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Man dies in attack on RUC in Lurgan

By Fionnuala O Connor

AS PART of what seems to be a Provisional IRA show of strength, an RUC inspector was shot dead yesterday and two young reserve constables seriously injured in the town of Lurgan, Co. Armagh. Responsibility for the morning attack, on a security barrier in Church Place, where two policemen have already been murdered, was admitted hours later by the Provisional's North Armagh 1st Battalion.

The dead policeman was Inspector Harry Cobb, married with three young children, who lived at Hillsborough, Co. Down. He is the eighth RUC man to be killed in the Lurgan area. The shooting followed that of a Protestant Derry businessman on Wednesday night—which in turn was a carbon-copy of another businessman's murder a month ago in the city.

Recent reports that Provisional IRA representatives have been meeting clergymen to discuss a ceasefire and that the Belfast Provisionals in particular are war-weary, were instantly and sharply denied as "sinister" by Provisional spokesmen. The shootings of the last two days might be seen as a brutal emphasis of the denial.

Only reopened

Yesterday morning's attack came as the security barrier in Lurgan town centre was opened to traffic. After the shooting of a constable there last July the barrier was closed but reopened eight weeks later because businessmen complained they were suffering from the loss of traffic into the town. This time it was provided with large corrugated screens on three sides to help protect the police on duty.

Yesterday morning Inspector Cobb came to inspect the security arrangements and was about to leave, with a young policeman going on traffic duty, when three men came out of a derelict cafe nearby and opened up with automatic rifles.

Inspector Cobb died almost immediately: two reservists were taken to Craigavon Hospital and were described last night as ill; the fourth man in the group escaped unhurt. Eye-witnesses said that the gunmen walked away towards North Street. Last night the RUC appealed for the person who they said had used the confidential phone to Lurgan police to ring again, as they "might have other valuable information."

Meanwhile, police in Derry found a car with a Dublin registration, believed to have been used in Wednesday night's murder of the businessman, Mr Peter Hill, co-owner of a chain of shops in the city. The car had been hijacked in Bishop Street Without and was found in Strabane Old Road.

And in Belfast, Mr. Leonard Steinberg, a businessman, shot in the thigh at his home on the Antrim Road on Wednesday night, was recovering yesterday. Mr. Steinberg is director of a book-maker's chain.

Condemnation of the murder of Inspector Cobb came yesterday from the leader of the UUUM, Mr. Ernest Baird, from the local SDLP former Convention member, Mr. Hugh News, from the Mayor of Craigavon, Mr. T. H. Creith, and from the local RUC chief superintendent, Jack McConnell, who said that there would have to be a "reassessment of the position concerning the security barriers in the town". Lord Melchett, Minister of State, who was visiting the area yesterday called at Lurgan RUC station to express sympathy.

Later Mr. Harold McCusker, Unionist MP for Armagh, also condemned the shooting, as did the Catholic Bishop of Dromore, the Most Rev. Dr. Brooks.

In Derry the Peace Movement put out a statement describing Mr. Hill's murder as "the latest atrocity" and said that it was hard to understand how it could be justified "in the name of freedom or anything else".

In Belfast last night a bomb badly damaged a shop near Ardovne on the Crumlin road, though no-one was injured, and four buses were hijacked and set on fire in the north of the city— at Limestone Road, Cliftonville Road, York Road and at Mill Road, Whitehouse.