or colleagues of theirs) returned to Black's Road and succeeded in stealing a white Vauxhall car, which was again witnessed by Margaret Black, who again called the police. However, she was told that her husband would explain the situation when he returned. It was reported that the purpose of the attempted thefts was to go into Andersonstown to engage in a surveillance exercise or possibly to plant a bomb or carry out a shooting. Because of the attempt to steal a number of vehicles it would seem more likely that a bombing mission was planned. The chosen vehicles would have been recognised and accepted in local nationalist areas.

Subsequently, there were three attempts made on Black's life, Lindsay believes, because of his perceived interference – on 29<sup>th</sup> August 1972, 20<sup>th</sup> January 1973 and the most serious attempt when he was critically injured, on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1974. He was dismissed from the UDR on spurious grounds shortly after the first attempt on his life. An attempt was made on the life of his eldest son, Tom, an RUC cadet, on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1972, when he was shot at from a passing car.

In the summer of 1973, Black had rented a cottage in Tullywest, near Saintfield, Co. Down for use as a holiday home. On 26<sup>th</sup> January 1974, when he visited the house after an absence of several months, he was confronted on the stairway of the cottage by two armed men who shot at him from bedroom doorways. He sustained very serious injuries – two bullets passed through his neck, breaking his jaw in three places, deeply lacerating his tongue, smashing out eight teeth and destroying nerves connected with taste, hearing, speech and jaw movement. Two other bullets ripped through his chest and stomach and one struck him in the back.<sup>43</sup> Despite his incredible injuries, Black managed to crawl down the stairs and escape. He succeeded in reaching his neighbour's house. The neighbour drove him to Saintfield UDR post where first aid was rendered. While he was being treated a strange incident occurred. A regular soldier came over and stood looking down at him and an impression of hostility was conveyed to the injured man. The soldier was six feet in height and wore a pistol, which indicated he was an officer. He also wore a beret with a regimental badge that Black had never seen before. He later described this badge to the journalist Robert Fisk, who immediately recognised it as the badge of the SAS.<sup>44</sup>

A very strange aspect to this shooting is the fact that Black was allowed to escape alive if the intention had been to kill him. It later emerged that, as well as the two gunmen upstairs, another was based in the kitchen downstairs and a further three positioned in sheds outside. Therefore, it is difficult to understand how he could have evaded capture. Lindsay claims that,

as Black made his way up the road to the house of his nearest neighbour, the gunmen again shot at him from the front doorway of the house but failed to hit him. He further claims to have information 'from inside the officer corps of the SAS' that one of their men, a trained marksman, was sent to Northern Ireland specifically to kill William Black and he suggests it may have been the soldier wearing the SAS beret.<sup>45</sup> It seems hardly credible that such a trained expert would have failed to kill Black when he fired at point-blank range or that he would have allowed Black to escape.

In the aftermath of the shooting, the Army issued a statement claiming that a man who was about to open fire on a mobile patrol had been shot. The Army spokesman said that the man had been challenged by the patrol but had raised a rifle and had therefore been fired upon. He further stated that the incident followed an arms and ammunition find in the area.<sup>46</sup> It was stated that he had been shot by members of the SIB (again the detective branch of the RMP). However, Loyalist members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, led by Rev. Ian Paisley and including Rev. William Beattie, Professor Kennedy Lindsay and Cecil Harvey, claimed that Black had, in fact, been the victim of a deliberate assassination attempt and demanded a 'major inquiry' into the shooting

A rather bizarre footnote to the shooting was that an attempt was made to smear Black by planting a Star pistol and assorted ammunition in a downstairs room of his cottage. This weapon had belonged to a man called John Todd, a member of both the UDR and UDA, who had been shot dead by soldiers of the Parachute Regiment in the Shankill

Road area of Belfast on 17<sup>th</sup> October 1972.<sup>47</sup> It was claimed that Todd was not carrying his legally-held pistol when he was shot and that it wasn't found at his home.<sup>48</sup> However, the Star found at Black's cottage bore the serial number of Todd's pistol.

A police report on the shooting of William Black was sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions. However, the DPP declined to make a decision on whether or not anyone should be prosecuted and forwarded the report to the Attorney General of the UK. The AG decided that, on the evidence before him, no criminal proceedings were warranted. In May 1977, the Ministry of Defence, while continuing to claim that the shooting had been an unfortunate case of mistaken identity, agreed to pay William Black £16,700 in compensation for the injuries he had sustained.<sup>49</sup>

When Robert Fisk broke the news that SAS men were serving in Northern Ireland as undercover agents, he referred to the case of William Black. However, he believed it was a case of mistaken identity and that the soldiers were watching a barn that Black had rented out some months previously. However, Fisk may have been unaware of the previous attempts on Black's life and the planting of the Star pistol and ammunition in his cottage. He did disclose that the Black family had been unable to ascertain which Army unit was responsible for the shooting. The Army claimed they were uniformed men of 32 Regiment, Royal Engineers based at Long Kesh.<sup>50</sup>

### **The Bawnmore Road incident**

In the early hours of 29<sup>th</sup> August 1972, in an isolated Catholic area of Greencastle, where a number of attacks on Catholics

from passing cars had occurred, vigilantes stopped a car. Two of the three men in the car had English accents and claimed to be members of the security forces, although they refused to produce evidence of this. When one of the men was pulled from the car, his companions fired a shot and drove off. The man left behind had an automatic pistol in a shoulder holster, which the vigilantes seized. He sat down on the road, put his hands on his head and claimed that his name was Peter Holmes of SAS, Palace Barracks, Holywood. A short time later, troops from 40 Commando arrived and arrested this man. One of the Commandos is alleged to have said: 'I suppose you are one of the £200 a head blokes'. Again the Army claimed the man had been fired on, denied that they were members of the SAS but refused to say to which regiment they belonged.<sup>51</sup>

### **The Leeson Street shooting**

On the afternoon of Saturday, 2<sup>nd</sup> September, a large green van drove into Leeson Street in the Lower Falls area of Belfast. The Army claimed that troops in civilian clothes exchanged fire with a number of gunmen and hit at least two of them. However, this claim was refuted by residents who said that the soldiers were the only people who fired shots and also that a number of soldiers had spent the previous night in a partially bricked-up house in Leeson Street to observe the situation in the district. The men who emerged from the green van exchanged fire with men in the house. Two Saracens then arrived in the street. The men ran to the vehicles for cover and then returned to their van. One of the Saracens drew up beside the house from which the shooting had come. Residents saw four uniformed

soldiers emerging from the house and enter the armoured vehicle. Then both Saracens left the area in convoy with the green van.<sup>52</sup>

According to Raymond Murray, IRA leader Brendan Hughes was the target. He was chatting to another man at the corner of Varna and Leeson Streets when the four men jumped out of the van and began shooting at him.<sup>53</sup> He escaped and the soldiers in the deserted house opened fire, probably thinking that gunmen were firing on them.

### **The New Lodge gun battle**

At 4.00 am the following day, an hour-long gun battle took place in the Catholic New Lodge area of Belfast. When it ended, one soldier lay dead, Robert Cutting of the Royal Marines, while a second was seriously injured. Both sides in the gun battle were soldiers – one side in uniform and the other in civilian clothes, according to eyewitnesses. These eyewitnesses claimed that a man in civilian clothes, who was shot by a soldier in uniform, had been pleading for his life in 'a definite Belfast accent' before he was shot. The body of this 'civilian' was taken away in a Saracen and, since no civilian in the area was reported missing at that time, it seemed likely that he was a plain-clothes soldier. The two soldiers named by the Army as having been shot were English and would not have had accents that could have been mistaken by several eyewitnesses for a Belfast accent.<sup>54</sup>

### **The murder of Daniel Rooney and wounding of Brendan Brennan**

On Tuesday night, 26<sup>th</sup> September, residents of the St. James area had noted the presence of suspicious cars

cruising around the neighbourhood. Four boys, including Daniel Rooney and Brendan Brennan, were standing talking at the junction of St. James' Road and St. James' Crescent. They were unarmed and having a chat before returning to their homes. Around midnight, undercover soldiers drove past in a Hillman Hunter and gunned down 18-year-old Daniel Rooney and Brendan Brennan, aged 19. Rooney died shortly after admission to hospital while Brennan, although very seriously injured, survived.

