



Report/Narrative

of

Richard Lewis



May 2023

The Incident:ⁱ

Richard was a lorry driver for Cantrell and Cochrane and at the date of the incident, the 26 November 1991, was a part-time member of the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR). On that day he was accompanied by the late Mr Kenneth Newell who, at the time, was a full-time member of the UDR. They both worked for Cantrell & Cochrane (Belfast) Ltd Omagh Depot.

Richard was a full-time lorry driver and Kenneth was a part-time lorry helper. Kenneth Newell, was found shot in the head, lying by a roadside verge between Crossmaglen and Cullyhanna, South Armagh around 10am on 27 November 1991ⁱⁱ

On the day of the incident, they were delivering goods to Concession Road, South Armagh. Both men were abducted and tortured by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA). Mr Newell was murdered, and Mr Lewis was released.

Richard had been working for Cantrell and Cochrane for around 5 years prior to his abduction by the PIRA. He would deliver to the Crossmaglen area once a month and regularly on the fourth Tuesday. He would always have a helper and it could be one of several men.

On the day of his abduction, Richard started work at 8am at the depot in Gortrush Industrial Estate, Derry Road, Omagh, Co. Tyrone. At 8.15am he left in his lorry, a Ford IVECO, registration number UXI accompanied by Kenneth Newell. He only knew about 10 minutes before he left the depot that it would be Kenneth who would be with him on that day.

Richard got diesel for his lorry at a garage in Omagh on his way to Cullyhanna and made deliveries to Murray's shop, Guiney's shop, and pub before travelling on to Hardy's shop in Creggan and then drove into Crossmaglen. Richard and Kenneth proceeded to Molony's shop, Molloy's, the Glen café, and Fitzpatrick's and then drove to the Concession Road where he parked his lorry on the hard shoulder and had their sandwiches.

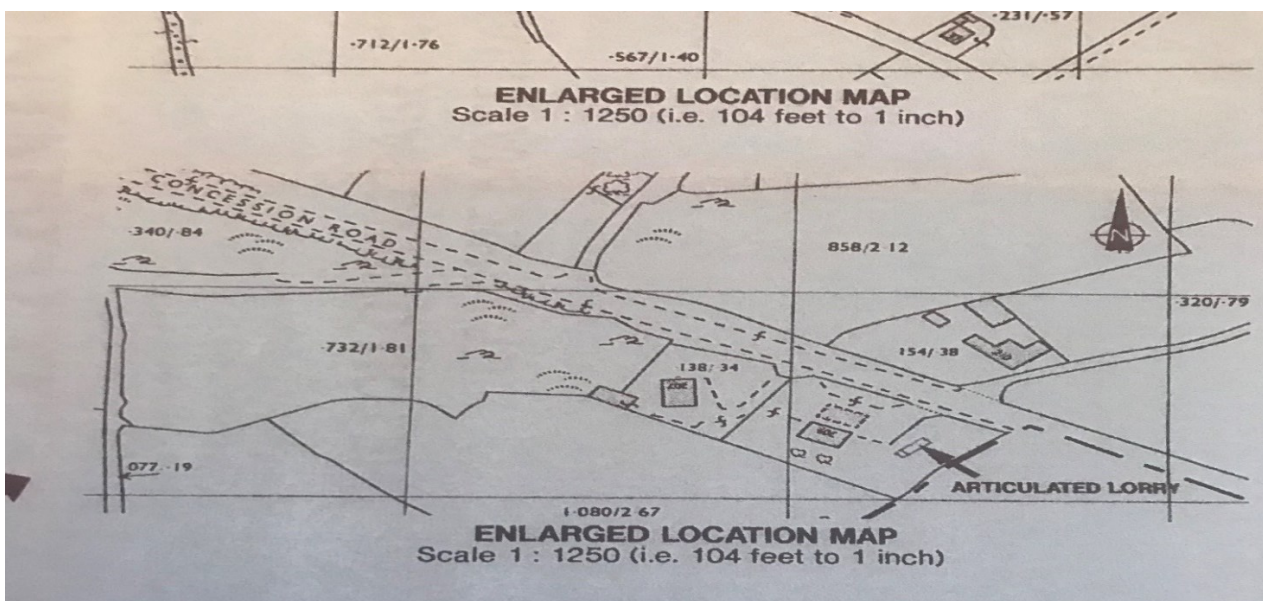
Richard and Kenneth then travelled to another garage, again on the Concession Road, which is situated on the border with the Republic of Ireland. They arrived at the garage around 2pm and the boss of the garage, who Richard knew, at that time was seen to be wheeling stones in the yard. He came over to Richard to speak to him at the driver's door of

the lorry, which was parked close to a big shed, which was usually open so that Richard could drive his lorry into it. Richard can recall that the boss was always 'going on' about the lorry being hijacked.

