



Report

of

Michael (Mike) Bruce Sangster



December 2022

Introduction

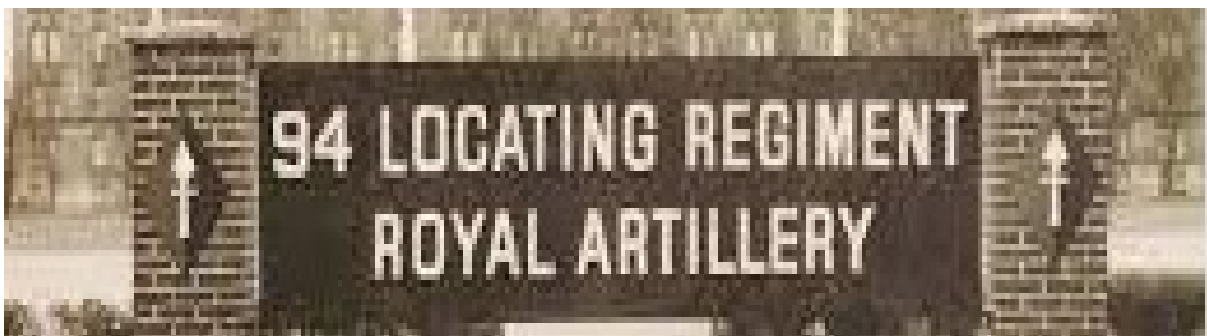
Michael Bruce Sangster is Scottish and was born in Perth, Scotland on 22 July 1950. He prefers to be known as Mike and he is married and lives in London. Mike is a retired member of the British Army having served in 94 Locating Regiment, Royal Artillery (RA) from 1968 to 1977 and then the Royal Artillery Specialist pool Territorial Army from 1978 to his discharge on 21 July 1998. He has over 30 years' service in the Army and retired when he reached the upper age limit.

Mike attended Perth Academy from 1962 until 1964 and then went to Bathgate Academy. He left school in October 1966 and was recruited by Rank, Hovis, McDougall in Edinburgh as a laboratory technician. Whilst working there, Mike also became a member of the local Army Cadet Force (ACF).

In September 1967 he was given leave by Rank, Hovis, McDougall to join a Regular Army unit, 40 Light Regiment, Royal Artillery for a two-week exercise, "Sunshine Express" in Greece. This experience and the boredom with civilian life gave Mike the spur to enlist in the Regular Army.

In December 1967, at the age of 17, Mike enlisted into the Regular Army as a member of the Royal Artillery and reported for basic training on 3 January 1968.

Because he had a reasonably good education (7 'O' Levels) Mike was advised to join 94 Locating Regiment, Royal Artillery, as it was a technical unit.¹ He joined the Regiment on 26 April 1968 as a potential Meteorologist. Ten years later in April 1978 Mike joined the Royal Artillery Specialist Pool. This unit consisted of Meteorologists, Artillery Intelligence, Naval Gunfire Operations (Ops) teams and Watchkeepers and was designed in time of war to provide reinforcements for units with those requirements.



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Northern Ireland Experience of the Troubles

Whilst serving in Northern Ireland, Mike experienced numerous incidents. Some of them were particularly disturbing and have had a lasting psychological impact on him. Although these incidents were reported to the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) at the time, Mike was never informed if they were ever investigated.

Mike completed four Operation Banner tours of duty in Northern Ireland between 1971 to 1976 as follows:

- First tour from January to May 1971 – Belfast Reserve then Lower Falls in Belfast.
- Second tour from November 1973 to March 1974 – Bogside Brandywell, city and Strand Road in Londonderry.
- Third tour from October 1975 to March 1976 – Brigade Intelligence Cell in Londonderry.
- Fourth tour from August to December 1976 – Belfast Brigade Task Force.

This narrative records a number of incidents that occurred during the first three tours of the regiment in Northern Ireland that Mike witnessed and was involved in.

