

Fry The Brain



THE ART OF URBAN SNIPING AND ITS ROLE IN MODERN GUERRILLA WARFARE

by John West

Chapter 1



Belfast, Northern Ireland, Before the 1998 Good Friday Peace Agreement

Kill a British soldier or policeman. Gerry's instructions were clear. The orders originated from the senior leadership of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) who felt the British government was not taking the current peace negotiations seriously. They intended to change this. Consequently, the PIRA leadership sent a message to the Belfast leadership: increase the pressure on the illegal occupation forces - now.

Until recently, the Belfast brigade had been lying low, recovering from a string of successful British raids based on intelligence from 'touts' - what the despised PIRA turncoats were called. The Belfast men had been focused on fixing their security problem and training new PIRA units. However, they were still ready to act as they had just finished training a new urban sniper cell. Gerry, the leader of this cell, got the order over a pint of Guinness in a smoke-filled pub. All it took was a single sentence uttered in between swigs of ale - the

boss wants the Brits to feel some pain - and a death warrant was issued. That was it. No written orders. No drawn out moral discussions. Combat action had just been authorized, as if they were talking about organizing a late tackle in a rugby match. And Gerry's superiors didn't want to know the details; they just wanted to see results. That's what the word 'compartmentalization' meant. There would be no evidence linking the PIRA leadership to the trigger man. Gerry got paid to make it happen. It would take him several days to look over the intelligence reports and pick the right target, but in a week he would be ready.

Several years ago, Gerry had cut his teeth in the PIRA with the Goldfinger sniper crew that worked the rural South Armagh area. After serving the Republican cause faithfully since his initial membership and learning to keep his mouth shut, he had risen through the ranks. Gerry had his own crew now and he had new ideas of how to use them. Gerry wanted to bring his sniper war to the city. Even though his sniper cell was composed mostly of PIRA veterans, this would be their first operation as a team.

Eight Days later, Friday afternoon, 1:50 p.m.

Brrrrrrrrring! Brrrrrrrrrrring! Brrrrrrrrring!

"Yeah, I'll be there already!" Mike said to himself as he hurried out of the garage and picked up the phone with his greasy hands, which was now all over the phone.

"Yeah?" Mike barked, unsuccessfully trying to hide his annoyance, wiping his hands on his

jeans.

“Hello, is Mike there?”

“This is Mike.”

“Are you free for a pint of ale, mate, down at Reilley’s?” It took Mike a second to recognize the voice, a voice that sent a chill down his spine, as if a pitcher of ice-cold water had just been poured down his back.

“Just got done working on my car. Sounds good.” He tried to sound like the conversation was absolutely meaningless to him, as if this was someone he talked to a thousand times before. But if the voice on the other end of the line could look into his stomach, it would see a bundle of knots caused by a cocktail of fear and adrenaline. It really didn’t matter what Mike was doing. He’d have to cut short his project and get ready whether he wanted to or not. He could be in the middle of putting out a burning fire at his house and it wouldn’t have mattered. The movement demanded dedication.

Minutes later, Shawn, Jimmy, and Tom all got the same phone call. An hour later, the group met at a pub, but it wasn’t Reilley’s. Reilley’s was just the code word signaling they were meeting at a prearranged location. If the authorities were listening to their phone lines - which they always assumed - the police would have no idea where they were actually meeting. This was a standard security precaution for the cell.

3:00 p.m.

One after the other, Shawn, Mike, Tom, and Jimmy came in, saw Gerry sitting at a table in the back of the pub, and took a seat. They scanned the pub, taking stock of who was there.

in the back of the pub, and took a seat. They casually scanned the pub, taking stock of who was in it and what they were doing. Nothing unusual stuck out. The four men had never met each other before and the only familiar face was Gerry's. This was because the PIRA Active Service Units (ASUs) were designed in a compartmented manner so the risk of compromise was minimized. Often, different members of an ASU didn't know who the other members were until they met for an operation. After some small talk, Gerry got down to business.

"I'm glad everyone could make it. I assume you're all clean or you wouldn't be here."

