

INTERVIEW WITH RONNIE FLANNAGAN, DEPUTY CHIEF CONSTABLE, RUC  
RADIO ULSTER - THURSDAY 8 AUGUST 1996

Seamus McKee: Ronnie Flanagan, good morning.

DCC Flanagan: Good morning.

Seamus McKee: Once again the perception is that here we have another victory for those who appear to be able to bring the greater numbers onto the streets. At Drumcree the Orangemen, in Derry the Residents Group.

DCC Flanagan: This is a victory for nobody. In many senses it's a defeat for common sense but I think this has to be viewed as a balanced decision, a decision which addresses not only a march; it's being forgotten that this addresses the possibility of protests as well, so the Secretary of State has moved to ban both only along that small portion of the Walls.

Seamus McKee: So there was a concern, was there, not just about Saturday but what might follow, for example, tomorrow night's march in the city?

DCC Flanagan: Absolutely, there's a concern. If it was just a march we had to consider without opposition to it there wouldn't be a requirement for any of this. This ban by the Secretary of State addresses both the possibility of a march and protests against that march.

Seamus McKee: To what extent was the RUC request to Sir Patrick Mayhew based on intelligence, that there are those on both sides who are looking for an excuse to return to a wider campaign of violence, and that the weekend may have been looked to to provide that?



DCC Flannagan: The request and the information furnished to the Secretary of State on the basis of that request was based on the belief that serious disorder would ensue if such a move was not taken. That's really the basis of the request to the Secretary of State.

Seamus McKee: Do you believe there are maybe those on both sides who are looking for such an excuse?

DCC Flannagan: Well, I think it's clear to all concerned that there are some people whose purpose it suits that trouble should ensue. Everyone of reason must make sure that their purpose is not served, must make sure there is no disorder.

Seamus McKee: Following Drumcree, and the Police Authority has said this, the integrity of the RUC was called into question, the credibility of the Force was damaged with the nationalist community. Do you guarantee that the ban that has now been put in place will be upheld?

DCC Flannagan: There's no question of the integrity of the RUC being impugned. Of course our Authority has said so, not our integrity, not in any circumstances would I accept that our integrity has been impugned. Of course our relationship, particularly with the nationalist community, has been damaged. We would be fools to ignore that. We would be fools not to work to re-build bridges that have been damaged, but our integrity has never been in question.

Seamus McKee: Do you guarantee the upholding of the ban?

DCC Flannagan: Absolutely. Now, it has to be remembered, most people look forward to this weekend with dread, but



DCC Flannagan: they can ring their hands and walk away from it and watch it on television. Our officers can't do that. They are the people who are placed in a position of trying yet again to reconcile irreconcilable viewpoints. If you look at Saturday's proposed parade, it's only a tiny proportion of the proposed route that is being affected, and not only is the parade being affected, protests against the parade are being affected. This is a balanced decision.

Seamus McKee: How do you view tomorrow night's march then, organised by residents?

DCC Flannagan: Well, that march has been lawfully notified to us. It's due to come into The Diamond and it's due to disperse at 9.30. We expect people to behave as they have notified to us, and follow that lawful notification that they have given to us.

Seamus McKee: And the police are allowing that to go ahead as requested?

DCC Flannagan: Yes, that's right.

Seamus McKee: Are you considering to any extent the possibility that there may be an attempt to prevent Orangemen getting into the city centre that could arise possibly from tomorrow night's march?

DCC Flannagan: What possible justification could there be for that? Even on the terms of the principles laid forward by residents groups, they have always said that city centres, commercial areas are neutral areas. There can be no justification for any attempt by them to interfere with the parade.

Seamus McKee: Are you satisfied there will be no such attempt?



DCC Flannagan: I certainly hope there's not, and there should be no justification whatever. And we'll be planning to allow the rest of the parade to go ahead as notified to us, that's the parade on Saturday, the vast bulk of which is unaffected by this recent prohibition by the Secretary of State.

Seamus McKee: Can you understand then the feelings of the Apprentice Boys who see themselves as having made every effort to meet the concerns of those opposed to their march, only to find that those who are opposed to it can have their own march while they are penalised, as they see it?

DCC Flannagan: Well, I can understand very well the feelings of the Apprentice Boys. I can understand very well their feelings when they entered into dialogue, to the surprise of many people, perhaps even to the surprise of the Bogside Residents Group that they did enter that dialogue; they didn't come out with an outcome that was to their satisfaction. You know, it's not our job to make valued judgements about whether a route or a portion of a route should be contentious. We have to deal with the reality of life. This particular section is contentious, has always been contentious and we must do all in our power to prevent serious disorder.

Seamus McKee: Drumcree nationalists felt betrayed, now Unionists feel betrayed.

DCC Flannagan: Well, I understand the deep feelings in this society and that illustrates very clearly that it's a societal problem. We can do everything in our power, as we have been doing, as we are doing, as we



will continue to do, but we cannot solve society's ills.

Seamus McKee: What's now required of Government, do you believe?

DCC Flannagan: Well, I think what's required of Government is what has been displayed by Government. What's now required of society is a cool head, a cool approach. People are acting at the moment on the basis of emotion. These contentious parades go right to the core of the divisions that afflict our society. I don't underestimate the difficulties, I don't underestimate the strength of feeling. People should beware of traps that are being set to draw them in to violence.

Seamus McKee: And when you say what's being displayed by Government, do you mean the action of the Secretary of State which he's taken on request from the Chief Constable?

DCC Flannagan: That action, and the action to move towards a review of this whole area. That's the forum to which people should [ preside ].

Seamus McKee: That becomes crucial now, doesn't it?

DCC Flannagan: I think it's absolutely crucial.

Seamus McKee: In what sense?

DCC Flannagan: In the sense that these contentious parades go right to the heart of the difficulties which beset us, and all steps must be taken to address this issue.

Seamus McKee: Can the RUC, however, continue to operate in the climate that's created by these marches?



INTERVIEW WITH PAT ARMSTRONG, CHAIRMAN, POLICE AUTHORITY

DCC Flannagan: Well of course we'll continue to operate. We operate by sensitivity and we operate from a position where we understand the deeply held feelings, on both sides of this debate. We understand how the Apprentice Boys must feel in this current situation, but we ask them to look at the entire route that they have notified to us and look at that proportion that is affected. They can still go on the Walls, they can still celebrate the event that's so important to them.

Seamus McKee: Ronnie Flannagan, thank you very much.

DCC Flannagan: Thank you very much.

Interviewer: Do you think there is any question that individual police officers will do what's asked of them and will maintain discipline over the weekend?

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Pat Armstrong: The RUC is a disciplined force and I wouldn't have any doubts about the discipline of the RUC in situations of this sort, but it's very unfortunate that they have to be placed in a position where they are required to police a public disorder situation which the community brought about itself, the two communities brought about. If they could have reached some sort of a solution, then the RUC wouldn't be in this position.

Interviewer: What we saw this afternoon was the Secretary of State making the announcement and then Sir Hugh Arbuckle giving interviews. Were you pleased to see that Sir Patrick had taken more of a, sort of, front line position on this evening over the last

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