

FORWARD:

This was an intellectual exercise where I tried to tell a story using dialog only. It was very difficult but I had the good fortune to finally reach the desired goal even though it is still not all I would like it to be. The Genesis of this story came from a public domain short story by Liam O'Flaherty called "The Sniper." I urge the reader to go on the Internet and read this outstanding short story. <http://everything2.com/title/The+Sniper> by Liam. The story takes place during the Irish Civil War.

The Sniper's Mission

"Patrick, this is your first sniper mission, isn't it?"

"Sure and it is Liam. If anyone had told me that I, Patrick Xavier McConahey, would be assigned to be the spotter for the great Liam O'Flaherty I would have called them a liar."

"Easy on the praise lad, wait 'til the mission is over for that stuff. By the way, how are those new headsets workin' for you?"

"They are workin' fine Liam. When we whisper to each other it sounds like you're talkin' right in my ear."

"Dublin is pretty dark tonight, and we have only the moon shinin' through those light clouds to illuminate our workplace. It's almost as if it were the pale light of approachin' dawn shinin' over the streets and the dark waters of the Liffey. This dim light is goin' to make snipin' all the more difficult"

The Sniper's Mission

by James R. Latham

“Yes Liam and here, around Four Courts, the heavy guns are certainly roarin'. The bleeding spasmodic firin' of the machine guns and rifles reminds me of dogs barkin' on the farm. I wonder who they are targetin' with the heavy guns?”

“Just be thankful lad that they aren't targetin' us. Hell, I don't even know if they on our side or if they are “Free Staters' guns. I hope they are ours, after all Patrick like the posters say -- We Republicans are wagin' a civil war with the Free Staters.”

“You're a strange one Liam. Your eyes have the cold gleam of a fanatic. They are deep and thoughtful, the eyes of a man who is used to lookin' at death. I mean no disrespect. Your tools are your rifle and a lot of other equipment that I suspect you've cobbled together to enhance your tradecraft. I hope you will teach me to be a sniper. I've always wanted to bring the war to those bastards who've blown up half of my family and snipin' is very, very personal. It would bring me a lot of satisfaction.”

“Of course, I'd be happy to teach you what little I know. We'll do this mission like it was a trainin' exercise.”

. . .

“Liam now that we are on the rooftop tell me somethin' about exactly where we are. I know that this area is four Courts.”

“Well, we're on a rooftop overlookin' the Four Courts neighborhood. To the North of us You can see the O'Connell bridge with the Liffey river flowin' beneath it. There are several side streets which you are goin' to have to keep an eye on. You

also have to watch the opposite rooftops for possible counter sniper activity. Any questions?”

“Yes, do we have any Star Scope light amplification equipment or any passive infrared glasses?”

“Not hardly old chum.”

“By the way Patrick would you hand me the sandwich and flask of whiskey from my pack? I haven't eaten anythin' since mornin'. I guess I've been too excited to eat.”

“Damn, that sandwich and whiskey were excellent and hit the spot. Now would you take a nip and put the flask back into my pack. Christ, I would surely like a smoke. Don't know whether to risk it or not. It's pretty dangerous. The flash might be seen in the darkness and there are enemies watchin'. I think I'll take the risk anyway. By the way, Patrick do you smoke.”

“No Liam, I've never taken up the foul habit but you go ahead and smoke, all my family does.”

“What was that Boyo?”

“It was a bullet that just hit the parapet of the roof.”

“Damn, the bastards must be watchin' pretty closely. One more whiff, put the fag out then we'll need to reposition ourselves. Let's move to the left.”

“I'm goon' to raise myself and look out over the parapet.”

The Sniper's Mission

by James R. Latham

“Shit, the enemy fired again. This time I saw the flash and heard the bullet go whizzin' overhead. It came from the opposite side of the street almost directly ahead of us.”

“I need a better look Lad. I'll crawl back to that chimney stack in the rear of us and stand up behind it. That way my eyes will be level with the top of the parapet.”

“Well lad, that didn't help much. There was nothin' to be seen - just the dim outline of the opposite housetop against the blue sky. Our enemy must be under cover.”

. . .

“what was that noise Lad?”