A. First tour: Incidents in Belfast

The first tour in Belfast in 1971 took place at the time the Troubles were becoming more intense and were a foretaste of what would happen the following year with the highest number of people murdered throughout the terrorists campaign.

a. Rioting in West Belfast on 4 February 1971

On 4 February 1971 at around 21:30 hours, Mike's Troopⁱⁱ was deployed in the New Lodge area of Belfast at the junction of the New Lodge Road and Lepper Street. They were confronted with a rioting mob.

Stones and bottles were thrown at them and as they advanced to force the mob down Lepper Street, several jars of what turned out to be ammonia and one flask of what later turned out to be liquid nitrogen burst in front of Mike's Troop forcing them to retire up Lepper Street.

As the mob was difficult to contain and as the people rioting were advancing again they were driven off by a platoon from 3 Queens Regiment. Although none of Mike's Troop were injured, several of them suffered choking from the ammonia fumes.



Troubles in Belfast early seventies

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b. Disturbances in Ardoyne on 6 February 1971

Two days later, on 6 February 1971 at around 22:00 hours, Mike's Troop were deployed in the Ardoyne area of Belfast at the junction of Berwick Road and Holmdene Gardens. Rioters had hijacked a lorry loaded with tarmac, set fire to it, and used it to block the junction.

Mike's Troop were confronted by the rioters who showered the Troop with rocks and bottles. The Troop tried to disperse the rioters with baton rounds and attempted snatches. However, about ten minutes into the action, two low velocity shots were fired at the Troop from about seventy-five yards. One of the rounds went through the window of a house in Berwick Road and lodged in an interior wall.

The rioters having been dispersed by the Troop reformed a short time later. At that point Mike was at the corner of the street behind a fence and the Troop stood up to charge the rioters. Those who were rioting suddenly scattered to give way to a gunman armed with a rifle who opened fire. The gun was thought to be a Garand from a short range. He fired eight rounds, narrowly missing Mike and other members of his Troop.

After this shooting the rioters appeared to disperse and the hijacked vehicle was recovered. The Troop carried out a quick search of the area where Mike thought the firing point was. However, it was pitch dark and the streetlights were all broken. Nothing was found and the Troop was ordered to withdraw.

c. Ardoyne incident dated 8 February 1971

Danger was never too far for the Troop and in the early hours of 8 February 1971, Mike was with a group of soldiers in the Ardoyne area. They were standing at the front entrance of Flax Street Mill Army base when they came under rifle fire from several terrorists shooting from the junction with Herbert Street. Thankfully, none of the soldiers were hit.

d. Ardoyne Bus Garage incident dated 8 February 1971

Late afternoon on 8 February 1971, the Troop were deployed in the Ardoyne bus garage. Around teatime, Mike was on sentry duty with three other soldiers when they came under automatic low velocity fire. The fire position was not known. About a dozen rounds were fired at the soldiers but luckily nobody was hit.

The same day, in the early evening, Mike was sitting in the courtyard of the garage with a few other Troop members when one of them shouted a warning and pointed to the top of the outer wall of the garage which was about ten yards away. An IRA terrorist had tried to throw a blast bomb over the wall, but it landed on top of it with the fuse burning. The soldiers had enough time to take cover before the bomb exploded. Nobody was hurt but the noise of the blast deafened the soldiers for a while.

The next day during the early hours of 9 February 1971, Mike was on sentry duty with one other soldier by the side fence of the garage when he saw a man running out and throwing something at him. Before Mike and his comrades could react, several IRA terrorists opened fire on them with a mix of low and high velocity weapons. Because of the fence he could not bring his rifle to bear on the terrorists who were firing from his left. So he went onto the platform of a parked double decker bus with the intention of climbing the stairs to be able to see over the fence.

As Mike did so, there was a bright flash and bang, and he felt a heavy impact on his back which pushed him into the rear internal luggage compartment. He was totally deafened and dazed by the explosion, and it took him several minutes to recover. Apart from a sore back he did not suffer other injuries and the Troop did not suffer any casualties from the gunfire. Although for the next couple of days Mike felt a bit disoriented at times, with headaches, and continues to suffer considerable pain in his lower back to date.

e. Disturbances at Belfast Magistrates Court Incident on 26 February 1971

At around mid-afternoon on 26 February 1971, Mike's Troop were called out to support his city unit because of disturbances at the Belfast Magistrates Court. A large crowd had gathered, some wearing IRA regalia, and were protesting about the six-month sentences that had been handed down by the Court to the recently arrested rioters.

