

# A Matter of Perception

by  
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## Foreword

There is, within the body of the study of Geography, a term and concept known as “mental maps”. Mental maps of the same place vary from individual to individual based upon their perception thereof, and that perception is a function of their experience of that place. Mental maps differ based upon such variables as distance, affordability, desirability, and environment. *In the final analysis, however, an individual’s, or society’s, mental map of a place does not represent to them so much a perception as a reality.*



## Chapter One

Sean Patrick O'Connell came of age in the '60s, but he was not a child of them. His father, Donald Patrick O'Connell, had been born on a farm midway between Mayo Abbey and Knock, County Mayo, in the West of Ireland. His mother, Mary Patricia Hanley, was a first-generation American. Both of her parents had been born in Stoke-on-Kent in Staffordshire, England. They had married and immigrated to the United States between the world wars and raised their family in Collingswood, New Jersey.

Donald, who had farmed 120 acres in Camden County, New Jersey, until Pearl Harbor, met Mary in 1942 at Fort Dix, just 37 miles from his farm, where he was a 32-year old Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army's Quartermaster Corps and she was a 22-year old clerk-typist, one of a roomful of fifteen, who processed the commanding general's daily volume of mail and correspondence. As with so many of their generation, and that before it, they were but one of millions of couples who had been thrown together by war and had just never left one another.

After the war Donald and Mary O'Connell moved to Chevy Chase, Maryland, in Montgomery County adjacent to Washington, DC. Donald, who by this time was a Major, had been offered a staff position with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at their cartographic offices on Sagamore Road in Bethesda located on the Potomac Palisades overlooking the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal, the Potomac River, and Virginia to the South.

Donald and Mary had settled into a small home on Cummings Lane just off Brookville Road and just Northeast of Chevy Chase

Circle where Connecticut Avenue and Western Avenue intersected on the Maryland-DC boundary line. And they had started a family. Their first child, a boy, had been born in 1946 at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, as were all their children. The second and third, both boys, were born in 1947, so-called “Irish twins” as they were born in the same year but not from the same pregnancy. The fourth child, yet another son, was born in 1948. And Sean Patrick O’Connell, their fifth child, was born in 1949. Two years later Mary O’Connell gave birth to her first daughter, and last child, Margaret Patricia, who her parents called “Margaret”, but who everyone else called “Meg”.

Sean and Meg, the two youngest O’Connell’s, developed an immediate affinity for one another. Meg was the youngest, and a girl. Sean was the sibling closest in age, and a boy. From infancy through adolescence they learned about the outside world with the help of one another. When Meg came to blows with one of Sean’s friends he would break it up. In the quiet of their home’s den, dominated by a fieldstone fireplace, Sean would try to explain to Meg what made boys “tick” and try to give her insights into the fragile male ego. At the same time Meg gave Sean tips as to how to relate to girls to whom he was not related.

Their relationship was a symbiotic one, and it continued through their school years. Sean started Kindergarten at The Sheridan School on 36<sup>th</sup> Street in far Northwest Washington in 1954. Meg followed him two years later, and their mother drove both of them to and from school each day. Once both children were in school, Mary Pat, as she was known to her friends, struck out into the big world to seek employment to help pay for the six children’s educations.

She hadn’t needed to look far. Through her attendance at The Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament just down the street at the intersection of Brookville Road and Western Avenue, and her work with the Sunday School, she had become well-versed in the

city's Catholic institutions. Of all of them Georgetown University was by far the largest employer. After dropping the children off at Sheridan one morning, she drove down to the Georgetown campus and parked just outside the stone wall which marked the Eastern perimeter of the campus and just North of the main entrance at 37<sup>th</sup> and "O" Streets. Walking through the iron gates, she approached a group of students seated at the base of the statue of Father John Carroll, the school's founder. She asked for, and received, directions to the Employment Office.

Based upon Mary O'Connell's 3+ years of clerical work in the commanding general's office at Fort Dix it was determined by the employment specialist at Georgetown that she was best suited for the current secretarial opening in the office of the Chairman of the relatively new School of Languages and Linguistics, Father James F. X. Sinclair, S.J. Not only could the office use her organizational skills but Father Sinclair's temperament and managerial style had been likened to that of a military officer.

Schools in a university compete for talent on a campus in the same way that colleges compete for the best faculty and students. And Jesuits are more competitive than most. In Massachusetts the fiercest competitions between the Eagles of Boston College in snooty Chestnut Hill and the Crusaders of The College of the Holy Cross in "blue collar" Worcester took place not on the playing fields but in the Admissions and Faculty Recruiting Offices. Nonetheless, the best and the brightest from Holy Cross frequently found their way into the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Washington headquarters and nationwide network of field offices while their counterparts from Boston College often ended up in the Central Intelligence Agency's headquarters or in some attaché posting in an American embassy or consulate abroad.

This same sort of competitiveness prevailed between The School of Foreign Service (SFS) founded by Father Edmund A.

Walsh, S.J., in 1919 and The School of Languages and Linguistics (SLL) founded in 1949. The SFS was instituted to fill a void in the nation's capacity to train young men (and, much later, women) for leadership positions in the foreign service and diplomatic corps of the Department of State, the international economics career ladders of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and the international commerce positions of multinational corporations. In contrast, the SLL trained its graduates not only to compete for those same foreign service and diplomatic postings but for staff positions at the fledgling United Nations and, most curiously, the coveted billets at the headquarters of the Central Intelligence Agency which was only two years older than the SLL itself. By virtue of their extensive training the graduates of the SLL had the ability, and adaptability, to move between languages, cultures and, when necessary, identities effortlessly. Thus, there existed between these two schools of this venerable university a friendly, and, sometimes, not so friendly, rivalry for talent in every capacity.

In the Fall of 1963, having graduated from The Sheridan School, Sean moved on to become a Freshman at Georgetown Preparatory School which was located a few miles North of the campuses of the National Institutes of Health and the Bethesda Naval Hospital on Rockville Pike. His father would drive him to school each morning before looping back around in a Southeasterly direction, via Tuckerman Lane and Old Georgetown Road, to Interstate 495, referred to locally as the Beltway, from Exit 35 to a frontage road at Exit 39. From there he could backtrack toward the city on River Road until a right turn on Goldsboro Road and a left on to Massachusetts Avenue led him to Sagamore Road and, after a right turn, the Corps' offices. As Sean was always involved in after-school athletics, football, soccer and baseball, in Fall, Winter and Spring respectively, he would await the return of his father each evening on his return trip from work for a ride home.

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Two Falls later, in 1965, Meg began her Freshman year at Georgetown Visitation Preparatory School. Visitation, as it was known, was adjacent to, and shared a stone wall with, Georgetown University. This made Meg's ride to and from school with her mother a foregone conclusion, though, in her case, it was field hockey, basketball and softball which consumed her after-school hours.

By the mid-1960s Donald O'Connell had been promoted through the ranks to the grade of Colonel. Before Meg would go off to college he would, in 1968, receive his first star as he was promoted to the rank of Brigadier General and given a staff position in the Office of the Secretary of the Army at the Pentagon in Arlington. Meanwhile his wife, Mary Pat, had made a name for herself and risen to the position of Executive Secretary to the Dean of The School of Languages and Linguistics.

And so it was that as members of the Classes of 1967 and 1969 at Georgetown Prep and Visitation respectively, Sean and Meg were preparing to embark upon the next phase of their education. The college applications had been sent for, received, completed and returned. The SATs had been registered for and taken, and the results sent to their appropriate colleges. April 15<sup>th</sup> of their Senior years' had come and gone. The acceptance, and rejection, letters had arrived and been responded to. And, as with virtually all adolescents of their age in the upper socioeconomic class, and, increasingly, in the middle class as well, the decisions which Sean and Meg would make would inexorably launch them on their own distinct paths which would shape and predestine their respective futures.

## Chapter Two

“You know,” Sean had said to no one in particular at the dinner table one Sunday evening as the O’Connell family was finishing up dinner, “I’ve always been rather good at Math and Physics and I’d like to find a way to capitalize on that when I get to college.” The dining room table was more densely populated than usual that evening. It was the late Fall of Sean’s Junior year at Prep. The Redskins had just dispatched their arch rivals, the Dallas Cowboys, under the watchful eye of most of the O’Connell clan who had huddled around the 25" RCA color TV in the den while being warmed by the blazing fire in the fireplace. Even Meg had joined in. Only Mary Pat eschewed football for her culinary pursuits.

“Engineering will give you the most ‘bang for your buck’,” James responded. James was 18 years old and a Sophomore in civil engineering at Villanova. “If you’ve taken Math through Calculus, along with Physics and Chemistry, you’ll be ahead of the game. And Engineering provides you with far higher starting salaries than Liberal Arts majors are getting.”

“He’s right,” added Thomas, James’ “Irish twin”. Thomas was a member of the Class of ’69 at The United States Naval Academy. “One of the factors which makes it so tough to get into Annapolis is the reality that the Academy provides one of the finest engineering curricula available in the country. And after you fulfill your military commitment you can market that degree and your years of experience for a fair price.”

“Thomas is right,” chimed in his father. “When I was a boy my father used to tell me that there were only three professions for a

man: doctor, lawyer or engineer. ‘In the case of women,’ he’d say, ‘there are only two: teacher or nurse.’ His observations may not have been very enlightened, and they were certainly sexist, but they weren’t wrong.”

Throughout the remainder of his Junior year at Prep Sean weighed the advantages of engineering versus other disciplines. He liked the idea of Pure Math, or Theoretical Physics, or Astronomy. But how many people could earn a living at them? On the other hand, people would always need buildings, roads, bridges, boats, planes, even weapons. In the end, he’d settled upon the discipline of engineering.

Then he’d needed to analyze the various subdisciplines within engineering. There were civil, mechanical, and electrical; the more mainstream pursuits. But there was also naval architecture and marine engineering, and aeronautical and aerospace engineering, the proverbial “rocket scientist”. In talking with one of the guidance counselors at Prep, Sean had been told by Father Richard Stanley, S.J., that, based upon his tenure as a United States Air Force chaplain, “civil engineers design targets; mechanical engineers design the weapons that destroy them.”

During Sean’s formative years at Prep the SST, or supersonic transport, had been the hot topic of discussion within the engineering community. He had focused his college search on that major and narrowed his choice of schools down based upon the perceived need for aeronautical and aerospace engineers in the last third of the 1960s and beyond. Little could he have known that, by the time he’d completed his Freshman year as an Engineering major, a multinational consortium of British and French companies would have rendered America’s ventures into the realm of supersonic commercial transport null and void by agreeing to build the Concorde and that men, and women, with PhDs in aeronautical engineering, who had previously been the pride and glory of Boeing in Seattle, would have been relegated to the ranks of power utility meter readers by the end of the 1960s.

Among all the colleges to which Sean had applied, including Michigan, Rensselaer, Princeton and MIT, he had chosen The School of Engineering and Applied Sciences of The University of Virginia in Charlottesville as his first choice. He'd received an Early Admission decision on November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1966, shortly following his personal interview in the Admissions Office located beneath the Rotunda designed, and built, by Thomas Jefferson, and had accepted their invitation. As part of the arrangement he'd been required to withdraw all other outstanding applications. By September of 1967, after having worked that Summer as a camp counselor and sailing instructor at Tonset, a boy's sailing camp in Orleans on Cape Cod, he'd found himself in UVA's student convocation center listening to an address by T. Braxton Woody. Woody instructed each incoming Freshman Engineering student to look to his right, and then look to his left, and appreciate the fact that in four years one of the three would not be at the graduation exercises having earned an Engineering degree from Virginia.

Sean, as it turned out, was not to be one of the two left at UVA in 1971. His first semester grades were more a reflection of his interest in the fraternity and nightlife of Charlottesville than his academic ability. He'd pledged Sigma Nu and cruised Lane High School football games for cheerleaders every Friday night rather than prepare for his 8:00AM Saturday morning class.

By the end of the first semester of his Freshman year Sean had decided that Engineering, at the age of 18, was not his forte. Because 1968 was the height of the Vietnam War, Sean turned his interests toward the political and applied, as a transfer student, to The School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University. His SATs, application essay, and diploma from Georgetown Prep, had cemented the deal. He registered as a Sophomore at Georgetown in the Fall of 1968, and began his curriculum in International Economic Theory shortly thereafter. Notwithstanding a love affair with a classmate whose father was the Secretary to

the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the midst of a campus inundated by demonstrations by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in the Administration Building, Sean established for himself a fine academic reputation during the 1968-69 academic year.

As a way of “fast tracking” his entry into the university-wide social scene Sean, who had a beautiful singing voice, had joined The Chimes. They were an eight-member, all-male a cappella group whose core repertoire was made up of old standards from the '20s and '30s, early streetcorner rock songs, Irish folk songs and, interestingly, Irish Republican Army (IRA) recruiting songs. And The Chimes traveled to alumni functions across the country, singing their songs among and between toasts. The college, having been founded in 1789 by John Carroll, a Jesuit, the student body and alumni base of Georgetown was still predominantly Irish Catholic, and these were the songs they came to hear.

From time to time, while singing some of these songs, Sean had momentary pangs of conscience. Although his father was himself an Irish Catholic, his mother was English and born into a family who observed the Anglican Communion. The thought that some of these songs glamorized the killing of Brits gave him pause. But The Chimes were Georgetown University's “Ambassadors of Song”, and fundraising was the name of the game for the Development Office who sponsored these affairs. Quite simply, the Irish nationalist songs tugged at the heartstrings, and pursestrings, of the affluent Georgetown alumni.

Throughout the first semester of his Junior year, Sean's academic performance waned as his obsession with The Chimes increased. His core courses were Calculus, Macroeconomics, German, Shakespeare, and Christian Marriage. During the break between the Fall and Spring semesters Sean received his report card. He'd earned four “F”s and one “D”. The “D” was in Christian Marriage.

After a consultation with the Resident Advisor on the 9<sup>th</sup> floor of Harbin Hall where his dorm room was located, with the dormitory's resident Catholic priest, and, most trying, his mother and father, Sean determined that he needed to take a semester off from school. This was, as noted above, the height of the Vietnam War, and the era of The Draft. There had been a great piece of political theater when Sean had first arrived at Georgetown. A lottery had been held to match birthdays with numbers between 1 and 366. The lower the number assigned to your birthday the earlier in each calendar year men without a deferment with that birthday would be drafted into the Army. Sean's number was 167. His father was not powerful enough to keep his son from being drafted if he dropped out of college, but he was able to determine that men of draft age with a number of 167 could expect to be drafted for basic training and active duty in about May.

Sean had reflected upon this bit of information and had done some research regarding his options. If drafted by the Army he'd have a two-year tour of duty. Ostensibly, no other branch of the armed forces drafted men but the Army. Waiting to be drafted offered the opportunity of serving the shortest tour of duty, but also the likelihood of the shortest life expectancy.

He could enlist in the Navy, Air Force, Marines or Coast Guard. Each required a longer period of active duty but a higher probability of surviving that tour of duty. The Navy had ships off the Vietnam coast; the Marines went where the Navy went, and then some. And then there was Parris Island. The Coast Guard, unbeknownst to many, ran boats throughout the Mekong Delta and up the Mekong River for SEALs, SOGs, and a variety of unacknowledged covert operations. The Air Force, however, was not, purportedly, on the ground in North Vietnam. They had bases in the South, as well as in Thailand, but that seemed the safest option. And Air Force training offered the greatest number of opportunities for training which translated over to civilian employment which Sean could use after the War.

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It was now the middle of January, 1970. The Air Force offered something called the Delayed Enlistment Program. This meant that a man could sign up, and take himself out of the Army's potential draft pool, but not need to enter into active duty for up to 60 days. That 60 days gave people the opportunity to do some last "civilian" things before relinquishing their own self-determination for the next four years. One morning in January Sean entered the Air Force Recruiting Office in the Old Town section of Alexandria, Virginia, and closed the deal.

Under the terms of Sean's enlistment contract he would report to the intersection of 15<sup>th</sup> Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, Northwest, in Washington at 6:00AM on the morning of Friday, the 13<sup>th</sup> of March, 1970. After six weeks of basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas, he would proceed to Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, Mississippi. After attending "tech school" to be trained as a Radar Operator he would be assigned to a permanent duty station.

On the evening of Thursday, March 12, Sean drove down Connecticut Avenue and took a right just before crossing the Calvert Street Bridge, which spanned a narrow segment of Rock Creek Park through which Rock Creek itself flowed, and a left into the Shoreham Hotel's parking lot. The Shoreham's Blue Room was Washington's premiere nightclub, and Thursday marked the first night of a three-night stand by Lana Cantrell, a singer of popular songs as well as old standards and torch songs. With what little money Sean still had from his Summer's work at Walden Bookstore he treated himself to a "last meal". He was given a ringside seat for the Lana Cantrell show and placed his dinner order; filet mignon, asparagus and julienne potatoes. And the waiter had brought him the Dewar's and water he'd ordered when he was seated. Twenty minutes later his dinner arrived, accompanied by a second scotch and water. Ten minutes later the show began. It was everything he'd expected from his first

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nightclub show. After the show he ordered a V.S.O.P. Courvoisier brandy. When he had emptied the snifter, he hopped into his father's 1960 VW convertible for the return drive home.

## Chapter Three

Sean's alarm clock began ringing at 4:00AM. By 5:00 he'd shaved, showered and dressed. Having packed the previous afternoon, he was in no rush. As it was still chilly in Washington on March mornings, he wore an oxford cloth long-sleeve shirt, khakis, wool socks and Hush Puppies. Over it all he had on a London Fog golf jacket to fend off the chill.

Shortly after 5:00 he'd called Diamond Cab and by 5:25 his taxi had arrived. The ride downtown took twenty minutes. By 5:45 he was waiting, along with around 55 other draft-age men, in the twilight catty-corner from the Treasury Department headquarters building at 15<sup>th</sup> and Pennsylvania Avenue, Northwest. At 6:00AM SHARP a chartered Trailways bus pulled up and the men boarded.

In one of those bureaucratic ironies unique to the federal government, there was no military Induction Center in Washington. Consequently the bus pulled out for its 40-mile trek to Fort Holabird, an Army base along the waterfront in Baltimore. The trip took little more than an hour and by 7:30 the men had joined others from the communities in the Washington-Baltimore metroplex. The room held around 250 but on the morning of Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> of March, 1970, they'd squeezed in an additional fifty chairs to accommodate the crowd which would soon be incorporated into the ranks of the United States military.

There was an aisle which had been created by the arrangement of the folding chairs within the auditorium. The aisle most noticeably did not divide the seating in half. Rather, about one

quarter of the chairs were on one side of the aisle and three quarters were on the other. The reason for this asymmetrical configuration became abundantly clear soon enough. As each of the six busloads of men arrived and entered the auditorium from the rear, a 5'6" Marine gunnery sergeant, dressed in a starched, pressed and creased khaki uniform, had barked out, "'Volunteers' to the left, 'draftees' to the right." About one in four of the 300 turned to the left; three in four to the right. The subtle differentiation between the "patriots" and the "long hairs" had begun.

They were all fed a box breakfast of a glazed doughnut and a hot cup of black coffee. Then each was handed a clipboard with a ballpoint pen attached to it by a metal chain and a dozen pages of paperwork under the clip. Throughout the day, when not being interviewed, or "examined" by a military doctor, the 300 plodded their way through the stack of paperwork. Boxed lunches had arrived shortly after noon.

There was one high point and one distinct low point to the day. The low point had occurred first. At about 10:30 the five-foot-six-inch Gunnery Sergeant, Fabrizio Gonzales, known affectionately to those who had earned the right to speak to him at all as "Gunny Gonzo", had stood in front of the three quarters of the auditorium populated by draftees with a sheet of 8 1/2" x 11" paper. From among the 225 young men who would have just as well been anywhere else that morning the "gunny" called out a dozen names and directed them to form a straight line, side by side, behind him. When they were all assembled the gunny turned around, drew himself up to his full height, stood at attention, and in a voice so loud and clear that it could be heard as clearly by those behind him as those in front of him, said, "Congratulations, gentlemen. You are now United States Marines."

The first reaction from the assembled 288, as well as the twelve in line, was stunned silence. The draftees who were still seated kept absolutely silent for fear of calling attention to

themselves. The volunteers' reactions ranged from sniggers, to laughter, to scattered applause. But when the gunny turned around and glared at the assembled mass there was nothing but silence. And then the reality of what had just happened began to sink in for the twelve in a row. Their reactions differed somewhat, but the sentiments they expressed were all the same. At least half had started crying. One had fainted. One had begun to try to bargain with the gunny. "That can't be right," he said. "My letter said I was being drafted into the Army. It never said anything about the Marines!" The gunny pulled him aside. "Look, son," said Gonzales, "the Corps failed to meet its recruiting quota in February. As a result we are required to select enough men at random from among the draftees so that we have a full class at Parris Island starting tomorrow morning."

"Parris Island?" asked the draftee. "That's Parris Island Marine Corps Recruit Depot in South Carolina," the gunny said. "We'll have you sworn in and on a plane out of National Airport in DC by 5:00PM. You'll be bussed from Savannah Airport to the Depot. You should be met by your DI by midnight. By sunrise tomorrow morning, if not earlier, you'll have begun Marine Corps recruit training." No man had ever transited the seven stages of grief, from anger to bargaining to acceptance, in a shorter amount of time than had this frightened eighteen-year old.

The high point of the day had occurred at about 2:00PM. The volunteers, whose processing had proceeded faster than the draftees' because the bulk of their paperwork had been completed at the recruiters' offices, were ushered into a small room down the hall to the rear of the auditorium. An Army Captain had stood in front of them, told them to raise their right hands, and repeat after him. Their oath varied little from that taken by Richard Nixon when he was sworn in as President of the United States in January of 1969. And then Sean Patrick O'Connell was a United States Air Force Airman Basic, or E-1.

At 4:00PM the Air Force enlistees were bussed to Baltimore-Washington International, or BWI, for a civilian flight to Love Field in Dallas, Texas. From there they took a small commercial jet to San Antonio where they were met by a Navy blue Air Force troop transport bus. As they approached it two technical instructors, or TIs, emerged from the bus and started barking orders. They told them where to put their luggage, when to get on the bus, where and how to sit, and to be quiet. During the ride to Lackland Air Force Base the TIs spoke, the enlistees listened.

When they got to Lackland they were ushered into one of two wings of an Air Training Command barracks. Sean's group consisted of sixty men, made up of twenty each from Washington, Atlanta, and Detroit. About half were white; half black. Sean would later learn that he was the only one with any college education. One was a graduate of Massanutten Military Academy, a military school in the rolling foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia off Route 29 midway between Washington and Charlottesville. As it would turn out, these two would lead this flight of sixty men through the next six weeks of basic training.

