

# DUP to their bloody necks



Ulster Resistance: Peter Robinson, Noel Little and friends

*As the DUP vies for respectability, a recent BBC 'Spotlight' programme reinforces the inconvenient truth that there was widespread collusion across the loyalist spectrum from the DUP to the UVF to MI5*

by Deirdre Younger

**I**N NORTHERN Ireland the past won't leave the present alone. This article will look at the implication of senior DUP figures in massive gun running by Ulster Resistance, about which RUC commander Harry Breen was well aware and which led ultimately to many numerous vicious murders by the Glenanne gang and others.

Just as the issue of the DUP's credibility has, because of its ultimately steadfast hardline on Brexit, attracted scrupulous global scrutiny, its historic observance of democratic norms is in question.

Sam McBride reports in his recently inflammatory book 'Burned' that for a long time (though no longer), "The DUP hierarchy could phone the [editor of the best-selling newspaper, the Belfast Telegraph] to have uncomfortable stories pulled or altered with the threat that government newspaper advertising controlled by DUP ministers might otherwise be pulled". But the reach and proto-hegemony of the DUP wasn't achieved just through dodgy association.

BBC NI'S 'Spotlight' programme on October 8 2019 raised again the issue of collusion between the security forces, loyalist paramilitaries and senior figures in mainstream Unionism during the Troubles. The programme focused on the arms importation instigated by Ulster Resistance (UR) leaders in late 1987, and claims that the late Willie Frazer, a loyalist paramilitary and

campaigner from Markethill, County Armagh, who confirmed this exclusively to *Village* on a number of occasions, was a major transporter and distributor of UR weapons. It also claims that he supplied weapons to the Ulster Defence Association (UDA). Johnny Adair, a notorious Belfast UDA gunman, told 'Spotlight' that Frazer was a link to Ulster Resistance, a coalition of the UDA, Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and figures allied to Ian Paisley and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), in Armagh. Frazer had an intimate knowledge of the UR arms and their movements.

Suspiciousness among members of UR of its infiltration by M15 agents led to the Security Services and Special Branch struggling to keep control and track arms that had been imported. 'Spotlight' showed images of RUC intelligence that ended up in the hands of the terrorist paramilitaries, UVF/UDA. It was used to target suspected republicans, including Loughlin Maginn, shot in Rathfriland in August 1989. His death, following that of solicitor Pat Finucane in February 1989, sparked the decades-long investigations by Sir John Stevens into collusion by the Security forces. Scandalously Stevens was not shown evidence of RUC collusion. The fact that the UDA were receiving large volumes of intelligence material from RUC sources was known to the agent Brian Nelson, his Army Intelligence handlers and M15. That intelligence also, no doubt, informs the de Silva Report into Pat Finucane's murder. De Silva was given access to British Army and M15 intelligence that RUC officers at every level were leaking information to Loyalists. That intelligence is also integrated into the Northern Ireland Police Ombudsman's report on the Loughinisland murders as it relates to RUC 'tip-offs' about surveillance operations carried out in an attempt to seize UR weapons in

Armagh in 1987 and 1988.

## Past but present

The past in Northern Ireland just won't leave the present alone.

### Commissioner Harris

Drew Harris, the Garda Commissioner, didn't leave the 'Troubles' of Northern Ireland behind him on entering Garda HQ. As former Assistant and Deputy Chief Constable of the PSNI and its former interface with the Security Services (UK), Harris has been accused of fighting attempts to get information about the perpetrators of atrocities like the Miami Showband murders and of blocking access to files about the many murders carried out by the Mid-Ulster, UVF 'Brigadier' Robin Jackson.

### Glennane Gang

In the High Court in Belfast in 2017 Judge Seamus Treacy ruled that there should be an overarching investigation into State collusion with the 'Glennane Gang' and asked the PSNI to respond. In the Court of Appeal in Belfast the Lord Chief Justice ruled in July against an appeal and said there must be an independent investigation carried out by the PSNI.