Trouble soon spilled over into the Markets Area of Belfast with several buses and other vehicles being hijacked and set on fire. While it was getting dark Mike was positioned with other members of his Troop at the corner of Cromac Square when they came under attack from terrorists using nail bombs and guns.

This resulted in a number of members of the unit that Mike's Troop were protecting suffering injuries.

f. Shooting in Lower Falls area of Belfast Incident on 1 March 1971

During the early hours of 1 March 1971, Mike was was a member of a three armoured vehicle mobile patrol in the Lower Falls area of Belfast. The patrol passed Balaclava Street when they came under fire from a group of IRA terrorists who were firing from waste ground. Several of the rounds struck the vehicle Mike was in but no members of his Troop were injured.

g. Rioting in Lower Falls area of Belfast on 4 March 1971

During lunchtime on 4 March 1971 mike's Troop were involved in cordoning off the areas of Leeson Street in the Lower Falls. Searches were being carried out for three kidnapped men from the Sandy Row area of Belfast. Severe rioting broke out and several buses and a petrol tanker were hijacked.

Along with two Ferret armoured car Scout vehiclesⁱⁱⁱ Mike's Troop advanced down Leeson Street to recover the petrol tanker from the rioting mob. They came under attack by rioters who threw dozens of petrol bombs at them. They stopped and fired volleys of baton rounds to try to disperse the mob.

The two Ferret Scout vehicles stopped one behind the other. Mike was by the right wing of the right-hand Ferret Scout vehicle when an IRA terrorist threw a hand grenade over the roof of a nearby building which exploded between the two Ferret Scout vehicles.

The Ferret that Mike had been beside shielded him from the shrapnel, but the blast caused the vehicles to bounce on their suspension and Mike was struck on the left shoulder and thrown to the floor. One other member of the Troop suffered shrapnel injuries to his legs.



Bus in flame in the Falls Road, Belfast in 1971

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2. Second tour: Incidents in Londonderry

During the second tour in 1973 and 1974 Mikes's regiment was stationed in Londonderry where the terrorist threat from the Bogside area was constant.

a. Bogside, Londonderry Shooting Incident dated 18 November 1973

Two armoured vehicles on mobile patrol were in the Bogside area of Londonderry on 18 November 1973. Mike was a member of that patrol^{iv} when at about 15:30 hours, halfway up Westland Street, it came under IRA terrorist high velocity fire from the direction of Meenan Square. Several rounds struck the side and rear of the vehicle that Mike was in, but no members of the patrol were injured.

Five minutes later, almost immediately after that previous incident, the patrol was ordered to deploy on foot to Elmwood Road. Mike took up a fire position at the junction of Westland Street and three rapid high velocity shots were fired at him by an IRA terrorist. The shooting came from the wood yard near Lisfannon Park. All the rounds narrowly missed Mike, but one round struck the rifle of a soldier a few feet behind him.

The splinters from the round hit the soldier in the face and in his right eye. Mike and a colleague helped drag the wounded soldier into cover. They gave him first aid as they put a field dressing over the wound and stayed with him until the ambulance arrived. This action means a lot to Mike as five years ago, the soldier who was wounded met up for the first time since the incident.



Rioting in Londonderry in early seventies

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b. Bogside, Londonderry Shooting Incident on 28 February 1974

During the afternoon of 28 February 1974, reserve Troop were deployed to the Masonic Army base in the city centre of Londonderry to assist that Unit. Mid-afternoon, Mike was in a sandbagged observation sangar on the wall facing the Bogside.

The sangar was located to the right and above the large overt observation post (OP) named KILO. An IRA terrorist opened fire on the KILO Sangar with what turned out to be armoured piercing bullets from a room in a house in Drumcliff Avenue in the Bogside. Mike scanned the firing area with the telescopic sight on his rifle trying to locate the firing point when he was spotted by the terrorist.

