

## PART 1 ORDERS



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Commanding 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The King's Own Scottish Borderers

### **THE DERRYARD ACTION 13 DECEMBER 1989**

On 13 December 1989 PVCP Derryard, North of Rosslea, 2KM from the Fermanagh- Monaghan border was manned by 2 teams from SP Coy 1 KOSB. The Commander was Cpl RB Duncan, the 2ic was LCpl MJ Paterson and the other members of the teams were Ptes CG Gray, H Harvey, J Houston, D Landsdell, J Sloan and KP Whitelaw. That day as a result of an unspecific threat to all border locations the PVCP had been reinforced by an additional SP Coy team Commanded by Cpl IB Harvey with Ptes SR Dunn, W Common and WRG Maxwell as team members. As normal the PVCP was operated by 4 men: Cpl Duncan in the Command Sangar, Pte Whitelaw in the rear observation Sangar, Pte Houston the roadman checking vehicles and Pte Harvey as runner. A visitor, SSgt SM Bradley RE a NISS SNCO was in the Command Sangar carrying out maintenance work. LCpl Paterson and his team were off duty and asleep in one of the 3 small portakabins. Cpl Harvey's team were on an external security patrol.

At 1620hrs PIRA attacked the checkpoint in considerable force. It is clear that the enemy had good knowledge of the layout, manning levels and routine of the PVCP, undoubtedly built up over many months of reconnaissance. For the terrorist it was a "soft target" being tactically indefensible, poorly protected and manned with the minimum of weaponry. PIRA brought with them the manpower, weapons, vehicles and explosive devices to destroy the base, which was their intent. They had not counted on the fighting spirit, training and natural aggression of the Jocks and did not know Cpl Harvey's team were in the area of the base. The enemy failed in their mission. At least 12 terrorists were concealed under a tarpaulin in the back of a Hino flatbed lorry. The sides of the lorry had been built up and protected with spaced compressed sand. A crash bar had been fitted, as had mountings for 2 machine guns and external armour plates. A second vehicle, an Isuzu van contained a 240kg bomb. The terrorists were armed with 6 RPG 7 rockets, a flamethrower, 6 Armalite and AK47 rifles, 2 MGs and several fragmentation grenades.

The lorry approached from the direction of the border and stopped in the PVCP road area. It was seen and reported by Pte Whitelaw and Cpl Harvey's team who were on the high ground 500m to the North. Cpl Duncan instructed Pte Houston to check the back of the vehicle. The lorry sounded its horn, at which Pte Whitelaw who was observing his other arc turned around to see the enemy attack launched. Simultaneous automatic gunfire killed Pte Houston, suppressed the Command and observation sangars and sprayed the thinly protected walls of the base, grenades were thrown into the base. Flame was fired at the Command sangar. Two RPG 7s were fired at the observation sangar, both hit and the sangar was destroyed. Heavy suppressive fire continued as the lorry was reversed and smashed its way through the gates into the compound and was then driven out of the base. The Isuzu van was driven in and the bomb primed. At least 3 terrorists dismounted with flame, gunfire and grenades, systematically set about clearing the portakabin.

As the enemy attack started Cpl Duncan immediately returned fire from the Command sangar. He continued to do so until forced to withdraw under the weight of fire and flame that was splintering the sangar walls and penetrating inside the sangar through the observation ports. He ordered SSgt Bradley to move under cover to the rear of the base. Pte Whitelaw was thrown to the ground inside the observation sangar as the structure broke apart and the upper floor collapsed. He suffered minor blast burns from the exploding rockets. As he recovered his senses, he saw an unexploded grenade

at his feet. He kicked it away. The grenade exploded harmlessly. A second grenade exploded causing him multiple minor fragmentation injuries in his side and back. As the enemy sprayed the base with gunfire and grenades and smashed the lorry into the compound, Cpl Duncan, still firing, crossed through the fire to check all the portakabins and to order his men to re-group behind cover at the rear of the base. He checked the observation sangar but Pte Whitelaw was not there. He moved to the rear gate. Inside the kitchen portakabin Pte Harvey was pinned down. Inside the accommodation portakabin LCpl Paterson and his team awoke as the attack started. He ordered the men to put on their helmets and flak jackets, grab their weapons and stay under cover. LCpl Paterson left by the rear door. He moved to the observation sangar where he found SSgt Bradley helping the injured Pte Whitelaw. The 2 NCOs moved him back into the accommodation. LCpl Paterson left the accommodation again and moved round into the compound where he was killed by gunfire. By this time Cpl Duncan was fighting his way to the observation sangar and back to the rear gate. Finding no one there, he moved into the compound to discover the body of LCpl Paterson. The terrorists had just withdrawn, still firing automatic weapons and another RPG 7 at the base. He ordered his soldiers to give first aid, check for casualties and get to the radio in the Command sangar. He moved to the front of the base to check for Pte Houston.

Following the sighting of the Hino lorry Cpl Harvey and his team were moving down towards the PVCP from the North when the attack began. Cpl Harvey's contact report at this time was critical. It was the only message received by Battalion HQ until after the action. It allowed the essential re-deployment of reserves and follow-up agencies. The team rapidly made their way to the PVCP, halting on the road some 75-100m to the North. The rear of the lorry was visible outside the base. The terrorists were clearly identified firing into the compound. Cpl Harvey and his men opened fire hitting the rear of the lorry five times. The enemy immediately switched the bulk of their fire onto the patrol forcing them to dive for cover into the hedgerows to the West of the road. By skilful fire and manoeuvre, the patrol worked its way to a position adjacent to the PVCP, continuing to draw heavy enemy fire and forcing the enemy to withdraw. The lorry was found abandoned at the border with a 210kg bomb on board. Cpl Harvey and his men came onto the road just as the lorry was disappearing and as Cpl Duncan was trying to revive Pte Houston. The 2 Corporals, recognising that the Isuzu van was a bomb, evacuated the base and established the cordon. As the booster charge of the bomb exploded the first helicopter arrived bringing in reserves. The casualties were rapidly evacuated and the follow-up began.

This was a terrifying close quarter action which lasted some 10 minutes. It was a fight for existence. As PIRA declared subsequently they were intent on "totally destroying the enemy position". Every man involved acted with exemplary courage and determination to defeat the enemy. The conduct of Cpl Duncan and Cpl Harvey and of LCpl Paterson was in the highest traditions of conspicuous gallantry. By their actions they saved the PVCP. By their actions they fought back at the enemy, fought to regain some initiative, and finally fought off the attack forcing the terrorists to withdraw prematurely and ensuring their failure. As PIRA also stated "the soldiers, despite several demands to surrender, refused to comply...ore ASU was forced to withdraw... (hastened by the presence of)...a sizeable British Army foot patrol". LCpl Paterson and Pte Houston died as true soldiers; they died fighting as men, in action, carrying out their duties. The size and type of this attack has never been seen before in Northern Ireland. The events of THE DERRYARD ACTION are a landmark in the modern fighting history of The King's Own Scottish Borderers.