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ARTICLE

Professionalizing clandestine military intelligence in Northern Ireland: creating the Special Reconnaissance Unit

David A. Charters

ABSTRACT
This article explains the origins of the British Army's covert counter-insurgency intelligence efforts in Northern Ireland, and shows how the army professionalized its approach to clandestine intelligence collection there. It traces the pre-1969 precedents for covert collection. It also shows that the early ad hoc efforts proved insufficient and problematic; some collection operations were exposed and compromised. Thus, the army decided to 'professionalize' the clandestine collection of intelligence, and created a special body–the Special Reconnaissance Unit–to handle the task. This laid the foundations for later intelligence successes and for current army intelligence doctrine.

Introduction

It has become an article of faith among commentators on the Northern Ireland conflict that as it became protracted it became less a classic insurgency/counter-insurgency campaign and more of an 'intelligence war'.[1] Writers examining the British dimension focus in particular on the roles of the Special Air Service (SAS) Regiment and 14 Intelligence Company (14IC) in clandestine intelligence collection.[2] This article explains the origins of the army's covert counter-insurgency intelligence efforts, shows how the army professionalized its approach to clandestine collection, and the impact of professionalization.

It will argue that neither the focus on clandestine intelligence collection nor the use of specialist units to conduct that task were new or unique to Northern Ireland. Such efforts had been central to Britain's post-war counter-insurgency campaigns. There was, therefore, within the army a body of relevant experience. But the article also will make clear that in spite of this institutional memory the early improvised efforts in the province proved insufficient and problematic. As the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) became more skilled and more secure it became harder to penetrate. And some collection efforts, such as the 'Four Square Laundry' discussed below, were compromised and exposed.

Failure is often a catalyst for change, and seems to have been so in this case. In the wake of the exposure of the laundry operation the British Army decided to professionalize the clandestine collection of intelligence. With the approval of Cabinet it created a special body–the Special Reconnaissance Unit (SRU)–to handle the task. Documents from the United Kingdom National Archives shed some light on the decision to create the SRU, which later became 14IC.[3] The document trail is by no means complete, so this article cannot claim to be a definitive account. But it tells us more than we knew before, and indicates gaps in our knowledge. In this sense, it breaks new ground, and may encourage other scholars to pursue further investigation.

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Counter-insurgency intelligence: the utility of specialist units

The centrality of intelligence to counter-insurgency was acknowledged long before the post-war era. The Irish campaign (1919–1921) highlighted the need for intelligence to disrupt insurgent organizations, but was so controversial that it discouraged close study of its lessons.[4] However, Major-General Sir Charles Gwynn's 1934 book *Imperial Policing* offered useful insights on counter-insurgency intelligence.[5] Likewise, specialized formations such as the SAS and the Special Operations Executive (SOE) proliferated in the Second World War. They engaged in a range of covert operations, including reconnaissance and intelligence collection; SOE ran its own agent networks. But they had left a mixed legacy, and most were disbanded at the end of the war.[6] So, it was not inevitable that the British Army would either look back to earlier campaigns for guidance on covert counter-insurgency intelligence or automatically assign such tasks to specialized units. So, when the army attempted to fuse the two in its post-1945 counter-insurgency campaigns it is not surprising that it experienced a steep learning curve.

Following rudimentary and generally ineffective intelligence collection efforts in post-war Palestine[7]through trial and error intelligence gradually gained a central place in British Army theory and practice about counter-insurgency. Just as it was for counter-insurgency generally, the Malayan Emergency became the touchstone for intelligence organization in that context. The appointment of a single director of intelligence and the creation of an integrated intelligence system based on the Special Branch (SB) established a template for subsequent campaigns. But since the conditions that shaped the Malayan campaign were not replicated in later conflicts, the so-called 'Malayan model' remained an ideal to be aspired to rather than a universally applicable solution. So, intelligence efforts in Kenya, Cyprus and South Arabia varied in their application of the model, and in the effectiveness of their intelligence efforts against insurgents.[8] Never the less, the army's 1969 counter-insurgency doctrine manual, *Land Operations Volume III Counter-Revolutionary Operations*, issued barely a fortnight after British troops deployed on the streets of Northern Ireland, reiterated 'the gospel according to Malaya'.[9]

A recurring theme in the post-war campaigns was the initial unpreparedness of the local SB to deal with insurgency. It required an investment of funds for more personnel, for training and for other resources, but colonial governments never had sufficient funds to spare.[10] Inevitably, the task of reinforcing SB fell to the military–usually the army[11]–and doctrine manuals later made a virtue out of this necessity. And, it usually was the army that took the lead in trying more innovative ways of collecting intelligence: employing specialized units.

