

Green and Blue Project Pat Finn Interview Transcript

I'm from Galway. And I came to Clonakilty in May, 1968, and I had my full service in Clonakilty apart from my temporary transfers.

My first trip to the border was in 1970, I went there in March... of 1970, to Ballyconnell was on the border 'twas in the Cavan/Monaghan Division, and... we thought we'd be there for a couple of months, but as it happened... the Conroy Commission... was set up prior to that and... the Conroy Commission was published around that time, and the individuals... most of the fellahs who were on the border, there was very few females at the border at that time, but we were all brought back to our stations and for the first of April, because new conditions came into the Garda... police force, Garda force, in 1970, so that was my first trip to the border.

Well we knew like 'twas border patrols, but now I knew where Ballyconnell was on the map, but 'twas my first trip to the border, and the fact that there was a number of sergeants there, we were in... all different accommodation... and I replaced some of the members from Clonakilty, or Clonakilty District, so... I would have gone into the same accommodation, as they left, so then we would have been on... long shifts I think that time, prior to the Conroy Commission a long shift would be... maybe... nine, nine hours maybe or well maybe even ten hours maybe, you wouldn't have the same now, when the Conroy Commission came in, this, 'twas eight hour shifts as such, but prior to that you could have been on longer shifts, and you would, there was... in actual fact you got no, you got no pay for overtime in other words.

You could be called out, and there'd be no, there'd be no payment for the longer hours, but as it happened we were... now, I got to know the... the number of people that were in the sergeants and the Gardaí and as well, and I got to know the border areas, now we were told it could be towards the border, it's one good thing about... all my trips to the border, is the fact that... each individual... that I met... they were very helpful... because they knew like that we didn't know the border areas, and they also gave us... advice in relation to the people that we could mix with, and the areas that we should not mix in.

I would have known a *bit* about it, but not to the extreme, the fact that you see, sometimes you see people might talk, to talk to you, and they could be... asking you questions, which, which now though I'm lucky enough that time we got advice, in the winter when we arrived there, and now luckily enough again I didn't meet anybody... that... I got any awkward questions... from.

You had to be vigilant, is right, and 'twas good experience as well, because... being only in Clonakilty, and I was in Dublin for... a number of months, way back in 1969, and outside of Clonakilty that was, Ballyconnell was my... other station, first station the border, and... again it gave me an insight into what the border was about.

You see, the border was totally different to the... Clonakilty, and to Dublin, because you met... different people... that could be... subversive in other words, and in actual fact, crossing the border then, as well as everything else, now you went as far as the border, but you didn't cross the border, and the border was new to me, 'cause I'd never been in Northern Ireland, prior to that... and Northern Ireland was, to me, even though I had been in England, and I had met a lot of people from different nationalities... but I did not know people from the north of Ireland, and... also the fact of the criminal activities that were happening there, I would have known nothing about that, and a fortnight was too short, so I didn't learn an awful lot at that particular time.

I went back up to Kinlough in 1971... Kinlough is in, is in north, is in north Leitrim, it's quite close to the Donegal border as well, and I, being single that time, being single we were sent there for two months, and the one thing about Kinlough that I remember clearly about Kinlough is the fact that there were a number of people living in Kinlough Sub-District... and they had escaped from Long Kesh... so we got to know then individually, and collectively as well, and we did... well we met them different times, and we'd have stopped them at checkpoints, and we were aware of who they were, and... that time, there was very few individuals carrying... firearms... and they would, sometimes you would be accompanied by Army... and then you'd be quite, you know... happy to stop individuals who you knew like were subversive and they could be dangerous, maybe we didn't know, but as it happened, they didn't create any difficulty for us, even though they did... tell us that they didn't like being stopped... and the fact that if they, you know that if they were stopped too often that they could, you know they could get angry... but now we didn't allow anybody getting angry, because we said we were told to do our work, and our duty, and... it was part of our work to... stop them, and search the cars, and search themselves if they need be.

