

# Newry Reporter



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## TWO CUSTOMS MEN DIE IN KILLEEN SHOOTING

Violence erupted across the Province at the week-end and in the Newry area alone the cost to human life was heavy-two civilians killed.

Customs Officer Mr. Ian Hankin, aged 27 a native of South Shields and Mr. Jimmy O'Neill, a cleaner employed by the Customs died in a hail of bullets directed at the army at the Killeen Border post on Saturday morning. The gun fire came from 4 or 5 terrorists operating from a hillside on the Republic side of the Frontier.

Just a few hours before the killings one of the temporary buildings at Killeen had been wrecked by a bomb planted by one of four men who ordered the staff out.

The wooden hut where the officers made tea and a caravan used as an office were both hit by the gunfire. Mr. O'Neill who was in the hut and Officer Hankin in the caravan were both struck and collapsed critically wounded.

Mr. Hankin and Mr. O'Neill died a short time after receiving their injuries.

Mr. Hankin, married with three children, lived at Shandon Park Newry. His wife Brigid was a nurse before her marriage and she is a native of Crobane, Newry.

### CARAVAN ARRIVED AFTER EXPLOSION

In the earlier explosion the main hut was blown up. But the small hut, which was being used as a canteen, remained intact. Within an hour a caravan was brought to the post and put into use as temporary office accommodation.

After the bomb incident members of the RUC arrived on the scene and stayed for quite a while in the area which then seemed to be quite quiet and safe. Security forces men of the Scots Dragoon Guards arrived at Killeen about eleven o'clock and almost immediately they were greeted with bursts of machine gun fire. At this time lorries and cars had been

passing through the customs check points.

Jimmy O'Neill was, making tea in the canteen. Officer Ian Hankin was in the caravan checking documents. Two other officers officers Mr. A. Greenhill of Warrenpoint and Mr. J. Radcliffe of Jerrettspass were working on the road clearing traffic.

### FELL TO FLOOR

When the machine guns opened fire. Officer Hankin was seen falling to the floor and Officer Radcliffe pulled him on to the road. A passing motorist stopped and took both officers to hospital where Mr. Hankin was found to be dead on arrival. Mr. Radcliffe was treated for shock.

## RAN TO HUT

Meanwhile back at the customs post, Officer Greenhill decided to evacuate everyone from the area. He did not see Jimmy O'Neill and ran to the hut at some considerable risk. Inside he found Jimmy lying in a large pool of blood. He was given first aid by soldiers and rushed by ambulance to Daisy Hill Hospital but was dead before he reached there.

## TREATED FOR SHOCK

Mr. Greenhill was treated at the hospital for shock. He declined to stay in hospital and was taken to his home by other customs officials.

When "Reporter" representatives went to Killeen it was a scene of desolation. Pools of blood in

the caravan and the canteen showed vividly where the two men had been struck down.

## OFFICERS WITHDRAWN

At the time all British Customs officers had been with-drawn from Killeen and later they were replaced.

Mr Patterson, an AA patrolman who was based at Killeen on Saturday said he was in his office when the shooting started. He left the small office by the back door and dived into a field for cover.

A thirteen-year-old boy was among civilians who had to hurriedly seek cover when the shooting began.