The Rooney family – parents and seven of their eight children – lived in the family home at Rodney Parade in the St. James area. According to the Association for Legal Justice, the Rooney family, in common with many others in the area, had been systematically harassed by successive regiments of the British Army although they had no involvement with subversive activity. While two of his brothers had been interned and others arrested, Daniel was constantly being stopped and searched and taken in for screening from time to time. The last occasion on which this occurred was just three days before the shooting.

Daniel's sister, Mary, gave a statement to the ALJ. She was walking along St. James' Road at 11.55 pm. This is an extract from her statement:

*'As I crossed the junction of St. James' Road/St. James' Place, I saw a car coming slowly out of St. James' Crescent and turn down St. James' Road ahead of me. Suddenly I heard bursts of gunfire coming from both sides of the car and saw the flashes. I heard screaming and thought to myself: "My God, someone has been hit." I ran down to the Crescent. As I ran I heard a further burst as it turned*

*into Rodney Parade. When I got to the Crescent I saw my brother Daniel lying flat on the footpath and bleeding. I also saw another boy bleeding...Brendan Brennan...I heard no other shooting in the district before, during or after the time I heard and saw the gunfire from the car. My brother was not a gunman and had been screened more times than I can remember by the security forces in the area...They have not been satisfied with gunning him down in cold blood. They have reached the depths of cruelty and said that he was a gunman and that he got his just desserts. May God forgive them.'*

According to other witness statements, there were two cars cruising around the area that night and two witnesses claimed that 'two lads' came up to them and told them that the same cars from which there had been shooting in the area the previous week were 'in again'. One of the cars was described as large and dark-coloured. These witnesses claimed that about ten automatic shots were fired, the flashes of the gunfire lighting the peoples' faces in the car. They saw four of these men – two in the front and two in the back.<sup>55</sup>

Another eye-witness claimed that, shortly after the shooting, a Saladin and Saracen came into St. James' Crescent. As they passed St. James' Road the soldiers in these vehicles started cheering and shouting.

The eyewitness evidence was sent to the Irish Government's Department of Foreign Affairs who found it so compelling that it was forwarded to the European Court of Human Rights at Strasbourg.

The statements issued by the Army in the aftermath alleged that these two boys were gunmen who had fired on



the patrol. They claimed that Daniel Rooney was an IRA gunman, that his activities could be traced back over a year, and that a couple of weeks earlier he had been spotted with a gun by the security forces.<sup>56</sup> A particularly malicious statement issued by the Army OC, Col. Evelegh<sup>57</sup>, said that the late Daniel Rooney had got 'his just desserts'. The suffering of Daniel Rooney's family was greatly increased by these false and malicious media briefings as Mary Rooney's statement clearly shows.

The priests of St. John's Parish read a statement to the congregations at all Masses on Sunday, 1<sup>st</sup> October 1972 asserting that Daniel Rooney was an innocent victim and condemning his murder in the strongest terms.<sup>58</sup>

An open verdict was returned at his inquest on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1973. The soldiers claimed to have been fired on by two youths with a rifle. This was denied by eyewitnesses and the forensic examination of Daniel Rooney failed to produce any evidence that he had been handling a gun.<sup>59</sup> No information was given as to the type of weapon used to shoot Daniel Rooney.

Almost three years after his death, an MoD official, Ken Carter, set out in a memo to Major Maurice Squier in Army HQ's Legal Affairs Department the pros and cons of whether it would be advisable to contest a claim for compensation by Daniel's father, John. Carter had been advised that the outcome would depend on whether local residents or Army witnesses were believed. He suggested that consideration should be given as to the desirability of defending in open court a case involving a plain-clothes patrol, the verdict of which could go either way. He

repeated Evelegh's claims made at the time of the shootings and stressed the necessity of establishing if either Rooney or Brennan had connections with the IRA. Carter pointed out that the Army version relied heavily on the claim that a third youth had been involved. The presence of the third youth had been confirmed at the Inquest by Brennan. (However, this young man had actually run into a nearby house when he saw the car coming). More tests were needed to ascertain the provenance of the bullet holes in the Hillman Hunter to ensure they hadn't been fired from weapons held by the patrol. After the shooting the Army had claimed their car had bullet holes to prove they had been fired upon). It was conceded that the forensic evidence in respect of lead residue was not in the Army's favour.<sup>60</sup>

### **Other unresolved murders in 1972 that may possibly be attributed to the MRF**

Adrian Barton, an 18-year-old Protestant Queen's University student, was fatally wounded when shot from a passing car on the Springfield Road on 19<sup>th</sup> May 1972. He died two days later. He had been walking home from a dance at Queen's along with two friends. One of his friends gave evidence at his inquest that a car had passed them, then turned and, while passing them a second time, fired a hail of shots at them. Given the location of the attack it is likely that the victim was mistakenly thought to be a Catholic by his attackers.<sup>61</sup>

In the early hours of 27<sup>th</sup> May, the body of Gerald Duddy, believed to be a member of CESA, was found at the junction of Riverdale Park South and Finaghy Road North by CESA vigilantes. It is claimed in *Lost Lives* that he was shot by the

UDA. However, he was killed at the exact same location as Patrick McVeigh two weeks earlier and nobody witnessed his murder. He was one of a small number of Catholics employed in Harland and Wolfe shipyard.

On the following day, a 21-year-old Catholic, James Teer, was shot in the same area as Adrian Barton. *Lost Lives* confidently quotes 'reliable loyalist sources' as stating that the UVF killed James Teer.<sup>62</sup> The body of James Joseph Boyle was found with a single gunshot wound to the head on 27th September 1972. (Boyle's murder occurred on the day following the murder of Daniel Rooney).<sup>63</sup>

Those responsible for these murders may have been loyalists but could just as easily have been the MRF. Dillon states that there were questionable shootings at that time when no Army statement was issued and people were deliberately encouraged to believe that the perpetrators were loyalists.<sup>64</sup>

Two other murders occurred in 1972 that may have been the deliberate targeting of the sons of prominent and outspoken Catholic members of the medical profession. The killings were ostensibly at least, the work of loyalists. Francis Peter Lane, aged 23, a medical student at Queen's University was killed on 30<sup>th</sup> September. His body was found on waste ground near the Glencairn housing estate. His father, Patrick Lane, a consultant surgeon in the Mater Hospital, was an outspoken critic of the British Army's methods of interrogating detainees and he had tried unsuccessfully to raise their ill-treatment with the British Medical Council the previous year. He had served with the British Army Medical Corps in France and

the Middle East during the Second World War and had sent back his war medals in protest.<sup>65</sup> Frank Aiken, the Republic's former Minister for External Affairs and Mr. David Andrews, TD, Parliamentary Secretary to the Taoiseach, attended Francis Lane's funeral on 3<sup>rd</sup> October.<sup>66</sup>

Rory Gormley, aged 14, was murdered on 27<sup>th</sup> November while he was being driven to school at St. Malachy's College, by his father, an eminent ophthalmic and eye, nose and throat surgeon attached to the Mater Hospital, when gunmen opened fire on their car. Peter Gormley had been a founder member of the Campaign for Social Justice, the forerunner of the Civil Rights Movement. Mr Gormley usually travelled via Agnes Street to the Antrim Road but, on this occasion, the Army had closed Agnes Street and he was forced to take a diversion onto Downing Street. The car was attacked at the junction of Downing and Ariel Streets. It was sprayed with bullets from an automatic weapon.<sup>67</sup> It is believed that the UVF was responsible<sup>68</sup> but the question arises as to how they knew the Army would close Agnes Street on that particular morning and that cars would be diverted onto Downing Street. It is quite a coincidence that the sons of two prominent surgeons at the Mater Hospital who were both opposing the *status quo* should be killed within two months of each other.

