GARDA RICHARD FALLON’S 50th ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION

Marking the 50th anniversary of the murder of Garda Richard Fallon, who was shot dead during a bank raid on Dublin’s Arran Quay on 3 April 1970, tributes were paid nationwide by his colleagues. John O’Brien, GSRMA Central Committee and Dublin North Branch, outlines the background to that horrific incident and describes how plans to honour a fallen colleague unfortunately had to be revised due to Covid-19 restrictions.

A pril 1970 was a time of considerable promise for members of the Garda Síochána, despite the looming clouds of the Northern Troubles. The hard-won benefits of the Conroy Commission were being implemented; all members would work a 42-hour-week and payment would be made for overtime and working unsocial hours.

Garda Richard (Dick) Fallon had debated these new benefits with great interest with his colleagues. He was in Mountjoy Station on the morning of 3 April and his thoughts were firmly on heading down to Roscommon for the weekend with his family. He needed to tie up some loose ends and he accepted a lift from the crew of ‘Delta 6’, the uniform patrol car attached to his station.

Garda Pat Hunter was the driver and Garda Paul Firth was the observer. All were unarmed Gardaí with the singular protection of a short wooden baton. They got a radio message that there was a raid alert at the Royal Bank of Ireland on Arran Quay and the crew told Dick that they would drop him and continue to the raid on their own. He declined and agreed to go with them.

It transpired that the phone lines to the bank had been cut which triggered a silent alarm. The patrol car quickly arrived outside the bank. The time was 11am and at that moment the raiders spilled out and Dick and his colleague Paul Firth ran to challenge them.

Garda Fallon closed rapidly on the raiders and he was
shot at close range and died instantly at the side of the building. He simply had no chance to survive.

ARMED BANK RAIDS
Armed bank raids had commenced in the Republic from June of 1968 and this attack was the 12th raid in that sequence. We now recognise that this was part of the destabilisation that occurred north and south as a consequence of the Troubles. Unanswered questions remain as to why more robust pre-emptive action had not been taken against the perpetrators.

We were thoroughly shocked by the killing. There was a tremendous outpouring of grief and his funeral in Dublin brought the city to a standstill. Was it not remarkable that the names of persons of interest were circulated to the media within 48 hours of the killing? It certainly was unprecedented and has not occurred since. The hunt went on for the killers, but some major questions exist to this day on the knowledge in security circles and government on the activities of the criminal gang responsible.

The sharpest grief was experienced by his wife Deirdre and her young family and there are no words that can be uttered which fully do justice to the wrong caused to them. The best we can do is to keep the memory of their sacrifice alive for future generations.

REMEMBRANCE DAY 2019
Last year I attended the Garda Remembrance ceremony with wife Margaret at Dublin Castle. It is always a very special occasion. When the official ceremony was over we wandered around, having chats, renewing old friendships and making some new ones.

A little later we went to the Memorial Wall as we normally do before leaving. This is a time to reflect on the names and pause for a while with familiar colleagues. A quite voice behind me said, “Do you have someone on the wall” and I turned to see a man whom I found out a short time later was Richard Fallon – the eldest son of Garda Dick Fallon.

We chatted for a while and I told him that his father’s death was still very real in our memory. I had lived as a very young garda on the same road as Dick in Santry. Together with many colleagues I had marched in his funeral cortege on 6 April 1970. This was an amazing turnout and the streets of Dublin were lined by people paying their respects.

I have great interest in the events surrounding his death and I researched this whole episode in some detail. I was also conscious, regardless of the sense of loss felt by his Garda colleagues that our feelings were very secondary to the extremely heavy burden which his family had to bear at the time of his killing and long into the future. We exchanged numbers and agreed to stay in touch.

DUBLIN NORTH MEETING
Sometime later Jim Murphy was chairing a Dublin North committee meeting and one of Dick’s colleagues – Tom Collins – was sitting next to me. The topic came up of remembering our fallen colleagues and, in particular, Dick Fallon. With his 50th anniversary on 3 April 2020 we agreed that surely it should be marked in a very special way.

Jim Murphy as Chair and Christy Lonergan our Secretary, together with the committee members, resolved to make sure that a fitting tribute would be made. After a discussion I was nominated to lead a small committee consisting of Frank Fitzpatrick, Eddie O’Donovan and Jude Murphy to make it happen, but to also ensure that his family were fully consulted and involved in any plans. Dick had three surviving children – Richard, Miriam and Finian.

PLAQUE ON ARRAN QUAY
The next task was to contact all of the relevant interests and it became clear that the preferred option was to have a plaque erected at 24 Arran Quay in Dublin. This was the site of the former Royal Bank of Ireland and is now the leased premises of Real Nation; and my early calls to this company were met with great co-operation.

Aidine Calvert and her team were endlessly helpful and this continued throughout the process. The owners of the building were also very willing to co-operate. It was necessary to get the advice and assistance of Dublin City Council.

