

Ed Moloney writes in the Belfast News Letter on the 25th March 2017 on the history of Martin McGuinness Murderous Career.

**The sudden if not unexpected death of Martin McGuinness is one of those occasions which calls for journalists, and citizens, to don the philosopher's hat to ask the following question: is it right or proper to overlook the sins of an individual if, thanks to those sins, that person's life concluded by making others' lives better?**

In McGuinness' case, he was the IRA leader who had conducted an orchestra of death and destruction for most of his republican career but became the man of peace who helped end decades of strife and violent death – or at least that is how much of the media greeted his passing in Derry on Tuesday morning. Not everyone joined in. Norman Tebbit, the British cabinet minister whose wife was permanently disabled in the 1984 IRA bombing of the Tory Party conference in Brighton, said the world was 'a cleaner and sweeter place' without him.

There's no doubt however, that the bulk of the media by far preferred 'the Chuckle Brothers' angle to the story. It played handily into a Biblical metaphor. On the day of his death, I almost lost count of the number of times that journalists asked if I could pinpoint Martin McGuinness' Damascene moment, the point in his life when he turned away from violence and embraced the path of peace to sit on the staircase at Stormont grinning alongside Ian Paisley.

I replied that I couldn't because I didn't think there was one.

I had in my mind as I fumbled for an answer the story of Caroline Moreland, a 34 year old single mother of three from West Belfast who had betrayed an arms dump containing, I believe, just a single IRA rifle. The IRA discovered her treachery in the summer of 1994 as the first ceasefire of the peace process approached.

Given the political delicacy of the moment, her fate was debated at a meeting in July of the IRA's seven man (no women) Army Council whose chairman at the time was Martin McGuinness.

There was no disagreement about her fate. She would die for her moment of weakness because to let her go would send the wrong message to an IRA grassroots already uneasy about the talk of ceasefires and sellouts.

The real debate was about what to do with her body afterwards. Most wanted to do what the IRA mostly always did, which was to leave it in a public place as a warning to others. But, my sources told me, McGuinness argued that she should be 'disappeared', her remains hidden in a secret grave so no-one, not least those in government and the media sceptical about the IRA's peaceful bona fides, would know that she had been killed.

McGuinness lost the argument, Caroline Moreland was shot dead and her body dumped near Rosslea in Co Fermanagh. A few weeks later the IRA ceasefire was called. In the euphoria over the cessation poor Caroline Moreland was forgotten, except by her grieving children.

So how does this square with the 'Martin McGuinness as the man of peace' narrative? I don't think it does. While some would argue that Caroline Moreland's violent death helped settle grassroots

IRA nerves and was a necessary sacrifice to keep the rank and file on board for the larger peace process enterprise further down the road, that argument dissolves if her body was dumped in a secret hole in the ground and no-one knew what had happened to her. Instead it becomes an act of callous, selfish cruelty.

Martin McGuinness' life is replete with examples of similar savagery, some of which he had a direct hand in. Leave aside for the moment that he gave the orders to kill Mountbatten and the ambush at Warrenpoint, which can be explained, if not excused, as acts of war. But what about **Patrick Duffy**, a 37 year old father of seven, shot dead as an informer and his body 'disappeared' in a Co. Donegal bog in August 1973 when McGuinness was the local IRA commander? Outrage on the part of neighbours and even fellow IRA members forced McGuinness to arrange the return of his lime covered corpse. Otherwise Pat Duffy would have been lost to his loved ones perhaps for ever.

Or **Patsy Gillespie**, a lowly worker in a Derry army base, forced to drive a van packed with explosives to a military checkpoint where it exploded, killing Gillespie and five soldiers. The attack, dubbed 'a human bomb', was approved by McGuinness in his capacity as IRA Northern commander and was the first of several such attacks.

Or, **Frank Hegarty**, an IRA informer who fled to England when an arms dump under his control was raided by Irish police, blowing his cover. He took refuge in a safe house provided by the authorities but was persuaded to return to Derry by his mother who had in turn been assured he'd be safe by McGuinness. According to one account the IRA's then Northern Commander

promised Hegarty's mother 'on bended knee' that her son would be safe to return to Ireland.

Within hours of his return his bullet-riddled body was found near Castlederg in Co Tyrone. A correspondent to my blog, [thebrokenelbow.com](http://thebrokenelbow.com), recently commented about the Hegarty killing: 'In the annals of armed republican history, I think this event is almost uniquely evil – to make a mother unwittingly complicit in the killing of her son.'