### Ivor Bell

More recently in Belfast a high-profile 'trial on the facts' to determine whether veteran Republican Ivor Bell was guilty of ordering the abduction and murder of Jean McConville recently collapsed because of the contentiousness of evidence derived from Bell's conversations recorded as part of the Boston College college project. That prosecution was initiated while Harris was in the PSNI with responsibility for 'Legacy'.

Dealing with the past is also causing problems for some retired RUC men - members of the Northern Ireland Retired Police Officers' Association (NIRPOA). They now apparently believe a policy of non-co-operation with bodies like the Police Ombudsman of Northern Ireland has been counterproductive.

### Loughinisland

The old guard of the NIPROA took a Judicial Review against the Police Ombudsman of Northern Ireland and his 2016 report on the 1994 Heights Bar murders in Loughinisland. Former Head of Special Branch and Assistant Chief Constable Ray White often acts as its spokesman.

Their affidavit was submitted in the names of Ray White and retired Chief Superintendent Thomas Hawthorne the former Sub Divisional Commander in Co Down and chief investigator of the Loughinisland killings. They challenged the powers of the Ombudsman to come to a verdict of collusion in his report on the murders. The report tried to establish the trail of the weapons which were used in the attack, from their importation into NI in late 1987 to their use in 1994. "Tried", because as the ombudsman said in his report: "Throughout my investigation I have been unable to obtain key documents, including records relating to the police response to the importation of firearms in 1987".

The old guard had a victory of sorts when Justice McCloskey gave judgment for the RUC officers and vindicated Hawthorne. The judge finally and reluctantly recused himself from the case. He had represented the RUC in an appeal against a previous Ombudsman's finding in the investigation of the Omagh Bombing. A finding on the remaining issues will fall to another judge.

The Ombudsman's report was damning of the RUC investigation into the murders of six men and of earlier searches for weapons; and concluded that there was collusion from beginning to end. One of his chief criticisms was of an inexplicable failure to conduct

a proper search for the weapons, particularly at the farm of the now notorious Glennane-based farmer, Ulster Resistance supporter and UVF accomplice, the late James Mitchell.

### RUC Commander Harry Breen

A central figure from the past is Harry Breen, RUC Divisional Commander for Armagh and parts of County Down, a senior figure in the collusive machinations of Northern Ireland until he was murdered by the IRA in March 1989. Ironically this spawned the Smithwick inquiry into collusion between the Gardaí and the IRA. His was a hugely important role with access to Special Branch intelligence, and to operationally-central Tasking and Co-ordination Group (TCG) briefings. His command of the Divisional Mobile support groups based in Newry and Armagh which carried out surveillance operations, as well as manning checkpoints and searches, meant he was in command of every operation carried out in his Division. As Divisional Commander, Breen was constantly on the move and his police journal shows that he regularly visited every station in the Division from Aghnacloy to Richhill, Forkhill, Armagh, Loughgall, to Ballynahinch and Rathfriland in Co Down.

Harry Breen, probably knew more than anyone about the secret world of Loyalists informers. Sources say he was one of the very few who also knew the whereabouts of the "Resistance" arms cache.

At this time, according to Security Forces sources, Breen was deeply distrustful of the new security directions coming from the Security Services and the NIO. Like many RUC men, he saw them as appeasement rather than taking the fight to the IRA, with a new emphasis on talks with Republicans rather than on fighting their terrorism. They say Breen would never have agreed to a "cease-fire" which they saw coming down the line.

Whether Breen was sympathetic to UR as some believe, or acting on an intelligence agenda it's unlikely he reached a senior position in the RUC as a "rogue" policeman.

Breen's death still causes unease among former members of the Security Forces in Armagh. One former UDR man said "The couldn't have let him live. He knew too much".

The RUC and UDR in Armagh at this time were under ferocious attack from the IRA - often shot down in front of their families. This has left a residue of bitterness to this day. But they also came under another form of attack over the constant flood of leaks from RUC stations allowing the targeting of Republican suspects and activists, by Loyalists. The Irish Government regularly protested about the leaks and threatened to stop sharing information under the structures of the Anglo Irish Agreement.

