

Subject- Fatal Motor Accident in Bogside, Londonderry, on 24th., July, 1971,  
Involving Military vehicle.

HEAD CONSTABLE'S OFFICE  
R.U.C. STATION  
- 5 AUG 1971  
VICTORIA  
LONDONDERRY

Sup't.,  
Victoria

Submitted. I respectfully refer to Chief Constable's minute of 30th., July, 1971 regarding this matter and have to report as follows:-

At approx., 12.30 p.m. on 24th., July, 1971 a convoy of Army vehicles consisting of two ferret armoured cars and one 4 ton Bedford lorry were travelling along the Lonemoor Road, Londonderry, intending to travel to the Army/Police post at Bligh's Lane. The armoured vehicles were attached to 17/21st., Lancers and the lorry to 3rd., Royal Horse Artillery. The lorry was in the middle of the convoy.

At the junction of Lonemoor Road/Westland St., the leading ferret turned in error into Westland St., and the two other vehicle followed. As the first scout car approached the junction of Westland St./Blutcher St., the driver realised his mistake and braked, apparently intent on turning at the junction and resuming his proper route. The driver of the Bedford lorry also braked but due to a slight shower of rain the roadway was slippery and the lorry developed a skid and eventually mounted the pavement crushing and killing a nine year old boy who had the misfortune to be standing there.

Almost immediately a crowd of some 20-30 persons gathered on the road and the atmosphere became tense. The crowd began to stone the Military personnel and after two had sustained injuries the person i/c of the convoy, having radioed the facts, decided to withdraw temporarily abandoning the Bedford lorry.

Police communications were informed via Army Ops. Room, R.U.C. Victoria at 12.43 p.m. A Police vehicle was dispatched to the scene but when still some distance away learned that a patrol of Royal Military Police had been obliged to hastily withdraw from the same area by a hostile mob. The car was re-routed to Altnagelvin Hospital in order that details of the deceased together with identification might be obtained.

Superintendent Forbes left Victoria R.U.C. Station in his own private car at 1 p.m. to visit the scene and evaluate the situation. At 1.5 p.m. a Mr. McIntyre, a native of the Bogside, called at Victoria R.U.C. Station and told Sergeant J.A. McElhinney, 9303, that Police were required at the scene of the accident to carry out the necessary investigations. He further assured the Sergeant that his committee, presumed to be D.C.C.C., would afford the Police the necessary protection. Sergt. McElhinney was joined by Sergeant D.W. Dorsett, 9286, and left for the scene with Mr. McIntyre.

Shortly after the Sergeants had left Superintendent Forbes transmitted an R/T message to the effect that a civilian car would call for two Police at Victoria and that they should come to Westland St. Sergeant McElhinney was able to report that the Police were in fact en route the accident.

When the two Sergeants arrived at the scene of the accident they found a crowd of 150-200 persons gathered around the Army vehicle. Approximately twelve members of the D.C.C.C. were maintaining order of a sort and giving a degree of protection to the vehicle. A large proportion of this crowd was in a highly agitated state and some had armed themselves with bricks and other implements of offence. The general concensus of opinion amongst the crowd was that the lorry should be immediately destroyed by burning. Mr. Canavan, chairman of D.C.C.C. together with his committee members insisted that the Police should be permitted to examine the scene and make their investigations before any such action was taken.

The accident prevention unit van crewed by Constables C.J. Davis, 8303 and P.A. Cromie, 8730, was summoned to the scene to carry out the necessary authorised officer's examination of the lorry. They arrived at the scene at 2 p.m. and in the course of their examination found it necessary to carry out a road test on the vehicle. Before the Bedford was driven off the crowd made it obvious to the Police carrying out the test that if the lorry was not returned the A.P.U. van would be destroyed instead and further that the other three Police would never leave the area. The Constables were obliged to observe this direction and indeed during the test drive they were accompanied by some eight youths carried in the rear of the lorry and Mr. Canavan in the cab. The road test lasted 15 minutes and the vehicle was returned to the scene of the accident. As soon as it was returned and before the two Constables had completely cleared the cab it was set alight by having a petrol bomb thrown into the rear. They dashed towards the A.P.U. van and made good their escape amid a hail of bottles and stones. The windows of the van were smashed but the crew escaped without sustaining serious injury.

The other three Police deemed it unwise to attempt an escape at this time on the grounds that they may not all have reached the Police van and had they all managed to bundle into the vehicle a petrol bomb, hurled into the rear, would have resulted in tragedy.

After the escape of this vehicle the crowd turned their full attentions on the three remaining Police striving to come to grips with them and threatening to murder them. The members of the D.C.C.C. formed a ring round the Police and managed to gain entrance for them in a house in Westland St., which they crawled through and out the back but were again forced by the mob to crawl into a small shed. Their situation was becoming perilous in the extreme but fortunately an Army patrol arrived in Westland St., causing the mob to rush towards the fresh target. At this stage the three Police escaped over gardens into Westland Avenue where a civilian car brought them to safety.

This operation was precarious but successful from a Police point of view in that they kept faith with a considerable body of persons in this disturbed area who look to the Police to carry out their essential work when needed. Secondly a successful investigation was completed in near-impossible conditions and thirdly the coolness of the Army and Police and their refusal to over-react in the situation probably averted total disaster. The sense of outrage that this unfortunate accident generated was immense and whilst rioting did ensue it was not on the scale that might have been precipitated by Police or Army over-reaction.

The Army lorry was in any case doomed from the moment of impact. It could not have been saved by less than massive Army intervention and in the circumstances it appears to have been better to forfeit this one vehicle in return for a fair measure of good will which still exists and might well have been totally dissipated by over-reaction.

*Sevgi J. Gurbur* Inspector.