A round was fired directly at Mike. It went through the wooden roof of the sangar. One member of the crew of KILO OP was injured by splinters.

3. Third tour: Incidents in Belfast and Londonderry

The third tour in 1976 was the most trying for Mike as a result of witnessing shooting incidents in Belfast but also the murder of a comrade in Londonderry.

a. In Belfast

i. Shooting Incident in Ardoyne on 30 October 1976

For the previous five days, Mike's section^v had been deployed on attachment to 46 Battery of 32 Regiment, Royal Artillery based at Flax Street Mill in the Ardoyne area of Belfast as temporary reinforcement because this unit had suffered five casualties in an IRA terrorist ambush a few days before, on 24 October.

During the morning of 30 October, Mike and others were part of a cordon for a large search operation in the Berwick Road area of the Ardoyne. They had been in position for about two hours when they came under IRA terrorist fire.

Then a further automatic burst of about fifteen high velocity rounds was fired beside them but they appeared to have been directed at another target. It may have been aiming at an RUC police patrol that was present during the operation.

ii. Shooting Incident in Short Strand area of Belfast on 2 December 1976

Mike was commander of a four-person foot patrol deployed to assist the City Regiment. At about 21:30 hours, they were walking towards the junction of Albertbridge Road and Short Strand in Belfast.

As the patrol turned to go back over the bridge towards the city, an IRA terrorist gunman fired several low velocity shots at the patrol and Mike in particular but he was

not hit. As Mike ran to the middle of the road to carry out a follow-up examination IRA terrorist gunmen opened fire on him and his patrol with high velocity weapons. Mike seemed to be their main target as he could feel the heat of the close passing rounds as he was lying in a prone position.

It was discovered after the incident, that one of the IRA terrorists' position was in the breeze block protection built into the side of what could have been Kelly's Public House at the corner of Thompson Street. Armed terrorists had taken over the pub and had held the customers at gunpoint until the shooting ended. The terrorists then made their escape through the rear door of the pub. Sixteen spent cases from an AR15 Armalite rifle were found on the floor of the breeze block attachment.

A further firing point was found near the bridge and more empty cases were discovered. It was estimated that about thirty-four high velocity and about six low velocity shots were fired by the terrorists. No member of the patrol were injured.

b. In Londonderry

i. Murder of Gunner Mark Anthony (Joe) Ashford Royal Artillery Regiment on 17 January 1976

Although it was not a direct attack on Mike, the murder of Gunner Mark Anthony (Joe) Ashford, Royal Artillery Regiment on 17 January 1976^{vi} while manning a busy pedestrian checkpoint in Great James Street in Londonderry on a Saturday afternoon has had a lasting psychological impact on Mike.

At 14:00 hours, Gunner Mark Ashford, two fellow soldiers and a female member of the Command Support Unit (CSU) were on duty manning the India 1 personnel checkpoint in Great James Street, Londonderry.

Two men approached from the Bogside in Londonderry and as they got up close, one of them shot Gunner Ashford twice in the head from point blank range with a 7.65mm pistol. The other man kicked open the door of the sangar and fired six shots from a .45 revolver, hitting the other two soldiers. Both terrorists then made their escape in a car which was waiting for them around the corner in Little James Street, Londonderry.

Gunner Mark Ashford was killed instantly, but the other two soldiers escaped, suffering only minor injuries. One soldier received a flesh wound to his forearm, while the other was struck on the shoulder but his flak jacket deflected the bullet. Mike was the first person on the scene after the murder of Gunner Ashford and he witnessed the final seconds of his life. This incident has caused Mike great psychological distress and still does.

Immediately after the murder of Gunner Ashford, Mike gave a short version of his actions to the Intelligence Officer of 42 Regiment, Royal Artillery which was the Unit Gunner Ashford belonged to. Mike's photographs were printed to see if they gave any clues. About two days later, from the information received, two names were released to the Intelligence Cell of Mike's Unit of those terrorists believed to have been responsible for Gunner Ashford's murder.

