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THIS WEEK

THURSDAY, 15 JUNE 1989

"HOLY TERROR"

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THIS WEEK - "HOLY TERROR"TX: 15th June 1989

THEME MUSIC

JOHN TAYLOR:

On the campaign trail in Ireland, with the priest they call Father Paddy, wanted by the British on terrorist charges of conspiracy to murder, and to cause explosions.

FILM CLIP - ELECTION CAMPAIGN

JOHN TAYLOR:

Only six months ago Father Ryan beat attempts to extradite him from both Belgium and the Republic. If elected today his victory will be a major embarrassment for the British Government.

FATHER PATRICK RYAN:

The British presence in Northern Ireland is a position of military occupation, maintained by force, maintained by lies, maintained by cheating, maintained by fraud, and maintained by torture. It would be my intention that the British presence should be, and continue to be as uncomfortable as that of the devil himself, in the presence of holy water.

JOHN TAYLOR:

But what was the extent of his commitment to get the British out of Northern Ireland? Tonight, This Week presents evidence of Father Ryan's involvement in IRA bombing campaigns, and we show how this tiny electronic device links the priest and the IRA.

Patrick Ryan was born in June 1930 in County Tipperary, a part of Ireland now as well known for its rebel priest, as it is for being the ancient seat of Irish kings.

He was brought up on a small farm above the village of Rossmore, one of six children. Republicanism was in the family. His mother Mary, was active in the Black and Tan War of the 1920s, offering shelter to IRA men on the run.

JOHN TAYLOR:

(Continued) Mary Ryan's values were passed onto her son. Young Patrick became Father Patrick in 1954, when he was ordained into the Paletine Order, missionary priests working in Africa.

He was sent to Tanganyika where he developed many practical skills. He built schools and hospitals, learnt to fly and handle explosives. But this was colonial Africa, and he came to associate with colonialism with injustice.

FATHER PATRICK RYAN:

When I did find myself in Africa, of course, I walked into a colonial situation, and there one rather quickly got to see how the colonial system of manipulation and exploitation worked. So coming back to my own country later, I found largely, particularly in the Northern part, a colonial situation, with all its injustices and exploitation.

FILM CLIP - NORTHERN IRELAND

JOHN TAYLOR:

At the end of the 1960s, Father Ryan spent two years working in Northern Ireland. The actions of the British Army on Belfast streets hardened his Republican resolve. He became convinced that his most useful mission could be on behalf of his own people.

FATHER PATRICK RYAN:

So in 1970 I decided that I would try to make a contribution, in one manner or another, towards helping the what for me, were the nationalist victims of a very aggressive and unjust foreign occupation. So I came up with the idea to myself that perhaps in the financial field, particularly, I might be able to do something in that particular domain.

JOHN TAYLOR:

And so Father Ryan set off for Europe. He began fundraising on a grand scale, approaching sympathetic governments through their embassies.

(Interview)

Are you personally satisfied that the money you were raising was going to the families of the people in the North?

FATHER PATRICK RYAN:

I collected money with that intention. By the way, this money that I collected was given to me. But also would be accepted on my part, provided there were no conditions whatsoever attached. Now as to its ultimate destination, from my point of view it was destined to be of help to the families, as I've said, as victims of a foreign occupation.

JOHN TAYLOR:

By the mid-Seventies the priest's travels had taken him to Switzerland, but in Geneva's Pradier Square in July 1976, he was arrested at the request of the British authorities. By this time, Father Ryan was collecting a million pounds a year, but he was suspected of doing much more than simply raising cash.

Ryan's arrest in Switzerland was a breakthrough. Police found a diary which gave them valuable information about his movements and a large sum of money. But their most interesting find was five hundred of these. It's called a Memopark, and it's a small timing device used by motorists on the Continent, to remind them when their parking meter's run out.

It was perfectly legal to buy Memoparks, but throughout the 1970s these tiny clockwork timers were being used by the IRA in thousands of bombs, in Northern Ireland and in Britain.

