

## **MEMORIES OF A COMBAT COP - P101**

### **Introduction:**

This article is contributed by a former member of the part-time Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve (RUCR) stationed at Willowfield Police Station, Belfast, from 1970 – 1980; and is part of their personal contributions to Project RUC 100. The article is constructed in question & answer format, written with feeling and a little humour, and provides authenticated historical information about the ex-officer's police and public service; and how it impacted upon all aspects of their private, family and business lives; some of which still apply to this very day. For security reasons, precise names and address have been withheld or altered. Sadly, this type of security measure still applies to many members of the wider police family in Northern Ireland.

As our contributor remains active in community and charity voluntary services, with over 55 year's continuous public service, and with the threat of terrorism remaining 'Severe', they wish to remain anonymous. For administration purposes, our contributor is referred to as Anon/P101.

### **Question 1 - Why did you join the Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve?**

Why did I join the Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve (RUCR)? Not, really an easy question to answer in a few words, or at all. Don't forget that was over 50 years ago, so bear with me. Dates might be a problem, and for security reasons I better not use real names or addresses. But here goes anyway. I had a lot of responsibilities in 1970/71 at the age of 26. I will tell you about these first, as they may well help you understand the person I am.

My adult life started when my father died in December 1959 unexpectedly. He passed away leaving my mother, elder brother and two sisters, (one younger than me and one older), a family business and ten employees. My brother took over all these responsibilities until 1965 when he decided to leave the family business and I took it over. I was only 21 and I now had a wife with a child on the way. These responsibilities became mine now. My younger sister was still at school, my new wife and the ten employees were relying on me for their lively hoods. 1969 brought the beginning of the 'Troubles'. I now had two young children and my wife and mother to support and the business to run. The business was on the Lisburn Road in Belfast and my family now lived in the Cregagh area. My mother and sister lived on the Lisburn Road.

In 1969 a business friend of mine, Norman A, who ran a similar business to mine, met up with me and during our conversation mentioned the RUC Reserve and asked me if I would join? At that time the Reserve was not armed. I felt the risks were too great as already three policemen had been murdered whilst on duty. The regular RUC being armed and the

RUCR unarmed meant the Reserve had no means of protecting themselves from assassination, kidnap, or other violent crimes. Given my family and business responsibilities, this was a risk I was not prepared to take, at that time. Towards the later part of 1970 the Reserve became armed, perhaps someone had heard my voice, perhaps not, anyway, away went my excuse for not joining. It was now time for me to face my family and inform them of my decision to join the reserve police. I discussed with my wife the risks that were involved, and she pointed out to me my responsibilities to our family. I listened and explained to her that I wanted to join and hopefully help prevent the terrorism that was coming from both sides of Northern Ireland's divided society. I wanted to help bring back the return of peace and security to all the people of Northern Ireland. Little did I know this task would prove to be virtually impossible? At least perhaps I could help prevent or reduce the massive loss of life, injuries, destruction, and chaos. So, I completed the application form, which was accepted in November 1970, and I was then introduced to training at the Belfast Rope Works a few weeks later. My entire life was about to get a whole lot busier, but I looked forward to the challenge. Ignorance was bliss!

## **Question 2 - What did the RUCR enrolment and training entail?**

ENROLEMENT: Very soon after I had sent in the completed application form, an acknowledgement arrived. This stated that I should report to the RUC Reserve Training Centre, at the Rope Works on the Newtownards Road, Belfast, the following Wednesday evening at 7.30pm, for the enrolment and induction.

Now this is where I am having difficulty remembering exactly what happened at the enrolment, after all, that was over 50 years ago. Now where was I? Oh yes, I arrived at the Rope Works on time and was shown into a classroom that contained more applicants. Shortly after, several regular police officers, in uniform, entered the room. Introductions were made and the format for the evening explained by a senior officer. The proceedings commenced with taking the Oath of Allegiance to HM the Queen, followed by the Aims and Objects of the RUC and the RUCR. The priority of the Aims and Objects was, in short, to protect life and property, prevent and detect crime and keep the peace. How honourable, I thought! We were presented with our warrant cards, signed by Chief Constable, Sir Graham Shillington CBE and welcomed into the RUCR. My Force Number was R???. Added up equals 13. Unlucky for some!

We were issued with a training schedule which was to start the following Wednesday and there after every Wednesday for the next month or two. The enrolment and induction process were now completed, and we were encouraged to go home and study the paperwork and prepare ourselves for initial training, and the challenges and opportunities that lay ahead.

TRAINING: After the enrolment, the previous Wednesday, it was back to school days again. I did not have my uniform yet. I would soon receive instructions to report to Central Stores at Sprucefield, near Lisburn, for fitting and issue of my new police uniform and other kit.

The classes at the Rope Works, each Wednesday, for the next number of months were to teach me about the Law and Procedure including Powers of Arrest, Use of Force, the Judges Rules, Taking of Statements, general administration including use of our notebooks and various aspects of crime prevention and detection. Personal presentation, good manners and courtesy and public respect and discipline when dealing with members of the public were all very important and the instructor's emphasised these requirements with absolute discipline and vigour. Public and community relations were always mentioned at some stage during training, as was personal, family, and public protection.

The police were regarded as the 'enemy' by all those involved in Northern Ireland's violent and criminal political conflict, as well as those who had become known as ODCs – Ordinary Decent Criminals (cop slang for criminals who didn't want to murder cops). We were the meat in the sandwich. We would be exposed to every kind of human aggression, from ostracization to assassination, just like our forefathers in the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC). History was about to repeat itself, big style. I could learn a lot about the present by studying the past, a case of 'study to survive'. Was I wise?

