

# Victims of the 'dirty war'

**Kidnap plots, assassination, forgery, lethal incompetence, even 'political' psychiatry . . . A former Army intelligence office in Northern Ireland reveals the inside story of the Army's 'dirty tricks' department in Ulster — in the first of a series of reports by Duncan Campbell**

A FORMER INTELLIGENCE OFFICER who served in Northern Ireland in 1974 and 1975 has revealed details of 'dirty tricks' by the Army in Ireland. Captain Fred Holroyd was an intelligence specialist in Northern Ireland for nearly two years. The details of his allegations have been checked over six months. We have spoken to eye-witnesses and others personally involved in Holroyd's reports. These activities range, says Holroyd, from the disreputable to the entirely illegal — and were conducted on both sides of the Irish border.

Since 1982, a special team from the Royal Ulster Constabulary, led by Detective Superintendent George Caskey, has been investigating Holroyd's allegations of illegal Army activities. Its report, a lengthy 900-page dossier, was submitted earlier this year to Northern Ireland's Director of Public Prosecutions. Last month, the DPP delayed his final decision on the report and asked the team to carry out more extensive investigations of some of the dozen or so cases that Holroyd has submitted. Until the DPP announces his decision on the cases concerned, neither the RUC nor the Ministry of Defence are willing to comment publicly on Holroyd's revelations. But we have learned from Army sources that the Defence Ministry last year ordered a special and separate enquiry by its own security officials into the 'dirty war' allegations.

As a Military Intelligence Officer in Northern Ireland, Holroyd was on undercover attachment to the RUC Special Branch office in Portadown, west of Belfast. He worked in close liaison with the headquarters of the Army's 3rd Brigade, which was militarily responsible for the highly dangerous territory along the southern border — the 'bandit country' of South Armagh.

Captain Holroyd himself ultimately became a victim of the often bitter rivalry between different parts of the security apparatus. Army staff contrived to have him abruptly removed from his post in May 1975, as an alleged psychiatric casualty whose 'mental stability' could be examined only in the safety and security of a hospital in England — a slur which was subsequently deleted from his official record, but which has left him bitter about the Army. He resigned his commission in 1976 and joined the then Rhodesian Army.

Following his removal from Northern Ireland, Holroyd repeatedly asked for an investigation both of his own treatment and of the methods employed by British intelligence agents and officials in the North. Former Army and police colleagues still hold Holroyd in high esteem. In 1977, RUC Assistant Chief Constable Charles Rogers — who was put in charge of the RUC's anti-terrorist campaign

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**Fred Holroyd: his RUC chief says that his 'success record against terrorists has not been equalled before or since'**

following the 'Darkley Church' killings last Christmas — wrote that Holroyd was a 'man of unquestionable loyalty, outstanding courage with a devotion to duty that one looks for but rarely finds today'. In short, Holroyd was determined, respected, and to many a hero.

SO WAS ANOTHER Army officer — Captain Robert Nairac of the Special Air Services. In 1979, Nairac was posthumously awarded the George Cross, two years after being kidnapped and assassinated by the IRA while on undercover operations in South Armagh. In 1975 Nairac told Holroyd how he had carried out a political assassination in the Irish Republic.

## Assassination

Robert Nairac first arrived in Northern Ireland early in 1974, with a troop of about 30 men from the SAS Regiment's Hereford base. At the time, the government was denying that the SAS were in Northern Ireland at all — so they were disguised as the 'Survey Troop' of the Royal

Engineers. They were based at Castledillon, near Armagh, in a secluded country house and estate that had previously been a sanatorium.

The SAS unit's commander was Captain Julian A. Ball, who had joined the SAS from the King's Own Scottish Borderers. Robert Nairac from the elite Grenadier Guards, at first a lieutenant, was his second-in-command. Nairac was new to the SAS and Northern Ireland, but had been specially trained by both the Army and the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) for work in Ireland. Ball had already served extensively in Belfast, winning a Military Cross. A former Army officer who served with Ball in Belfast has described him as an 'irresponsible cowboy'.

