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C O N V E R S A T I O N S W I T H :

M R . I V O R M O N A G H A N -

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P O Y N T Z P A S S

14th June, 1965.

On June 14th, 1965, I arranged with Mr. Eddie Boyle of Drumnahuncheon, near Beleeks, here, to meet a Mr. Ivor Monaghan in the Boyle homestead.

Mr. Monaghan is a native of Poyntzpass, a small village on the borders of counties Armagh and Down. He had been an engineer attached to the Fourth Northern Division pre and post Truce. Although he was a son of a substantial farmer in Poyntzpass he had gone to Belfast in his youth where he was apprenticed as an engineer in a firm there owned by Barber and Company.

While he was there, in his spare time he took up the art of boxing and trained in the gymnasium attached to a Presbyterian church. Amongst the professional boxers in that gymnasium was a man called Dave McGill, who was heavy weight champion of the R.I.C. and later of the R.U.C.

The gentleman in charge of the gymnasium was a Mr. Sayers, who took a keen interest in the training of youth. Later on in the tape we will hear how the paths of Mr. Monaghan, Constable McGill and Mr. Sayers crossed, but for the present we will hear the story beginning with the attack on Dundalk Jail, wherein was imprisoned Mr. Frank Akin and about 200 members of the Fourth Northern Division who had been captured when the Free State forces overcame them when they attacked the Dundalk Military Barracks which had been occupied by the Fourth Northern Division from the Truce.

The attack by the Free State forces took place in July, 1922.

Accompanied by several men of the Mullabawn area, Monaghan went to a place called "The Mount" on the outskirts of Dundalk and not far distant from their objective, Dundalk Jail.

± 2 am

They had gone from Dungooley, where in a large farmhouse they had a camp, that is to say, those who had not been captured by the Free State forces and arrived at the Mount about four o'clock a.m. on the morning of July 27th. They got a few hours sleep and set off for the jail arriving about twenty minutes to seven. The attack had been planned for 7.00 a.m., as Mr. Akin through secret messengers, had acquainted them that he would have his men in the exercise yard at that hour. They had been in the jail for about eleven days at this time.

Mr. Monaghan placed his mine at the base of a high wall and on hearing a long blast of a whistle from inside the prison (a signal which had been agreed upon between the imprisoned and those endeavouring to release them). He touched off his mine blowing a very large hole at the base of this high wall, through which streamed Mr. Akin and his men escaping recapture by the Free State forces.

However, I think that for the sake of veracity it is better to take down verbatim, Mr. Monaghan's story from this onwards.

" I remember well, it was the 27th July, for it was Dundalk Race Day. The arrangement was this. They had been in for ten or eleven days - they had been in from Sunday morning - a full week, and then from Thursday of the next week. The word we got out was they would be allowed out on exercise, and Frank, he lined them up and was organising them as prisoners of war. So that give him time to have everything just right because ordinarily they used to let them out, it seems before he got organised. They used to let them out one at a time and let them walk up and down the landings, but Frank, he didn't want to upset the apple tart too much and he went along with them, more or less. He wished to obtain for himself and his men the status of Prisoners of War and didn't wish to integonise his captures too much..

1 Cuchallans Ford / Mount

So patiently he sought and eventually obtained this status and received permission for his men to take their exercises together in a large prison exercise ring.

We came in from the place called "The Mount" - "Castletown Mount". We had come there from Dungleary camp about two o'clock in the morning. We stayed at "The Mount" for a few hours and moved off towards the jail about twenty minutes to seven.

(Fr.) "About how many Ivor were in this force?"

"About 22, there was." (EDDIE)

(Fr.) Well, were these men mostly from South Armagh. Can you remember the names of many of them?"

"Yes, there was Johnnie McCoy, Gerry Davis, Andy O'Hare, Tommy Grant, Charlie Grant, Peter Murphy, James Convrey, Loughran - from Armagh and Barney O'Hanlon.

(These are all the names mentioned).

(Fr.) "Well then, you came down from "The Mount" Ivor, and you arrived about twenty minutes to seven?"

"Yes, well we left there about twenty minutes to seven. ~~They~~ were out on exercise at seven."

(Fr.) "Well, how did you get information out from Frank Akin to this plan, like?"