In Palestine, the police–then headed by a former Royal Marines officer–created a special unit to hunt the Jewish insurgents. Former special forces officers led the unit, which did not limit their activities to intelligence collection, and instead carried out direct action efforts. One of these ended in a murder,[12] casting doubt on the value of such units and operations.

In Malaya, in addition to direct action missions such as ambushes the re-constituted SAS conducted long-range, deep jungle patrolling, tracking and reconnaissance–all essential contributions to the intelligence collection effort.[13] During the Mau Mau emergency in Kenya Field Intelligence Officers (FIO) were assigned to create networks of informers and agents.

While serving as an FIO then Captain (later General) Frank Kitson first 'turned' a Mau Mau gang member into a double agent then later created 'pseudo-gangs' of loyal tribesmen, former Mau Mau, and Europeans in disguise to gather intelligence on Mau Mau gangs and their supporters. The security forces then exploited that intelligence to destroy the gangs.[14] Similar specialist units–called 'Q-Patrols'–were used in Cyprus in the late 1950s. The SAS and the Gurkhas conducted cross-border covert reconnaissance and surveillance operations against Indonesian troops and bases in Borneo during the Confrontation campaign in the mid-1960s. The SAS also recruited local tribes to create a surveillance network along the border.[15] The role of the SAS in counter-insurgency intelligence-gathering was codified in the army's 1969 manual, which stated that it was particularly suited to 'The collection of information on the location and movement of insurgent forces.'[16] It seems fair to conclude, therefore, that on the eve of the Northern Ireland conflict, the army had a 'proof of concept' for, and some soldiers experienced in, the use of specialized units to covertly collect counter-insurgency intelligence.

Key intelligence issues in the Northern Ireland conflict 1969–1974

This topic has been addressed in detail elsewhere,[17] so this section will only highlight briefly the most salient points. First, it is important to grasp that the conflict changed over time. It started in 1969 as communal violence largely caused by loyalist rioters. By 1971, PIRA terrorism had become the principal security problem.[18] So, the role of the security forces evolved from riot control to counter-terrorism, and the intelligence task changed with it.

Second, even before the major riots in August 1969 the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) recognized the weaknesses in its Special Branch. At the RUC's request MI5 (the Security Service) and the army started assisting it. It took some time, however, for the SB and the army to develop a harmonious working relationship.[19] Third, the British Government did not create an integrated intelligence system because the Northern Ireland Government, which was responsible for law and order until direct rule, insisted that the RUC remain independent of army control.[20] However, in September 1969 a single Director of Intelligence (D/INT) from MI5 was appointed, not to 'direct' intelligence operations, rather to support the General Officer Commanding (GOC) by coordinating the work of SB and military intelligence. But after Britain had imposed direct rule on the province MI5 and MI6 (Secret Intelligence Service) established an Irish Joint Section to improve the flow of intelligence from the province. Then in October 1972, Alan Rowley of MI6 became the Director and Coordinator of Intelligence (DCI), to serve as the intelligence advisor to the new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (SSNI) William Whitelaw. Inserting MI6 into a domestic security problem, due probably to its experience in running operations in hostile areas, represented a major, politically sensitive, change in British intelligence practice.[21]

Fourth, the army realized at an early stage that it was operating in an intelligence vacuum because, as Martin McCleery's recent scholarly study of the internment operation shows, SB intelligence on the loyalist and republican armed groups was insufficient.[22] Given this problem, and since it controlled most of the intelligence resources anyway, the army instead of SB became the 'lead agency' for intelligence collection. It flooded the province with patrols, observation posts and snap searches. But the value of these overt efforts waxed and waned over time, and the flow of information 'dried up considerably' in the spring of 1972 when at the insistence of the SSNI the army adopted 'low profile' operations in the pro-republican 'no-go' areas.[23]

