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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW OF MASTER ENGRAVER, SEAN MCVICKER

Sean McVicker is a man who walks a thin line. He has seen humanity at its worst, and yet strives to believe that man is good, despite all evidence to the contrary. As a survivor of the Blitz, a former military member, and a refugee from attacks in Northern Ireland that caused the deaths of family and friends, he is haunted by the ghosts of war. And yet, through his music, poetry, and engravings he celebrates life by creating small acts of beauty, as though in defiance of the tragic events that have transformed his life. The following is an oral history interview recorded at his home on Tuesday, February 15th, 2011 for Preservation Chronicles.

World War II – The Blitz

Although the free counties of Southern Ireland maintained diplomatic relations with the Axis powers throughout World War II, Northern Ireland remained part of British territory, and as such was a major contributor to the war effort, delivering food and naval vessels from the Harland and Wolff shipyards. Belfast became the target of intense air bombardment, resulting in thousands dead and over 100,000 homeless. The following is McVicker's account of the bombings.

SM: I brought Bonnie back a few years ago to Belfast, and I tried to explain to her that during the Second World War, we were blitzed night after night. Our city hall in Belfast is reputedly one of the most beautiful city halls in the world. And, it's a copy that Sir Christopher Wren done of St. Peter's in England. Not one shell hit it. For some reason, every time they went down the main circle, they banked and missed the city hall. But, the library—the only thing they didn't rebuild in Belfast is the library, and it's Italian marble slabs. It's so beautiful, but they left every bullet hole. I used to run down the next mornin' and stick my fingers in the bullet holes.

And, Americans, even Irish, second generation, say, "Ireland wasn't in the war." Really! North of Ireland was blitzed. I watched Stukas, watched them dive down our street. And, why would they do that? Because it had the biggest docks in the world. It built the *Titanic*. I was born and raised in the slums at the docks. Bonnie, my wife, was awestruck at the scene—a mile and a half from where I was born and raised in the slums, where the *Titanic* was built. If you think Germany's gonna let that shipyard go, had the biggest rope works in the world, the biggest cotton manufacturing machines in the world, the biggest cotton and linen industry from it, right? The next mornin' after the Blitz—six thousand people died.

There is no way Hitler was gonna let the biggest dockyards in the world get out of this war. But, the problem was twenty-six counties were called Free State, and they declared neutrality. With the blackout (no lights to show after dark) German Bombers had only to follow the brightly lit Southern Highway, all the way up to the border which is 37.5 miles from Belfast. And, immediately they hit the border.

They came down our street, and I remember my mother used to grab me and we would run to one of the giant warehouses at the docks. The air raid warning sirens would be screaming and I could hear the anti aircraft fire from the guns on the roof of the building. The giant barrage ballons, with the long steel cables attached to catch the wings of the dive bombers, the search lights were fantastic white beams that searched the sky for hours on end, while my family crouched together listening to the awful sounds outside. At long last, the "all clear" would sound and everyone would start talking at once. The Germans

Devastation on Donegall Street, near McVicker's primary school, in the aftermath of a nighttime attack by German bombers on May 4, 1941.

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named this period of the war "The Blitzkreig" and the family always referred to it as "The Blitz".

My first communion photo, I'm standing with my cousin outside the warehouse on Great Georges Street, what you can't see is the two giant petroleum (gas) tanks 50 feet away, our so called shelter during the Blitz is directly underneath.

At the top of our street was the main gate of Victoria Military Barracks. The barrack's wall surrounded the whole area. Many thousands of troops would march up our street after unloading from the docks. They would drive giant flatbed trucks, with their loads covered by canvas. But us kids, we knew what they were by the shapes, propellers, bombs, but we loved the Americans. Later in the war as they marched by, they would throw chewing gum, chocolate bars and American coins.

In this picture taken at St. Patrick's Primary School, in Belfast Ireland, Sean McVicker is seen here seated in the second row from the bottom, the fifth boy from the left.

During the later years of the war, my Mother, along with many others, worked at the Docks in an old unheated warehouse, where waste paper (newspapers, cartons) were collected from all over, tons of mixed paper. This had to be sorted by hand. This was done by women on the top floor and sent down separate chutes in bales. They weighed about 100 pounds. My Mother used a Docker's Bailing hook that she had attached to her wrist by a string. It had been stolen often.

One particular time, she dragged the bale over to the chute, but did not pull the hook out fast enough, consequently she dropped two floors. Thank God the deep paper piles broke her fall. But it also broke her wrist. The women helped her set her wrist, wrongly, as it turned out, the rest of her life she was in pain.

