



If I remember correctly the day started very slowly. One section had left the SF base early to carry out a rural patrol with the platoon sergeant of 6pl B Coy - 'Skin Galbraith'. They would have taken most of the day away and wouldn't be returning until late. That had left two sections in the base who had been relaxing, carrying out admin and watching TV. As I recall the Olympics had been in full swing and the track and field events had just started. Myself and Tony Murphy heading both remaining sections, had been sitting talking as the Platoon Commander, Johnny Caskey, entered our Portakabin and in a calm voice said 'I think there's a device outside the base but can't be sure at the moment, as the RUC, although have eyes on the vehicle can't confirm what we suspect, due to the angle of the camera'.

After a couple of questions, we had ascertained that it was indeed a flatbed lorry with hay bales surrounding, and later we learned there were eight mortar tubes primed to go off. The RUC were going out to check the situation as they had witnessed a young child swinging on the rear of the flatbed. What had struck us all was the fact the vehicle had now been parked for some time and we had heard no explosions. Whilst waiting for confirmation we quickly immobilised both sections into full alert, fully dressed and ready to deploy. Confirmation was swift when the RUC officer had returned and told us what he had seen. We quickly grouped and decided on a safe route out of the SF base via the rear.

With snap orders given out and an appreciation of the map done, pumping with adrenaline we deployed in two sections into the streets of Newtownbutler. Having split the sections up, we set about clearing the immediate area of the public, setting up a cordon and establishing an incident control point (ICP). This of course needed to be done quickly and safely as any obvious ICP may have been identified by the IRA and booby trapped. Clearing methodically, we had managed with 30 minutes to establish a cordon, clear houses directly in the flight path of the mortars, which had been occupied with many older people, and lock down the majority of most of the traffic routes near the Station. This had not been easy with two sections a platoon HQ and very little RUC on duty in the station. As we settled into the cordon, we realised it could be a very long time before ATO arrived and of course back up troops and Coy HQ from Lisnaskea. The rain quickly came on and made for an even more miserable situation.

As the hours passed and darkness settled upon us, we finally heard the crack of the mortars being launched in the direction of the SF base. ATO had sent their famous robot in to check the situation and had managed to set the mortars off, due to the cab of the flatbed being booby trapped. The SF base had received a couple of live mortars and some them had failed to explode, thankfully most landed short, in and around the carpark and between the blast walls where our Portakabin was. Fortunately, the damage had been minimal to the base with a few cars damaged and no major damage to the station. The biggest casualty had been our old TV which had succumbed to the explosion and lost the back end. With the windows blown in and the damage swept up we quickly settled into a hard-earned sleep in the small hours. Oh well - there was always the next Olympic Games to look forward too.

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