Catalyst for change: the military reaction force

The army had been running 'plain clothes' surveillance patrols from the early stages of the Northern Ireland campaign.[24] It also was recruiting and handling clandestine Humint sources as early as spring 1970, and it continued to do so thereafter both independently and in conjunction with MI5. 'Observer B',[25] a British businessman who maintained and reported on a series of clandestine contacts in Londonderry, was one such case and his example is instructive in this regard. [26] Likewise, the army and the RUC jointly were running covert intelligence collection teams as early as spring 1971. Later that year the army converted these into the Military Reaction Force (MRF) to conduct covert surveillance, counter-hijacking, close protection and arrests. The MRF included 'turned' PIRA members, referred to as 'Freds'.[27] In that regard, the MRF was almost identical to Kitson's anti-Mau Mau counter-gangs, and it is alleged that the impetus for creating it came from Kitson himself, who then was commanding 39 Brigade in Belfast.[28]

The MRF has been a focus of controversy and speculation, aggravated by the paucity of reliable information on it. It is nearly impossible to verify some of the claims made about it.[29] Official sources say that each brigade had a small MRF under its command, and that the Commander Land Forces (CLF) Northern Ireland exercised overall control of them.[30] This speaks to their operational and political sensitivity as well as to their perceived strategic value.

Only one MRF operation has been described in any detail partly verifiable through official sources, and that is because it was compromised and its story became public knowledge. Even so, some details remain unconfirmed. The 'Four Square Laundry' was an MRF front company that collected intelligence for about two months while operating under the guise of a legitimate business. The company used a

van to collect laundry from homes in Republican areas. The security forces analysed the laundry for forensic evidence (such as gunshot or explosive residue) that would indicate which customers had links to violent groups or activities. These people could be arrested or put under direct surveillance to identify their associates or to monitor their activities. Some sources say the van themselves were equipped with a compartment that allowed British operatives to conduct covert surveillance. However, according to Ed Moloney PIRA 'blew' the operation after it detained and interrogated two of its own members: Seamus Wright and Kevin McKee. Wright had fallen under suspicion, and admitted under interrogation that he was working for the MRF. He also named McKee as a fellow collaborator. Based on their information PIRA ambushed the laundry van in the Twinbrook Estate in Belfast on 2 October 1972, killing the plain-clothes army driver. On the same day it also struck two other suspected MRF locations. The laundry incident attracted a great deal of media attention, and the army was forced to issue a statement about it, acknowledging the killing of the driver. PIRA claimed it had killed five undercover soldiers, but that has not been substantiated.[31]

GEN 79 (the cabinet committee on Northern Ireland) also discussed it briefly. Whitelaw argued that in spite of the publicity such operations generated enough valuable intelligence to warrant continuing them. More intelligence was coming in about PIRA activities, giving 'grounds for cautious optimism'. The NIO, however, felt it that would be 'best to play down this aspect of security force operations as much as possible.'[32] Several commentators have criticized the laundry operation as 'amateurish' and as an indication of how little the army knew about PIRA.[33] But a case also could be made that it was quite imaginative and effective. It had shown that army intelligence could recruit and run agents inside the group. Wright and McKee had identified many members of its second Battalion. And Wright had been caught only by chance, highlighting for PIRA its limited counter-intelligence capability.[34]

But there were other compelling reasons to wind up the MRF. Even if the more lurid conspiracy theories are dismissed, it seemed to be implicated in a number of questionable incidents resulting in the deaths of civilians.[35] Clearly, it was time for a different approach.

Learning from experience: creating the SRU

The army recognized that the MRF's operations were high-risk, run on an 'ad hoc basis'. They suffered from high personnel turnover, and a lack of security consciousness, proper training, detailed command and control and administrative support. The security awareness problem in particular could explain the PIRA's compromise of the laundry operation. That disaster may explain the DCI's 1973 directive requiring his prior approval for all military intelligence operations. But it also forced the army to undertake a re-appraisal of these activities. The result was that, on instructions from the Defence Secretary (Lord Carrington), the Chief of the General Staff (CGS) General Sir Michael Carver issued new orders intended to put army covert operations on a more regular footing under closer, more centralized control with formal administrative support and better training.[36] The GOC initially requested that an SAS squadron be assigned to this task, but this was not approved. Political sensitivities probably informed that decision, but another reason may have been that in late 1972 the SAS was heavily committed to a counter-insurgency campaign in Dhofar, Oman and did not have troops to spare.[37]

