Double Blind

The untold story of how British intelligence infiltrated and undermined the IRA

Matthew Teague, The Atlantic, April 2006 Issue
https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/04/double-blind/304710/

I first met the man now called Kevin Fulton in London, on Platform 13 at Victoria Station. We almost missed each other in the crowd; he didn't look at all like a terrorist.

He stood with his feet together, a short and round man with a kind face, fair hair, and blue eyes. He might have been an Irish grammar-school teacher, not an IRA bomber or a British spy in hiding. Both of which he was.

Fulton had agreed to meet only after an exchange of messages through an intermediary. Now, as we talked on the platform, he paced back and forth, scanning the faces of passersby. He checked the time, then checked it again. He spoke in an almost impenetrable brogue, and each time I leaned in to understand him, he leaned back, suspicious. He fidgeted with several mobile phones, one devoted to each of his lives. "I'm just cautious," he said.

He lives in London now, but his wife remains in Northern Ireland. He rarely goes out, for fear of bumping into the wrong person, and so leads a life of utter isolation, a forty-five-year-old man with a lot on his mind.

During the next few months, Fulton and I met several times on Platform 13. Over time his jitters settled, his speech loosened, and his past tumbled out: his rise and fall in the Irish Republican Army, his deeds and misdeeds, his loyalties and betrayals. He had served as a covert foot soldier in what has come to be called the Dirty War: a cutthroat and secret British effort to infiltrate and undermine the IRA, carried out in the shadows of the infamous Troubles. "It was a lot grayer and darker," Fulton said of the clandestine war. "Darker even than people can imagine."

But there's this: it worked. British spies subverted the IRA from within, leaving it in military ruin, and Irish Republicans—who want to end British rule in Northern Ireland and reunite the island—have largely shifted their weight to Sinn Féin and its peaceable, political efforts. And so the Dirty War provides a model for how to dismantle a terrorist organization. The trick is to not mind killing, and to expect dying.

This came clear to Kevin Fulton on the day his cover as an IRA man collapsed. It happened inside an IRA safe house in north Belfast, in 1994. Fulton sat facing a wall, blindfolded. Curtains shut out the pale light of winter. Bottles lay scattered on the floor, and the place stank of stale beer. An interrogator paced the room, his boots scuffing against the floor. He said, "I know what yer done, boyo."

He pressed a thick index finger against Fulton's temple, hard, then leaned in close to Fulton's ear and murmured a series of threats: *The IRA hunts down all snitches and executes them. Two quick bullets in the brain. Remember the boy from County Armagh who left behind the pregnant wife. Remember the boy from County Louth who left seven children mewling for a father. Remember them all.*

British authorities had recently picked up Fulton for questioning. Now the IRA, which had begun to suspect him of being a British agent, wanted to know why.

Again, the finger to the temple.

"What did you tell them?"

Fulton knew the voice, and its owner: Scap, one of the IRA's most feared interrogators. Fulton had once helped prepare safe houses for such interrogations, and knew that sometimes Scap's subjects survived. Sometimes not.

Colleagues called both men "hard bastards"—true IRA boys, mothered by terrorism. They killed for the cause, time and again. But British spies had infiltrated the IRA, spreading deceit and rumors of deceit. The IRA had turned against itself. Scap couldn't say for sure who fought on his side.

The interrogation dragged on for hours. Fulton remained outwardly calm, and denied everything. Inwardly, though, he felt sick. He'd been spying on the IRA for a decade and a half, and he knew that if Scap broke him—if he admitted anything—he'd be a dead man—own a hole," in IRA slang.

So throughout the interrogation, Fulton sat stone-faced, blindfolded, and facing the wall. Double blind. He held tight to his secret: yes, he was a British spy.

But then, so was his interrogator.

As a boy, Freddie Scappaticci ducked and scuffled on the streets of Belfast, fighting Protestants to fit in with his Catholic friends.