The first week of Air Force basic training was as much about testing and paperwork as it was about physical training and marching. Based upon one of Sean's tests he was asked to come to the office of a personnel specialist who told him that, based upon his aptitude, the Air Force wanted him to waive his enlistment contract guaranteeing him radar operator training after he completed his basic training and agree to a one-year assignment to study Mandarin Chinese at The Presidio in Monterey, California.

Because the mystique of San Francisco, as promulgated by the rock venue of The Fillmore West and Scott McKenzie song "San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in your Hair)", piqued Sean's interest, and because learning Mandarin Chinese in an academic setting appealed to him more than radar operator training in Biloxi, Mississippi, Sean jumped at the opportunity.

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With the exception of one AWOL enlistee (who was drafted before his peers graduated from basic training), all 59 of Sean's charges graduated from basic training. All but Airman Basic Arrington graduated with the highest rating. Arrington had stayed behind to help his flightmates, a measure and indicator that he'd learned the real lesson of basic training; there is no "I" in "team".

Sean proceeded to the Casual Squadron. This was a holding area at Lackland for graduates of basic training who were awaiting their dispatch to Tech Schools throughout the country. Sean awaited a Mandarin Chinese class which was scheduled to begin in July. But, shortly before his anticipated deployment date he received orders from the Air Force Security Service saying he was no longer being considered for assignment to the "command" which would have taught him Mandarin Chinese.

Now he was in limbo. Fortunately, he had developed a close friendship with a Staff Sergeant from New Haven, Connecticut, who was intimately acquainted with personnel issues. He learned that, if he did not proactively seek out another AFSC (Air Force Specialty Code), he would either stay at Lackland to be trained as a Security Policeman or be sent to Camp Lee, Virginia, to go to the all-service Cooks School.

As the son of an Army officer, a former student at Georgetown, and someone who had always been interested in maps, he selected a Map Compiling course at Fort Belvoir, just outside of Washington. By going there he could study something he found interesting while picking up where he left off dating the same girls and frequenting the same bars which he had six months earlier while still a student at Georgetown. He began his training as a photogrammetric cartographic analyst (AFSC 22130) at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, in July, 1970. When he'd arrived in San Antonio on March 13, 1970, the temperature had been below freezing. On the day that he left for a flight through Dallas Love Field to Dulles International Airport (DIA), the temperature was 110 degrees.

## Chapter Four

Sean's 13 weeks in the Army's Map Compiling Course at Fort Belvoir were informative, educational and fun. Five days a week his time was taken up with classroom work. The weekday evenings were taken up with homework and reading. Friday nights and Saturdays were a blur of parties and barhopping in Georgetown. And Sundays were split between Catholic religious services at the base chapel at Fort Belvoir and the lawn parties which accompanied the polo matches at the Potomac Polo Club in Potomac, Maryland.

Although he lived in the enlisted men's barracks on base, he had a semi-private room adjacent to the front door of the barracks as he and the airman with whom he shared that room were the leader and assistant leader of the members of the Map Compiling Course. Interestingly, the class was made up of soldiers, airmen and Marines. That being the case, the testosterone-soaked residents of the barracks frequently got into service-related scuffles. Sean, being three years older than the barracks's average resident, was always able to defuse those situations in which he found himself. The same could not be said for his roommate, a hothead from Tyler, Texas. Consequently, he left Virginia for California 13 weeks later with two fewer teeth than the number with which he had arrived courtesy of a gung-ho Marine who sucker punched him on a staircase one evening.

The Map Compiling Course included the history, fundamentals and technology of cartography. The students were exposed to everything from ancient maps to the various kinds of

“projections” to the skills necessary to turn aerial imagery into a set of geographic feature overlays, engraved negatives and full-color target charts.

To Sean the most fascinating segment of the training involved photogrammetric analysis; more specifically the use of stereopairs of photos to define topography. This meant taking two aerial photographs of the same geographic location taken from slightly different points above that location, placing them under a stereoscope, and adjusting their alignment until features such as mountains, buildings, bridges and water towers literally leapt off the flat table and appeared in three dimensions. Those features which were higher than others actually appeared so when viewed through the stereoscope. In reality, the three-dimensionality of these pairs was generated by two images taken from the belly of a reconnaissance aircraft a fraction of a second after one another. Through the concept of parallax the apparent height of a feature increases as the difference in the appearance of that feature between the two images, taken from two different points of view, varies. Said another way, the perceived height of a tactical obstacle is a function of the viewer’s perspective.

Once again, Sean was the only member of his class with any college education and, fortunately, some of that had been in Math, Science and Engineering. These skills kept him at the head of the class. Nine weeks into his 13-week curriculum he was called into the school commander’s office and told that, because of his performance to date in his studies, he would be transferred, following his graduation, to Lowry Air Force Base outside of Denver, Colorado, to take a 26-week Air Force course which would train him to be an Imagery Interpretation Specialist; more simply, a photointerpreter.

Unlike a photogrammetric cartographic analyst who was exposed to the full range of the cartographic arts, an imagery interpretation specialist’s training was focused on evaluating the

content of an aerial image and extracting from it the pertinent data which would enhance the intelligence about a particular location. Troop movements, construction, radar installations or missile batteries, anything which might change a location's offensive, defensive, tactical or strategic capabilities, was of importance to the intelligence analysts. Moreover, that information, and the changes it might make in the location's priority as a target, would have to be modified on the air target charts for that area.

The first week in October of 1970 Sean received his diploma from the U.S. Army Map Compiling course and boarded a jumbo jet at Dulles for the non-stop flight to Denver's Stapleton Airport. Once on the ground he was picked up, along with a half dozen other incoming students, for the trip to Lowry. Twenty-six weeks and an additional stripe later (he was now an Airman First Class), he graduated from the Imagery Interpretation course and added the AFSC of 20630 to his primary 22130. Then it was back across country via Dulles and Norfolk to his first permanent duty station at Langley Air Force Base, Virginia.

Langley was home to the headquarters of the Tactical Air Command (TAC) and its resident intelligence unit, the 480<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance and Technical Group. Although it was now April of 1971, with the Vietnam War still raging, no intelligence regarding Southeast Asia was currently being processed at the 480<sup>th</sup>. Their geographic areas of interest were Africa and the Middle East.

The 221X0s worked in the Top Secret area of the 480<sup>th</sup> generating air target charts from the overlays compiled by the 206X0s who worked in "the Vault". Raw data, either negatives or prints, never left the vault. And, because one never knew what one would find within the raw data, all the airmen, NCOs and officers who worked there held an "R" above Top Secret clearance. The vault was compartmentalized from the rest of the 480th by a vault-style door (hence the name) with an electronic lock controlled by a mechanical keypad.

The actual production of an air target chart from the time the overlays are completed can typically take from three to six weeks depending upon the complexity of the subject area. However, in Sean's five months at Langley he produced only two maps. The first map he was assigned was of Lagos, Nigeria. While the front of each map showed the usual roads, rivers, tunnels, bridges and a three-dimensional shaded relief of the topography, these air target charts had two features which wouldn't have shown up on your AAA TripTik. First was a set of numbers which corresponded to annotations on the back describing the target in enough detail to allow a flight leader, or even an individual pilot, to make on-the-spot modifications in the objectives of a given bombing mission based upon unanticipated variables. The second unique characteristic of these air target charts were the presence of RSACs, or Radar Significant Analysis Codes. RSACs were always in magenta and were irregular-shaped polygons with varying densities of magenta-colored shaded fill ranging from 15% to 85%. Their appearance was meant to mirror, as accurately as possible, the configuration of the radar return in the cockpit of an Air Force fighter or bomber on a night sortie. Without roads or rivers to guide them, matching geometric shapes was nearly instantaneous for these spatially-oriented pilots.

The air target chart of Lagos had proven less than challenging for Sean O'Connell. However, the next assignment would more than make up for it. Since the '68 Arab-Israeli War the Mideast had been hotter than at any time in the previous ten years. And much of the violence had been centered upon Beirut, Lebanon. Hostage takings, terrorist bombings and house-to-house fighting had become the norm to this city which was once to the Eastern Mediterranean what the French Riviera was to the West.

Sean's second assignment was the air target chart of Beirut. To the uninitiated this may seem strange. Wasn't Lebanon, after all, an American ally? The answer to that question was, clearly,

“Yes”. But territories of ally nations can fall into the hands of one’s enemies. And, should that occur, the well-prepared ally will possess enough tactical and, if necessary, strategic intelligence about that target area to disable, or dismantle, the local infrastructure as to render it unusable as a base of operations or, as a last resort, uninhabitable. From the annotations and RSACs Sean picked up the occasional curious bit of information; such as the fact that the main water reservoir for the city of Beirut was located under the tennis courts at AUB, the American University of Beirut.

At the end of May Sean received orders that he was being transferred, effective September 1, to the 548<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance and Technical Group attached to the headquarters of the Pacific Air Forces at Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii. On August 21<sup>st</sup> Sean pulled his 1971 navy blue Chevy Vega out of the West Gate of Langley and headed for Travis Air Force Base, California, between Sacramento and San Francisco. Five days, and more than 2500 miles, later he arrived at the Motel 6 in Davis. The following day, the 27<sup>th</sup>, he turned his car over to a private firm which ferried the vehicles of military personnel from just outside the Travis gate to the Port of Oakland where they put them on freighters for shipment to Hawaii.

Bright and early on the morning of August 28<sup>th</sup> Sean caught a cab to the Base Operations Center, or Base Ops, at Travis. The he joined a Boeing 707-sized contingent of soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines, all bound for Honolulu. At 11:00AM they boarded the Trans World Airways charter. Accounting for the time difference, by mid-afternoon they had landed at Honolulu International Airport. The lucky ones, like Sean, disembarked and were met by buses which would take them to Fort Shafter, Pearl Harbor Naval Base, Hickam Air Force Base or Kaneohe Marine Corps Air Station. For the rest they only had three hours to stretch their legs in the terminal, grab a drink in the bar, and buy

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a souvenir in the airport's gift shop before reboarding the plane. With a new flight crew and tanks freshly topped off with jet fuel, the 707 lumbered down the runway on the final leg of its journey to Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines. Next stop, Vietnam.

## Chapter Five

Sean Patrick O’Connell had turned twenty-one while living in the barracks at Langley Air Force Base. But he became a man in Hawaii. Manhood is not measured by chronological age, but, rather, by maturity. And maturity would be what was demanded of him at Hickam.

The most superficial insignia of that maturity Sean wore on his arm every day. When he’d reported for work that first day in September, 1971, he had worn the two stripes of an Airman First Class. Three months later he’d been promoted to Sergeant. And, after what had seemed to him the toughest year of his life, in May of 1973, at the age of twenty-three, he’d been promoted again, this time to the rank of Staff Sergeant.

The promotion to Sergeant had been a function of four variables: his time in service, time in grade, passing the test which upgraded his primary AFSC from 22130 to 22150, and outstanding Airman Performance Reports, or “APR”s, which had been all “9”s (out of a possible “9”). The promotion to Staff Sergeant in May of ’73 was based upon time in service, 18 months time in grade, and another “9” on his annual APR.

For the first year in Hawaii Sean had shared a small apartment on Wilder Avenue with another airman. It was just down the street to the West, or “Ewa”, of The Punahou School, an elite prep school established for the education of children with a high enough percentage of “Native” blood to be considered true Hawaiians. Not far to the East, or “Diamond Head”, of the apartment was the Manoa campus of The University of Hawaii. This would later turn out to be quite handy.

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After just over a year in the Air Force Sean had come to two conclusions regarding his future. The first was that if he were going to remain in the Air Force after his first enlistment he would do so as an officer. The second conclusion was that, whether or not he made the Air Force a career, a Bachelor's degree was the minimum education which would allow him to become an officer or become successful in civilian life. For this reason he had applied to, and been accepted by, The University of Hawaii as an undergraduate Engineering major. All his previous college coursework with a "C" or higher grade, both from Virginia and Georgetown, was transferable. This made him a Sophomore/Junior.

Sean had applied to the Headquarters of the Pacific Air Forces, of which the 548<sup>th</sup> was a tenant unit, for a 90-day "TDY", or "Temporary Duty", assignment to The University of Hawaii. Because he was, ostensibly, pursuing an Engineering degree, of which the Air Force was in desperate need, and because at the level of a Junior he could not take the required courses after hours or on weekends, his request was granted for the months of June, July and August, 1972. A TDY basically meant that his "job" was to attend school. It also meant that during the Summer of 1972 Sean never once was required to wear his uniform, and he seldom got a haircut, or shaved.

In September he and his roommate moved to a condo on Green Street in Makiki Heights about a dozen blocks Ewa from the first apartment but at the base of Punchbowl crater and high enough to have a view from the lanai, or balcony, that extended from Diamond Head in the East to Honolulu International Airport in the West. For the second time, in the Summer of 1973, PACAF Headquarters granted him the courtesy of a three-month TDY.

When all was said and done, however, it was his work that required of him the maturity, integrity and commitment that would turn a boy into a man. The first air target chart he was

assigned was a stretch of the Sino-Soviet border which divided China from the USSR. For the past few years there had been the occasional border skirmish which had erupted and threatened to pit the two Communist superpowers against one another in a land grab for natural resources with which to support their people. And this particular stretch of border had the interesting characteristic of two sets of antenna arrays, one on either side, transmitting Radio Moscow into China and broadcasting Radio Peking into the USSR. Ultimately, there was a great deal of saber rattling and rhetoric, but nothing came of it.

Sean's second chart was of Hong Kong, Macao, and Kowloon Island. Because of the high densities of the populations, industries and infrastructures, this chart, by all accounts, had the largest number of annotations and RSACs that any of the old timers, including those who had done the photo interpretation during the Cuban Missile Crisis, had ever seen. He finished it up in late April of 1972. As it turned out it was just in time as all Hell was about to break loose at the 548<sup>th</sup>.

The signature air superiority gesture of the end of the Johnson administration, as well as the first Nixon administration, had been Operation Arc Light. The carpet-bombing by Strategic Air Command B-52s on loan to PACAF had targeted the Ho Chi Minh Trail as well as other North-South routes and the personnel and vehicles which traveled them. In May of 1972, with the presidential election six months away, Nixon upped the ante.

The city of Haiphong was the seat of heavy industry in North Vietnam and was home to one of that country's few deep-water harbors. In early May the President ordered the mining of Haiphong harbor by naval assets operating in the Gulf of Tonkin and the South China Sea. With this gesture the burner under the hostilities was turned up from "High" to "Hotter'n Hell".

Sean and his fellow cartographers, along with the photointerpreters who supported them, went on 'round the clock

alert. They were subject to recall at any time of the day or night. When not at work or at home they had to let their immediate superiors know how to reach them. The easiest way to go about your life was to be at work, at home, or at Bellows Air Force Station, a small Air Force installation on the North Shore which was made up of a club, a complex of rustic cabins, and a long wide stretch of white sand beach. From time to time the public address system would come on recalling individual airmen, or entire units, back to Hickam. This strenuous regimen was broken for Sean only by his 90-day TDY for school in the Summer of '73.

The code name for the activity of mining Haiphong harbor was Operation Pocket Money. But there was a concurrent mission whose name would have had little meaning outside of the U.S. Air Force; Operation Compass Link. Most satellites operated by the military, or the CIA, orbited the earth collecting images of wide swaths of the surface for analysis at the National Photographic Interpretation Center, or NPIC, at the old Washington Navy Yard. Compass Link was different.

The airborne component of Compass Link was a satellite in a geosynchronous orbit above the Pacific Ocean. By traveling at the same speed as the earth revolved, adjusted for both latitude and altitude, Compass Link maintained a fixed position above the earth exactly halfway between Hickam Air Force Base and Ubon Royal Thai Air Force Base in Southeast Asia.

Every morning U.S. Air Force aircraft would fly numerous sorties to take out tactical targets in both North and South Vietnam. Hot on their heels would be flights of RF-4Cs out of Ubon with high-speed cameras mounted in the bellies of their fuselages. They would overfly the day's targets to determine what had been destroyed and what was left standing. Upon their return to Ubon the film from the reconnaissance flights would be developed and the images beamed by satellite dish uplink to the Compass Link satellite. The satellite, powered by multiple arrays

of solar panels, would amplify the signals and relay them to a satellite dish downlink in Hawaii. There the images would be analyzed by a team of photointerpreters to determine which targets the sorties had been tasked to take out were gone and which remained. If a target needed to be hit again a new target overlay was prepared by the photointerpreters and engraved by the cartographers. The revised target images were then uplinked to Compass Link for relay back to Ubon. When the signals arrived in Thailand they were reproduced both as slides for the pilots' morning briefing and prints to be handed out to flight leaders to guide them on the day's sorties. This process went on 24 hours a day, seven days a week, from May, 1972, through early 1973. It was then that an effort to implement Richard Nixon's "secret plan" to bring about "peace with honor", under the watchful eye of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, was initiated.

Sean was scheduled for rotation back to the U.S. mainland September 1, 1973. Because of the short amount of time that would be left on his enlistment (6 months) when he returned, Sean was eligible for an "early out". The Air Force would discharge such airmen directly to their home, or place of enlistment, rather than pay to relocate them twice in 6 months. Sean had gotten a list of civilian employers who hired cartographers from the Base Personnel Office. He'd sent each a detailed resume, leaving out only classified information. Baker, Hagstrom, Rand McNally, National Geographic and more, he'd written every employer known to the U.S. Air Force. Because the war was now winding down, and the U.S. was being flooded with discharged veterans from every branch of the service, it was a buyer's market.

Because he'd received no job offers, Sean did not elect to exercise his "early out" option. And then, on the day he was to fly back to the mainland, he received a phone call in his work area at the 548<sup>th</sup>. It was the head of personnel at Hoskins-Western-Sonderegger, a consulting engineering firm in Lincoln, Nebraska.

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They'd called to offer him a job doing for them exactly what he'd been doing for the Air Force for the past 3 ½ years. Unfortunately he'd had to decline as the window of opportunity had now closed.

As a treat to himself Sean had taken the allowance the Air Force had given him for his flight to San Francisco and upgraded the ticket to First Class. He took a "Red Eye" United 747 out of Honolulu and arrived in San Francisco just after sunrise. As he had shipped his recently-purchased air conditioned white 1972 Volkswagen convertible to Oakland weeks before, and moved into on-base transient housing due to his lack of transportation, Sean's car was waiting for him. He caught a cab and picked up his car an hour later. Because of the high life he'd lived in First Class, and his lack of sleep, he only made it as far as Sacramento that day. The next day he made it as far as Salt Lake City. On the third day he drove to Vail, Colorado. Four days later he arrived at the apartment he'd rented in the Winston Townhouses in Newport News via telephone and the U.S. mail. He still had a week before he had to report for duty back at the 480<sup>th</sup> so he wiled away the hours watching Sam Ervin chair the Senate Select Committee's Watergate hearings on a 12" black and white TV he'd packed in the VW's trunk under the front hood before he shipped it from Hawaii.

When he got to the 480<sup>th</sup> he had less than six months left on his enlistment. But Sean was gung-ho! He applied to, and was accepted by, William and Mary College in nearby Williamsburg. He talked to the 480<sup>th</sup>'s enlisted Retention Officer about re-enlisting. Sean had figured that in 1976 or 1977, at the age of 26 or 27, he would receive his Bachelor's degree and be off to Officer Candidate School at Medina under the auspices of Operation Bootstrap which turned experienced enlisted men into officers. And he'd applied to the Headquarters of the Tactical Air Command for a 90-day TDY for the Summer of 1974. But, to his surprise, they'd said "No". Although PACAF had said "Yes" 12

semester hours earlier, TAC had said “No”. Sean was frustrated, and Sean was angry.

The day after he learned that he’d been turned down by TAC Headquarters, Sean called Lincoln, Nebraska. He’d once again spoken to the head of Personnel at Hoskins-Western-Sonderegger. “Is the job you offered me six months ago still available?” Sean had asked. “It’s yours if you want it,” had come the reply. And so a potential career Air Force officer became a one-term enlistee. On the morning of March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1974, Sean headed out the same West Gate he’d gone through 2 ½ years earlier. But this time he was in a Volkswagen, not a Vega, and he was headed not for Hawaii but for America’s Heartland.

That first night on the road he’d stayed at the Holiday Inn in Charleston, West Virginia, and watched Bill Walton and UCLA play in the NCAA basketball tournament. The next few days all ran together. But then he’d crossed the Missouri River and found his way to Louisville, Nebraska. He’d never been in Nebraska before but the main street in Louisville looked like they’d just taken down the hitchin’ post for the patrons’ horses in front of the General Store the day before. “What the Hell have I done?” Sean asked himself. He’d have been surprised to know that he was only several miles away from a nuclear power plant.

By that evening he’d checked into a room at the airport Holiday Inn in Lincoln. But he’d have to check out by Thursday morning. The next four days the Holiday Inn was booked solid by teams playing in the Girls State High School Basketball Championships. Welcome to the Midwest!

## Chapter Six

Ever remembering that he'd resolved to pursue further education, Sean had made a second call to Lincoln the day he'd accepted the position as a cartographer. That call was to the Office of the Registrar at The University of Nebraska. He'd had his transcripts from Virginia, Georgetown and Hawaii with him and had read them to an Admissions Officer. Based upon Sean's pledge to follow up his phone call with official transcripts sent from the three schools he was admitted into the Cartography Program within the Department of Geography as an incoming Junior for the Fall Semester of 1974.

Had Sean kept up a standard academic pace after his graduation from Georgetown Prep in June of 1967, he could have been expected to graduate from college in 1971. But, due to his four-year detour into the U.S. Air Force during the Vietnam War, he was now looking at an anticipated graduation date of December '75 or June '76. His sister Meg, however, had met with no such obstacles. Two years her brother's junior, she had graduated from Visitation in June of 1969 and entered Georgetown's School of Language and Linguistics, where her mother worked, in the Fall. Four years later she'd graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in French and a minor in German.

The theory behind language education in 1969, whether at the high school or college level, was fundamentally the same. The first year was consumed with the learning of a basic vocabulary and the rules of grammar. The second year progresses into the

idiomatic aspects of the language as well as its use in literature and the arts. The third year curriculum encompasses not only the remaining aspects of the language but an immersion in the culture of a nation for which the language is the native tongue. In the case of French, Switzerland was one such country and Meg had spent her Junior year abroad at The University of Freiburg.

Good linguists in any foreign language have always been hard to find in the United States, and nowhere were they more coveted than at the government's own Department of State and Central Intelligence Agency. Upon her return from Switzerland in 1972 Meg had been actively recruited by both. Perhaps because she had seen one too many James Bond movies, Meg ultimately chose the CIA. In the Spring of her Senior year Meg had left the dorm early one morning and walked down the hill from the Georgetown campus, across Key Bridge which spanned the Potomac River between Washington and Virginia, and entered the offices of the Personnel Department of the CIA housed in a high-rise building in Rosslyn.