“It was an armored car Liam. It just came across the bridge and advanced slowly up the street. It has stopped on the opposite side of the street, about fifty yards ahead of us. Listen . . . you can hear the dull pantin' of the motor.”

“I can see it. It is an enemy car. I want to fire, but it is useless. The bullets would never pierce the steel that covers that gray monster. Sometimes this work can be a little frustratin'.”

“Tell me what you see Boyo. We need to test your powers of observation.”

“Well from round the corner of a side street there came an old woman, with her head covered by a tattered shawl. Then she began to talk to the machine gunner in the turret of the car. She

The Sniper's Mission

by James R. Latham

was pointin' to the roof where we're layin'. Obviously she is an informer.”

“OK, I can see the turret openin' and a man's head and shoulders appearin'. He's lookin' toward us. I'm goin' to take the shot. Tell me what you see.”

. . .

“When you shot, his head fell back heavily onto the turret wall. I'm sure he's dead. Then the woman darted toward the side street and then when you fired again. She whirled round, shrieked and fell into the gutter.”

. . .

“Damn Patrick I've been hit. What happened?”

“There was a shot from the opposite roof. I heard the shot and you dropped your rifle. It clattered to the roof. I thought the noise would wake the dead. When you stooped to pick the rifle up but couldn't lift it I had a bad feelin'. Where were you hit.”

“I was shot in the forearm and a right good shot it was. It seems we have a counter sniper on that opposite roof. My arm is numb.”

“Liam, crawl over here to the parapet, check out the wound and tell me how serious it is.”

“OK, With my left hand I can feel the injured right forearm. The blood is oozin' through the sleeve of my coat. There is no pain - just a deadened sensation, as if the arm had been cut off.”

“What are you doin' now?”

“I'm gettin' my knife from my pocket, open it on the breastwork of the parapet, and rip open the sleeve. I can see a small hole where the bullet entered. On the other side of my arm there is no hole. The bullet must have lodged in the bone. It must have fractured it. I can bend the arm below the wound and it bends back easily. I can tell you truthfully that it hurts like hell.”

“I'm tellin' you what I'm doin' so that you can take over if I can't do it. Now I'm takin' out my field dressin' and rippin' the packet open with my knife. I just broke the neck of the iodine bottle and am lettin' the bitter fluid drip into the wound. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, the sting as well as the pain. Now I'm puttin' the cotton waddin' over the wound and wrapped the dressin' over it. I have to tie the ends with my teeth. I'm tryin' to lay still against the parapet, I'm closin' my eyes and makin' a herculean effort to overcome the pain”

. . .

“What do you see now Lad?”

“Well in the street beneath us all seems pretty still. The armored car just lit out acrost the bridge like a spiffy with a fire up its' arse. The machine gunner's head was hangin' lifeless over the turret. The woman's corpse still is alayin' in the gutter.”

“Liam, you should take a couple of aspirin and lie still for a good while just nursin' your wounded arm. Don't let it stiffen up on you.”

“Yes, well we have to plan our escape. Mornin' must not find us on the roof with one of us wounded. Also the enemy on the opposite roof has to be dealt with. We must kill that enemy and I can't use my rifle. You have your rifle and I have only a revolver to do it.

. . .

“Boyo, I just thought of a plan that might do the trick. I'm goin' to take off my cap and place it over the muzzle of my rifle. Then I will push the rifle slowly upward over the parapet, until the cap is visible from the opposite side of the street. I'll bet you a tenner that the sniper won't be able to resist a shot. Somethin' for you to learn lad.”

. . .

“Did you see what happened Lad?”

“Yes, almost immediately there was a report, and I can see that a bullet has pierced the center of the cap.”

“Now I'll slant the rifle forward and let the cap fall down into the street. Then I'll catch the rifle in the middle, drop my left hand over the roof and let it hang, lifelessly. After a few moments I will let the rifle drop to the street. Then I'll sink to the roof, draggin' my hand with me.”

. . .

The Sniper's Mission

by James R. Latham

“Liam, I can see that the ruse has succeeded. The other sniper, seein' the cap and rifle fall, thought that he had killed his man. He is now standin' before a row of chimney pots, lookin' across, with his head clearly silhouetted against the western sky.”