His parents had immigrated to Northern Ireland in the 1920s with a wave of other Italian families and settled in the Markets area of south Belfast, where Freddie was born in 1944. The old neighborhood hummed; under historic Georgian terraces, families bustled from churches to butcher shops to apple stalls. The Scappaticcis sold ice cream and earned a reputation as "terrible nice people."

Belfast appealed more to the terrible than to the nice during Freddie Scappaticci's childhood. After thirty years of Protestant-Catholic strife, Catholic hatred for Protestants had grown so powerful that it enfolded all Irish Catholics, even those with Italian parents. As tension escalated in the 1960s and the Troubles began, Scappaticci joined in schoolyard brawls and street fights, and at sixteen he received the ultimate mark of credibility: Protestant police on patrol beat him severely, leaving him bruised and proud.

In 1969 the British army blundered into Northern Ireland at the request of its overwhelmed government, to stamp out Catholic and Protestant animosity once and for all. Soldiers in armored Land Rovers patrolled city streets across the country; they wore uniforms and helmets, and brandished automatic rifles. They planned to bring peace to a troubled land. For a while the local population showered the troops with gratitude for helping separate the two black-eyed factions, but soon, in pubs and cathedrals across Northern Ireland, people began whispering "occupation." The whispers grew to shouts, and shouts became hurled stones. Before long Scappaticci—who had started to go by the less-Italian name Scap—took to throwing bricks at British squads. "Freddie was full Belfast," his childhood acquaintance Victor Notarantonio remembers.

Across the city, bands of jobless young men roamed the streets looking for a cause, or an excuse. And in 1971 they found one. After several murders by the IRA, the British instituted a policy of internment without trial, sweeping hundreds of suspects off the streets and taking them to an unused air base, called Long Kesh, several miles south of Belfast. It proved a spectacular bungle. The British had relied on outdated intelligence reports and arrested many people, including Scappaticci, with only a passing connection to the IRA, while the IRA's top people received tip-offs and went into hiding.

The roundup stirred up the peaceful majority of Northern Ireland's Catholics, and many of the moderates detained by the British quickly grew into extremists behind bars. Previously scattered rebels organized themselves at Long Kesh, forming leadership and rank. Scappaticci found himself interned alongside future notable Republicans like Gerry Adams and David Morley. The old IRA leadership in Dublin—relatively tame Marxists who spent more time writing than fighting—faded away, replaced by a more ferocious guard that called itself the Provisional IRA. The older generation had huffed and puffed against Protestant discrimination, but these younger men took up arms against a larger enemy: the British army.

When Scappaticci was released, three years later, he had become a hard-shelled IRA man. He switched from bricks to bullets. His colleagues marveled at his marksmanship, and rumor has it that he killed several soldiers. At the time, the atmosphere in Belfast was like Irish poteen liquor: boiled and fermented, distilled into something potent and unlawful. Protestants flew the Union Jack and painted their curbstones red, white, and blue; Catholics flew the Irish flag and painted their curbs orange, white, and green. Men in one part of the city wore bowler hats and carried silver-knobbed canes; men just a block away wore green and carried shillelaghs. Belfast felt more British than London, and more Irish than Dublin.

The IRA swelled in power, money, and numbers. Its members executed increasingly ruthless operations against Protestant groups and British forces, but Scappaticci gradually began to notice a disturbing pattern: hot-blooded young men were sent headlong into dangerous missions, but their leaders stayed safe in the pubs back home. And when these foot soldiers died or landed in prison, the leaders sometimes showed up around town with the missing men's wives. The leaders grew

rich on cash pressed from the tills of working-class Catholic shopkeepers and tradesmen, and they splashed it around like mobsters. To Scappaticci, their behavior seemed more like robbery than revolution.

So did the IRA's assertion that the Protestant gangs were only a tool of the "real enemy," the British occupiers. It seemed a neat trick, summoning the banshee of a dying British Empire. The Catholics could conceivably stare down the Protestants at home, but they could never beat the British at war. A campaign against the British would ensure the IRA's necessity for generations to come. Scappaticci spoke out, mouthing off at pubs, questioning the IRA leadership. One night in 1978, after an argument over IRA policy, IRA men beat him and told him to straighten up: *Don't cross the IRA.*

Scappaticci, the British intelligence services quickly recognized, had the makings of the perfect agent. A local man, born in Belfast. A credible IRA member. A disillusioned foot soldier. Beaten down. Ready.