### **The Four Square Laundry incident, Gemini Massage Parlour and the abduction of Kevin McKee and Séamus Wright**

The Four Square Laundry was a bogus service operated by MRF in order to carry out surveillance and to gather intelligence. By the beginning of October 1972 it had been operating for about

two months in the Twinbrook estate and other nearby areas. Clothes collected by them for laundering were taken to Army HQ at Lisburn to be forensically tested for explosive residues before being laundered by a legitimate service – the Monarch Laundry on Donegall Road and then returned to the customers by Four Square. According to IRA sources, the laundry van was garaged at a house on the Lisburn Road.<sup>69</sup> There were rumours at the time that similar services, such as an ice-cream van, a hot-dog van and window cleaners, were ‘withdrawn’ from housing estates in west Belfast.<sup>70</sup>

Robin Ramsey claims that one of the operations of the Palestine ‘killer squads’, which grew out of a unit called the Police Mobile Force, involved the use of a laundry van as cover.<sup>71</sup>

On 2<sup>nd</sup> October, at 11.15am, Sapper Telford Edward (Ted) Stuart of the Royal Engineers was shot dead in Twinbrook by the IRA. Stuart was, in fact, a plain-clothes soldier and a native of Ardstraw, Newtownstewart, Co. Tyrone.<sup>72</sup> He was driving a green Bedford Commer van for the Four Square Laundry operation. His companion was Lance-Corporal Sarah Jane Warke, Provost Company, Royal Military Police, who survived the gun attack by sheltering in a house on the Twinbrook estate where she been collecting dirty laundry.<sup>73</sup> She was a native of Coleraine, Co. Derry.<sup>74</sup> Warke was awarded the Military Medal for bravery in September 1973.<sup>75</sup> She was the first member of WRAC to receive the military decoration. She used the name Kate while working in ‘Operation Four Square Laundry’. A spokesperson for the Ministry of Defence said the award was being made for other work she had done in Northern Ireland, as well as the laundry operation. The MoD

refused, for security reasons, to allow her to be interviewed.<sup>76</sup>

The IRA claimed to have killed two other spies, whom they said were hidden in the roof of the laundry van but no corroborative evidence has ever emerged. Dillon completely discounts the claim.<sup>77</sup> However, according to Ken Connor, the longest serving soldier in the SAS, the laundry vans were fitted with false roofs, concealing intelligence operatives who used cameras and electronic surveillance equipment to document the movements and contacts of IRA suspects.<sup>78</sup>

An hour after the attack on the laundry van a shooting incident took place at 397 Antrim Road in which one man was injured. The premises of Gemini Massage Parlour, another MRF operation, were located above a Bank of Ireland branch and a hairdressers. It placed advertisements ‘for gentlemen only’ and offered ‘attractive masseuses’. It provided much more than massages, which left its clientele very vulnerable and open to blackmail. The injured man was shot in the arm in a waiting-room. The massage parlour had been open for business for just a few weeks.

A short time later, about 12.40 pm, two women, one of them armed, followed by two men, one of whom was also armed, pushed their way into an office block at 15, College Square East. The IRA believed these premises to be the offices of Four Square Laundry. The armed man tripped on the stairs and his gun was discharged accidentally. They proceeded up to the top floor but the office was empty at the time. The two operatives, it was claimed, had a flat at 247 Antrim Road, which they shared with two other agents said to be ‘Bossman’ Jim and

a woman who it was alleged was the daughter of a British Army Brigadier. The IRA claimed to have killed Jim and the Brigadier's daughter but, again, this has never been corroborated. The offices at College Square East had been rented for £80 per annum at the beginning of June. During the trial of a man charged with the murder of Sapper Ted Stuart, Crown Counsel said Stuart was a member of MRF.

Séamus Wright, named as 'an IRA informer used by the MRF' in an internal Army Information policy brief,<sup>79</sup> had been arrested on 5<sup>th</sup> February 1972 during an Army swoop on Bombay Street. He was missing for six months and then arrived home unexpectedly. He told his wife that he had been living in a house within the British Army compound at Palace Barracks, Holywood.<sup>80</sup> The IRA had become suspicious of Wright during his absence and picked him up for questioning at the earliest opportunity. He readily disclosed his involvement with MRF believing he would be of use to the IRA as a double-agent. The IRA decided to go along with this suggestion and he was used in this role for some time. As a result, they were successful in learning a great deal about the *modus operandi* of the MRF. Wright informed them of the involvement of Kevin McKee, who was a nephew of IRA leader, Billy McKee. This caused some consternation and led to McKee being interrogated. When McKee eventually broke, he became a mine of information and revealed details of the Four Square Laundry operation and the massage parlour.<sup>81</sup>

On the evening of the day the Four Square Laundry was exposed, McKee and Wright, described by the British Army as 'turned terrorists',<sup>82</sup> were abducted by the IRA and later killed. The bodies

of McKee and Wright were never found and they are two of the 'Disappeared', although Dillon claims that, because of his close family connections to the IRA, McKee's body was returned to his family and given a secret burial in Milltown Cemetery.<sup>83</sup> This claim has never been authenticated. They were the first of several victims who were abducted and killed by the IRA whose bodies were not returned to relatives. Dillon claims that he was told by an IRA source: 'We identified Wright, who gave us McKee, who told us about Hammond.'<sup>84</sup> (The tragic story of Louis Hammond will be related later in the pamphlet).

### **The Special Reconnaissance Unit (SRU)**

It was clear to the British security forces, after the Four Square Laundry episode, that changes were urgently needed in their counter-insurgency strategy. The weaknesses identified by the study of that debacle indicated that there should be teams of undercover soldiers established who were properly trained for this type of operation.<sup>85</sup> During the short lifetime of the Military Reaction Forces, there had been too much exposure of their activities to the public at large. Apart from the Four Square Laundry affair, this was particularly the case in relation to the Glen Road shootings for which Sergeant Clive Graham Williams was due to stand trial the following year. Its use of 'Freds' also left it open to scrutiny. It was an amateurish outfit with many untrained operatives.

Ken Connor discloses that he was one of a three-man assessment team sent to Northern Ireland to evaluate the Military Reaction Forces in the aftermath of the Four Square Laundry shootings. Their assessment was that the MRFs' cover

was blown and the group of people running it were so out of control that it had to be disbanded at once.<sup>86</sup>

In late 1972, according to a Northern Ireland Office brief, its operations were brought under a more centralised control and a higher standard of training was introduced by establishing a Special Reconnaissance Unit (SRU) of 130 all ranks under the direct command of HQNI.<sup>87</sup> It was classic British *modus operandi* in the wake of bad publicity – to re-form and re-name.

On 15<sup>th</sup> November, a top-level memo entitled 'Special Operations for HQNI' was sent from Major JB Howard to the General Officer Commanding (GOC) informing him that the Chief of the General Staff (CGS) accepted the need for an organisation to handle special troops despite the heavy overheads that would be involved in recruiting and maintaining such a high calibre of soldier. He specified that nobody who had served in the SAS for the previous three years would be allowed to join. Soldiers would volunteer for an unaccompanied tour of one year for special plain-clothes intelligence duties in Northern Ireland. The GOC undertook to report to CGS on the numbers required at a meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> November.<sup>88</sup>

The Defence Secretary, Lord Carrington, sent a similar minute to the Prime Minister on 28<sup>th</sup> November in which he sought agreement for the use of volunteers with SAS training as the basis for reorganising 'the old Military Reaction Forces' into what became the Special Reconnaissance Unit (SRU). He agreed that serving members of 22 SAS and any men who had served with them within the previous three years would be excluded and every attempt would be made to conceal SAS involvement.



