

SEAMUS BRADLEY
Aged 15
Killed by British Army
Operation Motorman, 31
July 1972
Bishop's Field, Derry



Introduction

On 30/31 July 1972 units of the British Army began a major military operation designed to restore to state control a number of 'No-go' areas controlled by the IRA throughout the north of Ireland. 'Operation Motorman,' involving thousands of soldiers and armoured units, was aimed at saturating working class nationalist areas with troops, in particular the Bogside, Brandywell and Creggan areas of Derry, 'Free Derry' as it had become known. Media reports in the hours before the operation began suggested that unprecedented levels of troops and armoured vehicles, including Centurion tanks and bulldozers, would be involved.

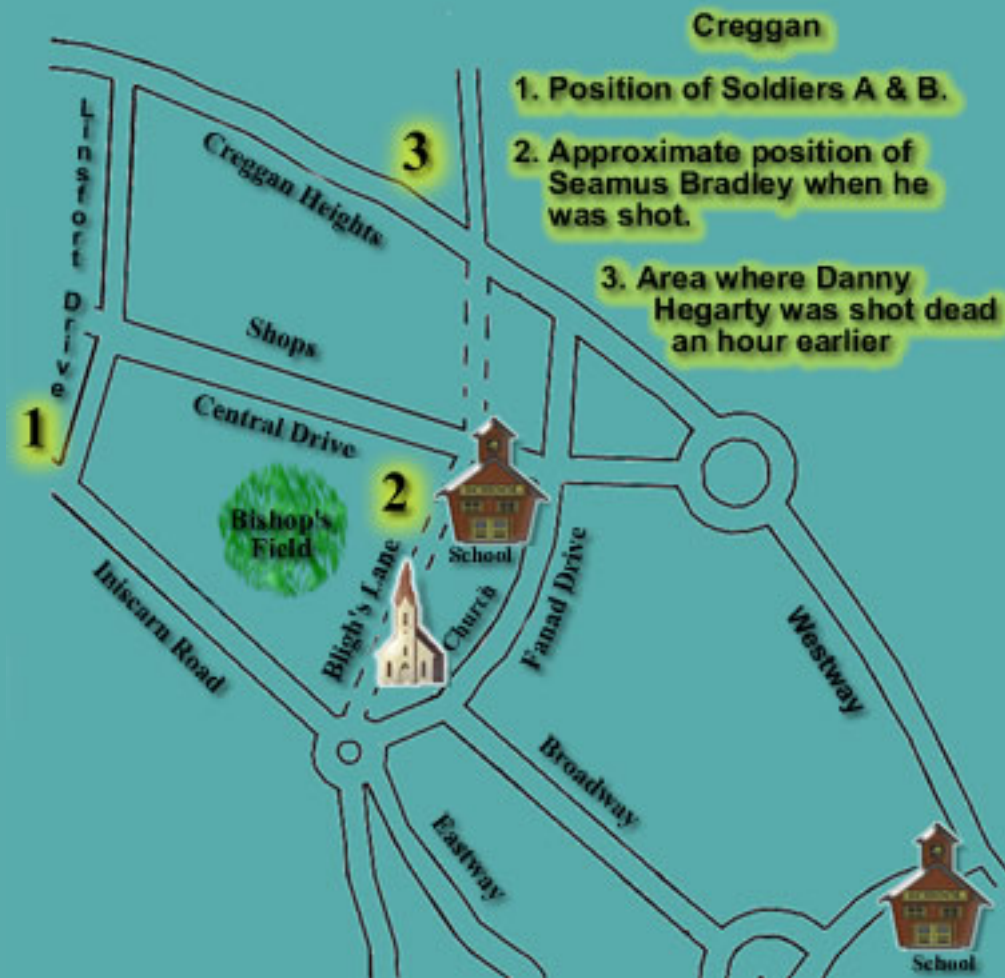
Seamus Bradley

Rumours have long surrounded the circumstances of the death of nineteen-year-old Seamus Bradley during Operation Motorman. He was a member of the IRA. It has been claimed that he was shot and injured before being taken away and tortured. The very nature of the military operation on the night he died meant that civilian witnesses were few and far between. Despite the dearth of civilian evidence it has been possible to build a picture of the events surrounding that night in the Creggan estate in Derry. The process of accessing documents, statements and photographs has been painstaking and is still

incomplete. The fact file below is largely based on documentation available from the Public Records Office, including statements from the RUC and the British Army Special Investigation Branch. As usual more questions have been raised than answered.

