

## **Green and Blue Project**

### **Jim Gallagher Interview Transcript**

Well I joined the Guards in 1969, twenty fifth of June, 1969... and as you're aware, that was at the very start of the troubles, and after the initial training... I was sent down to... William Street in... Limerick city. Two years later then, I was asked to go to the border, and being a native of... Lettermacaward in west Donegal... I jumped at the idea because I'd be stationed... about forty five miles from my home in Lettermacaward... and when I arrived, I moved into digs in the Diamond, which was right beside the Garda station, there was a sergeant and four Guards, in the station, on the *permanent* staff... and the rest of them were all... on temporary, they came up from... the midlands, Laois and Kildare... and of course, I was from Limerick... and in each unit in Lifford there was one sergeant and three Guards... the sergeant was usually from the Mayo Division, and was generally men with fairly... big service... when I arrived in Lifford, interment, *internment* had taken place... so there was... a lot of young men who had fled the security in Northern Ireland, had come to live in Lifford, and were living in houses and in caravans round Lifford, and... most of the day was taken up planning how to attack... Strabane with bombs, and or attack the British Army and the RUC when they came into Clady village, now Clady village is about five miles from Lifford, on the northern side, and there's a, a direct route in at Cloghfin into Clady... now it was a regular occurrence that bombs were placed in cars in the Lifford area, and they were driven into Strabane and placed at... business premises... and then the people who planted the bomb would come... back over to Lifford, to the cheers of the crowds... shooting incidents were a daily occurrence... any time the British Army came into Clady village, on the northern side, they were usually met with... attacks from... the southern side, either from Dunnaloob or from Bonner's Lane, which... this is, Clady is down in a valley and the... territory on the... southern side is higher, so they went up and fired into Clady village, because the British Army had a lookout post there and they usually went into it, when they arrived in Clady, now they had very poor... results from these... attacks, I don't think they ever hit anyone, but they certainly made a lot of noise. Now we had a strategy, we didn't have the Army with us at that time,

No, no, no there was none, there was none at all, in actual fact... Cloghfin, which is the crossing point, was nearly a no-go area as far as we were concerned, 'twas Kirk's, Pub, yeah, and we'll talk about that later on, there was a bomb went off in it, but... we had a strategy to deal with these shooting incidents, we didn't have any back up of the Army, at the time, we were an unarmed police force, and we're dealing with armed terrorists, and the strategy was to... make the area on either side of... Cloghfin a sort of a sterile area to keep traffic from moving from Lifford... who were going towards Strabane, or to Castlefin, to stop them well clear, the Ballybofey car used to go down to Dunnaloob to stop traffic coming into that area, and the Castlefin car would park on the... opposite side, on the Castlefin side, and stop traffic coming from Castlefin, and... just one incident, this was practically a daily occurrence, these attacks, and well anytime the British Army came into Clady, they were attacked, that was basically it... and I remember one time... the IRA reacted to

the way... what our strategy was, because I got a call one day, I was parked on the Lifford side of Cloghfin, and I got a call from Lifford station, 'two two four' to 'two two five', was the call sign, 'we're after getting a message from across... the way', that was... I mean from the RUC... that they want the driver of the white patrol car to move the car, as the British Army cannot return fire, he's in the line of fire, so [laughs] I can tell you, I wasn't long getting out of the way. I was the driver of the car, yeah, so we got away anyway, and the British Army opened up with one of these Bren guns or whatever, on the top of an armoured vehicle, and I tell you... there was some noise that day.

