

“The Northern Ireland Peace Process: Attempting to Deal with the Past”
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health,
Global Human Rights, and International Organizations
Testimony of Eugene Devlin
March 11, 2014

Ladies and gentlemen: My name is Eugene Devlin, and today I am a proud American citizen, having made my home in this fine country since 1978. I am in the business of owning and operating restaurants. This opportunity to participate in the legislative process, through this hearing, is very much appreciated.

I was born in Ireland, in 1954, in Andersonstown, a suburb of Belfast, County Antrim in the Province of Ulster. The recent “Northern Ireland” Troubles erupted during my teen-age years. I had neither art nor part in the Troubles, but on the night of the 12th of May 1972, the Troubles came to me – up close and personal.

Returning by cab from a school disco, with my friend Aiden MacAloon, I had failed to notice a car following us, nor did I notice that car’s unusual turn, illuminating us with its headlamps. We were nearly home, and on familiar turf. Suddenly a number of shots rang out, and I fell wounded, whilst my companion managed to get over a hedge. My left arm was shattered by, what I was later told, was a 9mm bullet, fired from a British “Sterling automatic” sub-machine gun. I was first taken to the Royal Victoria Hospital, and then transferred, under heavy guard, to the military wing of the Musgrave Park Hospital. After surgery I spent about a year with my arm in a cast, followed by months more in a sling. Although they identified the bullet and the type of gun, they would not allow me to keep the bullet, as they required it for “evidence.” Although the 9 mm is deadly force, had the bullet been a caliber .45 ACP from a Thompson submachine gun, or a high velocity rifle bullet, I probably would not be here to testify today.

Providentially, my arm saved my life. But today I still have physical reminders of that wound, and every day, carry medication as a consequence.

Police forensics determined that neither my friend nor I had handled any weapons that night – nor have either of us ever been charged with any violation of law.

Later that fateful night, a second, separate, such predatory, plain-clothes car patrol fired on a group of equally innocent men, wounding five, and killing Pat McVeigh.

Rumors had been circulating about such death squads, and random killings, presumably to terrorize the population. But, until that night, they were not uppermost in my mind.

On 27th September 1972, Daniel Rooney (also age 18, like myself) was killed by a similar bullet in a drive-by shooting, which differed from my situation only in that the perpetrators achieved a more deadly result.

It was a shock that someone who didn't know me would try to kill me (they nearly did), but I am sure that they didn't care if I died, any more than they cared about Pat McVeigh, or about Dan Rooney. These shootings were unjustified, and remain unjustifiable.

It was only later that it came out that these shootings were the clandestine acts of a secret terrorist force, carefully selected from the British Army (perhaps calculated to stimulate inter-communal retaliation – “divide and conquer” – among the various Irish communities). It seems that they were part of the secret “Military Reaction Force” (MRF).

The most disturbing thing about this is that the army, which had been sent in, in 1970, to restore order, and to protect us from sectarian (or other) violence, had become transformed into an army of occupation, with elements of that army operating outside even their own law and regulations.

When the facts of these atrocities became public, those in whose interest (and, presumably, by whose orders) they were perpetrated, disavowed any knowledge of specific “irregularities.” The records are nowhere to be found. Yet at the time Prime Minister Heath ordered that the MRF cease and be disbanded, and replaced by a unit taking special care that it operate within the law. Meanwhile, the perpetrators have generally been rewarded with pensions, promotions and medals. There is a message in that.

Being shot that night in 1972 was a terrifying experience. The only other truly terrifying experience of my life was “9/11” in New York City, when I emerged from the subway station very near to World Trade Center 2, just as the building was collapsing. In both cases I was an involuntary victim, but, the difference in 9/11 was that, even though still terrified, like so many others, I took the opportunity to become an instant voluntary responder – making it to my own restaurant on Pearl Street (a block or so from Fraunces Tavern) and working with my staff to provide aid and comfort to many people. Apart from having a terrifying experience, the other similarities are that I would up in hospital that night, and also continue to suffer physical effects from the experience.

In the interest of Truth and Justice, I thank you all for this opportunity to testify, and I'll be happy to answer your questions.