Each member of the ASU had been trained months before in counter-surveillance measures at a PIRA safehouse in the northern city of Dundalk in the Irish Republic. They were taught to always take a route enabling them to determine if they were being followed, such as switching from taxicabs to walking on foot. If they did detect surveillance, they didn't go to the meeting. It was a real pain in the ass to keep switching their routes, to keep looking at who was behind them, and to switch meeting places time and time again. But, as their instructors had reminded them, *it's a bit better than being in Long Kesh, isn't it?* Long Kesh was the maximum security prison where PIRA members were sent to do time.

Gerry, running his hands through his jet-black hair, continued, "It's such a nice day out, maybe we should go for a drive, eh?" It was posed as a question, but it was really an order. Gerry was in charge and they knew it. Now it was time to get down to the business at hand.

3:20 p.m.

The four left the pub and followed Gerry to a cream colored van parked out front. With Gerry driving, they departed, taking an unpredictable series of side streets and unlikely turns. The van was stolen the day before from an airport long-term parking lot by a separate PIRA unit specializing in obtaining vehicles for combat operations. Their intent was the van would be stolen, used for the operation, and then returned before the owners knew their vehicle was gone. If anyone recognized the van during the operation and reported it to the authorities, the police would end up tracing it back to a completely innocent person. Since the PIRA had a contact working at the airport, it was easy to secure any vehicle they needed.

Once Gerry entered the specific western Belfast neighborhood he was looking for, the Ballymurphy Estate, he slowed down and pulled into an empty parking spot alongside the street. Stretched out on either side of them were long rows of two-story brick apartment buildings, all looking essentially the same. The neighborhood was poor, but clean. It was the same kind of urban dump they all either grew up in or still lived. They immediately grasped the key characteristics of the battlefield. Gerry kept the van running and began his brief.

“At the intersection in front of us, in two and a half hours, there will be a police patrol passing by. I’ll make sure the patrol stops. See that apartment on the corner with the green door? The back door is unlocked and there is parking in the rear. It’s been made available to

us for the day.”

Location 148

2%

The others looked at the various landmarks

us for the day.”

The others looked at the various landmarks as Gerry briefed them. They were all vaguely familiar with the area. In fact, Jimmy had a cousin who lived a couple blocks away.

“Questions?” Gerry asked. He knew there had to be. This was the first time they were all working together and all he had done so far was sketch out the basics of the operation.

“What kind of patrol is it? How many? What direction are they coming from?” Shawn asked. These were normal questions since he was the trigger man. Shawn tried to sound confident, masking his true nervousness. This was the first combat operation for Shawn. He was still a ‘virgin’ – what the PIRA called a new member with a clean record with the British authorities. This was precisely the reason he was picked to be a shooter, because he was off the police’s criminal radar and was still invisible. If he passed this first test, he would have a future with the organization. If he screwed up, he might be placed under suspicion and considered a possible infiltrator until proven otherwise. But that was the nature of the game he was now playing.

“From the south going north. That’s their normal pattern. The patrol consists of two Land Rovers. They usually pass by about six, give or take a few minutes.”

“Armored?” Mike wondered.

“Let’s assume so, yes.”

This meant a shot through the windshield or door was out. It would take a .50 caliber rifle to shoot through the armored glass and doors of the Land Rovers. It was too hard to hide and move such large sniper rifles in the city, so that

Location 159 out. They’d have to get the target
out in the open 2%

option was out. They'd have to get the target out in the open.

"How good is the info?" Mike wanted to know.

"It's good." Gerry wasn't going to say much more about it. In fact, Gerry had no idea where the information came from. The Belfast chain of command provided him with several target packages and he chose this one. It was standard practice in the PIRA to separate their intelligence collection activities from the ASUs who acted on it. However, it was likely the PIRA unit that ran the local 'neighborhood watch' obtained the information from a housewife or local kids who played in the area. Since the PIRA had strong support in this neighborhood, there were half a dozen people who may have volunteered the information.

The van only idled in place for two minutes when Gerry pulled back into the street, taking a different route back to the pub. He stopped a mile short at a small parking lot near several shops.

"Mike, do you have any more questions?" Gerry asked. Although Shawn was the shooter, Mike would lead the tactical execution of the operation.

"No problem. I'll figure it out," Mike quipped.

"Okay."