The boss of the garage informed Richard that he had ordered spirits but that the sales representative had told him that as he had not got a licence, he was unable to sell them to him. He added that he had a good mind not to take the mineral order and that he was going to ring Cantrell and Cochrane before he would accept it.

The boss then went back to the wheelbarrow, emptied the load of stones, levelled them, and disappeared. Previously to this there was another man (who worked in the garage and who usually checked the deliveries) and the boss had sent him to phone, but he, this man, just seemed to get to the door and a minute or so later Richard saw him serving a car at the petrol pumps.

Richard and Kenneth were sitting in the lorry when he heard a screech of tyres and the sound of a car coming from the direction of the Border. This car pulled up behind the lorry and Richard, by looking in the mirror, saw four men get out of it two of which approached on either side of the lorry. All four of them were wearing balaclavas.



Above is a map of the location where Richard and Kenneth Newell were abductedⁱⁱⁱ.

One man pulled Richard out of the lorry and put him on the ground where he was thoroughly searched. The terrorists knew his name and nickname and said to him "they had got him

now.” He, Richard, noted that one of the men had what looked like an AK47 and neither was he aware, at this stage, what had happened to Kenneth. As Richard, still lying face down on the ground, saw a yellow Toyota Hiace Van drive from the direction of the Border up to the petrol pumps.

The terrorist with the AK47, who was with Richard, ran over towards this van, shouting for it to stop. He seemed to bring the AK47 up into the firing position, but the magazine fell off. The terrorist pushed the magazine back on the AK47 whilst another member of the gang pushed Richard on the head to keep his head down. Richard saw the yellow van drive off, but he does not know if any of the terrorists went after it.

With hands still tied behind his back Richard was then put into the boot of the red car which had pulled up behind the lorry. The boot was closed, and the car drove off extremely fast. He believes that the car headed towards the Border as he thinks it turned off to the left.

Richard can recall the car stop, turn, and then reverse into a shed. He believes the journey took about 20 minutes. He thinks he heard Kenneth get out of the back seat of the car and recalls hearing someone asking him where he lived and enquiring about other members of the security forces that lived in the same area as himself. He also heard the terrorists specifically questioning Kenneth about the UDR but as they kept hitting the boot of the car he could not hear properly.

Richard recalls hearing a digger or bulldozer working nearby for most of the time that he was there and believes he was not too far away from a main road as he could hear cars passing close by.

Richard was then hooded and taken out of the boot and questioned about what he was doing in the Crossmaglen area that day. They asked him about the UDR, Police, UVF, UDA and Orange Order. They all had South Armagh accents and knew what his nickname was. They also asked him if his mate was in the UDR, and he told them only that he worked for Cantrell and Cochrane like himself.

Richard also recalls that the terrorists said to him that Kenneth had told them that he was in the UDR. At this stage he vividly remembers concluding he was certain that he was in the hands of IRA terrorists and prepared himself for death. However, he decided there and then

that no matter what the terrorists did to him he was not going to give them any details about his comrades and friends. Further he recalls that the questioning went on all evening, and the terrorists took it in turns to question him. He recounts that one of them kept hitting him on the shoulder, felt as if a gun was being pressed against his side and at the same time repeatedly telling him he was lying.

Then one of the terrorists said that they had been too long in that one spot. Richard was put back into the boot of the car and he thinks Kenneth was put back into the back seat. The car was driven to another shed where Richard was again taken out of the boot, blind folded, and once more questioned about the UDR.

Also, during his abduction, Richard explained that he was subjected to a mock execution which he still has nightmares about, and this dreadful experience has negatively affected his mental health and well-being until this very day. He was told to get down on his knees and asked if he wanted to say a prayer. As he felt the rifle barrel at the back of his neck and heard it being cocked Richard closed his eyes as he thought he was going to be shot. Then someone came up to him and told him it was his last chance - that they had shot Kenneth and that he better speak now.