Eventually, inevitably, an intelligence officer asked him: Would he spy?

About that time, in a small town called Newry, a teenaged Kevin Fulton was honing his shooting skills in the countryside, hunting foxes and rabbits. Newry lies about forty miles south of Belfast, in the rolling borderland almost midway to Dublin. It's a charming little seaport, with a linen mill and a city hall that straddles the drowsy Clanrye River on a three-arched stone bridge.

Growing up in the 1970s, Fulton heard songs of rebellion and stories of derring-do. He longed for adventure. Something grander than rabbits. But his family seemed determined to cling to the dullness of a balanced life, even during the chaos of the Troubles, even in a border town. They were Catholic, yes, but not political. They attended church, not rallies. They had another son who served as a priest, instead of a soldier. They kept to themselves.

Just after his eighteenth birthday, Fulton made his way to Belfast's Grand Central Hotel, which British soldiers had sandbagged and billeted as a headquarters. There he enlisted with the British army's Royal Irish Rangers. It was an extraordinary move for a Catholic kid from a Catholic town—the British army! a miniature rebellion!—but it allowed him to shake off a sleepy home life and, as he put it, maybe "play around with guns and explosives." He expected to travel—the Falklands, and stare down foreign fighters.

He showed up for basic training, just a blue-eyed lad with no experience in the world. But his commanders saw unusual potential in him—or, rather, they heard it, in the snip and slur of his Northern Irish accent. In a matter of weeks he received a tap on the shoulder from a military intelligence officer. The British had a plan, the man said, and a proposition: Would he spy?

After the Long Kesh internment debacle, the IRA gained ground against the British. On patrol in Belfast, British soldiers dodged stones by day and firebombs by night. Troops in armored Rovers and protective helmets made no good friends; they only made good targets. They needed a better strategy, and a powerful personality to implement it. And they soon found the man for the job: Brigadier General Frank Kitson.

Kitson rolled into Northern Ireland in the early 1970s with considerable experience battling insurgencies in Kenya, Malaya, and elsewhere. He had learned valuable lessons, particularly in Kenya in the 1950s battling the Mau Mau, a band of rebels fighting for independence. He had rounded up suspected Mau Mau supporters, who then endured interrogation and torture at the hands of the British authorities. The Mau Mau couldn't match the British militarily, so they resorted to guerrilla tactics, hiding in the hills and striking from the shadows. But Kitson followed them there, recruited locals with money and idealism, and infiltrated the insurgent ranks. With layer upon layer of sabotage, subterfuge, and duplicity, he obliterated the Mau Mau.

Kitson's methods proved so effective that he wrote a now-classic counterinsurgency book, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency, Peacekeeping, which laid out principles now being followed by American forces in Iraq*. By the time Kitson arrived in Northern Ireland, *Low Intensity Operations* had become his instruction manual for war there. He stayed for only about two years, but in that brief period he set a new course for the British army that, for better or worse, carried it through the Troubles. By 1978, using tactics endorsed by Kitson, the army had for years been regularly stopping vehicles at checkpoints and randomly arresting drivers to screen them. One of the men hauled in that year was Freddie Scappaticci, fresh from his beating by the IRA.

The account of why Scappaticci entered into intelligence work—whether he was driven by a desire for vengeance after his beating or wooed by his handlers over time—varies depending who recounts it. Regardless, he entered into it with vigor,

ultimately signing on to work for a secret intelligence outfit called the Force Research Unit. Through the FRU, Scappaticci served a host of agencies, among them MI5, a paramilitary police unit called Special Branch, and army intelligence. Eventually he became one of the most important spies in Britain's history, working his way toward the IRA's heart.

His handlers gave him the code name Stakeknife.