In 1971, the careful application of 'Judges Rules' were very important. Verbal and written cautions went something like this when making an arrest; *"I have been told by Constable???? I am not obliged to say anything, and I understand that anything I do say will be taken down in writing and may be given in evidence. I clearly understand this caution and wish to make a statement"* Signed.....? Fortunately, much of the legal procedure was contained in my notebook and I was able to read or copy the exact wording, as and when required.

Anti-Terrorist, Personal Protection and Weapon Training were specific essential training subjects. These were very serious subjects and were taught with personal and public safety as essential priorities, as was each officer protecting their colleagues; and bearing in mind that female officers were not armed at that time, placed them at greater risk to violence. Subsequently, female officers were always accompanied on patrol by an armed male officer.

The drawing and use of weapons was a last resort, and Force discipline procedures and investigations were fully explained and applied. The use of weapons in any circumstances had to be fully explained, justified, and investigated. No cowboys! On successful completion of firearms training and assessment, I was issued with a .38 Webley Revolver, spare rounds, and a black cloth shoulder holster made out of old 'great coats'. This was now my personal protection weapon, commonly known as a PPW. I carried it concealed in my under-arm shoulder holster, when not in uniform. Later we were issued with a Walther PPK 9mm short semi-automatic pistol. Training also included the 9mm Sterling sub-machine gun (SMG) and

the Browning 5 shot semi-automatic shotgun with a long barrel, possibly 32 inches? I remember the shotgun fired special cartridges which each contained 12 large ball bearings. One cartridge was also a 'solid shot/slug', especially designed to stop car engines. This weapon was mainly carried on station security duties, and it was not in service for very long.

Fortunately for me, I only ever fired my PPW once, and that was to extract myself from a loyalist mob of youths attacking me. Thankfully no one was hurt. But I was subject to a rigorous disciplinary investigation which resulted in 'no further action' (NFA). My actions were fully justified, and I lived to fight, or should I say, be attacked, another day!

The weapon training was carried out at the sound proofed range which was also at the Belfast Rope Works. Weapon training tactics included the safety of our families, our homes and travelling to and from the Police Station. I was well advised to ensure that my family was made aware of the risks involved with me being a member of the RUCR. This was all very new to my family, and I wasn't sure that I was being fair to my wife and two children to put them into the danger that came with being in the Reserve. This was the beginning of a 10-year stint of dangerous voluntary public service, but I was determined to give it a go. It was now a case of, 'train hard, fight easy'.

I was eventually allocated to Willowfield Police Station on the Woodstock Road, in East Belfast. This was not far from my home at the time of joining. Later I moved house to the Stranmillis area of South Belfast. I felt it was not a good idea to live too long in any one place, especially when your neighbours got to know you were a police reservist and your movements were easily noticed or monitored. We were even advised not to hang any washing out to dry on our cloths lines that may indicate someone in the house was in the police (especially our green shirts).

Members of the part-time Reserve were deemed to be potentially 'high risk' for terrorist attack when off duty, as we had to attend our regular place of employment and carry out our normal work routines within the community, which made us easier targets for watching, intimidation, kidnap, and assassination by terrorists. Some Reservists had to ask permission from their employers and reschedule work shifts and timings, which potentially lead to more people knowing their movements. Imagine if you were a regular delivery driver, or a postman or milkman or someone doing the same deliveries and visits every day. You and fellow workers would be soft sitting targets. A dead cert, literally. Any wonder some people avoided you and stopped invitations for dinner and drinks!

These risks also extended to our homes, family, schools, and social and sporting occasions; in fact, all aspects of public and private life, even your place of worship wasn't safe, especially for Catholic officers. Instruction on situation awareness and continuous risk assessment was provided and updated on a regular basis and became daily practice, but sadly many Reservists were still identified and intimidated and had to move house or were brutally murdered in front of their family and friends. This was also true of other security

and military organisations including civilian workers of all categories. Republican terrorists were well known for selecting easy and soft targets and carrying out their terrorist crimes with inhuman and ruthless efficiency. But despite these threats and criminal activities, the part-time RUCR continued to recruit, train, and develop, along with the rest of the Force and policing carried on with increased effectiveness, courage, and resilience, as living with violence and terrorism became the new normal for many throughout Northern Ireland.

Training and learning became an ongoing necessity. All members of the police, military, and civilian support staff, including contactors, had now become 'authorised and approved legitimate targets' for republican terrorists, and if family members or friends happen to get in the way, they were murdered too. Many Catholic officers were particularly vulnerable and were targeted at their places of worship; some were murdered in front of their families while attending Mass. Despite these horrendous conditions, ordinary men and women continued to join and serve in what had become to be regarded as the world's most dangerous police force in which to serve; the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). Later to be awarded the George Cross, for gallantry.

### **Question 3 - Describe your first duty?**

My working day ended at 5.30pm in those days, when I closed the shop and headed home to my wife and two children. We had a quick conversation during our dinner. Then I rushed upstairs to change into the uniform of a Reserve constable. Back downstairs for some hugs and kisses and receive words of "take-care daddy". Then off I go to do my duty for the first time and bring peace to Northern Ireland, or so I thought. On the drive to the Police Station, I had time to think, then it struck me that I might never see my family again, such was the danger that all police officers in Northern Ireland had to face in those days, both on and off duty. I was about to open a new chapter in my book of life!