As the British Army moved into the no-go areas in Derry on the night of July 31 1972 a unit of the Royal Scots, Sp Coy, took up position behind a hedge at No.3 Linsfort Drive in Creggan. The time was approximately 4.15am. Half an hour later a soldier in this unit, identified only as soldier "A", claimed that he saw Seamus Bradley through the 'Starsight' scope on his rifle. According to soldier A Seamus had broken away from a group of ten people at Central Drive shops and run towards the trees in Bishop's Field. This person was carrying what appeared to be a Thompson submachine gun, again according to soldier A. No reference is made to any other persons. In fact he is clear that **only one person had broken away from the group**. According to his statement the alleged gunman stayed at the base of the tree for some three minutes before climbing up into the branches.

Soldier "B", who was in charge of the unit, was informed and claimed in his later statement that he then also used the Starsight scope and identified a further two men standing at the base of a tree in the Bishop's Field area. He then ordered his subordinate, soldier A, to open fire.



Soldier A admits to then firing four shots. The distance was some 175 metres. He claims that only the third shot (ankle wound) and fourth shot (thigh wound) hit Seamus Bradley. According to

soldier B the two men at the base of the tree disappeared when the wounded Seamus Bradley fell to the ground following the shooting. Soldier A makes no mention of any other individuals. Seamus Bradley, according to the British Army version, was now lying with two gunshot wounds in a hollow near the base of the tree. He was out of sight but surrounded.

At approximately 5.45am, **almost an hour later**, a soldier identified only as soldier "C" was in command of a Saracen parked at the junction of Linsfort Drive/Central Drive when he received an order from his platoon commander to search for a "body and weapon" in an area bounded by Bligh's Lane, Iniscarn Rd, Linsfort Drive and Central Drive. He claims that he secured the area and then, accompanied by soldier "F", he approached the wounded man, who was approximately 10 yards from the tree. Soldier C said: "'come on boy'. Seamus Bradley then turned and said 'I'm hit Jock...'. As we were lifting him into the Saracen he said 'Kelly, Kelly, don't leave me...'. Once we started moving the person he asked for some water and never spoke again. On arrival at St Peters School the person was dead... On my arrival at the scene I noticed that the person was wounded in his left thigh and left foot. It was about 10 minutes later when I arrived at St Peters School and saw the Medical Officer". Soldier C claims that a search for a weapon was made before leaving the scene but none was found.

In a statement provided to the British Army Special Investigation Branch a Soldier D states that he was the Regimental Medical Officer with the 2nd Battalion The Royal Green Jackets. At "approx. 5.55am" he was in a Saracen ambulance in the grounds of St Peters School when a Royal Scots unit arrived in a second Saracen with a "civilian in the back". He certified that the man was dead and ordered the body to be taken into the school. According to his statement he asked for a civilian ambulance to be called which "arrived at least half an hour later". According to hospital records the bodies of both Seamus Bradley and Danny Hegarty were admitted to the morgue at Altnagelvin at 7.10am on the morning of July 31.

Later that same day two Corporals from the Army Special Investigation Branch took statements from soldiers A, B, C and D, the Medical Officer. The official version of the incident appeared clear cut. A gunman, who the IRA admitted was a member, had appeared during a military operation carrying a submachine gun. Four shots had been fired at him and soldier A 'claimed' two hits. The man, Seamus Bradley, died from his wounds.

Several hours after the statements had been taken the State Pathologist Dr Thomas Marshall carried out a post-mortem examination of the body of Seamus Bradley. Death was as a result of a bullet wound that had severed the left femoral artery, i.e. the wound to the upper left thigh. The fourth shot. **The report of the autopsy, which has only recently been made available, revealed startling additional information. "He had been shot at least four times" according to the report.** The autopsy left open the possibility that a fifth wound to the left ankle area was a further gunshot wound or was caused by one of the four bullets which had struck his body. **In addition reference is made to bruises on his nose, lips and chin and "some bruising with a vertical linear pattern on the chin and the front of his neck."** The autopsy findings were completely at odds with the version of events portrayed by soldiers on the ground.

It is highly unlikely that the four, and possibly five, gunshot wounds inflicted on Seamus Bradley

could have resulted from the original shots fired by soldier A.

There are a number of reasons for stating this.

