

## A Sniper's Promise by Marty Kay

Three days of continuous rain had soaked the ferns and heather on the soggy turf bank, by the woods, where Mickey Moran settled into a prone position. The narrow stretch of water separating the North from the Irish Republic gleamed under a full January moon. Apart from the undergrowth squelching beneath him, and the cold wind rising from the lough, it was a perfect night for an ambush.

On this occasion, circumstances favoured him. The British Army had no jurisdiction in the South. By the time soldiers made contact with southern authorities, and the Gardai dispatched a team to investigate, he would be long gone. Any threats to his safety were further diminished by the recent acquisition of new firepower. He now used an American made, semi-automatic, long-range sniper rifle. A state-of-the-art weapon, it offered increased range and a highly developed electro-optic night scope. It was a far cry from the crap they'd been importing from Libya, and assured him tactical dominance in tonight's personnel, precision-elimination mission.

All he had to do now was wait. But waiting could be the hardest part. It gave him time to think and allowed his conscience to taunt him. At twenty-one, he had served the cause well. He had done his fair share of killing. But he wanted to leave the IRA while he was still young enough to wipe the slate clean and start afresh. He dreamed of a new life in America, perhaps New York or Boston, where he could leave his past behind, and move on. His Commanding Officer could arrange this – he had done it for others.

His thoughts were interrupted when a convoy of four jeeps pulled up. Soldiers jumped out and began to erect a checkpoint. They fanned out, and positioned themselves behind hedges and walls. Mickey scanned the area through his scope and spotted one of them crouched by a fence. Aligning his target with care, he blessed himself, as he always did, took aim, and fired.

The soldier slumped forward, jerked his head back, staggered, then fell. As his helmet rolled across the road, others rushed to take cover. Mickey kept his eye on the target. The man writhed in agony, lay still, then began to crawl. He was about to pull the trigger a second time, when his victim turned onto his back and made the sign of the cross.

He paused and studied the soldier's face. *Jesus, he looks like he's sixteen years old.* His comrades sprayed the woods with sporadic gunfire, but their weapons were short-range and ineffective. He took aim again. As if expecting the fatal bullet, the young soldier joined his hands and held them up toward the woods.

Mickey thought for a second, swore, then lowered his rifle.

Two members of the wounded man's battalion rushed out to help. Mickey Moran could have been a hero that night. He could have picked the three of them off with ease. Instead, he watched as two brave soldiers, crouched in fear, pulled their buddy to safety. At that moment, he promised to end his armed conflict. He had succumbed to the human face of war. That child belonged to someone. He couldn't murder him.

The young man leant against the wall and raised his joined hands toward the woods again. His two comrades held their M16s in a horizontal position above their heads. They acknowledged that the enemy had granted them a reprieve.

That was the last time Mickey Moran held a weapon.

A few weeks later Police found the body of a young IRA volunteer lying in a ditch by the roadside. He had a single bullet wound to the head. The media published a statement from informed sources claiming Michael John Moran had been court-martialled and executed for cowardice, desertion, and dereliction of duties while on active service.