The Security Services also pointed the finger at the RUC as can be seen in documents published in the de Silva Report. A memo from the Head of the Assessment Group (M15) to the Director and Coordinator of Intelligence (29 September 1989) gives a stark warning: "All in all the overall picture seems to be one of RUC collusion and links with the Loyalists which is similar in scale (if not greater in some respects) to that of the UDR, but the latter is much more likely to become involved in very serious crimes...".

Pat Finucane and Loughlin McGinn were shot dead on the back of leaks in February and August 1989. The UDR in Rathfriland had used RUC documents to identify targets including McGinn.

BBC 'Spotlight' showed some of the RUC documents used to target Republicans. In his report on the Heights Bar in Loughinisland the Ombudsman quoted a Special Branch officer in Co Down who kept the fruits of a 1988 search of Clough Orange Hall secret for fear of leaks to Loyalists. He had retrieved assault rifles and other weaponry. The marathon Stevens Investigations into collusion began in September 1989 as a result of the murders.

Breen had been a member of a notorious Special Patrol Group (SPG) in Armagh, in the 1970s. It is believed the SPG engaged in collusion with the mid-Ulster UVF led by notorious Commander Robin Jackson, a member of the UDR. It seems likely Jackson was a protected State informer, though even senior former RUC Officers find it hard to work out exactly which agency was running Jackson. One concluded recently that it was probably multiple agencies at different times. John Weir, a former SPG member in South Armagh, described Breen in a statement to the Barron Investigation into the Dublin and Monaghan

Bombings in 2003, as being fully aware, and encouraging, of their actions. Weir's statement first made in 1999, includes numerous mentions of Breen. Weir said in a later interview that Breen wasn't a rogue policeman but that he was "doing his duty" in his dealings with Jackson and other loyalists. Weir had been imprisoned for ten years in 1979 for his part in a conspiracy to murder Catholic chemist William Strathearn in Aghogill in Antrim. He maintained Jackson was actually the gunman but that he was not charged after an 'intervention'. Jackson only ever served one short term of imprisonment. According to Special Branch sources Brian Fitzsimons, former Chief Superintendent at Newry Station and Deputy Head of Special Branch, said in the early 70's that Breen was "gathering arms" for Loyalists in Armagh. Ex Army Intelligence officer Colin Wallace gave a statement to Judge Barron's investigations into the Dublin and Monaghan bombings in 2003 which alleged that Army Intelligence believed Harry Breen and Frank Murray, who was the Head of Special Branch in Armagh, were sympathetic to Loyalist paras: "Harry Breen was one of the key figures giving information and support for (their) operations generally". However, Breen's career advanced apace. He became Chief Superintendent in Bessbrook and then Divisional Commander in H Division containing a good deal of Armagh and part of Co Down. Breen succeeded Chief Superintendent Brian Rally as Divisional Commander in February 1988. Lally retired aged 53 after refusing transfer to a post liaising with the new Army Battalion which policed the border, as he considered the transfer a demotion. In 1982 Lally was reported by the Irish News to have helped prepare the CID file after INLA men Roddy Carroll and Seamus Grew were shot dead on the outskirts of the city.

After just over a year as Divisional Commander, Breen was ambushed by the IRA on the Edenappa Road on 20 March 1989. An IRA statement to the Smithwick Tribunal investigating the murder said Breen was a target after Loughgall when the IRA's East Tyrone Brigade were wiped out attempting to bomb an RUC station. Breen was in charge of the armed RUC officers at the scene according to sources.

The actions of Breen and the RUC SPG operating in Armagh in the 1970s will now be an integral part of an investigation into what became known as 'The Glennane Gang'.

