

and night watchman Ian Riley. The service was arranged by his niece, Mandy. Once the renovations are completed it is hoped that two memorial benches will be installed, one for Barry and one for Ian.

Note: In memory of Barry (and Ian Riley), Mandy will be taking part in the Great North Run on 13 September 2020, with the proceeds going to the Blue Lamp Foundation (www.bluelampfoundation.org). Donations can be made at <https://www.justgiving.com/Amanda-Cook29>



The Iranian Embassy Siege – a personal recollection

by

Tony Moore

Next month, on the 30 April to be precise, it is the 40th anniversary of the commencement of the Iranian Embassy Siege, when 6 armed men, calling themselves the Group of the Martyr, stormed the building at 16, Prince's Gate and took 26 people, including a police officer, Trevor Lock, hostage. The men's demands included the release of 91 prisoners then being held in Iran and a plane to carry the group with the hostages from England to an undisclosed location. Over the next five days, protracted negotiations resulted in the release of five of the hostages but, on 5 May, the men became increasingly agitated, killing one of the hostages and dumping his body on the porch of the Embassy. This resulted in a 17-minute operation in which the Special Air Service stormed the building, killing 5 of the 6 armed men and releasing 20 hostages; unfortunately, one was shot dead by one of the armed men as assault went in, meaning that only 19 were rescued alive.

I was a Superintendent at Kensington on B District of the Metropolitan Police at the time, and on 30 April, with other senior officers, I was attending the District's quarterly Senior Officers' Luncheon in the

functions room on the 5th Floor of what is now regarded as the old New Scotland Yard in Victoria. Half-way through lunch, the District Commander, George Rushbrook, was called out. On his return he told us that armed men had taken a number of hostages, including a police officer, and were holding them at the Iranian Embassy. Lunch was effectively over.

Prince's Gate, was just off B District on A District, and it was natural that officers from that jurisdiction initially had control. But, anticipating a lengthy operation, Commander Rushbrook had been told that B District would take over at 9 p.m. that night. He then named the officers, me being one, he wanted to report back at 8.30 p.m. that evening. In the meantime, we were told to get some rest.

By the time I returned, Zulu Control (which now would be referred to as Gold (Strategic) Control and Alpha Control (Silver (Tactical) Control), and the various other control facilities, had been set up in the Royal School of Needlework, at No.25, Prince's Gate, a building in the same terrace. I was put in charge of the outer cordon. Sometime during that first night, Deputy Assistant Commissioner Edgar Maybanks, who alternated overall command (Gold (Strategic)) with Deputy Assistant Commissioner John Dellow, called a meeting of the senior officers on duty. This included Commander Rushbrook, who was effectively Silver or the Tactical Commander, Night Duty; the chief superintendent of C13 (the Anti-Terrorist Branch), and Chief Inspector Bob Wells from D.11 Branch from whence the snipers came. Bob and I had served in the same regiment, the Buffs (Royal East Kent Regiment) in Aden in 1958. The purpose of the meeting was to formulate a response plan to meet every possible outcome that could conceivably arise.

Before I left the scene at the end of Day 2, I was informed that, with effect from 9 p.m. on 2 May, I would be Alpha Controller for the 12-hour shifts. By this time, all control facilities had been moved next door to 22-24 Prince's Gate, a Robert Montessori School. This was ideal with several classrooms, toilets, a kitchen and furniture, although the latter, and indeed the toilet facilities, were better suited to children between 4 and 11 years of age. Alpha Control was responsible for deploying of the inner and outer cordons, the former

consisting of armed officers from the Diplomatic Protection Group and the Special Patrol Group. More importantly, it controlled all movement within those cordons, and ensured, generally, that only one movement was taking place at any particular time. Thus, for instance, when negotiations were taking place, there were no other movements within the cordons that might spook the hostage-takers; when food was being delivered to the stronghold, nothing else was permitted to take place; similarly, when officers were being replaced on the inner cordon, this was the only thing that was allowed to take place. Alpha Control had rudimentary closed-circuit television (CCTV) monitors showing the front and back of the stronghold.

Shortly after taking over as Alpha Controller on the evening of 2 May, the leader of the hostage-takers, Saleem spoke to one of the negotiators, Trevor Lloyd Hughes, and asked for cigarettes to be delivered. This was done. At 11 p.m., a Gas Board van arrived in an adjacent street, and activated a gas compressor to provide ambient noise. Later that night, Box 500 (the name by which MI5 was referred to at the time, after its official wartime address of P.O. Box 500) removed some equipment that had previously be installed in 15 Prince's Gate, the Ethiopian Embassy. Otherwise the night shift was uneventful.

A female hostage was released shortly before coming on duty the following night, 3 May. This occurred as part of an agreement to broadcast a message on behalf of the hostage-takers on the BBC World Service. Between 11 p.m. and midnight, food and cigarettes were delivered to the stronghold. Otherwise it was another uneventful night.

When I came on duty on 4 May, it had been a day of increasing tension. Saleem had been agitating all day for certain Middle-Eastern Ambassadors to be brought to the Embassy to act as negotiators, something the authorities were reluctant to agree to. Drilling had been taking place within the Ethiopian Embassy to insert an optical probe and was causing some concern amongst the hostage-takers. Shortly after 1 a.m., Saleem demanded the noise stop and Maybanks eventually gave an order for it to cease. The Gas generator was also turned off. Saleem threatened to kill a hostage if either started again.

On Monday, 5 May, I got up at about 6 p.m. At around 7 p.m., I sat down in front of the television to watch the World Championship Snooker Final between Cliff Thorburn and Alex Higgins. By a strange coincidence, the Championship was sponsored by the cigarette manufacturer, Embassy! Suddenly at about 7.30 p.m., the snooker switched to scenes of the SAS raid on the Embassy. The result is, as they say, history.

I left my flat in Earls Court, which coincidentally, was not far from accommodation the six armed men had occupied in the days leading up to the attack, around 8 p.m. and was back at Alpha Control half-an-hour later. By then, the SAS were packing up their equipment in 14, Prince's Gate, which had been their base since they arrived on the first night; the hostages had been whisked away to St Stephen's Hospital, but the building was still on fire. The firemen had to exercise great caution because of the danger of ammunition, discarded by the hostage-takers during the assault, exploding. By the time the fire was eventually extinguished, the roof and the upper two floors had been almost completely destroyed. During the night, the process of recovering the accessible bodies of the dead men, and the firearms and ammunition got under way but much had to be left until the following day after the building had been examined by structural engineers. During the night, I was able to go up the inside of 22-24 Prince's Gate, walk across the roofs of the adjoining buildings and look down into the still smouldering shell that had once been the Iranian Embassy.

The one surviving gunman, Fowzi Nejad, was sentenced to 30-year imprisonment. He was eventually released in 2008 but was allowed to stay in Britain. Trevor Lock was awarded the George Medal. The Iranian Embassy was eventually repaired by the British government and was reopened in December 1993.

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