Gerry got out of the van and into a black, 500 series BMW and drove away. Gerry didn't want to know any more about their plans. This was another deliberate measure to protect the ASU. The rest of the ASU had no idea how Gerry was going to stop the Land Rovers and they didn't want to know. In turn, Gerry

didn't want to know anything about the execution of the operation. That way, if any of them were captured and interrogated, they only had a partial understanding of the overall plan. Gerry had already done a stint in the infamous Long Kesh prison in the H-Blocks (you could still see where his nose was broken from his 'questioning') and he knew the importance of security. He didn't plan on going back anytime soon.

3:40 p.m.

Mike slid over into the driver's seat, lit a cigarette, and pulled into traffic.

"What kind of weapon do we have?" Mike said looking back at Shawn, blowing a thin column of smoke through his pursed lips and out the cracked window.

"AR-15 with scope and suppressor. I'm dialed in at two-hundred meters."

This civilian version of the standard M-16 assault rifle was imported from Boston through the PIRA's support network so no one could trace it to a domestic purchase in any one of Northern Ireland's six counties. It was a 'clean' gun.

"Who's shagging the rifle?" Mike asked.

"I am," Tom said, "It'll take me an hour to get it."

Only Tom knew where the gun was hidden – another ASU security precaution.

"Right. Jimmy, I take it you're from around here?"

Although the ASU members had all trained separately, they knew the standard sniper cell

was composed of a team leader, a shooter, a quartermaster who provided the weapon

was composed of a team leader, a shooter, a quartermaster who provided the weapon and other materials, and a surveillance man. Process of elimination meant Jimmy was the surveillance specialist.

“Something like that,” Jimmy smirked. It was none of their business where he was from. He knew the area and that was good enough.

“Jimmy, I want you to case the area an hour out and in the corner flat thirty minutes before the hit. Give me a heads up on anything unusual. Here’s your cell phone and here’s my cell phone number. As soon as it’s done, leave out the back. Make sure you take care of the phone as soon as possible.” They were using cell phones ‘procured’ by another team, pilfered earlier from some tourists staying at a local hotel. After the operation, they would give the phones to a courier who would take them to a supporter who worked at a coal-burning power plant and would incinerate the phones in the blast furnace - no questions asked. A lot of things disappeared in that blast furnace over the years, some mechanical, some human.

“Got it.”

Mike pulled into the pub parking lot. Jimmy got out and walked off to hail a taxi. Jimmy knew his part of the plan and didn’t need to know anything else.

“Tom, we’ll meet you in an hour and a half at the park in front of Hanrahan’s.”

“Right.”

Tom walked off to his car, which was parked several blocks away. He had the rifle stashed in the boot of a car (hidden where the spare tire was supposed to go) in a park-
Location 196 The car was registered to someone 2%

ing garage. The car was registered to someone who worked in England. The owner was a family friend and supported the movement. However, the owner had no knowledge of the weapon in their car because they were overseas six months at a time, doing agricultural contract work. In case the car was compromised, the owner could legitimately claim ignorance because of their long absences out of the country.

Mike flicked his cigarette out the window and turned to Shawn, "Let's go in and have a pint. We have some time to kill." They could both be dead or in prison an hour from now. Might as well go out feeling good. Plus, Mike could smell the fear oozing out of Shawn. His body chemistry screamed, *I'm scared to death because I'm about to do something crazy*. A police dog would have smelled Shawn a mile away. Yep, a big brown pint of Guinness was just what the Doctor ordered. It would calm the nerves. It always did.

5:11 p.m.

Mike and Shawn pulled up to the small park across from Hanrahan's right on time. They were only sitting for about a minute when Tom pulled up. Tom got out of his car, opened the boot, and pulled out a bright, red cooler. Tom carried the plastic cooler to the van and heaved it through the side-door that Shawn had opened. The cooler creaked and moaned like an old woman as Tom set it down on the floor of the van. Once the gaudy cooler was in the van, Tom popped the top and pulled out an

Location 208 2%

ice-cold Coke. He opened the can and took a long swig.

“Ahhhhhh!” Tom gave an exaggerated sigh after lowering the can. “Don’t drink and drive!” he warned. Tom could afford to be a smart-ass since his part of the job was half over. “I’ll service the drop off point fifteen minutes after the hit. Don’t be late.” Tom described where to drop off the rifle, a place located just a few short miles from where the operation would occur.