#### Ulster Resistance

The trail begins with the founding of Ulster Resistance by Ian Paisley, Noel Little, Peter Robinson and others, to resist the Anglo Irish Agreement in 1985. Their centrality to the Democratic Unionist Party is unrivalled. Paisley and Robinson are the principal figures in the party since its instigation in 1971, having led it between them until 2015. Noel Little's daughter, Emma Pengelly is currently an MP, and was formerly an MLA for the DUP, in Belfast South. She was endorsed by the UDA-linked *Loyalist* magazine before the 2017 general election. Arlene Foster, current DUP leader, acted as solicitor to Willie Frazer

UR spawned various Loyalist plots to import arms. Normally reliant on stolen weapons or weapons 'donated' by part time members of the Security Forces, the importation of high-velocity weapons, especially CZ58 assault rifles in late 1987, gave the Loyalists new killing capacity. All in all Kalashnikov-type weapons like the CZ58 killed over 70 people.

The Ombudsman focuses the first part of his report in Armagh, the engine room of the UR/UVF/UDA plots to import weapons. It

traces the arms importation to the 1985 visit of loyalist covert-army-FRU (Force Research Unit) Agent Brian Nelson to South Africa and his dealings with the massive arms conglomerate, Armscor. The UR contact Richard Wright was a director of Nimrod, the marketing arm of Armscor and an uncle of a UR founder, Alan Wright. Noel Little also had long-standing links with Wright. He was head of the Armagh 'Ulster Club' a quasi-paramilitary organisation over which Wright's uncle was the overall President.

The Loyalist connection with the arms trade was through Shorts' East Belfast factory which manufactured sophisticated ground-to-air missiles. The Blowpipe and more its sophisticated successor the Starburst were highly sought after by the South Africans for their bush wars. Shorts were willing sellers to a myriad of customers including US Colonel Oliver North involved in his nefarious schemes to arm the 'Contras' in Nicaragua, and to exchange arms for hostages with the Iranians in the 1980s.

In other words despite an arms embargo the UK Government covertly supported the arms trade. The arrangements in 1987 were facilitated by Douglas Bernhardt, an Armscor agent in Switzerland, who apparently brokered the deal with 'Brigadier' John Michael, the UDA leader, who was murdered by a car bomb shortly before the arms arrived in 1988. After receiving the money Bernhardt bought the guns from a Lebanese middleman. They were then shipped from Beirut to Belfast. The weapons consisted of 206 CZ58s high velocity rifles, 26 .38 Browning's, 4 rocket launchers, 25,000 rounds of ammunition, and grenades. Loyalist sources, including the late Willie Frazer, are convinced the entire deal happened under the eyes of the various security services. Indeed it was only through Security Service and Army agents that some weapons were seized after they had initially been slipped out of Belfast port and driven to Armagh.

The deal to import weapons was made between the UVF, commanded by 'Brigadier' Robin Jackson, whose enforcers lived around the UVF power base in the Lurgan, Portadown, Armagh, Tandragee area; and Ulster Resistance, also rooted in Armagh. They were a colourful mixture of Paisleyites and unionists including Noel Little, Alan Wright, and Peter Robinson, in alliance with the UVF, whose stronghold was in Armagh. 'Resistance' as it became known was supported by 'small men' - townspeople and farmers many of whom were members of the Territorial Army or UDR. The third party to the importation was the Belfast UDA with its informers including FRU agent Brian Nelson.

The shipment came into Belfast Port in late 1987. The weapons were transported by an Armagh man who drove articulated trucks in a 40-foot lorry to a location outside Portadown. One source connected to Ulster Resistance pointed out that the weapons stayed in the container and had to be stored in a large yard. He named a UVF leader who had such a yard near Portadown. Having lost track of the initial delivery, which the Ombudsman described as a "major intelligence failure", it was through the UDA link that Special Branch in Belfast picked up the trail again on 8 January 1988. The Head of Belfast Special Branch at this time was Ray White, mentioned above. In the book 'Phoenix: Policing the shadows', published in 1996, after Chief Superintendent Ian Phoenix who was head of an RUC

intelligence unit had been killed in the Chinook crash in 1994, Phoenix concluded that "The only group to successfully get its hand on the...weapons was Ulster Resistance. However, it later reached an agreement with the other two organisations and shared its portion of the haul with them, ensuring a loyalist escalation of violence would take place over the coming years".



Harry Breen

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