According to the official ('Restricted') manual on 'Counter-Revolutionary Operations', the SAS's tasks included the 'infiltration of . . . assassination parties . . . into insurgent held areas', and 'liaison with . . . forces operating against the common enemy'. Ball and Nairac visited intelligence officers in the Armagh areas, including Holroyd in Portadown, asking for suggestions of worthwhile intelligence targets. They told Holroyd that they were under the direct orders

Captain Holroyd appeared on the Channel 4 programme, *Diverse Reports*, on Wednesday. The programme was researched and reported by Christopher Hird and Duncan Campbell.

of SIS and army headquarters intelligence staff.

On 10 January 1975, in a remote mountain-side farmhouse in County Monaghan, a mile south of the Irish border, a leading republican, John Francis Green, was murdered. Careful planning and good intelligence was evident in his killing, for he had only visited the farm at short notice. The killers waited until Green was alone and then burst in on him, emptying the contents of two pistols into him.

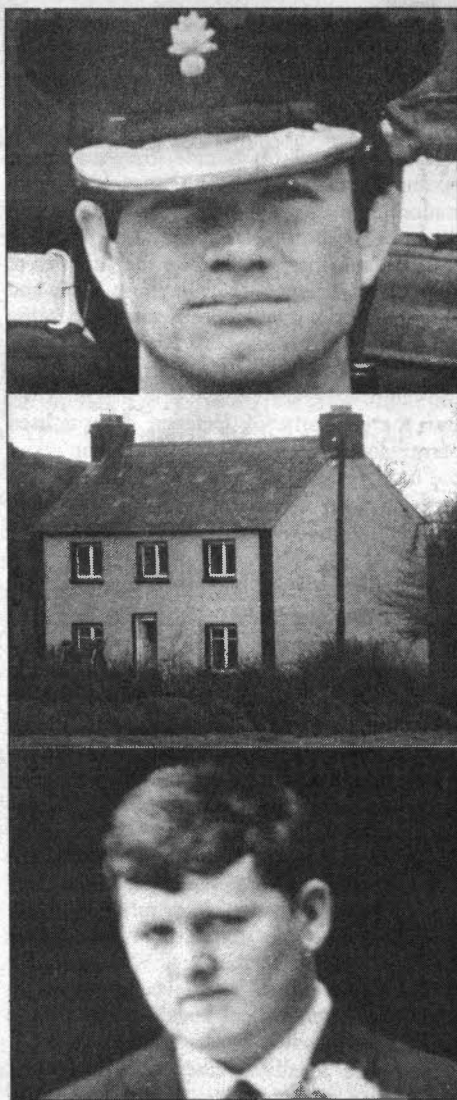
Soon afterwards, Captain Nairac called routinely on Holroyd at the Army's Mahon Road camp in Portadown. The subject of Green's death came up — Green, aged 27, a local republican hero after an escape from internment in Long Kesh in 1973, had by 1975 become the IRA commander in North Armagh. After an SAS sergeant major left the room, Nairac said that he had killed Green. When Holroyd expressed disbelief, Nairac produced a colour Polaroid of Green's bloodsoaked body, taken soon after his death. Green was pictured from the waist up, lying on his back. With some reluctance, Nairac allowed Holroyd to keep the picture. It remained in Holroyd's photo album until 1982, when it was handed over to Superintendent Caskey of the RUC.

Who took the Polaroid picture is still a mystery. Nairac implied that he had done so. RUC detectives investigating the case suggested to Captain Holroyd in 1983 that the picture had been taken by the Irish Police. But a very senior Garda source says that no Garda officer in the area had either the equipment or any official reason to take such a picture. He said that the morning after the crime, a fully equipped Garda photographic team travelled up from Dublin, and took pictures using standard (black and white) film.

