

## **Green and Blue Project**

### **Dónal Cullinane Interview Transcript**

I am coming up... sixty five born 1949

I suppose I was on the force for two to three years... and mostly all single people were drafted up that time, because of... I suppose, it costs... cost less to send... single fellahs more than *married* people. So I was stationed in Waterford, and... I think 'twas a month or two months at the time, I'm not sure, *but* I remember anyway, people were dodging Christmas, and... you know, people were drafted in for that, so I was sent up... over the Christmas period, and I think I spent two months there. From Waterford city to Kiltyclogher County Leitrim.

Oh no, 'twas just an ordinary Garda station, in the little village... of about... I suppose a hundred or two hundred people. I don't know how many were stationed there that time, but they were all like myself, there was... probably two local Guards, and a sergeant, and I was I suppose one of... about ten I suppose who were, who came up from... the Waterford/Kilkenny Division filled different stations, and that was one of the stations that they...

When you arrived... you might think like that someone would say look, we'll drive you down now to... this is, this is actually the line, or... no, I never saw! I never saw the line or I never was shown... the line, I was told 'twas down there, just down by the bridge, down there, but we never went down, and you know, that was to me a little... a little, I suppose... I thought if I was in charge that's the first thing I would do, was...Yeah, this is our area, and... but that was, that was it... and you did the ordinary week of nights and the ordinary... earlies and that... and we spent Christmas... over Christmas, I'd say I was one of the only Pioneers there.

And I remember Christmas day, I was the only fellah working.

Well, they were all working, but I was the only, So... I did all that, and we had absolutely the most fantastic... lodgings I ever had, hot and cold water in the room, back in nineteen seventy one or two.

Unbelievable now, unbelievable... the nurse, what was her name? She was an old midwife nurse, and she had one daughter, and they were all winking at her.

But... she was a lovely lady, they were fantastic, I'd say she made no money out of it.

The grub was so... Oh supreme, yeah.

Oh yeah, 'twould be oh full Christmas Diner yeah and she was, I tell you now the food there was... now better than home if you know...

You'd be, I suppose you'd be assigned... you'd be given I suppose certain vehicles to watch out for, or certain people to... if you did come across them, to log, to log down same, to drive such roads... to drive, we'll say the main... the main ones, but... not necessarily down to the actual border, which may not, you know these were... you see a lot of the roads... they were all coming into Kiltyclogher, now especially, was one of these roads that was blocked off, so there wasn't much good in driving down there per se, because there was all these concrete prisms or...

Pylons in the middle of the road, you know, but other than that we didn't get any specific... you know, we were there as, I'd say, to me, looking back on it now, you were there as a token, as a presence on the border, and sure we'd nothing...I wasn't told anyway.

Sure I didn't question it, really, I didn't question it, sure I was only a raw recruit really, at the time, I mean I was only... joined the Guards in... March '69, this was seventy one or two, surely... you know... you were only beginning to get to know people more than, you were still, and I was still only twenty two, twenty two years of age. You did not question authority at that time.

Oh Jesus, not really, no [pause] there was another incident now, I just recalled it... there was a reformatory school over in, was it Black...No, that's in, that's in Galway... I'll think of it now in a minute, but on Bloody Sunday we were sent, we were sent there because they were expecting refugees, the Sunday after Bloody Sunday, and that was over in... 'twas one of these, the priest's houses... where they're training priests, and... I'll think of it in a minute... but I remember spending a day, the full day over there, just patrolling around, walking around, and I met... I remember... a fellah... and actually the, we... if we go back far enough, he's... he you know, came from Durrus, and I had... an uncle who joined the Guards from Durrus, and they were actually related, so we had a... anyway eventually came, I worked with him here in Cork afterwards... what is that place? No harm anyway, but nothing arrived that day. I suppose 'twas a contingency plan really, I mean the Bloody Sunday was... a horrible day, and then it was... do we know if it was going to flare up afterwards, and I suppose they had these places if people did, had to run across or whatever, or get out, they had these billets, or these, 'twas like these, one of these schools, reformatory schools... 'twas down in Blacklion I'd say, or...

I'll think of it now before I go, but... that was at another day, anyway as such... but...

