

Terrorism is a way of life



VIOLENCE is a way of life in the troubled Northern Ireland county of Ulster and this is particularly true for the members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. An insight into the life of one of the constables of that force is given in this special article, extracted from a letter to Constable Ray Bedford, of the Australian Federal Police Northern Region. Ray is located at Regional Headquarters in Brisbane.

By BRIAN GRACE

Anti-terrorism, riot and crowd control are day-to-day activities of one of the world's best-known police forces, the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Steven Williamson is typical of the men who make up this force in the troubled Northern Ireland city of Antrim.

He is a member of the Divisional Mobile Support Unit (DMSU). Apart from the normal police duties, which are the same the world over, members of Steven's unit are daily involved in such things as searches for terrorist weapons and for explosives in their daily battles with the terrorists of Northern Ireland.

Violence is a way of life and the police of Ulster have to be prepared at all times for any emergency.

When they set off for work in the morning, they don't simply drive the family car or catch public transport.

As Steven says: "The day usually starts off for us with a check of the car for booby trap devices, which may have been placed during the night.

"I drive to work in civilian clothes. To wear a uniform invites disaster. The route you take is varied as much as possible."

The Ulster Constabulary cannot afford to take the same route to work twice.

"The terrorist is always on the look-out for patterns in behaviour and once he has figured out a target's behaviour and routine, then it is all too easy for him to plan his attack!" he says.

"Even when we are at home in the evenings with our families, we are open to attack.

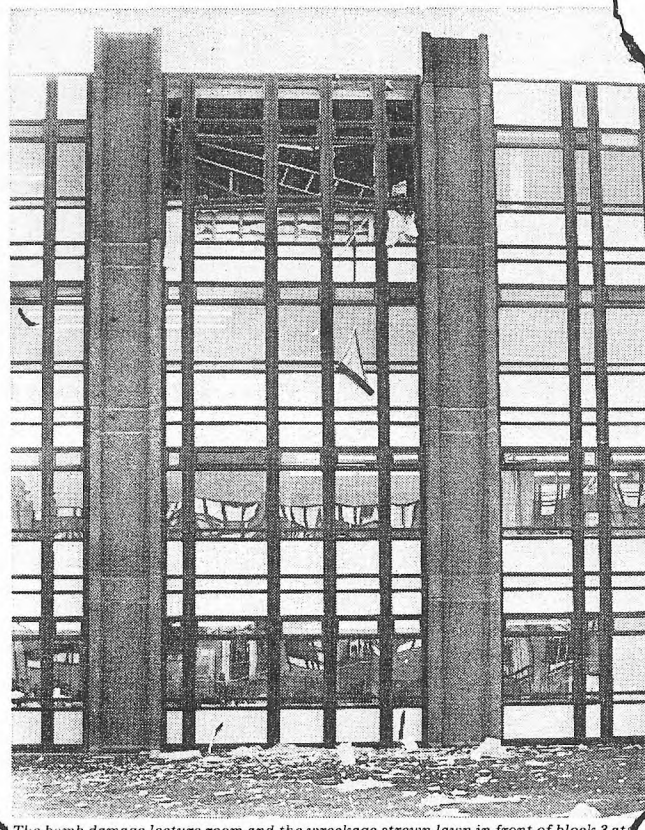
"All too often an off-duty policeman has answered a knock at his front door to be gunned down in front of his family," Steven says.

In fact, in the four-day period he took to write his letter, three policemen were killed. One was shot as he put his car in the garage after returning from work. Another was shot while he worked on renovating an old country farmhouse he had bought and another was killed and eight of his colleagues wound-

ed when terrorists mounted a mortar attack on a police station at County Tyrone.

To give some idea of the state of readiness which police have to operate under, the newly-constructed Antrim Police Station is a prime example.

Condemnation by wake of bomb



The bomb damage lecture room and the wreckage strewn lawn in front of block 3 at Ulster Polytechnic.

'Even home with our families we're open to attack'

• A clipping from a newspaper shows the effects of a bomb which exploded in a lecture room used by constables on a special course.

Steven, along with most of his colleagues, is undergoing a special course at Northern Ireland Polytechnic. In November he attended his weekly class on a Wednesday and the following Friday the building was blown apart by a terrorist bomb. The bomb, two pounds of commercial explosive packed with nails and bolts, exploded at 11.30 am in a lecture room.

The no-warning blast ripped through the third-storey classroom, blowing out a wall and win-

The walls are specially thickened and all windows are bullet proof. There is a formidable wall built around the perimeter with a fence on top. There are armed guards on the gates and the perimeter is always under constant surveillance by closed circuit television.