We quickly learned that the building was a protected building. There were two possible choices: engage in a planning permission application or alternatively submit an application to the Commemorative Naming Committee of Dublin City Council for approval. We chose the latter course and again we were met with very good assistance and guidance.
GARDA RICHARD FALLON

RICHARD FALLON’S PARTICIPATION
We had a number of meetings on site, now with a larger group and Richard Fallon on board and the various permissions steps were covered. In line with practice the Dublin City Council would produce and mount the plaque on the building. The formal application was made on the 8 December 2019 and permission came through early this year. The Central Committee of the GSRMA were fully supporting the project and Mick Lernihan, our new General Secretary, was now on our organising committee and he was of great assistance as events later unfolded.

At this stage we were getting down to the precise detail of the ceremony itself. The Commissioner agreed to attend and a musical tribute would be provided by members from the Garda Band. An Honour Guard would also be present. Assistant Commissioner Pat Leahy, who is in charge of the Dublin Region simply asked “What do you want and I will make it happen”.

The Lord Mayor of Dublin agreed to perform the unveiling ceremony, while Aidine Calvert from Real Nation volunteered the use of her building for a reception. We even agreed a menu for those attending.

Dublin City Council announced that the plaque had been completed and would be mounted a short time before the ceremony. Richard Fallon agreed to address some remarks on the occasion and other speakers were nominated.

WHAT COULD GO WRONG?
So what could go wrong? Had we not covered all the contingencies, even bad weather wouldn’t stop us now. Of course Covid-19 came along and changed the course of everything for us and indeed for the whole world. It became a question of what could be achieved in the circumstances. We considered having the plaque mounted quietly and without ceremony but that couldn’t work because social distancing interfered with the fit out crew.

We had always considered having wreaths laid at Balgriffin Cemetery and Mountjoy Station as part of the overall tribute. At this stage the prevailing social distancing restrictions would have allowed this to take place and indeed suitable honours could also be rendered.

The passage of time dictated that some remedial work needed to be carried out on the headstone and surrounds. This was organised by the GSRMA in conjunction with Richard Fallon. Then the health restrictions were ramped up, which effectively meant that no formal ceremonies could take place at either place.
RESCUING THE MEMORY
We were all operating remotely via Mick Lernihan and the staff at the GSRMA, Marina and Michelle, who were to prove their worth in gold. We tried hard to at least have some tribute made; it was unconscionable that the day would pass without mention or recognition.

Then on the evening of Friday 27 March, the situation changed markedly with the introduction of new restrictions until Sunday 12 April, which noted that it would no longer be advisable for people aged over 70 or those with health compromises to leave their own homes and that they should cocoon.

The movements of all others who were not in the ‘essential worker’ status would be fully restricted except for short journeys of less than 2km or longer for vital provisions. In effect, from an organisational perspective we were greatly restricted in what we could do for Dick Fallon’s remembrance.

I exchanged many emails and phone calls with Frank Fitzpatrick and Mick Lernihan. I also had a contact with the memorial works providers who assured me that they would have the necessary works completed in time, provided the cemetery was still available to them. Also, it would no longer be possible to have an honour guard or music tribute at the graveside.

POSITIVE RESPONSE
It is quite amazing and humbling the degree to which one’s world shrinks to a very small area. However, Frank took on the job of getting a wreath for the grave and a bouquet of flowers for Mountjoy Station. Kirwan’s funeral directors were more than helpful and provided a magnificent wreath.

We speak about the ‘Garda Family’ and Teresa Fitzpatrick made up a wonderful bouquet for Mountjoy Station. I had been speaking with Richard Fallon and he was fully supportive.

The next and most important part was to arrange the delivery of the tributes to both places. I contacted Chief Supt Mark Curran, in charge of the Dublin North Division. Mark was more than happy to assist and contacted Supt Gerry Donnelly at Coolock Station and the ‘R’ District leader.

Gerry personally collected the wreath from Frank’s house and liaised with Richard Fallon as well. It was agreed that Gerry would attend at the cemetery at 11am on 3 April at the time and date of Garda Fallon’s murder 50 years before. In the meantime Chief Supt Paddy McMenamin very kindly agreed to have the bouquet of flowers delivered to Mountjoy Station.

‘LIGHTING THE LIGHT’ MOMENT
Many contacts were made with our colleagues and families to look for support and to inform everyone of the emerging picture. An agreed press release was passed to all main news outlets and to individuals as well.

However, Covid-19 was submerging all other commentary or so it would seem. After discussions it was decided that a ‘Lighting the Light’ moment should be marked at 11 am on Friday 3 April. It seemed that the very least we could do was to take a moment of reflection in our homes to remember our fallen colleague.

The bugle call of the ‘Last Post’ evocatively encapsulates the emotions we feel when remembering fallen colleagues, but unfortunately this also was not going to be possible.