*Lord Carrington*

The Special Reconnaissance Unit was much more disciplined and sophisticated than its predecessor and its operatives all had SAS training. It operated under the cover name of NITAT (NI) – Northern Ireland Training and Advisory Teams (NI), ostensibly the equivalent of genuine NITAT teams in UK Land Forces and British Army on the Rhine (BAOR).<sup>89</sup>

Several detachments came under the umbrella of the Special Reconnaissance Unit and were given normal military names such as Four Field Survey Troop and 216 Signals Unit. Four Field Survey Troop was declared to be part of the Royal Engineers, so nothing could be more innocuous on the Border where roads were being cratered.<sup>90</sup> The Four Field Survey Troop detachment was based at Castledillon, Co. Armagh while 216 Signals was based at Ballykelly. An inside source claims that a unit was based in Dublin, which consisted of 12 men. The source further claims that the Northern units would also have travelled to the Republic where they would operate

in twos in order to avoid attracting attention to themselves. IRA members were the main targets of their surveillance but certain Irish politicians would have been under observation as well.<sup>91</sup>

Fred Holroyd in a letter to the *Guardian* dated 13<sup>th</sup> May 1987 – not published by them but subsequently published by *Lobster* the following month, claimed that Four Field Survey Troop, under Capt. Julian Antony (Tony) Ball and 2 i/c Capt. Robert Nairac, had operated under the name NITAT. He wrote that they were co-located at Castledillon, Co. Armagh with an Engineer Regiment, which was fed this information. Holroyd's claim has now been borne out by the document from the Prime Minister's papers providing details of the SRU.

On the Special Forces roll of honour, Tony Ball is listed under the heading of 22 SAS as follows: Lt. Col. Julian Antony Ball, Sultan of Oman's Special Forces; Parachute Regiment (Private); King's Own Scottish Borderers (Officer); 22 SAS (Captain); 14<sup>th</sup> Int. (Lt. Col.); Awards – MBE, MC; killed in a road traffic accident, Oman on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1981, age 37 (with Andrew Nightingale of KMS Ltd., – former 22 SAS).<sup>92</sup>

Capt. Robert Nairac, Grenadier Guards, was abducted from a pub in south Armagh and killed by the IRA in May 1977. He was posthumously awarded the George Cross.<sup>93</sup> Immediately after his abduction, in a secret initial report by Major APA Jones, Nairac is described as 'a member of the permanent cadre of SAS Det. [Detachment] NI acting as an SAS LO [Liaison officer]'. This gives the lie to the British claim that Nairac was not a member of the SAS. Jones goes on to state that Nairac 'was briefed at SAS HQ, Bessbrook at 2135 hours

and departed at 2158 hours.' This contradicts claims made over the years that Nairac was a maverick acting alone without support or control. The report quotes the publican at the Three Steps Inn as saying that, when he left the pub with two men, Captain Nairac appeared to be drunk. Jones comments that this was his 'normal method of op'.<sup>94</sup> However, in a memo of the same date to his Minister of State, J. Dromgoole, Assistant Under Secretary, General Staff describes Nairac as a liaison officer between RUC Special Branch and the Army, primarily SAS but not a member of SAS. Dromgoole goes on to state that Nairac had served previously with NITAT (NI), in other words SRU.<sup>95</sup>

The primary task of the SRU was 'to conduct covert surveillance of terrorists as a preliminary to an arrest carried out by security forces in uniform.' The SRU was also used 'to conduct and handle agents and informers and for the surveillance and protection of persons and property under terrorist threat.' The SRU worked to a great extent on RUC Special Branch information and Special Branch had a high regard for it.

On 5<sup>th</sup> June 1973, in a report on a recent visit to Northern Ireland the CGS referred to NITAT stating that 'the new organisation is working extremely well on its surveillance tasks' and that it 'could play a very important part in the plans for capturing a top Provo.' A minute from Lt. Col. D.J. Ramsbotham to various Army sections dated 26<sup>th</sup> July was celebrating just such a success. Ramsbotham claimed that a very successful attrition rate against PIRA was being maintained and that 'the capture of Jerry (sic) Adams and the other high-ranking members of the Belfast Brigade last Thursday' was

the result of an extremely successful combined operation involving Special Branch, NITAT (in reality SRU) and battalions in 39 and 3 Brigades.

On 31<sup>st</sup> August, Mr. R.C. Stevens, Assistant Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for NI received a minute from MoD stating that the new-style SRU had proved extremely effective, achieving successes out of all proportion to its size.

A Northern Ireland Office brief reported that the three-year rule regarding SAS members had been 'slightly breached' in May 1973 with the appointment of a new commanding officer and in September, it was agreed, in order to help bring the unit up to strength, that the three-year embargo should be reduced to two.<sup>96</sup> It was clearly stated that the purpose of the embargo rule was to make it 'that much easier to reject allegations that current members of SAS are employed in Northern Ireland'. The term SRU and the details of its organisation and *modus operandi* were being kept secret. Lord Carrington, the Secretary of State for Defence, approved the reduction in the embargo in September.<sup>97</sup>

However, by December concern was again being expressed that, despite the reduction in the embargo of SAS men serving in the SRU, the position had, in fact, got worse with the unit some 40 operators below strength. The Defence Secretary proposed to abolish the embargo altogether, rejecting a further reduction. It was proposed that, when the unit was again up to strength, the two-year embargo, or perhaps a shorter one, should be re-imposed.

Men who had served in the SAS were serving in the SRU but no actual SAS units were serving in Northern Ireland as of April 1974. One officer and 30 soldiers

serving with the SRU since January 1974 were due to resume service with 22 SAS by 7<sup>th</sup> April. Their presence with the SRU had gone undetected for well over a year until Robert Fisk published an article in *The Times* on 19<sup>th</sup> March 1974, which blew the lid on SAS involvement in Northern Ireland.

In response to Fisk's article, a minute from the Secretary of State for NI to the Secretary of State for Defence of 21<sup>st</sup> March, confirmed that the policy of the two years' embargo had been changed and confirmed that soldiers direct from SAS service had been sent to Northern Ireland in January 1974 to serve the SRU.

It was almost two years later, January 1976, before the SAS was openly deployed to County Armagh amid great fanfare in response to a spate of sectarian murders. In the meantime the two-year embargo on members of the SAS joining the SRU had been re-imposed. Roy Mason, the Secretary of State for Defence sent a memo to the Prime Minister on 8th September 1976, regarding a review he had carried out on the relationship between the SRU and the SAS. He declared that the purpose of the embargo was 'to strengthen our hand in denying any allegations that we had surreptitiously deployed the SAS to Northern Ireland.' This had caused a problem in that SAS instructors had been prohibited from visiting the SRU, which was considered desirable in order to strengthen the link between operations and training. Mason was greatly relieved that, because of the deployment of the SAS to County Armagh, this no longer presented a problem. In his review he recommended that the existing structure of the SRU should be maintained; there should continue to be rigorous assessment of all volunteers to the unit; the SAS should

continue to train candidates for the SRU in Britain but the SAS should be allowed to attach temporarily to the unit in Northern Ireland. Most importantly, he recommended that the two-year embargo should again be abolished. However, in order to be able to continue to deny that SAS were serving the SRU, he proposed that volunteers for the unit should be 're-captbadged'<sup>98</sup> and posted back to their 'parent unit' before joining the SRU.<sup>99</sup>

It is interesting to note the Machiavellian machinations in which British ministers and army officers engaged so as to be in a position to deny that the SAS had been deployed to Northern Ireland (apart from County Armagh). It was of course the SAS by any other name.