Bomb making kits recovered in England show how they were used time and time again, as safety arming devices, giving the bomber time to get away before the main timer triggered.

(Interview)

How many Memoparks did you buy in total?

FATHER PATRICK RYAN:

I think in that period, I think, about nine hundred. And seeing that I had the hassle that I had with them, I didn't ever buy any more Memoparks since.

JOHN TAYLOR:

And what was the purpose of buying them? What were you doing buying nine hundred ten franc gadgets?

FATHER PATRICK RYAN:

Yes, exactly. I was answering a request from somebody who asked me simply to purchase those things for them.

JOHN TAYLOR:

Somebody, a government, or ...

FATHER PATRICK RYAN:

Somebody that might have be - have been connected with perhaps some arm of a particular government, who would - at least that would be my impression. The real identity of these people, of course, again, in that domain is a matter generally of speculation. And where it eventually ended up, I wouldn't have the faintest idea, and neither did it interest me at the time.

JOHN TAYLOR:

Police believe they can link specific bombs from an IRA campaign in London in 1981, with the Memoparks brought by Father Ryan. They believe the bomb that blew up the car of Royal Marine's Chief, Sir Stuart Pringle, contained one of Father Ryan's Memoparks. A Memopark was recovered intact from the bomb that failed to go off, found in a toilet in Debenhams store in Oxford Street, another, they say, of Father Ryan's purchases.

Police believe yet one more was used in the attack on the home of Lord Havers, then Attorney General. And in the Oxford Street Wimpy bar bomb, which killed bomb disposal officer, Ken Howarth, a Memopark was found, again, allegedly linked to Father Ryan.

But police may have some difficulty in proving their case. Father Ryan committed no crime when he bought his Memoparks, and he says, he has no idea where and to whom they went. Furthermore, in Switzerland in the 1970s, these clockwork timers were mass produced by several companies.

We traced one of the biggest producers to this factory in the Swiss clock making town of Grenchen. The company told us that in the mid-Seventies, they were producing between a hundred and two hundred thousand Memoparks a year, making the task of tracing each one impossible.

JOHN TAYLOR: (Interview) Is that one of your Memoparks?

ALEX L'EPLATTENG: (Translation) (Managing Director) Yes, certainly, that's a Memopark made by Michel SA.

JOHN TAYLOR: Is it possible to make a connection between that Memopark, and an individual sale?

ALEX L'EPLATTENG: (Translation) No, absolutely not. There were hundreds, thousands of them sent all over the world, all like this one here.

JOHN TAYLOR: What identifying marks were on those Memoparks?

ALEX L'EPLATTENG: (Translation) Only the name of the manufacturer, Michel SA, but there are no serial numbers and specifically it's not possible to identify the period it was made and sold.

JOHN TAYLOR: After his arrest in 1976 in Geneva, Father Ryan was taken to the City's St Antoine Prison, where he was detained and questioned for ten days, but he said nothing. To hasten his release Father Ryan successfully used the traditional Republican ploy, the hunger strike. The Swiss couldn't detain him, because he'd committed no offence on their soil, and at no time in 1976 did the British ask for his extradition.

Thirty-six hours into the hunger strike, Father Ryan was put on a plane, a free man.

Two years later, in 1978, he turned up in Spain on the Costa Blanca. He'd bought a studio flat in Benidorm, where he became a well-liked and respected member of the community. He bought a car, which he kept in the garage, under his block, and although he didn't have a job he kept himself busy. The garage was also a workshop where he practiced his skills as a handyman. Neighbours said he was an excellent plumber, carpenter and electrician.

SPANISH NEIGHBOUR: (Translation) He was an extraordinary neighbour, very decent with all the community and all the neighbours. He is a good person. We never found anything wrong with him. We always said he was our guardian angel.

JOHN TAYLOR: You said that Patrick was an angel, did you know that he was a priest?