Again, Richard was put back into the boot of the car and driven for a further 30 minutes to another shed where he was taken out of the boot and questioned again. Following this he was put back into the boot once more and the car travelled for around 20 minutes before coming to a halt.

At this point, and after telling him that they were not sure about him, and if later it was found out he was lying they would come for him, he was told never to be seen in that area again. Instructing him to start walking (he was still hooded at this juncture) Richard heard the car drive off in the direction of Ashfield Golf Course.

Richard summarised that up to this point he was stiff and sore from lying cramped in the boot of the car, he had been physically, verbally, and mentally abused as well as being punched and hit by rifle butts a number of times. He had also been threatened while he was in the second shed by the terrorists. They mentioned a man from Londonderry who they told Richard had been a tout that they had held him for two months. They asked Richard if he would like the same experience to happen to him. Also, whilst he was in this same shed

Richard recounted that he heard a helicopter flying overhead and from the sound of it he thought it was Puma.

Richard believes that up to this point, in total, his ordeal at the hands of vicious IRA terrorists had lasted between 12 to 16 hours. He reiterated that he had suffered stiffness and soreness from lying cramped in the boot of the car, had been physically, verbally, and mentally abused as well as being punched and hit by rifle butts a number of times.

When finally released Richard walked a few meters (still hooded) and bumped into a wall of a house having been dropped off on a road that ran between the white gables of two houses, one on either side of the road. Having discarded the hood he turned left and walked for about a mile until he came to a staggered road junction where there was a signpost that indicated that Crossmaglen was four miles away.

Realising where he was - on the main road to Newtownhamilton - Richard eventually found a telephone box and dialled 999 and spoke to the operator asking to be put through to the Police. He explained to the Police in Newry who he was and what had happened and remained on the line with them until an ambulance arrived and took him to Daisy Hill Hospital where the Police collected him. He added that while talking to the Police, he noticed a car whose occupants he believes were terrorists observing him.

Conclusion:

Richard experienced a horrendous ordeal at the hands of Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) terrorists. His abduction by IRA terrorists has affected his mental health and well-being. There is no doubt that he will carry the psychological scars of what happened to him for the rest of his life.

Richard believes, following the incident and since, the UDR, or Police did nothing to help him. What he wanted more than anything else was emotional support to help him get through his life. He says friends forsook him, and he had no other support whatever. He started drinking heavily, which is understandable, but eventually came to see the futility of such a maladjusted strategy in dealing with his trauma. As a result of his ordeal, Richard has been diagnosed with PTSD.

Richard's case was never reviewed by the Historical Enquiries Team (HET) and is now part of the caseload of the Legacy Investigation Branch (LIB). He would like to know why no decisive action has been taken by either the Policy or Army to find out what happened on 26th November 1991. He also believes that he may have been 'set up' by a fellow worker at Cantrell & Cochrane.

Only a handful of people have lived to tell the tale of an interrogation at the hands of the South Armagh Brigade of the PIRA, and fortunately Richard Lewis was one of the lucky ones.

Richard did not receive a detailed debriefing on his abduction by IRA terrorists from either the Police or UDR simply a statement to the Police on his abduction. However, 6 weeks after his abduction, he met with two Army Officers in Lisburn, who asked him various questions on how the PIRA interrogated him. Apparently, the aim of this meeting was to gather information to train soldiers posted to Northern Ireland on the interrogation methods of the PIRA.

To date (12 August 2021), nothing has been done by any statutory body to 'investigate' Richard's horrific experience. However, the UHRW will continue to make efforts to ensure his case is properly addressed. The organisation will be asking the authorities in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) what investigation, if any, was conducted into the abduction of Richard and the murder of Kenneth Newell the latter whose body was found straddling the border of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (ROI).

Endnotes

ⁱ Extract from the eight-page witness statement of Richard Lewis dated 22nd March 1994 given at the coroner's inquest relating to the death of Kenneth Newell (Inquest ref.: DOW/6/1/1/71/2A).

ⁱⁱ Lost Lives 2001-page 1261 case number 3263 Kenneth Newell.

ⁱⁱⁱ Map of the area where Richard Lewis and Kenneth Newell were abducted. Source: RUC Mapping Section, Knock Road, Belfast.