

Markets area has war zone look after night of the gun

A LONE ARMY BUGLER sounded calls at Cromac Square this morning, marking the end of a remarkable gun battle between 300 troops, many of whom hadn't been to bed for 48 hours, and a gang of gunmen operating from the Inglis bakery.

The Catholic Markets area had been entirely sealed off during the overnight exchange of shooting and, like many parts of Belfast, the little streets around the bakery in Eliza Street, took on a war zone look.

The Battle of the Markets started around 5 p.m. yesterday when five armed men took over a car sales room and garage in May Street.

They entered from the rear, held the staff, and set the building on fire.

But the staff were able to use their own fire extinguishers to put out the flames.

Then, it is thought, the gang—one of them a youth who wasn't able to hold a revolver steady as his hand was shaking so much—moved across to the bakery.

Then started a sniping battle against the Army, which reached its zenith around 4 a.m. and tailed off around 7 a.m.

The area was sealed off until almost 10 o'clock, with troops lying about at every corner, girls banging dustbin lids, youths gathered at corners—and the streets a mess.

One section was nearly two feet deep in sliced pan loaves.

A Telegraph reporter did, however, manage to get into the bakery itself by closely following a small group of managers who were brought through the littered streets to see if operations could be restarted.

Inside, the big ground floor was crowded with Army vehicles and soldiers . . . great racks of loaves lay untouched . . . a box contained a number of telephones which had been torn out during the night . . . a police official was taking notes.

Out at Cromac Street the Press cameramen were waiting to come into the area. They found the littered streets . . . container lorries with hundreds of loaves

and buns scattered . . . lorry loads of new bricks from a nearby yard lying in piles at street corners . . . big steel pipes lying everywhere.

Tension was high. People had been unable to get out to Mass or for food, particularly milk. Some people were sorting out boxes of fruit which had been scattered by rioters on the streets.

What a place to spend a holiday. That was the position 63-year-old Mr. James Walsh, from New York, and his wife Kathleen found themselves in at a friend's home in Eliza Street, just yards from the main battle zone.

Both are originally from the Markets area. "It is just awful," said Mr. Walsh. "How can people continue to live through this. Their nerves must be breaking. Even I had to take a tranquilliser last night, but it didn't do any good."

Throughout the early hours, he said, they could hear the bullets flying. But like most of the people approached about the battle they were very sketchy on details.

Shortly after 8 o'clock one local was saying the gunmen must have got away. Rumours were flying.

Two women got out early because they pleaded that milk was needed for the children.

"The children were crying all night in bed," one woman said. "We blocked off the front rooms with furniture and kept to the back of the house. The bullets were whistling down the street."

Said another: "It was a night I want to forget."

Local men were unable to say who had taken over the bakery. Said Mr. Barney Ross, of Verner Street: "I just cannot say. There have been a lot of strange faces about the Markets these past few days."

Verner Street leads from Cromac Square on to Eliza Street.

Two young girls ran out and headed for work. Said Miss Bernie Brown: "It is better at work than staying all day at home."

Groups of young men stood at corners and talked quietly as the huge Army bulldozers moved in to remove

makeshift barricades of vehicles and big steel pipes.

As the battle emergency ended lines of red-eyed troops fled down each side of Eliza Street towards Cromac Square.

One soldier in the Square played Reveille and Come to the Cookhouse Door, Boys.

"It is just to cheer us up a bit," said one soldier, who was searching people leaving the area at Telephone House. "Many of us haven't been to bed for 48 hours."

Outside, small crowds had gathered since early this morning looking at the troops lying at the street corners only a few yards away.

It was an amazing city centre scene. The big road leading from the Albert Bridge was completely empty except for a little cluster of wrecked bread vans. A soldier lying on his stomach at the Square bawled at three men to get away from the corner.

A 62-year-old baker had a narrow escape when rioters pushed a burning bread lorry against a wall of his house.

Mr. John Smith was in bed at 9 Eliza Street when he was awakened by the fire.

"I was lucky I wasn't burned to death," he said. "I was the only person in the house and I was trying to get some sleep as I was on the early shift at the Inglis Bakery. When I woke up there was a lot of smoke all round the place. I rushed downstairs, but I couldn't get the front door opened at all."

"I managed to slide out through a back window and people in the houses about got buckets of water and managed to put the fire out."

Next door, Mrs. Margaret Campbell (61) was in her house during all the trouble.

"You couldn't get out if you wanted to," she said. "I didn't even dare look out to see what was happening."

Mrs. Campbell, who lives with her brother, added, "There was nothing I could do but go to bed about 5 a.m. Things had quietened down a lot and I was very glad to see the soldiers," she said.

People living opposite the bakery moved to the back of their houses when the shooting started.