No, no there was nothing found that we, that I, at that particular time, now we did do, we did some searches, but there was nothing found of... in relation to anything that... subversives would need, or... would have hidden, so we don't know whether they had or not, and these fellas that we knew like that time, came across the border, and they just weren't, didn't want to be part of Northern Ireland, because they knew they were wanted in Northern Ireland, and... we... did have some... knowledge, but they will, the [pause] RUC, police in the north knew they were living there, but and we were... we were... kept notes in relation to the times we stopped those people, and who they were, you know, just give them some, and would be passed on, I think it was passed on, we passed it on to our sergeants and

inspectors, and the superintendent, and that would be passed on probably, I *assume* it was passed on, I don't know, but we didn't do it ourselves.

Just would meet the RUC on the border, we'd have just general conversation with them now... because again we wouldn't have been, and see... you don't talk to people too long... when you don't know them, and we just got to know them, and we knew they were policemen, and they knew that we were from the south of Ireland, and they didn't, you know, we just give them the time of day, or maybe just talked about a few things that were happening, maybe 'twas... about football, which they would be... you know, some of them would have known a good bit about football and things like that as well, because... they wouldn't know that much about hurling, and on the border, so... and whatever was happening in the areas as well, we'd just have a short discussion with them.

In actual fact, that was my first time using the... the car radios, we didn't have car radios in... in West Cork at that particular time, so got used to them again in the... the two-way, because they had a radio... in every station in the border at that time, and we were able to have communication when we were out, and with the station at all times, which was a big help as well. It was, we thought it was at that time, but... 'twas very small compared with communication nowadays.

Well what we did socially now, we... we travelled, you know to Kinlough, and just before we'd start duty, maybe an hour or two before we'd start duty, and... now, and again 'twas eight hour shifts, we started maybe on a, ten o'clock on a maybe a Monday night... and then we would finish maybe on the... next Saturday, and we'd go to dances in, the Beach Hotel was one of the places we used to go to in... down in Mullaghmore... and Mullaghmore in actual fact, that was one of the things, place we covered actually during the summer, because of Lord Mountbatten.

I was there, there were different times when Mountbatten, the Lord have mercy on him, Lord Mountbatten was, was coming there on holidays... and we would patrol that area, and we got to know him, you know casually now, we didn't, what I mean casually, we had a... short conversation with him too, from time to time during the summer that he was there, he was there for a couple of months in summer... because he had a residence there, and... we seen him go out in his boat as well, and... some of the people that he would be with as well, you know... again we... just knew him... and we didn't know very few, we knew some of the staff, but we didn't know them by name, and he was very nice towards everybody, you know, and... very courteous to us as well, now he seemed a... fine, straight individual, and and... very friendly.

We got back into normal routines again, and then that was my, you know, the 1971 was my, I spent two months at that time, and then eight months after I went back,

in 1973... and I spent any number of, I spent eight months at that time, '72 – '73... and again we would have done the same thing, but again like I said, we could have Bundoran maybe for, you know when we would have... time off, and we would go to the local dances there, and as well as that, we would go to the beaches in... Mullaghmore, or Bundoran, and we got to know... you see we were only temporary, and we got to know the fellas from the different areas, that would have been nearer the border and we got friendly with them as well too, so we created good friendship, and again... where we were living where, it was quite good accommodation as well, we got well fed, and we got on well with the sergeants that were there as well and they were there permanent, there was three sergeants there at that particular time, and I remember the sergeant in charge of... Kinlough, and he couldn't have been nicer to us, he gave us loads of advice, and... anything we wanted, and if we wanted change of shifts... you know he would have been, he'd be very helpful that way as well too.

We went across the border a few times now, we were gone to... different areas and then the border, but now 'twas, we went in our own time in actual fact, I went dancing a few times across the border as well too, but not too often now, but we would, we would just, have our identification with us, we didn't, we drove our own cars, and that was it, we didn't, you know that... we were, we would be always terribly... careful as to where we went, and the fact that we didn't want people to know that we were in the Garda force, because we were afraid just of the fact that if they knew we were Gardaí, they mightn't like it, some of the people that we'd have met up there, so we just kept to ourselves that way.