Army headquarters in Northern Ireland (HQNI) then came up with an alternative: to create a new special unit to conduct covert surveillance in the province. The initial proposal called for a unit of 120 (later expanded to 130), of whom 50 would be active on patrols at any time. The CLF would exercise central direction of the force, while the DCI would direct policy and (through his representative at HQNI) would 'keep a professional eye on the security aspects … of the operations of the force.'[38] By mid-November the proposal had been thoroughly examined within the Ministry of Defence (MOD), and had gained the support of the CGS, the DCI, and the Deputy Chief of Defence Staff for Intelligence. Carver then sought the approval of Lord Carrington, emphasizing that getting the unit manned was 'a matter of urgency.'[39]

Carver explained that instead of drawing troops from units as they rotated into Northern Ireland on their regular tours, the new force would recruit volunteers from across the army. The three detachment

commanders (one per brigade) would serve 18-month tours, while the remainder of the troops would serve for a year. Starting in January 1973 22 SAS would conduct an eight-week selection and training programme, with the first troops ready for deployment by the end of February. SAS involvement was to be kept secret. The costs were to be carried on HQNI's intelligence budget with possibility of some assistance from the DCI.[40] The CGS expected that as the new unit came into being the need for plain clothes operations by regular units would decrease, as would the problems associated with them:

> [A]s the whole organization becomes more professional than at present, the risk of exposure and penetration of the operations should become correspondingly smaller. The improvement in control should automatically reduce the risk of nonsenses.[41]

Carver finished his memo to Carrington by emphasizing that the unit would have to operate under the existing rules of engagement and within the law.

Carrington did not immediately approve creation of the unit, but instead referred the matter to GEN 79. He also appealed directly to Prime Minister Edward Heath for approval to use the SAS to train the new unit to a high standard. Attaching a memo covering all the points made by the CGS (including the value of the MRFs as intelligence-gathering units), he acknowledged that there was a risk of controversy should the SAS' role become known. But he concluded that, 'I can see no practical alternative to using SAS to help in setting the new organization up.'[42] His appeal must have been persuasive; on 30 November GEN 79 approved the plan to use the SAS to train the new army plain clothes teams. Heath emphasized, however, that 'special care should be taken to operate within the law.'[43]

With that the SRU came into being. The selection and training regime was extended to 11 weeks, with the first output joining the SRU between March and August 1973. The SRU operated in the province under the cover name of Northern Ireland Training and Advisory Team (Northern Ireland) [NITAT (NI)], to give it ostensible equivalence to the genuine Northern Ireland training teams working with UK Land Forces and British Army of the Rhine to prepare soldiers and units for deployment there. According to Mark Urban the SRU was divided into three detachments, each attached to a brigade and consisting of about 20 soldiers commanded by a captain. Once deployed on operations they used cover names related to the unit or base to which they were assigned (the 3 Brigade detachment was called 4 Field Survey Troop).[44] Their primary task was 'to conduct covert surveillance of terrorists, their haunts and contacts and their couriers within Northern Ireland.'[45] They were also trained to contact and handle agents or informers. The SRU relied heavily on RUC Special Branch information, and occasionally the SB and the SRU would carry out joint operations. It was the security forces' principal tool that allowed them to arrest terrorist leaders and organizers on a selective basis 'without upsetting the communities.'[46]One notable success was the arrest of suspected PIRA member Gerry Adams in July 1973 in a joint SB/regular army/SRU operation.[47]