Or James and Ellen Sefton, killed when a booby trap bomb exploded under their car in North Belfast in June 1990. James Sefton had quit the RUC Reserve four years earlier after an IRA mortar bomb attack on a police station in West Belfast had killed a colleague and injured him. He was living quietly in retirement with his wife when their lives were taken. James had long ceased to be part of the Crown forces and his wife's only crime was to married to an ex-cop.

The attack was approved by McGuinness as Northern Commander of the IRA.

Martin McGuinness also lied repeatedly about his life in the IRA, lied more, perhaps, than Gerry Adams. The Sinn Fein president has repeatedly denied ever being in the IRA whereas McGuinness maintained that while he was a member in the early 1970's he quit the organisation in 1974.

That's one more lie than Gerry Adams has told about his life; first that he left the IRA, which he never did, and that thereafter he was never a member. Not only he did not quit in 1974 but at that time Martin McGuinness' IRA career was really only beginning.

When Adams and other leaders were released from Long Kesh in the mid and late 1970's they had a plan to restructure and revive an IRA that was on the edge of defeat. A new Northern Command was created and McGuinness was made its first commander.

But in early 1978, Adams was arrested in the wake of the La Mon atrocity and McGuinness took his place as IRA Chief of Staff, the organisation's military commander, a role he played for the next four violent years.

In 1982 he stood down to be a Sinn Fein candidate in elections to the Prior Assembly but a couple of years later, when the first consignments of Libyan weaponry arrived in Ireland, the IRA leadership was restructured and McGuinness was made Northern Commander again, the second time in his career.

The years of his stewardship of the IRA would see the organisation's fortunes transformed. From the verge of defeat in the mid-1970's the IRA recovered to once again be a player in Northern Ireland politics. It was never again the force it was in the early 1970's but thanks in no small part to McGuinness' efforts nor could it be ignored.

That and the arrival of Libyan weapons, especially the explosive Semtex, made the peace process viable. As long as the IRA held those stocks of arms the British had a reason to seek a deal.

McGuinness would remain as Northern Commander, overseeing and directing all IRA violence on the Northern side of the Border for the next fourteen years, until 1996 when he stood down in

preparation for the Good Friday Agreement and the restoration of a government at Stormont.

**From thereon his principal role was as the IRA's chief diplomat.** As chairman of the Army Council he represented the organisation in all contacts with outside bodies and individuals, a role that grew in importance as the pace of the peace process accelerated.

Martin McGuinness' history as an IRA leader, twice as Northern Commander and once as Chief of Staff, would prove immensely valuable to his alter ego Gerry Adams. Not only did his record outshine Adams' but he was trusted, believed and liked more than the Belfast man. He had also 'done the business', participating in IRA operations, whereas Adams never did.

By himself it is doubtful whether Gerry Adams could have delivered the IRA into the peace process but with McGuinness by his side it became possible.

A measure of his value to the process came at a special IRA Convention, or delegate conference held in 1996, a few months after the breakdown of the 1994 ceasefire. Dissident opponents of the peace process were on the offensive, determined to torpedo the initiative, and for a while it looked as if they would succeed, isolating and defeating Adams and his allies.

As the delegates swayed towards revolt, and the fate of the peace process hung in the balance, Martin McGuinness got to his feet to speak. This is what I wrote about what happened next in 'A Secret History of the IRA':

‘The old Army Council, (McGuinness) declared, had no intention of entering talks that would lead nowhere and had already decided there would not be a second ceasefire, and it would advise the incoming Council accordingly. It was as close as any leader came that night to declaring the peace process dead, and it swung the meeting.’

And so, the Adams leadership survived and with it the peace process. McGuinness had lied of course. The Provos would re-enter talks and there would be a second ceasefire but the delegates believed him because....well because he was Martin McGuinness, **the man who had killed Mountbatten and approved Warrenpoint**, who wanted to bury Pat Duffy and Caroline Moreland in secret graves, who had sent Patsy Gillespie and the Seftons to horrible deaths and lied to Frank Hegarty’s aging mother.

Had Gerry Adams made the same speech the IRA might well still be at war.

Would any of this have been possible had Martin McGuinness not been the savage, duplicitous person that he was?

So back then to that philosopher’s hat and the question I posed at the start of this article. Should Martin McGuinness’ many sins be overlooked because, thanks to those sins, his life ended in almost complete contradiction to how it was lived, in a Northern Ireland that is more at peace than for many decades?

What, dear reader, do you think. Ed Moloney is author ‘A Secret History of the IRA’, ‘Voices From The Grave’ and ‘Paisley - From Demagogue to Democrat?’