Oh I was only on one, one... I've a feeling 'twas for two months, because of the Christmas now and wanted to... and then you were young, I suppose the only good thing about it, there was extra money in it, you got subsistence allowance, and that was tax-free, and I suppose there was some bit of compensation for... but we used travel up and down to home then, I suppose it was our long weekends off, and... 'tis only now, you're, when you've children of your own, that you can understand what they (my parents) were thinking... but... 'cause I'd no fear, you know, you've no fear, really... not... not in the slightest, like you know.

Yeah, there was a bit of drinking going on all right, but I just, I never drank until... I won't tell you when! When I broke it, but I broke it anyway, but I, I never drank at the time, and then, I imagine now in days of... Christmas Days and days like that... you were saddled with... and all these things, but... it didn't matter to me, I mean if you there doing your thing, so you might as well be doing something.

The phone now was a thing... you'd have to dial... you'd have to crank up the machine... there was no such thing as the dialling, and you were told to be careful about... phone numbers that... you were, it was alleged... that people were listening in... you know? Do you know, as I know... from exchanges, that can happen, like and it was just, just be careful and, yeah... because that was I suppose one of the IRA's avenues of getting information.

It wouldn't be that much discussion of plitics like, but... I mean I, from what I understand a local married a Guard. But... she was completely... you know, you felt completely at home with her, but then there was local Guards... staying with her as well, the two local guys, one of them actually was from Fermanagh, he was a native of Fermanagh, which was... just past the border... and I thought was... unusual, you know, I did think... and [pause] but I never mixed, I never mixed with... people that really, you know, I suppose I'd say... in our meetings, I'd often say what we did in the winter time, when it snowed or anything, we were playing cards, you know, and 'twas... harmless stuff, now.

Yeah, well you had, you hadn't any... you hadn't any, I suppose great uniform like what I suppose they have... up to today. But still... it never bothered me that way, right I never, I felt... I was absolutely delighted to join the Guards, when I, since I was a child... I wanted to join the Guards.

Well he'd be an uncle-in-law, through marriage, but there was no, there was no connection that way, but... where I was from, we used to keep lodgers, and there was always two or three Guards in the house, and I just had great respect for it, like, and... since whenever I did, that was my, my aim at the time, and I remember... joining and talking to the local fellah below, and he said 'look' he said, 'go in there now', he says, 'you'll be in there now' he says 'for about six months' or whatever it is, 'keep your nose clean in there' he says, 'when you come out' he says 'you'll have a good time'. And I absolutely loved it, loved it, now I mean there were, you know I had ups and downs but... and when I left it, I had no problem with leaving,

I was stationed in Waterford for three years, Buttevant for ten months, my mother died... and I was transferred then to the city, and to traffic, and I spent my last nine years at immigration. 'Twas lovely, immigration was great for a start, but... the influx came then, and it became stressful enough... people thought it was lovely because you were in... you were dressed up like, but... could be stressful enough, you know?

A Thursday morning, I couldn't tell you what year now, but I'd say 'twas '72, I have a feeling. I was on six to two, and... hoping the eight hours would go by, because we were going home for the weekend, and we were going home with... a fellah by , in police station back in... He's stationed back in Skib... I was on anyway, and around, what... I would say it was around half past nine or ten, we could hear some... some hammering and... like... I suppose machinery going below... at the border, which would be... down a narrow road from the village, but you could not actually see it... so [pause] I was in the car anyway, and... next thing is the sergeant arrived, and he said, 'come on' he said 'we'll go and we'll have a look... to see what's happening'... so I drove away and he said 'come up here now' he said 'we'll have a vantage point here' and we drove up and in through a kind of a... I suppose a small hill where there was furze and heather... and that type of surface... and there was no, I don't think there was any kind of a road... so we stopped anyway, we could look down and we could see... not... I suppose, as the crow flies they'd be about four or five hundred yards away, the British Army, and they... I suppose reinforcing the barriers at the, this kind of border road... so we were there looking, we'd... a black Avenger car... and we'd no roof sign... and, we'd only our uniform on us, and well... 'twas a black car and, you could be identified if you wanted to be, I suppose, but... there was no sign, there were no signs on the car like they are today or anything like... so after about ten minutes anyway, we could hear... shooting... 'Jaysus!'... now, it's hard to say where it came from... but it looked like as if it came from behind us... firing across at the... at the British Army, or whatever, whatever it was down there... so... and next thing we could hear machine gun firing, [makes shooting noises].