In a conscious effort to minimize controversy and opportunities for IRA propaganda, serving members of the SAS and those who had served in it within the previous two years initially were excluded from selection for the SRU. However, in November 1973 the GOC requested a change in policy to allow 30 soldiers from the SAS to join the SRU, because the unit was not expected to be up to full strength until May 1974. The extra troops were needed to fill the gap until then. As explained in a later memo the shortfall was due to the stringent selection standards set by the SAS. Lord Carrington understood the requirement, but expressed concern about the political implications if the news leaked out. Up to this point, the government had been adamant that the SAS was not serving in the province (although half a squadron had, in fact, served there briefly in 1969–1970). Carrington was inclined to support the request, subject to clearing the matter with the PM and the NIO. In the event 1 SAS officer and 30 other ranks withdrew from regiment temporarily, resumed their original regimental affiliations and joined the SRU as individual reinforcements in January 1974 for a four-month tour. Their presence remained undetected only briefly; journalist Robert Fisk exposed it in *The Times* on 19 March 1974.[48] From 1976 the SAS began conducting covert operations (initially in South Armagh then later in other rural areas of the province),[49] and later trained Close Observation Platoons.

Improved training and coordination, however, did not wholly preclude further 'incidents'. The very nature of SRU activities presented a conundrum: how to ensure their operational security while de-conflicting them from other security forces' operations. To prevent PIRA penetration and to ensure maximum effectiveness knowledge of SRU operations was carefully compartmentalized. But this meant the RUC was kept 'out of the loop' on such activities. This created a 'perfect storm' of conditions that led to two deadly 'blue on blue' incidents on 20 March 1974. In separate shootings in the rural area of south Armagh RUC patrols accidentally killed two plain clothes SRU soldiers, mistaking them in the darkness for armed terrorists. The RUC had not been warned that the SRU was operating in that area. For their part the SRU did not know the police were there, and the RUC vehicle involved was not marked as such. Yet, even after this tragedy the MOD did not think it wise to alert the RUC to SRU operations.[50]

The combination of media scrutiny and occasional high-profile incidents ensured that maintaining plausible cover and deniability for the SRU indefinitely would be difficult. When exposed, SRU cross-border operations into the Irish Republic caused political difficulties for both the British and Irish governments.[51] Similarly, the stories surrounding SRU officer Captain Robert Nairac, who was abducted and murdered by PIRA in 1977, simply added fuel to conspiracy theories that saw the hand of the SAS behind every unresolved terrorist incident.[52] Mark Urban asserts that by the late 1970s HQNI concluded that the NITAT cover was wearing thin, so they changed the SRU's name to the Intelligence and Security Group, a title already assigned to a regular military intelligence unit. Then in the early 1980s, it became 14 Intelligence and Security Company, a name which eventually morphed into 14 Intelligence Company.[53] However, in 1980 Brigadier James Glover (head of military intelligence at HQNI) also created the Field [later Force] Research Unit (FRU) to control the army's recruitment and handling of agents and informers. This placed the army on an equal footing with MI5 and Special Branch in the domain of agent-running, and in which it achieved some notable successes.[54]

Along with the SRU and the SAS this put an indelible 'military' stamp on intelligence operations in the province. But it is important to emphasize that to the extent that these clandestine operations succeeded they did not do so in isolation. Rather, they were part of an increasingly integrated, full-spectrum overt and covert collection and analysis effort. In that sense they not only built upon similar efforts in previous campaigns, but also presaged the concept of the Single Intelligence Environment enshrined in current British military intelligence doctrine.[55] The SRU's legacy also lives on in concrete form. In 2005 14IC provided the cadre of officers and troops selected to create the army's new Special Reconnaissance Regiment, which was formed to conduct covert surveillance and reconnaissance, including counter-terrorism.[56]

Conclusion

The secretive and risky 'intelligence war' that came to dominate the conflict in Northern Ireland did not begin with the SRU; it had been going on for at least four years when the SRU was created. But even if the sources now at our disposal do not allow us to assess fully its operational record they show that it played an important role in professionalizing the army's approach to clandestine intelligence collection.

