



Face-to-face on front line of hate

Holding the line: Soldiers from the Royal Irish Regiment deploy along the Ardoyne Road to support the RUC at the height of angry scenes centred on the Holy Cross Primary School. Minutes after this photograph was taken a blast-bomb was thrown, injuring two RUC officers

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HE didn't see it coming, so there was no time to react. The pipe-bomb landed behind Lt Calum Barclay and the explosion blew him off his feet.

"I felt a force going into my back which knocked me forward and I knew immediately it was a pipe bomb," said the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders officer.

"I was a bit dazed and my ears were ringing as I looked around to see if anyone else was hit. It was a hell of a bang, but apart from a sore back there was no damage to myself."

About ten minutes later, one of Lt Barclay's men saw the state of the weapon that had been slung around his back. The butt of his SA80 looked as if it had been through a car-crusher. It had taken the

When simmering sectarian hatred burst into ugly violence on the streets of north Belfast, the Army stepped in to support the Royal Ulster Constabulary

full blast and saved Lt Barclay from serious injury.

The Army has been in the thick of it in north Belfast, an area covered by 39

Infantry Brigade. In the Ardoyne, where Lt Barclay was hit, Catholics live cheek-by-jowl with their Protestant neighbours, and civil disturbances have been a regular feature of the area's nightlife.

Troops have found themselves caught in the middle as they protect both communities from each other. In recent months soldiers, particularly the Argylls, have been on constant patrol, policing the interfaces and peace-lines.

An already tense situation was ratcheted up extra notches at the start of the new school year.

A dispute that had been simmering all summer rapidly escalated into violence. It centred on the Roman Catholic Holy Cross Primary School and the route the children took to get to the classrooms.

The direct route took the children

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Lucky man: Lt Calum Barclay, above, escaped serious injury. The butt of his rifle, below, took the full impact of the blast-bomb



Soccer rivalries remain on pitch

OVER recent months The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and Scots Guards have made a real contribution to the peace process through the sensitivity they have shown in dealing with both communities.

The Argylls, for instance, who recruit from the West Coast of Scotland and a swathe through the central belt, comprise about 25 per cent Roman Catholic and 75 Protestant.

Almost all members of the battalion have allegiance to either Celtic or Rangers, but the rivalry remains on the football pitch.

"As a Scottish battalion we have a reasonably good reception from both sectors of the community," said Lt Col Russell. "I am a firm believer that the Glengarry we wear sets us off at 15-love up with both sectors of the community."



Back to school: CH Holy Cross school, was taken seconds

Cooling the cauldron

Changing

AS the rear-based Battalion, Scots Guards switching between order in Belfast.

This unique situation guarding Buckingham Tower of London or to dampen down a Ardoyne.

Maj Giles Taylor, Company, Scots Guards the Trooping the Colour and tunics, and the of life does not let

Mob rule: A hostile crowd of about 200 people gather in front of an A and SH position to hurl missiles and insults

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through a Protestant enclave in a largely nationalist area. Once the new term got under way, the short walk to school meant the children and parents faced an ugly barrage of insults.

To help protect them from intimidation, soldiers and RUC officers established a corridor of men and vehicles on both sides of the Ardoyne Road.

Girls, some as young as four, were holding their parents' hands on their way to school when a blast bomb was thrown in their direction. The blast injured two

RUC officers and the shock waves were felt around the world. Army medics were quickly on the scene to administer first aid.

It was a low point in community relations and at times the Army bore the brunt of both sides' anger.

The 1st Battalion, The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, under the command of Lt Col Bruce Russell, took over as the resident battalion from The Royal Green Jackets in March.

A total of 22 companies have operated under the battalion's command, includ-

ing four companies of Argylls. "We thought we would be in for a relatively quiet tour," said Lt Col Russell. "In fact it has turned out to be quite the opposite. Since we have been here we have had everything from mild verbal abuse to petrol bombs and shots fired at us."

Lt Barclay and the rest of Delta Company hardly had time to catch their breath before they were back on the streets to deal with more civil unrest. His men had snatched only a few hours' shut-eye in the previous three days. Sleep in barracks was as rare as peace on the streets.



Children, above, make their way to school, watched by soldiers and RUC, in Belfast before a blast bomb was thrown

g the guard

Northern Ireland Battalion, the 1st Guards has been seamlessly public duties in London and public

tion can see the same soldiers at Buckingham Palace, St James's and the Home Office on the same day and within two days trying to deal with riot situations on the streets of the

officer commanding Right Flank Squadron, in Belfast said: "We finished the parade, put down our wet bearskins and went out to Belfast. The pace was up."



The nightly ritual of riotous assembly appears choreographed. Like well-rehearsed old troupers, everyone in the crowd knows their part, their entrances and exits.

Act One usually begins about 9pm when the ensemble cast emerges from the side streets, some tanked up on booze. The dress code, which is strictly adhered to, comprises baseball caps, hooded jackets and trainers.

Act Two commences with a barrage of bottles, stones, ball-bearings, fireworks, paint-bombs, acid bombs and golf balls -

Belfast rain. Then the mob surges forward to within spitting distance of the baseline and, after a considered time, withdraws as if responding to some pre-arranged cue. That's when the blast-bombs usually get thrown.

Another favoured tactic is to set a car alight and steer it at the troops.

Unless they feel up for an encore, the final act sees the crowd melt away into the shadows, until tomorrow night's equally sinister performance.

Lt Col Russell said: "When you consider that the majority of soldiers on the

streets are 18, 19 or 20 years old it vindicates the training we do. The fortitude, steadfastness and professionalism of the troops is remarkable in the face of severe verbal and physical provocation.

"Whenever a soldier puts a rifle over his shoulder and goes out on patrol in Northern Ireland, there is always the threat that he might not come back."

These daily disturbances are punishing too for the Army's fleet of vehicles. It is the job of SSgt Gav Graham and the men of the Light Aid Detachment REME,

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Working together

UNDER the command of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, soldiers from the following regiments have been supporting the Royal Ulster Constabulary: Coldstream Guards, The Royal Irish Regiment, The Royal Welch Fusiliers, The Royal Highland Fusiliers, Scots Guards, The Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment and the RAF Regiment.

As darkness falls: An A and SH static patrol, left, prepares for another night