Not a fear of my life, like... you know yourself, the next time we're going to, what's going on, you're not going to get out of here now, you'd say that all right, but... I remember it, I never had nightmares about it! You know what I mean? That to me is afraid.

So we, we lay on our, we got out of the car, and we threw ourselves down on the ground, and kind of, half under the car, and next thing there was a lull, and it would come again, from both sides, well we thought enough, now definitely it was the, the machine gun was from the... from the north side, and I would think that the... it sounded like rifle fire now to me, from behind us, which would be the south side... and... after there was a lull came anyway, and the fellah who was with me, and he said 'come on' he said, 'we'll try and get out of here', so we put on our hats anyway, see could we... see would they see us with our caps on, and... I got into the car and tried to turn it, there was no space to turn it, I can recall, and I backing in, with this Avenger, and eventually headed slowly, drove slowly, as they say you're no threat! [laughs] and... got out of the place, now it took us I suppose... by the time we got up off our belly, into the car and ran it... it took us... three to four minutes before we... we'll say we got out of fire, and we went back down into the station, and... the next thing the helicopter arrived, and 'twas over us, and 'twas over... I would say 'twas over the station, like. 'Twas in our, in Irish aerospace, we'll say, and people, I remember some local coming along, and he saying... 'that shouldn't be up there', he says 'that's over...' and you know, and I was saying... 'what can I do about this at the present, go in there and make a complaint' or whatever, so [pause] we were, we wouldn't take much notice, I mean... the fellah that was with me went in, and I suppose he notified the authorities, I went in and I rang my mother... and I said... 'we mightn't be home this evening, there's a, there's a kind of an incident here', and I mentioned cross-border, and 'shut up!' he says, don't say cross-border, he said, 'because this could be an international... thing more than', do you understand what I'm saying? That, we'll say if you...

Incident, like and I was... it meant nothing to me, an incident or same, but 'twas some... I suppose 'twas an incident, seemingly 'twas on the one o'clock news all right, and... people at home heard it when I came... so... I finished my tour of duty... at two o'clock, got into our car, three of us, and we drove off down to West Cork... so, I wasn't asked anymore reports on it.

Well, I'll just give you one incident now, And this is just internal, now... and there was... a man in charge of us we'll say, not in the station now, but we'll say from Manorhamilton, he used come out visiting, and doing a parade, and we'd parade in front of him... every now and again... and this fellah who... he, he, kind of [pause] a good clump of hair behind, you know? And he was... he picked them and he said... 'hi'... I won't mention his name now, he says, he says 'you' he says 'you go away and get a haircut' he says... and this to me now, the first bit of... someone talking to authority, he says... 'I will, superintendent' he says, 'when you forward to me' he says 'my advance subsistence allowance'.

And he was right, and he was right, like, and your man had no, but they thought he could pick him for, imagine now and me above on the border, and this... rubbish... you know? But... I can still remember that... but, and your man then... he was a bit of a... the Guard now, was a bit of a... you know, you know how a kind of a

sloucher, like... Jaysus he became... he became a sergeant afterwards... kind of... called in fellahs himself, like... I hate that... I fucking hate that... I do, like, Jaysus if you're not true to yourself... if I ever got I don't think I'd change a day, like... sincerely.

Looking, in hind... you know what I mean, people were maybe saying that the Guards should be... in hindsight to me anyway, I think you were... you were a way better off without them, because... you see Ireland being a neutral country, you're no, you're no threat... right? And being without, you're a Guard, unarmed Guard, you were no threat, and that to me was a safeguard in itself.

You know all these things about Ireland now, you know, you're loved nearly around the country, , we're not, we're not going to, we're not like Britain, like we're not going to plunder anyone, you know we haven't the forces to do it, you're no threat to anyone, and that to me was, would be that...