The hiring process began with a series of standardized tests designed to assess both her aptitudes and emotional stability. She was then interviewed by a team of language analysts to test her proficiency in both French and German. Then came the laborious task of filling out the paperwork which would allow federal investigators to vet and evaluate her life's history, from her birth at Walter Reed to her childhood on Cummings Lane to her undergraduate years at Georgetown. Finally, she hopped on a CIA shuttle bus for the brief ride out George Washington Parkway to the CIA headquarters building in Langley, Virginia. There she completed the application process by taking a polygraph test. The language analysts had told her that if the polygraph took more than thirty minutes she'd know she had a problem. She was done in twenty-five.

As Meg rode the shuttle back to Rosslyn, and walked back to her dorm room, she knew there were only two things to do. The

first was to successfully complete the Spring semester of her Senior year. The second was to wait. In early May Meg learned she'd been accepted for employment by the CIA. Following her graduation exercises Meg had taken two weeks off to decompress. But by mid-July she had begun her new employee orientation which began with a classified briefing and welcome from the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) in the main auditorium at headquarters. By September 1, 1973, Meg's one-year probationary period as a language analyst had commenced.

During the Summer of 1974 Meg made a momentous decision. She decided to apply for assignment as a field operative, a secret agent, a spy. Yet another round of psychological testing, and another background investigation, turned up nothing untoward. By October she'd been tasked to Camp Peary, Virginia. This installation, Northeast of Williamsburg, North of Yorktown Naval Weapons Station and Northwest of Langley Air Force Base was known, affectionately, as "The Farm".

At The Farm potential field operatives underwent physical conditioning, marksmanship and small explosives training, and indoctrination into the various methods of "tradecraft" by which espionage is conducted. Some of them were so old that they dated back to the days of Sun Tzu and dynastic China, and his seminal work on conflict and espionage, *The Art of War*.

Following her graduation from The Farm Meg returned to Langley to await her first assignment. One of the situations developing on the world scene in which the CIA, and the United States government, had a great interest was the political instability within the Italian government and concurrent ascendance of that nation's Communist Party.

At the end of World War II Italy had the strongest Communist Party in Western Europe. But its influence had abated over time. The seeds of this newly invigorated movement had been sown by agents of the Stasi, or East German secret police, in concert with

the vibrant Communist Party in France. The outcome of the impending national election was in serious doubt with a distinct possibility that the Communist Party would either win or force the creation of a coalition government with the Communist Party wielding veto power. The destabilization of the Italian Communist Party prior to the general elections became a mission for the CIA, and Mary Margaret O'Connell was to be one of the members of the team sent in to do just that.

In order to create her "bona fides" with the local Communist sympathizers in Rome a "legend" had been created for her. Her new identity, with papers to match, was "Fraulein Anna Weissmann". Born in East Berlin in 1951, she was the daughter of two Holocaust survivors whose identity papers had long since been destroyed, she had graduated from the Gymnasium, or high school, in 1969 and made her way into the Communist "underground" in Paris. She arrived in Rome in early 1975 and quickly fell in with a group of young college students and Communist activists. In concert with her colleagues from the CIA who were also "in country", they conducted an intense campaign of political sabotage and misinformation. Campaign posters, which were to be printed and posted, were neither printed nor posted. Communiqués from the Communist Party which were to have been distributed to the media for publication or broadcast were either never issued or released in such a form that the message was either garbled or contrary to the beliefs and needs of the Italian population. And isolated acts of sabotage, the occasional explosion or fire in which no one was injured but significant property damage was sustained, were being attributed to young college students who held Communist sympathies. The Communist politicians' campaigns were in shambles and their legitimacy with the people was undermined. In the end a more conservative coalition government emerged from the general election and Fraulein Anna Weissmann was instructed by her

handler, the Deputy U.S. Ambassador for “Cultural Affairs”, to remain in place until her next assignment was decided upon.

Throughout all of this Sean Patrick O’Connell had been leading two full-time lives. Starting ten days after his discharge from the Air Force he began work as a cartographer for the consulting engineering firm of Hoskins-Western-Sonderregger in Lincoln. Because HWS held a contract with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to map the floodplain of the Missouri River and its tributaries from Omaha to Kansas City, and because the Corps’ specifications for mapping were identical to those which had been taught to him at the Defense Mapping Agency school he’d attended at Fort Belvoir, Sean needed little, if any, supervision. He did, however, check in with his boss on a weekly basis. He’d been given the keys to the HWS building so that he could work at any time of the day or night.

This had come in tremendously handy in September of 1974 when Sean registered as a full-time undergraduate student at The University of Nebraska with a major in Geography and a minor in Political Science. When Sean’s courses met during the day he could work at night; when they met at night he could work during the day.

Taking 18 semester hours per semester Sean made rapid progress toward his Bachelor’s degree. The faculty of the Geography department was unique. Three of the full-time faculty members, including the department chair, were former members of the United States intelligence community in one form or another. One member was a young lad from the British Isles who would himself go on to be department chair, who’d gotten his PhD at Nebraska and had just never gone home. A fifth was a Korean War veteran of Hispanic descent from the South Bronx in New York who had put himself through college at the lily-white LaCrosse campus of The University of Wisconsin. He’d received his Master’s and PhD at Iowa before moving to Lincoln to teach at Nebraska.

Compared to the Geography department the faculty of the Department of Political Science was fairly tame. The notable exception was the department chair, and Assistant Dean of The College of Arts & Sciences, who was a beautiful blonde in her mid-forties who was married to a mortician who ran Lincoln's largest chain of funeral homes. There was little remarkable about the rest.

Sean was making incredible progress toward his degree. Having taken 18 semester hours in the Fall of '74 and the Spring of '75, along with a full-time Summer School courseload, Sean was on track to graduate in December of 1975. He had applied to go on for his Master's degree in Geography and been accepted. He'd also been offered a Graduate Research Assistantship which, it turned out, meant making the maps for all of the faculty members' publications. Also, in the Fall of 1975, based upon his grade point average and outstanding work, Sean had been inducted into Pi Sigma Alpha, the National Political Science Honor Society.

And then, one day in the Fall of '75, an event took place which would change his life forever. One of his Political Science professors, a young man who had graduated from Tulane and would himself one day go on to be department chair, approached Sean and invited him to prepare a proposal which would be submitted on behalf of The University of Nebraska to the Fulbright Scholarship Program in New York.

"This could really put me on the map," Sean said to himself, noting after the fact the irony in this statement. But, while Sean was good at Political Science he was even better at Geography. With a major in Geography and a minor in Political Science, Sean had always thought of himself as a student of Political Geography. If he was ever asked exactly what that meant, which he was frequently, his answer was always the same. In fact, he'd developed it himself. "It is the study of the movement of political

phenomena across space over time.” Sean never knew if there was a formally accepted definition of Political Geography, nor had he ever bothered to ask. He liked his answer and he was sticking to it.

But just what did Sean know about Fulbright Scholarships? First, he knew they were for study overseas. That presented his first hurdle. Sean had taken two years of German at Georgetown Prep because it was a graduation requirement to have two years of a foreign language. He’d taken three semesters of German at Georgetown but, although he’d passed all three, the grades of only two semesters had been good enough to transfer to Nebraska. In lieu of having to take two more semesters of German at Nebraska he’d taken a course called Comparative Linguistics so he wouldn’t have to take fourth semester German and he was currently plodding his way through third semester German, a course which could actually pose a stumbling block to his graduating in December. In any event his language skills were inadequate to study at the graduate level in German. That meant he’d have to study at an English-speaking university, most likely in the United Kingdom.

Then there was the choice of universities if he was to continue his studies in Geography. The Department of Geography at The University of Edinburgh on the East Coast of Scotland had a stellar reputation. Finally, much like a doctoral dissertation, a Fulbright course of study is meant to break new ground and expand the base of knowledge in the discipline. How to combine Political Science, Geography and Cartography. The Cartography he could do in his sleep, and he was getting real good at Political Science, but what about the Geography component? He’d taken a course called Political Geography for which part of the coursework focused on the sectarian disputes between Roman Catholics and Protestants in Belfast, Northern Ireland from 1969 to the mid-1970s, and which had sparked his interest as the son of a Catholic and a Protestant.

It came to him as if he'd been struck by a bolt of lightning; as if by Divine Intervention. He could use nearly every skill he'd acquired in the past five years in an attempt to resolve an unresolvable problem which was gaining worldwide attention as well as frequent exposure on the nightly news.

First, he was a Cartographer; he could analyze every square block of the pentagon-shaped sector of the West End of Belfast, Northern Ireland, which was bordered by Falls Road to the South, Springfield Road, Lanark Way, Shankill Road to the North, and Northumberland Street. Falls Road was the heart and soul of the Catholic community; Shankill Road of the Protestant. He was a Political Scientist; he could analyze the movement of political phenomena across space over time. In this case it was the creeping socioeconomic repression of the Catholics in the six counties of Northern Ireland, not only by Protestants but by Crown and Country itself. But surely this had all been done before. What would make Sean's proposal unique? He was an Intelligence Analyst; he knew how to collect data and organize it in a number of ways until one way made sense. Now the only question left to answer was what made Sean uniquely qualified to analyze the data in a way in which it had not been done previously. The answer rest in two geographic concepts: mental maps and parallax.

It would require fieldwork along Falls Road and Shankill Road in West Belfast. And it would require photogrammetric analysis of psychological stereopairs. But he knew he'd developed a methodology which could resolve a problem that had plagued Northern Ireland for nearly a century.

Once a month Sean would take a week off from classes at Edinburgh. Early on a Monday morning he'd catch a bus via Glasgow and Ayr to Stranraer on the West Coast of Scotland. From Stranraer he'd take the ferry which made the three-hour passage to Belfast. And, once there, he'd make his way to either

Falls Road or Shankill Road and spend the week interviewing the local residents. After asking some preliminary demographic questions he would ask very specific questions which would evoke that particular resident's mental map of Falls Road, Shankill Road, and the pentagonal polygon of West Belfast between them. Weeknights he'd sleep at the Youth Hostel in the city center. Friday nights he'd return to Edinburgh and spend the next three weeks analyzing his new raw data. For each resident he'd spoken to, using a specially designed interview tool he'd create a sort of three-dimensional mental map of the West End of Belfast. When a resident told him that a particular geographic location represented an area of relative safety, or a low barrier between Falls Road and Shankill Road, Sean would assign a relatively low value such as 0, 1 or 2 to that grid coordinate. Such a place might be a municipal office building where Catholics and Protestants alike were periodically required to go to get such mundane items as marriage licenses, birth certificates, driver's licenses and death certificates. Contrariwise, when a resident told him that a particular geographic location represented an area of high threat, or a high barrier, he would assign a relatively high value such as 8, 9 or 10. Such locations might be Catholic or Anglican churches.

When all the fieldwork was done, after a year of study, Sean would be ready to turn his two-dimensional data into a three-dimensional model. He would start by superimposing a simple 1" x 1" grid system over a large-scale map of the West End, each square representing a small parcel of the land in that locale. Then he would methodically go through every questionnaire placing in each grid square a number of 1" x 1" squares of construction paper with adhesive on both sides equal to the score given by each resident of the West End interviewed. When that tedious, and laborious, task was completed Sean would take a large sheet of fine mesh metal screen, much like that found in window screens

but capable of retaining its new shape once deformed, and press it down over the grid map until the peaks and valleys created by the stacks of squares of paper made permanent impressions. The next to last step would be to form a thin layer of casting plaster over the mesh framework to create a smooth pentagon-shaped surface which would represent the cumulative data of a year's worth of field work. Finally, key geographic landmarks such as roads, churches, schools, and playgrounds would be carefully drawn on the top of this topographic surface.

But what would you then have? What would you be looking at? You would have, on a table in front of you, nothing less than a three-dimensional mental map of the West End of Belfast as created by the residents themselves. No need for the government in Dublin or London to commission a study. No need for endless prattling by local politicians protecting their own self-interests. When a civil engineer designs a highway he links the contiguous paths of least resistance until the course of the highway defines itself. Except, in this case, we're talking about linking the collective paths of least resistance of an entire segment of society with the result being a roadmap for peace in Northern Ireland.

## Chapter Seven

As graduation day approached Sean Patrick O’Connell was becoming more excited, and more anxious. First, there was the sheer excitement of receiving his Bachelor’s degree, the “sine qua non” for further academic pursuits, much less a successful career in any discipline. He had his Graduate Research Assistantship in the Department of Geography lined up for the Spring of ’76. He had also applied to, and been accepted by, The College of Law at Nebraska for the Fall semester of 1976. And then there was the Fulbright proposal. In the worst case scenario it would never leave Lincoln. In the best case he would find himself spending an all expense paid year abroad, beginning in September of 1976, studying at The University of Edinburgh in Scotland.

But with great academic success came certain requirements and expectations. First, he still had to pass the final exam in third semester German. Second, the faculty of the Geography department had come to depend upon him as both the proverbial pinch hitter and utility outfielder. He was easily four years the senior of any of his undergraduate peers, with the maturity which those years and a four-year stint in the Air Force conferred upon him. One consequence of this was that he’d been asked to tutor a Nebraska football All-American in Geography to keep him academically eligible. As with any transfer student, one often finds oneself taking lower level prerequisite courses which are a necessity for graduation in their final year, or final semester. In Sean’s case this was Geography 101, or Introduction to Geography.

About two weeks before the Thanksgiving break the Graduate Teaching Assistant and doctoral candidate from The University of Michigan who was teaching Geography 101 received word that he would need to return to Ann Arbor to defend his doctoral dissertation. He and the Chairman of the department approached Sean and asked him if he'd be willing to teach those class meetings which would otherwise be left uncovered. He'd said, "Yes."

The class met from 9:00-9:50AM, Monday, Wednesday and Friday. That meant five classes. The subject for the module being covered was Plate Tectonics, with special emphasis on Pangaea, continental drift, colliding plates and sea floor spreading. On the Friday thirteen days before Thanksgiving Sean had been sitting in the first row of the second tier of seats in a full 500-seat lecture hall with a podium in the front and one of those neat counterbalanced triple blackboard systems where you'd inevitably run out of class time before you ran out of space. The following Monday morning, when the bell rang at 9:00AM, Sean, to the astonishment of his 499 classmates, was standing at the podium.

They all looked at him somewhat quizzically, especially the unbroken string of cute coeds, less than six months out of high school, which always seemed to populate the front row of such a lecture hall. He introduced himself, explained the regular teacher's absence, and launched into the lecture he'd been preparing all weekend. Using slides and an overhead projector, and writing key terms on his three blackboards, he gave a serviceable lecture on how the seven continents had derived from a single landmass. At exactly 9:48 he wrote Wednesday's homework assignment on the last unused portion of blackboard while reading it aloud. At 9:50 the bell rang. Sean announced, "Class dismissed!" And then the darnedest thing happened. At first there was the faintest ripple of clapping, then a more

generalized applause, and then, one by one, the students, his classmates, stood up while continuing to clap. By 9:51AM Sean was receiving a standing ovation from his peers. By 9:51:30 it was over, but it didn't matter. It was as if he'd gone from sitting in the bleachers to standing at home plate in the bottom of the ninth inning with two outs, the bases loaded, and his team down by three runs. And he'd hit one out of the park. If he'd been at Fenway the announcer would have been saying, "Look out on Lansdowne Street." At Wrigley Field it would have been Harry Cary yelling, "Holy Cow!" It was a once in a lifetime moment, but Sean didn't care. It was his moment.

And then it was over. At a small mid-year graduation ceremony in the Reception Room of the Student Union Sean had received his Bachelor's degree. He stared at it, he held it, and, when he got home to his apartment on South 16<sup>th</sup> Street that afternoon he laid it on the dining room table so he could glance at it every time he walked by.

After Christmas break he began his first semester at Graduate School and his first semester as a Graduate Research Assistant. He'd quit his job with HWS and been taken on as a Planning Intern by the Nebraska State Office of Planning and Programming whose Executive Director was also a Geography graduate from Nebraska. His functional title was A-95 Coordinator. The term "A-95" referred to a federal circular which required states to have an office or individual whose job it was to review all changes in federal law to ensure that State planning goals were consistent with federal government policy. It was a tedious job, but it helped pay the bills.

Sean had been able to put himself through Nebraska using money from the 48-month GI Bill benefit and the money he was paid by HWS, who had given him \$0.50 an hour more than minimum wage because he was a veteran. Now he would support himself with the pay from his State job as well as his Graduate

Research Assistantship stipend and remaining GI Bill benefits. And he didn't have to pay tuition any more because Nebraska gave a tuition remission benefit to all Graduate Teaching Assistants and Graduate Research Assistants.

Since the first of the year Sean's Fulbright application had been making its way through the bureaucracy. First it had to be read and endorsed by faculty members from the Political Science department as well as members of the staff of the Office of the Dean of The College of Arts & Sciences. Then, if it passed muster, Nebraska would send it on to the Fulbright office in New York. In Sean's case it made it there by March. There was also the matter of getting accepted by the Geography faculty at The University of Edinburgh. This was mostly a matter of getting an application, filling it out, and returning it with the proper fees, getting three faculty references, and having his transcripts sent to Scotland.

Sean heard from Edinburgh before he heard from the Fulbright people. He got his letter of acceptance from the University in March. And he got his letter informing him that his Fulbright proposal had been approved for full funding in May. Sean was beside himself. His first call was to Maryland to tell his mother and father. They were thrilled and told him that they expected him to stay with them for at least a week before flying off to Europe. Had he known how to contact her, his second call would have been to Meg.

Sean spent the remainder of the Spring semester of 1976 and the Summer earning, and setting aside, as much money as he could. While the faculty of the Geography department were all sad to see him go, they knew he would bring credit upon himself and, by extension, the university. He also gave his notice to the State of Nebraska. They would miss him as well, but there was always a line of graduate students in a town like Lincoln looking for an internship. Sean's successor would start the Monday of the week after he left.

*A MATTER OF PERCEPTION*

Because Sean had been renting a furnished apartment since March of 1974, he had only his personal belongings to pack. He shipped his electronics gear (a color TV, stereo receiver, turntable, reel-to-reel tape deck and speakers) by Parcel Post to his parents' house in Chevy Chase. He shipped his Winter clothing to the Geography department in Edinburgh which had agreed to hold it until he arrived. All he had left to pack were his Summer and Fall clothes. He did this on a Sunday night, and crammed them into the back seat and trunk of his VW.

On Monday of the second week in August Sean turned in his apartment keys to the resident manager, gave him his parents' address to which the refund of his security deposit could be sent, and headed out East on Interstate 80 for Maryland. He spent his first night at Jumer's Castle Lodge in Peoria, Illinois. The second night found him in a Holiday Inn on the outskirts of Cincinnati, Ohio. Late on Wednesday evening he pulled his '72 VW into the driveway on Cummings Lane. His parents had fallen asleep on the couches in the den while watching TV and waiting up for him. He had to wake them up after he let himself in the back door, but they were so glad to see him they didn't mind.

He and his parents spent the next two weeks catching up, talking about Sean's trip to Europe, and planning for the future. At the age of 26 Sean clearly missed having his 24-year old sister, and confidante, Meg around. But, having worked in the intelligence community himself for four years, he understood why it had to be so. He would have loved to have Meg drive him out to Dulles International to see him off. After an incident in April of '72, when the United 707 he was on for an eight-hour flight to Chicago O'Hare had been struck by lightning and all but skimmed the waves of the Pacific for the better part of an hour, the thrill of flying had decidedly left him. But Meg had a job to do, and Sean had a graduate degree to pursue.

On the evening of August 26<sup>th</sup> Sean had kissed his parents "Good night, and farewell." Shortly after 10:00PM he'd called

Diamond Cab, the same company which had delivered him into the womb of the United States Air Force, for a 7-minute ride to the Chevy Chase Holiday Inn on Wisconsin Avenue just across the street from Sak's Fifth Avenue. From there he'd taken a limousine to the airport to catch his 12:30AM flight to London's Heathrow.

## Chapter Eight

As Sean's plane lifted off from Dulles International Airport (DIA) at 12:42AM on that morning of August 27<sup>th</sup> and dipped its wing to the right for the leg of the flight which would take them across the Delaware coast on their way to the northern Atlantic transoceanic air lanes, Sean could see from his window seat the twinkling lights of northern Virginia, suburban Maryland, and the Nation's Capital. Little did he realize that within four months his fate and, indeed, that of his sister Meg, would rest with the men and women within a handful of those buildings beneath him whose lights were ablaze twenty-four hours a day.

After more than two weeks of laying about Sean was well rested, and this night he was much too excited to sleep. He was seated in the Coach compartment of a British Overseas Airways Corporation, or BOAC, Super Viscount VC-10, the British equivalent of a Boeing 707, whose wings' scalloped trailing edges looked just a little too much like those on the Batplane in the 1960s TV series Batman. Unable to sleep, Sean ordered a cup of coffee and decided he'd give himself a last-minute refresher course on the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland so he could be conversant in the subject when he arrived in Edinburgh that evening.

In 1916 predominantly Roman Catholic Ireland, including a small band of Irish rebels leading the fight from within the walls of the Grand Post Office in Dublin's city center, staged a five-day revolt against the rule of England and the Crown. The rebellion was, for the most part, successful. But, in the process of

negotiating a peace treaty, the northern six of the nation's 32 counties, an area to which English and Scots had immigrated under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell in the mid-1600s, were partitioned off to remain under English control. While most borders are geographically or topographically logical, this one was strictly sectarian. Unlike the 26 counties of the Irish Free State, now the Republic of Ireland, which were, and are, predominantly Catholic, the population of the six northern counties had a Protestant overclass and a Catholic underclass.

As a sovereign nation, the Republic of Ireland had its own self defense force, the Irish Republican Army, or IRA. The IRA follows the constitution, aims, objectives and disciplinary procedures set forth in a document known as The Green Book. Objectives 1, 3, 4 and 5 capture the tone of The Green Book.

To guard the honour and uphold the sovereignty and unity of the Republic of Ireland . . .

To support the establishment of, and uphold, a lawful government in sole and absolute control of the Republic.

To secure and defend civil and religious liberties and equal rights and equal opportunities for all citizens.

To promote the revival of the Irish language as the everyday language of the people.

The IRA's Irish name was, and is, *Oglaigh na hEireann*. The IRA even had a female wing by the name of *Cumann na mBann*. Historically this group had functioned as a sort of women's auxiliary, but, with the widely-publicized exploits of Leila Khaled, the first female hijacker of the Palestine Liberation Organization, or PLO, and the IRA's own Maria Maguire, an attractive but deadly gunrunner, the status of IRA women in the "Troubles" was escalated to an almost equal, albeit different, role as that of the men.

For many Irishmen, however, the six northern counties represented then, as do they now, a matter of unfinished business.

