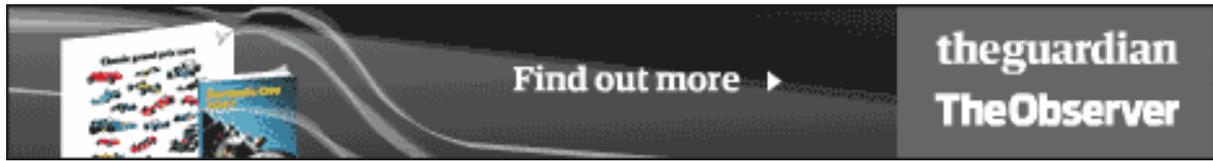


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MI5 chief told agents: 'Call me Bob'

Former British agent set to expose new intelligence boss's role in infiltration of IRA

Jamie Doward, home affairs editor
Sunday March 11, 2007
[The Observer](#)

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In the back streets of Belfast, Jonathan Evans, the new director-general of MI5, was known as 'Bob' to the agents who fed him crucial information that helped lead to the downfall of the IRA.

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He cut his teeth in the murky world of bombings, kneecappings and disinformation, where a bad decision could cost the life of an agent or allow a terrorist bomb to reach its target.

Evans had been an MI5 agent for 11 years when he was sent into Northern Ireland with a mandate to help the shadowy Force Research Unit (FRU), the army's undercover force responsible for infiltrating Irish terrorist groups. Last night former agents stripped away some of the secrecy that inevitably goes with being head of the security service and gave an insight into the mind of the man they knew.

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Evans made sure he was popular with the men he sent into the republican heartland to discover the secrets of the IRA. One intelligence source said that, prior to Evans's arrival in Northern Ireland, agents had been treated poorly. 'Before he arrived, some of those undercover may as well have been living in a mud hut in Biafra. But Evans changed all that. He looked after them. It was like they had been moved to Number 10. We were flown all around Europe, to posh hotels. We had debriefings in France and Scotland.'

One of Evans's major triumphs came after MI5 was tipped off that the IRA was developing a new, lethal form of technology. The device consisted of explosives packed in a metal cone, known as a 'doodlebug', which were detonated by a photographic flash gun, triggered when someone walked by. The same sort of technology, albeit wired to infra-red 'trip' devices, is now being used to deadly effect by al-Qaeda in the streets of Iraq.

Since there was no way of stopping the IRA getting its hands on the equipment, MI5 came up with a radical solution: it would give the terrorists the technology itself.

'They knew that the IRA was going to develop the technology anyway,' said 'Martin Ingram', a former FRU

member, now turned author, who writes under a pseudonym.

'So it was decided it was much better to know what the enemy was going to do, so they could counter it.'

A decision was taken to use a key IRA infiltrator, Kevin Fulton, to procure the equipment in America. Fulton was an undercover British soldier who had spent years getting close to the IRA high command. In return for such a dangerous operation, Fulton was promised that he would be looked after when he 'came out'. 'You could argue that MI5 helped the IRA enhance its technology,' Ingram said. 'But from an intelligence point of view, it allowed Kevin to infiltrate the IRA and gain knowledge about how it was going to deploy the technology.'

The problem was how to help Fulton obtain the bomb parts, which the IRA had located in America. Any attempt to acquire sensitive technology would alert the US authorities. Evans was dispatched to New York to liaise with the FBI and ensure Fulton's mission went unimpeded.

But the strategy was controversial. In March 1992, a bomb exploded near Newry, killing an RUC constable, Colleen McMurray, and seriously injuring her colleague, Paul Slaine. The explosion was triggered by a flash gun. 'Yes, the IRA went on to use the technology successfully, but in the end the strategy saved a lot of lives, because the security services were able to track it,' said one former intelligence source.

Now the story of how Evans helped Fulton to infiltrate the IRA looks set to come back to haunt the new head of MI5. Angry with the way that he has been treated since his cover was blown in 1994, Fulton is taking his former employer to court in a civil case.

Fulton's lawyers claim the security service promised him a pension and a new identity. He already has a number of FRU members who have pledged to give evidence corroborating his claims. Last December, the judge hearing the case in the High Court in Belfast ruled that

Fulton could call any witness who can provide evidence as to his value as an undercover agent. The Observer understands Fulton's solicitors will subpoena Evans after their client identified him in the newspapers last week, following the spy chief's promotion.

The mere possibility of Evans appearing in court threatens severely to embarrass MI5, which has been trying to stonewall the case for three years. Sources close to the intelligence service admit Evans was in Northern Ireland, but deny he was one of Fulton's handlers. Those watching the case, however, believe Evans will now be called to testify. 'It's a cast-iron guarantee,' Ingram said. Perhaps if Evans enters the court he will trade glances with Fulton and recall the dangers they shared. He may even recognise the gold tie pin Fulton has pledged to wear in court. A small token of thanks from the man he knew only as 'Bob'.

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