Fulton resisted British intelligence work at first. After joining the army, he was sent to Berlin for Ranger training, where he learned to follow orders, to shoot, and to work with explosives. All the while, intelligence officers hovered nearby, whispering, promising, making appeals. Finally Fulton came around.

In 1981, two years after leaving his hometown of Newry, Fulton returned. If anyone asked about his absence, he rolled up his sleeves and showed them tattoos from his brief stint as a teenager in the Merchant Marines.

Evening after evening he showed up at the Hibernian Club, where IRA men unwound in their spare time. Fulton never asked where they went, or what they did. Never asked so much as the time of day, because questions made IRA men nervous. So he faded into the walls, just another son of Newry with working-class parents and a priest for a brother. He played pool. Drank pints. Laughed at tall tales. Drank more pints. Watched. Waited.

In time, with jokes told and pints drained, Fulton became one of the boys. And after several months, it finally happened: "Kevin! C'mere, boyo. Got an errand for you."

So it started. He delivered a package—a pistol and bullets—across town. He made another delivery, then another. Always on time and dependable. The jobs escalated in subtle increments, and as his errands reached farther, the packages grew deadlier. Bullets became pipe bombs, and pipe bombs became car bombs.

In carrying out his early errands, Fulton followed instructions handed down by his handlers in British intelligence. Whenever he overheard some tidbit of valuable information, some snippet about an IRA mission, he dialed a toll-free line and arranged a meeting. Usually his handlers told him to drive to an obscure parking lot, or a spot on a country roadside, and to wait there for a white delivery van. When it arrived, a side door would fly open and Fulton would climb in, typically greeted, he told me, by men representing the various agencies he served: MI5, military, Special Branch, all working with the secret Force Research Unit—the same group handling Scappaticci. They'd speed off to a safe house, often in a grand upscale neighborhood.

If the plan ever kinked—if his cover blew and he had no time for a phone call—he would follow an emergency plan. He'd drive out of town immediately and press a button that his handlers had installed under his dash. The button would send a tracking signal to British forces, who would then sweep in and extract him to safety.

Each night Fulton rocked himself to sleep repeating the mantra his handlers had given him: "The greater good. The greater good. The greater good." He and Scappaticci engaged in a difficult mathematics, a calculus of souls. If a man kills thirty people to save 3,000, has he done right? What about thirty for 300? Or thirty for thirty-one?

At one point I asked Fulton whether, in light of the human toll he would exact in the course of his career, someone could have served the greater good by killing him as a young man. I meant the question to be rhetorical. But Fulton just nodded.

"Yes," he said.

In 1980, after a couple of years working as a British spy—arranging meetings, handing over tidbits—Scappaticci joined the IRA's internal security unit, which IRA men called the Nutting Squad. "Nut is Irish slang for the head. When the Nutting Squad found a snitch or a British spy, its interrogators typically tortured him, squeezed him for information, then "nutted" him with a pair of bullets to the brain.

Scappaticci's history as an IRA sharpshooter gave him an advantage as an agent, and he quickly made his way to the top of the Nutting Squad. The achievement reveals either a tactical brilliance or a profound stroke of luck. The position gave him access to the IRA's innermost secrets: missions completed and upcoming; arms storage sites; travel and security details; bombing and assassination targets. Over several years he helped foil numerous killings and kidnappings, and the information he provided to the British so dazzled his handlers that they passed it along to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher herself.

Moreover, his position atop the Nutting Squad made him untouchable. If the IRA leaders ever suspected an infiltration, they reported it to the Nutting Squad—and so to Scappaticci. If his own activities ever drew suspicion, he could simply divert attention by fingering an innocent man. Some British press reports estimate he killed as many as forty people. A former British spy handler who worked at the time of Scappaticci's rise—a man who now goes by the name Martin Ingram—puts the death toll lower, but still "well into the tens," including other agents. He said it all fit into the larger British strategy. "Agents have killed, and killed, and have killed," Ingram told me. "Many, many, many people."