Nonetheless, when he was chosen head of the democratically elected government in 1932, Eamon de Valera warned that no armed minority would be allowed to preempt the government's sole right to wage war. And thus was born the Provisional IRA, or Provos. It was not until the late 1960s, nearly forty years later, that de Valera's policy was modified.

The inequities which fomented the sectarian violence of 1969 and thereafter were numerous and cumulative and born out of fifty-three years of hatred. The two principal categories of issues which fueled this hatred were discrimination and law & order. State-sanctioned discrimination by Protestants against Catholics took the form of unequal treatment in the areas of education, employment and housing. In the realm of law and order there was an inequitable administration of justice, oppressive policing, and a tacit acceptance, if not a propensity for, violence against Catholics.

On New Year's Day, 1969, forty members of a Catholic movement called Peoples' Democracy began a four-day march from Belfast across Northern Ireland to Derry. On the fourth day the march was ambushed and attacked by a Protestant Loyalist mob at Burntollet Bridge. The force charged with maintaining law and order in Northern Ireland is the Royal Ulster Constabulary, or RUC. On this day, however, 80 members of the RUC looked on as the marchers were also attacked by off-duty members of an anti-Catholic anti-Republican part-time paramilitary force known as the Ulster Special Constabulary, or "B Specials". It was not until the march reached Derry's city center that the RUC broke up the disturbance.

By this time 500 members of the Prince of Wales' Own Regiment of Yorkshire were encamped in Northern Ireland to supplement the usual British Army contingent. Although the violence had started in Derry, it soon switched to Belfast. In July of 1970 the British Army conducted a 34-hour curfew and search

operation in the Lower Falls area of Belfast which marked the apparent transition of their role from protectors of Catholic areas against Protestant attacks to enforcers of the rule of law upon Catholics. In April of 1970 the Ulster Defense Regiment (UDR) was formed to replace the B Specials which had been disbanded after the fiasco in Derry. In 1971 the Ulster Defense Association (UDA) was formed from a variety of Protestant paramilitary groups, as was the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF).

The policy of “internment” began in August of 1971 with the goal of removing radical and violent Republican sympathizers from the streets. These men soon filled Long Kesh prison, later to be renamed the Maze, to and beyond capacity.

The deadliest year since the renewal of the “troubles” was 1972. On January 27<sup>th</sup> two RUC officers were shot and killed in their car while on patrol in Derry. Consequently Loyalist sentiments were running high. Add to that the fact that two days later, on January 30<sup>th</sup>, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association was planning a march for 20,000. The powder had been primed and the fuse lit. Accounts of the chronology differ depending upon the sympathies of the witness but, in the end, 13 civilians lay dead at the hands of British Army gunmen, with another 14 in hospital. The day came to be known as “Bloody Sunday”. Three days later funerals for 11 of the dead took place in Derry. In Dublin a sympathy march attracted 100,000. Following the march a crowd attacked the British Embassy and burnt it to the ground.

Thereafter sectarian violence continued unabated. On January 4, 1976, less than eight months earlier, five Catholics had been shot and killed in South Armagh and the next day ten Protestant workmen were removed from a bus in nearby Kingsmills and summarily executed. In response a unit of the British Army’s Special Air Service, or SAS, was deployed to South Armagh. Finally, just this month, three children in the Andersonstown

section of West Belfast had been killed when run over by a car whose driver had been shot and killed by the British Army. The death tolls: 1972, 467; 1973, 250; 1974, 216; 1975, 247; and 1976, still counting.

At 50,000 feet over the North Atlantic, with his BOAC Super VC-10 hurtling toward the sunrise at 8 miles a minute, Sean had a horrifying epiphany. He was walking into the front lines of a war. With Shankill Road to the North, Falls Road to the South, Lanark Way to the West and Northumberland Street to the East, he was about to find out how the lead horseman felt in Tennyson's *Charge of the Light Brigade*.

It was only appropriate that, as his plane began its descent, he was looking out the same cabin window through which he'd last seen Washington at a panoramic view of Ireland with Belfast tucked safely away in its harbor on the East Coast. First the seat belt sign came on with a "gong", then the "No Smoking" sign, and another "gong", and then all he could see was the tarmac of Heathrow rushing up at him.

Thirty minutes later Sean had cleared Customs and found the bus to Scotland. After the adrenaline rush, and subsequent panic attack brought on by a review of the last seven years of Ireland's sectarian violence, Sean had "crashed". On the ride North he slept the sleep of the dead. He only awoke when the bus jolted to a halt at the terminal in Glasgow. From there he caught a local bus to the terminal in Edinburgh; and from there a lorry to the University. Classes were over for the day, but he thought he'd try the Geography department anyway. The faculty had all gone home, or to the Faculty Club, but, as with any department whose doctoral degrees were worth what you paid for them, there were several graduate students still hard at work in their small offices which were required to accommodate four students each.

He stuck his head into one of the offices and started, "I'm Sean . . ." But before he could finish he heard, "O'Connell. Yeah, we know."

All the graduate students were required to read your proposal. Some of the faculty has, too. Oh, I'm sorry. I'm Alan, Alan MacAdams." Alan extended his hand and Sean shook it. "We knew you were comin' in tonight. We just didn't know when."

"I've been in a taxi, a limousine, a plane, a bus, and a lorry continuously since 10:00PM last night, East Coast time in the States. That's...Oh, Hell, you do the math," said Sean. "That desk over in the corner'll be yours, at least when you're here," Alan said. "We'll be sharing the office with two others; one's your roommate. They're both down at the pub by now," said Alan. "Let's drop your luggage off in your room and then join them for a few."

"Lead the way," said Sean.

Sean and Alan walked part way across campus to the unmarried graduate student residences. The exterior of the building was stone and mortar but, once inside, it became clear that at some point in the last 75 years the entire interior had been gutted and rebuilt. On either side of a central corridor on each of the building's four floors were four suites of rooms. Upon entering the suite one found themselves in a living room/dining room/kitchen common room about 20 feet by 30 feet. Against the back wall were five doors which led to five two-person dorm rooms. In the back left was a small alcove which led to a sixth, windowless, dorm room which shared one wall with the common room, one with the corridor and one with the adjacent suite. It was as large as the other five but, because of fire codes and the lack of a window, it was only allowed to house a single student. In the back right was another small alcove which led to the communal bathroom with five sinks and mirrors, five urinals, three toilet stalls and four shower stalls. Had all gone as planned, Sean would have resided here for the next nine months.

At Alan's direction Sean dropped his luggage in the corner of the common room and then the two of them were off to the pub.

Their destination was a “publick house”, less than a stone’s throw away from Sean’s residence hall, by the name of The Tap Room. Part of a solid block of storefront businesses, it had a Tudor exterior with numerous multi-paned cut glass windows overlooking the street.

As Sean and Alan walked through the door Sean was struck by the nearly suffocating blue-gray haze of cigarette smoke. Apparently Scotland’s Surgeon General had missed a memo from his counterpart in the States. In a booth against the right wall they found a young man and a young woman, each aged 23, who were just finishing their first pitcher of Guinness Stout. Alan turned to Sean and said, “I’d like you to meet two of your fellow graduate students in the Department of Geography. The pretty one, on the right, is Rachel Stuart. The other one is your roommate, Billy Campbell. Rachel, Billy, meet Sean O’Connell, your new colleague from America.”

“Pleased to meet you,” said Sean as he first shook Rachel’s hand, then Billy’s.

“Have a seat, then,” said Billy. “Seeing as how you’ve never bought a round for us before, the next one’s on you.”

“Fair enough,” responded Sean. The cumulative effects of jet lag, the long bus ride, and the excitement of the day, were conspiring to bring Sean to a state of near exhaustion, but he was not about to be unsociable.

Billy Campbell had drunk more than his share of the first pitcher, and, after the waiter brought the second, accompanied by two clean mugs, and fresh glasses had been poured all around, he began, “So, you’re the chap who’s going to march into West Belfast, walking up Shankill Road and down Falls Road asking the local citizenry, ‘So, what’s the problem?’” “Well,” said Sean, “I had hoped to be a little more subtle than that. Once a month I’ll catch the bus to Stranraer via Glasgow and Ayr, and catch the ferry to Belfast. Once there I’ll take a lorry to either Shankill or

Falls Road. They're only a five-minute walk from one another. I've developed a research tool which, after collecting some demographic data, will allow me to assign numerical values to their responses to my questions. At night I'll stay at the Youth Hostel in Belfast's city center analyzing the data and trying to get some sleep."

"Yeah, yeah, I know all that," Billy retorted. "What I meant was, how are you going to keep yourself from being kidnapped, or worse?" Rachel had been listening to Billy's drunken inquiries without saying a word. Now she wanted to see how Sean handled himself. "I just figured I'd get by on my rugged English good looks and my Irish wit." Not only had Sean put Billy in his place, but it seemed to shut him up for the remainder of the night. Alan, Sean and Rachel, next to whom he was sitting, spent the rest of the evening in small talk.

After "Last Call" the four of them made their way back to the residences. As they climbed the stairs, Alan and Billy, with Sean in tow, turned off down the hall on the third floor. As Rachel continued up the stairs, she looked back over her left shoulder and, giving him the slightest hint of a smile, said to Sean, "Come up and see me sometime. I'm just on top of you, you know." Sean made it no farther than the common room where he collapsed on one of the threadbare couches where he slept until noon the next day.

## Chapter Nine

Sean, with the assistance of Alan, Billy and Rachel, spent the weekend familiarizing himself with the university's campus which sprawled throughout the city of Edinburgh. He made mental notes as he went of those places which he could have to revisit when school opened Monday morning as well as those places American students abroad would be best to avoid. He never, for one moment, forgot that he was a guest in his host country and that his every action reflected not only upon him but upon the United States as well. This was a lesson that his military service had taught him, and a lesson that he would not soon forget.

The 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> of August were the last two days of classes for the second Summer term followed by three "exam preparation" days and another weekend. Alan, Billy, and Rachel were all but incommunicado from Wednesday morning until the afternoon of Friday, September 10<sup>th</sup>, the final day of exams. As Sean would soon learn, the final exam was followed shortly thereafter by the obligatory trip to The Tap Room. On the Friday night of Exam Week the university students tended to displace the working class at most of the bars neighboring the university's several campuses. This inevitably led to a greater than usual number of drunken brawls between the "towns" and the "gowns".

The four Geography graduate students all slept in Saturday morning nursing their respective hangovers and spent Sunday reviewing the university's course catalogs in preparation for the first day of the Fall Semester which began September 13<sup>th</sup>. Although most graduate students had registered for their Fall

Semester courses near the end of the Spring Semester, the “drop-add” period ran for the first three days of the new semester. Consequently there was the usual “jockeying” for the best teachers, the best schedules, and that last-minute prerequisite course without which a student would not graduate.

Sean Patrick O’Connell was spared this semi-annual ritual. He had pre-registered for all of his Fall Semester courses while still in Lincoln. And so he spent the week of September 13<sup>th</sup> meeting his professors, attending his first classes at the university, and preparing for the following week’s trip, his first, to Belfast.

He was already familiar with the rudimentary bus system in Edinburgh, and knew how to get from its intercity terminal to Glasgow. Nonetheless he double-checked the schedules for good measure. Next he got the Glasgow-Ayr-Stranraer and Stranraer-Ayr-Glasgow weekday schedules. And, finally, he obtained the Stranraer-Belfast weekday ferry schedules.

Now, Sean had been preparing for this trip since mid-July. But there was another phenomenon which had been playing itself out in Belfast since mid-July and which was just now coming to its natural conclusion; the Marching Season.

The seminal event in Irish history which was the underlying source of all conflict between that country’s Catholics and Protestants dates back to the 1600s. Much as the United Nations laid the foundation for today’s Arab-Israeli conflict in 1948, King James I of England set the standard in Ireland. In the mid-1600s he set aside six counties in the North of Ireland to be settled by Protestants from Scotland, mostly Presbyterians. But these lands were not uninhabited. For centuries Irish farmers had tilled the land and eked out a living, albeit modest. This dislocation of a Catholic peasant class for the relocation of Protestant immigrants started the conflict and enmity which persists to this day.

On July 12<sup>th</sup>, 1690, an army under the command of William of Orange won the Battle of the Boyne whereafter he established a

Protestant government in Ireland. A century later a young student named Wolfe Tone wrote a pamphlet entitled “An Argument on Behalf of Catholics in Ireland”. Tone, a Protestant, led a movement to unite people of different faiths into a common effort to win Ireland’s independence from the rule of the Crown. But wealthy Protestants whose links to England were a source of their fortunes formed an opposing group, the Orange Order.

Tone’s efforts failed and, since that time, every July 12<sup>th</sup> the Orange Order stages a series of marches throughout Northern Ireland, through Protestant and Catholic neighborhoods alike, celebrating the English victory at the Battle of the Boyne. Though greeted with cheers in the Protestant neighborhoods like Shankill Road, by 1976 these same marchers were greeted with rocks, bottles, taunting, and occasional gunfire. By 1969 the “peace line”, a series of barricades and walls separated the Shankill Road Protestants from the Falls Road Catholics, but the Orange Order insisted in marching through both neighborhoods, as a gesture of ridicule and oppression, under the armed protection of the Northern Ireland government’s police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). And what was once a one-day event now lingered into the early days of September. Indeed, on his first trip to Northern Ireland during the week of September 20<sup>th</sup> Sean Patrick O’Connell would see for himself, in the Falls Road neighborhood, the remnants of the nearly two months of sectarian violence which preceded his arrival.

Sean had resolved to travel to Belfast for the third week of each month. The first month’s trip would be for the sole purpose of reconnaissance. On the morning of September 20<sup>th</sup> he boarded the lorry which ran through the campus and got off at the main bus station. From there he took the bus to Glasgow. And from there the bus which proceeded through Ayr as it wended its way toward the Western seacoast and its final destination, Stranraer. Arriving just before noon Sean had to sprint, with his knapsack weighing

him down, from the bus stop to the boarding ramp of the ferry. He had no time to purchase his ticket at the terminal and so was forced to pay the surcharge assessed against those who waited to purchase their tickets until they were on board. He then settled in for the three-hour ride across the Irish Sea to Belfast.

Due to a prevailing Westerly wind the Motor Vessel Shamrock pulled into its slip in Belfast harbor 15 minutes late. His first stop after disembarking was the youth hostel in the city's center. There he made arrangements, and paid, for four night's lodging. Then, with his knapsack safely stowed at the hostel, he made his way to the central bus terminal. It was the locals in which he was most interested. In the center of the terminal there was a five-sided kiosk with maps of different scales adorning each of its sides. The mid-scale map gave Sean the information he needed.

There was a local bus route which left the terminal and proceeded West-South-Westerly until it traveled along Falls Road to its final destination in Andersonstown. It then simply retraced its path to the terminal again. Another route left the terminal, proceeded West-North-Westerly until it turned onto Shankill Road, and followed a somewhat rectangular route, continuing to make right-hand turns through The Ardoyne and then Antrim, and back along lower Crumlin Road until it ultimately returned to the terminal in downtown Belfast. Sean got the schedules for both of these routes from a rack along the terminal's Northern wall. He then decided to spend the remainder of the day familiarizing himself with Belfast's central business district.

Less than a block from the youth hostel was a serviceable coffee shop and bakery, as one might well expect, and just over two blocks away was a reasonably priced family-style restaurant should Sean get a craving for a home-style meal. However, morning, midday or evening most of his nourishment would be grabbed on the run as he did his best to maximize the work

completed in his limited time on the Emerald Isle. Finally, less than a five-minute walk from the hostel was O'Rourke's, a prototypical Irish pub where both the ale and the gossip flowed freely. In such a place one could learn immeasurably more about the pace and manner of life on the island by keeping one's mouth shut than one ever could by opening it.

Sean was pleasantly surprised how quickly he got to sleep after a couple of pints of stout and how well he slept in the hostel's Spartan conditions. On Tuesday morning he awoke by 9:00AM, rinsed off, and made his way to the coffee shop. With a notepad and pen in one hand, a large cup of black coffee in the other, and a small bag of pastries tucked under his arm, Sean was off to the bus terminal. Today's activities would be strictly limited to observation. Sean caught the next bus to Andersonstown.

As the bus pulled out of the terminal and made its way out of the jigsaw puzzle of streets which was downtown Belfast, it turned on to Lower Falls Road. Sean had thought, by virtue of all of his reading, that he was prepared for what he was about to see that day. Nothing could have been further from the truth. The juxtaposition of the entirely normal and the totally bizarre side by side was an assault on his senses.

Block upon block of neatly cared-for row houses interspersed with the occasional mill or small factory reminded him of Baltimore's inner city where the row houses, each with a set of marble steps out front, were maintained in pristine condition. Each wave of immigrants which had moved there had perpetuated the tradition and every weekend you could see a mother or father on their hands and knees in front of their house scrubbing the marble steps with a brush and an abrasive cleanser gotten from a nearby bucket. Over the decades this ritual had actually left a trough on each and every step. But on Lower Falls Road many of the houses bore spray-painted anti-English graffiti. The factory walls bore murals railing against the English occupation and

glorifying the Provisional IRA. On one block could be spotted a patrol car with a pair of RUC officers inside and several blocks later one could see a couple of black-hooded Provos peeking out on the street from the sanctuary of an alleyway.

As one moved from Lower Falls Road across Grosvenor Road onto Falls Road and on into Andersonstown the contrast between the routine activities of daily life like grocery shopping taking place side by side with the ruins of burnt out houses and storefronts became even more stark. Just a month before in Andersonstown the three Maguire children had been accidentally run down by a car after the driver had been shot. Two died at the scene; the third later in hospital. As a result Betty Williams, Mairead Corrigan and Ciaran McKeown had formed Peace People. Their aim was “a nonviolent movement towards a just and peaceful society.” Williams and Corrigan were later to win a Nobel Peace Prize for their work. But in September of 1976 the Catholic neighborhoods of West Belfast resembled something akin to the bombed out sections of London after the Second World War or the neighborhoods adjacent to the Berlin Wall.

When the bus reached the end of the line in Andersonstown he couldn't decide whether to get off or simply stay on board for the return trip to the bus terminal. Remembering that discretion was the better part of valor he stayed on board. Retracing the path he had just taken did not lessen the impact of what he saw. When the bus finally pulled into the terminal in the city center Sean returned immediately to the hostel. For the next six hours straight he committed to writing his recollections of what he had seen, and his impressions thereof. Then he walked the few short blocks to O'Rourke's. He ordered up a sandwich with chips and a pint of Bass ale. It being the dinner hour the sandwich would take the better part of an hour to arrive, but the taps were always flowing. He was just starting his third pint when his corned beef on sourdough arrived.

Biochemistry's a funny thing. Regardless of the desired result the human body just follows nature's laws. And in this case the two pints of stout's alcohol hit his bloodstream before the sourdough arrived in his stomach to absorb it. Being alone, Sean had sat at the bar. At first he'd just sat there sipping his Bass and listening to the Celtic music emanating from some distant speakers. But then the alcohol and the flood of emotions evoked by the day's events conspired to betray him. And so he began to rail against the injustices inflicted upon West Belfast's Catholics to whomever was unfortunate enough to sit down next to him. Fortunately for Sean, Belfast's city center was a place of commerce, not political discourse. Consequently no one bothered to respond to the imprecations of a clearly drunken, and clearly American, student. But that is not to say that his rantings were not taken note of.

By 11:00PM Sean had made his way back to the hostel and gone to sleep. In his impaired condition he was totally oblivious to the three amiable young men who had stayed just half a block behind him on his way "home". Nor was he aware of the discrete inquiry, and handsome tip, which they offered the underpaid overnight clerk at the hostel for some basic information about one of his guests.

The next morning Sean felt none the worse for the wear of the previous evening. Following the former day's routine, he grabbed notepad, pen, coffee and pastries and boarded a bus, but this time the one headed for Shankill Road. The bus was soon traveling Northwest along Shankill Road, crossing upper Crumlin Road into The Ardoyne, and circling back through Antrim along Antrim Road and lower Crumlin Road until it once again returned to the bus terminal. The trip had taken somewhat longer than that of the previous day. But what had struck Sean was that the sights and sounds of Shankill Road were virtually identical to those on Lower Falls Road. Its denizens clearly derived from the same

gene pool, fair skinned with reddish hair, the occasional pair of piercing blue eyes, and all well-scrubbed and properly cared for.

But, then, from a political perspective it was as though he had traveled through a parallel universe. What had been pro was now con, and vice versa. What had been black was now white. But the devastation had still been the same. As he had done on Tuesday, Sean returned to the hostel to record his observations and impressions in detail. And then it was off to O'Rourke's. It being slightly later in the day, due to the longer duration of his bus trip, the sourdough bread stood an even chance of beating the Bass to Sean's digestive system. As a result the concentration of alcohol in his bloodstream did not reach the previous night's levels. But there was a new wrinkle. Three young men had sat down at the bar, two on one side of Sean, one on the other.

By way of polite conversation Sean's three barmates introduced themselves. The oldest, and clearly the "Alpha male" of the trio, was David Durbin who was sitting next to Sean. To his side was Brian Callahan, and on Sean's other side was William Callahan, no relation. As Sean replied he gave his name, the fact that he was an American, his status as a graduate student at The University of Edinburgh, and that he was a Fulbright Scholar. Unbeknownst to Sean, David, Brian and William had known all the information with which he'd provided them except the last bit before they'd left the youth hostel the night before. But on this night, by contrast, Sean's monologue focused upon the plight of the Protestants on Shankill Road, as well as in The Ardoyne and in Antrim. The three Provos were now clearly confused. On Tuesday night Sean might well have been the reincarnation of Michael Collins. Tonight he sounded like a spokesman for Stormont, or the Reverend Ian Paisley. A phone call to a colleague at Georgetown would clear up this discrepancy.

On Thursday afternoon, while Sean was trying to assimilate all the information and impressions which he'd gained over the

previous two days, David Durbin was on the phone to Meaghan MacDonough, a graduate student at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. She had, over the course of her undergraduate and graduate career at Georgetown, been an invaluable source of information for the Provos. Durbin had three succinct questions for her. Who was this Sean O'Connell, what was he studying at The University of Edinburgh, and why was he in Northern Ireland?

It would take Meaghan at least twenty-four hours to ascertain the answers to David's questions, and by that time Sean would be on a ferry back to Stranraer. But she assured him that Fulbright Scholarships ran for a full year. David, Brian and William would no doubt be seeing Sean again. Little did they know they'd need to wait until October 18<sup>th</sup>, the third week of the month. But by this time they'd have in hand a transcript of Sean's Fulbright proposal and a far better idea of what he was doing on their home turf.