Nairac told Holroyd that he and two other men had done the killing. He then described in detail how they had crossed the border during the evening and driven down a country road. Green was at first in the company of farmer Gerry Carville — whose house had long been an IRA 'safe house'. But the old farmer, said Nairac, had left at a set time, known to the killers. One man stayed with the car, while the other two crept up a lane to the isolated farm and watched Green through an uncurtained window. They kicked down the door and shot him repeatedly, emptying one of the guns into his body as he lay dying.

Nairac's account of the killing, as provided to Holroyd, is chillingly exact. Irish police investigations produced reports of an unknown vehicle in the area at the time of the killing — a white Mercedes or Audi — which eyewitnesses thought contained three men. Farmer Gerry Carville has told us that for more than a month he had left his farm at the same time each evening to tend a neighbour's cow. In the last month it has been revealed that, at the time, there were two well-placed informers working for British security inside IRA circles in the nearby town of Castleblayney.

Garda investigation of the killing confirmed many aspects of Nairac's account. The room in which John Francis Green was shot was indeed uncurtained at the time. The front door frame was kicked in, and still bears the cracks. Forensic experts, whose reports we have also seen, later established that two guns were used to shoot Green; one is thought to be a Luger, the other a Spanish-made Star automatic pistol.



**Top: Captain Robert Nairac of the SAS; Bottom: John Francis Green, Provisional IRA commander in Armagh, whom Nairac claimed to have assassinated on the territory of the Irish Republic; Centre, scene of the Green killing — the lonely Carville farm, on the slopes of Mulleyash Mountain, County Monaghan.**

AT FIRST, the Garda in the Republic suspected that other local IRA elements might have killed Green. Green had recently been asking questions about the proceeds of a series of bank robberies in Northern Ireland. The Royal Ulster Constabulary continues to put forward a theory that Green was killed by a deranged northern Protestant, called Elliott, who believed that his brother had been killed on Carville's farm — and who had come with a second, unknown man to kill Carville, not Green.

But we have established from a confidential police source that the RUC obtained evidence in 1975 conclusively linking the Green killing to a series of notorious murders carried out by persons closely linked to the Protestant extremist paramilitary organisation, the Ulster Volunteer Force. The link is the cartridges from the Star automatic pistol found at the scene of the killing. With the secret help of the Garda, these were tested by a scientist attached to the RUC forensic staff, Norman Tulip, and found to be identical with cartridges left at the scene of four sectarian murders, committed between 1973 and 1976. These included perhaps the

most notorious killing of the 1970s — the slaughter in July 1975 of members of the Catholic Miami Showband.

Robert Nairac, like many other army personnel in Northern Ireland (including Holroyd), obtained and sometimes carried personal 'unattributable' weapons. The serial numbers and firing characteristics of such guns were not officially recorded. During the trial of Nairac's killers in 1977, his then commanding officer told the Dublin Court that a 'personal pistol', apart from his official issue Browning automatic, had been found in Nairac's room after his death.

The Caskey Report, it is believed, does not suggest that Holroyd is wrong in his recollections, but quotes other Army officers instead in an attempt to show that Nairac was a braggard, inventing his participation in the Green murder. Some RUC officers have also tried to raise doubts as to whether Nairac was ever a member of the SAS. Holroyd says that he has come under intense pressure from the RUC to withdraw his murder accusation against Nairac. He refuses to do so.

Obtaining evidence affecting Nairac's story has been difficult, because of the death or disappearance of almost everyone involved. Elliott, the RUC's supposed suspect, was himself killed in 1979. Captain Ball left the Army to become a British government security adviser, and has since reportedly died in a traffic accident. Nairac and Ball's SAS company sergeant major is said by the RUC to be 'untraceable'. Craig Smellie, in 1974 the Secret Service 'controller' at the Army HQ at Lisburn, left to become SIS Chief of Station in Athens, and has also since died. Nairac himself left the SAS in 1976, but stayed on in Northern Ireland as a military intelligence liaison officer in Bessbrook and was killed in 1977. His death means that the final story of the Green assassination may never be told. But the Army has a clear case to answer.