### **Arrest of Martin Watson**

On 5<sup>th</sup> January, 19-year old Martin Watson was arrested on the Falls Road by members of the security forces in plain-clothes. The Civil Rights Association claimed that a car containing three men 'screeched to a halt' at the corner of Clonard Street where a group of youths were chatting. One of the men jumped out of the car and held a 9 mm Browning automatic pistol to the youth's head and forced him into the car, where another man was sitting with a sub-machine gun. Watson was taken to North Howard Street Army post where he was questioned and told he was being arrested under the Special Powers Act for IRA membership. He was then driven to Springfield Road RUC station where he was released almost immediately having signed a statement giving his name, address and some family details.<sup>100</sup>

### **New Lodge murders**

As Desmond Breslin left McLoughlin's Bar on the Antrim Road around 11.40

pm on 3<sup>rd</sup> February, he noticed two friends of his, Jim McCann and Jim Sloan standing talking across the street. His attention was, however, quickly drawn to a dark-blue four-door Morris 1800 driving up the New Lodge Road and onto the Antrim Road. As a mechanic, he was familiar with car suspensions and believed the vehicle was weighted down with armour plating. He was convinced it was a military vehicle or had previously been used as one. In the garage where he worked some military vehicles were re-sprayed from the original green to the same shade of dark blue. One of the passengers in the car attracted his attention. He later described this man as clean-shaven with a military-style haircut. He was dressed in black and was holding a sub-machine gun, either a Sten or a Sterling. As the car turned the corner this man opened fire, the car did a U-turn and came back up the Antrim Road. Breslin's impression was that the gunman acted with military precision. The car continued down the Antrim Road towards Girdwood barracks, firing a second burst of shots at a Chinese restaurant as it went past.

Meanwhile, McCann and Sloan, who were both members of the IRA, were lying dying on the pavement. Eight bullets had hit McCann while three had struck Sloan. As the car was making its getaway it met a Saracen armoured personnel carrier, which made no attempt to intercept or pursue it. Other eyewitnesses claimed that the same car had been seen several times passing through the New Lodge district earlier in the day and the soldiers in the observation posts would have logged it.

Soldiers from the Saracen then took up firing positions and subsequently killed four more local people, three civilians and one IRA member, Tony Campbell. The purpose of the double attack was to lure



the IRA into a gun-battle with the Army.<sup>101</sup> The initial attack bore all the hallmarks of the MRF. The name may have changed but the SRU was still using the same tactics as its predecessor.

### **Derry shooting**

A shooting incident occurred in Derry's Bogside in the early hours of 5<sup>th</sup> March. John Hume described it as follows:

*Now we have a clear case in which armed plain-clothes members of the British Army are clearly admitted to have been travelling within the Bogside area in a car, and to have attempted to assassinate one of our civilians. Surely it is time the public, not only here but in Britain as well, were made aware of the full facts. Are these groups official, or are they undisciplined revenge groups?'*

The Bogside Community Association described the shooting as a deliberate attempt to stir up sectarian violence in Derry.

The British Army admitted that a number of shots were fired by a member of the security forces, "in what appeared to be unauthorised circumstances."<sup>102</sup>

It is not known what action, if any, was subsequently taken against the soldier involved.

A May 1973 *Irish Times* article refers to the scaling down of plain-clothes patrols in civilian cars due to 'incidents in both Belfast and Derry where members of these patrols were charged by the police with the attempted murder of innocent civilians'.<sup>103</sup> Just such pre-emptive action was recommended in an Information Policy briefing on Sergeant Clive Williams of 16<sup>th</sup> May in the run-up to his trial. It was suggested that the announcement on the scaling down could be made in a

bland manner such as in a response to a planted Parliamentary Question. It would appear that the media was used instead.

Just over a year later, on 14<sup>th</sup> April 1974, an undercover soldier, Captain Anthony Pollen was killed by the IRA in Derry. Mark Urban claims this was the first member of 14<sup>th</sup> intelligence to be killed.<sup>104</sup> However, the name 14<sup>th</sup> intelligence had not yet been given to these units and Pollen would actually have been a member of the Special Reconnaissance Unit. There would be several incidents involving 14<sup>th</sup> intelligence in Derry in the years from 1977 to 1984.<sup>105</sup>

### **Ranger Louis Hammond and other 'Freds'**

Louis Hammond, a deserter from the Royal Irish Rangers, was found alive near the Ormeau Road, Belfast, having been shot three times in the head and once in the abdomen on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1973.<sup>106</sup> It appears that Hammond had joined the Royal Irish Rangers in 1969 and had deserted while on leave early in 1972. He is said to have become an intelligence officer with E Company of the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion of the Provisional IRA. The Army arrested him in May 1972. His status as a deserter was discovered during interrogation and, rather than face a court martial for desertion, he agreed to work for MRF.<sup>107</sup> A 1976 Army memo confirms that he deserted at the end of January 1972, returned to Northern Ireland and enrolled in the Provisional IRA. He was arrested in a house raid in May and was persuaded to work for the Army as a 'turned terrorist.' He was employed in this way until December 1972. The memo states that he became unreliable and had tried to make contact with the Provisional IRA. It was decided

that he had 'outlived his usefulness on intelligence duties'.<sup>108</sup>

The Royal Irish Ranger referred to by Geraghty in his description of defectors is almost certainly Louis Hammond. Two of his companions in Palace Barracks, Holywood were Séamus Wright and Kevin McKee.<sup>109</sup>

The publication of a 'dirty tricks' story in the Sunday Times newspaper on 8th April 1973 led directly to the shooting of Hammond. Proof can now be provided that this was an MRF sting, as Dillon claims.<sup>110</sup> Two journalists, Paul Eddy and Chris Ryder, published a headline story – 'IRA Provo chiefs milk £150,000 from funds.' The article claimed that senior officers of the First Battalion had siphoned off funds for their own use, which had been the proceeds of bank robberies. The story originated with the Army who 'revealed' that a report from Liam Shannon, (adjutant of the Long Kesh Battalion) to Séamus Twomey, (O/c the Belfast Brigade) had been intercepted by them while being taken out of the prison. The report was alleged to have named seven 'Provisionals' who had been involved in embezzlement. This document was purportedly shown to the journalists who accepted it at face value. However, other journalists claimed that the document had been doctored before being shown to Eddy and Ryder.<sup>111</sup> In the same article, they claimed that the former intelligence officer of E Company, First Battalion, had come forward to confirm that the report was 'totally correct'.

The reference to the intelligence officer in the article would have clearly identified Hammond and would obviously have led to the attempt on his life later the same month.

In follow-up articles in *The Times* during

the same week, Christopher Walker provided further 'evidence' of the embezzlement. His source of information was, again, the Army.<sup>112</sup>

After the shooting of Hammond at the end of April further articles appeared in *The Times* written by Christopher Sweeney and Christopher Walker on 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> May and in the *Sunday Times* on 13<sup>th</sup> May by Eddy and Ryder. In their article, Eddy and Ryder named Hammond as the man who had 'exposed the embezzlers'. They suggested that Hammond was a double agent, in reality passing minor information to the Army while giving very important information on the MRF to the IRA. However, the much more likely scenario is that the Army was using Hammond one last time in order to support their 'embezzlement' story and were prepared to sacrifice him to the IRA now that they had no further use for him.

Around the same time at Army HQ NI, Col G.W. Hutton prepared an Information Policy brief on Sergeant Williams in anticipation of his forthcoming trial the following month. Concerns were expressed in relation to the possible disclosure of information about the activities of the MRF in court and the desirability of seeking to have the case heard *in camera* was suggested. Hutton went on to comment that, although the term MRF had been used in the press, only two papers had got the name right (Military Reaction Force). He mentioned the recent articles in *Sunday Times* of 13<sup>th</sup> May and *Times* of 14<sup>th</sup> May as having provided the reading public with more information about the MRF, which might help to reduce subsequent propaganda speculation. An official has noted in the margin 'deliberately misleading', which proves that the information contained in the articles was black propaganda, which

almost certainly emanated from the Information Policy Unit.<sup>113</sup> The newspaper articles, therefore, served a dual purpose – to expose the IRA as criminals and to leak selective information about the MRF in advance of Sergeant Williams’ trial.