There was no, there was no difficulty... no difficulty for our ID, sometimes we weren't even asked for ID, But we just made sure that we were, you know that in case we were stopped and we did have ID with us.

I went to Blacklion then in 1975, I spent two months there actually, and Blacklion was right on the border, and there was... an Army post as well right on the border, and... again it was a smaller area, and the fact that even though, what I found about Blacklion is the fact there was some members from... permanent there, and they were very young, and they found it very boring, and that's what I would have seen, that's one of the things disappointed me, is the fact there wasn't enough facilities for entertainment, or you know, off time, for individuals who were there permanent, they would have been... get, I know some of the individuals that were there in my time, they had a problem with alcohol, you know, again that was one of the things that disappointed me, now I'm lucky enough again like that I was staying in Manorhamilton, when I was in Blacklion, and we used to go for games of handball, and different things like that as well with some of the lads, so...

'Twas just part of the duties, and I, we didn't worry about it, the fact that we were, we became acclimatised to it, and we got good advice at all times as well too, and we did what we were asked to do.

There was, it was across the border, on both sides, and they, there was... the Irish Army were right on the, right on the border... and I'd say they found life boring as well, because 'twas very very boring, because they, they were doing all their duties in the one spot.

No, nothing, nothing... nothing to be alarmed about, now the other thing, the other station I went to, was Monaghan, I was there in nineteen... the 1980s, 1985-86, that was now, Monaghan was different, because Monaghan was one of the... I suppose areas where there was a lot of... subversives there... and we knew, we got to know them, now and I got to know some of them as well too, and there was incidents when, when I was in Monaghan... because there was... two subversives I can't think of their names now, but they were shot in the north of Ireland, and there was funerals that we attended, and... Scotstown was one of the areas where there was one of the, those people buried, and... the build up to the funerals was, now... that was a bit scary... now not for ourselves, but you could feel, you could feel the tension, the tension that was building up because they, the Garda force knew like that there was a big funeral coming off, and they knew like that there'd be a lot of... publicity and the fact there would be so many people, subversives and lots of other people supporting them, now we, we had no worries about them, deep down, but you could, again there was tension, but lucky enough I think on all the funerals they were at, and McIlwaine was one of the individuals I can remember now, I just thought of his name now, they were shot when I was there you know, and... you could feel again all the pressure... and... the public themselves were waiting for things to happen, now there was... fellahs in balaclavas, they would have fired shots at the grave and things like that as well too, and then there was checkpoints going to and from the, the funerals, you know that I was at, so again, that was one of the times that you could feel the tension again, like I said... and also the fact... that there was always a danger point or the possibility of a danger point.

Ah 'twas tense in that you could feel a bit, each individual was, every individual was going out there was... was tense because of the... possibility of something happening, 'twas more so the possibility, so... people were delighted when, I can tell you when the, those... funerals were over, we felt sorry for the, you know the people who were shot, but there was nothing we could do about it whatsoever, because the fact that... they were doing probably something they shouldn't have been doing, and I mean sure they were in places, where they shouldn't have been.

I was in Monaghan two different, three, two or three different occasions... matter of fact I was in two stations in Monaghan, because I was in the old station, and the

new station, because my first time up there was in the, in the old station, and then by the time I got back again... so again we met, now made a lot of good friends there, and that's the other thing about Monaghan that I remember clearly, is the first day I arrived there, I was told if I, that if I was taking a drink... there was some of the pubs... that I should avoid... and also the fact that... the pubs that were safe to go into, and that you wouldn't be taunted or asked questions, and... that you would feel... comfortable, which is very very important, and that was great advice again.

Oh you could, safety... safety comes, is very very important to each and every one of us, and the fact that you were... because people would get to know you... in a short period of time if you were inside in a pub, and no matter where you went, that you're a stranger... so and then you would, maybe you went with a couple of more colleagues, and then you like,

They'd recognise is right, and they could be, if you went to the wrong pub, you'd never know what you... we were advised, got great advice.