- 1) Soldier A did not even claim four 'hits'. There is no legal reason why he should claim two as opposed to four 'hits' against an alleged 'gunman'.**
- 2) It would be extraordinary that all four shots would be accurate given the range, 175 metres, and equally extraordinary for a man to stay upright long enough for such wounds to be inflicted while it was claimed that he was standing on the bough of a tree.**
- 3) Soldier C claims that Seamus spoke when he and Soldier F put the injured man into the Saracen. This would confirm that he was alive at least one full hour later. In the unlikely event that all the wounds confirmed at the autopsy were sustained while 'in the tree' it must be doubted whether he would still have been alive an hour later given the extent of the wounds. (Dr Raymond Mc Clean has viewed the autopsy photographs and studied the documents and this is also his opinion.) In other words, if he was alive an hour later it is improbable that he had sustained more than the two wounds claimed by soldier A.**

Was Seamus Bradley armed?

Soldier C admits that a search of the area was carried out sometime after 5.45am **but no weapon was found**. Was there ever a weapon?

- 1) In his statement Soldier A states that his unit, Sp Coy Royal Scots, was ordered to "secure and maintain a firm base covering the waste ground between the roads, Blighs Lane, Iniscarn Road, Linsfort Drive and Central Drive." Their orders were to remain at this location in other words. **From the time of the shooting, approx. 4.55am, until Soldier C moved in with his group to arrest the injured man after 5.45am the area, which soldiers presumably believed contained an armed, dangerous and wounded man, was under close observation. Anyone who attempted to retrieve a weapon in such circumstances would have been shot on sight.****
- 2) When Soldier C did approach the wounded man sometime after 5.45am it was already dawn, allowing for a more thorough search of the area. **No weapon was found.****
- 3) As Operation Motorman continued the entire Creggan Estate came under the complete control of the British Army rendering absurd any possibility that a weapon could have been recovered from 'secured' waste ground in the middle of the estate.**

This leaves open two possibilities. The first is that **no weapon existed**. This is consistent with the policy

of the IRA at the time which was, quite literally, to 'melt into the background' during the military operation. No soldiers received gunshot wounds during that morning for instance. The second possibility is that the two men who are alleged by Soldier B to have been standing at the base of the tree took the weapon when they disappeared after the shooting. Soldier A, using a Starsight Scope, made no reference to more than one person breaking off from the original group at the shops, to anyone near the tree or to any individuals running off afterwards. Since Soldier A refers to Seamus spending some three minutes at the base of the tree before climbing it two inferences can be drawn. The first is that he had a clear view of that immediate area. The second is that it is highly unlikely that he would have told his superior that one gunman was at that location if there had been in reality three men, one of whom was carrying a gun. In addition, statements provided to the Pat Finucane Centre by individuals who were with Seamus Bradley at the shops shortly beforehand concur with the claim that Seamus broke off alone and unarmed from a group of youths and made his own way down towards Bishops Field.

This raises the question as to why Soldier B, who ordered the shooting, claimed the existence of a further two individuals at the base of the tree in a statement taken some seven hours later? It is not unreasonable to assume that the man who was legally responsible for the killing realised the need to account for the absence of a weapon. Did he intend to claim that the phantom gun disappeared with the phantom individuals alleged to be accompanying Seamus?

Two factors united against the truth ever emerging in this case: 1972 saw the highest death toll of any year of the conflict with 496 people losing their lives. In addition Seamus was a member of the IRA. For some this justified any use of lethal force regardless of the morality or legality of the individual killing. Yet the death of Seamus Bradley raises a number of disturbing issues.

Wounds Inflicted

Given that it was extremely unlikely that all the gunshot wounds were inflicted by soldier A the implication is that further wounds were inflicted, possibly from close range, on a wounded man already in custody. Did this occur while he was lying in the field or later when he was taken away in a Saracen? What explanation is there for the bruising to the area of the neck and face and in particular for the finding of "some bruising with a vertical linear pattern on the chin and the front of his neck."? According to the autopsy findings bullets entered his body from two different directions. In addition the bullet wound to the left armpit could only have been inflicted if the left arm was raised. **Why did soldier A not anticipate a possible discrepancy between his statement and the autopsy findings? Possibly because he did in fact only wound Seamus Bradley twice and was unaware of what another unit did later.** His and the other statements were taken before the autopsy was carried out. Given the scale of the military operation with multiple regiments and units involved it may well have proved both difficult and unnecessary to get a consistent version of what happened. In any case no-one was asking awkward questions.

To date the RUC has been unable to furnish the PFC with any witness statements taken from civilians living in the area. None. From the available information it also appears that the RUC did not even interview the soldiers involved. Significantly, in August 2000, the RUC admitted in a letter to the PFC that swab and forensic tests from the body and clothes of Seamus Bradley had tested *negative*, ie Seamus was unarmed when he was shot.

The RUC has conceded that documentation and photographs will be provided to ballistics and wounds experts. Until that happens the jury at the inquest have the last word. They passed an Open Verdict on the death of Seamus Bradley.

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