When he was found shot Hammond was taken to the Royal Victoria Hospital and was later transferred to the military wing of Musgrave Park Hospital for his own safety. He was evacuated from Northern Ireland on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1973 to the Royal Herbert Hospital, Woolwich. However, his family was not informed of his whereabouts for quite some time afterwards.<sup>114</sup>

On 1<sup>st</sup> June, the British Army’s Director of Security, in an internal memo, entitled ‘Protection outside Northern Ireland of key military witnesses and ex-Northern Ireland intelligence agents’ expressed serious concerns about what he described as ‘security near misses’. He made particular reference to three ‘Fred’s’, who had all been injured in Northern Ireland and who had been evacuated to England for medical treatment.

He complained that a Staff Sergeant Green had arrived at the Royal Herbert Hospital, Woolwich on 12<sup>th</sup> April without the prior knowledge of the Security Directorate or Metropolitan Police Special Branch. He believed Green was a possible IRA target. Staff Sergeant Green may well be James Green, the driver of a black taxi, who was shot dead by the IRA on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1977. Dillon discloses that James Green had, like Louis Hammond, spent some time in the Royal Irish Rangers.<sup>115</sup> It is suggested in *Lost Lives* that Vincent Heatherington may have named Green to the IRA as a British agent.<sup>116</sup> (The role of Heatherington will be dealt with later).

The Security Director next referred to Ranger Hammond and remarked that, although on this occasion, they had 24 hours’ notice, there was confusion as to his method of travel ‘and a duplication of effort with the RAF’. He went on to mention a third ‘Fred’ whose name has been redacted and whom he claimed was treated at the Millbank Hospital between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> February and from 24<sup>th</sup> April to 29<sup>th</sup> May 1973. He related that this man was clearly of security interest to HQ NI as the alias of ‘George Brown’ was used and not his real name. When he was discharged on 29<sup>th</sup> May he was collected by a Captain and Sergeant, both in plain-clothes, under HQ NI arrangements. He understood that this man intended to join 1 Green Howards in July and, that like yet another ‘Fred’ serving in 3 Royal Green Jackets, he would have to be placed under passive surveillance. He stated that a number of ‘ex-Freds’ had been discharged back into civilian life.<sup>117</sup>

The Attorney General commented in a memo that the Under-Secretary of State (Army) had compiled a report on Ranger Hammond on 16<sup>th</sup> May and advised that he was trying ‘to tie up the loose ends’ so that he would be in a position to advise what action should eventually be taken on Hammond’s future and what, if any, the service liability for him would be, bearing in mind the circumstances of his employment. He explained that he needed to establish certain facts about Hammond’s absence and ‘any other military offences he might have committed,’ before making a decision on what administrative and disciplinary action should be taken.

He had been advised by the Director of Army Legal Services that to take a ‘Summary of Evidence’ would not

be recommended because Ranger Hammond would have to be offered the services of a solicitor to advise him and be present at the hearing and he feared that might attract publicity. The AG therefore recommended that an Army Legal Services Officer should take a statement from a particular officer who knew the details of Hammond's employment. This officer had asked for assurances that anyone giving evidence would be free to do so without fear of subsequent disciplinary action against themselves or others they might implicate. He reported that Hammond was making satisfactory progress and had been removed from the seriously ill list. However, he said that the specialist was guarded about predicting his future because of residual metal fragments remaining within his brain.<sup>118</sup>

In a further internal memo of 22<sup>nd</sup> June from Mr. Ian Gilmour to the Secretary of State expressing relief that arrangements were now being made to ensure that any informer would, in future, glean very much less information about 'our methods' and hopefully none at all about his colleagues. He advised that if they ever got another case like Hammond, where they had reason to suspect that a 'Fred' might try to contact a terrorist organisation after being dropped, then Ministers should be told and their advice sought before the informer would be paid off.<sup>119</sup> In the Army memo of August 1976, CE Johnson, Head of DS10, reveals that Hammond was paid from May 1972, when he was recruited, until June 1974 when he was discharged on medical grounds. He was assisted in obtaining a disability pension and in preparing a case for compensation under the NI Criminal Compensation Act. However, his medical condition, more than three years after he sustained his

injuries, had not stabilised sufficiently to permit a final settlement. Johnson expressed concern about possible publicity the case might attract.<sup>120</sup>

These memos give a very chilling insight into the expendability of informers and the callous way in which they were used and abused by the British Army and Government, even to the extent of denying poor Hammond the right of having a solicitor present at his hearing, having already set him up to be shot by the IRA. In 1973, Ian Gilmour was Minister of State for Defence and succeeded Lord Carrington the following year as Secretary of State for Defence.

Séamus O'Brien may also have been named to the IRA as an agent by Vincent Heatherington. O'Brien left his wife at Easter 1973 to live with a young Protestant woman in Larne. A year later they moved to a loyalist estate in Bangor. Faligot states that a short time later O'Brien became involved with 'Bobby' who claimed to be a member of the Red Hand Commando and to have a strong socialist philosophy. He further claimed to be working inside RHC for an organisation called the People's Revolutionary Army. He told O'Brien the aim of this organisation was to put a stop to sectarian murders by eliminating all those involved in such killings and who were preventing the emergence 'of an inter-community socialist force.'

'Bobby' in reality worked for British intelligence and suggested to O'Brien that he make contact with INLA Headquarters. He was given photographs of loyalists deemed to be responsible for the killing of Catholics to pass on to the INLA and to try to encourage them to build up links with 'Bobby's' group, the People's

Revolutionary Army. If the INLA leaders had been naïve enough this could have sparked off a campaign against Protestants who were most likely not guilty of any crime. This would, in turn, have discredited the INLA and provoked a backlash from loyalists.

At the beginning of 1975, as a feud developed between the Official IRA and the IRSP, 'Bobby' indicated to O'Brien the location of OIRA arms dumps which the INLA could raid and suggested that, in exchange for arms, the INLA should give him information on the Provisional IRA.

O'Brien moved to the Catholic enclave of Short Strand where 'Bobby' introduced him to 'Brian'. 'Brian' offered O'Brien money for any information he could obtain on PIRA so that their socialist aims could be achieved.<sup>121</sup> Faligot gives no indication as to the source of his information but he himself was, in the mid-1970s, a member of the IRSP. (He was arrested and held for questioning in relation to the bombing of the railway line at Baronrath Bridge, near Sallins, Co. Kildare in June 1975, and the murder of Christopher Phelan,<sup>122</sup> which was later proven to be the work of loyalists).

O'Brien was alleged to have been involved in a bomb attack on the Strand Bar, Short Strand in which six people, four of them women, were killed. The attack took place on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1975 killing the women and one man instantly. The sixth victim, a second man, died a week later.<sup>123</sup>

The IRA abducted Séamus O'Brien, along with his brother Paddy, in the latter's flat in Andersonstown in early January 1976. Two days later, Paddy O'Brien was dumped from a car on Kennedy Way having been warned not to inform the security forces. Exactly a

week later, on 17th January, the body of Séamus O'Brien was discovered by a roadside ditch in the Glen Road area.<sup>124</sup> The IRA's Belfast Brigade said he had been killed for spying for both the British Army and a Loyalist paramilitary group. A statement was issued by an organisation calling itself the Ulster Army stating that O'Brien had been passing information about both the Official and Provisional IRA to them for over a year. They said O'Brien had been a true Ulsterman and loyal Catholic who wanted to break the stranglehold of the Republicans over ordinary Catholics.<sup>125</sup> The true source of the statement was undoubtedly the Information Policy Unit.