German prisoners were there at the top of our street, and they used to wear gray with patches, dark patches. And, my mother would send me up 'cause I could reach the bars at Victoria Barracks. We're called the Barracks People where we lived. I climbed up—they're only eight feet, and I would pass 'em eggs and butter from my mom, remember, and bread and cigarettes. They made me toys at Christmas, but you know what killed me, Brent? Christmas, they would sing "Silent Night" in German. And, they were being blitzed—while they were there at the top of our street to the docks. And, their own planes were bombing them going down our street. I don't want to forget that, you know? But, when I came to America and people would say, "Oh, I was in Ireland last year. We were all over it." I said, "Oh, what did you think about Belfast" "Oh, we wouldn't go there." "Man, you missed Ireland; you missed Belfast."

Grandfather's Barbershop

As a young boy Sean worked alongside his grandfather at a barbershop in Belfast near the wharf. The navy men returning from overseas would stop in for a shave and regale the young boy with stories of their adventures, which led the young man to leave his native Ireland and become a citizen of five countries. Here McVicker describes his first job as soap boy at the age of nine.

I was called the soap boy. And there were three giant tubs, beautiful brass and copper, shining at the back of the barbershop. I know now what they were. They were hot water geysers. There was no hot water in those days. You turned on the gas, and it heated the water in them. You come in; you go in the first chair; I put the drape on you, the old man called it. I get the towels out of the bottom of the geyser where they're steaming hot. And, believe me, it hurts when I hit you with them, but it's the start of the regeneration of the pores. It softens them.

So, what would happen is you'd come in off a winter's night in Hill Street, and we're right at the docks. You need a shave; you're goin' out that night with the old lady. But your beard is purple with the cold. You can't even touch—it hurts. So, you come in. Now, my granda is on the second chair working by brushing with soap and massaging the beard by hand. There's a man in each chair. He's on the second, first one is finished. He started the second, so I get you, bring you out, and I'm only nine years old. I've got a stool to stand on, so I put you down, put the drape on. I get the towels, soften you up, okay? He's finished his second one. I'm already over; I'm cleaning you up, brushing you off and getting you out the door. I take a second man, put him on. I go back to the first. He is softened up, so I took my wobbling brush, and I start to soften you up. I spend at least seven to ten minutes depending on the—I could tell a beard (snaps) like that. Otherwise, the old man used to hit me.

And then, on Friday night get their money and come down to the barbershop, and then they would all sit and sing. And, they had—their gargle bottles would be passed around. And, as the old man would—he was singin' too. But, what amazed me was—'cause he'd been gassed in WWI—his hand was goin' like that (trembling). He never seen blood once in the years I was with him. I never seen him draw blood, and it's all open razors by the way. And, he honed razors for other barbershops. I never seen him draw blood once. And, the men that were there are singing the old tunes from the First World War 1914-1918—that's how I learned 'em.

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An Apprentice in Ireland's Printing Industry

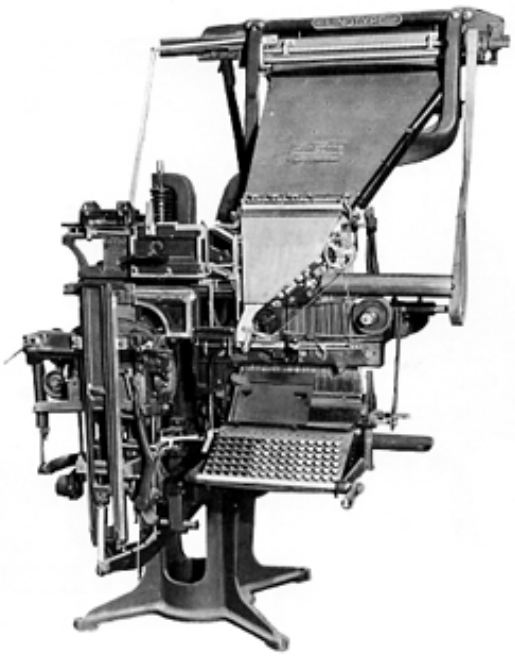
Employment in Ireland was controlled by trade groups who indentured boys from an early age for apprenticeship of five years, which was a lengthy and arduous training process that groomed the young recruit to one day take the place of his master. Once selected for a particular trade, the tradesman's path in life was largely determined. The manufacturing techniques employed by the various trades were protected by unions and Masons who jealously guarded their trade secrets, even preventing members from traveling to the Americas where they might establish a shop beyond the reach of the union. In this excerpt McVicker discusses his work as a letterpress operator during the evolution of the business from letterpress to linotype.

SM: The family printing business got very big, became a factory, publishers. Now, letterpress was the thing at the time. All of the world, even in America—all printing was done letterpress. Letterpress is exactly what it means. You take a plate, ink it, put paper on it, roll it, and it comes out like that. And, up until my—oh, jeepers, forty years ago, even newspapers were done that way, every publication, every book, until Multilith came in. So, to do that—could you imagine that every one of those letters was done by hand?