Under Scappaticci's close direction, the Nutting Squad killed dozens of people, including:

Seamus Morgan, 24. Abducted, shot in the head, and dumped by a road in 1982.

John Corcoran, 45. Told his shooter, "Go easy," just before a bullet entered above his left ear, from behind, in 1985. He had eight children.

Paddy Flood, 29. Held captive for two months and tortured, then killed and left on a roadside. Twelve years later, it came out that Flood's murder was a mistake; he had been innocent.

The list goes on.

Scappaticci's handlers themselves went to extremes to protect their prize agent. Take the case of Francisco Notarantonio, the father of Scappaticci's childhood acquaintance Victor. In his day, the elder Notarantonio—who had been interned with Scappaticci at Long Kesh—had enjoyed a reputation as a tough IRA man. "Even when the queen came here," Victor told me, striking a certain triumphal tone, "before the Troubles started, my father got arrested and put away for a couple of days to make sure no harm came to the queen." But by 1987, the old man had mellowed and retired, both from driving his taxi and from the IRA. About that time, a powerful Protestant gang got a description of a man working high in the IRA. The gang suspected Scappaticci and dispatched a hit squad to execute him. As the squad moved toward Scappaticci, the alarmed British directed the killers toward another Italian IRA man: old Notarantonio. Shortly thereafter, Notarantonio lay dead in his bedroom, shot to death in front of his family.

I put it to Martin Ingram, the former spy handler, that in the case of Scappaticci, the British strategy had gone amok.

"No, I don't think so," he said. "I think it went very much to schedule."

"So you think—"

"I don't *think*, I know. He was acting to orders."

So the British government knew of Scappaticci's killings?

"Oh, yeah," he said. "The one preconception the IRA had is that if you are dirty—that is, if you have killed—then you cannot be an agent." Scappaticci exploited that misapprehension. "His best protection," Ingram continued, "was to keep killing."

If that's true, the British spy services beat the IRA by appealing to a belief that the United Kingdom wouldn't sacrifice its own subjects—especially its own agents.

In Belfast I met with Denis Donaldson, a Sinn Féin party leader and an IRA veteran alleged to have run the IRA's intelligence wing. He's a folk hero who led hunger strikes early in the Troubles, and British investigators say he traveled the world, cultivating terrorist contacts in Spain, Palestine, El Salvador, and elsewhere: a hard IRA man if there ever was one.

We sat at his kitchen table as he smoked, cursing British "interference" and "collusion." We had talked for a couple of hours before I noticed that the discreet television in the corner near the ceiling wasn't a television at all. It was a security monitor, and at the moment, it showed the front door through which I had entered. I noticed, too, a wrought-iron door that sealed off the upstairs, forming a redoubt.

When I mentioned the names of Scappaticci and Fulton, Donaldson's shoulders slumped. "I still can't believe it," he said, shaking his head. "My God."

His face seemed thin and gray, the face of a man who senses an end looming. A couple of weeks after we talked, the IRA laid down its arms, defeated by a confluence of circumstances: a change in the world's view of terrorism; apparent gains made by its political partner, Sinn Féin; and the steady infiltration of British spies.

Fulton worked as a painter by day, whitewashing the pocked walls of County Down, Northern Ireland. But secretly he made bombs, as part of a small team of demolitions experts who operated in both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. Some of their bombs blew up military targets. Others blew up civilians. Fulton could sometimes sabotage missions. Often he could not.

By early 1993, Fulton and his team of bombers had found something less clumsy than wires to use in bomb and rocket detonation. They rigged bombs with photo sensors, which they triggered by popping off camera flashes. The results were lethal. Trouble was, other lights—bright headlights, or a tourist's disposable photo flash—could set off a bomb prematurely.

British intelligence services, in an effort to control IRA techniques through collaboration, secretly passed along a solution for the problem: a new technology—the infrared flash—that could be acquired only in America. Fulton's handlers offered to facilitate an undercover IRA shopping mission to New York, and an MI5 officer flew across the Atlantic on the Concorde to make arrangements with American services in advance of Fulton's arrival. "This was a terrorist organization operating in the United States," Fulton told me, and it required cooperation. "It was a pretty big thing."