SPANISH NEIGHBOUR: (Translation) No, he never spoke about his private life, and we never asked him.

JOHN TAYLOR: In fact, Father Ryan's Spanish neighbours knew very little about the man who lived next door. He was very much the mystery man who would disappear for months on end, never saying where he'd been.

We have since discovered one of the places he went, Libya.

Father Ryan has told us he's a great admirer of its ruler, Colonel Gadhaffi, who has openly supported the IRA, and is thought to have been one of their main suppliers of arms and equipment.

While staying at the Al Yaser Hotel in Tripoli in 1980, Father Ryan met this man we'll call Mr Bingham. Over the next two years they became close friends.

JOHN TAYLOR: What was he doing in Tripoli?

"MR BINGHAM": He said he was a meat exporter, and he was there in Libya to sell meat to the Libyans.

JOHN TAYLOR: Did you see him often at this hotel?

"MR BINGHAM": Most nights up until December 1980.

JOHN TAYLOR: What did you see him doing?

"MR BINGHAM"

Meeting with Libyan officials, going out with Libyan officials, in cars.

JOHN TAYLOR:

Who were these Libyan officials?

"MR BINGHAM"

A colonel in the police who used to pick him up and take him out, assumingly to meet Gadhaffi.

JOHN TAYLOR:

It's now clear that in the early 1980s, Father Ryan gave British police the slip in Europe. We've learnt that a Special Branch intelligence report, in 1984 admits that his whereabouts were unknown.

In London, in 1982, the IRA was launching a major new bombing campaign.

The IRA bomb that killed four soldiers and seven horses on the morning of July 20th 1982, was detonated by remote control. It was the first time such a device had been used outside Northern Ireland, and it signalled a new phase in the IRA's bombing campaign. In the aftermath the painstaking search for clues yielded a significant find: fragments of a circuit board. From these fragments forensic experts believe that a particular type of switching device had been used, an FX 401. FX 401s are tone decoders, which activate only when they receive a signal on a particular frequency. They're in common use in domestic remote control devices, but they can be used in radio controlled bombs.

FX 401s are only made by this company, Consumer Micro-Circuits in Essex. When police made inquiries here, they discovered that fifty FX 401 and fifty FX 101 L switches had been bought from the company in January 1982. They also found an invoice, which gave the date, the cost and the name of the purchaser, Mr Bingham, Father Ryan's friend in Libya.

(Interview)

What specifically did Father Ryan ask you to buy for him?

"MR BINGHAM" Switches. FX 401s and Fx 101s.

JOHN TAYLOR: He actually specified what he was going to buy?

"MR BINGHAM" Yes, he specified what company to buy them from in England.

JOHN TAYLOR: Did he say what he wanted them for?

"MR BINGHAM" No. He said he was looking into a problem what we'd been talking about in Libya, about the voice security of Gadhaffi's radios.

JOHN TAYLOR: After you bought these micro-switches, how did you get them to Father Ryan?

"MR BINGHAM" I took them over in a cigarette packet with me, to Paris, because the switches are no bigger than my little fingernail, and I handed them over to him in the Gardinor Hotel because they were only in plastic bags when they were given to me. So I put them in there for safety. I took them from - straight from CMC, to London Airport and flew to Paris. I met Father Ryan in the coffee shop next to the Gardinor Hotel, and handed them over to him, where he paid me the balance of the money, my air fare, my expenses, plus he paid the hotel bill.

JOHN TAYLOR: Did you get a receipt for the purchase?

"MR BINGHAM" Yes. I handed that to Patrick Ryan.

JOHN TAYLOR: In Paris?

"MR BINGHAM" In Paris.

JOHN TAYLOR: When at the end of June last year Father Ryan left his flat in Benidorm and took the overnight coach to Brussels, police saw this as a

JOHN TAYLOR:

(Continued) significant move. The year had been one of intense IRA activity in Europe. Three IRA bombers had been shot dead in Gibraltar by the SAS. There had been attacks on British servicemen in Holland and Germany. Most worrying, the Queen was just about to pay an official visit to Amsterdam, the day after he arrived in Belgium, Father Ryan was arrested and questioned.

