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Man arrested over Nairac killing

British soldier murdered in 1977

Tuesday, May 20, 2008

By Deborah McAleese

Police investigating the murder of SAS officer Robert Nairac over 30 years ago today arrested a suspect.

The 57-year-old man was arrested in south Armagh and taken to the serious crime suite in Antrim for questioning after being arrested by the PSNI's crime operations serious crime branch early this morning.

It is believed the arrested man had been living away from Northern Ireland for several years, but had returned to the province where he has been living under an assumed identity.

Police could not reveal any more details as the investigation is ongoing.

However, it is understood officers have been in contact with the authorities in the US to discuss the possible extradition of two more suspects.

Captain Nairac, an SAS-trained Grenadier Guard, was kidnapped from the Three Steps Inn in Drumintree near Jonesborough on May 14, 1977.

He aroused suspicion when he sang rebel songs. He was seized during a struggle in the pub's car park and taken across the border to a field at Ravensdale, Co Louth, where he was interrogated and beaten for over an hour, and then shot dead.

His body has never been found and his name recently appeared on the list of the Disappeared.

At the time of his death, the 29-year-old Oxford University graduate had been working as a liaison officer with an SAS detachment, briefed to make contact with all the relevant intelligence outfits.

By night he would go undercover to local bars. But during the day he would walk the streets in patrol uniform.

It has never been established why Captain Nairac visited the Three Steps Inn on the night he disappeared. One theory is that he was there to infiltrate local republican circles.


However, his fake identity as Danny McLairne, a member of the Official IRA from Ardoyne, had come under suspicion by republicans.

Shortly before 9.30pm that evening, he left his base at Bessbrook Mill barracks in an unmarked, military issue car and drove directly to the bar, armed with his 9mm Browning pistol.


He entered, ordered a pint of Guinness and talked to locals before joining the pub band to sing Irish rebel songs.

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Later he was noted to have been acting strangely, making frequent visits to the lavatory and preoccupied with the disappearance of his cigarettes.

Members of the pub band sensed he was in danger and offered him a lift, but he refused.

After 11pm, as Cpt Nairac walked from the bar to his car, he was attacked by a group of men, bundled into a car and driven towards the border.

He was tortured, beaten and shot in the head. Throughout his abduction and torture Cpt Nairac never revealed his true identity.

According to Major Clive Fairweather — a seasoned SAS officer in Northern Ireland at the time Nairac was here — who was interviewed by journalist John Parker for his book *Death of a Hero*, Cpt Nairac fought back and made several attempts to escape.

"He fought very hard for his life He had gone through an enormous amount of punishment but his wits were still there and he was still speaking in an Irish accent and sticking to his cover story, his own established cover story," he said.

Six people were convicted for their part in the killing. Five of those convicted were from Northern Ireland and one from the Republic but police believe three other members of the IRA were involved. It is understood two of them are now living in the United States.

Captain Nairac's disappearance still remains one of the biggest mysteries of the Troubles. In over 30 years, no-one has ever said how he died or what was done with his body.

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