Tom got in his car and drove off, with Mike and Shawn a few seconds behind him. Mike and Shawn had about thirty minutes before they needed to be in position, giving them enough time to make another series of turns and switchbacks to see if they were being followed. If they detected anything suspicious, they simply wouldn’t show up. The absence of any member of the ASU meant the operation was terminated, no questions asked.

5:30 p.m.

“Shawn, we’re ten minutes out. We’ll park at the street corner north of the intersection. It’ll be a hundred and fifty meter shot.”

As Mike spoke, Shawn put on a pair of white, latex surgical gloves, reached into the cooler, under the top layer of ice and sodas, and secured a disassembled AR-15 wrapped in a heavy plastic bag with two metal grommets at the top. Shawn had trained on this exact rifle one month ago on an isolated farm in the PIRA dominated county of South Armagh. He hadn’t seen the rifle since because Tom was responsible for hiding and maintaining it. After Location 219 2%

responsible for hiding and maintaining it. After unwrapping the weapon, Shawn slid the upper receiver onto the lower receiver and snapped the well-oiled retaining pins shut. Then, he inspected the four-power scope that was attached directly to the Weaver rail on top of the receiver. The scope was still taped with foam to protect it. Shawn spied a small bottle of water in the cooler, next to one of the sodas. Tom had thought of everything. Shawn removed a suppressor from the plastic bag and poured the water into it. He slowly rotated the suppressor around by the ends, making sure the suppressor was completely soaked inside. He poured the remaining water from the suppressor back into the cooler and attached the suppressor to the end of the rifle's barrel. This suppressor, like many modern ones, was a 'wet' suppressor and was designed to have water poured in it to dampen the sound better.

Shawn kept the telescoping buttstock of the rifle as it was, all the way in, so he had more room to maneuver inside the restricted confines of the van. He pulled a twenty-round magazine from the bag, inserted it into the magazine well, and jacked a round into the chamber. He placed the rifle across the back seat and covered it with an old, green blanket with a pattern of pretty red roses sewn on it. It looked like something from a retirement home, like a blanket a grandmother would put over their old, cold legs. Shawn pulled the 'cleaner' bag from the cooler and took a quick accountability of its contents. He removed a lightweight, clear, plastic rain jacket, put it on over his black t-shirt, and zipped it up. It was one of those cheap ones you might buy at a conces-

sion stand at a football game.

Shawn picked up a black nylon balaclava and put it on over his head, covering up his curly blond hair, so just his blue eyes were visible. Then, over the balaclava went a woman's nylon. One couldn't do this job and be claustrophobic because the nylon smashed the balaclava into your face like someone was trying to smother you. The balaclava would hide his identity and the nylon served as a forensics barrier. His PIRA instructors in Dundalk hammered this into his head: *you can disguise yourself all day if you want, but if there's gunpowder all in your hair when you're done with the op, you're screwed aren't you?* There was also a small rag and several alcohol wipes in the bag. Shawn was just finishing as Mike pulled up to the curb. Shawn had talked himself through the procedures ten times already so there was no way he was going to miss anything. *If you get sloppy, you get yourself caught or get yourself dead.* Shawn moved to the back of the van and slid open the rear window about two inches. The angle was perfect. Mike had eased the van into just the right position. Shawn just barely had a line of sight from the window to the intersection. A row of apartments blocked the rest of his vision and he knew the police patrol would only be able to see the rear of the van as they approached.

5:45 p.m.

Gerry' gleaming, black BMW – it looked like it had just been waxed and polished by hand - drove slowly through the intersection, stopped

briefly, and then sped off. Mike's cell phone vibrated and he answered it.

"Hey, someone just dumped a body at the intersection. His legs are in the road."

It was Jimmy. He had a good view of the intersection as he peered through the drapes of the corner flat. The back door to the flat was unlocked just like Gerry said. It was obvious a family was living there, since there were a pile of dirty dishes in the sink. The owners were an Irish Republican family who supported the cause and were conveniently away for the day.

"Right," Mike confirmed. He put his head over his right shoulder and hissed to Shawn between clenched teeth, "Do you see the action at the intersection?"

"Yep. A black BMW stopped and took off. He dumped something."

They were running ahead of schedule. Mike's phone vibrated again.