“Now here comes the hard part. I'm goin' to lift my revolver above the edge of the parapet. I see that the distance is about fifty yards--a hard shot in this dim light. Jesus, my right arm is painin' me like a thousand devils. I will then take a steady aim. My right hand is tremblin' with eagerness. I'm goin' to Press my lips together, take a deep breath through my nostrils and fire.”

. . .

“Liam, I was almost deafened with the report and your wounded right arm really shook with the recoil. Faith and B'Jesus, the enemy was well and truly hit.”

“Hurray, I can see that when when the smoke cleared our enemy had indeed been hit. Patrick, did you see that in his death agony he reeled over the parapet. He struggled to keep his feet, but was slowly fallin' forward as if in a dream. His rifle fell from his grasp, hit the parapet, fell over, bounded off the pole of a barber's shop beneath and then clattered on the pavement. I hope you witnessed it all.”

“Yes, I saw it. The dyin' man on the roof crumpled up and fell forward. His body turned over and over in space and hit the ground with a dull thud. Then it lay still. I guess you can count him as dead.”

The Sniper's Mission

by James R. Latham

“Patrick, I can't tell you of all of my emotions but after a killin' they're always the same. As I watched him fallin', I shuddered and the lust of battle died in me. Now I am bitten by remorse. Who am I to take the life of another human bein'? Tis true that I am sorely weakened by my wound and the long summer day of fastin' and watchin' on the roof but still I am revolted by the sight of the shattered mass of my dead enemy. The sweat is standin' out in beads on my forehead and my teeth are chatterin'. In a few minutes I'll begin to gibber to myself, cursin' the war, cursin' myself, cursin' everybody. . . .”

. . .

“Why did you throw your revolver down? When it went off, the bullet whizzed past my head. I thought I had been shot.”

“Damn, I don't know why I did that. I'm OK now. I was frightened back to my senses by the shock. My nerves have steadied. The cloud of fear has been scattered from my mind. Ha Ha Ha.”

“Hand me that flask of whiskey again and take a pull before givin' it to me. . . . There isn't much left. There's just enough for a single drought. By God lad the influence of the spirit is makin' me feel reckless.”

“We'd best leave the roof now and look for our company commander, to report. Every thin' around here is quiet now. There is not much danger in goin' through the streets. Please give me my revolver – I'll put it in my pocket. Let's then crawl down through the skylight to the house underneath.”

. . .

The Sniper's Mission

by James R. Latham

“Now that we've reached the lane-way at the street level, I have a sudden curiosity as to the identity of the enemy sniper whom we just had killed. He certainly was a good shot, whoever he was. Perhaps I knew him. Perhaps he had been in my own company before the split in the army. Let us risk goin' over to have a look at him.

“Patrick, peer around the corner into O'Connell Street. I can tell that in the upper part of the street there still is heavy firin', but around here all seems to be quiet.”

“Let's dart across the street?”

. . .

“Damn, what was that?”

“It was a machine gun which has tore up the ground all around us with a hail of bullets, but praise Jesus we escaped. When we went to earth we ended up face downward right beside the corpse. Listen – the machine gun has stopped.”

. . .

“Oh No, Mary mother of Jesus Christ, I'm lookin' into the face of me brother. ”

. . .

“Patrick, now how do you like bein' a sniper?”

The end.

An Explanation:

The Irish Civil War (28 June 1922 – 24 May 1923) followed the Irish War of Independence and accompanied the establishment of the Irish Free State, an entity independent from the United Kingdom but within the British Empire.

The conflict was waged between two opposing groups of Irish republicans over the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The forces of the "Provisional Government" (which became the Free State in December 1922) supported the Treaty, while the Republican opposition saw it as a betrayal of the Irish Republic (which had been proclaimed during the Easter Rising). Many of those who fought in the conflict had been members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) during the War of Independence.

The Civil War was won by the Free State forces, which were heavily armed and assisted by the British government. The conflict may have claimed more lives than the War of Independence that preceded it, and left Irish society divided and embittered for generations. Today, two of the main political parties in the Republic of Ireland, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, are direct descendants of the opposing sides in the war.

The end.