

A Winter's Tale

By MAURICE ELVYN OAKES

I was recently talking to a serving member of our local police. We were discussing the use of plastic, and the reduced use of cash in present society. I explained how the police often assisted in the transfer of large amounts of cash. He said that this is not now part of police procedure – it is left to private companies to facilitate.

This reminded me of an incident approaching Christmas time, 1975. I was then a Detective Chief Inspector in the Greater Manchester Police, 'A' Division, Manchester, city centre. The head of CID rang and asked me to organise security for a large transfer of cash to and from Northern Ireland. It was a one-off job; apparently the cash was required urgently for the Post Office Christmas bonus pension payment. It was a sensitive issue because of the tension in Northern Ireland at that time. I liaised with the security officer at the Bank of England in Manchester to arrange the highly unusual transfer details.

On the appointed day my officers and I escorted two flat backed vehicles, each carrying a large container to Manchester Airport. We were all armed with .38 revolvers. On arrival we drove to a secluded loading bay where a propeller-driven twin engine aircraft was waiting. A stacker truck was used to remove a large number of metal cages on wooden pallets from the bowels of each container. I saw

that the cages were filled with new banknotes of various denominations - £5, £10, £20 etc. It was the first time that I had ever seen actual banknotes in any movement of cash. I asked the Bank of England man what was the value of the shipment and he replied 31 million pounds.

The cages were loaded onto the aircraft, completely filling the left side, which left an aisle down the right-hand side. I queried this with the pilot who assured me that this made no difference to the balance of the aircraft. He said a tail or front load would certainly affect the balance.

We took off, and once airborne the pilot invited me to sit in the co-pilot's seat and explained the controls. We flew between radio beacons on automatic pilot. I thought briefly about all that cash, my revolver and what a trip to South America would entail. It all seemed like a dream. We had an in-flight meal and after around 45 minutes landed at Aldergrove Airport, Belfast.

As we taxied to a halt, we were surrounded by a ring of steel. There were all kinds of heavy machine guns, light anti-aircraft guns and a very large number of seriously armed police and soldiers. I saw that there were a similar number of metal cages on the ground, containing the old notes as is usual in these exchanges. This meant that at the time of unloading there

would be a total of 62 million pounds on the tarmac. It was a very sobering thought!

Whilst the unloading was in progress, I asked the officer in charge if I may go into the airport building to buy a present for my wife. I reminded him I was armed. He agreed to my request and made the arrangements. I walked over to the airport security guard at the door. As he expertly frisked me down I muttered "I've got a .38 revolver in my left shoulder holster" He said, "Yes, I know" and continued with the search. I entered the airport building and bought a Celtic brooch, and returned to watch the loading.

Our return flight was equally uneventful, and we repeated the procedure in reverse.

My wife clearly did not at first believe that I had been all the way to Ireland to buy a brooch!



ELVYN OAKES served with Cheshire Constabulary and Greater Manchester Police, mainly in the CID, from Detective Constable to Detective Superintendent. He was Deputy Commander of Salford Division, GMP at retirement. For 20 years he was the representative for Stockport Branch and later Chair of Manchester East Branch of the International Police Association. For the past 17 years he has been a volunteer with the National Trust.