"Aw, there was a friendly warder, and he (interjection)

(Fr.) "What was his name?"

"I couldn't recall his name."

(Fr.) "At any rate the plan was that he would be exercising them having obtained status as Prisoners of War, therefore they would be (interjection)

"They were not out in the ^{RING} wing yet. They were lined up in a corner - you see there were two wings in the jail. There was a circle in between the two wings - the 'A' wing and 'B' wing of the jail and this was the 'A' wing. It ran out into the Louth Road ~~at~~ the Ardee Road. Well, he was to blow the whistle."

(Fr.) "Yes, but he was lining them up in the corridors?"

"He had them lined up ostensibly giving them instructions and, in the course of these instructions he blew a whistle as if that was the signal for them to fall in but then there was a longer blast on the whistle which was a pre-arranged signal for us to touch off the mine as he and his men were in position for escape."

(Fr.) "Well then Ivor, did you make your own Irish cheddar that time in the I.R.A.?"

"No, we didn't make our ~~own~~ ^{OWN} ~~own~~, we got it from headquarters."

(Fr.) "Was it manufactured in Ireland?"

Yes, ~~during~~

(Fr.) "During the Truce what shape did your mine ^S take?"

"Well now, it was, you'll laugh at this. There were two pillow slips and each slip was filled with this 20 lbs. of Irish cheddar and the detonators were inserted with a stick - I made a hole down in the charge with a round bit of a stick and this let the detonator go down without any interference because they were a very delicately constructed thing and the least pull on the wires - they were electric detonators - might have broken the wires inside, so I left a slack length of wire inside the tied neck of the pillow case and left about six inches of the detonator were outside the neck of the bag to attach to the firing cable. So having done this we reeled off our firing cable which we had coupled in electric series."

While awaiting the whistle signal I heard someone

say : 'Look out Ivor!' and I looked around and saw two soldiers coming down the crescent and immediately one ~~of~~ of them fired at me with a rifle and almost immediately there was a reply volley from some of our men who had been covering me. I also fired at him with an automatic I had."

(Fr.) "Would this firing Ivor, not have alerted the Free State forces inside the jail?"

"It ~~was~~ should indeed have but for some reason it did not. Probably there was so much sporadic firing around many parts of Dundalk and sniping was a regular affair that they thought it a repeat of this."

(Fr.) "Well you placed your mines safely in position what then?"

"Yes, I placed them about two feet apart and got back ready to fire. I may add here, Father, that I had to use a large quantity of charge, owing to the need for speed and the impossibility of being able to tamp the mines into position and cover them with sand bags, so the pressure of the explosion would be directed inwards.

Well, I reeled off my cable and somehow or other it got caught and it did not give me enough length to get around the corner of the jail wall, and I dare not pull the cable to release the kink in it.

Well, Johnny McCoy says to me "If you cannot get round the corner to free it just let her go - let's chance it." So I let off the explosion. There was a great cloud of dust and stones and it seemed like a week watching for the prisoners to come out and I don't remember now if it was Johnny McCoy or John Quinn who shouted " We'll go down and push it in - it'll be well enough softened now."

We started off at the double to push the wall in and the first thing I seen was Frank emerging from

the hole covered in dust with his coat over his head-
then another and another and then by two's and four's.

When we saw this we beat ~~it~~ along with the escapers.

(Fr.) "Who was the John Quinn?"

"He was from Newry and was later killed.

Well, the men made off up the Carrick Road."

(Fr.) "Why did the Free Staters not fire on the
escaping prisoners?"

"Well, the reason was this. Where the explosion had
blown a hole in the jail wall had been deliberately
chosen as owing to its position it could not be
sniped at from the Prison Hospital which was where the
soldiers were billeted and the ~~wall~~ wall enclosing
the prison exercise yards prevented them from firing
with effect against the men escaping. "

Fr: "It was a well chosen spot for the mine Ivor, but
how were you told by those inside exactly where to
place your mine? It surely was not chosen by you men
outside at random."

"Well, I remember pacing it out from the first dip on
the top of the outside wall of the jail and going the
number of paces that had been conveyed to us from
Aiken. They inside had chosen the spot deliberately
when they saw where the military were. "

Fr: "The hole, now cemented up, is still there Ivor.
Have you seen it?"