The first... the first action that we took against the IRA was... probably six months after I came in, it was decided to... raid the caravans... up beside the greyhound track,

They were living, some of them were living in houses, some were living in caravans. Yeah, just beside the, the old dog track, and I wasn't involved in the raid in the morning, but they went up and now they seized loads of explosives and loads of guns, and they took, there was about forty Guards in for the raid in the morning, and... they were allowed to leave... and I was on the two to ten shift,

Well once they had, the seizure, took the guns off to Letterkenny with them and everybody disappeared, you know there was no anticipation that there would be a backlash... from across in Strabane, but I recall I was in, driving a patrol car and I was up in a particular house in the Castlefin area, Taylor's, they kept Guards there, in digs, and the phone rang to say that they've got word from the RUC that a crowd was gathering in Strabane, and that they were going to march on Lifford Station, in protest about the earlier raid. So I went down to Castlefin Station and I picked up, I think it was two other Guards there, so we had *four* on the way back, and... by the time we had got back into... Lifford, the crowd had, there was a crowd gathering in, in Lifford as well, 'cause the word came across that... this march was coming from Strabane, so we happened to get up to the station anyway... and... lo and behold, this crowd of three or four hundred marched across the bridge, and I recall *vividly* that they were shouting the name of the local sergeant... 'bomb the bastard', 'kill the bastard', and he and his family just lived up the road in a bungalow, and there was young children in the house at the time, and I have no doubt that they could hear the chants of these people coming across the bridge 'cause they lived... less than half a mile away... but the, people from Strabane joined up with the, with the protestors from Lifford, and they... marched on the station... and I recall the sergeant and there was, we at that stage we had mustered seven, and we had a detective, he was armed... but the leaders of the... the march who were well known to us, as Provisional IRA activists indeed, leaders... at the time, they handed in a letter of protest to be conveyed to the Minister for Justice, and immediately they... shelled us with bottles and we had to retreat into the station... now... when we got back into the station there was only eight of us, seven uniform people, and the one detective, the windows were all smashed, I recall... being under the table in the... public office, ringing Lifford, or sorry, ringing Letterkenny for help, now just to let you, what the communications were like, the telephone at that stage in Lifford Station was a box, and you picked up the telephone and you rang this,

You wound the handle, and you were hoping that someone would answer down the... at Post Office in Lifford, and they would put you through, so I was under the table, trying to ring this thing that was a permanent fixture on top of the table, and stones coming through the window, but eventually I got through to... to Letterkenny and alerted them that we were under attack, now... I recall... that, there were a number, quite a number of fellas up from the Laois, and Kildare area and they used to play hurling, and they left the hurley sticks... in the Garda station, so we thought just it might be a good idea to repel the attackers, that we'd... use the hurley sticks, and we broke up, we had no shields, we'd no riot gear... and as far as I can recall, I didn't have my own baton with me either... and, we repelled them back to the bridge, and then we, at that stage we got out of... the station and we sort of put our defence... at the, what used to be Devine's Tea 'twas closed at that stage, but to, well we could hide out there, and wait for them to come up, throw their stones, once they expended their stones, we'd attack, back to the bridge, and we were up and down, and up and down... and... I remember a young fella, one time coming after me with a stone, and I waited until he threw it... and I turned back... and he was picking up another stone... I better not tell you what I did with me hurley!

Now... this, the inspector from Letterkenny, and a whole lot of Guards arrived, and at that stage we got the old Garda motorcycle helmets, and riot shields and I thought at that stage... things, you know, we were going to make the final charge, but... one of the terrorist guys, he was... he was known, so he couldn't be involved in the riot, 'cause we'd be able to pick him out, But, he was breaking up the concrete on Lifford Bridge, to throw at us,

And then the, when the young fellas came up to attack us, threw their stones, went back and got replenished, now in the final [pause] sort of a... effort to put them back into Strabane... we had probably about twenty or thirty Guards at that stage, and we had our shields and we had our riot helmets, and we headed back over the bridge, and I was pretty fit, with that playing county minor, and playing county senior, or at that stage I was playing club senior football, and I was first across the bridge, and I didn't realise that... the footpaths had been dug up, to use as ammunition against us, and in my haste to get after... some of these nefarious fellas that were attacking us, I didn't see... with that eye shield in front of me, I didn't see the hole in the bridge, and I fell, and just as I fell, I got hit with a stone, on the eye... and I received ten or twelve stitches and I was taken back to Lifford Hospital... and who was on the slab... at Lifford Hospital only the guy, my friend that I had met earlier.

