



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

A vindication of sorts - 27 years on!!!

The following article on the Enniskillen bombing by the IRA 27 years ago appeared in this week's "Impartial Reporter", the local newspaper for the Fermanagh, South Tyrone area.

I have highlighted a very significant section in the middle of the article.

I too remember the Enniskillen bombing very vividly because of those I knew who were murdered and maimed in that wicked, cowardly act by the IRA, the lies and deception of church and state and also because it happened on my 44th birthday!

The significance of the highlighted section is that it goes a little way to vindicating me and the allegations I made, following the bombing, about the 'powers that be' seeking to placate Irish Nationalism and the Roman Catholic Church and hide from the public the involvement of elements within the Roman Catholic church in Enniskillen in the steps taken to set up the bomb in one of their properties.

I was most surprised to read in Mr McDaniel's comments a reference to a statement I issued to his newspaper at the time, for it is not the norm for newspaper editors to acknowledge they might have got it wrong - especially after 27 years.

For that I thank him.

In answer to the question he poses in the title of his article: Yes, we will get answers. When? In that day when "every one of us shall give account of himself to God," Romans 14:12.

To read the account I gave of the "Poppy Day Massacre" at the time, **click here**. I have highlighted in it the letter, referred to by Mr McDaniels, that I sent to "The Impartial Reporter" but which he chose not to publish.

Ivan Foster.

7th November 2014.

Will we ever get answers as to what happened at Enniskillen?

Denzil McDaniels, Editor

Published by the Impartial Reporter, Enniskillen, 6 Nov 2014.

One of the quotes I saw on Twitter this week was: "I may not be there yet, but am closer than I was yesterday. One step can make all the difference."

It's one of those simple sayings which, I presume, is meant to be inspirational; but it challenged me to ask another question. Am I the same person that I was 27 years ago?

I hope not.

But have I taken a step forward every day? Clearly not; life's not like that and I feel I have often taken a step forward, a step back, a step sideways.

Why 27 years? Well this weekend, that is how long it has been since the Remembrance Sunday bombing in Enniskillen, one of the very low, dark points in our troubled history. On 8 November 1987, a bomb exploded just before 10 to 11 on a Sunday morning when hundreds were gathering around the War Memorial in Belmore Street to honour the dead of world war.



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Eleven people were killed and 63 injured, many of them grievously. A 12th fatality followed some years later when Ronnie Hill passed away after lying in a coma.

I cannot imagine the difficult steps forward and back taken by those most directly affected over those 27 years, indeed those still struggling on their journey. As, of course, are many thousands of people robbed of normal lives and in physical or mental pain due to decades of violence.

My own memories of that day are still vivid, and as I approach another anniversary I have been thinking of the day itself, the immediate aftermath, the repercussions for society and how my views over almost three decades often change back and forth.

I ended up writing a book about the bombing on the tenth anniversary, and remember so well the interviews I carried out with people who were very forthcoming with their emotional accounts of rescue attempts, being injured or losing loved ones. It was a humbling experience for me, and now I look back and think that even many of those I spoke to have now passed on themselves.

It is, in itself, a reminder of one's own mortality and how quickly time moves on.

As a working journalist, my memory of 8th November, 1987 is probably different to many. I had become editor of the Impartial a few months earlier, and me and the rest of the staff were thrown into a major world story. We worked round the clock to cover as much as we could.

There were surreal moments. Like standing outside the Presbyterian church for one of the funerals, taking notes as the Minister's address was relayed by loudspeaker, only to look round and see the funeral of another victim coming down East Bridge Street.

But, of course, it was a world story with a difference for us. We knew the people concerned, it was my home town, and while I was on "auto pilot" most of the time, I recall on occasions going home for a cup of tea and breaking down with tears of emotion as the event overwhelmed me. And that was someone who hadn't lost a relative.

There was one tough decision to be made for a young editor. The building in which the bomb had been placed, known as the Reading Rooms (where the Clinton Centre now stands) was owned by the Catholic church. In a statement, the Free Presbyterian church Minister, the Rev. Ivan Foster claimed that a proper security check had not been carried out on the building due to pressure from the Catholic hierarchy.

There was a volatile atmosphere around Enniskillen that week; the interview by Gordon Wilson in which he forgave those who killed his daughter, Marie, was credited with keeping the lid on things and in hindsight I'm proud of the way the good people of Enniskillen responded with a lack of bitterness.

But, would Ivan Foster's statement have blown the lid off?

I decided not to publish. Tough call, because throughout my career I was always of a mind to put everything into the public domain.

Was I wrong? Would I do it differently today? Who knows, one can only take a decision honestly at the time.

But all these years on, there are many, many questions which remain unanswered.

As it turned out, the Enniskillen bomb was a massive own goal for the IRA and leaders of Sinn Fein, including Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, have since agreed that the action was wrong. The tragedy also turned out to be one of the catalysts in turning Northern Ireland towards the peace deal.

Interestingly, a Republican friend and I were chatting recently, and he pointed out that if the bomb had been



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planted a few hundred yards up the street and the victims had been members of a UDR patrol arriving that day, there wouldn't have been the same outrage and history would have been different.

When I was writing my book in 1997, I speculated on how the operation by the IRA was carried out; but it was a theory based on several conversations I had with Republican activists and members of the RUC. No one has ever been charged with any offence in connection with one of the most serious and awful atrocities of our Troubles.

A few years later, I listened intently to a senior RUC officer being interviewed on television and expound an explanation of what happened; and it was virtually taken from the book.

It's significant, is it not, that this theory is the only one ever put forward? Is that because the authorities don't have any other one? Or, on a more sinister note, is it convenient not to go any deeper to avoid more serious questions?

There were hopes that the Historical Enquiries Team had made progress a couple of years ago, but that report hit the buffers and it looks as if that sort of inquiry won't be resurrected. Why? Is somebody being protected?

A couple of years ago, I went against my natural instincts again and said I was opposed to an inquiry into Enniskillen; I suppose I just felt it was an inquiry that would go nowhere.

But looking back now in 2014, I'm more suspicious than ever.

Considering the way it's emerged that the British authorities infiltrated the IRA, now I'm wondering who knew what in advance of the bombing?

Is it crazy to suggest that MI5 had intelligence and let it go ahead knowing that the IRA would be dramatically damaged and be forced into negotiations? It's an awful thought; but the most awful aspect of it is that one couldn't rule it out.

Apart from that last one controversial paragraph, there are still many questions unresolved about Enniskillen.

I can only conclude by saying that the times of 1987 were very different; but however difficult the challenges we face today are, the remembrance of it this weekend brings sharply into focus that we must never go back to those days.