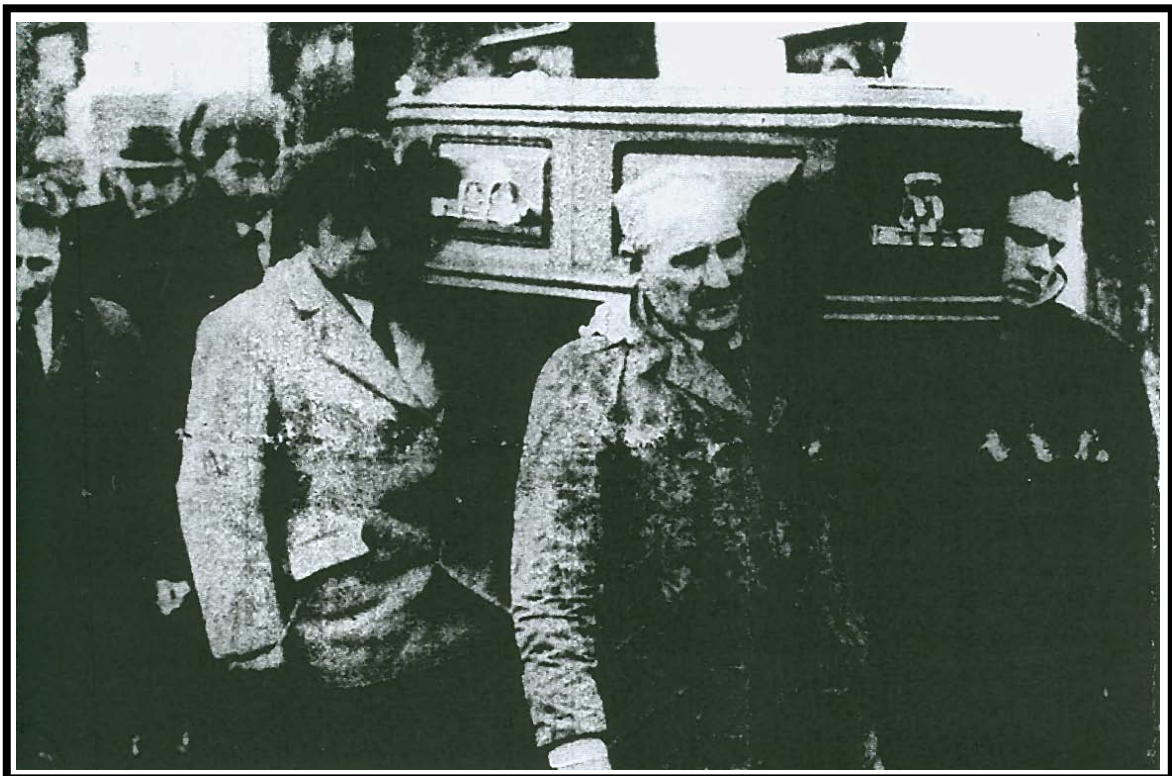
Another AA eye witness said that he was helping a motorist further up the road towards

Newry. He heard the shooting and stopped oncoming traffic.

## FIRED ON

Men of the Scots Dragoon Guards on approaching the Killeen Customs Post were fired upon from a range of 800 yards from across the border. The patrol, which was in two land rovers, continued for another 200 metres and then stopped. At this point the gunmen changed their line of fire and fired at the customs post. Afterwards one man was found to be dead and the other was fatally wounded.

An army spokesman said it was believed that both men were taking cover at the time they were shot. The military did not return the fire.



Colleagues and friends of Ian Hankin bear his coffin to its final resting place.

# Waterguards Tribute

Tributes to the Customs Officials shot at the weekend were paid this week by Mr. S. O. Lacey, who was senior Waterguards Officer at Newry when the tragedy occurred.

Mr. Lacey stated: . Ian Hankin, who used to live in South Shields, England, married a Newry girl. and they decided to make their home in this town. In April, 1971, Ian started employment as a Land Preventive Man in the Customs and Excise, and joined the small staff working at Killeen Land Boundary Post.

## POPULAR COLLEAGUE

" Ian soon proved to be a very popular colleague and fitted into the small working community as though he had been there for years. It was soon apparent that Ian would develop into a good Customs Officer and that he showed exceptional keenness at his work and a desire to get on..

" The Newry Customs staff ascertained that he had other abilities as well, and Ian was soon to be seen playing as goal-keeper for the Newry Customs Football team, and he helped. in no small a way, that team win a local Customs Trophy.

## ALWAYS A SMILE

"This team also owed a lot to the constant support given to them by Jimmy O'Neill who had worked as a fulltime cleaner in the Custom's offices at Newry and Killeen since 1955.

"Of some cleaners it could be said 'Oh, you mean the Cleaner' as though that person was not very important but this could never be said of Jimmy. .Not only were the offices spotless, but

Jimmy was always around making tea. tidying up and having a chat with the staff. His cheerfulness played a great part in supporting the morale of the Killeen staff as one explosion followed another. However temporary the replacement accommodation was, however impossible the conditions, Jimmy always appeared with a smile, a quip, and. from somewhere. cups of tea.

" The tragic loss of both these officers is deeply felt by all the Customs staff in N. Ireland, but especially by the staff at Newry and Killeen."

Jimmy o'NEILL

His band colleagues in .Newry have paid this tribute to the late Mr. Jimmy O'Neill who was killed under tragic circumstances last Saturday:

"Jimmy has gone to his eternal rest. His tragic death came as a very deep shock to all but especially to music lovers of brass. A member of St. Catherine's Band for the past ten years or more his life as a musician was devoted to brass as a cornet player. A punctual attender at rehearsals and outings, Jim loved to be among the young musicians. His love for music of all kinds took him to church and chapel to listen to choir and organ and we have never known him to scoff or say an unkind word in earnest. his outlook in life was always practical and his first love as was natural with Jim. was for his aged mother. His presence will be sadly missed by all. May he rest in peace." .

At a meeting of St. Catherine 's Band and Club a vote of sympathy was passed on the tragic death of Jim O'Neil!.