## Chapter Ten

When Sean returned to the residence in Edinburgh on Friday afternoon he was full of stories, thoughts, and conflicting impressions of what he had seen during the week. He ran into Alan in the common room and, without even dropping off his knapsack in his room, immediately launched into a monologue about what he'd seen. The monologue soon turned into a dialog and by evening Billy and Rachel had joined them. By midnight there were more than a dozen graduate students engaged in one main discussion, with numerous side discussions, regarding the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland.

Over the next three weeks Sean religiously attended his classes and completed all of his assignments, but he would have been dishonest with himself had he not acknowledged the burning desire to return to Ireland. And so, on the morning of the 18<sup>th</sup> of October, it was with great anticipation that Sean began his return trip to Belfast. He had grabbed a bite to eat on the ferry so he was not hungry when he got to the youth hostel. Instead he surrounded himself with his reference books, guidebooks and questionnaires and mentally prepared himself for the next day's trip to Lower Falls Road, Falls Road and Andersonstown.

On the morning of Tuesday, October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1976, Sean Patrick O'Connell began his fieldwork for his Fulbright Scholarship. This time the bus wouldn't do. He walked due West until he reached Lower Falls Road. It was then that he took out his clipboard, fastened a questionnaire under its clip, and went in search of his first subject. Walking Westward on the North side of

the street he encountered Maggie Riordan, aged 57, approaching him from the West with two shopping bags of groceries. He walked up to her and introduced himself as an American student. He told her that he'd like to ask her a few questions as part of his research and, as she lived alone and seldom had company, she agreed. She was widowed, maiden name Conlin, born and reared in Belfast. Sean took it as an article of faith that she was Catholic. And then the question which was at the crux of his project. "Along the 'peace line' which bisects the neighborhoods between Falls Road and Shankill Road, in what areas do you feel the most safe, and in what areas the least?" Notwithstanding the events of the 15<sup>th</sup> of August, 1969, Mrs. Riordan still felt that the Clonard Monastery, under the direction of Father McLaughlin, was a safe haven for Catholics. The Clonard was a small Catholic enclave which jutted North from Lower Falls Road into the Shankill Road neighborhood. On that day in 1969 Protestants invaded the monastery grounds when rumors of IRA gunmen in the monastery arose. Though not, in fact, IRA gunmen, the two men were armed. They fired on the Protestants and the Protestants fired back. By the time the incident was over the entire Catholic neighborhood of adjacent Bombay Street was razed. Other than the monastery Maggie kept to Lower Falls Road and associated with only those she knew. Hence, there was no place along the peace line where Maggie believed Protestants and Catholics could come together in a civil way, but she would, from time to time, venture into the monastery at midday.

As Sean proceeded Westward toward, and across, Grosvenor Road, this same meet-greet-interview routine was played out over one hundred times. By the time he reached Andersonstown it was nearing dinner time and the streets were nearly deserted. By the time dinner was over it would be getting dark and the pedestrian traffic along Falls Road would be over for the day. Sean caught the next bus back to downtown Belfast and headed to O'Rourke's

for a sandwich. As he reflected upon the events of the day it occurred to him that several patterns had arisen. The first was that the general level of suspicion and anxiety about the Troubles was directly proportional to the respondent's age. The older respondents stayed close to Falls Road with the exception of an occasional trip to the monastery during daylight hours. And the women were less likely to venture there than the men. Among the middle-aged working class the playing fields where one could find a good match of rugby or football (soccer to an American) after work or on weekends was added to the monastery as a place less threatening than the remainder of the theological No Man's Land. Finally, it was the children who seemed to have the least trepidation about approaching the peace line, though sometimes it was for the sole purpose of tossing a rock at "the other side" and then running as fast as their little legs would carry them. Much as American children played at "cowboys and Indians", these Irish children seemed to be willing to engage in the occasional game of "Protestants and Catholics".

That evening, at the same time Sean was digesting his first day's data and shepherd's pie, Maggie Riordan was on the phone to her nephew, David. She told him of her chance encounter with an American student who had just wanted to ask her some questions. Because David had always seemed to take a keen interest in his Aunt Maggie's welfare, as well as the general state of affairs on Falls Road, she thought her sister Mary Durbin's boy would be interested in the day's events. David thanked her for the call and told her not to be alarmed. As soon as he hung up he rang up Brian Callahan and told him he'd be right over. He also told Brian to call William and have him join them. On the way out the door he grabbed his jacket and the Air Mail envelope from America which had arrived the week before.

Brian Callahan lived in a flat in Ballymurphy between Springfield Road and Falls Road Southwest of Belfast. By the

time David got there William had already arrived. David told his companions of his phone call from Aunt Maggie. Then he opened the envelope, the contents of which he had already read, and summarized them as he passed it first to Brian, then to William. That a graduate student from America would be doing research in Northern Ireland was no cause for concern; it happened all the time. Considering their preoccupation with civil rights and nonviolent protests born of that nation's racial injustice and the assassination of Martin Luther King and the Kennedy brothers it was little wonder they thought they could solve the problems of the world. But they'd all come and gone and the killing in Northern Ireland continued apace; 1,180 in the previous four years. They'd all employed social work techniques; mediation, reconciliation, negotiation and the like. And then they'd gone home frustrated to set up private practices in the suburbs of Washington, New York and Boston catering to the worried well. But what of this O'Connell?

Sean Patrick O'Connell was going to use 50-year old techniques utilized successfully in two wars and bring them to bear with the only aim being the cessation of hostilities in Northern Ireland. He wasn't working for the Brits. No, that David could have dealt with by conventional means. Worse than working for the Brits, Sean's goal was peace in Northern Ireland and, by extension, to render the Provos irrelevant. That David could not let happen. Were the violence to abate their gun money from Southie in Boston, The Bronx in New York and the Georgia Avenue corridor in Washington would dry up. And with it a way of life which had justified the deaths of two generations of Irishmen.

The three men resolved to locate Sean Wednesday morning along Falls Road and observe his daily routine. But when noon had come and gone on Wednesday and the three men cruising Falls Road in their 1966 Vauxhall Victor had not caught a glimpse

of Sean, they became concerned. Then Brian recalled that Sean's research design called for conducting identical interviews on both sides of the peace line. They headed North along Lanark Way and took a right heading East on Shankill Road. And there, standing on the South side of Shankill Road, talking to an elderly Protestant pensioner, was Sean O'Connell. It was with a modicum of relief that the three returned to Brian's flat seemingly secure in the knowledge that they could find Sean whenever they deemed it necessary. And, then, there was always the overnight desk clerk at the youth hostel.

As David, Brian and William sat around that evening they surmised that if Sean had attracted suspicion along the Falls Road side of the peace line he might well have done so on the Shankill Road side of it as well. And with a name like Sean Patrick O'Connell the figurative alarm bells may well have gone off at the local RUC station on Springfield Road. The three sifted through the information they had to see if they could locate a flaw in Sean's methodology. There was none. The people Sean met on Falls Road had, for the most part, been happy to share their thoughts with him. One could only assume that the same would be the case along Shankill Road. What the three men did not know was what the respondents had been telling Sean.

The three knew that they could have coerced the information out of the residents of Falls Road, but intimidation was not a tactic one wished to employ against one's own unless absolutely necessary. Seeking that same information on Shankill Road would have attracted undue attention. No, they would simply have to wait for their moment in the hope that, at some point, Sean would tip his hand. What they could not have known was that a solution was already beginning to present itself to Sean for a plague of violence which had wrecked havoc upon this island for some 60 years.

It is widely accepted, though never confirmed, that in the early 1800s the Duke of Wellington said that "the Battle of Waterloo

was won on the playing fields of Eton.” Who was to say that the same philosophy might not apply to Irish leaders; that “the future leaders of Ireland would be born on the playing fields of West Belfast.” It was the same sentiment with a working class ring to it. Surely rugby and football were man’s peacetime equivalent of war, and war is what civilizations use to settle disputes when diplomacy fails. Now a rugby match can never offer restitution for decades of oppression, and a football match can never reconcile disparate ideologies, much less theologies. But what Sean had heard over and over again on Tuesday and Wednesday was that working class men, as well as adolescents and children, felt safest in the No Man’s Land between Falls Road and Shankill Road when they were engaged in games of skill. Even if they were competing against a team from “the other side”, they knew that the contest had rules, something that could not be said of the protracted conflict which had consumed them for six decades and taken hundreds, if not thousands, of lives.

Sean spent Thursday lost in thought, analyzing his data and formulating his hypotheses. The three-dimensional mental map of West Belfast would still have to be constructed, although the results of his findings were becoming abundantly clear even without it. To the Catholics on Falls Road there was a solid wall between them and Shankill Road save the qualified sanctuary of Clonard Monastery and the common playing fields. To the Protestants from Shankill Road there was no chink in the wall save the playing fields. To both sides, then, there was no common ground save the ground of the playing fields.

Life was never this simple, and it would not be so for the Catholics and Protestants from West Belfast, but every minute spent in competition exchanging goals was one less minute spent in conflict exchanging gunfire. To the oldest generation who were, for the most part, too old to fight, though not too old to hate, the final disposition of their anger would only be found in the

solitude of their grave. To the middle generation those that wanted the killing to continue would continue to kill. But those who wanted the killing to stop could stop killing. And, finally, for the youngest generation, those who needed to hate would continue to do so. But for those who recognized that hatred was an option, their choice would be dictated by those adults they decided to emulate. This wasn't a "quick fix". Killing, in some form or manner, might continue for another generation, in the worst case two. But the killing had already gone on for two generations, and every step away from that precipice was a giant one.

On Friday Sean returned to Edinburgh. But before he left Belfast he posted two letters, one to the priest of the largest Catholic church on Falls Road and another to the rector of the largest Presbyterian church on Shankill Road. In each he informed them that he would be returning to Belfast the week of the 15<sup>th</sup> of November and asked if he might be granted the privilege of addressing a meeting of their parish and congregation respectively, with any interested non-members being freely allowed to attend.

Again, as with after his first field trip to Northern Ireland, Sean spent the next three weeks in intensive study, consultation with his professors and, in his spare time, preparing a presentation for the two churches in West Belfast. He knew that he was not going to wow these crowds with his resume or research methods. If he had any chance at all of winning them over with his ideas it would be through humility, sincerity and common sense. At this point he had little more he could offer.

On Thursday, November 4<sup>th</sup>, he received an invitation from the priest of the Roman Catholic church on Falls Road to join them on the evening of Monday, November 15<sup>th</sup>. The following day he received an invitation from the rector of the Presbyterian church on Shankill Road to join them on the evening of Wednesday,

November 17<sup>th</sup>. Sean had originally hoped to give his presentation on consecutive nights, preferably Tuesday and Wednesday, but was going to neither equivocate nor negotiate. He sent each a letter accepting their kind invitation and thanking them for their hospitality.

As the time for his return trip to Belfast neared Sean began to become anxious about his presentation. Speaking in front of large crowds was not Sean's forte. He had, however, done a serviceable job of delivering his geography lectures before a class of nearly 500. Moreover, he was going to be speaking from the heart about something in which he believed. As a sort of reality check he scheduled an appointment with his graduate advisor, Professor Merlin Wishart, the Chairman of the Department of Geography. They met at noon on Friday, November 12<sup>th</sup>, less than 72 hours before he was scheduled to leave for Belfast again, and 79 hours before he was to speak at St. Columba's Roman Catholic Church on Lower Falls Road. In his letter Father Matthias from St. Columba's had informed Sean that even Father McLaughlin from Clonard Monastery would be there, his making one of his rare excursions outside the walls of the monastery after dark.

Sean had sent Professor Wishart no reading materials, thinking his oral presentation stood the best chance of gaining a good reception. And when he entered Professor Wishart's office, though he had been beckoned to have a seat, he chose to stand, and pace. He began by thanking the professor for his time, and then launched into a summary of his findings. Professor Wishart listened without reaction. Then came the moment of truth. Sean presented those hypotheses he'd entertained. Finally, Sean began to expand upon the hypothesis upon which he'd settled; that violent games of skill, which daily offered the prospect of winners and losers between two opposing forces, might supplant the armed, and hand to hand, violence which daily offered the prospect of another round of funerals.

No sooner had Sean finished than a guttural chuckle began to emerge from Professor Wishart's closed lips, and then grew until a full-blown guffaw erupted emitting laughter as a lava dome might spew forth volcanic ash. "What kind of myopic optimism passes for scholarship in America these days?" he nearly shouted. "You can't be serious!" It took Sean a moment to regain his composure. And then he said, "Here, sir, let me show you my data."

"This war between the Catholics and the Protestants for the past sixty years has not been fought with data. The war between the Provos and the RUC has been fought with bullets and bombs, and its casualties have died from their gaping wounds, not paper cuts." That last comment had really hurt Sean. He was devastated. In three days he'd be presenting his ideas to a church full of parishioners who lived this conflict every day. Would their reaction be any different?

Sean's meeting with Professor Wishart had gone downhill from there. He explained to the professor that his original premise for the research was that along the dividing line between the Catholic and Protestant neighborhoods there would be a variable topography. For example, if there was a municipal building where both had to come for birth certificates, death certificates and marriage licenses, the perceived level of danger would be low. The same could be said of a factory where both sides had to come to earn a living. What Sean might have been able to learn, but clearly hadn't, was that if such locations had existed prior to 1969 they did no longer. Indeed, even the playing fields had fallen into disrepair due to a lack of regular use, but here Sean felt there was room, if not reason, for optimism.

## Chapter Eleven

On the morning of November 15<sup>th</sup> Sean arose uncharacteristically early. He knew it was going to be a very long day but he was inordinately nervous about his speech that night. As dawn broke he could see that it was pouring rain. Maybe that would keep the crowd down at St. Columba's, something for which Sean had come to hope. As he made his way by bus from Edinburgh to Glasgow to Ayr to Stranraer he studied his handful of 3X5 cards which he'd prepared, not so much to read from as to prompt him. The Irish Sea was shrouded in fog, so much so that the ferry operator was considering canceling the remainder of the day's runs. Perhaps for the first time it struck Sean at a visceral level he indeed lived on an island and the sea, not man, was always in control. And he was headed to an even smaller island where, even if everyone didn't know everyone else, it was what physical scientists referred to as a "closed system". What had ever possessed Sean to think that he could impact from outside the functioning of a closed system?

Just then the dockhands dropped the chain which closed off the boarding ramps and the loudspeaker crackled, "The twelve o'clock ferry is now ready for boarding." Sean had been musing that the weather may have been a form of divine intervention designed to deliver him from certain humiliation that night. But no such luck. As he rode on his solitary bench inside the ferry during the three-hour trip (he would have been soaking wet in five minutes had he stepped outside) he kept thinking to himself, "Where's God when I need him?"

Imperceptibly at first, and then almost palpably, the answer to Sean's rhetorical question arose within him. "God is always here." Said another way, if the ferry sailed at noon that day it was because it was God's will. By extension, if Sean were standing in front of a church full of people that evening it must be because God wanted him there. "Okay," Sean thought to himself, "this is good." But where was God in Northern Ireland? Where was God when a single people, derived from a single gene pool, who worshipped a single God, went to war in the name of that God? When two opposing armies went to war, each doing so in the name of the same God, on whose side was God?

Sean suddenly realized that this line of reasoning, though tedious, may be productive. War, as with organized religion, was a man-made institution. Over the course of history all man-made religious institutions had been shown to be fallible. Why not, then, the man-made institution of war? Further still, war was not only a fallible institution but a futile one as well. Much as cigarettes are one of the few man-made items which, when used in accordance with the manufacturer's intentions, cause death, war was one, if not the only, man-made institution which, when executed in accordance with the officers' orders, was done so at the cost of human life. Could this truly be God's will? And deprived of "God's will" what, then, would be left as the Protestants' and Catholics' justification for murdering one another in perpetuity?

Deprived of God as the justification for fighting, if men continued to fight it was because they wanted to. But whether in an old American western movie or in West Belfast, when two men got into an argument in a saloon, or pub, and decided to step outside and "settle it like men", a bareknuckled brawl would ensue. It was a contest of skill, albeit primitive. In the end one man walked away victorious. The other man licked his wounds and vowed to fight again, usually the next day. It may not have been civilized, but it wasn't murder.

By the time the ferry docked in Belfast a Westerly wind, spawned by the Gulf Stream, had blown away the dense fog. Indeed, the sky was brilliant blue. Had Sean been anywhere in Ireland but dockside in Belfast he would have seen that the fields were an equally brilliant green. Sean threw away his 3X5 cards. He had his opening remarks, he had his case, and he had his summation. For Sean, over the course of his three-hour ferry ride, his trip had been transformed from an academic exercise into a mission.

By the time Sean had checked in at the youth hostel it was nearly four. He had become so lost in his thoughts that he'd forgotten to eat. He didn't want a heavy meal as it would dull his senses before his speech. He'd just grab a bite at O'Rourke's before heading out to St. Columba's and then grab some "pub food" before bed. As Tuesday was a "day off" this particular trip he could sleep in the next morning. He walked down to O'Rourke's and nibbled on a pastry, washing it down with some black coffee. Then he went back to the hostel to freshen up before his speech.

Sean shaved for the second time that day, something he'd only done previously on days when he had a date in the evening which he hoped would end up with someone next to him in bed the next morning. He put on the most conservative rugby shirt he owned, the one with the stiff white collar, and a pair of slacks which still bore the last remnants of a crease. Finally, he cleaned the mud off of his L.L. Bean hiking boots and he was ready to go.

There was still enough daylight left that he felt safe walking the mile and a half to St. Columba's. He arrived just after 6:30 and made his way to the rectory where he introduced himself to Father Matthias. The good Father told Sean that the parish had been abuzz with talk of this evening's meeting ever since he had announced it at Mass eight days earlier. Sean thought back to the presidential campaign in the States which had ended just two

weeks earlier. President Ford's handlers had worked hard to lower expectations of his performance in the televised debates with Georgia governor "Jimmy" Carter, but no one could have predicted Ford's gaffe in stating that Poland was not under the control of the Soviet Union. If that one statement alone did not win the election for Carter, it certainly lost it for Ford. But tonight it sounded as though expectations were at a fever pitch for Sean's speech.

As the appointed hour approached Sean and Father Matthias made their way from the rectory, through the garden, to an entrance to the church which brought them to the preparation area behind the altar and out of view of the parishioners. Sean straightened himself up as best he could without the benefit of a mirror and, promptly at 7:00PM, he and the Father made their entrance. The silence was deafening. Since he'd been identified as an American scholar studying abroad maybe the audience expected a bearded man with graying temples and a Harris tweed jacket with suede patches at the elbows. But there was Sean looking more like an altar boy than Mr. Chips.

"Ladies and gentlemen, parishioners and visitors, this is Sean Patrick O'Connell. He's from the States and is studying Geography at Edinburgh."

"The Sunday School's downstairs," shouted Seamus Flynn who had stopped by Kelly's pub on the way to the church for some pre-meeting lubrication. "Now, Seamus," said the good Father, "Give the boy a chance. He's studied the 'goings on' hereabouts and would like to talk to us about what he's found. Sean?" With that Sean stepped up to the microphone mounted on the pulpit.

"Good evening. My name is Sean Patrick O'Connell and I'm from Washington, DC."

"I hear you've got yourself a Baptist for a President," interjected Seamus. At that two of his mates gently escorted Flynn out of the church proper and into the Parish Hall for an early cup

of tea. "As I was saying," Sean proceeded, "I'm from Washington and I'm studying at Edinburgh. But my real reason in coming to your island was to look at an age-old problem with a fresh set of eyes in the hopes that I could divine some new approach to its solution." With that there was a pronounced round of muttering and tittering in the audience. Sean waited for it to subside.

"For nearly three centuries your homeland has been torn in two by war, oppression, discrimination and the killing of 'brother' by 'brother'. While I'm sure there is not a soul here tonight who has not been affected by this strife, I know there is no one here of the generation which started the conflict." Sean paused, perceptibly, if only momentarily. "Will you be the generation which stops it?" There were a few polite claps, but the noise they caused was not even enough to wake the babies sleeping on their mothers' shoulders or disturb those discreetly feeding at their mothers' breasts.

"I came here sixty days ago with great optimism. But I soon began to believe that it was the collective will of your society that the bloodshed continue apace. When I got a chance to speak to you, one on one, I learned that was not the case." There was a modest round of muted applause. Even David, Brian and William, seated near the back of the church, clapped politely so as not to attract attention to themselves. "I had a theory that there were places between here and Shankill Road where Catholics and Protestants came together in a civil manner to transact their daily affairs. I was wrong. But I did learn that there is a time, and a place, where Catholics and Protestants come together when not engaged in their daily affairs, in a form of *unarmed* combat; you call it 'football'. Where I come from we call it soccer. You also have rugby, which we scarcely have at all." There was some polite laughter. "If given the chance, wouldn't you, and your children, prefer to exchange goals rather than gunfire and petrol bombs?"

"All Irishmen, both Catholic and Protestant, have enough to occupy your waking hours, what with jobs and families," Sean

paused, "and God." A few gasps, but Sean pressed on. "And yet there are still a few, a small minority, who perpetuate the violence while purportedly killing in the name of their faith. But those they kill, while of a different faith, worship the same God." Not a sound could be heard.

"You sit here tonight in the house of God. Your fathers and grandfathers built this house to honor him. Surely neither your actions, nor your thoughts, are hidden from him. I say to you again, and before God himself, yours was not the generation which started this conflict; will yours be the one to stop it?" There was a genuine round of applause. No standing ovation as from his fellow Geography students in Lincoln, but applause nonetheless. And had Sean been able to see more clearly he would have noticed a tear or two in the eyes of those babies' mothers.

"This is not something *I* can make happen. This is *your* parish, *your* neighborhood, *your* city, *your* island," Sean went on, preparing to wrap things up. "Talk to your fellow parishioners, your neighbors, your relatives, your friends. Tell them what you heard here tonight. Discuss it, dissect it, and then accept or reject it. I'll be saying the same thing on Wednesday night, but this time on Shankill Road. I pray that they listen as politely, and as attentively, as you have tonight. God bless you." With that there was another round of applause. Father Matthias rose, shook Sean's hand and turned to the parishioners. "There will now be tea and cookies in the Parish Hall. And Mr. O'Connell has agreed to stay to discuss his ideas further with any of you who might be interested."

This last comment took Sean by surprise, but he could scarcely decline the invitation. Nearly everyone proceeded to the Parish Hall. Only mothers with children whose bedtimes had passed, and three young men who had appeared to have arrived together, left the church through the rear doors. David, Brian and William walked down the street to Kelly's and found a booth in a back corner, out of earshot of the others.

“Gents,” began David after a pitcher of Bass ale and three glasses had been set before them, “we have a problem. I know it makes no sense, but with all this talk about civil disobedience, and now football, a few people may actually believe this fellow.”

“Go on,” said Brian. “Who’d be foolish enough to listen to this American?” “Mothers who want to see their sons grow up to be men, that’s who,” David responded. “We’ve got to take this O’Connell out of the equation.” The three spent the rest of the evening in intent discussion about how to keep Sean from further disrupting the status quo. They resolved to make sure that Sean’s scheduled speech on Wednesday never took place.