I had a DVD of a remembrance service, which was held in memory of Garda Hugh Ward who had been shot on 14 November 1926. The service was held at his graveside in Nobber, Co. Meath on 28 June 2014, where his grave and surrounds had been refurbished. Michael Finnegan had sent me that DVD and it had a poignant rendering of the ‘Last Post’ played by a Garda bugler.

I copied that audio and added some words of tribute. Mick Lernihan circulated it to our members. It seemed very fitting and appropriate that the Garda bugler’s tribute for another fallen colleague should be also used in the memory of Garda Richard Fallon.

FIFTY YEARS LATER
We lit a candle in our house just like many others and played the tribute to Garda Richard Fallon while Supt Gerry Donnelly laid a wreath on his grave. And his son Richard was present with Chief Supt Mark Curran. Our good-serving colleagues in Mountjoy Station were paying their own tribute at this same time. Dick will never grow old in our memories.
TRIBUTES PAID TO A FALLEN COMRADE

The 50th Anniversary of the death of Garda Richard (Dick) Fallon was marked at 11am on 3 April 2020 across Ireland and indeed further afield by GSRMA colleagues and the policing fraternity. A number of personal messages and images, sent to GSRMA House on the day, provides a snapshot of the huge impact which Dick’s death has had both at home and abroad, writes Mick Lernihan, GSRMA General Secretary.

The GSRMA was to the fore in remembering our colleague, Garda Dick Fallon, who was murdered on 3 April 1970 at Arran Quay in Dublin.

Whilst we could not pay our respects in person on the 50th Anniversary of his death at Arran Quay nor Balgriffin Cemetery, due to the dreaded coronavirus, many of our GSRMA members, together with the Fallon Family and our serving colleagues in An Garda Síochána, personally marked the 50th Anniversary to the day, date and time of Dick’s supreme sacrifice to the State.

Ar Dheis Dé go raibh a Anam Dílís.

Joseph P. Johnson, Retired Police Officer with the NYPD - “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost Dear Heavenly Father, we bow before you today and grieve the loss of Garda Richard Fallon who was murdered 50 years ago on this day in the line of duty. Richard gave his life while protecting our lives, our homes and our communities. ‘Greater love has no one than he lay down one’s life for his fellow man.’

This TRUE Irish Hero answered the call to a difficult and dangerous task and had shown his love and commitment in the finest tradition of An Garda Síochána for us and for this we are eternally grateful. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.”

Barry E. Eck, Retired Police Officer from New Jersey, USA – “To my Irish brothers, sometimes things happen for reasons we sometimes will never know. I am a retired police officer from New Jersey, USA, having spent 30 years doing what we do best – serving and protecting our neighbours. While our communities are miles apart, we are all part of one big community, the community we call humanity. I may never know why, but as I scrolled through my LinkedIn page, I saw the article. Today 3 April is my mother’s birthday; she also passed away on 3 April 2003. Yes, her birthday.

As strange as it may sound it was also my mother and father’s anniversary. So, as you can see April 3rd has a very special meaning in my heart and soul. She was English and very proud that I, her only son became a police officer. While I had never heard of Richard before, I know we are all brothers, in a war together to save our planet and that Richard is somewhere above cheering us on. That is why this moment in time is so strange.

You asked that at 11am on 3 April we pause for a moment to remember Richard and all our fallen brothers.
Well, I write this letter at exactly 11:27am on 3 April. The thing I spoke of before, sometimes never knowing why things happen... I didn’t plan to open my LinkedIn account this morning, but I did and as I began to read your article about Richard I looked down at my clock...it was exactly 11am 3 April. God bless and keep safe.”

K. Barrett, GSRMA member – “I am sending a quick email to acknowledge the thought behind the marking of Garda Fallon’s anniversary. It is a beautiful and meaningful idea in this unprecedented time that will connect people. God bless and keep safe.”

Pat Joe McCarthy, GSRMA member – “A friend of mine outside the State spoke to me about the audio tribute, which he considered to be the best he came across in communication. It arose out of necessity but it could be adopted to cover other such events of remembering fallen comrades. He said it gripped one’s undivided attention, oral length and music perfect. It gave the likes of him a chance to participate in his own home. Some of us in the GSRMA would be in a similar position. Well done to all concerned.”

Fr Joe Kennedy, Garda Chaplin, Mount Argus – “I remember the day well. I was a young priest on duty in Mount Argus when the phone rang. I was asked to go to Santry where Dick lived and break this awful news to his wife Deirdre and his young family. I went over on my lambretta scooter wearing my Passionist habit and sandals and when I arrived at the hall door, Deirdre opened the door and she looked at me in shock because of my attire. And she asked me three questions in quick succession: “What’s wrong? Is it Dick? Is he dead?” God rest his brave and good soul.”