## Intelligence disaster

Another of Holroyd's accounts concerns a plan to discover the IRA's major escape route from Belfast for wounded and wanted men. The plan went wrong, resulting in two, and possibly five, deaths.

Sergeant Tony Poole of the Intelligence Corps, who worked as a 'Field Intelligence NCO' at the RUC station at Dungannon, set up the plan in 1974 and explained it to Holroyd. Poole planned to use a Catholic youth, who had recently been questioned by the Army, as his infiltrator. The hope was that he might finish up at an IRA training camp in the Republic.

But Poole's choice of agent was ludicrous. The operation quickly went wrong and his operative, Columba McVeigh, a woolly-headed 17 year old, went to jail for four months. In February 1975, an innocent Protestant man, was killed almost certainly as a result of the bungled operation. Three Catholics are believed to have then been shot in turn in a 'tit for tat' revenge killing.

During the summer of 1974, Poole told Holroyd that McVeigh, was to be 'set up' on a charge of possessing ammunition. He would carefully be allowed to avoid arrest and would ask the IRA to get him out. Poole and his colleagues were particularly keen to compromise a priest, who was then working in a

small village nearby, and whom they suspected was a key to the IRA escape route. McVeigh knew the priest concerned.

Poole's plan was to give the youth several rounds of ammunition in a cigarette packet, to put in a chest of drawers in his bedroom. Poole was then to order an army raid on his house, claiming 'a tipoff' from an informer. The Army would think the find was genuine. McVeigh's parents have confirmed that the operation began as Poole had planned it; an Army team suddenly raided their house at 6 am one morning in September 1974 — but Columba escaped. His father saw the Army searchers go straight to the bedroom drawer and announce as they opened the cigarette packet that 'we've found it'.

So McVeigh went on the run. But the suspected priest refused to help him; and another priest, unconnected with the IRA, sheltered him briefly. McVeigh then went to the police station to ask Sergeant Poole for further instructions, which surprised the police, as he was supposed to be on the wanted list. After a week spent openly in Dungannon, he was arrested by an Army patrol.

He was charged with illegal possession of ammunition and held in jail. In court, he refused to recognise the court — the normal stance of a member of the IRA. But the IRA knew that McVeigh had not joined. Inside Crumlin Road Jail, he was beaten up by Provisionals and accused of being a stool pigeon. He confessed his involvement and agreed to give the IRA complete details of his dealings with the security forces and a list of names of people working with them.

This information was sent out of Crumlin Road in a coded letter. The Army specialists decoded it and showed the list of names to Holroyd. The list the IRA had obtained from McVeigh was nonsense, fabricated in order to escape further beating. At the head of the list of Catholics supposed to be collaborating with the British was a well respected local solicitor and SDLP politician. At the top of the list of Protestants was the McVeigh family's milkman, a Protestant who lived in the same area as the family. We have also spoken to a public figure in Dungannon, who saw the list after it had been sent out. He confirmed that he saw the same names as Holroyd.

COLUMBA MCVEIGH was given a suspended sentence in January 1975 — completely unprecedented for someone accused of terrorist offences and who had implied membership of the IRA. He went to Dublin with his brother to live there, but suddenly disappeared ten months later. He has never been heard of since.

Father Denis Faul, a leading spokesman for Northern Ireland Catholics, who knows the McVeigh family, says that by letting Columba go free in this way, he was in effect being proclaimed an informer — even though he had been quite unable to supply any information at all. The suspended sentence, says Father Faul, 'condemned him to death'.

A month after McVeigh was freed, on 11 February 1975, the 'milkman' on his list was gunned down in a nearby village. The dead man was not in fact the regular milkman, but his relief roundsman. Christopher Mein, a recently married 29-year-old Protestant, had taken on the round on his own for the first time that day.