At noon on the 17<sup>th</sup> David and William made their way to Brian’s 4<sup>th</sup> floor flat in Ballymurphy; David drove his black ’66 Vauxhall while William took the Andersonstown bus and walked the rest of the way. First, they were going to take David’s car, so he had topped off the tank with petrol. Second, they would be armed in case of trouble. The three stored their Armalites at Brian’s flat above the acoustic tiles in the false ceiling. The Armalite is the non-military version of the M-16 developed for use by the American military in Vietnam. It had a muzzle velocity of 1,000 meters per second, a range of 2,000 meters, a lethal range of 400 meters and a capacity of up to 950 rounds per minute. In every way it was superior to anything officially carried by either the Irish *or* British army. This would beg the question as to where the three Provos got their weapons. The Clan na Gael is the American organization through which money and other necessities of war are funneled to the Republicans from the States. George Harrison, a native of County Mayo and now a respectable resident of New York, was the former quartermaster for the IRA. It is estimated that in 1969 alone he smuggled into Northern Ireland, three or four at a time, seventy firearms with the associated ammunition. Three had found their way to Callahan’s flat in Ballymurphy. David and Brian would store their weapons

between the seats and the front doors on either side of the Vauxhall; William, sitting in the rear, would conceal his, lying lengthwise on the rear seat, under an inconspicuous picnic blanket. Finally, Brian usually kept the blinds on the flat's windows closed, even after dark, and especially if the lights were on. Consequently, that would not attract attention.

Their plan was quite simple. They would drive to Shankill Road between the city center and the Presbyterian church at about 6:15PM. From there, every ten minutes or so, they would make a circuit from their starting point to the main bus terminal, out to the church, and back. In this way they had a high probability of encountering Sean entering the terminal, getting off the bus, or, if he chose to walk as he had on Monday, just walking down Shankill Road. As the hour approached they reviewed the plan mentally and out loud over and over again. This type of "snatch job" was nowhere near as complicated as other operations they had run. It should have been a snap.

At 6:10 they left the flat, their weapons concealed under the coats they were wearing as it had been raining all day, and rang for the lift. In another minute they were walking out of the building toward David's car in the parking lot. As the sun was already down, and people were scampering to and from their cars to keep from getting soaked, they attracted no attention as they crossed the parking lot and approached the car. They hopped into the car and David turned the ignition key. To their horror the only sound the car made was the sickening click-click-click of a dead battery. They were battle-tested Provos, and showed it by not panicking. They agreed to leave the keys in the car and split up. They would each take one of the first three floors of the building. Whoever was the first to find someone with jumper cables who was willing to come out in the rain to help them get the car started would return to the Vauxhall and get the engine running; the others would return shortly. William had taken the second floor and, after

trying six doors with no one at home, came to the door of Katie Baer. She told William she'd gladly help and grabbed her keys and raincoat. She pulled her Ford Prefect none-to-nose with the Vauxhall. Both she and William popped the hoods on their respective cars and William connected Katie's jumper cables. As neither David nor Brian were in sight he let Katie run her engine for a while to ensure the battery was charged. At about 6:30 William's two companions showed up just as he was starting the car. All three thanked Katie profusely, returned her jumper cables, hopped into the car, and pulled out into the dark and rain of Springfield Road. Ironically, they passed the Royal Ulster Constabulary station before they reached Shankill Road where they took a right-hand turn.

There were already a good number of cars parked along the road in front of the Presbyterian church. They admitted to themselves that Sean would not have walked to the church in this rain, and that they were probably out of time to make a circuit to the city center and back before the meeting started. They resigned themselves to finding their "target", and then improvising.

David, Brian and William entered the Presbyterian church shortly before 7:00PM and took seats near the rear. None of the congregation knew them but, as with the meeting Monday night at St. Columba's, visitors had been explicitly invited so no one asked them their names and few even took notice of them. Just at 7:00PM Reverend McHugh and Sean took to the microphone on the altar. After a brief introduction by the Reverend Sean stepped up to the microphone and delivered the same presentation as two nights earlier. The reception was much the same. The audience's reception might have even been a bit "cooler" than the one he received on Monday owing to their suspicion aroused by his name. "Patrick" and "O'Connell" were names just a little too Republican for some tastes. Nonetheless, Sean deemed the speech a success.

He might have been asked to stay for a while afterward but, because of the rain, the congregation was anxious to get home. The Reverend asked Sean if he needed a lift to the youth hostel but he declined. Heading out into the rainy night he had only gone half a dozen paces when he was approached by three familiar-looking men. David reintroduced himself and reminded Sean that they had met at O'Rourke's in September. Their faces looked vaguely familiar, and he knew he had seen them listening to his speech earlier, so he was not alarmed. David asked him if they could offer him a ride into town. Since it was now pouring, Sean accepted.

By prior arrangement Brian had yielded the front passenger seat to Sean and joined William in the rear. No sooner had both doors closed and David started the engine than Brian grabbed the strip of duct tape which had been positioned on the rear of the passenger seat and, swinging it over Sean's head, pulled it tight over Sean's mouth, effectively silencing him. As Sean began to scream unintelligibly, and reach for his face, Brian pushed him forward in the passenger seat and lashed Sean's wrists together behind his back.

"Oh," began David, "if I forgot to say so the first time, welcome to Ireland" Sean would have struggled more but he immediately noticed the Armalites next to the seats, one just to his left and one to David's right. He had no illusions that they'd not use them, and on him if necessary. As he drove, David continued his one-sided conversation with Sean. "We were so fascinated by what we heard at St. Columba's Monday night that we just had to come back for more." Then it hit him. Not only had Sean seen these three at O'Rourke's and at the Presbyterian church but at St. Columba's as well. That anyone would have wanted to hear his speech *twice* should have made him immediately suspicious.

"We're part of a sort of 'mutual aid society'," continued David. Sean's mind tried to focus on what he was saying. "Our society derives a great deal of support, financial and otherwise,

from the local citizenry, as well as back where you came from.” That clinched it for Sean. David, Brian and William were Provos. “You’ve said some interesting things the past few days, though I doubt anything will come of it. But the support of the locals, as well as that from the members of the Clan na Gael back in the States, comes strictly from their desire to see us fight British oppression and achieve reunification through whatever means necessary. Your scheme, as daft as it is, would accomplish neither. But a decrease in the level of fear and anxiety, both here and abroad, could jeopardize our financial support. And that is something we simply cannot allow.”

By this time they were back in the parking lot of Brian’s apartment. Everyone was either safely, and dryly, in their homes or waiting out the rain at one of the numerous local pubs to which they had gone after work. In either case, both the parking lot and the hallways were deserted. They wrestled Sean out of the car and into the elevator. William pushed a button and, three floors later, the quartet emerged in the hallway of the fourth floor. With David and Brian on either side, they escorted Sean down the hall to Brian’s flat. He let everyone in and then locked, chained and deadlocked the door shut. David pulled one of the four chairs from around the card table which served as Brian’s “dining room” into the middle of the room and thrust Sean into it. Then, using more duct tape, he lashed Sean to the chair. “Now Sean, my boy,” began David, “what are we supposed to do with you?”

## Chapter Twelve

Since 1969 David Durbin, Brian Callahan and William Callahan had operated as a “cell” within the Provisional IRA, officially referred to as an ASU, or Active Service Unit. ASUs were organized predominantly around their specialty; bombings, assassinations, ambushes or mortar attacks. A number of ASUs comprised a Company and a number of Companies made up a Battalion. Two or more Battalions formed a Brigade, of which there were six: Armagh, Belfast, Donegal, Dublin, Londonderry and Tyrone/Monaghan. Truth be told, there were only fifteen operational ASUs, twelve operating in Ulster, two in the South, and one in Europe. The only Brigade in which something approximating a full complement filled the available billets was Belfast, with four Battalions, each running one ASU.

The Brigades, each responsible for a county or area, made up the Southern and Northern Commands of the GHQ, or General Headquarters. The GHQ was a twelve-man body selected by the Army Council which, in turn, was elected by a twelve-man Army Executive which functioned as the head of the Provisional IRA.

Unlike the Provisional Irish Republican Army which had entered the world stage in 1969, the Special Air Service, or SAS, of the British Army had a somewhat longer history, having been founded in 1941 to conduct raids behind German lines in North Africa during World War II. After the war the world’s various empires came under attack and were the victims of both protests and breakaway efforts by their colonies. The insurgencies were undertaken by the disaffected and the disenfranchised in the

remaining colonies using combat methods not well articulated until the omnipresent book by Castro compatriot Che Guevara, *Guerilla Warfare*, coincidentally written in 1969. During the Vietnam War the U.S. federal government had undertaken a study through one of its many “dummy” and quasi-governmental corporations, like RAND and MITRE, to analyze the phenomenon of guerilla warfare, or insurgency, and its appropriate response, counterinsurgency. Hidden within the black budget of an intelligence agency was a line entitled “Numismatics”; a term legitimately used for the study of metal legal tender or, in this covert instance, COunterINSurgency (“COINS”). The funding was then funneled through a legitimate research university (in this case American University, conveniently located in Washington, DC) which held numerous government contracts.

What had been learned over the many years of the Vietnam War was that one needed to win the “hearts and minds” of the local citizenry. Their loyalties would follow. These counterinsurgencies were also conducted by forces hidden away where no battlefield existed, and who operated in such a way as to deny the insurgents any safe haven. Ironically, in 1950, the Director of Operations for the British counterinsurgency efforts in Malaya had consulted with Mike Calvert, a former SAS officer, and been told much the same thing. Those tactics had been employed successfully in Malaya, Oman, Brunei, Borneo and Aden. Throughout the succeeding twenty years three circumstances arose which emphasized the ongoing need for men trained to function under just these conditions. The first was the Cold War, the second was the use of international terrorism as an alternative to diplomacy, and the third was Northern Ireland. In 1957 the forces which had undertaken these missions were formally constituted as the 22<sup>nd</sup> Special Air Services Regiment. They were based at the former Royal Air Force base in Hereford,

Herefordshire, England. They were something akin to the U.S. Army Green Berets, the Air Force Pararescue troops and the Navy SEALs. Since 1969 much of the unconventional warfare in Northern Ireland had been nothing so much as the story of the running battle between the Provos and the SAS.

In 1969, the year that David, Brian and William had dropped out of the Christian Brothers' School on Glen Road in Belfast following their 9<sup>th</sup> year, there had been only eight terrorist incidents in all of Northern Ireland, all bombings. In 1970 the number had escalated to 383, 213 shootings and 170 bombings. But by 1972 Northern Ireland had clearly begun its descent into madness with 12,481 incidents, including 10,628 shootings and 1,853 bombings.

Since leaving school at the age of fifteen the three mates had lived on the edges of the Troubles, running the odd errand for the Provos, tossing the random rock across the peace line into the Protestant neighborhood to the North, but always making it home by supertime. In 1973 they had all moved out of their respective parents' houses and found lodging in the State-subsidized tenements of Falls Road and Andersonstown which were set aside for Catholics with a low income or on the dole. They held the occasional odd job for as long as it took them to save up some spending money and a little pocket change for extras. And then they were off to what they enjoyed best—being a thorn in the side of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. It wasn't until January of 1976, at the age of 22 and less than a year earlier, that they had graduated to murder. David, Brian and William had put one bullet each into the skulls of three of the ten Protestant workmen pulled from a bus in Kingsmills and shot at point blank range.

Sean's three captors were all now 23 years of age, four years younger than himself, and had already "made their bones" with the Provos. Though he had no way of knowing this he should have had no doubt that whatever threat they made they were fully capable of making good on it.

The first to notice Sean's absence and departure from his routine was the day manager at the youth hostel. When he made his rounds of the rooms on Thursday morning he'd gotten no reply when he'd knocked on Sean's door. Upon entering the room he'd found that the bed had not been slept in. This, in and of itself, could have meant one of several things. The first, and clearly the most fortuitous, possibility was that Sean had fallen prey to the irresistible charms of some Belfast lass and spent the night in her flat rather than in the Spartan surroundings of the youth hostel. Little did the day manager know that this was not an option for Sean. The second was that he'd simply been taken in by one of his interviewees the better to learn more about the day-to-day life of a Belfast resident and their family. From there the options' likelihood decreased but the ominous tone which they took on increased. He could have run afoul of the city's criminal element and be indisposed, he could have inadvertently gotten caught up in the politics of the Troubles and be being held against his will, or he could be dead.

Friday morning brought with it a downturn in the prospects of a positive outcome. He'd not slept in his bed for the second night. Hospitality and one night stands all had their place in any young man's coming of age, but Sean had a boat to catch and the later in the day it became the less likely it became that he'd catch a ferry which would allow him to make the necessary connections to reach Edinburgh that night.

Alan, Billy and Rachel had gone out to The Tap Room after classes that Friday evening as usual. More often than not Sean would arrive back at school from his excursions to Belfast in time to catch last call before they returned to the graduate residences. Tonight there was no sign of him. All three began to become worried, but Rachel more so than the two others.

After closing time they made their way back to campus and to their respective rooms. Alan and Billy were nearly asleep by the

time their heads hit the pillows, but Rachel went straight for her telephone. Unbeknownst to Alan and Billy, Rachel and Sean had become fast friends and their friendship, over the course of the first three months of school, had emerged as a full-blown romance. More than once, with the assent of their roommates, Sean had spent the night in Rachel's room, or she in his. They had gone on day-long walks throughout Edinburgh or lay on an open stretch of cool grass away from the city at midnight holding hands as they watched the stars make their way ever so slowly across the sky. Sean had thought to give Rachel the number of the youth hostel in the event of an emergency at home in America. It had never occurred to him that the emergency might be his own.

Rachel rang up the university operator and made a trunk line call to Belfast. It was the night manager, Liam Brennan, who answered. "O'Connell you say?" asked the manager after Rachel had inquired as to his whereabouts. "That's right, Sean O'Connell. He's a graduate student at the University of Edinburgh and he comes to the youth hostel for a week once a month to do research in Belfast." Ironically Rachel had not told the manager anything of which he was not already aware. "Hold on," said Brennan, rustling through a bin beneath the front desk. "He was here this week. Paid for four nights; scheduled to leave today. 'cept he wasn't in his room the last two nights and he didn't take his belongings with 'im. Still here, they are. In the 'Lost and Found'". Liam grinned to himself when he thought of this girl, no doubt a lady friend of O'Connell's, as she must have reacted to the notion that he wasn't sleeping in his own bed Wednesday or Thursday.

"I want you to hold on to all of his things until I'm able to pick them up. I'll pay you for the trouble; just keep them safe!" "Yes, mum," said Liam, who was as willing to take a Scottish student's money as he had been the Provos. "And when do you suppose that might be?" "I can't say," said Rachel. "Maybe this weekend, maybe next week. Just don't let them get away from you."

“I’ll see to it myself,” said Brennan. ““night, mum.””

By now it was the middle of the night in Scotland and late evening in Washington. “Time to wake some people up,” thought Rachel to herself. The first two, who would be of no help whatsoever but who *would* provide moral support, were Alan and Billy. She ran down the single flight of steps to their floor and pounded first on one’s door, then the other. They both staggered out into the common room in various stages of undress.

“Sean’s missing,” she said. “Whah?” said Billy, as eloquent as ever. Alan just looked at her quizzically. “Sean didn’t sleep at the youth hostel in Belfast Wednesday or Thursday night, and now he’s nowhere to be found and he’s left his belongings behind.” Now Billy and Alan’s first reaction to the part about not sleeping in his own bed had been the same, but they’d never let on. Sean’s leaving his personal items behind, however, had caught them both by surprise. “Okay,” said Alan, “it’s the middle of the night but, nonetheless, the university must have some mechanism for dealing with this.”

Alan called the school’s Security Office which was staffed 24 hours a day. “Officer MacClain,” answered the voice on the other end of the line. Alan handed the phone to Rachel and she related to the officer the same set of facts she’d just told her two classmates. “And he’s a Fulbright Scholar, an American!” she added for emphasis. “Oh,” said Officer MacClain. “then give me your number and let me get the Chancellor on the line. I’ll call you back when I have more to tell you.” Rachel was reluctant to hang up, but she knew that Officer MacClain couldn’t get the bureaucratic wheels of the University of Edinburgh moving until she let him go. “Call back as soon as you can tell us what is being done...*please.*”

“Goodnight, m’am,” said the officer.

Aidan MacClain had never done this before, but there was a first time for everything. He got out his university directory and

looked up the Chancellor's home phone number. Chancellor Bannock was a bachelor and known to keep quite late hours. He was just finishing off his bedtime snifter of Courvoisier when the phone rang. "Chancellor Bannock, Officer MacClain here. We've got a missing student, an American, who never made it back last evening from a week's research in Belfast. The way things have been going over there I thought I'd better give you a call. What do you want me to do?" "Where'd you get this information, MacClain?" Bannock asked somewhat gruffly. "One of his classmates just called the office. Real worried, she was."

"Call her back and tell her I'll look into it personally, tonight."

No sooner had Bannock hung up the phone from talking to Officer MacClain than he dialed the number of the American Consulate across town at 3 Regent Terrace. "Watch Officer," answered the voice. "Sadler here."

"This is Chancellor Bannock at The University, Mr. Sadler," he began. "We've got a situation here which will require your assistance. We have a graduate student from America, one Sean O'Connell, who's gone missing. He spent one week each month over in Belfast doing research. To date all's been well. This time he didn't return."

There was a long pause while Sadler gathered his thoughts. "We've got American students walking the streets of Belfast in these times?"

"He's a Fulbright Scholar, sir. They vetted him and signed off on his plan of study."

"Chancellor, I'm going to have to kick this one upstairs to the American Consul, Malcolm Beveridge. Within the hour there'll be lights on in Washington and Langley. Would you please notify his parents immediately and give them the consul's name and number. I'm sure they'll want to speak to us directly."

"Thank you, Mr. Sadler," said Bannock as he was hanging up.

"This is why I get the big bucks," grumbled Bannock to himself as he ruffled through his new copy of the student

directory, complete with parental contact numbers. “O’Connell, O’Connell, O’Connell. Here it is, Sean O’Connell. Father, ‘Donald P.’; mother, ‘Mary P.’” He dialed the number. If there was any saving grace to this call it was that they were West of him where it might still be a decent hour. “Hello,” came a man’s voice after the typical transatlantic delay. “Mr. O’Connell, Donald O’Connell?”

“That’s right.”

“Mr. O’Connell, this is Neal Bannock, Chancellor Neal Bannock of the University of Edinburgh. I’m afraid I have some disturbing news.”

“Is Sean alright, is he alive?” At that Mary Pat’s face went white. “You see, sir, we don’t quite know what’s become of him. He didn’t return from Belfast last evening as was his custom. His classmates got concerned and called Security. They, in turn, called me. And I’ve just gotten off the phone with the office of the American Consul, one Malcolm Beveridge. His number is 0131 556 8315. He’ll be expecting your call. Now I’m going to call Sean’s classmates back and try to calm them down. Do keep me in the loop, won’t you?”

“We’ll do our best, Mr. Bannock.” That term of address always rankled Bannock, but he was so tired as to be beyond caring.

Donald O’Connell told his wife, Mary, everything that Bannock had told him. He’d call Malcolm Beveridge in a minute. But there was one call he’d have to make first. It was “local”. It took only one ring for the phone to be answered. “State Department Watch Officer. Greely here.”

“Greely, this is Brigadier General Donald O’Connell. Give me the Duty Officer on the European Desk.”

“Yes, sir. That will be Colonel Danforth.” With that there was a single click. “Danforth here.”

“Colonel, this is General O’Connell. You don’t know me. Hell, I’m not even in the same T.O. as you. But I need your help.”

With that Danforth interrupted. “O’Connell, did you say? Donald O’Connell; son, Sean P.?” “That’s right, Colonel.”

“I just got off the phone with our Consul in Edinburgh, Malcolm Beveridge. He told me everything he knows. We’ll have our first task force meeting on the situation here at Foggy Bottom before the sun’s up in the morning.”

“Glad to hear it, Colonel. But, say, I still need that favor.”

“Name it, General.”

“I’ve got a daughter, Margaret Patricia, but everyone calls her Meg, who works for our friends up the Potomac at Langley. She’s 25 and a graduate of The Farm. All I can tell you, because it’s all I know, is that she’s in Italy and that she’s awaiting redeployment. You’ve got your opposite number at Langley, and I’m hoping you’re on speaking terms with him. Now I know that there’s times when State and the Agency haven’t seen eye to eye, but if there’s anyone out at Langley that still remembers how to put two and two together they’ll be able to figure out how best to use Meg next.”

“The guy’s name is Kilgore. He can be a pain, but this one doesn’t sound like rocket science. Meg should be able to get into Sean’s head pretty good. Let’s just hope she’s as good with strangers if he’s exercised bad taste in making new friends.”

“Amen, brother. I owe you one, and if you ever need to get in touch with me I’m in the Secretary’s office at the Pentagon.”

“Always good to have friends in high places, General. Good night, and good luck.”

## Chapter Thirteen

Sean O'Connell had not left Brian Callahan's flat since he'd arrived, under duress, Wednesday night. He had not bathed or had a change of clothes since then. When not going to the lavatory, where he was always escorted by at least one of his captors, he was always lashed to a wooden chair in the middle of the living room. With the rare exception he was always guarded by two of the three members of the ASU which had taken him hostage.

After midnight that Wednesday David had taken his leave of Sean and his two mates to meet with his Battalion Commander, Jimmy O'Flynn. This little foray into the geopolitics of Northern Ireland had not been sanctioned by consensus of the four battalion commanders in Belfast, but David was a fast talker and convinced O'Flynn of the necessity of their actions. Nonetheless, it fell to O'Flynn to explain the facts of life to David, facts which he was explicitly instructed to pass on to Brian and William outside of earshot of Sean.

"David," began Jimmy, "don't you realize what you've done? This O'Connell character wasn't just any outside agitator. He is a student at Edinburgh; that brings in Scotland and, by extension, England. He is an American; that brings in the US with their arsenal of military and intelligence resources. And he is a Fulbright scholar; that tugs at the heartstrings of all the pointy-headed liberals in the US upon whom we can usually count to support our cause in the face of our occupation by a colonial oppressor. We've got to think this one through very carefully so that the outcome works to our favor."