"We've got two vehicles coming - Land Rovers. See ya'." Jimmy's job was done. He wanted to sprint to the car like madman, jumping down the brick stairs in a single leap like an Olympic hurdler, then tear open the driver side door, and burn rubber out of there like his life depended on it. But that's not how you do it. That's what idiots do who end up doing ten to life in Long Kesh. *You act like a chameleon, like everyone around you, like you're going to walk the friggin' dog.* Instead, Jimmy casually walked out the back door, down the stairs, and got into his car. He had given early warning of the arriving patrol like instructed. It was now up to the trigger man to do the rest. Jimmy was pulling away as the patrol arrived.

5:46 p.m.

The first Land Rover approached the intersection, slowed down, and came to a stop. The second vehicle stopped about fifty meters behind it. The occupants of the first vehicle were obviously looking at the body on the side of the road. A peeler got out of the passenger side of the lead vehicle, carefully scanning the area. A 'peeler' was slang for a policeman. He was wearing black body armor over his smartly pressed uniform and carried an MP-5 submachine gun, his finger gently massaging the trigger. In the distance, several teen-age kids walked down a side street, kicking a soccer ball. Maybe these were 'dickers' the policeman thought - kids used to scout operations for the PIRA. One could never really know.

One hundred meters up the main road a hand-painted mural was visible on the side of a building. White letters, a foot tall, screamed: COLLUSION! IT'S NOT AN ILLUSION! The mural was in reference to the PIRA's long-held belief that the Royal Ulster Constabulary (the Northern Ireland police force) and the British military were working with Protestant paramilitary organizations, helping them to murder and terrorize innocent Catholics. Obviously, this wasn't a friendly Protestant Loyalist area. This was a hard-core Republican one. The policeman knew the PIRA frequently dumped the bodies of British informers so they could be easily found. This was done as a warning to others who might try and 'grass' (inform) on the PIRA. This was nothing to get excited about. However, since the PIRA often booby-trapped these bodies, it was standard practice for a patrol to secure the immediate area and

trapped these bodies, it was standard practice for a patrol to secure the immediate area and call in the bomb squad. Better to let the experts deal with the body instead of getting blown up over someone who was already dead. It was probably some low-life any ways who deserved what he got, an informant who worked both sides of the fence and finally got nailed by the Nutting Squad - the PIRA's counterintelligence team who got rid of stool pigeons by putting a bullet in the back of their nut (their head).

5:47 p.m.

The muzzle of Shawn's dull-gray metal suppressor stuck out of the van's rear window by an inch. Shawn wanted to make sure he was clear of the window, but he didn't want to give his position away. He had to squat down awkwardly to get a good position, because his six foot frame wasn't meant to fit in the family passenger van while standing up. Shawn had the peeler in his sights as the man looked in his general direction. The peeler could see the rear of the van, but it didn't look any more suspicious than the scores of other vehicles parked on the same street. Shawn squeezed the trigger.

"Pfft!" The gas from the exploding gun powder rushed down the barrel, behind the rotating bullet, eventually getting caught in the internal baffles of the suppressor. By the time the gas exited the suppressor, it was muffled so much that the resulting gunshot sounded like a car door being shut. The policeman dropped to the ground, grabbing his lower

stomach.
Location 278

3%

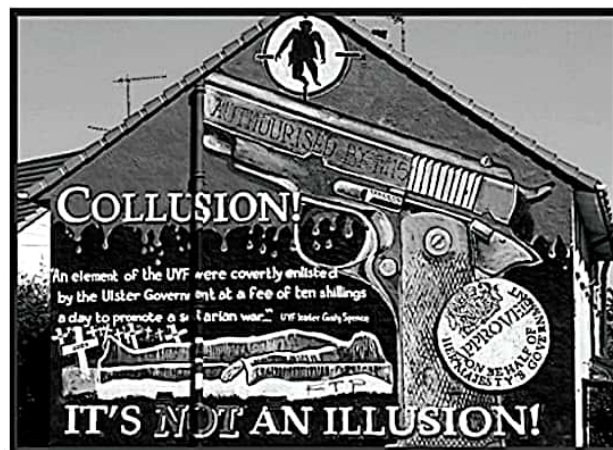
stomach.