It is Mike's understanding that the two terrorists believed to have been responsible for the murder of Gunner Ashford and other Active Service Unit (ASU) members tried to ambush a 14 Intelligence Cell (Int Cell) Operator on 28th May 1981 who was driving his covert vehicle around the Creggan Estate in Londonderry. During an exchange of gunfire, both terrorists believed to have been involved in Gunner Ashford's murder were shot dead. The 14 Int Cell operator escaped unharmed.

Shortly before his murder, Gunner Ashford became engaged to a girl who lived just outside Londonderry. They were to be married on 27 March 1976.

Lack of investigation

No one has ever been charged, convicted, or held accountable for the above non-fatal incidents Mike was involved in, in Belfast and Londonderry and he feels extremely disappointed and dismayed about this.

He received a letter dated 1st February 2017 from Chief Superintendent in charge of Legacy & Justice Department informing him that the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) did not have the necessary resources to review or investigate any non-fatal Troubles-related crimes, committed against any persons including soldiers, police officers or the broader public, where there is no binding legal obligation to do so.

Lasting impact of Troubles-related incidents

The incidents in Belfast and Londonderry that Mike was involved in and especially the murder of Gunner Mark Ashford have had a lasting psychological impact on him and have been the cause of a lot of his nightmares and flashbacks. As a result of the incidents he experienced whilst serving in Northern Ireland he has been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Roll of Honour

ROYAL REGIMENT OF ARTILLERY
AND
ROYAL HORSE ARTILLERY



1st Regiment Royal Horse Artillery

24326988 Gunner DAVID ALBERT FARRINGTON
24632323 Gunner TIMOTHY PETER UTTERIDGE

3rd Regiment Royal Horse Artillery

24130956 Bombardier PAUL CHALLENOR
25014352 Lance Bombardier STEPHEN RESTORICK
25037699 Gunner JON DAVID COOPER

2nd Regiment Royal Artillery

23657126 Sergeant CHARLES EDWARD COLEMAN

4th Regiment Royal Artillery

24214250 Gunner BRIAN ROBERTSON
24224496 Gunner VICTOR HUSBAND
24155248 Lance Bombardier DAVID PATRICK WYNNE
24115910 Gunner ERROL LEROY GORDON
24023491 Bombardier TERENCE GRIFFIN
24123869 Gunner LEONARD JAMES GODDEN
24287053 Gunner KIM IAN CAMERON MacCUNN
23653368 Sergeant BERNARD FEARNES

5th Regiment Royal Artillery

24123893 Bombardier BRIAN THOMASSON
24058479 Lance Bombardier ERIC BLACKBURN
24252847 Gunner PETER WILLIAM RAISTRICK
24430508 Gunner PETER ARTHUR CLARK
24742641 Gunner LYNDON MORGAN
24788012 Gunner MILES DANIEL AMOS

16th Regiment RA

24352336 Gunner WILLIAM MILLER

19th Regiment RA

449063 Major DAVID ANTHONY STORRY

20th Regiment RA

24067820 Bombardier TERENCE JONES

22 Locating Battery RA

24422598 Lance Bombardier KEITH CHARLES RICHARDS

24378274 Gunner ALAN DAVID AYRTON
24505443 Gunner WILLIAM JOHN BECK
24493155 Gunner SIMON PETER EVANS

22nd Regiment RA

24155745 Gunner RICHARD THOMAS JAMES HAM
24224401 Gunner IDWAL KEITH EVANS
24004710 Sergeant THOMAS WAYNE CRUMP

24 Missile Regiment RA

24338967 Gunner MARK ANTHONY ASHFORD
24201137 Gunner CLIFFORD LORING
24094845 Gunner PAUL THOMAS JACKSON

26th Regiment RA

23892257 WO2 GRAHAM PATRICK SHIELDS
24878700 Lance Bombardier PAUL ANDREW GARRETT

27th Regiment RA

24211585 Gunner ANGUS JAMES STEVENS
23917491 Lance Bombardier DAVID EDWARD TILBURY
24182799 Gunner IAN BERNARD DOCHERTY
24353729 Gunner ANTHONY JEAL
24900278 Gunner DARREN CHRISTOPHER OLDFIELD