With the initial training at the Belfast Rope Works now completed, my first night on duty at Willowfield Station was to begin. This was a cold and wet March night, I think! I reported on time to the briefing room for duty at 7pm. The briefing was carried out by the Station Sergeant, Alfie K. I made my first entry in my new notebook. This was all new to me. I was teamed up with a very experienced fellow reserve constable. His name was Bob A. Bob knew the area well and took me out on my first familiarisation beat patrol and showed me the ropes. I learnt the nooks and crannies of the 'patch', back entries, short cuts, and general local knowledge. This local knowledge became very useful to me in the future as I made use of it on many occasions. The entries and alleyways were the places I would later find those who did not want to be found. While on patrol, we met some of the local youths, commonly referred to as 'gougers' (not nice people). They were all known to Bob. They did not know it at the time, but I was going to meet some of them again. Bob later took me further down the Woodstock Road to Georges Street. He wanted to introduce me to the local flashpoint areas where rioting frequently took place between loyalists and nationalists. The main flash point, which later became a permanent 'fixed point' for many years were the

junctions/general area of the Short Strand/Georges Street/Woodstock Road and the bottom of the Ravenhill Road. The fixed point became known as the 'Bottom of the Road' or B.O.R for short. This point, at this time, was generally manned daily by one regular RUC officer and the remainder by Reservists and duty continued into the early hours of the morning. At least one officer always carried an SMG and spare mags. It was now getting late so Bob and I headed back to the Station, and I signed off at 11pm. My first night on duty had ended. I was still alive and uninjured. Hooray! I learnt more that night than I thought. I had now become a real COP – 'Citizen On Patrol'. Thanks Bob 🍷👍

The only parking place at the station was on the roadside opposite. Not a very safe or secure place for our cars to be, with our number plates visible to all and sundry, but it was opposite the Station and in full view of a Reserve constable on Station security duty. No Sanger in those days, only doorways. The drive from the Station back home was the most likely place for an ambush to happen. Keeping a close eye on the mirror and changing my route home was most important. This was to be the first night of many to say "bye-bye" to my family, driving to the Station, returning home from the Station and creeping into bed, trying not to waken everyone. Returning home was rarely at the same time. No mobile phones or internet in those days!

Some years later whilst on duty with Jimmy McC at the B.O.R., we came under sniper fire from the nationalist Short Strand area. Four shots were fired from an automatic weapon. Fortunately for us they missed. This was to be my first survival of an attempted murder. The B.O.R. was not for the faint hearted, but flak jackets helped reduce the stress! As did the odd glass of your favourite tipple!

#### 'THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN'



The above photograph shows a party of police officers from Willowfield Police Station parading for duty at the B.O.R. The briefing was conducted on the street by the senior man (3<sup>rd</sup> from left) and we took up our positions accordingly.

#### **Question 4 - Describe your first detection and report?**

My first detection was for disorderly behaviour. I arrested Stephen S, lodged him in the Belfast Police Office at Townhall Street to appear next day in court in front of RM Charles S. He was found guilty and bound over to be of good behaviour for 12 months. This was his first offence, but he later went on to greater criminal things and lost his life in so doing.

The detection I do want to mention happened on the morning of 5 January 1975. I was on duty as Observer in Foxtrot 102, Royal Military Police (RMP) car with 2 RMP's and R/Const. Jim K. on board. At 1.30am I noticed a car exit from Lord Street unto the Beersbridge Road, without lights. I asked our driver to overtake and stop this car, a silver Cortina, which he did in Clara Street. The driver of the car we stopped made a quick exit with me in pursuit and was soon caught a short distance away, in an entry. I brought him back to the RMP vehicle and after securing the Cortina, we made our way to Willowfield Station. My prisoner, Jim Jnr, was age 17, was formally arrested and charged with taking and driving away a motor vehicle without consent and other motoring offences. Mr Jim Jnr was on parole and had escaped from Rathgael Young Offender's Centre, in Bangor. Rathgael were not aware that he had escaped. They asked for him to be returned to Bangor which we did later. In the meantime, I sought details of the owner from Uniform (BRC), as our communications radio centre was then known. I then contacted the owner. It was now 2.30am and he thought his car was still outside his house. He was surprised it wasn't and pleased it was recovered undamaged. I advised him to bring the car keys when collecting the car. I was pleased with this result, especially as the culprit was caught before he was reported missing and the car returned, undamaged, to the owner before it was reported stolen. Back then, good police work received instant recognition!!!! The sergeant gave me a pat on the back, issued me with the appropriate paperwork and invited me back for more duties. Lucky me!

#### **Question 5 - Describe your first court appearance?**

The dawn has arrived of my first day in court. Better make sure the boots are polished, the uniform clean, the hat brushed. Must have my notebook marked at the correct page and must know my lines, sorry facts. Must know how to address the Resident Magistrate (RM), Judge or whatever. Must get there early and observe how the others in the courtroom addressed the Judge. I am nervous. I am only 29, only been in the Reserve a year, never been in court before. I make my way from home to the Petty Sessions Court on Townhall Street. I now must find the correct court. I don't know the procedure, better ask someone, who will I ask? Don't want to appear stupid. I decide to ask a fellow police officer whom I thought is the most likely person to help me. I will tell him it is my first time and hopefully he will take pity on me. Then I asked myself, why did I have to make the arrest in the first

place? Bit late now, so into court I go and out comes my notebook, again. I must remember the facts of the case, appear confident, speak clearly and with authority and not let the defence destroy my credibility. What am I worrying about? Afterall, I'm the good guy!