"Yes, I went to see it after I got back from America.

(Here an interval for tea.)

Fr: "Where is Johnny McCoy now? "

"I think he now lives in Dublin. He had lived in

Kill, Co. Kildare."

Fr: "Ivor, when did you first join Sinn Fein?"

"When did I first join? Well I first joined in 19 and I think it was 1917 in Belfast."

Fr: "And how did you gravitate to Belfast from Poyntzpass? Weren't you a farmer's son?"

"Yes, but I always had a yearning to be a boxer and I thought I'd further this wish better in Belfast."

Fr: "Was your yearning for boxing because of your fine physique?"

"No, I just had a liking for it and for general athletics. I went to Belfast and was apprenticed in Coombe - Barbours and whilst there joined the Gymnasium of the C.P.A - a Presbyterian affair, and in it there was a boxing class."

Fr: "When did you first feel that you might be a boxer?"

"I don't think I ever felt I'd become one. I was an apprentice fitter in Coombe Barbours and I lodged first of all in 19, College Square North. It was Mrs. McDonnell's - an aunt of mine was married to a brother of her's."

Fr: "Well, you joined the Volunteers in 1917 -"

"Yes, the time Thomas Ashe died from forcible feeding while on hunger strike."

Fr: "Can you remember the names of any of the Volunteers?"

"Yes, there was a Peter Byrne, Dennis McCullough, one of the Ryans - I don't remember which of them, and I think Dan Duffin."

Fr: "How long were you in Belfast?"

"There was a strike in Coombe-Barbours which lasted for

about four months and I came back home at that time. That was in October 1919."

Fr: "Did the Belfast Volunteers not wonder at an employee of Coombe-Barbour's being a Volunteer?"

"Oh indeed they did and they even suspected me because of my being a member of the Presbyterian Sports Club."

Fr: "But to get back to the strike?"

"It was a moulder's strike and this threw the works out of action."

Fr: "Were you out of your time in 1919?"

"No, I wasn't. I was in my fourth year.

The strike lasted until February, 1920 and the Monday night of that week that I left Belfast was the last mobilization of the Belfast Volunteers that I was at - at least I wasn't notified of any further meetings so I suppose at least I felt I was suspect because of what I told you."

Fr: "Well you were now in Poyntzpass. Was there a company of Volunteers there?"

"No, not then but early in 1921 one was started."

Fr: "Who formed it?"

"I think it was Tom Cooney from Ballymoyer. I think he now lives in Bray."

Fr: "How many were in this company?"

"Not many - about six I think. There was my brother Francis, Vincent, Gavin, and John Gribben from Poyntzpass."

Fr: "Are these alive yet?"

"Well Francis is dead and Gavin is in England, in York, and the least said of him the better."

Fr: "Well I suppose you are right Ivor, as from another source I've heard about him. But what operations would have been carried out by you at this time?"

"Oh just minor things like cutting telegraph wires, blocking roads."

Fr: "Were you in the attack of Camlough Barracks?"

"No, I wasn't - that was before Christmas 1920, wasn't it? Well you see I returned to Belfast in October, 1920, and was not attached to the Volunteers there when I did return as I was brownd off by their treatment of me. In fact from their point of view I would seem to be in bad company with having Presbyterian friends."

Fr: "But was there no one that could help you to explain yourself to the suspicious Belfast Volunteers?"

"Well to tell you the truth I was too independent to do anything about it; I knew that my soul was quite clean and if they thought different then they could think it."

Fr: "Did you, after your return to the City ever meet any of your former Volunteer comrades?"

"Oh, I did, but only in passing when going up or down the Falls Road."

Fr: " Did you ever meet Roddy McCourley?"

"I did. I think he stopped in our house one night. He was with Johnny McCoy, I think."

Fr : "Well, you became an engineer attached to the Fourth Northern?"

"Yes, when I was in Belfast I used to visit Smithfield and buy any military engineering manuals I could get, and it was from these that I got any military engineering knowledge I have. However, I am no military engineer. I got to know how to make mines which for us at that time was the main job and how to check them for continuity of current with an instrument called a Galvanometer which had a very high resistance and cut down the current of the battery that it wasn't strong enough to heat the fusing of the wires. "

Fr: "Did ever you engineers of different Brigade areas couple together and swop ideas?"

