

# 'THE GARDA UNIFORM IS NOW LIKE A RED RAG TO A BULL'

Sgt Dave Haughney barely survived the assault that turned his life 'upside down'. Two attacks on gardai last weekend were among hundreds now thought to occur each year



Conor Lally

When the news emerged over Easter about two sets of gardai being attacked by groups of men in Dublin and Mayo, Dave Haughney was thrust back to a dark night in rural Cork two and a half years ago.

Every aspect of the Garda sergeant's life changed in a moment of savagery. It's there every time he opens his eyes in the morning. The 50-year-old with almost three decades of service lost more than three-quarters of the vision in one eye in a gang attack. His description of the assault, on December 14th, 2014, is a frightening insight into the violence that gardai seem to be facing ever more frequently. Haughney was hit in the face by a rock. His skull fractured, he was knocked unconscious and his eyes swelled so badly that they were "completely shut and couldn't even be examined for three days".

Haughney believes that, had his partner that night, Garda John Tarrant, not drawn his baton to deter his attackers, he would have died.

The two gardai, who were based in Youghal, had been sent to check reports of men acting suspiciously on a back road outside the town. When they arrived they saw 20-year-old Luke Quilligan and his

22-year-old brother, John Quilligan, walking along the road. When they stopped to talk to the men a car reversed into the driveway of a nearby house. After Haughney and Tarrant tried to block it, the Quilligans – now joined by another brother – attacked them.

"I remember ducking loads of stones," Haughney says of the first volley of missiles. He was also fending off another attacker, who was "putting his fists up and saying, 'C'mon, I'll f\*\*king get you' – that kind of thing."

**"The pain was unreal"**  
In the pitch dark, as stones rained down on Haughney and the Garda car, one caught him full force on the side of the head, close to his left eye. "The pain was unreal. You think it's going to be like a film, and in a moment like that you'll say something brilliant. But the only words I could manage were, 'John, I'm gone. I'm gone.' I collapsed on the ground, and that was the last thing I could remember for a long, long time. I was out for between five and 10 minutes.

"The first thing I remember after that was coming to and looking up and seeing John Tarrant standing over me. He had his baton drawn, and he was holding them back. If John hadn't done that, and kept them off me, I don't think I would be around today to talk about it."

The brothers and the woman who had been driving the car then sped away as Haughney and Tarrant waited for back-up and for an ambulance. The group were tracked to their home in Ballymartin, Dungourney, where, during a four-hour stand-off, the Quilligans' father, Simon, also attacked gardai. Two armed-support units used a range of nonlethal weapons, in-

cluding stun guns; the Quilligans armed themselves with slash hooks and shovels. When the case went to court Judge Seán O Donnabháin said it had been an appalling night of violence. The sentences ranged from five years to suspended terms of imprisonment.

#### Off work for 11 months

Haughney's eyes swelled shut before the ambulance arrived. He was treated at Cork University Hospital for five days and was off work for 11 months.

He later learned that, rather than alert the Garda, another driver who saw the attack filmed it on his phone – and in the weeks that followed was "showing the video to friends of his, in a pub, for their amusement".

Haughney's skull was fractured "from up into my forehead down into my face"; macular damage meant he has lost about 80 per cent of the vision in his left eye. "Everything is a blur, and your depth perception is gone," he says.

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The garda has been restricted mostly to administrative duties since the attack; before it he had been "hands on, active, never a pen pusher", and trained colleagues in the use of pepper spray and the extendable baton.

Haughney once hoped to serve overseas with the United Nations, as many Garda members do, but that is no longer an option. After 26 years' service he has decided to retire as soon as he has spent 30 years in the force, when he will qualify for a full pension. He doesn't want to "go early", he says, "but the job just isn't the same for me now. Things I loved doing before I just can't do now. That's the killer."

As a garda, he says, it was hard to accept that he needed counselling. "You don't want to be regarded as a victim. People look at you as somebody who can come and help. That's the job I always wanted. And for me to wear the uniform is an honourable thing. So when you're the one who's hurt, and depending on others, you don't feel as whole as you could possibly be."

#### Headlines

In the unrelated attacks in Dublin and Co Mayo last weekend, four gardai were hospitalised after being attacked as they responded to call-outs in the early hours. Haughney says such incidents are not uncommon. Other gardai who speak to *The Irish Times* this week welcome the attention the pair of attacks have generated but wonder why these two incidents, of several hundred each year, have made the headlines.

The Garda Representative Association has been critical of the absence of up-to-date statistics about attacks on its members. It believes that about 1,300 gardai have been injured in the past six



■ Above: images from a 2009 Garda Representative Association campaign highlighting violence against members. It estimates there were more than 200 assaults last year. Left: Sgt Dave Haughney's eyes swelled so badly they 'couldn't be examined for days'

think there's also an attitude: 'I was drunk or I was drugged, so what I did doesn't really matter'."

Some gardai believe that recent controversies in the Garda have undermined confidence in and respect for the force. But Haughney says most people look past that. "They treat you as an individual rather than part of a group. They know Dave Haughney hasn't been the person up before the Public Accounts Committee.

"I have always believed in the power of one, anyway. There is a lot of reform you can do by looking to yourself and your own actions. And you can really only account for your own actions. You don't tend to think of the national problems when you're working; the controversies and the need for reform in the Garda. You think more in terms of how you support the people working next to you and the people you meet."

But his injuries have undermined his ability to provide physical back-up for his colleagues. "When you can't think on that level it makes it very difficult. Your whole belief system is turned upside down."