The GOC, the CGS and the MOD agreed–and were able to persuade their political masters–that plain-clothes operations such as those of the MRF and the SRU constituted a valuable intelligence tool. They collected more useful intelligence than regular army operations, and allowed the security forces to operate in a much more discriminate fashion against PIRA. In the political climate of the province at that time a less visible army 'footprint' was desirable. The fact that the creation of a unit dedicated solely to this was discussed and approved at the highest levels of the British Government demonstrates the importance it attached to this collection method. But ad hoc approaches, such as the MRF, had been shown to be too risky from both operational and political perspectives. Given the political climate and the nature of the enemy, clandestine collection had to be regularized to ensure effective command and control. Moreover, members of the unit had to be trained to a high professional standard. The SRU was intended to achieve that, and it largely did so. If its record in this regard was not unblemished one must acknowledge that, however well-trained it was, the SRU still had to 'learn by doing'. The very natures

of the Northern Ireland conflict and of covert intelligence operations conducted in that environment, such as running agents whose personal and political agendas might differ from those of their handlers, made mistakes an inevitable part of the learning process. Finally, unlike the MRF was SRU was not a 'one-off' experiment. Groomed by the SAS it laid the foundation for a new permanent agent-running and covert surveillance capability within the British Army.

Notes

1. Geraghty, *The Irish War*, xiii; Urwin, *Counter-Gangs*, 6.
2. Urban, *Big Boys Rules*; Moran, *Northern Ireland to Afghanistan*, 39–41, 44–48.
3. Urban, *Big Boys Rules*, 38. In the light of the documents used for this paper it is clear that the SRU was the original name for the unit that became 14IC.
4. See Townshend, *British Campaign in Ireland,* 50–55, 85, 146–48, 151–57, 200–205. The British Army's official account, *Record of the Rebellion in Ireland* (War Office, 1922) included one volume dedicated to intelligence, but the whole collection remained classified 'Most Secret' until the 1970s, which probably limited access and thus its utility as a source for 'lessons learned' before that time.
5. Gwynn, *Imperial Policing*, 11, 12, 21–23.
6. Charters, "From Palestine to Northern Ireland," 208, 243-44 n. 145.
7. Charters, *British Army and Jewish Insurgency*, 153–63.
8. French, *The British Way*, 19–33.
9. UK, MOD, *Land Operations Volume* III, Part I, 1, 5, 22–40.
10. French, *The British Way*, 11, 16, 19, 21, 22.
11. Ibid., 29; Charters, "From Palestine to Northern Ireland," 218, 219, 246 n. 180.
12. The author's article "Special Operations in Counter-insurgency," 56–61. See also Hoffman, *Anonymous Soldiers*, chapter 18, which draws on sources not available in the 1970s.
13. Charters, "From Palestine to Northern Ireland," 210.
14. Ibid., 209. See also: Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency 1919–60*, 131, 132; and Heather, "Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency," 74–78.
15. Charters, "From Palestine to Northern Ireland," 212; Urwin, *Counter-Gangs*, 6.
16. UK, MOD, *Land Operations Volume III*, Part I, 60.
17. Charters, "Have a Go," 206–15.
18. O'Dochartaigh, *Civil Rights to Armalites*, 202–5, 215, 219, 230, 232–37; Smith, *Fighting for Ireland*, 95–99.
19. Charters, "Have a Go," 207, 208.
20. Ibid., 212, and notes 33–34. On the struggle over control of the RUC, see also: Freeland to Baker, 17 October 1969, and CDS to GOC, 24 October 1969, The National Archives of the UK, Records of the Ministry of Defence (hereafter TNA DEFE) 11/702; "Home Secretary's meeting with the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland," 18 November 1969, The National Archives of the UK, Records of the Prime Minister's Office, (hereafter TNA PREM) 13/2848, 2; *Bloody Sunday Inquiry*, IX/193, 26; Hennessey, *Evolution of the Troubles*, 16, 17; Patterson, "The British State," 500.
21. "Alan Rowley," 52; Christopher Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, 621; and an anonymous reviewer's comment.
22. McCleery, *Operation Demetrius*, 18–22.
23. "Minutes," Cabinet committee on Northern Ireland, 2 May 1972, 1, 2, 18 May 1972, 2, The National Archives of the UK, records of the Cabinet Office (hereafter TNA CAB) 130/560. Whitelaw used the term 'low profile' in referring to the military's operations. See also: "Notes of Interdepartmental meetings," 7, 14, 21 April, 2 May 1972, The National Archives of the UK, records of the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) (hereafter TNA CJ) 4/135.
24. "Use of Plain Clothes Patrols," TNA DEFE 13/992. This may have been a press release. Content suggests it was written c. 1973–74.
25. His identification for the Bloody Sunday Inquiry.
26. Charters, "Have a Go," 202–29.
27. "Army Plain Clothes Patrols in Northern Ireland," 28 March 1974, TNA CAB 134/3778, 1; Carver to Carrington, "Special Reconnaissance Squadron – Northern Ireland," 17 November 1972, TNA DEFE 25/282; Urban, *Big Boys Rules*, 36, 37. The acronym MRF also has been taken to mean Mobile Reaction, Mobile Reconnaissance and Military Reconnaissance Force.
28. Moran, *Northern Ireland to Afghanistan*, 37.
29. The standard works do not cite any sources. See: Geraghty, *The Irish War*, 90, 137, 138; Urban, *Big Boys Rules*, 35–39; Dillon, *The Dirty War*, 25–57.
30. "Army Plain Clothes Patrols," 28 March 1974, TNA CAB 134/3778, 2, 3. Major-General Anthony Farrar-Hockley, the CLF until July 1971, had served in Palestine and Cyprus, and had been chief of staff to the D/OPS in Borneo where he was involved in the covert cross-border operations against Indonesia.
31. Moloney, *Secret History*, 119–21; Urban, *Big Boys Rules*, 35, 36; and Urwin, *Counter-Gangs*, 19, 20.