I now prepare to give my evidence. "Once upon a time". Oh dear, that can't be right. Start again. On the 26 of March 1973, I was on duty with R. Constable Norman M when two men, whom I will call Bell & Lovel (not their real names) were being very disorderly in the Orby Drive area, just off the Castlereagh Road. They were given many opportunities to go home quietly by Norman and myself. Lovel decided to go home quietly, Bell decided to stay and be offensive, then very offensive, then arrest-able offensive! He was then arrested. Conveniently, a military mobile patrol (UDR) came along and conveyed us to Willowfield Police Station and later onward to the Belfast Police Office. Bell would appear in court the next day. This meant I had to take time off my day job. The next morning Bell's case came before the Resident Magistrate. I had to be careful on how I addressed the RM. The defendant was very well dressed in a suit. Dressed to impress I would say. The court duty Inspector presented the case and charge. I was still nervous; this was my first time in court and no one in the courtroom knew that. I was expected to give evidence and justify why I had made the arrest. This would have been before the RM, defence barrister and the many others in the full courtroom, this was something I was not accustomed to doing. I was in the uniform of a police officer and was expected to be able to manage the prosecution of the villain. Bell was asked how he pleaded to the charge, guilty or not guilty. "Guilty your honour" was his reply. Relief! Panic over! I was now able to relax as I wasn't required to give evidence. Bell was bound over to keep the peace. Arresting Bell was a last resort. If Bell had calmed down instead of being abusive, a caution would have sufficed. This was just a minor misdemeanour considering what the courts had to deal with in those days. Well, that was my first court case over, and I would be more able to handle the next one, or so I thought. I really don't know what all the fuss was about!

Another first for Anon. It was now time to go home, get out of the uniform and go to my normal work and enjoy a relaxing day at the office. I hope?

### **QUESTION 6 - What type of anti-terrorist duties did you perform?**

Regardless of what specific duty you were detailed for you were always alert to the fact that that some terrorist may attempt to murder you at any time or place, by bomb, bullet or brick, or you may be sent to a 'come on', or you may witness a murder, bombing, robbery or other violent crime carried out by any of the various loyalist and republican paramilitaries, not to mention serious rioting and petrol bombing by all sides. So, thinking anti-terrorism and personal safety became a natural and essential habit, a way of life, both on and off duty. At all times an essential chore, but one with potentially fatal results, if neglected.

Anti-terrorist duties included station security, prisoner escorts, bomb scares and evacuations, road stops looking for specific persons and searching vehicles, joint



police/military/RMP patrols and responding to any terrorist incident as directed by Uniform/BRC communications.

I remember a particular Wednesday in early 1975 and I had the day off from my work at the shop. I signed on for duty at Willowfield Station at 8am. I was detailed to Castlereagh Holding Centre, frequently referred to as Castlereagh Interrogation Centre, The Holding Centre was constructed from Porta-cabins and held some of the most dangerous terrorist suspects for interview by CID and SB. I reported to the Officer in Charge and was briefed on what was required of me. My PPW was taken from me for safe keeping. Such was the risk that prisoners posed, that I would encounter, and under no circumstances was I to underestimate their abilities to 'adapt, improvise and overcome'. I was required to assist with the escorting of the detainees to and from the interview rooms. The escorting involved keeping a safe distance from them and observing their movements. The occupants of the cells also had to be checked constantly via the sliding panels in the doors. The one thing I was very much aware of was the stench of the place. Lunch time soon came, and I was no longer required, picked up my PPW and left. I was glad to be out of there. It was worse than court!

I was not very happy with this detail as I met men who would not have hesitated to kill me or have me killed, if they got half a chance. The way they looked at me, they would know me again, they were studying me like a 'shrink'. This could endanger me and my family, I thought, and those who worked for me in my shop on the Lisburn Road. This danger was real as I will tell you about in question 8. This was the risk you took by being in the RUCR. What must it have been like to be a Detective interviewer and end up giving evidence in court for days on end? Many of them became targets for assassination and intimidation by all sides. My hat is off to them. Very brave people!

I had taken and passed my police driving test and I was assigned as driver on quite a few occasions. On 25 August 1976 with R/Con L as Observer, we were instructed to take the Willowfield land-rover, call-sign Foxtrot Two, to the Lisburn Road and set up a road stop, in both directions. The reason was a siege was ongoing with 4-armed IRA men at a house in Cranmore Park, Belfast. The road stop, which lasted for four hours, was to prevent the four men from, should they have escaped from the house, escaping from the scene. They eventually gave up and surrendered to the police at the scene, with the help of a local priest. An undercover anti-terrorist unit from Bronze Section SPG had interrupted the terrorists, who had then taken refuge in a nearby house. Apparently, this was Bronze Section's first day on duty in their new undercover anti-terrorist role. They subsequently became known as 'The Ants' and in some circles their memory 'doth liveth for evermore'!?

On the night the La Mon Hotel was firebombed by the IRA killing 12 people and seriously injuring dozens more, we were tasked to set up road stops on the lower Ravenhill Road, not far from the junction with the Short Strand, to intercept the suspected bombers returning to any nationalist area. We never caught anyone. Regular road stops became an effective method of preventing and interrupting terrorist activity in the Willowfield Station area.