**Podcast**  
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## China must flex its diplomatic muscle to defuse the Korean crisis



Clifford Coonan

in Beijing

Amid sabre-rattling rhetoric and threats, China must tighten the screws on Pyongyang, appease the US, yet avoid a costly war

When Donald Trump hosted Xi Jinping at Mar-a-Lago and appeared, over chocolate cake, to win the Chinese leader over to his approach for dealing with the Korean nuclear crisis, it put China into central role as peace broker.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, China has been the main prop holding up the flagging North Korean economy, and both countries like to talk of how they are as "close as lips and teeth" since the Korean War of 1950-1953 in which Chinese and Korean troops fought side-by-side against US-led forces.

Trump is keen to leverage this closeness to North Korea to bring about an end to Pyongyang's nuclear programme.

China likes to point out that it doesn't have as much influence as Washington thinks. But China also dislikes the nuclear

tests and missile launches on its borders, especially since Kim Jong-un has left Beijing out of the loop on the project.

And the relationship is indeed tense right now. The apparent assassination of North Korean leader's half-brother, Kim Jong-nam, who had strong links to China and lived in safety in Macau for years, has added to the strain.

The Chinese government believes the US has leverage in North Korea and while it may agree to tighten economic sanctions here and there, it strongly believes that dialogue is the only way to resolve the situation, not more sanctions.

Xi has called Trump to say the crisis must be resolved peacefully and has mentioned the six-party talks, involving China, both Koreas and Japan, which collapsed in 2008 after North Korea launched a rocket.

#### Tougher sanctions

A recent editorial in China's *Global Times*, which is published by the same group that prints the *People's Daily* and often reflects the Communist Party's thinking, seemed to indicate that China will back even tougher sanctions.

"There's some triage going on right now where the Chinese leaders are sending signals and taking short-term action to pull everyone away from the cliff," said John Delury, an associate professor of Chinese studies at Yonsei University in Seoul.

"China is trying to give something to both Washington and Pyongyang. It's a little more creative than just six-party talks. I don't agree with the view you sometimes hear that it's a fundamental shift in Chinese strategy. The Chinese don't like the missile tests and they will go ahead with sanctions, but they don't believe sanctions



■ Soldiers parade to celebrate the 105th birth anniversary of Kim Il Sung, in Pyongyang, North Korea.

will work," said Delury.

Despite UN sanctions, North Korea fired at least 25 projectiles and detonated two nuclear devices in 2016, and a sixth nuclear test is expected any day now.

China has come up with two proposals through foreign minister Wang Yi. The first is a short-term patch of freezing testing and then, longer term, the focus is on talks to come up with a peace treaty.

"China believes that the US is the one with the leverage in negotiations with North Korea. And China is right that unremitting pressure is not the way to get North Korea to change its mind," says Delury.

For Xi, the role of peacemaker comes at a time when he needs to stabilise China's relationship with the US ahead of the vitally important 19th Communist Party congress in the autumn, at which he will further strengthen his grip on power.

#### Trump's unpredictability

"What's driving Chinese behaviour at this particular moment of tension on the Korean peninsula is Donald Trump, and his unpredictability," said Paul Haenle, a former White House National Security Council official who now directs the Carnegie-Tsinghua Centre for Global Policy in Beijing.

"Xi needs to demonstrate that he can manage China's most important bilateral relationship, and get it back on a positive and constructive trajectory. President Trump has made Chinese co-operation on North Korea a key requirement for that to happen," said Haenle.

**“**China is also worried about the possible collapse of North Korea if too much pressure is applied

This has put Xi in a position in which he must balance between tightening the screws on Pyongyang to demonstrate to Trump that he is willing to work with the US, while also ensuring that tensions don't escalate into a costly war.

Military action would feed Kim Jong-un's long-held belief that the US wants to overthrow his government.

A conflict on the Korean Peninsula would have spillover for China because of the humanitarian and refugee crisis that it would have to deal with at its borders.

#### Missile defence

China is also worried about the possible collapse of North Korea if too much pressure is applied. A united Korea aligned with the US on China's border is a major threat, as we can see from China's fierce opposition to the deployment of the US anti-missile defence system the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD).

"China will continue to press for the resumption of dialogue. But until the US sees evidence of a serious commitment by the

North on denuclearisation, I think dialogue is not on the cards," said Haenle.

"The state department and other White House officials have made it clear that their policy now is to maximise pressure. The eventual hope is that pressure would lead North Korea back to the table for talks on denuclearisation, but my sense is that that is a long way off," said Haenle.

Trump has implied that he received tacit approval from China for the missile strike on Syria, which also happened during the dinner at Mar-a-Lago, which would be surprising as it goes against China's policy of opposing military action.

#### Stand-down

"This stand-down was reinforced the next week by China's abstention vote on a UN Security Council resolution condemning Assad's chemical attack, forcing Russia to cast the only veto among the P5. So maybe there is something to the idea of US-China co-operation," Marcus Noland and Kent Boydston from the Peterson Institute write in a research note.

There are also questions about whether China, with its ultra-cautious approach to foreign policy, can sustainably handle Trump's style of tweeting off information and acting impulsively.

Another case in point is that of the *Carl Vinson* nuclear strike force, which Trump described as an "armada" heading to Korea when in fact it was headed elsewhere. This kind of public bluffing rankles with the Chinese.

But having a central role in addressing a regional problem is something that will appeal to the Chinese, as they try to earn the diplomatic muscle to match the country's growing economic strength.