Can you imagine the time for me to set this a letter at a time in what's called the stick? The stick was a box with a movable unit to clamp it. It's all I done all day long. The newspapers would put them in, all columns.

But then, this guy came up, and I—there's nobody I've ever met, professors, scholars—anybody that said he wasn't mad. You can't invent that stupid machine, but he did. And, his name was Mergenthaler. And, he looked at this one day and said, "That's stupid. I can build a machine that'll hundred times—" He beat it by five hundred fold. He designed the linotype machine. And, that's exactly what it was, line of type. He measured in picas, which really is called Ms and Ns. Twelve M, twelve picas, eighteen picas, twenty-four. Whenever a guy was doin' a newspaper, he shout out to me, "Hey, make it two Ns!" Two picas or two Ns. N is half a pica, an M is a full one. And, I still have my scale.

So anyway, the idea was what he could do—this stupid machine, the first time in my life, I was frightened. The guy had a typewriter, and he would sit and type it like that. What was happening is, an arm would—it was very high. An arm would come down, and every time he hit the letter, a brass pica of an A, an N, and a D would come down. And then, he'd hit the space. The arm would come down, pick up the brass like that, take it up, dump it into hot metal. There was a pot in the back of the machine of hot lead, would put it in, cut it to a line of six-uh—this space, and that line, eighteen picas, would pick it up, cool it, cut it, bring it back, and send it down beside it. All the lines slid down beside 'em. He would check it. If there was a mistake, he'd do it again. Before that arm was holding all the letters, but as soon as he hit it, the arm moved again and brought the letters over the respective places and distributed them again in the proper cases. The most used letter in the alphabet is an E, never missed, machine was perfect. And, for 210 years, that machine ruled the world in newspaper.



During his apprenticeship as a printer and engraver, McVicker mastered the operation of Melie, Hiedelberg, and Platen printing press machines like Mergenthaler's linotype machine depicted above.

And then, of course, to do that as a compositor, you had to go to school. Now, you're askin' me how you start. Okay, so you go to school. First thing you learn is how to set type. Then you have to do three years college of art for design work if you're goin' into book publishing. Then, you have to do printing.

And, as far as my life as an apprentice, I hated every minute. Anyway, in those days, you done five years. The government made it compulsory that you got a day off to go to a college of technology, but you must go two nights. They pay for everything. You got three exams a year, one went to your father, one went to your boss, and one went to the government. And, if you didn't pass, you're out. You can't go back. And, you can't as an amateur after you're a plumber and retire become a printer. You know what I'm gettin' at. You can't do that. The unions won't allow you. You'll never get work. And, the old thing about-uh—that's trade secret. You could be killed if you give away trade secrets. That's how they held the union and held the grip, the newspapers, all of it.

The longest running, strongest trade union in the world was the printers. They ruled all of Fleet Street, all of England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Germany, France. They ruled it, all of it. And, if they went on strike, there was no computer, nothin', no telegraph, no writers. They could bring the world to a standstill.

So, if you became a young apprentice, and it was so strict that you could not hire more than one apprentice to three tradesmen or masters—and they kept it level. When a tradesman or master died off, the apprentice moved in. And, they picked him by a thing called a Muir and Audi exam. Muir and Audi were two lawyers that set up an exam system for the government, and the government—I must admit British went into Ireland, even Northern Ireland, and they would pick a kid from the slums like me. And, I didn't know what I was gettin' into, but if I passed the exam, you're in. But, you can't be over fourteen. Today it's sixteen. And, the thing is, if you fail your exams, you're out. They pick another kid to give him a chance, and you're finished.

Uh well, I had done engraving through that period. To become a general manager—you had to learn it all—

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managership, accounts and statements, banking, and in a printing industry for publishing, you have to do book binding and letter press printing. I could run a Melie, Heidelberg, Platen; I could hand feed when I was ten years old at five hundred an hour. If you go down to Old Town San Diego, there's an old Platen there on display. I could get it goin' tomorrow.

Engraving in the American Style

Trained as a master engraver in Europe, after immigrating to the United States, McVicker pursued his childhood dream of engraving guns and weaponry in the American style. His pieces are highly prized among collectors and are considered some of the finest in the world. In the following exchange, which includes comments from his wife Bonnie McVicker, Sean discusses his passion for the art.

SM: When I was a kid, I was like any young American kid. I wanted to see Gene Autry and Roy Rogers and all that. I would walk out of Gene Autry's picture; humming his tunes and I wanted to do that engraving. I saw the cowboy guns, but to my knowledge at the time, it was a five year jail term. If you were caught in Britain, Northern Ireland, with even an empty pistol, it was worse off than 1968.

BM: You went to-uh GRS Tools in Emporia, Kansas, to learn Western style engraving.