And I remember the doctor saying to him, 'where are you from?' he was accompanied by two well known Provos, and the doctors asked him... 'where are you from?' and he says 'Strabane', and the doctor says, 'well, you go back to Strabane and you get... you get fixed up over there', so I was next up on the slab to

get my ten or twelve stitches anyway. Now... that was the first... time that we took any action against the Provisional IRA, and... I'll just tell you another incident which... would probably outline... what the *attitude* was to these Provisionals at this stage... I remember being on a checkpoint with myself with a sergeant who... since deceased, he was on temporary up from Ballymote, and we were doing a checkpoint just at the, where the roundabout is now in Lifford, and this Volkswagen came through and failed to stop, so I was after doing my driving, passing my driving... course, and mad to show my skills as a driver, and tore off with the sergeant after this buck, anyway... and they turned up into a... a housing estate, up the Lifford, or up the Castlefin Road... and there was only one way into the housing estate, and one way out, so I blocked off the way out with the patrol car, and this guy... this guy stopped at a house, and we knew... who they were leaving off, because they were well known to us... and he approached then in the Volkswagen and myself and the sergeant got out and we searched it, and as you know the old white Volkswagen, the boot is in the front of it, and we lifted up the boot, and in the front of it was a scone of bread... a knife... one of the old bread knives with the wooden handle, they were very... prevalent at those time, a battery, and hundreds of metres of wire... so you wouldn't have to be a genius to put two and two together,

The sergeant anyway... a good fella, he said... he arrested this fella under Section 30 for being a member of the IRA, and we took him down to the station, in Lifford, and the sergeant decided to ring... Letterkenny to let them know that we'd this fella... so we're starting to swab him for explosives and getting the kit ready, and next thing, the phone rang from Letterkenny to tell us let him out. [Pause] So, that was... I don't know if that was an isolated incident, but certainly it's one that stands out in my memory. [Pause] Another incident that stands out during this two year period, is... the twelfth of July, I think it was 1972... where the Protestant community... were, they normally have a feeder parade, they marched down St Johnston village, and then they head off to... whatever the main parade is in Northern Ireland... so they, they had their parade in the morning, and they were attacked and I think, as far as I know a few drums were smashed, but anyway they got away and they had their celebration of the twelfth of July in wherever... they were in Northern Ireland... and then they arrived back that evening, and... we had quite a number of Guards there... to prevent... they, they were able to march up the village okay... because we had a lot of Guards there, but... then... there was quite a number of attacks on... Protestant... halls and Protestant... houses, now this was a very serious escalation, at this stage now, there was the, the Bogside which wasn't that far away, was a no-go area... and... it was a very serious escalation of it where they were attacking *houses*, and Protestant halls, so I recall... we sent away to get the Fire Brigade to put out a fire and the Fire Brigade was hijacked on the way, at the scene, and it was driven down by... the old railway station, now there's a cricket club down there... and I was the first patrol car to go down to try and retrieve it, and there was two other patrol cars come in behind me, and... we found the... the Fire Brigade... the engine was running and I turned, once we had it retrieved then, 'twas grand, I turned back... and on the way out anyway, I came up to the Hole in the Wall pub,