These road stops were mainly carried out by the Reserves. We rarely found firearms but one thing for-sure, we never knew what crimes we prevented. We were often told by irate motorists to "go catch some terrorists". These cars were often pulled over and searched just in case this was a ploy. We could not trust or take anything for granted. You would be amazed and sometimes disgusted, where some people hid things..... on their person!

### **Question 7 - Describe your most dangerous duties and experiences?**

It was the 21 December 1971 and I was driving along the Lisburn Road about mid-day. On approaching Ashley Avenue, suddenly and without warning there was a loud explosion at the Ashley Bar. I pulled over and approached the side door of the bar, which was hanging off its hinges. There was a lot of damage to the building, it was on fire, and it looked unsafe. I did not enter but investigated the building from the doorway. I saw lots of rubble and lying amongst it was a badly mutilated and dismembered body. I did not go to the body as it was very obviously dead. No one could have survived that blast. (I later learned it was the owner who was attempting to carry the bomb out of the building). The emergency services had now arrived, I identified myself and helped as best I could. The area was cleared and searched in case of secondary devices. This was my first experience of death and the aftermath of a bomb. I did not know it at the time, but I was to witness more of the results of IRA bombs and the pain and suffering they left in their wake. Man's inhumanity to man know-eth no bounds!

1972 is recorded as the worst year of the 'Troubles' with the highest number of deaths, murders, and terrorists' incidents of all kinds. I was on duty on the 29 December 1972 at Willowfield Station at 12-20am, when a gentleman reported to me that he had seen two youths run off from a car parked on the footpath outside the Castle Arcade. I made my way there and on checking the car I noticed there was a large box on the back seat with wires coming from it. I started evacuating the houses close by with the other police assistance that had now arrived. A neighbour advised me that there was an elderly bedridden deaf lady living in a house that backed onto the arcade. With some assistance, two of us gained entry to the house and carried the lady out of her home and took her to a nearby safe house, a very upsetting experience for her. During the evacuation of the area, I noticed several loyalist youths in the entry opposite and went to advise them to get clear of the area. They went further up the entry and started throwing bricks and bottles at me and challenging my 'parenthood'. Meanwhile other youths had come up behind me and I was now cut off in the entry, with no escape. Loyalists had no love for peelers and would have thought nothing of attacking or killing them, as they had done in the past. I was now in great danger and outnumbered. I drew my revolver, shouted a warning, and fired one shot in the air. Fortunately for me this was enough, and they ran off. They were from a well-known loyalist gang known as the 'Tartans'. After this incident was over, I found one of the gang's distinctive tartan scarfs, which later ended up in the Station Sergeant's trophy cabinet.

I considered I had got myself into a trap but luckily had got myself out of it, alive and unscathed. On return to the Station, I reported to the Sergeant and made out a statement of evidence. Was it a form 38/36? Later the ATO reported the bomb was a hoax. I was first on the scene of what could have been a real bomb, rescued an old lady and nearly got myself killed, or certainly badly injured in the process, by the infamous loyalist Tartan gangs. I got home about 4am, quietly slipped into bed and rose again for my daily work at 7am. When I awoke, I thought, lucky me! And wondered how the old lady was?

On another occasion one 12<sup>th</sup> of July in 1979, I was assigned to the Lisburn Road Police Station. I was to manage traffic on Balmoral Avenue, part of the route of the main 12<sup>th</sup> Orange Parade. About mid-day whilst the parade was passing, a resident came up to me and advised me there was a man acting very strangely in his front garden. I went with him to his garden and when I got there the man was having what I thought was a very harmful and aggressive fit. I called for an ambulance which soon arrived. I safely restrained his legs with my belt and helped him into the ambulance to be taken to the Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH) in West Belfast. I was not familiar with this area. The ambulance Crew would not leave the scene unless I travelled with them. I radioed Uniform/BRC for advice and was instructed to go with the ambulance to the RVH, and I would be collected from there. I waited outside A&E for some time getting what I considered to be dirty looks from all and sundry. I was at the Falls Road entrance. Not a very friendly place for a person in a police uniform at that time. I could become a target if my transport did not arrive soon, I thought. That was my fear. Fortunately, and just in time, the 'constabulary cavalry' arrived, and I was safely transported back to base, where I checked the occurrence book and completed my notebook entries, before heading home for supper, via yet another circuitous route! I had just survived another 'hard day at the office'?

### **Question 8 - How did your police service impact upon your personal, family and business life?**

My experiences with the police reserve can be summarise as good, bad, and downright ugly. But my colleagues were the salt of the earth. I had been introduced and exposed to a side of life which previously had not been part of my life. Inhumanity, extreme violence, and cruelty including near fatal close encounters with bombs and bullets and bullies, multiple deaths and injuries, destruction of property and people's lives, distress, pain and suffering on a scale hard to imagine, and dare I mention it, trauma. Trauma for me was what you took home with you at the end of a shift; trauma was memories that never left you and are still remembered to this day; trauma was feeling inadequate for not being able to do more to help those in greatest need, or prevent the violence, or arrest those responsible; trauma was watching guilty terrorists and criminals walk free from court with a smile on their faces knowing they were off to plan another atrocity or crime; trauma was being able to accept and live with man's inhumanity to man; trauma was worrying about your family, friends and attending the funerals of murdered work colleagues; trauma was also simply about

everyday worries, stress, regrets, anger, sadness and the next knock on the door. Need I go on? Security awareness and continual risk assessment had become a way of life for me and my family. The price one pays for being a Cop in Northern Ireland.