29 Commando Regiment RA

24167846 Gunner ROBERT STEVEN CUTTING
23824074 Sergeant IVOR WILLIAM SWAIN

32nd Regiment RA

24348506 Gunner ANTHONY BRIAN ABBOT
24375440 Gunner MAURICE MURPHY
24632816 Lance Bombardier STEPHEN JEFFERY CUMMINS
24713593 Lance Bombardier DAVID OSBORNE SHEPPARD
497404 Major MICHAEL JOHN DILLON-LEE

39th Regiment RA

24422607 Gunner PAUL EDWARD SHEPPARD

40th Regiment RA

24163428 Gunner KERRY JOHN VENN
540033 2nd Lieutenant JAMES CHARLES JOSEPH FOX

42nd Regiment RA

22847062 Gunner CYRIL MacDONALD

45th Regiment RA

23926407 Sergeant MARTIN LEONARD CARROLL
24167857 Gunner KEITH BATES
24391791 Gunner RICHARD AMOS JAMES FURMINGER
524143 Captain NIGEL HAROLD EDWIN FRENCH

49th Regiment RA

24341255 Gunner STEPHEN NICHOLSON
24356747 Gunner EDMUND FRANK MULLER
24268649 Gunner GEORGE MITCHELL MUNCASTER
24332275 Gunner ROGER GEOFFREY EDWARDS

50 Missile Regiment

24484554 Lance Bombardier KEVIN MARK WALLER

94th Regiment RA

24181317 Gunner ROBERT GEORGE CURTIS
24102365 Lance Bombardier JOHN DOUGLAS LAURIE
24224441 Gunner JOSEPH RONALD S. BROOKES
23888432 Bombardier HEINZ ERIC PISAREK
23710622 Sergeant JOHN HAUGHEY

Depot RA Woolwich

23823188 Gunner RICHARD COPLAND S. DUNNE

Otterburn Training Camp

105900 Lieutenant Colonel JOHN C. STEVENSON

Royal Artillery Regiment Unknown

23985151 Staff Sergeant JOHN GARDNER CRAIG
24283763 Gunner BERNARD GEOFFREY JONES
24283404 Gunner JAMES IAN REYNOLDS
484336 Major GEORGE WILLIAM MILBURN
491709 Captain MICHAEL JAMES KETT
24626671 Gunner STEPHEN THOMAS IRWIN
509579 Major GARY PAUL SPARKS

Royal Artillery Territorial Army Units

102 Regiment RA (V)

**22209313 Sergeant SAMUEL CAMERON McCLEAN BEM
24617359 Bombardier PAUL FREDERICK CREE**

105 Regiment RA (V)

24471973 Gunner PAUL DUNCAN KEARNEY

The Royal Artillery Regiment had the highest number of casualties in the “Troubles” for a single cap badge in Northern Ireland outside of the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR)/Royal Irish Regiment (RIR). Of the 264 soldiers murdered for serving with the UDR and RIR during the “Troubles”, 60 were murdered after leaving the Army.^{vii}

Endnotes

ⁱ In the Royal Artillery a Troop was approximately the same in number of soldiers as in an infantry platoon (30 soldiers) but could vary in size.

ⁱⁱ Mike Sanster belonged to Unit Y Troop 57 Battery that was attached to 32 Regiment Royal Artillery.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Ferret armoured car, also commonly called the Ferret Scout Car, is a British armoured fighting vehicle designed and built for reconnaissance purposes.

^{iv} The patrol was part of Unit Reserve Troop 94 Locating Regiment.

^v Unit B Section, 3 Troop of the Belfast Task Force.

^{vi} Lost Lives page 617 (1587) David McKittrick, Seamus Kelters, Brian Feeney and Chris Thornton (2001) 3rd edition.

^{vii} <https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=HOW+MANY+UDR+AND+RIR+WERE+MURDERED+DURING+THE+NI+TROUBLES&ei=KhJZY6DjE4jXgQbX6aqlAg&ved=0ahUKEwigolNr3f36AhWla8AKHde0CiEQ4dUDCA8&uact=5&oq=HOW+>