YEAR	RUC	RUC'R	KILLED SINCE AUGUST 1969				TOTAL	DEAD IN EXPLOSION
			ARMY	UDR	CIVIL'S			
5/10/68	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
1969	1	-	-	-	12	13	-	
1970	2	-	-	-	23	25	3	
1971	11	-	43	5	115	174	53	
1972	14	3	103	26	321	467	138	
1973	10	3	58	8	171	250	66	
1974	12	3	28	7	166	216	60	
1975	7	4	14	6	216	247	75	
1976	13	10	14	15	245	297	68	
1977	8	6	15	14	69	112	13	
1978	4	6	14	7	50	81	23	
1979	9	5	38	10	51	113	43	
1980	3	6	8	9	50	76	17	
1981	13	8	10	13	57	101	14	
1982	8	4	21	7	57	97	35	
1983	9	9	5	9	39	71	17	
TOTAL	124	67	371	136	1642	2340	625	

ROAD	DEATHS AND INJURIES	
	KILLED	INJURED
1969	257	7124
1970	272	7902
1971	304	7658
1972	372	8025
1973	335	7662
1974	316	7188
1975	313	7340
1976	300	7319
1977	355	7849
1978	288	8080
1979	293	7628
1980	229	7035
1981	223	7557
1982	216	7923
TOTAL	4072	99,103
1983	161 DEC	6144 OCT

• This toll board at the Antrim Police Station speaks for itself.

for Ulster's Constabulary



BRIAN GRACE of Brisbane, above, has been a journalist for 30 years. He worked on newspapers in Lithgow, Wollongong, Sydney, Gosford, and edited the *Wellington Times*, before becoming a sub-editor on the *Canberra Times*. He has been involved in Government information for 10 years and for six months in 1982 was Press Officer for the XII Commonwealth Games in Brisbane.

dows, killing two and wounding 34. Large chunks of glass lodged in the grass below the building and the scene in the lecture room was one of devastation.

As Steven says: "The results were horrendous. This was the same lecture room we had used on the Wednesday.

"Unfortunately, incidents like this are all too common for the policeman in Ulster.

"All too common to the extent that it is a way of life."

In Steven's own words:

As a member of a Divisional Mobile Support Unit (DMSU) much of my duties are concentrated on countering terrorism — searching for illegal weapons and explosives in 'hides', or in transit, dealing with disorderly crowds and the arrest of suspects.

Of course, such security duties are in addition to routine police duties which we perform and which would be common to sister agencies throughout the world — crowd control at major sporting or public events, industrial disputes, searching for lost children, elderly or confused people, and training to deal with major rail, road or air disasters.

The rationale behind the DMSUs is that groups of officers will always be available at centres throughout Northern Ireland to act as a back-up to ordinary divisional uniform police whenever the need should arise. The system, as you will appreciate, enables the authorities to assemble substantial additional resources to deal with emergencies.

Although various specialist vehicles are available, our normal form of transport is the long wheelbase LandRover fitted with an armoured body and specially protected glass. The 'skirt' fitted round the vehicle is to prevent explosive devices being rolled underneath them.

Such measures are an indication of the threat to officers attempting to provide a traditional police service to the community in Northern Ireland. Such vehicles have been subjected to attack by petrol bombs, blast bombs and barrels filled with explosive, high velocity gunfire, landmines and missile attacks from the Soviet-bloc RPG 7 rocket launcher.

Where a less easily identified vehicle is preferred, we can call on the armoured Ford Cortina which, since it is unsigned and differs only in minor external details from the standard production model, is widely used for plain clothes duties and in areas where an easily recog-



● *Steven Williamson, writer of the letter, stands beside six LandRovers in the station yard. Although they may look dilapidated, these vehicles are mechanically A1 and have been through some of the worst rioting in recent years.*

nised police vehicle might be at risk from landmines.

The Cortinas have been adapted and fitted with armour plating and bullet-proof glass and have certainly saved the lives of a number of police officers involved in terrorist ambushes.

While the terrorist threat is still, despite the dramatic reduction in the number of incidents over the past few years, a factor which police officers here must always be aware of, it is important to put it in some sort of perspective. Terrorism accounts for less than 10 per cent of the RUC's workload. The remainder covers all the examples of crime or public service common to our sister forces throughout the Western world.

A few statistics at this stage may be of assistance. The year 1972 was our worst year for terrorism, with 467 people killed — 95 of them in just one month. Last year, by contrast, the death total had dropped to 77 — just about half the number killed on our roads.

Where the reduction is less evident is in the casualties for the security forces, the main target these days for the Provisional IRA and Irish National Liberation Army terrorists.

The RCU, with a strength of 8,000 men and women, has suffered 124 members murdered and more than half its total strength injured. The RCU Reserve, most of them ordinary members of the public who give up part of their spare time to assist the regular force, has a strength of 4,500 and has had 68 members killed, while the Ulster Defence Force, a locally recruited regiment of the regular British Army, has suffered 139 members murdered out of its strength of almost 7,000.

A further 371 soldiers also have died as part of the terrorists' violent campaign to forcibly reunite the two parts of Ireland against the wishes of the majority of the citizens of Northern Ireland, and in the face of the declared wishes of the main Southern political parties for a peaceful solution.

As the figures indicate only too graphically, members of the RUC cannot relax their guard against attack whether on or off duty. Even though 90 per cent of the Province is normally trouble-free, the terrorist has the benefit of surprise and is always looking for a 'soft' target.



● *Above: A special armoured Ford Cortina, used when a less easily identified vehicle is needed for police duties.*

● *Below: A long wheelbase LandRover fitted with an armoured body and special glass, and used for normal patrol work. The 'skirt' prevents explosive devices being rolled underneath the vehicle.*