Thankfully, I did not have treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, nor did I feel I needed it, but I don't think it was available at that time. Comradeship among the wider police family was very good and my problems were usually quickly resolved, but I know that was not the case for everyone. Many victims and survivors are still suffering to this very day. I made many friends both within the regular Force and the Reserve, which I still have and cherish, to this day. Sadly, some have passed on, but the memories are everlasting, as is the pride of having served in the Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve.

My deepest regret is that I was not able to do more to prevent the pain and suffering so ruthlessly forced upon so many innocent people, by so called patriots. I have many good memories of comradeship, compassion, courage, and the feeling of privilege for being a member of such a unique, brave, and professional police force, whose service, sacrifice and suffering eventually resulted in the award of the George Cross, which was personally presented to a disabled police officer by HM The Queen, here, in Northern Ireland.

MY PERSONAL LIFE: The RUCR introduced me to a side of 'life survival' that I had no prior experience of, or contact with, such as self-preservation and the potential for continuing present danger, always, both on and off duty. I had been issued with a PPW which I always carried concealed under my clothing while off duty. This proved inconvenient and embarrassing at times, especially as many premises and locations employed security guards and searchers, who by their actions would inadvertently draw attention to you and your family and friends. On many occasions my 'cover was blown' and I had to quietly exit myself from the occasion and hope I had not been observed by anyone with malicious intentions! This proved financially expensive at times, not to mention the inconvenience and disappointment of having my plans cancelled. At times we all had to 'live a lie'. Not good for your peace of mind or family relations.

Checking underneath my car several times a day for booby trap bombs had become a routine necessity, as was sitting with my back to an entrance/exit doorway and varying my routes between home, work, and the Station. I was aware this procedure always started from and ended at the same place and that was its weakness. My wife was also practicing various protective measures which impacted on her life and emotions, and many times we shared 'duties' when together. Hardly a romantic experience; but necessary to survive? This was normal for police families in those dangerous days of the 'Troubles'.

Police duties give me experience of managing fear, new situations and the unexpected. Fear was no bad thing, it taught me caution and kept me alive and free from injury on many occasions. I was soon to learn what adrenalin and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) were. The RUCR brought me into contact with death and injury on many occasions, such as,

the bar owner who was trying to save his business by carrying the bomb outside and losing his life. I was first on the scene and witnessed seeing his horrific remains. Then there was the old age pensioner I found lying in the street having been kicked to death. Also, the young man who had been shot in the chest in the Oakley Bar, on the lower Ravenhill Road. Fortunately he did not lose his life. I still have my first notebook that reminds me to this day of plenty of other grim incidents I encountered. Situations that entered my mind, long ago, and that have never really been forgotten.

Allow me to tell you when I felt real fear in a situation. I was with Sergeant S and other police personnel answering a call, on foot, to the King Richard Bar at John Long's Corner on the Castlereagh Road. A large hostile loyalist crowd, perhaps a hundred or more, had gathered and on seeing us they started charging towards us. We were hopelessly outnumbered, and the Sergeant gave us the order to get back to Willowfield Station, which was at least 400 yards away. We ran, I certainly ran faster than I ever thought I could and just made it back to the vicinity of the station in time. The Sergeant had radioed for the back gate to be opened, we waited but the gate did not open. The crowd was now attacking the Station and setting fire to cars parked on the opposite side of the road. We were cut off, so the Sergeant suggested we make our way to Castlereagh Police Station, in our private cars, which were parked in the street beside the station. The attack on the Station continued for some time and until we returned with reinforcements from Castlereagh. This was a very frightening incident for us all. Just one of many.

The examples I have given of how the police service impacted upon my life continued every day into my family and business life, when I was not on duty. I always carried my PPW and always checked my car. Carrying my PPW brought its own risks, the fear of it being taken from me, by force, and used to kill me or my family, or losing it in a fight or riot and it being used later to murder someone, or simply having it stolen. Some many worries. I was told by my friends that the RUCR had changed some of my attitudes to life and my personality. I was not impressed with these comments. I was now part of a unique family of people whose job it was to police and protect all communities, regardless of the risks involved, including to my family and friends. I had to change accordingly to survive. Maintaining a reasonable life/work balance was a luxury I could not afford. No matter how hard I tried I frequently failed or achieved only partial success. For me and my family, security came first.

**MY BUSINESS LIFE:** The hours of duty I put in as a part time police reservist amounted to approximately 40 per month, equating to two nights per week. Many of these nights of duty went on into the small hours. I mainly did duty on nights during the week. Next morning, without a lot of sleep, I got up, had breakfast with the family and went off to work. I employed 5 staff, including my wife and sister, at this time. I also had short business contract to manage which sometimes necessitated employing up to 20 people; and their security was important and required proper planning and risk assessment too. Running the business often meant I was working late into the evenings, planning the next day's work,