At the crossroads, and at that point, the people came out, had already come out of the Hole in the Wall, had been drinking in it... and they had the place blocked up with tar barrels, and... big planks of wood, there was a building being built directly opposite the... so... I had to make a decision, what was I going to do? So I did, I was only twenty one at the time, and... my decision was anyway to ram the tar barrels and the car went into a bit of a spin... and it got caught on the grass verge... so a man who was known to me approached the patrol car... he pulled the door straight back off its hinges and told me 'get out'... now I recall taking out my baton, and I must... you know, there was about, at least fifty or sixty people there, armed with all sorts of... boards and, from the building site that was there adjacent to them, so I was told to go anyway, and... I headed down towards Ard Bathan, which would be on the road to Carrigans, and I recall... I had the baton in the hand because I hadn't put it back in a pocket, and... there was a... I was able to pick that all these guys off, they were running after other Guards that were running in the same direction, but I was coming behind them, and I was able to pick them off as I was passing them, from the back! [laughs] So, the Ballybofey patrol car picked us up, and we went back onto the main street of St Johnston... and we were organising a baton charge... and it took us a while to get the whole thing organised, and we started the baton charge, and we heard two fierce bangs, and as we got down to the top of the hill there before you go down to main road, there was two fellas lying on a footpath... and... we didn't know what happened them... and they told us 'we were shot, we're shot, we're shot' [pause] and... we didn't believe them for a while, and maybe... we might have handled them a bit better if we realised that they *had* been shot, but what happened was, they attacked a Protestant house at the side, in in the main street, St Johnston... the owner, afraid of his family... well, was protecting his family, he shot from the top of the stairs down through the door, and it shot the two boys who were attacking it outside... and that, that baton charge ended the riots of St Johnston at that time, and... for several days, and maybe weeks afterwards, we were protecting the Protestant community... in the St Johnston area, there was protection of all the Protestant houses, but it was a fierce strain on resources and there was some compromise anyway and it was taken off. Yeah [pause] so [pause] another incident, I suppose it just shows you how *dangerous* things were... we got a report that there was a bomb, there were bombs at, I think it was... Bridgend? Killea... I think there might have been one in Ballyshannon, and one at Lifford, now the Army at that stage, the bomb disposal people had come in and they'd cleared the other three... and we were waiting for them for first light, to... have a look at the one in Lifford, so there was men on the Lifford side, Guards on the Lifford side to prevent people from crossing over the bridge, and there was a sort of a presumption that there was nothing in it, because the other three had been cleared, so I remember I was Station Orderly anyway and... started at six, and I think it was sometime around ten... past seven or something like that, this bomb went off... in the middle of Lifford Bridge... and all the windows in the Garda station came in around me... I was sitting at the, there was an old hearth fire, the old open fire... was in Lifford at the time, and... I got a... I tell you... it fairly wakened me up anyway at that time of the morning, you'd be fairly drowsy at six or seven in the morning, do you know? But, the dangerous part about it is, at that stage of the, the Customs in Lifford had their office in the middle

of... just at the entrance to the bridge, in the middle of the road, cars went both sides of it, and the engine of the car was blown right over that building, and landed beside where the two Guards were that were preventing people from coming across, now there was no-one... to prevent people from coming from the northern side, like the camel's hump wasn't in existence at the time, and it'd be very dangerous for the RUC, because they'd be attacked from the southern side if they showed their face, so people had been walking past that from the northern side... and it could have gone off at any time, and they'd be blown to smithereens, yeah.

Now, I suppose another major incident was, as far as we were concerned anyway, was... there was a new Chief and a new Super, came to... to Letterkenny, and they were, they wanted to obviously wanted to... get them, they were from down the country, and... they decided they'd go out and have a tour of the border, but when they arrived out, didn't the IRA start peppering them with... bullets, I don't know exactly what time this happened at, but it was obviously during daylight, and I remember I started work in Lifford at ten o'clock ten p.m., .. and we got the call to go up to Castlefin... that the chief and the super were missing.

We went up to Lifford and the sergeant there, John S O'Connor, God rest him, he's dead... a Kerryman, great fella... he... he told us that the patrol car that went out looking for him hadn't reported back... and that the Chief and the Super and the Detective that was with them... were missing... so I can't recall who was with me, but I remember him driving the patrol car, and we went down to Dunnaloob which is right beside the border, and rather than drive into trouble, we decided... we'd reverse in, and put off the lights, it was probably a naïve enough way of thinking, that if we were attacked, that the fact that they only could see one light at the rear, they might miss us if they shot at us, you know? So, we reversed in anyway, and Jesus, next thing we met the Chief and the Super coming... pushing a Cortina... I don't know what it is, is it a Mark I, I think it would be, the one with the... the steering wheel.