I felt in actual fact there was more tension as well too, like Monaghan was... was now the one station like I said, in relation to all the tension when I was in... Kinlough, and Ballyconnell and Blacklion, there was less tension up, less tension because I think the next factor was less fear... even though they... some time afterwards there was an incident, there was serious, bomb, there was bombing in, in Blacklion, but that wasn't in my time now, but you could feel some of the, you know, this again... the locals in Blacklion were lovely, but it was who was coming and going through Blacklion was the danger. 'Twas busy, oh 'twas busy, yeah... so there was full-time checkpoints...

It was at your discretion, now again you took, now there'd normally be some of the local... Gardaí... that were permanently there, and you'll be supporting them, more so than anything else, and the same, any station we were in, and they weren't,

We were lucky with accommodation now, each time I went to the border... in, in Ballyconnell and Kinlough, we were lucky enough that we got... very good accommodation, even though there was... now, one in Kinlough, on one occasion... and one of the time we were there for a number of months, we moved into a house, four of us moved into a house on our own, so we did our own cooking and our own, you know, everything else, which was a small bit cheaper than... getting... fed from landladies and things like that as well, and I can definitely say that... the landladies looked after us well.

The weather in the north of Ireland, I found now, not so much in Kinlough or... well Blacklion yes, in some ways there was a bit, a lot colder, now 'twas the month of January and February that I was there in 1975... but in 1985 I went to... Monaghan... and the weather was very very cold there, in actual fact 'twas so cold the first couple, I was only there a couple of days, I went back and I decided I'd buy... pair of long johns, and... because again 'twas five or six degrees colder than here, and the checkpoints were longer then too, because we, at that time I was armed... I was armed you see, now I was in the Technical Branch when I went to Monaghan, and the fact that you were armed, you're doing eight hour duties, and... and if you're there from ten o'clock at night 'til six in the morning and it was very very cold, and there was an occasion actually, on a number of occasions, I suppose the weather was so cold that fellahs went to light a fire nearly on the side of the road Yeah, keep themselves warm, that's what we found now, that there was, other than that the conditions we were in great accommodation in fairness.

Well we had to keep walking in matter of fact, because if you stayed standing you would get, you'd be very very cold altogether, so what we'd do was we used to go in pairs and... pace the road as much as we could, and everything was stopped that particular time as well.

We also did escorts as well too from time to time from the Post Office, from Sligo, when I was in Kinlough, now, the escorts of the mails, and we used to go to the different village, you know we'd be in Sligo in the mornings, especially if there was any morning they'd be carrying cash could be the first Tuesday... and then on the Friday mornings, we did, you know we did that fairly regular from Kinlough, that's the only other thing I can remember now, there was...

I was married when I was in... Monaghan... We had, yeah, we had children in, two children in 1985, '86 but sometimes they would have stayed in Galway because my wife's from Galway as well, and they might have stayed in Galway for some period, so then times they stayed in Clonakilty.

There was no mobile phones in other words, yeah you would've... kept contact with the Garda station, the Garda station was, you know you could ring the Garda station and... you'd make the time, that you'd be there.

Well yeah, maybe on occasions, yes... but then we were home on our rest days, we were home for the... two or three days, in you know every week, so that was...

Ah 'twas yeah, it was two hundred and fifty miles from Clonakilty to Monaghan, but you, at that time when you're younger you don't take as much notice as you would,

The roads were bad, but lucky enough like, that there was only one occasion that I had a mishap, a slight mishap, when I was travelling from, there was a lot of snow on the road from... Kinlough to Galway... my car skidded and snowed very very heavy snow, and I just... touched a wall, lucky enough I didn't do... I just broke a headlamp, that was all,

It was, but you knew, you see, you would be only away for a week, you know,

Come back is right, then you didn't mind that, and you knew like that things were going... you know, that you would saw [sic] them... regularly.