He had no connection with any loyalist organisation. Holroyd noted the milkman's death in his notebook at the time, commenting that 'the milkman in Pomeroy was head of Tony's man's confession list . . . "mistaken identity"'.  
As a result of this bungle, Sergeant Poole became *persona non grata* at Dungannon police station. So the Army created a new job for him in a town 30 miles away. When Holroyd revisited Northern Ireland in the summer of 1975, he says he was told that both Poole and another Army intelligence man were being posted home, because the RUC had begun investigating what had really happened to McVeigh. Sergeant Poole is still in the Army. But the Ministry of Defence have refused permission for journalists to talk to him about the case — which is, like the other Holroyd reports, under investigation by the police and DPP.

## Political psychiatry

Captain Holroyd claims that he has been the victim of a campaign of vilification and what amounts to 'political psychiatry' by the Army. He has succeeded in getting the Army to withdraw allegations by a senior officer of 'mental stress', which were originally used to justify his removal from Northern Ireland. We have established that this original slur was based on false evidence used in Army records.

The mid-1970s, was a time, as both the Ministry of Defence and the police now openly acknowledge, of poor co-operation and co-ordination between competitive intelligence operations in Northern Ireland. With the Army in effect unaccountable to civil authority, it was also a time when the 'cowboys', keen to make a name for themselves, flourished.

Holroyd's loyalty to the police and their undercover agents made him an awkward customer for some Army commanders. Another source of friction was that he started working directly for the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6), whose controller was based at Army headquarters, but whose activities were kept a closely-guarded secret from the Army staff. Holroyd worked with both SIS staff and with the undercover SAS team, thus giving him detailed knowledge of sensitive activities by the

security forces.

The last straw, so far as some in the Army were concerned, was a secret trip Holroyd made to Dublin in the spring of 1975. At the invitation of a senior Garda officer, Assistant Commissioner Garvey, Holroyd and some RUC officers went to the Garda headquarters at Phoenix Park, Dublin, to inspect materials seized from an IRA bomb factory. Army officers were officially supposed never to cross the border without permission. Holroyd's Army commander had told him not to go. But intelligence staff at the Northern Ireland Army HQ in Lisburn, says Holroyd, countermanded this order.

Holroyd was removed from his post, without warning, on 27 May 1975. The ostensible reason given to him was that his wife (from whom he is now divorced) had suddenly complained that he had repeatedly threatened her life and those of their children with a hidden gun. Following this, his wife's doctor was alleged to have told Army officers that, if the Army didn't commit Captain Holroyd to mental hospital, they would. Following these alleged complaints, Holroyd was persuaded to undergo a brief examination at Musgrave Park Hospital in Belfast. He was then ordered to report to an Army Hospital at Netley, Southampton.

Holroyd's account of these events is now confirmed by the Ministry of Defence. An MoD spokesman claimed to the *New Statesman* earlier this year that Holroyd's wife and her GP

were discussing whether he should be certified or not . . . The Commanding Officer had no choice in view of what was recommended to him by the GP at the time . . .

But this version of events is completely denied by both the ex-Mrs Holroyd, and by her GP — and by Holroyd himself. Holroyd's ex-wife says that she merely told another Army wife that Holroyd was under too much strain in his job and had wanted her to return with their children to England for a month, to avoid further pressure on their marriage. She had not been threatened with a gun, but had merely told his Army colleagues that he kept his 'unattributable' gun (in fact, merely a spare barrel) in their house.

Released after a rest period at the Netley Hospital, Holroyd was told that he could not return to Northern Ireland. Instead, he was offered a job of equal status in England. He refused and appealed to the Army Board against the confidential order which had sanctioned his removal from Northern Ireland. He was told that the Board decided

that his removal from appointment was justified in the circumstances at the time, but that this does not reflect adversely on his character or ability . . .

The Board directed that 'any reference to his mental condition shall be expunged'. The only justification for his removal that then remained was an allegation that he allegedly 'disobeyed orders' by going on the secret mission to Dublin — a serious disciplinary offence, if true, but one for which no charges or court martial were ever brought.

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