Heatherington also named a young Protestant man, Gregory Brown, as also working for British Military Intelligence. He told the IRA he had met Brown in Palace Barracks Army base and that he had been part of a unit which had killed the UDA leader, Tommy Herron in 1973. Herron had undertaken to open up a line of communication with Republicans.<sup>126</sup>

The information provided by Heatherington was passed on to the UDA. Brown was gunned down by the UDA as he walked along the Cregagh Road near his home on 13th May 1976. In the aftermath of his death David McKittrick wrote that Brown had been part of a gang which consisted, as well as Brown, of an RUC detective constable, not attached to Special Branch but to CID, a woman who was either a foreign journalist or a native of Belfast and a Catholic who had once lived in east Belfast and now lived in Craigavon.<sup>127</sup>

On 1st July 1976, an unemployed barman from the Falls Road, Brian Palmer, was murdered by the IRA while

drinking in the Roadhouse pub, Finaghy Road North. The IRA issued a statement on the following day claiming that Palmer was 'an active member of MRF'. However, there is no evidence in the public domain to support this claim. He, too, may have been named by Vincent Heatherington.

After the murder of two police officers in Belfast on 10th May 1974, Vincent Heatherington and Myles McGrogan, two young men in their late teens, were charged and remanded in custody to Crumlin Road prison. These were trumped up charges and the young men were actually Freds planted by British intelligence. They were admitted to A wing by the IRA O/c, Brendan Hughes, after an initial interview in which they claimed to be members of the IRA's 1st battalion. Enquiries were made with the IRA outside the prison as to their *bona fides* and information was soon received that these men were not members of the IRA and had not been involved in the murder of the policemen.

When questioned, the young men admitted they were not involved but claimed that the police had forced them to sign statements admitting their guilt and they had requested to be accepted onto A wing because they felt they would be in danger from loyalist prisoners considering the nature of the charges against them. After a considerable period of debriefing, Heatherington appeared to break and began giving information of working for Special Branch, and subsequently for MRF, having being caught with an old Lee Enfield weapon in 1971. He began naming names of many members of the IRA, both inside and outside the prison, who he claimed were working as agents. He claimed to have carried out bombings including

one where two children were killed at a bar in Corporation Street. However, Heatherington's description of how this bombing was carried out differs from what actually happened. Heatherington is alleged to have said that McGrogan was driving the car and threw a bomb at the bar in Ship Street on 31st October 1972<sup>128</sup> whereas, in actual fact, a car containing the bomb was left outside the pub, which exploded shortly afterwards killing the two children.<sup>129</sup> Like all good propagandists, Heatherington's 'confessions' were a mixture of true facts and lies.

McGrogan did not 'break' at all but a note planted by him was found in Heatherington's bed warning him against giving any information to his interrogators. Eventually, Heatherington 'admitted' that the purpose of their incarceration on A wing was to poison three top IRA members including Brendan Hughes, O/c of the Belfast Brigade. This information caused panic on A wing, particularly when poison was discovered in the prison after details of the plot were conveyed to the prison governor. This episode created paranoia among the IRA leadership in the prison who did not know what to believe and led to great difficulties in the organisation, which was, of course, the intention.<sup>130</sup>

Vincent Heatherington's body was found on the Glen Road where he had been blindfolded and shot by the IRA on 6th July 1976. Myles McGrogan met the same fate on 9th April 1977, a month before James Green was killed.<sup>131</sup>

### **Controversial shootings at Shaw's Lake and Mowhan Post Office, County Armagh**

In the early hours of 20th March 1974 two plain-clothes soldiers were

accidentally shot dead by members of the Armagh Special Patrol Group (SPG) of the RUC. Shortly after midnight, an Orange-coloured Commer van containing about four soldiers developed engine trouble and stopped outside a house in Glenanne. They sought assistance from the householder and were given oil, which enabled them to re-start their vehicle. They also contacted their base at Gosford Castle seeking assistance. However, the van broke down a second time beside Shaw's Lake and it was there that the first shooting occurred. Members of the SPG came on the scene, were suspicious of the occupants of the van, particularly when a sub-machine gun was spotted, and they opened fire. The van driver was shot through the head. The remaining men surrendered, telling the police they were soldiers. Meanwhile, another Army vehicle, a white-topped Land Rover, again containing plain-clothes soldiers, was speeding south, purportedly to render assistance to their comrades. The Land Rover drew into the forecourt of the post office at Mowhan and a soldier got out to make a phone call in the public kiosk. He was cut down by automatic fire directed from a police vehicle on the far side of the road. The post mistress, who was awakened by the shooting, saw a man lying on the ground and another standing against a wall with his hands up and there was a small group of armed police.

The Army statement claimed that two soldiers returning from leave in Germany had been shot in separate shooting incidents by the RUC. A second statement was issued jointly by the Army and RUC much later the same day, which stated that the first

shooting had occurred at 12.50 am and mentioned that two Army vehicles had been involved. Later still, when pressed as to why the first vehicle had been travelling in a northerly direction if those inside were returning from leave in Germany, the Army's response was that the vehicle was on an 'administrative' run, dropping off individuals to units based in Newtownhamilton and Newcastle, County Down. It was claimed that it was only because of the breakdown that the van was heading back in the direction of Gosford. However, the incident raises a number of questions. Why were men, returning from leave, not transported in a more regular fashion? Why were plain-clothes armed soldiers wandering around isolated roads of Armagh where danger could be expected? Why were they not in direct contact with their base? Why had the RUC not been informed beforehand? When a rescue-party was sent out, why were two plain-clothes soldiers in a Land Rover sent out alone along deserted roads and why did they have to rely on a public telephone to contact their base?

It seems much more likely that these soldiers were part of an undercover unit or perhaps two undercover units. Supporting evidence for this belief comes from a rather bizarre incident that is alleged to have occurred a few hours before the shootings. The incident, which involved a loyalist named Williams, occurred in a pub in the Edgarstown area of Portadown. Two men walked up behind Williams at the bar, one stood behind him and placed a small black revolver at the back of his head and said in an English accent: 'You are coming with us, kid.' However, Williams managed to break free and the two men left in a blue saloon car. The barman and a customer said that one of the dead

soldiers, whose photograph appeared in newspapers in the aftermath of their killings, was identical to the man who had attempted to abduct Williams.<sup>132</sup> The parent regiment of the dead soldiers, Michael Herbert and Michael Cotton, was 14th/20th Hussars<sup>133</sup> but this does not preclude them from being members of SRU.

### **Links between the Special Reconnaissance Unit (Four Field Survey Troop detachment) and the Glenanne gang**

The detachment of the SRU known as Four Field Survey Troop, which was based at Castledillon House, County Armagh and connected to the Special Duties Team at Army HQ in Lisburn, were working with what Colin Wallace describes as ‘some sort of pseudo gang’ in 1974. He stated in a letter to a former colleague, dated 14th August 1975, that the sectarian killings that took place at the end of 1974:

*‘Were designed to destroy Rees’ attempts to negotiate a ceasefire, and that the targets were identified for both sides by Int/SB people. They [Craig’s people – Craig Smellie of MI6] believe that some very senior RUC officers are involved with this group. In short it would appear that Loyalist paramilitaries and Int/SB members have formed some sort of pseudo gangs in an attempt to fight a war of attrition by getting paramilitaries on both sides to kill each other and, at the same time, prevent any future political initiative such as Sunningdale.’<sup>134</sup>*

He goes on to disclose that he was given information that those responsible for the Dublin [and Monaghan] bombings were working closely with Special Branch and Intelligence at the time.