"No, there wasn't much opportunity for this but we were given pamphlets on engineering from Dublin."

Fr: "Well, the Truce came and were you in the I.R.A camp at Dungooley?"

"No. I was in the Military Barracks with Aiken at H.Q. there. That was after the Treaty you see for the British did not hand over the Barracks until after the Treaty. I was in the Barracks until a Saturday night in July, 1922, when Sean Quinn, Johnny McCoy and myself went to Omeath. I think it was around the 12th for you could look over and see the Orangemen parading in Warrenpoint. We were in the Coastguard station in Omeath, and while we were there we got word on the Sunday that the fifth Northern had taken Dundalk and put Frank and all his men in the Jail there excepting those who would join with the Fifth Northern.

Right away we held a Council of War so to speak in Quinn's house; they had a summer residence near the Coastguard Station. At this there were us three - Mick Fearon, Johnny Grant, Eddie Boyle and we planned what we could do about getting the men out of the jail.

We were able to contact Frank and notes passed in and out and plans were made for the Jail Break [which Ivor brings us up to where we broke off when the tea came in.]

Where, Ivor, did you go following the escape of the prisoners?"

"I went out by Knockbridge. I think out by Joe ~~McKenna's~~ McKenna's and then we crossed over towards Dungooley. The Free Staters opened fire on us at about 300 yds. range and I remember Gerry Davis and I were near each other in a field and the bullets were passing dangerously over our head. Gerry said:- 'Duck' so we lay down for a couple of minutes - it looked longer than that - maybe it wasn't more than half ~~ex~~ a minute when someone said we'd better get on because there seemed to be so many Free Staters that we were afraid of becoming encircled by them and being captured so we went a wider route, and eventually got to Dungooley."

Fr: "Did they all get away?"

"Yes, all excepting some Dundalk men who had not been allowed out for exercise with the others. I think they were kept in the Jail Basement Cells. They had raided a bank and were awaiting trial in a Civil Court. You see our funds were so low we had to resort to a bank raid for money."

I think Felix Gavin did not come out with the rest either.

Well, we got to Dungooley and stayed there till nightfall, and Frank said we'd better shift for between the Staters on one side and the Specials on the North side we'll be in trouble, and be recaptured, so we Frank and five of us went to Kilcurry - Paddy Quinn, Mick O'Hanlon and John Quinn, I think. We all went to Paddy Hughes' where we stayed for several days and nights."

Fr: "Wasn't it very strange that the Free State military did not immediately launch a raid on this district?"

"No, they were afraid. They knew the Mullabawn men and their arms were still intact and they now knew that Frank and his men were there to augment the force that released them."

Fr: "Well, you stayed some time in Hughes'? Where then did you go?"

"We went to Annaverna mountain, Ravensdale area, where Micky Fearon had his camp for 3rd Battalion, where we remained till about midnight and as we left it to go to Paddy Connolly's of the Lime Kiln. (There was Connolly's and Doctor Blakes that were open to shelter us). Frank said: "I see several headlights of lorries leaving Dundalk" (you see we were up in the mountains above Dundalk) coming over the Big Bridge at McGills and he says 'I don't like it - I think it is dangerous for us to be going down to Ravensdale at all.'

However, we went on. Frank stayed in Blakes and I think Mick O'Hanlon went with me also there. Blakes and Connollys were tow large houses near each other.

Well, we got some supper and went to bed - Frank and I slept in the one bed. Sometime in the early morning I felt a prod in the ribs and heard Frank ask me "Did you hear that?" I was out to world and had heard nothing. "Hear what?" says I. "Did you hear a whistle?" "No" said I, "I heard nothing".

Says he - "Get up and get in behind the curtain and watch."

So I got up and watched through the curtain, I couldn't be seen from the outside but I could see out. Heavy lace curtains they were.

I wathced and I saw the glow of a cigarette."

Fr: "Well Ivor, this is interesting to see how you're going to deal with this situation. What happened now?"

"Nothing Father, we just went back to bed and later they left!"

"What?! Nothing happened?"

"No. Nothing!! and this is the explanation.