Shawn saw that the peeler was wearing body armor and had aimed for his pelvis. He could have taken a chest shot, hoping the body armor was only soft armor designed to defeat handgun rounds. But, what if it was hard ceramic armor, which would stop his 5.56 mm rifle round easily? A chest shot was out. What about a head shot? What if he missed? The head was a small target to hit at this distance, especially with sweat running down your forehead and into your eyes, like God himself was trying to create every challenge possible so you couldn't make a successful shot. Shawn only had a second to decide and he made the choice to go for the pelvis, hoping to hit an artery or at least the intestines. He knew this was the right answer. His instructors had been in the same situation before. *It's called a body armor drill, men. You have no idea what kind of armor they have on at a distance and at more than a hundred meters, the head is a difficult target. So, you go for the largest, unprotected area on the body – the abdomen. You shoot 'em in the bollocks.*

5:48 p.m.

“We're good!” Shawn called out, his heart pounding so loud in his ears he couldn't tell if he said it normally or screamed at the top of his lungs. All he wanted to do was get the hell out of there and begin the counter-forensics process. They didn't have much time. Mike started the van and pulled away, like a crocodile easing back into the waters, its job on land done. Shawn immediately began wiping down the van with a rag, wiping clean any fingerprints and most of the gunshot residue.

the rifle with the rag, wiping clean any fingerprints and most of the gunshot residue. He dropped the magazine, jacked the live round out of the chamber, removed the suppressor, and broke down the AR-15 into the upper and lower receivers. Shawn put the rifle back into the plastic bag and re-padded the scope. He took a section from a metal coat hangar, ran it through the metal grommets at the top of the bag, and twisted the hangar so the bag wouldn't slide off.



Next, he took off the plastic rain jacket, the nylons, the balaclava - you can disguise yourself all day if you want, but if there's gunpowder all in your hair when you're done with the op, you're screwed aren't you? - then the gloves, and stuffed them in their plastic bag. He opened the alcohol wipes and cleaned his forehead, face, neck, and hands to get rid of the bulk of the gunshot residue. He knew this wouldn't pass close scrutiny, but it would remove enough residue to create doubt in the legal system. Maybe you got all the ingredients of gunpowder on your hands from painting your fence earlier today. After all, the key identifying elements found in gunpowder are also found in common house paint. Shawn even had some white paint on his fingernails from working with his paint brush that morning. For the last stage of the clean-up, Shawn took

working with his paint brush that morning. For the last stage of the clean-up, Shawn took several cue-tips and cleaned out his ears and nostrils. Even in these hard to get places, incriminating gunshot residue could settle.

When Shawn went for his initial training at the PIRA safehouse in Dundalk, one of the first classes he received was how to remove incriminating evidence like gunpowder residue, fingerprints, and even fibers from his clothing. Since the British had such a strong forensic capability, every ASU incorporated a counter-forensic cleaning stage into their operations. After Shawn thought he was relatively clean, he put the wipes in the same bag as the jacket and gloves. Shawn then buried the plastic-wrapped rifle back under the ice and began looking for the expended shell. It took a few seconds, but he found it on the floor. Since Gerry continued to make unexpected turns in order to lose anyone who might try and follow them, Shawn lurched all over the back of the van like pinball until he finally secured the lone casing. He picked it up with his shirt and dropped it in the cleaner bag and put the bag under the sodas.

6:00 p.m.

Shawn had just completed the cleaning process when Mike turned a corner and pulled up next to a sidewalk. Adjacent to the sidewalk was a gray metal grate for rainwater to drain into. There were several plastic garbage cans lining the sidewalk, right in front of the grate. As soon as the van came to a halt, Shawn slid

Location 310 3%

open the side door about a foot. The garbage cans provided an effective screen, blocking the view of anyone who might be watching. Shawn lowered the plastic bag and the rifle through the grate, hanging the bag on one of the metal bars with the coat hanger. Shawn slid the door shut and Mike pulled away.

The grate was the drop off point Tom directed them to go to after the operation. Tom didn't want them going directly back to him with the weapon. The goal after any operation was to immediately disassociate oneself from the physical evidence connecting one to the activity. This way, Tom could watch the drop-off point and make sure Mike and Shawn weren't followed. When all was clear and it was a little darker, Tom would drive up to the grate and retrieve the rifle. Once Tom secured the weapon, he would clean it and return it to its hiding place. After two or three more sniping operations, Tom would change out the upper receiver with a new one. The old upper receiver would then be taken to a machine-shop and the barrel drilled out, removing all the lands and grooves in the barrel. This way, the old incriminating barrel, which could be ballistically linked to the rifle and the shootings, would be removed from circulation and forensically sterilized. Then, Shawn would have to re-zero on the new receiver.