and doing the admin and paperwork. We also did nightshifts occasionally, both when specialising in cinema maintenance work and when employed on MoD contracts in Lisburn. Due to the long hours of normal business work, my RUCR duties and trying to provide some sort of a safe family social life, I was becoming very tired and exhausted. Policing and security was taking its toll.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December 1977, two days before Christmas and just five minutes after leaving my work at 7pm, my premises were bombed. The bomb was attached to the window grills and exploded sending a wall of fire into the interior of the building. I was lucky no one was in the building at the time. I and my wife and staff had finished work for the day. The Fire Brigade were on strike at the time and refused to fight the fire. The local Fire Station was just across the road. We stood helplessly and watched our business and livelihoods burn, courtesy of IRA terrorists. The premises continued to burn until the 'green goddess' (military fire engines) eventually arrived. The military were providing a temporary fire service during the Fire Brigade's official strike. I do not know if the bombing was because I was in the RUCR, but it could have been. The rebuilding was completed two years later in June 1979. It transpired, unknown to me, I was on an IRA hit list. I subsequently had a visit from two officers from Lisburn Road Station, who informed me of the existence of the list and provided advice. Better late than never I thought! My entire family and I had now joined the ever-increasing que of official victims of the Northern Ireland's 'Troubles'. We now knew what it was like to experience 'Incomprehensible and pitiful demoralisation', like so many others. Terrorists terrorise, and the IRA were ruthlessly efficient at it!

MY FAMILY LIFE: The hours I spent on duty and the danger I brought to my family were very much on my mind, most of the time. I had to keep reminding my wife, to be always careful and not forget to check under her car. She was very careful but said very little. This was to me a warning to take note of. To me it meant she was not handling the situation very well but had to accept it. She kept much of her concerns to herself and suffered in silence. Looking back now, it was a terrible situation for a wife and mother to continually endure.

As the 'Troubles' continued and intensified, so did my duty requirements. Many nights I did not return home until after 3am or even later and this did not help our relationship. Communications with the family in those days was very limited, no mobile phones or internet. My wife did have a visit from the local police Inspector who briefed her on the use of my PPW, should the need occur, and on general personal and home security. Joining the RUCR had brought all this upon my family. My police service, the business, sailing activities and the Round Table business charity were all part of our life during the years I was in the Reserve. The sailing club at Bangor and the Round Table was something we all could occasionally participate in and enjoy, in relative safety? This gave us a social outlet when I was not on duty and helped relieve our collective stress. These social activities mostly took place at the weekends. The children were at school during the week, the weekends were very important for any family life. My wife worked in the shop whilst the children were at

school. I now had a temporary shop opposite to the site of where the shop used to be. It was now a building site. I was trying to manage my marriage, domestic, business and police lives all together but it was proving difficult. My wife was far from happy, you couldn't blame her.

The bombing did not help our relationship, it was not very good at this time and our marriage eventually ended in divorce a few years later. The combination of normal but busy everyday work, RUCR duties, increasing security implications and the ongoing terrorist campaigns all contributed. I had too much on my plate. But too late to do anything about it. Our marriage was not working, it was over. I resigned from the RUCR in April 1980.

I am aware that many officers of all ranks made many sacrifices and their families suffered greatly, in various ways, because they were in the police; I consider my situation to be at the lower end of the scale and grateful none of us were killed or seriously injured. Today, I am proud of my service in the RUCR and look back with gratitude for the many friends and colleagues who helped me along the way. Sadly, it ended the way it did.

### **Question 9 – How were you able to use your personal and business background for the benefit of community policing?**

Lisburn Road RUC was my local police station in terms of where I lived and had my business located. My parents had brought me to the Lisburn Road area when I was 12 and we lived happily in the area for many years enjoying all aspects of community life. The family business had been established in 1852 and was well known and respected. I went to school in Belfast city centre. At age 15 my father died. My elder brother became the bread winner and ran the business until 1964 when I took it over. The local police knew me and my family well. During my time in the RUCR and afterwards, I maintained close contact with the local police in my role as a police liaison officer for various trader associations and business organisations. Over many years of living and working in the area, I had gained good local knowledge, including relating to the business community across greater Belfast; and with my police Reserve experience, I was trusted and encouraged to help in local matters relating to general crime prevention and detection and various community activities.

The Lisburn Road was the main route for the Belfast 12th of July annual Orange Parade and in those days security and public safety were at high risk of attack by republican terrorists, and those wishing to cause public disorder and civil unrest, not to mention economic chaos. With my local knowledge and business contacts I was frequently asked to help local police and Belfast City Council with their operational planning and research for community events.

When I left the RUCR in 1980, the troubles continued with many IRA bombings (20 or more) taking place on the Lisburn Road, including a car bomb at Lisburn Road Police Station, which was eventually declared non-operational; and a temporary reinforced concrete bunker type building was quickly constructed across the road, and was nick-named the 'Submarine',

among others. Bombing of police stations had become a priority for republican terrorists but the RUC always had a plan 'B' in such events and were determined to show the public it was 'business as usual'. And the 'Submarine' became a local symbol of defiance and resilience for police and public alike.

The businesses on the Road later formed the Lisburn Road Trader's Association. I had the privilege of being Secretary and we created a successful trader's organisation for the Lisburn Road and increased contact with the local police, which benefited everyone. We organised Christmas lights, publicity campaigns, fought the over-zealous traffic wardens, succeeded in having parking-bays created and a replacement carpark built. This was to replace the old carpark the new Police Station is now built upon. Parking on the Lisburn Road was always a problem because it was considered a prime and safe shopping area, that's why it became a primary target for republican terrorists. Bombs on the Lisburn Road ticked all their 'boxes' including disrupting commerce and the local economy and tourism.