Fulton traveled to New York with several thousand dollars, met secretly with his handlers, arranged the purchase, and returned to Northern Ireland, ready to create a deadly new weapon. The IRA embraced the innovation, and it worked so well that other terrorist groups soon took notice and adapted the infrared photo-sensor bomb to their own wars. Today, Iraqi insurgents wield it against British and American troops in Iraq.

The British and American strategy—tracking insurgents by abetting them—seemed to follow a convoluted logic: that of a fighter who, trying to zero in on his opponent, waits for a few good shots to the nose. When Fulton traveled to New York with his handlers, he provided valuable inside information about the IRA's new tactics. But as each such step offered insight, it demanded another step, and another. The information came at a high price.

In Newry, for instance, not long before Fulton's trip to New York, a policewoman named Colleen McMurray and her colleague, Paul Slaine, were driving past the canal that runs through the center of town. Across the water, an IRA man triggered a flash unit, and a hidden rocket—called a "doodlebug"—burst from the grill of a car he had planted. It slammed into McMurray's car, injuring Slaine—he lost both legs in the attack—and killing McMurray on the spot.

As Fulton and I surveyed the bloody plain of his career, he said that McMurray's death was the only one he truly regretted. I asked why, and his hands traced the universal hourglass symbol for "woman." It seemed almost as though he didn't want to say it aloud: he had constructed a moral code as a bomber and spy, some unspoken list of atrocities he refused to commit, and apparently it included killing a woman.

Other people paid a price, too. Consider the case of Eoin Morley, a member of Fulton's bomb squad. After six years as a low-level IRA man, Morley quit and turned away from the IRA. Maybe he did it for the love of his girlfriend, and for her tiny children from a previous relationship. Maybe he did it because of an intra-IRA dispute. Maybe he did it because he already felt old at twenty-two.

That Easter Sunday night, Morley and his girlfriend put the children to bed and then turned their attention to a sink full of dishes. She washed, he dried. Someone knocked at the door. His girlfriend dried her hands, crossed the room, and opened the door. Two armed, masked men burst past her and grabbed Morley. They dragged him out into the garden and forced him to lie down. One of the masked men—Fulton, sources say—raised a high-powered assault rifle and shot Morley twice. The first bullet entered the back of his left thigh. Automatic rifles tend to rise as they're fired; the second bullet thumped into Morley's lower back.

As quickly as they had arrived, the men disappeared.

An ambulance took Morley to the hospital. His mother, Eilish, having gotten word of the incident, arrived soon after. Shootings were a way of life in Northern Ireland, and she expected him to rise from his bed and walk out—just like his relatives, just like his friends, just like Lazarus. But then a nurse burst into the waiting room and said, “Would you come quickly?”

Eilish moved to the door of the surgery theater, but someone stopped her at a red line painted on the floor. She wasn’t sterilized and might infect the patient. Her son lay on a table in the center of the room. A doctor approached and said, “We couldn’t save him. It’s only a matter of minutes.” She suspects now that the doctor kept her behind the line not because of infection but to spare her the sight of her son’s body laid bare, bristling with instruments, tubes, wires.

Eilish told me this sitting in her living room, and throughout the story she stared at a spot on the floor just in front of her feet. Her voice strained. “I can see it here—a red line,” she said. She moved her hand in the air just before her knees, as though tousling a small boy’s hair. “I had to stand at that red line, and he died … it probably took five minutes, but to me it was five hours … I wasn’t allowed over the red line.”

She sat there for a long time after saying this, tousling an invisible boy’s hair and staring at a nonexistent red line. At that moment, both seemed more real than anything else in Northern Ireland.

"I know what yer done, boyo.”

In the Belfast safe house, in 1994, Scappaticci continued to grill Fulton. The interrogation centered on something about a van. A phone. An assassination.