You see, whilst in Ravensdale area Johnny McGoy and myself and others had sheltered in Connollys and on the night the soldiers surrounded Connollys and in the early hours had thrown up gravel at a window which awakened Mrs. Connolly.

She opened a window and they asked her : "Is he down yet?" Meaning 'Is Frank down yet'. She repeated several times that she did not know who they were talking about so they just waited and it was a light from one of their cigarettes that we saw - the houses were only about 30 yards from each other - they decided to wait his exit in the morning rather than risk attacking him and his men in the house. You see they imagined he and they were in Connollys whilst we were all that night in Blakes.

To me, Ivor, the whole affair sounds incredulous and shows great cowardice on the part of the Free State Forces.

Well, Father, maybe another aspect of the matter may help you to understand.

Collins had given strict orders that Aiken was to be taken alive or not taken at all."

"Why did he wish this course to be adopted, do you know?"

"Well, as far as I know Frank left Dundalk and went to Dublin to Beggar's Bush Barracks soon after the attack on the Four Courts to try and effect a Truce and for a Peace.

They listened to his plea and sent him South to get in contact with Liam Lynch and Ernie O'Malley and find out what their terms would be.

Well Frank went South, found his men and came back and reported the result to H.Q.

They sent him back on a Saturday night to Dundalk and he was told to draw up plans for a Truce and Peace.

John Quinn, Johnny McCoy and I went to Omeath over the weekend and Frank and the rest of the Divisional staff sat up till 4.00. a.m. drafting proposed plans for a Truce and had just got in to bed and fallen asleep when he was prodded by a Thompson machine gun and told to get up and dress as he was now a prisoner, and he with all his men were then marched off up to the jail.

I think Charlie Daly was with Frank when he came back."

"Ivor, did the 5th Northern do this on their own initiative regardless of Collins?"

"No, it seems as if Britain gave Collins the order to get them out of the Dundalk Military Barracks - or else!!"

"Did Aiken's men not offer any resistance to Hogan's attack on them?"

"No, because there were only a few shotguns in the whole barrack. Earlier the main arms had all been shifted out to dumps, and for ten days before the attack we had been busy removing rifles etc. from it."

"But Ivor regardless of orders from Collins, Hogan could never have done as he did, so eventually the blame must be Collins!"

"I don't know indeed Father, but Frank always said he had implicit faith in two men on each side.

De Valera and Dick Mulcahy and I suppose he thought they'd stop the Civil War."

"Well the Civil War progressed Ivor. Did you then go further South where it waged furiously?"

"We operated all over Counties Louth, Monaghan and Cavan and I was eventually captured at Inniskeen in Monaghan where I had been sent to train men in the use of explosives."

"Well, anywhere in Co. Monaghan would be rather dangerous for so called Irregulars. Wouldn't it?"

"Oh yes it was, and the worst of it was this. We were taken to the place in day light and I was caught early the next morning - my very first day so to speak on duty.

I was awakened by a soldier with a rifle who ordered me to get ready."

"Who went with you to Inniskeen?"

"Mick O' Hanlon, but he went on to Cavan."

"When would this have been?"

"It was late October or early November."

"Where were you brought to?"

"To Carrickmacross where I was for two nights and then in to Dundalk Jail."

"Can you remember the names of others of your men who were with you in Dundalk?"

"There was Mick Fearon, Tommy Magill, Harry Carragher."

"Was Johnny McCoy in then?"

"No, he had been removed I think to Mountjoy by this time."

"How many prisoners were in at that time? Were all the cells filled?"

"Oh they were filled alright. There were on an average 3 to a cell and there was 24 cells - ~~10~~ 12 on each side of each landing - that is basement, A1 and A2 and B1 and B2, but on the A1 landing there were special prisoners."

"What were conditions like in the prison?"

"They could not hardly have been any worse. If the British had treated their prisoners as we were by our own countrymen there would have been an outcry to the world."

"For example, Ivor, what kind of treatment?"

"Well there was very serious overcrowding in the cells and the only food you could eat unless you were ravenously hungry was oatmeal porridge and only my father arranged when in Dundalk fair one day for me to get food sent in I'd have starved. My brother Francis was also in so he also got some sent in."