“We may be overlooking one facet of our captive’s past which we can turn to our favor. Meaghan MacDonough at Georgetown got me a copy of O’Connell’s complete Fulbright application. Posted it to me last month. It included his resume. From 1970 to 1974 Sean worked in military intelligence for the US government. And get this; he’s a Catholic. Since Bloody Sunday we’ve been hinting at MI-5 and MI-6 involvement in Northern Ireland. MI-5 would have authority; MI-6 would not. We could even imply that he was working with the 14<sup>th</sup> Int.” Much like its American counterpart, the FBI, MI-5 was limited to domestic affairs while, like *its* American counterpart, the CIA, MI-6 was limited to operations outside the monarchy. The “14<sup>th</sup> Int” was the 14<sup>th</sup> Intelligence unit comprised of 50 men whose existence in Ulster had never been formally acknowledged by the Royal Army. “This time the law works in our favor. By stretching the truth we can claim MI-6 involvement in Northern Ireland assisted by a covert American agent, one with four years of military intelligence experience and masquerading as a student, working for the CIA. Or his complicity with an intelligence unit which Whitehall claims doesn’t exist. If nothing else we can turn this situation into a propaganda goldmine.”

O’Flynn thought for a moment. “We can get our supporters seeing spies where there are none and, in the process, get those who provide us our ‘gun money’ to think that they’re now protecting Irish Catholics from both the Crown and CIA quislings. Harrison and his friends in America won’t be able to launder the money fast enough. But we’ve got to do this right. I don’t want to turn this American into a martyr.” With that O’Flynn dismissed Durbin for the night with an admonition to keep Brian and William in line, and not to harm a single hair on Sean’s head.

David returned home to find Brian and William engaged in a game of checkers while Sean was sleeping, sitting up, in his chair.

He didn't even stir when David entered the flat. Durbin proceeded to tell his two colleagues about the content of his discussion with Jimmy. Then they started to think of ways in which a "spy" could be punished "behind enemy lines". Their thought process was fascinating for they indeed thought of Northern Ireland in the same way the Communist Chinese thought of Taiwan; a part of their nation which was temporarily under foreign influence but which would, one day, return to once again make their country whole. Thus an American or Brit who was operating in their country was doing so on Republican soil, their native soil.

The three started running through scenarios. Unbeknownst to them, Sean had awakened but had kept his eyes shut and tried not to move. "You can always execute a spy," said William, the dimmest in the room. "Where's the propaganda value in that?" asked David. "Better to trade him for all the political prisoners in The Maze. Get all our mates back and reconstitute the Provos as a standing Army that can give the RUC or Royal Army a real fight."

"Or you could just put a bullet in the back of his head like we did those guys in Kingsmills and leave him for dead in a ditch somewhere," chimed in Brian. "You could even put him over the border and blame it on the SAS. British troops on foreign soil; bad business and all."

"Time for you two to get some sleep," said David "I'll keep an eye on our hostage, here, 'til morning." With that Brian and William got up and found their way to the bedroom and the couch respectively. Within fifteen minutes they were both asleep. Sean slowly opened his eyes. "David, pssst David," whispered Sean. "Come here. I want to talk to you." David walked over to Sean but stayed just beyond arm's reach just in case. "What do you want?"

"Look," Sean began, "when you first met me I was just another drunk in a bar ranting about the British oppression of Catholics. A month later I was a drunk ranting about the Irish oppression of the

Protestants. If I were a 'spy' is that the way I'd behave to maintain a low profile? I mean, really. I'm just a student trying to pass my courses. I've got a beautiful girlfriend back at school, a sister I haven't seen in years, and exams coming up next month. I wouldn't have time to be a 'spy' if I wanted to."

"So *you* say," said David. "How about this," continued Sean, "Why don't you get my girlfriend and my sister to come and get me. They'll both vouch for me, you can release me, and the three of us will just march right on out of your lives."

"And how does that do me any good?" asked David. "There'll be no more interviewing citizens, no more speeches at churches, I'll go back to the States; maybe I can get my girl to come with me. I'll pick up my life right where I left off when I landed at Heathrow. Clark University in Worcester, Mass, has one of the best graduate programs in Cartography in the country. Hell, maybe I'll even become a Red Sox fan. At least then I'd never have to worry about the expense of traveling to any World Series road games." The humor of this last comment was lost on David.

"You mean you'd just up and leave, like you'd never been here?" "Sure, I mean it beats the Hell out of that scenario where I get a bullet in the back of my head."

"But what about Brian and William?" asked David. "What about them? You're clearly the brains of the outfit. They'll do whatever you say, and I'm sure your fellow Provos can set you three up somewhere other than this rat-infested tenement. It would be as though this entire episode never occurred."

"You know, when I think about it I wish it never had," said David.

"This is just all too much too fast," he continued. "Taking you out of the equation; that was the easy part to decide upon. Even with your harebrained ideas there were bound to be people who would listen to you: people who are desperate for a peaceful conclusion to this 'war', regardless of the 'cost'. But now I just

don't know. I mean, even my battalion commander, while being pleased about the success of our mission tonight, hasn't a clue as to how to proceed next, and what we'll ultimately do with you."

"I just gave you the answer," responded Sean. "I don't know; I just need to think for a while." With that David wandered over to the window. Peeking through the closed Venetian blinds he could see the glow from the city reflected on the low-hanging clouds to the Northeast. "How the Hell did things ever get this far out of hand? Three-hundred years ago some king thought no one would mind and, more importantly, no one would fight back if he just gave Ireland's six northern counties to some Protestant Scotsmen. Sad to say, for the most part he was right. Sixty years ago this year some patriots decided they'd had enough and started to fight back down in Dublin. Seven years ago it was the RUC and the B Specials who failed to protect the Catholics from the Orange Order in Derry. And now look what it's brought us!"

Sean didn't speak. Partly because there was nothing left to say, and partly because, for the first time, he was beginning to understand where the Provos' rage came from. It didn't make him feel any better when he remembered that *his* father's side of the family had endured the same oppression and abuse for that self same three-hundred years. His intentions may have been noble when they were set down on paper back in Lincoln a year before, but now, sitting in this prison which held not only him but David, Brian and William as well, it all seemed somewhat naïve, and futile. The Maze held political prisoners, but no more so than this tenement in Ballymurphy. An end to the violence was an honorable goal but, suddenly, the loyalists' side of the argument seemed just a little less compelling than it had months, or even weeks, earlier.

By Saturday evening there were events swirling around the Sean O'Connell affair from Langley to Foggy Bottom, from Belfast to Edinburgh, and from Whitehall to Trieste. The Central

Intelligence Agency's Deputy Director of Operations was arranging for a telephone conversation with Meg O'Connell. At the State Department the Under Secretary of State for European Affairs was staying in constant contact with Malcolm Beveridge in Glasgow and Edward Heath at 10 Downing Street. In Belfast the RUC had been provided with Sean's picture and in Edinburgh Rachel Stuart was preparing, against the wishes of the Chancellor and her parents, to travel to Belfast Monday morning. In Whitehall the Ministry of Defence was simulating scenarios to free Sean O'Connell from his unknown captors in an undetermined location. And, in Trieste, Meg O'Connell's handler had told her to be at a particular pay phone at a particular time. The caller would ask to speak to "Sparrow" and would identify himself as "Eagle". There was not yet a plan in place, but all the players, save Sean himself, were on the move. From a distance it would have appeared as if a great chess game with all the pieces converging upon, or aligning themselves to, the king. Sean, at the confluence of the collective efforts of agencies and countries spanning half the breadth of the globe, was oblivious to any of it. The most he could hope for was a hot mug of coffee rather than yet another cup of tea.

It was now that timelines became of prime importance. In Trieste one particular pay phone rang right on schedule. "May I please speak to Sparrow?" asked the man's voice. "This is Sparrow."

"Sparrow, this is Eagle. Listen carefully, I want to keep this as short as possible. Rent a car and drive to Florence. It's 257 miles and should take you approximately 7 hours. Book a seat on the next Alitalia flight to Frankfurt. When you arrive in Frankfurt make a reservation on the next BOAC flight to Heathrow. Now, and this is very important, while waiting for the departure of your flight you will be approached by a woman who will identify herself as 'Robin'. She will hand you a package. Do not open it

but put it in your purse. It will contain all of your authentic papers which you left behind in Germany en route to Italy; your passport, driver's license, etc. You will arrive in the UK as Fraulein Anna Weissmann. When you get there walk toward the Aer Lingus ticket counter. You will be intercepted by a man who will identify himself as 'Falcon'. He will have already picked up your ticket for you and will explain your next assignment. Dispose of any identifying items bearing the name 'Anna Weissmann' in a trash receptacle in the women's lavatory. Oh, and Sparrow, as attested to by both the name on the ticket and your papers you will, once again, be Margaret Patricia O'Connell. Welcome back, Meg!" With that the phone went dead.

Meg's head was spinning. The other members of her network would be informed of her departure from Italy by the usual means. Such occurrences were so frequent as to not even warrant a second thought. But, for Meg, this was a first. She rented a yellow Fiat 850 and headed out toward Florence. Due to the differing time zones Margaret Patricia O'Connell landed at Shannon before midnight Sunday. She took a taxi into Dublin where reservations had been made for her in a nondescript hotel for the night. Unable to get the thoughts of her captive brother out of her head, it took her until about 3:00AM to get to sleep. At about that same time Rachel Stuart was waking up to make the bus connections to the earliest possible ferry to Belfast. By sundown Monday night the two "queens" in this game of chess had converged on the city of Belfast.

Rachel, a simple graduate student from Edinburgh and an Aberdeen native, was nothing more or less than she seemed. Meg's identity, however, needed a little work. As there were Meaghan MacDonough's throughout the IRA's network of supporters, the CIA had a three and one-half year hole in her resume to fill. A Master's in Italian and a PhD in Linguistics from Ohio State would occupy her time from May of 1973 until

September of 1976. Since then she'd been knocking about Washington going on interviews and trying to make her first significant career decision. There were records in Columbus and the offices of several multinational corporations with offices in Washington to document every minute of her non-existent postgraduate life.

## Chapter Fourteen

As Rachel Stuart sat across the table from Battalion Commander Jimmy O'Flynn in a small flat above O'Rourke's on Monday evening she reflected upon the strange twists of events which had brought her here to advocate for the life of her lover. The first was the rather unorthodox way in which she had developed a sympathy and understanding for the IRA and its causes. Her mother, Marie Murphy, was a product of Lower Falls Road in Belfast. Born in 1930, she had moved to Glasgow upon her graduation from convent school in 1947 to escape the effects of loyalist oppression and discrimination. She attended nursing school in one of that city's major hospitals and there met Angus Stuart, ten years her senior and a graduate of the University of Edinburgh's College of Medicine, who was completing his residency as a general practitioner. Two years later, upon receipt of her nursing diploma, she and Angus were married. Angus, a stubborn Scot, had a contempt for the monarchy equal to that of his wife and born of the same resistance to English occupation as that of William Wallace nearly 700 years earlier.

In 1950, when Marie had completed her studies and Angus his residency, they moved to the Stuart homestead in Aberdeen. There, in 1951, Rachel Stuart was born. From her first days in the cradle and at her mother's breast to the last days before she went off to the University, Rachel had been exposed to eighteen years of anti-English diatribes. Little wonder, then, that she fell in with a similarly oriented group when she arrived on campus. It was 1969, the heady days of Bloody Sunday and Bernadette Devlin, as

well as the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement in America. Her political allegiances were formed and fostered over the next several years, both as an undergraduate and graduate student.

She had fallen in love with Sean O'Connell on sight that night in The Tap Room. He was handsome, and intelligent. She had read his Fulbright proposal before his arrival and had found it innovative, if not naïve. A lot had happened between them in the preceding 90 days, intellectually, emotionally and physically. She had, indeed, been concerned when Sean had not returned to Edinburgh on the evening of Friday, the 19<sup>th</sup> of November. By the time she had returned to her residence that night David Durbin had already paid the first of what would be his many visits to Battalion Commander O'Flynn in that selfsame room. In point of fact, Rachel had made two calls to Belfast before alerting her classmates to Sean's dilemma. The first had been to O'Flynn who was well aware of Sean's presence in Belfast. He had told her that Sean was in IRA custody and was, as yet, unharmed. He instructed her to continue to play the distressed girlfriend and make arrangements with the youth hostel to have his belongings secured until she could recover them lest any of Sean's findings, itineraries or contacts be discovered by the RUC.

When she arrived in Belfast that morning she had checked into a modest hotel in the city center frequented by workers from both the South and Scotland who would spend weeknights in Belfast and weekends at home while employed by a local shipyard or construction firm. After orienting herself to her surroundings and getting supper she had made her way to the youth hostel just after the shift change to the night manager. Liam Brennan had given her everything Sean had left behind and collected his proverbial "30 pieces of silver". Ironically, she had nearly crossed paths with Meg O'Connell in the lobby of the youth hostel as she was exiting. Meg, the younger sister of the captured American student, would

be staying at the hostel while playing the most difficult role a spy could take on; one's self.

Battalion Commander O'Flynn's first task when Rachel had arrived was to reassure her that, although David, Brian and William had acted without the sanction of the four battalion commanders or the brigade commander when they snatched Sean, they were not so hot headed as to do anything rash like harm or kill him without their approval for such action would bring down retribution upon them from their superiors. Once Rachel had been put at ease the two sat in their respective chairs sipping their respective cups of tea and analyzing their alternatives. The first option was to kill Sean. This course of action was of no benefit to the Provos and would do nothing but bring down the wrath of God upon them from the US, the UK, and numerous non-governmental organizations whose self-appointed mission in life was to safeguard humanity from itself. Rachel was, at once, both relieved and perplexed. Sean would be allowed to live, and for that she would be eternally grateful. But of what benefit could Sean be to the Provos that would not place either him, or her, at risk? The second option they examined was to simply let him walk out of Brian's flat in Ballymurphy and go upon his way. As with the first, this course was of no more value to the Provos than killing Sean. No, there had to be something better which would keep Sean safe while, at the same time, providing some benefit to the Provos.

It was now the Autumn of 1976. In 1971 a young firebrand by the name of Gerry Adams, aged twenty-one, had become the commanding officer of Second Battalion, Belfast. He had been interned, on and off, from 1972 'til 1976. But he was an astute observer of the conflict and had discovered a flaw in the IRA's structure. Much as Napoleon's incursion into Russia in 1812 was followed by a withdrawal precipitated by the untenable length of his supply lines, the IRA's operations in the North suffered from

their dependence upon taking direction from the South. Upon his release from the Maze in 1976 Adams convinced the Provo leadership to establish a Northern Command which could act on its own orders. He was subsequently named a member of the Army Council. Adams understood that “targets” had to be chosen carefully. It was important that, whether the target was human or bricks and mortar, it had to be emblematic in the minds of the Provos’ supporters of the occupying force of the Crown. He was also quite aware of the depleted ranks of the frontline troops and the strategic use of propaganda to ensure the citizenry’s continued support for their armed conflict. Sean O’Connell’s captivity offered an opportunity on every front to reinvigorate the disenchanting ranks.

First, as an American with a background in intelligence work, it could be claimed that Sean’s actions in Northern Ireland presented a clear and present danger to the undertakings of the Provos. His activities over the past three months could easily be characterized in a good public relations campaign as surveillance at best, and reconnoitering for an operation at worst. Pressure, both psychological and physical, could be brought to bear upon him to disavow any loyalist sentiments he may have misguidedly held and to embrace the Provos’ struggle. And, finally, this American, this student, this Fulbright scholar, could be ransomed for all the political prisoners held in the Maze in exchange for his safe return. They could even bring in Father Matthias from St. Columba’s to broker the deal, thereby giving it an ecclesiastical touch.

While the Provos had been devising a strategy whereby they could make maximum practical and propaganda use of Sean O’Connell, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the British Ministry of Defence and the American CIA had themselves been strategizing, developing scenarios whereby they could safely effect Sean’s release without loss of face, or the unnecessary loss of life. They had started with the assumption that the Provos would not risk

transporting Sean long distances, and certainly not across the border into the Republic. They knew from their interviews with his classmates in Edinburgh that he was scheduled to speak in a Catholic church on Falls Road Monday night and a Presbyterian church on Shankill Road on Wednesday night. The fact that he had made his scheduled appearance on Wednesday meant that he had been free to move about the city as late as Wednesday evening, November 17<sup>th</sup>. Reverend McHugh had been asked to make an announcement at the end of each of his services on Sunday, November 21<sup>st</sup>. Anyone who had attended Sean's presentation on the 17<sup>th</sup> had been asked to assemble in the church at 7:00PM on Monday evening.

A contingent of constables from the RUC station on Springfield Road had descended upon the church by not later than 6:45. As each congregant entered they were asked their name and that of those who had sat on all sides of them. In this way they could make a good estimate of just how many people they would miss during their interrogations and who they were. Fortunately there were very few. Word had spread throughout the neighborhood that the American student had gone missing and they did not want his abduction, if that is what it was, in any way blamed one of their own. Everyone remembered it had been raining that evening and that they were all anxious to get home. Reverend McHugh recalled offering Sean a lift to the youth hostel but that he had declined. Several members of the congregation remember seeing Sean leave the church, and thinking that it was somewhat inhospitable to let the poor young fellow get soaked on the way back to town. But they had each felt somewhat less guilty when they observed him encountering three young men who he seemed to know and jumping into their black 1966 Vauxhall Victor.

It would have been too much to expect that any of them had remembered the license plate number, but they asked

nonetheless. The descriptions of the three men were of little use; three Irish youths attired in rain gear which all but obscured their identity. But the make, model and year of the vehicle was an excellent start. Upon their return to the station that evening the senior constable and his sergeant had run the car's vital statistics through Belfast's motor registry computer. There were only four hits. Three known addresses were in the Catholic section of the city; one in the Protestant. This could mean nothing for the car could have been stolen, but it was a start.

The process of elimination was not as simple as it may have first appeared. In addition to the possibility that the vehicle had been stolen it could have just as well been loaned out to a friend or family member. The RUC put surveillance teams on all four addresses that very night as well as putting an All Points Bulletin out for the vehicle itself. The instructions were explicit. If the car was seen the officer was to report its location and follow at a safe distance so as not to be detected. Under no circumstances was the vehicle to be approached or stopped. It was becoming increasingly clear that they may be dealing with a hostage situation and to alert any of his captors may endanger Sean's life.

A second constable had been put on the task of running down the identities of the owners of the four 1966 Vauxhall Victors. Three were getting up in years and had no previous criminal record. The fourth, one David Durbin, had a rap sheet of petty crimes, but nothing of this magnitude. He did, however, also have reported ties to known associates of the Provisional IRA. For this reason his surveillance, and the lookout for his vehicle, was handled somewhat differently from that of the others. The Ministry of Defence in Whitehall had called on the Security Service, better known as MI5, for support. By noon Tuesday an MI5 agent was tasked to accompany all RUC surveillance teams in the hunt for either David Durbin or his vehicle. In this way local law enforcement, the military, domestic intelligence and

American intelligence could keep one another apprised of any developments.

It hadn't taken long to get results. On Tuesday afternoon at about quarter after five the Vauxhall had driven up to Durbin's Bombay Street address. Just over seven year's earlier many of the residences on Bombay Street had been burned to the ground by a loyalist mob following the August 12<sup>th</sup> Battle of Bogside in Derry. The officers confirmed his identity from the copy of his driver's license photo which had been distributed to all the surveillance teams. He stayed for less than an hour. Upon his departure he made his way to Ballymurphy and the five-story housing project where Brian Callahan lived. His "tail" kept a safe distance. After David had parked his car and entered the building the two officers, one RUC and one MI5, reported the address to the Springfield Road station which shared it with all the participating agencies. Seeing as how this rundown tenement housed almost exclusively Catholics on the "dole", the checks on the address yielded the names of several known IRA sympathizers. The females could be excluded, not because they were any less capable of wrecking havoc upon loyalist targets but because of the descriptions gathered at the Presbyterian church which bore out that the three suspects were male.

During the night there was no activity, and the car was never moved, but the authorities had been busy collecting driver's license photographs of the residents who had come up on the suspect list. There were a total of six. Copies of each of the six photos were distributed to all teams. On Wednesday morning David Durbin emerged from the building accompanied by another man who the "on duty" team quickly identified as Brian Callahan. The two got in the car, with Brian driving, and went to a construction site in the city center. Brian dropped off David and then returned home. Two down and one to go. This time the authorities ran a cross-tabulation on known associates of Durbin

with known associates of Callahan. That process yielded two names: James McLaughlin and William Callahan. At noon a third male left the building and entered David's car. He drove to a nearby grocer where he purchased a variety of foodstuffs and then returned. Rather than wait for pictures to be distributed the teams traded off and those who had observed the third man made their way to the Springfield Road RUC station where they identified the photo of William Callahan.

The laborious task of winnowing the wheat from the chaff had taken less than thirty-six hours. They had the names of three suspected IRA sympathizers and the fourth floor apartment number of Brian Callahan which they had retrieved from housing authority records. What they did not know was whether Sean was in the apartment, whether he was dead or alive, and, if he were alive, what conditions would be demanded for his release. It was now 2:00PM on Wednesday, November 24<sup>th</sup>. It was time for the authorities to bring their "ace in the hole" into the game. Each day at 4:00PM Meg O'Connell had gone to the coffee shop and bakery nearby the hostel and ordered a cup of tea and a slice of soda bread. This day she was joined by a young man who, when no one was within earshot, told her that they had made tentative identification of the three men who had abducted her brother and had a possible address as to his whereabouts. She was, needless to say, elated and ready to charge in like John Wayne to rescue her brother. The man said that wasn't the way things worked in Northern Ireland. Any liberation attempt would have to be vetted at the highest levels; Whitehall and 10 Downing Street. And there would be a call made to a small military unit in the sleepy agricultural town of Hereford in Herefordshire, England. Although it was a trip of over 400 miles and nearly nine hours by car and ferry from Hereford to Belfast, the distance "as the crow flies" was only 219 miles and could be executed in one hour and eleven minutes if one had friends with the right sort of transport. Meg smiled at the man, excused herself, and returned to the youth hostel.

## Chapter Fifteen

Whitehall and 10 Downing Street had signed off on the plan, as had the National Security Agency (NSA), the CIA, State and the White House. There was, as of yet, one unknown variable; the hostage, if indeed he was one, his location and condition. There were several widely held assumptions which, at this stage, could not be verified. The first was that Sean O'Connell had been taken hostage. A dead American student was not only of no use to the Provos, but the international revulsion and level of retribution would strike a stinging blow to any perceived moral high ground or legitimacy the Northern Irish cause might have claimed. The second assumption was that Durbin and the two Callahans had taken him. And the third, stemming from the second, was that he was being held in Brian Callahan's Ballymurphy flat.

An "eyes on" confirmation of Sean's location and condition was out of the question. But, as will sometimes happen, fortune was about to shine on the forces of good. At the direction of Battalion Commander O'Flynn Rachel Stuart had placed a phone call to her classmates in Edinburgh. They had been in touch with the Chancellor, the American Consul and the O'Connell family in the States. They had all confirmed that Meg O'Connell, a recent doctoral graduate of Ohio State and currently unemployed younger sister of Sean, had made her way to Belfast and was staying at the youth hostel there in the event she could be of any assistance to her older brother.