Fulton had pieced it together. In addition to his work as a bomber for the IRA, he specialized in procuring supplies: electronics, weapons, vehicles. Sometimes he stole the goods; other times, as in his trip to the States, his British handlers provided them. In 1994, when the IRA’s leaders needed a “basher”—a mobile phone with no traceable bill—and a clean van, they turned to Fulton. No problem. Fulton got both from his handlers, who outfitted them with snooping equipment. Not long after, the IRA attempted to kill Derek Martindale, a senior police detective; but armed officers managed to arrest the would-be assassins in their van near Martindale’s home. It was Fulton’s van. The IRA, suspecting that a snitch had betrayed the mission, launched a massive internal investigation.

Meanwhile, the police arrested anyone who might have been even remotely connected to the case, including Fulton. “Who do you work for?” they demanded. Fulton sat silent.

Eventually the police released him, and right away the IRA ordered him to the Belfast safe house, where Scappaticci interrogated him. A close relative of Fulton’s sat in another room, also awaiting time with Scappaticci.

The interrogator prodded Fulton: “What did you tell them?”

“Nothing.”

Fulton was telling the truth. He hadn’t known anything about the assassination attempt.

Scappaticci didn’t believe him. He suspected Fulton of being involved in more than just the Martindale betrayal, in fact.

“You provided both the phone and the vehicle used in the job. Couldn’t be a coincidence.”

Fulton denied everything, because he had no other choice. To confess anything—anything at all—would mean instant execution.

The denials worked. Scappaticci wasn’t sure. He needed more time. So he told Fulton to come back a couple of days later for a second round of interrogation. And to bring his relative.

Right away Fulton called for a meeting with his handlers and delivered what he thought was alarming news: Scappaticci was on to him.

“Oh, we’ve got the inside track,” they told him. “Don’t worry about it.”

Fulton had no choice but to return with his relative for the second interrogation. Again Scappaticci pressed him hard. Again Fulton kept up his denials. Scappaticci released Fulton again and told him to come back one more time.

As Fulton and his relative drove away, Fulton complained about having to come back for a third interrogation. The relative looked at him blankly. “What third interrogation?” A siren sounded in Fulton’s head. He’d been called back for a third round, alone. Later that day a British handler, but not his own, contacted Fulton secretly to offer a private warning. “Don’t go to the last meeting,” he said. “You won’t go home.” Fulton blew out of Belfast and went into hiding.

After several meetings on Platform 13, Fulton invited me to his home. It’s an expensive flat, with heavy security, overlooking a well-known London landmark.

Inside the apartment, Fulton cooked a steak pie. While it baked, he put out laundry to dry. Then he took the plastic collar off a six-pack of canned beer and used a dainty pair of scissors to snip the rings. It’s better, he said, for the “wee fish and creatures of the sea.” He heard himself and grinned. “I’d make a fine housewife, wouldna?”

Over dinner he talked about New York, how he’d like to see it again. Outside the window, a construction crew worked near the entrance to the apartments. Fulton told me he won’t go out while they’re working, for fear one of them might be a boy from back home.

Some things he confesses, some he doesn’t. “I can’t admit to individual things,” he said, for fear of prosecution. “But I won’t lie to you.” Over the course of our time together, he developed a winking non-denial answer: “No comment.”

I asked if he had killed Eoin Morley.

“No comment.”

I asked if it was true that he had personally killed eleven people, not mentioning the uncounted bomb victims.

“No comment.”

I asked if that bothered him.

“You cannot pretend to be a terrorist,” he told me. “I had to be able to do the exact same thing as the IRA man next to me. Otherwise I wouldn’t be there.”

Fulton harbors complex feelings about the British spy services. His handlers in Northern Ireland abandoned him after his encounter with Scappaticci. His special toll-free number suddenly stopped working and eventually became the hotline for a forklift company. Fulton suspects that once the IRA loosed Scappaticci on him, his handlers decided he would make a good sacrifice: another mark of credibility for their prize agent, Stakeknife. His handlers betrayed him.