The activities of this gang, which comprised members of the RUC, the UDR and loyalist paramilitaries (a classic pseudo-gang) working under the direction of Four Field Survey Troop and possibly other units of the intelligence community and Special Branch, are well documented elsewhere. They were responsible for many murders in the Murder Triangle area from 1972 to 1977, including the Miami Showband murders, as well as cross-Border bombings – the Dublin and Monaghan bombings of May 1974, the Dundalk bombing of December 1975, the Castleblayney bombing of March 1976 and the murder of IRA member, John Francis Green, in January 1975.

In their 1993 documentary on the Dublin and Monaghan bombings, Yorkshire television quoted a former soldier of Four Field Survey Troop as stating:

*We were a specialist unit with training in surveillance and anti-surveillance, silent weapons, breaking and entering. We were also trained in weapons for sabotage with explosives and assassinations. We also crossed the Irish border with explosives to booby-trap arms dumps and for other missions.’<sup>135</sup>*



## Conclusion

**T**he aim of this paper is to provide some information on the *modus operandi* of British undercover units operating in Northern Ireland in the early-mid 1970s – the Military Reaction Forces and its successor the Special Reconnaissance Unit. Other units have followed – the Northern Ireland Special Patrol Group, 14th Intelligence, the Force Research Unit and, most recently, the Special Reconnaissance Regiment, which currently operates in Iraq and Afghanistan. (A chilling operation by this unit in Basra shows that their work continues apace. In September 2005, two men in Arab dress captured by police turned out to be British soldiers. They had been travelling in a civilian car packed with explosives. Their Army colleagues later freed them from custody

by demolishing the police station in which they were being held. The usual black propaganda was disseminated in the aftermath).

By shining a light on these undercover units it can be shown that senior members of the British security forces/services and politicians were and are prepared to use civilian assassinations, bombings and black propaganda to achieve a military, rather than a political, solution to the Northern Ireland conflict and other conflicts in which they are involved. Undoubtedly, other covert agencies were also heavily involved in Northern Ireland including the RUC Special Branch, MI5 and MI6. Obviously, the cases outlined here are only ‘the tip of the iceberg’ and most of the deeds and misdeeds of these units remain hidden and may never be exposed.



*The controversial Force Research Unit in the late 1980s, one of the army units to emerge from the MRF tradition.*

## Endnotes

- 1 'Low-intensity operations' is a military term for the deployment and use of troops and/or assets in situations other than war. Generally these operations are against non-state actors and are given terms like counter-insurgency, anti-subversion and peacekeeping.
- 2 Frank Kitson, b. 1926, was commissioned into the Rifle Brigade. He was awarded the Military Cross in 1955 for service in Kenya against the Mau Mau uprising (1952-60). He was awarded a bar to it in 1958 for service in Malaya. He served in Northern Ireland in the early 1970s for which he was awarded a CBE for his operational services. He is author of *Gangs and Counter-gangs* (1960); *Low-intensity operations* (1971) and *Bunch of Five* (1977). The Mau Mau was a Kenyan anti-colonial group dominated by the Kikuyu tribe.
- 3 A pseudo-gang is a state-sponsored group used to advance an agenda while discrediting the real opposition.
- 4 Richard Clutterbuck (1917-98) was a pioneer in the study of political violence. He was a professional soldier and later in life an academic. He was commissioned into the Royal Engineers in 1937. After the Second World War he served in Palestine during the Irgun campaign. In north-east Thailand in 1966-8 he put into practice the counter-terrorist philosophy he was gradually evolving. When he became Chief Army Instructor of the Royal College of Defence Studies, he specialised in the teaching of low-intensity operations.
- 5 Porter, Bernard, *Plots and Paranoia*, (1992), Routledge, pp.198-9.
- 6 *Lobster*, Issue 18, October 1989
- 7 Geraghty, Tony, *Inside the SAS*, (1987), p.29.
- 8 National Archives of UK, PREM 16/154, Prime Minister's Office registered papers.
- 9 Ibid, FCO33/1486/109691, 4th October 1971.
- 10 EOKA was a Greek Cypriot nationalist paramilitary organisation that fought to end the status of Cyprus as a crown colony of the British Empire. It desired political unity with Greece.
- 11 National Archives of UK, PREM16/154, Prime Minister's Office registered papers.
- 12 Dillon, Martin, *The Enemy Within: The IRA's war against the British* (1994), Doubleday, p.120.
- 13 Saville Inquiry, Day 339, pp.215-6, testimony of Ian Hurst (Martin Ingram).
- 14 Faligot, Roger, *Britain's Military Strategy in Ireland*, (1983), p.14.
- 15 Kitson, Frank, *Low Intensity Operations: subversion, insurgency, peacekeeping*, (1971) p.100.
- 16 Oral source No. 1.
- 17 Dorril, Stephen, *M16*, (2001) p.739.
- 18 National Archives of UK, CJ 4/266, Correspondence from Sir Harry Tuzo to SSNI, 9th July 1972, Conduct of Military Operations in NI.
- 19 National Archives of Ireland, Dept. of Foreign Affairs 2003, Report of Association for Legal Justice, April 1972; *Hibernia*, 30th March 1973, p.17.
- 20 *The Times* (London), 3rd March 1973.
- 21 *Irish Times*, 20th January 1973.
- 22 Renwick, Alastair, *Oliver's Army*, Chapter 8, website of Troops Out Movement – statement made by Northern Ireland veteran at a Troops Out public meeting in 1978.
- 23 *The Times* (London), 3rd March 1973.
- 24 *Hibernia*, 30th March 1973.
- 25 Murray, Raymond, *The SAS in Ireland* (1990), Mercier Press, p.48, quoting *Magill*, September 1978, article by Ed Moloney.
- 26 *Irish Times*, 13th May 1972.
- 27 Ibid, 3rd March 1994.
- 28 McKittrick et al, *Lost Lives*, (2007) Mainstream Publishing, p. 183.
- 29 *Hibernia*, 30th March 1973.
- 30 National Archives of UK, DEFE 24/969, Information Policy Brief, with accompanying letter sent to Lt. Col. F.M.K. Tuck, MoD (MO4), Whitehall, London from Col. G.W. Hutton for GOC, HQ, Northern Ireland, 16th May 1973.
- 31 Ibid, Defensive Press Brief from A.W. Stephens, Head of DS10, to Permanent Secretary and Under-Secretary of Secretary of State (Army, 22nd June 1973).
- 32 *The Irish Times*, 23rd June 1972.
- 33 Supplement to the *London Gazette*, 23rd January 1968.
- 34 *Hibernia*, 30th March 1973.
- 35 *The Times*, (London), 4th May 1973.
- 36 Supplement to the *London Gazette*, 13th June 1992.
- 37 Dillon, Martin, *The Trigger Men*, (2004), Mainstream Publishing, p.61.
- 38 National Archives of UK, DEFE 24/969, Information Policy Brief, with accompanying letter sent to Lt. Col. F.M.K. Tuck, MoD (MO4), Whitehall, London from Col. G.W. Hutton for GOC, HQ, Northern Ireland, 16th May 1973.
- 39 *The Irish Times*, 28th June 1973.
- 40 Ibid, 29th June 1973, p.9.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Lindsay, Kennedy, *Ambush at Tully-West*, (1980), Dunrod Press, pp.18-19.
- 43 Ibid, p.56.
- 44 *ibid*, p.57-8, 67.

- 45 Ibid, p.67.
- 46 *Irish Times*, 28th January 1974, p.1.
- 47 McKittrick et al, *Lost Lives* (2007), p.283-4.
- 48 Lindsay, Kennedy, *Ambush at Tully-West*, pp.63-4; *Lost Lives*, pp.283-4.
- 49 Ibid, p.81, 83.
- 50 *The Times*, (London), 19th March 1974.
- 51 *Hibernia*, 30th March 1973.
- 52 *The Irish Times*, 4th September 1972; *Hibernia* 30th March 1973.
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