

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



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It has been alleged from time to time that murders and other major crimes committed in Northern Ireland have been the work of the SAS. Clearly the terrorist organisations have found it convenient to encourage this belief as a means of evading the responsibility which is properly theirs.

The facts are as follows.

No SAS unit has been or is stationed in Northern Ireland.

It has been readily acknowledged in Parliament and to the press that the Army in Northern Ireland undertakes plain clothes patrols. The reason for this is quite simply that soldiers operating in uniform and with Service vehicles are easily recognisable at a distance and plain clothes are therefore adopted on certain occasions where effective surveillance is essential. As far as practicable the Army work in conjunction with the Police on these occasions, as at all other times. The value of these patrols has been amply borne out.

The training which soldiers who volunteer for service with the SAS receive would be particularly valuable in any plain clothes operations; but in order the more readily to refute hostile propaganda about SAS involvement in Northern Ireland, the policy has been to avoid employing such soldiers on these duties in Northern Ireland until some two or three years after their SAS service has ended. However the overriding considerations must

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always be the operational needs of the situation and we must be free to use whatever measures are most appropriate to counter the current terrorist threat. On this account the normal embargo may be waived when necessary. The first occasion on which this has in fact been done has been during the past three months when, in order to maintain the level of plain clothes patrols, use has been made of a number of volunteers whose experience with the SAS had been acquired only just beforehand.

These and all other soldiers employed in plain clothes duties are required to conduct their activities within the law and remain subject to the civil law and to military discipline at all times. Any suggestion that they are employed to carry out assassinations or to create inter-sectarian suspicion is nonsense. The fact that such claims are made is in itself an indication of the degree to which the plain clothes surveillance patrols hurt the terrorists.

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