32. "Minutes," Cabinet Committee, 6 October 1972, TNA CAB 130/560, 1; "Note of a meeting," 3 October 1972, CJ4/135; Moloney, *Secret History*, 120.
33. Moran, *Northern Ireland to Afghanistan*, 37.
34. Ibid.; Moloney, *Secret History*, 120, 121.
35. Moran, *Northern Ireland to Afghanistan*, 37–39.
36. Carver to Carrington, 17 November 1972, TNA DEFE 25/282.
37. Ibid.; de la Billiere, *Looking for Trouble*, 271 points out that during this period at times of handover two squadrons–half of the regiment–were in Dhofar, Oman.
38. Carver to Carrington, 17 November 1972, TNA DEFE 25/282.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.; Custis to Ramsbotham, 20 November 1972, and Carrington to Heath, 28 November 1972, TNA DEFE 25/282.
43. Roberts to Custis, 30 November 1972, TNA DEFE 25/282.
44. "Army Plain Clothes Patrols," TNA CAB 134/3778, 3; Urban, *Big Boys Rules*, 38–40.
45. "Army Plain Clothes Patrols," TNA CAB 134/3778, 4.
46. Ibid.
47. Urwin, *Counter-Gangs*, 22, 23 cited official sources on this operation, but did not provide source notes.
48. "Minutes," Northern Ireland Policy Group, MOD, 3 December 1973, TNA DEFE 13/916. See also "Note" accompanying E10, "Northern Ireland – Special Reconnaissance Unit," TNA DEFE 25/282; and "Army Plain Clothes Patrols," TNA CAB 134/3778, 5.
49. House to Mason, 11 November 1976, TNA DEFE 11/917.
50. Nicholls to Mason, "Aftermath of Shaw's Lake," 3 April 1974, TNA DEFE 13/992; Urwin, *Counter-Gangs*, 30, 31.
51. FCO to MOD and HQNI, 29 July 1976, TNA DEFE 11/917. See also, Fitzgerald, *All in a Life*, 201, 202, 230, 231, 257, 281.
52. Urwin, *Counter-Gangs*, 22, and notes 94, 95 citing archival sources, make clear that Nairac was working with the SRU. But his possible link to the SAS is less certain.
53. Urban, *Big Boys Rules*, 39, 42–44. That is the name by which the SRU was most commonly known within the army.
54. Urban, *Big Boys Rules*, 92–98,109, 216. Geraghty, *The Irish War*, 151 refers to it as the Field Reconnaissance Unit. Given the various names associated with the SRU both Urban's and Geraghty's unit name usages for the FRU may be correct. The most publicized FRU 'mole' inside PIRA was supposedly code-named 'Stakeknife'. See Teague, "Double Blind," 53–62.
55. UK, MOD, *Joint Doctrine Publication 2–00* Section VI, para. 131. I am grateful to one of the anonymous referees for bringing this perspective and the document to my attention.
56. "Written ministerial statement," House of Commons Debates, 5 April 2005, col. 131WS.

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