

Why soldier cops dance to 'supergrass' songs

EVERY time a 'supergrass' starts 'singing' about his terrorist links, the policemen of 1 Regiment Royal Military Police start dancing.

It's not so much a dance of joy — although they're pleased the way the current crop of trials are progressing — but more a dash up and down corridors of thousands of shelves full of files. And the man doing most of the dashing dance is WO2 David Bryceon of 178 Provost Company, the Regiment's Special Investigation Branch at HQ Northern Ireland.

"We have the logs of every battalion to have served in the Province since the start of the present troubles," he said.

"So when supergrasses sing, we're kept busy digging out unit reports. We can check pretty well every incident involving the Army since 1969."

Calling the tune to which WO Bryceon 'dances' is Major Paddy Smyth, the Regiment's 'legal eagle' who collates and presents evidence in court.

Mostly his work concerns claims by civilians against the Army. "There have been some pretty substantial bids over the years," he said, declining to reveal exactly how much they amounted to. "But it's my job to find evidence to rebut those claims, and that's where our file of battalion logs is proving invaluable," he said.

While the backroom coppers of the Regiment get on with the paperwork, and the presentation of evidence, Captain Mike Cop-

land and his team of SIB investigators are fighting crime at source.

He is justly proud of his section's record — 73 per cent success rate to date.

"We work closely with the civilian CID. Mostly that involves petty crime, but the 'supergrass' trials are keeping us extremely busy and mean, in a good many instances, travelling the world tracing people to give evidence in trials yet to come."

Minor Army crimes, too, keep them on their toes. Like the case of the fruit machine bandits when two soldiers were sent down for stealing.

"The machine had been consistently broken into and robbed," said Mike Copland. "So we used video to trap the thieves."

Demonstrating the film he added: "Were they surprised

The Heckler-Koch automatic rifle. The special weapon used by 177 Pro Company in their close-protection role.



when we identified and charged them. We hid a camera and took a shot every ten seconds.

"In the past ten years we have advanced 50 in the use of modern equipment in the fight against crime."

He followed this up by pointing to a standard-size folder and saying: "We have in this the name of every soldier in the Army."

"A touch of Big Brother," he echoed. "No fear. It simply enables us to find people should we need to contact them."

He showed how this could be done by tracing his own son, who joined the Army a few weeks ago, within seconds.

LCpl Paula Fleischmann, a 'Coffeepot' with 181 Company, carries out a search at one of the city's segment gates.

He followed this by describing how video is used for lectures and post mortems.

"It's not possible for large numbers of SIB officers to attend a PM, so we use video to show what is involved."

He ran a film showing the body of a young soldier killed by terrorists a few weeks ago.

A similar incident happened when a soldier died in an attack on a joint Army/RUC base.

Security prevents naming the base, but this particular place has the uneaviable record of suffering six grenade attacks in the past 18 months. Walls are pitted with scars caused by bomb fragments and in one case was pierced by an armour-piercing round from a 20mm anti-tank rifle.

Life for the three-man duty RMP team is, to say the least,





Belfast scene . . . hammering rain, flashing lights and a car-bomb warning.

fraught with danger.

But they take it in their stride, as do the smallest of the five companies making up 1RMP, 177 Company under the command of Captain Jon Dawson. As specialised in their way as the SIB is in theirs, they are responsible for the safety of every resident and visiting VIP in the Province.

"They are the best NCOs in the RMP," said Jon Dawson. "They are hand-picked and highly motivated with an emphasis on skill with a gun."

Highly motivated really means being prepared to shield a VIP with their bodies should it become necessary.

"Naturally, these chaps keep a low profile, even though it's public knowledge they are in the vicinity of any VIP," he said.

And just to back up their protective role they are experts in the use of the German-made Heckler Koch automatic rifle which, said 6ft 5in-tall Jon, is ideal for the job they have to do.

A visit to Girdwood Park, an Army base in North Belfast, indicated that, while there is a general decline of terrorist activity, danger is still very real as a Pointer team of 175 Provost Company showed only too well.

They are the men who collect evidence from bomb outrages and the like for the RUC to follow up.

Initially their role is to attend the scene as soon as the alarm sounds. On this occasion it was in the centre of Belfast near to the law courts.

A patrol from 10 UDR had seen three men leave a car in a nearby car park with its lights on. They alerted the Pointer team from Girdwood, under Sgt Charlie Swanson, who, with the 10 UDR men, had the area and nearby buildings cordoned and cleared within minutes.

Two banks were within yards of the suspect car and the whole scene overlooked by a known terrorist area called The Markets.

"Just make sure you stay out of any line of fire from there," said Charlie Swanson. "Get in or behind the Land-Rover."

This then was the RMP at work in a danger zone. Protected by their anti-flak jackets, they provided an escort for the bomb disposal team who decided, after inspection, to "blow" the car.

This meant someone had to place small explosive charges on the doors and boot to see if the car was booby-trapped.

It so happened it was clear, but

Bombs mean disruption. Sgt Charlie Swanson, RMP Pointer team leader, closes one end of a threatened street.



Here come the EOD boys. Risky work, but they don't take unnecessary chances.

the incident caused hours of disruption in the city centre.

"When we get one like this we expect to get several more, one after the other," said Captain Ian Waters, of 175 Pro Company.

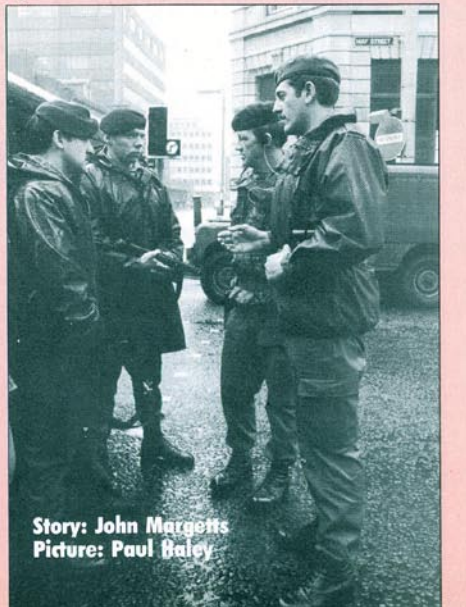
But while the military policemen got on with their job of ensuring safety for everyone and assisting the patrolling RUC men, the populace, used to these situations after 14 years, carried on, in the pouring rain, unconcerned.

Perhaps it's just as well, said a watchful soldier, "Could be bloody murder otherwise." ■



Cpl Jackie Gordon . . . micro-file ▲ records of every soldier in the Army and updated every three months.

Captain Ian Waters, 2/c 175 Pro Company, discusses the May Street car bomb with an attending Pointer team. ▼



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