Taken to St Giles Prison in Brussels the priest admitted he was an IRA sympathiser, but not a member of the IRA. One of his interrogators told us that in all his years of fighting terrorism, Father Ryan was the strangest man he'd ever met. In the high security wing he denied he had any intention of attacking the Queen.

FATHER PATRICK RYAN:

Now on this question of the Queen visiting Holland, as you mentioned, yes, that was the first question that was put to me after being arrested in Belgium, but that was actually the first that I had ever heard of it. I had no interest whatsoever in the comings and goings of the good Queen or any of her family for that matter, except of course, to wish them well, you know, in all their comings and goings, otherwise I had no interest.

JOHN TAYLOR:

Back in Benidorm, Father Ryan's studio flat was being searched by Spanish police, who shot their way in through the locked door, but they found little of value. But in Belgium it was a different story. In his rooms, in the two houses where he had stayed, on and off, for several years, police made significant discoveries.

There were two false travel passes for the Paris Metro, one in the name of H I Gill, the other in the name of D H Scottson. There was also a British passport in the same name. The passport had been stolen in 1980, from a British holidaymaker in Benidorm.

FATHER PATRICK RYAN:

I had used a false passport, certainly, yes.

JOHN TAYLOR:

Why?

FATHER PATRICK RYAN:

I could not travel on my own valid papers, so I decided the next best thing, and I set off to find another one, which of course, I did, and continued my business. That would be the reason of the false passport, false papers.

JOHN TAYLOR:

Police also found two drums of sodium chlorate, a weed killer that can be used as explosives, two sixty minute kitchen timers, three Memoparks, a wooden box with a hole in the side, two text books on explosives, and a list of nine other books on explosives.

What possible interests can a Catholic priest have in explosives?

FATHER PATRICK RYAN:

Well, if one is to be of use and of help in any domain, the first essential is a little bit of knowledge. Now in the handling of explosives, as I have handled in Africa, on a number of occasions, knowledge, I think would be deemed to be essential for a variety of very obvious reasons. So I have an interest in that subject, as I would have an interest on books on mechanics, or electronics, or electricity, or music, I have a lot of books on music.

JOHN TAYLOR:

They also found a Robbe receiver like this. It's a piece of electronic equipment usually used in conjunction with a transmitter as a remote control device to fly model aeroplanes or sail model boats. But a Robbe receiver has also been used to trigger switches to detonate bombs.

FATHER PATRICK RYAN:

As my knowledge on the making of bombs, and the mechanism connected with bombs, as my knowledge is zero. I have no idea of how these devices may be used. If I were presented with a Robbe receiver at the moment, and the name blotted out, I would not know what it was.

JOHN TAYLOR: Are you aware that a Robbe receiver, or Robbe receivers have been used by the IRA to detonate bombs?

FATHER PATRICK RYAN: As I have no connections whatsoever with the IRA, or their manner or mechanism for waging war, I wouldn't have any idea.

JOHN TAYLOR: But the most significant and incriminating discoveries were these, twenty-three FX 101 L and one FX 401 switches. Police also found the receipt for the hundred switches bought by Mr Bingham, and handed over to Father Ryan in Paris in 1982.

There were also some micro-switches found.

FATHER PATRICK RYAN: Yes, indeed, there were.

JOHN TAYLOR: Were they yours?

FATHER PATRICK RYAN: These were micro-switches that again, I think it must have been. I don't know when. Perhaps in the early '80s, that I had acquired to oblige and to fulfil a request. Some I had forwarded as directed. Others I had kept, awaiting a further request, which I think never came.

JOHN TAYLOR: Are you aware that micro-switches have been used in IRA bombs that have been set off in London?