The ignition, the keys were gone out of the ignition and there was a steering lock on it, and the Chief and the Super couldn't leave... the patrol car behind them, I don't know where the Detective went... and... we rescued them anyway, and took them out, but those were the type of incidents, now we had another incident then... 'twas probably towards the end of '73, we'd a young man... that was walking across Lifford Bridge, or Clady Bridge... with the intention of placing a bomb... in the lookout post where the British Army used to come, it was... the cases when they weren't there, but they used to come to it, when they arrived... on patrol, and... the bomb went off in this young fella's hand... and blew him to smithereens, and you know it was an awful sight, because... you know we were only twenty one, twenty two and have to go around scraping his... body off... the bridge at Clady, and fair dues to the British Army, they shone their lights across for us, they had good lights, and we were... we'd only torches, and... I recall... putting about five or six bags... into the back of the patrol car, of human matter... and taking them up to Lifford Hospital... and the priest, I remember it vividly, the priest praying over them, you know and he was said, it was an awful thing, you know? Now the person that was with them was... with this young man that was blown up and killed... he was taken

to hospital and he was eventually charged, now I don't know what happened to him, but... went down the next day anyway, and there was a gun battle going on... the... [British] Army were still in Clady and the IRA attacked them from the southern side... and we couldn't go down to retrieve... any more bodies, or any more in daylight you know, so... I recall having to go down and taking another bag away where the civilians... gathered up some of the flesh, and I took it back to Lifford to, to... so [pause] I was injured in the summer of '73, 'twas a... a simple enough incident, but nearly had [pause] dire consequences. The sergeant in Lifford asked us to go up to Castlefin, to collect some sort of a form that he needed for the monthly returns, so I went up anyway, and we met Sergeant O'Connor, and he gave us the form and I remember it was a beautiful morning, I arrived eleven or twelve o'clock in the morning, and we were just at patrolling speed, coming... having left Castlefin, heading back to Lifford with the form, and a crowd of about twenty young youths came out of a shed, as far as I can recall it was... they used to manufacture McKinney's Trailers in it, and they... pelted us with stones at point blank range, now one of those stones came through the windscreen of the patrol car and hit me flush on the nose... the car went out of control, it mounted an embankment, where the council had cut through an embankment to widen the road, it bounced off, I'm told this – because I was knocked out – by my observer... and it came back down off this embankment and stayed in front of a lorry, but at this stage the observer... had control of the car and stopped it,

I was knocked out, hit by the stone on the nose, knocked out... cold, yeah... and... I remember putting down the windscreen of the car... and... I must have regained consciousness, because I drove back... I drove the patrol car back to Lifford... and I was in Lifford Hospital overnight, I had a severe injury to the left side of my face, just under my left eye... and I was taken to Letterkenny Hospital then, and I spent a week in Letterkenny Hospital, and... I was under the eye of a consultant there, the... who had no experience of dealing with... ear and nose or throat injuries, he was a general... Surgeon, yeah... so, the ward in the... hospital was like a half-way house, every Guard in the country that was up on the border and further afield was coming in to see me, and it wasn't doing a lot for my injury... and I was bleeding profusely into my stomach from an injury at the back of my nose... the blood was going in and 'twas making me vomit, so I was getting weaker and weaker, so they eventually decided that they'd give me a blood transfusion, now I had a blood transfusion card in my pocket, or in my... belongings, which showed that I had rhesus O negative blood, it's the universal blood, I can give blood to anybody... but... when I saw the nurse hanging up the blood that was... I told her that, you know, that wasn't my blood, that I was a rhesus O negative, that that was positive blood, 'ah' she says, that 'that's okay', you know, so next thing I had a... I flaked out when I got this blood, so I recall my mother coming in the next day and I said to her, 'I want out of here'... and [pause] it was arranged that I... that a consultant would come in from Altnagelvin, there was two of them in the house, one of them was Harvey, the other was a big young lad, I'm not too hundred per cent sure which of them came in, but... the hospital... was sort of caught on the hop, they were waiting for him at a particular time, but he came an hour earlier, and he asked the nurse, 'well, what's his blood pressure?' She didn't know. He asked her, did I receive a blood

