

# 'He's right as rain, it's just a show'

## Special report: race issues in the UK

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Christopher Alder was a hero - officially: he was commended and decorated for his service as a paratrooper in Northern Ireland. But he died on a police station floor, medically unattended, with his trousers and pants pulled down to his ankles, choking on his own blood.

The rattles of his last breaths can be heard on security camera videotapes that also show police officers discussing the situation for more than 10 minutes before silence from the lifeless body prompted a vain attempt at resuscitation.

Alder was 37, a father of two, black and, according to a coroner's jury, unlawfully killed while in police custody.

The tragedy began late on March 31 1998 when Alder left his home in Hull's Old Town to visit pubs and clubs in the warren of streets around the city's renovated Prince's Dock. He finished up with friends at the Waterfront club, drinking and dancing in the soul music suite.

At around 1.30am on April Fool's Day a quarrel flared between Alder and another clubber. Fighting broke out, and the paratrooper ended up bloodied and flat on the pavement with an egg-sized lump on the back of his head.

At Hull royal infirmary, Alder was arrested for breach of the peace and taken by police van to the police station. From here, after being hauled from the van, in which traces of blood were later found, his final moments were starkly recorded on film.

In 12 minutes, because of lack of oxygen and subsequent brain damage, he made only 37 breaths while four constables and a sergeant stood nearby. After he had been hauled, half-naked, on to the floor of the station's custody suite, the arresting officer, Nigel Dawson, can be heard telling Sgt John Dunne: "He is as right as rain. This is just a show."

When the sergeant replies "Take him to hospital," PC Dawson says: "That is where he came from." PC Neil Blakey says: "He kept doing a dying swan act falling off the trolley." PC Blakey is also shown on the video laughing as Alder is placed on the floor while PC Dawson says: "They don't show you this on the training video."

Suddenly, at 3.57am, the film convulses with action and shouts of "He's not fucking breathing lads" and "Do you want an ambulance?" As officers glance anxiously at one another and two try life-saving techniques, Alder is given his brief epitaph: "We've lost him sergeant. There's no pulse."

Paramedics were shocked to find it was their ambulance that had taken Alder to the hospital earlier.

Although he was dead, however, the agony for his family was just beginning as Richard Alder and his sister Janet pressed for details of the terrible night and the actions taken by police. It emerged that their brother's clothes had been destroyed, police officers' clothing had not been forensically checked and there had been rumours about Christopher's mental state and the possibility - inconceivable, the family says - of drugs.

Ten thousand hours of investigation was carried out by West Yorkshire police and 18 months after Alder's death the five policemen in the custody suite were charged with wilful neglect amounting to misconduct in public office.

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