“He trusted the people he worked for,” Jane Winter told me. She heads a human-rights organization called British Irish Rights Watch, one of the few authorities respected by people on both sides of the continuing conflict. “He believed that he was doing something that—although it was difficult and unpleasant—was necessary and right. And then he found out the people that he trusted were not worthy of his trust. I think that must be very difficult for anybody.”

Scappaticci, too, eventually fell. In 2003, Francisco Notarantonio’s family instigated a police investigation that soon exposed the existence of the agent Stakeknife. Like Fulton, Scappaticci fled Northern Ireland. Rumors circulated that he had gone to Italy, specifically to a certain Hotel La Pace in Cassino, a hillside town between Naples and Rome. The manager at La Pace told me that yes, he remembered Scappaticci arriving from England, but no, he knew nothing of his next destination. That’s where Freddie Scappaticci’s trail goes cold.

In Belfast, I met with Scappaticci’s attorney, Michael Flanigan. In a neighborhood known as an IRA stronghold, we sipped coffee in a shop that had once been a Presbyterian church. I asked about Scappaticci’s career as a spy, and Flanigan shook his head. He has previously called the allegations “misinformation” and told me it was all British propaganda. The British, he said, just wanted to embarrass the IRA by pretending they had penetrated it. When I suggested that the Stakeknife affair might reflect as poorly on the British as on anyone else, he smiled.

A few weeks later, back in the United States, I received a phone call early one morning from a source in the United Kingdom. He said, “Yer man Denis Donaldson”—the legendary IRA hunger-striker who had met with me in his kitchen—“has just been expelled from Sinn Féin, about three minutes ago. For being a British spy.”

Donaldson, it turned out, had been spying on the IRA for two decades.

After my last visit with Kevin Fulton, we walked through London on a route that took us past Chelsea Barracks, a sprawling compound of bunker-like brick buildings not far from Buckingham Palace. The British army has stationed soldiers there for a century and a half, but the neighborhood has changed around it, and now Londoners consider it an eyesore. The Ministry of Defense plans to move its soldiers to another base and sell Chelsea Barracks for retail development. The site has outlasted its usefulness.

Fulton feels an affinity for the place.

In 1981, early in his stint as a terrorist, the IRA bombed the barracks, killing two people and injuring more than three dozen. As he and I approached the barracks, Fulton pointed out little strips of clear tape stuck to streetlights, electrical boxes, telephone poles—anything with a hinge or slot. Each piece of tape bore a serial number, he told me, and was meant to seal a potential hiding place for a bomb.

As we passed the Chelsea Barracks entry gate, Fulton noticed a sign announcing that this was Open Day, the annual recruitment day. Over the compound’s high walls, I could see little boys inside, scurrying up a recreational rock-climbing wall. Fulton’s eyes flashed. “You want to go in?” he said. “Let’s go in.”

We wandered in. Uniformed men and women staffed booths arrayed in the courtyard. As we picked our way through the displays, Fulton began looking for members of his original regiment, the Royal Irish Rangers. “Where’re the Royal Irish?” he asked passersby. “Have ye seen the Irish?” I noticed that Fulton wore a tiny green pin on his collar that read ROYAL IRISH RANGERS.

At last we saw a group of men sporting green plumes and tending a booth that featured terrorist bombs. On display were explosive devices from insurgencies around the world: Algeria, Palestine, Iraq. Fulton picked through them with a certain efficiency, looking for something. He grew more agitated by the moment. “Jaysus,” he grumbled to himself. “They’ve got nothing from Northern Ireland here.” He was searching, I realized, for his handiwork.

He strode up to a smiling, broad-chested soldier with red hair. “Have ye nothing from Northern Ireland?” he barked. “Nothing? Nothing a-tall, then?”

Fulton’s tone, his brogue, and the keenness of his interest focused the soldier, whose smile disappeared. “No, sir,” he said. “We haven’t.” His eyes traveled down and back up Fulton’s stocky frame.

Fulton caught himself and stuffed his hands into his pockets, and he turned to walk away. “Well,” he said. “If they weren’t such fecking terrorists, then maybe they could have a spot, aye?”