Later, I was invited to join the South Belfast Partnership Board, which held its meetings in the new Lisburn Road Police Station. Superintendent Brian McC. was the officer in charge (SDC). I knew Brian from Willowfield Police Station when I was stationed there. I brought to the partnership board my local knowledge and my contacts, both police and community. I had gained much valuable experience in dealing with various people and groups in the ten years I was in the RUCR, and this proved very helpful in developing the local Trader's Association, which in turn, led me to assisting in the setting up of other Trader's Associations, including Sandy Row, Cregagh Road, Newtownards Road, Shankill Road and Duncairn, to name but a few. All these associations were supported by Belfast City Council and local police. Once again, my previous police experience was being recognised and used to good effect, and my police liaison contacts increased, which in turn resulted in more meetings between the police, council officials and business groups. At times, it almost seemed as if I had never resigned? My previous police training and service was still valued by many. Once a cop, always a cop?

One time during the marching season, curb stones were painted red, white, and blue in an area where the locals did not want them. I was approached and asked if I would help solve the problem. My previous police experience and training once again came into play and I used my local knowledge contacts and skills to try and have the matter resolved, which it was. The red, white, and blue curb stones magically turned to a paler shade of grey overnight and peace and tranquillity was once again restored. Local knowledge works wonders!

All part-time RUCR officers possessed various knowledge, skills, talents, and abilities, which, when properly assessed and utilised, could help the overall policing effort where the officers served. Many went on to join the full time RUCR and the regular RUC. Some rose to dizzy heights within the Force and elsewhere. But perhaps the most valuable assets of all were



their willingness and courage to protect life and property, keep the peace and serve the public impartially. And not to expect too much in return.

But sadly, many were murdered, killed or died in service; some took their own lives; some were injured and disabled for life; and some suffered psychologically and domestically. Being a part-time police officer in Northern Ireland during those days was especially difficult and dangerous and sometimes fatal. Their service, sacrifice and suffering must never be forgotten. I know my family and I will always remember them. We owe so much to so few!

### **Question 10 - Given your personal experiences and sacrifices, would you do it all again?**

Would I do it all again? In short. Yes. Northern Ireland at that time needed people like me and my friends to volunteer and help the police terrorism and civil unrest and restore peace. Therefore, the answer to your question is yes, I would do it all again, but I would do it all differently. What would I change? The only asset I have now is the benefit of hindsight, which was not available to me then. It is now 40 + years later since I resigned. I would like to think that all the changes needed, have now been made. But the obvious answer is that I would be more mindful of my family's welfare and other responsibilities affecting my business staff. As the old saying goes, "if I had known better, I could have done better".

Even though the RUCR was not well-paid I would do it all again. To most of us at that time it was more of a community emergency volunteer position, and I didn't meet anyone who joined for the money. We all wanted to do our civic duty regardless of the risks, dangers, and difficulties. The pay, which I can't remember, was a nominal amount which was subject to taxation. What income you were left with was usually eaten up with your personal travelling and food expenses. No entitlements. F11s and F40s hadn't been invented yet for part-timers! In the early days you could do as many hours per month as you wanted, or as the Sergeant allowed. The average number of hours I did was about 40 per month. Two nights per week, anything from 4 to 8-hour shifts and sometimes day shifts. I enjoyed my duties most of the time and have learned a lot and benefited from my police training and experience, much of which I was, and still am able to use in other aspects of my public life and service.

However, there was one very serious problem my family and I had to face. I had submitted my resignation in April 1980, and it was accepted by Superintendent P. (I still have his letter of acceptance). Our problem was one of security and protection. The IRA had already successfully bombed my business premises and got away with it and my name was still on an IRA hit list. My wife and I had been warned and advised about our personal security, but I felt that once I resigned, we would be in even more danger and become easier targets for the IRA, who were increasingly attacking and murdering police officers and soldiers on an almost daily basis. As we did not now have the benefit of being part of the police organisation, I believed we were at greater risk, as we were not provided with any

protection. Thankfully, my fears did not materialise but there were many troubling and anxious times and 'false alarms' for years to come, and we were always on our guard. Even to this day, the past presents problems ..... But my security consciousness never leaves me!

Are you sure you would you do it all again? I think I will amend my original answer and say, "providing I can serve with the same courageous Constables, Sergeants, and Inspectors ..... I can unreservedly say, YES."

**FOOTNOTE:** Thank you for the invitation to contribute to Project RUC 100. May I take this opportunity to encourage all readers to help support the Project by providing contributions as suggested on the website. Now, during this 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the foundation of the Royal Ulster Constabulary is the appropriate time to research and record our combined knowledge and experiences. The service, sacrifice and suffering of the Force, including our families, friends, and allies needs to be recorded and preserved. We can do this by publicly presenting an accurate and authenticated account of our collective history, which must be written and presented by those who served, suffered, and survived.

Let's preserve the truth, by sharing it!

Signed: Anon/P101

Ex RUCR (PT) member

**COMMENTS:** Project RUC 100 team (P100) wish to say a very sincere thanks to Anon/P101, our first registered contributor, for their continued support towards Project RUC 100 and for taking the time to write this very comprehensive article. This will help to publicly document and explain the service, sacrifice and suffering experienced by so many police officers and their families and friends, while serving in the Royal Ulster Constabulary; and to recognise Anon/P101's service, including their personal and family's commitments and contributions towards helping to prevent terrorism and crime and restore peace and public order, during Northern Ireland's 'Troubles'.

We hope readers enjoyed this article and will be inspired to consider contributing their own historical support which will help to ensure the memory of the Royal Ulster Constabulary GC is publicly preserved and presented in a fair and accurate manner, by those who served, suffered and survived.

Thank you.

**P100**