"Wasn't it generally delivered to you?"

"Yes, a sister of Eugene Sweeney's used to bring it to the prison gate in a basket."

"Well that was not so bad, was it?"

"No, but they also used to heat up the prisoners. I got a bad licking one night. I have the marks of it still on my upper lip."

"What did you get this licking for?"

"Oh, I suppose I was a bad boy. At any rate there

~~XXXX~~ was a Stater, a soldier warder, called Alex Lynch and Jamie Lynch a brother of his had been a prisoner in Belfast Jail with Frank Rogers, a cell mate of mine. Well Frank who was a Dundalk man - his food was also sent in and there was another we called the Humpy Sergeant, Tommy Rickhall, who like Lynch, was just cruel for the sake of being cruel."

"Could the Governor not have improved conditions for the prisoners?"

"The Governor - Fitzpatrick, showed himself such a tyrant that when he was transferred later to Mountjoy the prisoners there found their holiday under his predecessor and had sadly ended."

"Well, how long were you in Dundalk?"

"Some were sent in March 1923 to Mountjoy and to the Curragh and myself, Mickey Fearon, Tommy Magill and I think Harry Magill - oh no, not Harry, I think he was killed in the fight outside - and Frank, my brother were put in isolation in Block A2 where we were kept from March to September, 1923. We were only allowed out of our cells for half an hour."

"Why did they treat you all this way?"

"I suppose it was because we were the only officers of the 4th Northern that they had."

"When were you eventually released?"

"On May 12th, 1924, I was released from Hare Park Camp on the Curragh to which we were taken from Dundalk late in September 1923.

We were taken first to Tintown Camp there, but on New Year's morning 1924, military orderlies came in shouting "Pack up - pack up" and everyone instead of packing up threw everything away thinking they were going home.

We were ordered to line up in the Compound which we did. Everyone was in great glee but the soldiers told us to cut out the fun and prodded us with bayonets.

"You're not through yet" they said and indeed we weren't. We were ordered to march to the gates and at the gates an order Right Turn which was in the direction of the railway station but at some distance on this road we got an order "Left Wheel" We all thought it was Newbridge Railway Station we were being marched to but instead of Newbridge Station we landed in to Hare Park Camp where I remained as I said till 12th May.

I think by the end of May the whole lot were released."

"Where did you go when you were released?"

"I went first to Dublin and Dr. Patrick Quinn was being released from St. Brian's that day and I went to Dundalk with him, and it was an arrangement then that some of our men would meet the last train in to Dundalk in case any of those released would be on it.

~~Well on the evening Charlie Reilly from Derry came near Billingham.~~

Well, on this evening Charlie Reilly from Derry came near; Billingham was there at the station and he invited us out to their place - a large farm house which had always been a safe hide out for Frank Aiken - so I stayed there for a good while."

"Did you ever try to get home?"

"Oh, I did secretly and I helped train men in munitions work over the Border and in Louth and Monaghan because the fight had not yet ended in the North.

A remarkable thing happened me about this time.

Dave Magill was fighting in Dublin and Dave and I had been great friends when I was in Belfast.- I used to be his boxing sparring partner. Well he also had a great friend as I had too, a George Sayers of Belfast - he was a Boxing Instructor in the Gymnasium. I think he was related to the Sayers of the Belfast Telegraph.

I remember he sent me boxing gloves when I was in Hare Park and he sent sweets also. It was very good of him.

Well Dave was fighting in Dublin - he was fighting a Cork man - the Irish champion - I think his name was O'Mahoney. I was at the fight and after it I went to Dave's dressing room and George and he had a great welcome for me, and invited me for a meal with Dave.

We all went to some restaurant in Dublin and we all went back on the same north bound train, but when I was getting out at Dundalk he said 'Could you give Dave a work out in Belfast?' "In Belfast?" says I and George knowing the difficulty I was in about going there said 'It is alright!' with as much as to say I'll fix it with the authorities if you come.

I said, "Well not right away" and he said "When I'm ready I'll send for you" and in about two weeks he sent for me and I became Dave's sparring partner at £3.10s.0d. a week and many's a time trained with him running in Linfield Park, the home of Orangeism in sport.

*Mention of Joe Louis camp, USA.
in Start of Type.*