It was a warm summer evening and Shawn's shirt was soaked in sweat. If he had stepped into a shower for a full minute, he would have been drier. He had just seriously wounded a man, maybe even taken his life. A perfect stranger who was doing nothing more than his job was gunned down and Shawn

Location 321 trigger. While you're sighting in 4%

shawn's job was ginned down and shawn pulled the trigger. While you're sighting in on a human for the first time its almost surreal, like it's not even you doing it. You're floating in the sky, looking down, watching someone else named Shawn pull the trigger. Taking the shot was easy. Thinking about it later was something different. *You just killed a man, Shawn. You're a killer. A wanted man. You'll be on death row someday when they catch you. If they catch you.* The operation drained him mentally. He was glad it was over. Mike dropped Shawn off halfway to the pub so he could take a cab home.

"Good job, mate. Really good. Gerry is gonna' like your work." Mike had been in Shawn's shoes before. He worked as a trigger man until he moved up the ranks. It didn't matter how tough you were, or how tough you thought you were, the first time always weighed on you. Every man you killed, you carried on your back for the rest of your life. After a few more shootings, Shawn would get calloused like the rest of them. In another year, shooting a peeler would be just like shooting an inanimate object, like shooting a scarecrow. It wouldn't mean a thing.

Shawn managed a weak smile and a shrug and walked off to hail a cab. As soon as he got home, Shawn would take a long shower, being sure to thoroughly clean any remaining gunshot residue from his body. He would also burn his clothes in the chimney, eliminating any forensic link connecting the shooting to him. Then, he would throw up, heaving until it seemed his guts would fall out.

6:12 p.m.

Mike pulled into the original pub parking lot, put the keys under the driver's seat, and walked off. Half an hour later, a PIRA 'cleaning crew' arrived and took the van directly to a nearby warehouse in the industrial district where rows of near-identical, pre-fab, rusted buildings dotted the landscape. In the warehouse, the cooler was removed and the clothing bag and its contents were burned later that day at the coal plant. The cleaning crew wiped down the entire vehicle to remove any fingerprints, even though everyone in the ASU had been instructed not to leave any. It was better to be safe than in prison and under interrogation. The cleaning crew also vacuumed the seats and floor carpet, sucking up any trace fibers. After the van was cleaned inside and out, which took about thirty minutes, the cleaners brought the van back to the airport parking lot where it was stolen. With any luck, the family wouldn't even know the vehicle was borrowed for the day.

Mike was home before the cleaning crew arrived. He took a long shower even though he never touched the weapon. There still might be some gunpowder particles that were transferred onto him. Stranger things had happened. They all wore blue jeans during the operation because blue denim fibers were so common in Northern Ireland they were forensically useless. Also, all their t-shirts were nylon soccer shirts, which shed relatively few fibers. Gerry was dead serious about limiting fiber transfers during operations, even though

near future planning operations, even though it was a tedious chore for everyone involved. *Let 'em bitch about it all they want. I'm not going back to the H-Blocks.* The Maze Prison was referred to as the 'H' blocks because, from the sky, the layout of the buildings looked like a giant letter H.

Gerry would get in touch with him in a week or so. He just had to lay low until then. The entire ASU would know the results of their operation the following morning when the headlines inevitably screamed, "IRA TERRORISTS SUSPECTED IN SHOOTING OF POLICE." The article might even disclose the name of the officer, the unit he served with, what town he was from, and the exact nature of his injuries. If he was dead, the paper may even say where the funeral was being held. Maybe they could get more officers of the Royal Ulster Constabulary at the funeral with a drive-by. The newspapers usually provided the best post-operation review.

If this operation proved to be successful, Gerry would get another order to conduct another operation. The PIRA needed to step up the tempo in the cities. The British would be forced to the negotiating table - at gunpoint if necessary. If Gerry and his ASU could provide the steady stream of casualties the Republican movement demanded, there was plenty of work for them.