Here the means and source of communication between the Provos and the authorities became of paramount importance.

Rachel Stuart's role was to remain the concerned and enamored classmate of Sean O'Connell. O'Flynn would take the role of spokesman for the Provos. Rachel strolled down the street to the youth hostel at 5:00PM on the 24<sup>th</sup>. As Liam Brennan didn't come on duty 'til 6:00 Rachel was a new face to the young man at the front desk. She asked to speak to Meg O'Connell. For security and confidentiality's sake he called Meg on the intercom and told her she had a visitor, Rachel Stuart, in the lobby. Though anxious, Meg walked measuredly to the front desk. When she got there the day manager introduced her to Rachel. Meg had been briefed on who the authorities in Scotland believed Rachel to be; a classmate at Edinburgh who may be romantically linked to her brother.

They hugged on sight and Rachel feigned a few tears. They went out for a drink and Rachel pledged to Meg her willingness to do anything to aid in Sean's safe release. Afterward Rachel walked Meg back to the sidewalk in front of the youth hostel. She then went to O'Flynn's office above O'Rourke's to assure him that Meg was the genuine article and nothing more.

At 10:00AM Belfast time on November 25<sup>th</sup>, Thanksgiving Day in the States, the Provos made their move. Battalion Commander O'Flynn went to a phone booth in Belfast's city center and placed a call to the American Consul in Edinburgh. The Provos were holding the American student Sean O'Connell. They were willing to exchange him for the release of all the IRA political prisoners in the Maze prison. Upon their safe release a contingent of armed Provos, using safe passage enforced by the RUC, would escort O'Connell to a rural airfield outside of Belfast where a transport plane would pick up the entire retinue and deliver them to Shannon airport in the republic. Once the aircraft was safely on the ground Sean O'Connell would be escorted to the American Embassy in Dublin.

Malcolm Beveridge said that he would have to consult with the British authorities. Moreover, he asked O'Flynn how he could

be assured that Sean O'Connell was unharmed. Here's where the Provos made their boldest move, and their fatal tactical error. O'Flynn told Beveridge he was aware that both Sean's sister from the States and girlfriend from university were in Belfast. He was to contact Rachel and have her, in turn, contact Meg. They were both to be at St. Columba's Church on Falls Road by noon. There the two, accompanied by Father Matthias, would be picked up and taken to the location where Sean was being held. A phone call from Meg and Rachel to RUC Headquarters would confirm Sean's wellbeing. The entourage would depart at 1:00PM and be airborne before 2:00.

Beveridge protested that he wasn't being given enough time. O'Flynn responded that his terms were non-negotiable and rang off. Rachel Stuart had been ready for hours and was merely awaiting O'Flynn's call to move into action. Beveridge placed a call to the crisis management team in Whitehall which had been constituted on the evening of the 20<sup>th</sup> and was told that his involvement was no longer relevant to the mission.

The RUC Liaison Officer got on to Belfast to fill them in. The American Liaison Officer did the same with Fort Meade, Langley and Washington. And the Ministry of Defence (MOD) brigadier general who had been chairing the team called Hereford to give the 22<sup>nd</sup> Special Air Services Regiment the "green light".

O'Flynn's phone call to Beveridge had taken seven minutes. Beveridge's call to Whitehall another twelve. By the time the SAS got the "go" code it was 10:21AM. Its hostage rescue unit had been on call since the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup>. Air support for the SAS is provided by a Royal Air Force special forces squadron based at RAF Lyneham in Wiltshire. A C-130 Hercules is always on standby at Lyneham to deploy SAS forces on a hostage rescue mission. Today, however, the aircraft of choice would be a Chinook CH-47C. The Chinook was a versatile, twin-engine, tandem rotor heavy-lift helicopter. It had a split-section personnel

door behind the cockpit on the left side and a rear loading ramp that could be set to any level. It was armed with a single 7.62 millimeter machine gun on a pintle mount on either side. The air crew consisted of a pilot, copilot and combat commander. While the CH-47C could carry 33 fully-equipped troops on its sidewall seating and more in center seats if necessary, today's cargo would consist of one four-man SAS unit. One Chinook CH-47C from Lyneham with three rotating three-man crews had also been on call at Hereford since the 21<sup>st</sup>.

The MOD brigadier general's second call had been to the "14<sup>th</sup> Int." in Northern Ireland to relay O'Flynn's demands. They'd know what to do from here on out. Following the call from the American Liaison Officer to the NSA and CIA the two had conferred, finalized the operational plan, and also called the 14<sup>th</sup> Int. which would be running the op on the ground.

The RUC Liaison Officer had called RUC HQ in Belfast to work out the details of their action. The RUC operation would be overseen from, and operated out of, the headquarters building. No unusual activity was to take place at the Springfield Road station so as not to attract the attention of the Provos' troops which were bound to be ringing Brian's Ballymurphy flat. They were to form a cordon around Ballymurphy but outside its boundaries, prepared to move at a moment's notice. The Liaison Officer also called the warden at The Maze and told him to have all IRA political prisoners prepared to be released by 12:45PM.

## Chapter Sixteen

As soon as Malcolm Beveridge had gotten off the line with Whitehall he had called the youth hostel in Belfast. The front desk had paged Meg by intercom and called her to the front desk for a phone call. She took the receiver and identified herself. After that her only words were “I understand”. She was told to expect a call from Rachel. Following that they’d meet and take a taxi to St. Columba’s on Falls Road. There the two would be picked up, along with Father Matthias, and taken to Sean. From there they’d proceed to a rural airfield where a transport aircraft would pick them up and deliver them to Shannon in the Irish Republic where Sean would be turned over to the American ambassador in Dublin.

No sooner had Meg returned the receiver to the desk clerk and the phone placed back in its cradle than it rang again. This time it was Rachel Stuart asking for Meg. Rachel said she’d received a call from Malcolm Beveridge. She told Meg she’d meet her in front of the youth hostel in five minutes in a taxi. Meg went back to her room, grabbed her purse, and then went outside to await Rachel’s arrival. The time was now 10:34AM. At 10:39 Rachel pulled up in front of the youth hostel and Meg hopped into the taxi. They drove to St. Columba’s where the driver dropped them off and they paid him. Father Matthias exited the church by the main entrance and came down the front steps to join them.

At 10:48 another taxi arrived at St. Columba’s. There were two men in the front; a driver and a second man, both wearing black balaclavas. They ordered their three “fares” into the back.

The RUC had deployed three specially-equipped vehicles to locations Northeast, Northwest and South of Ballymurphy. Their direction-finding radio receivers with black cathode ray screens were all at the ready. As the taxi pulled away from the church headed to Ballymurphy the green blips on those three screens began to move again. By simple means of triangulation the RUC could determine the taxi's distance, speed and heading.

But, at that point, the passenger in the front seat had demanded that both Rachel and Meg hand over their purses. For effect, he searched Rachel's first. Finding nothing unexpected he returned it to her. He then began searching Meg's purse. At first it appeared to contain the usual contents of any woman's purse: a key ring, wallet, lipstick, tissues and a plastic compact. But upon closer inspection the compact proved to contain something more. Beneath a false top containing makeup he found a rudimentary electronic device. It was a thin, rectangular metallic case with a wire extending from one end and looped several times around the inside perimeter of the case. He recognized it for what it was, a miniaturized homing device. He placed it on the taxi's floor in front of him and smashed it with the butt of his 9mm Browning automatic pistol's grip. Simultaneously the bright green blips on the RUC's three CRT screens disappeared. The gunman tossed the purse out of the window as the taxi made its way through the Northeast corner of Andersonstown.

The gunman turned around and grabbed Meg by the collar of her unbuttoned coat. "Look, Missy," he said. "This plan has been in the works for a week now. We're not going to let some smartass college bitch like you screw it up!" With that he threw Meg into the passenger-side corner of the rear seat. Disheveled, and shaken, Meg strained to regain her composure. She sat up and tried not to cry. Rachel feigned support. Meg poked at her hair, straightened the buttons on her white, collared blouse, and tightened her belt as if preparing for battle. Rachel urged Meg to

sit back and relax, and not to provoke their captors further. All this time Father Matthias had sat in the opposite corner of the rear seat not knowing what to make of the recent developments.

While all of this was transpiring the RAF flight crew at Hereford had been making its last-minute pre-flight inspection and preparations while the four-man SAS unit was receiving its final situational report, or “sit rep”. Much like U.S. military intelligence and special ops units, members of the SAS unit, as with the U.S. Army’s Criminal Investigative Division (CID), the U.S. Navy’s Naval Investigative Service (NIS), or the U.S. Air Force’s Office of Special Investigations (OSI), the SAS eschewed reference to rank when in the field. All CID, NIS and OSI agents were known simply as “Mister”. This was probably in deference to combat situations where officers among prisoners of war were mercilessly interrogated and tortured for their supposed superior knowledge of plans and operations over enlisted men.

The SAS took this anonymity one step further. On this mission there would be four men known simply as soldier A, soldier B, soldier C and soldier D. Rank was immaterial in the field. Only functionality mattered: munitions, communications, medic and transport. All were marksmen. Within the regiment little else mattered, and outside the regiment additional information only gave its critics more ammunition and its enemies leverage in the use of family members and loved ones for coercion or blackmail.

The SAS unit was told that they would take off from Hereford and fly, by the shortest route possible, out over the Irish Sea. Maintaining minimum safe altitude to escape detection, they would then fly North to a point just East of the mouth of Belfast harbor. There they would ascend to close to the Chinook’s maximum operational altitude of 22,100 feet to reduce telltale engine noise and “orbit” until called in to an exact set of coordinates to extract the hostage or hostages. It was now 10:31AM on the morning of Thursday, November 25<sup>th</sup>.

In Ballymurphy carloads of Provos had formed a discreet but deadly ring of vehicles in close proximity to, but not in view of, Brian's flat. Each bore no less than two men carrying Armalites or high-powered automatic handguns. Unbeknownst to them the RUC had taken up positions in a slightly larger concentric ring ready to converge on the smaller one on command, or on Brian's flat if need be. To clinch the deal a U.S. Air Force C-135 AWACS aircraft was itself orbiting above Northern Ireland at nearly 50,000 feet monitoring all activity on the ground and in the airspace above not only West Belfast but the entire region. At 10:37 the RAF Chinook CH-47C with an air crew of three and an SAS unit of four lifted off from Hereford. By 10:40 they were "feet wet" over the Irish Sea.

At 11:09 a taxi pulled up in front of Brian Callahan's flat in Ballymurphy. The driver and passenger in the front seat emerged first, two men carrying weapons and wearing black balaclavas. Then their "passengers" got out of the taxi on the side between the vehicle and the front entrance to the building. Though partially blocked by the taxi, it was clearly two women and a priest. They entered the apartment building at exactly 11:11.

When the two gunmen and their three charges reached Brian's 4<sup>th</sup> floor flat they were met by Brian, David and William. Sean was seated in his chair in the middle of the room, bound and gagged. There was nearly a collision as both Meg and Rachel rushed to hug Sean. Rachel asked if she might remove his gag. His captors acquiesced. She and Meg peppered Sean with questions. The net result was that they determined that Sean was healthy, albeit somewhat malnourished and dehydrated. By 11:35 Meg and Rachel had satisfied themselves that Sean was in one piece and in good, if not excellent, shape.

Meg spent the next fifteen minutes trying to reason with Sean's three captors to simply let Sean, Rachel, Father Matthias and herself go. Surely it would reduce the risk of bloodshed that

day, she argued, and they could use their pre-established means of escape to ensure they made it safely to the South. She had not been told that it was only their captors holding of their “four” hostages which would guarantee their safe passage and provide the political motivation necessary to effect the release of all IRA political prisoners in The Maze as part of the bargain. This last bit of information came as startling news to Meg. Somehow Malcolm Beveridge had neglected to mention it as he thought it of no concern to Meg. It was now 11:50AM.

The RAF Chinook with its cargo of one four-man SAS unit had arrived on station East of the mouth of Belfast harbor and ascended to 20,000 feet at 11:47AM. At 11:52 the communication center at the 14<sup>th</sup> Int. came on the air and in a “burst” transmission provided the Chinook with the latitude and longitude of its final destination along with the location of Brian’s flat among the fourth floor apartments in his five story apartment building courtesy of the NSA, CIA and Meg O’Connell.

Burst transmissions are nothing more than high speed transmissions of routine data which are either physically or digitally sped up before sending so that they sound like little more than static. By the time the opposition knows what it has, assuming they’ve been monitoring the correct frequency, the op is usually over. The NSA had developed the technology as well as the ultra-miniaturized homing device cast into the buckle of the belt Meg O’Connell was wearing that day. She only needed to unbuckle and buckle it again, as she had in the rear seat of the taxi after her purse was discarded, to activate the device so that it would emit a secondary tracking signal. In all her location had been off the RUC’s screens for no more than 90 seconds. Both homing devices, the compact case and belt buckle, had been passed to her at her 4:00PM tea on the 24<sup>th</sup> by the CIA operative from the CIA station in London whom she’d first met at tea time on Tuesday.

## Chapter Seventeen

The timing couldn't have been better. Under the watchful eye of the USAF AWACS plane above the RAF Chinook was "feet dry" over Northern Ireland at 11:54AM making its way, at high altitude for stealth, West over Belfast. At 90 seconds before noon it began its downward approach to Ballymurphy at its maximum rate of descent leaving it hovering ten feet above the apartment building and twenty-two feet above the top of the windows to Brian's flat just as the factories' noon whistles went off to alert the neighborhood housewives that their husbands were on their way home for lunch. The noise covered the sound from the Chinook's twin Lycoming T-55-L-11 turboshafts generating 3,750 horsepower each.

The four members of the SAS unit exited the personnel door simultaneously and began their descent on lengths of twenty-six foot pre-measured cable. Meg had just picked up the receiver of the phone to call RUC Headquarters and had dialed the first three digits. She never made it to the fourth. In unison the SAS unit pushed off the red brick wall segment between the fourth and fifth floors with their boots and came crashing through the large plate glass window of Brian's flat, feet first.

The munitions man, soldier B, tossed a flashbang grenade into the apartment the moment an opening in the glass and Venetian blinds appeared. The light was blinding, the sound deafening and disorienting. The M-84 Stun Grenade produces a blinding one million Candela of light effectively activating all sensory pigment in the retina and making vision impossible for approximately five

seconds. It also produces a 180 decibel blast stimulating the movement of fluid in the inner ear's semicircular canals and disturbing the victim's sense of balance. The four SAS men, wearing both tinted goggles and earplugs, were spared the maximum effects of the grenade.

The two women and the man lashed to the chair were immediately identified as "friendlies", as was the priest owing to his clerical collar. While all four soldiers had been given photos of the three "targets", taking time for photo identification was a luxury they simply didn't have. David Durbin, Brian Callahan and William Callahan, along with the two men from the taxi, were all dead from automatic weapons fire before they regained their sight or equilibrium. Today was not a day for taking prisoners as the SAS knew the Provos would have begun converging on the apartment building the moment they heard the Chinook's twin rotors whipping the air.

Soldier C radioed to the combat commander, "All clear; we're coming up." Soldier D cut Sean loose from his chair and duct tape bondage with his KA-BAR knife and soldier A began ushering the four civilians toward the door and into the hall. There was an "EXIT" sign at the far end of the hallway and all eight of them, even Father Matthias, ran directly for it. Two flights up they found themselves on the roof.

Not knowing if the roof could withstand the weight of the Chinook's 22,380 pounds plus eleven bodies, the pilot had descended to about five feet above its surface. Soldier A directed everyone to the loading ramp at the rear of the aircraft. In between barking instructions the combat commander was manning the aircraft's left side machine gun as they had started taking small arms fire from Provos in the parking lot. Approaching the rear loading ramp from the right side all eight, one after the other, climbed, were lifted or, in the case of the two women, thrown aboard.

The combat commander yelled, "Go, go, go!" and the Chinook lifted off, first heading due North to avert the gunfire and then veering Southeast and out over the Irish Sea on its way to Hereford. Meanwhile, back in Northern Ireland, events were unfolding at a feverish pace. The call the warden at The Maze had been expecting from RUC Headquarters never came and prisoners in their cells who were expecting to be set free were never released. There was a near-riot and a rash of short-lived hunger strikes to follow, but nothing compared to the deadly hunger strikes of years later.

More significantly the RUC patrols which had effectively cordoned off Ballymurphy tightened the noose, as it were, around the Provos concentrated therein to escort those in Brian's flat to the rural airfield where their rendezvous with an escape plane was to occur. There were a number of running gun battles but, in the end, dozens of well-armed Provos joined their brethren in the already overcrowded Maze prison. Finally, the aircraft which was to fly Durbin and the Callahans to the Irish republic was impounded by the RUC, never to leave Northern Ireland.

After the first rush of nervous chatter and introductions following the Chinook's clearing Northern Irish airspace things had become very quiet aboard the aircraft. On the sidewall seating along one side of the aircraft were the four SAS soldiers and the RAF combat commander. On the opposite side sat Rachel, Sean, Meg and Father Matthias. About 40 minutes into the flight Rachel began fidgeting with her purse. Suddenly she pulled out a small caliber German-made automatic, a Walther. She took dead aim at the combat commander and demanded, "Turn this aircraft to the Southwest and take me to Dublin!"

At first Meg was astounded. How was it that her well-concealed homing device had been found when her purse was inspected but Rachel's pistol had gone undetected? Then reality slowly crept in. Rachel had been an IRA sympathizer known to

the Provos from the very beginning. While Rachel may not have set up Meg's brother she had certainly done nothing to aid in his rescue.

The combat commander, playing for time, had ordered the pilot to turn the aircraft Southwest and set a heading for Dublin. Father Matthias was dumbstruck and Sean simply didn't understand what was happening. As if from years of experience, though in fact it had only been months of training at The Farm, Meg leapt into action. She lunged across Sean at Rachel, sending Rachel's pistol flying and snapping both the tibia and fibula in Rachel's right forearm in the process.

Soldier B secured the weapon. Soldier A subdued Rachel and secured her as best he could without aggravating her wounds. Only then did soldier D, the medic, tend to her injuries. The combat commander ordered the pilot to return to his original heading, destination Hereford. Forty-five minutes later, when they reached their home base, Rachel was taken to the Infirmary. Meg, Sean and Father Matthias were put up in VIP housing for the night. And soldiers A, B, C and D reported to Regimental Headquarters for their operational debriefing.

## Chapter Eighteen

The sun's rising on the morning of Friday, November 26<sup>th</sup>, seemed to dawn on a new world. Sean and Meg O'Connell, with Father Matthias in attendance, were feted to a glorious and sumptuous breakfast in the Officers' Mess. The four-man unit which had rescued them, officers and enlisted men alike, were also present. The regimental commander made a few brief remarks of prayer and thanksgiving and the three were on their way.

Father Matthias was taken by staff car to Lyneham RAF base where he'd board a Lear jet for the thirty-minute flight to Belfast and then a hastily arranged motorcade back to St. Columba's. Sean and Meg would board the same Chinook which had plucked them from the apartment rooftop in Ballymurphy for an hour-long flight to Edinburgh. Sean's classmates, who had learned of their safe arrival in Hereford at mid-afternoon on Thursday, or at least those who were still sober by sundown, had worked all night to prepare a grand homecoming.

When the Chinook reached Edinburgh it was instructed to land on one of the main playing fields of that storied university. The field was ringed by students, faculty and townspeople alike. A Bentley convertible, with its top down, drove to the center of the field. Chancellor Bannock and Professor Wishart exited the car's front passenger door to greet Sean and Meg as they exited the aircraft through the personnel door. The two kids hoisted themselves onto the "boot" of the Bentley and seated themselves there, their legs dangling into the passenger compartment, their

feet resting on the plush leather of the rear passenger seat. Bannock and Wishart got back on board.

Like a Rose Parade in November or a carriage ride through Central Park, they were treated to a spin once around the campus before being delivered to Sean's residence hall. They were greeted with hugs and kisses all around. The party there had already been going on for nineteen hours and continued 'til after midnight Friday night.

Then it was only Rachel Stuart who was left behind at Hereford, there to, figuratively, "lick her wounds" while awaiting ground transport to London where, on Monday, she would be arraigned in the Old Bailey as a British subject charged with treason and numerous lesser charges.

In Chevy Chase Brigadier General and Mary Pat O'Connell had scurried around all Thanksgiving afternoon making reservations on the Monday-Wednesday-Friday non-stop Concorde flight from Dulles International Airport (DIA) in Chantilly, Virginia, to London's Heathrow. Upon their arrival in London late Friday they were put up in that nation's equivalent of Blair House, the Washington residence reserved for visiting heads of state, for the night.

Though it took a while to locate them among the assembled mass of students asleep in, around, and atop the graduate residence hall, the two RAF officers finally located Sean and Meg and told them to "freshen up" before their flight to London Saturday morning to be reunited with their parents. Less than an hour later they were on the same RAF jet which had returned Father Matthias to Belfast en route to the BOAC VIP Lounge at Heathrow where they met their mother and father. The happy foursome boarded a BOAC VC-10 for the non-stop flight to DIA, but this time, rather than coach, Sean, his sister and parents, were flying First Class courtesy of the British government.

Back safely in Chevy Chase, Sean and Meg were given the rest of the year off by The University of Edinburgh and the CIA

respectively. At the direction of Chancellor Bannock, and over the strenuous protestations of Geography Department Chairman Wishart, Sean was given a passing grade in all of his courses following the reasoning that four weeks spent “on the ground” in Northern Ireland was surely as valuable, if not more so, than four months spent reading about it.

In January he returned to Edinburgh to successfully fulfill the terms of his Fulbright Scholarship. As for Meg, she received a two-year posting to the CIA station in Tehran, Iran, her tour of duty ending before Islamic fundamentalists loyal to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini stormed the American Embassy, taking its staff hostage for over a year.

Rachel Stuart was found guilty of treason and sentenced to ten years in Her Majesty’s Prison Holloway in London. Her sentence might well have been life imprisonment but her age was taken into consideration along with the fact that she did not discharge her weapon in the course of her attempted commandeering of the RAF aircraft.

After his year in Scotland Sean returned to the States where he completed his Master’s degree in Lincoln before moving on to Iowa City for his PhD in Geography from the University of Iowa. His doctoral dissertation, “Mental Maps as a Paradigm for Peace Negotiations: A Case Study”, became well read on both sides of the Atlantic. Published in 1982, it was used as a reference work by Presidents Reagan, Bush and Clinton, and as a road map by Prime Ministers Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair.

At the signing of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement between Great Britain and Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Irish Republican Army, represented by Tony Blair and Gerry Adams respectively, Sean Patrick O’Connell, then 48 years old, was one of but only a handful of Guests of Honor.