transfusion, she didn't know, so I was able to answer, I knew what my blood pressure was, I knew that I had got the wrong blood, so I, I embraced the consultant, I said 'I want out of here'... so, he said, 'okay, it's either Dublin or Derry', I said 'I'll go to Derry', so there was arrangements made with the security forces in, in, with the British Army at the checkpoints, that I was an emergency transfer and that I was [pause] a member of the Guards and that I'd been injured on duty, and I went into Derry and... the consultants in there... who knew what they were at, knew what they were about, had me, I spent about another month in Altnagelvin Hospital, and at one stage I was being prayed for in the local, the churches at home, such was my deterioration in Letterkenny Hospital. So that was in the summer of '73, and then in... I then... was recuperating at home, and I came back to work I think in about November... and I applied for a transfer... and I got a transfer to Manorhamilton, in County Leitrim, I didn't want to go back to Limerick, because it was too far away and they facilitated me in Manorhamilton and... 'twas the best thing ever I did... because totally different scenario up there, people were very supportive, crime rates was low, there was no... very little subversive activity, we had to be on the ball, but not to the same extent that... was in Lifford, and I spent six very happy years in Manorhamilton, so that's ended the sort of... Direct confrontation, yeah with the Provos, you know?

I came back, well I went into... into Sligo then, and I spent two years on the beat in Sligo, and I was promoted then to sergeant, I went back down to... Kinlough, in Leitrim... back on the border again... 'twas during the Anglo-Irish Agreement, that was... I went down there, I think it was '82 to '86... and we had a, the Anglo-Irish Agreement was set up, and... there was a lot of security came up from the west of, from Mayo and Roscommon, we'd a lot of detectives, every, all our... checkpoints were armed, and... I eventually, there was no incidents there, the odd stolen car going through checkpoints, and that stuff, but there was no subversive incidents... and I went back then into in-service training, as a training sergeant for four years... and then I went in as a sergeant, duty sergeant in Sligo for two, then a sergeant in charge of Sligo, and I was promoted and sent back to... Donegal again in Bunrana in '93. As an Inspector, and then I got a transfer, I only spent about five months in Bunrana, I went in then to... Letterkenny, and... most of my work there was court prosecutions and making decisions on files and that sort of stuff, a lot of it was indoor work... and then I was promoted and went to... Milford in... '97... intended to stay in Milford for the rest of my service, but... that was interrupted by the Carthy Inquiry into... malpractice in Donegal, and I was sent into Letterkenny in 1999 for what I thought would only be six weeks but ended up being nearly seven years... went right through the Carthy Inquiry, and right into the Morris Tribunal, and then in 2005 I went back to... Milford for three years, and then for the final year, 2009/2010 I was a commissioner... sending me out to... as a commander in Nicosia, commander of the... UN in Sector 2, which were policing the buffer zone between the Greeks and the Turks, and I came back,

Yeah, that was fairly uneventful, there was no... whilst we had to be vigilant, and we worked hard, there was no major incidents, and I came back in the February of



2010 and I had a month of my mandatory service left and I retired then a month later in March, 2010.

If you were in the Guards, when we were on the border now, there was only, in Lifford there was only twelve Guards and three or four sergeants, there was you know about thirty Guards in Lifford when I came back, and sergeants, there was permanent checkpoints at Cloghfin and... up at... on the way into Castlederg, and you know, all the border roads had been blown up, so you know, things had changed, the Guards got organised, we had then, we had the foot and mouth and we had the...BSE... incidents, you know we, they went on for a long time, and it was a big drag on resources, but we managed to do a great job in relation to both of those things, and kept the... both diseases away from... ruining our national herd, you know?