FATHER PATRICK RYAN: Now what a micro-switch actually is, I'm not so sure. If somebody presented me with a micro-switch, I wouldn't know it was a micro-switch...

JOHN TAYLOR: You just bought them?

FATHER PATRICK RYAN: I buy them the same as I buy anything else and pass them on. It's none of my business. But I would stress the IRA never requested that I buy any such items for me.

JOHN TAYLOR:

Father Ryan refuses to say what happened to these switches, but unlike Memoparks they can be traced. The single FX 401 found in Brussels, bore the batch number 8131. That's the same number that was on the FX 401s, bought by Mr Bingham for Father Ryan.

And there's a direct link between these switches and the IRA. In Salsey Forest, Nottinghamshire, 1984, a complete decoding unit for a bomb, was found in an IRA arms dump. That unit contained an FX 401. Its batch number was 8131.

The circuitry of a bomb found here, exactly matched the fragments recovered from the Hyde Park bomb.

With the discoveries in Brussels, British police knew they had a strong case for extradition. The Belgium courts agreed there was a case to answer. The Belgium police were so confident that extradition would go ahead, they sent all their evidence to London. But Father Ryan and his supporters had other plans. The priest went on a carefully calculated hunger strike. This escalated to a thirst strike, the day before the Belgium Cabinet met to take the final decision on extradition.

With Ryan only a few days away from death, the Belgians gave in, and put him on a military plane to Ireland. Dublin had secretly given assurances that Father Ryan wouldn't be arrested on his arrival. As he recovered in hospital, Westminster politicians could not disguise their fury.

FILM CLIP - WESTMINSTER

JOHN TAYLOR:

This exchange in the House of Commons was fully reported the next day. In this highly charged atmosphere the British Government sought extradition from Ireland, but the Press coverage tipped the scales in Father Ryan's favour, faced with these outbursts the Dublin Government refused.

For the Irish Government, extradition is always a sensitive issue, even more so with Father Ryan. He'd beaten extradition in Belgium, and as a

JOHN TAYLOR:

(Continued) Catholic priest here in Ireland, he could become a potent symbol of Irish nationalism. In announcing his decision the Attorney General, here in Dublin, agreed that there was a case to answer, but said that Father Ryan's trial had been hopelessly prejudiced by publicity in London. Britain's last chance of bringing Father Paddy before the courts, had gone.

The blame for this failure, according to the Former Lord Chancellor, lies partly with British politicians.

LORD HAVERS:
(Former Lord Chancellor)

They were so blatantly against him. So blatantly hostile, and I think it obviously was the sort of justification the Irish Attorney was looking for. I think the privilege in the House of Commons is abused more often than it should be, particularly with regard to innocent people outside, who have no remedy. They can't sue for libel. If it's said within the Chamber, the Commons, it's totally privileged.

FILM CLIP

JOHN TAYLOR:

Father Ryan, has again donned his dog collar, and put his faith in the ballot box to continue his campaign against the British. Dublin has yet to decide whether to bring charges, but with the passage of time, the chances of a trial in the Republic looks slim. As the polls close tonight, Father Ryan's elections prospects look slim too.

FILM CLIP

JOHN TAYLOR:

Despite the difficult times, the rebel priest from Tipperary, looks back on his career with satisfaction.

FATHER PATRICK RYAN:

My work for the past twenty years, as I would see it, was simply an extension of my work in Africa, transferred in this instance to another geographical location, to the benefit of some of our own people suffering injustice and

FATHER PATRICK RYAN:

(Continued) persecution, and oppressed. That was what my work was in the last twenty years, and should I not be elected to the European Parliament, then I have every intention of continuing that work.

JOHN TAYLOR:

And has it been twenty years well spent?

FATHER PATRICK RYAN:

Extremely well spent, and extremely effective, if we're to judge by Maggie Thatcher's rage, not so long ago. And I would say, yes, extremely effective, and I would have only one regret that it wasn't even more effective.

THEME MUSIC

END