SM: Western style. I had done bank note—I worked for Browning's; I worked for the bank note. They do not like your (American) style—Now, while I was at this—you'll want to know, and this I want people to know. While I went to college, I met a man that owned a factory in the college, just a dream of a man named Donald Glaser. Donald Glaser, wonderful man, and this man you'll want to write about because the world knows about him now.

Now, let me give you a basic. I'm an engraver. I start off, and it's called "push." I get a little cutter, and I'm trying to push. What age am I gonna get 'til I can't do it anymore? But, that's not the problem. I have a gun I'm doin' from Gettysburg. I could cut it with my false teeth, but then they started to do American steel. Then they done case hardened; then they done case color hardened steel; then they got into carbide. I cut it. I learned to do it, and I make my own cutters, burins they're called. But, Mr. Glaser came up with a system to save thousands upon thousands of old engravers like me, and he became our friend. And, he designed a machine besides that would help them to cut through carbide with the same tools, and it's a little air unit. A simple little jack hammer that enables old engravers, like me to handle the strongest metals.

BM: Mr. Glaser created this machine called the Gravermeister. But, it's—I guess the only way to describe—that it's like a miniature jackhammer, you know? But, you're still doin' everything by hand, but air makes it pulsate—which helps cut through the heavy steel. And, this teacher, Lee Griffiths, is one of the masters. His work is unbelievable, and that's where Sean learned Western style engraving, which makes it larger scrolls where bank note and the bulino—bank note engraving is smaller—much smaller. And there's different styles of engraving, like, when Sean engraves, for example—he's got a Colt that went through Gettysburg. He engraves it in the style of the era. He wouldn't put modern scrollwork on a Civil War gun. He would engrave it in the Civil War Period and the style of that time in the style of the engravers.

SM: And-uh, all right, I got a gun that was at Gettysburg. But when the lady brought it in, she said the kids were using it as a hammer. And, that great American that said, "Any man that loves whiskey and hates kids can't be all that bad," W. C. Fields—so when I looked at that, and I looked at the gun, and I realized that some young officer, Union, as you can tell by the frame, that has put his life on the line—uh,

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it's hard to take. But, it's even worse because I couldn't get real—people to realize how many Irish kids died at Gettysburg—how many died at Antietam in the gulch, and they wouldn't believe me when I told them. So, I wanted to lecture, so I did.

BM: We went to the Gene Autry Museum up in Los Angeles for an exhibit called Dazzling Pistols, and they got a lot of the pistols that Colt made for presidents from private collections and a lot of other guns from private collections. The exhibit was unbelievable. And, they asked Sean to go up—and a few times while it was here in Los Angeles—to sit and demonstrate and talk and lecture on hand engraving. And, we did that. Sean did that, I should say, and then the show went on the road from Los Angeles to Redding, and it went to Lafayette, Louisiana, and then to Texas.

SM: She wouldn't let me go on the road.

BM: And, it was supposed to come off the road, but they put on one more show in Indianapolis at the Eiteljorg Museum. When they found out that Sean was available, they asked him if he would go to Indianapolis. For two weeks, actually, a year ago today we were in Indianapolis to lecture and demonstrate on gun engraving. So, we went, and people couldn't believe the guns that were there back in the 1800s and the engravers were gone. Mrs. Autry had a gun there that was made—engraved at Tiffany—had jewels on it. They didn't realize the older guns were more valuable because the engravers were dead and they couldn't get it as good as that anymore. They couldn't get that. And, a lot of the styles of engraving today, when they say, oh, it was factory engraved, they don't know who the engraver was, but it was done in the style of the old engravers.

Sean McVicker and Joe Clarke are seen here in Quebec perched on the hood of McVicker's 1963 Corvette. McVicker is strumming a very rare Gretch White Falcon (stereo model).

BJ: I know that you've made quite a career at engraving guns of all different types. Uh, I understand that you were also involved with the Canadian government and engraving some currency.

SM: In the Canadian Bank Note—now there's the British American Bank Note—they're downtown. The Canadian Bank Note was on Richmond Road in Ottawa. And, I was offered a job as an engraver at a Canadian Bank Note in Ottawa. So, what they done was they asked me to run a department of letterpress and-engraving. But, they had a new system. The system is called Elrod, E-l-r-o-d, and Ludlow. And, it was actually the hand process of what I told you, linotype. You done it by hand. It had progressed to where you do it yourself, so I went on from there. I took over the engraving department, and where'd I go from—Montreal? Oh! I went back to—to Ireland and stayed on the pro circuit musician, and then I ended up here.

The Irish Show Bands

In the eighteenth century, the Gaelic language was outlawed as subversive by a series of measures enforced by the British government. However, the Gaelic culture was not so easily extinguished. Through songs that serve as a kind of daily communion that are sung throughout Ireland's pubs and barbershops, the people are united in their ancestry. No wonder that some of the outstanding musicians of the twentieth century have emerged from the lounges of Belfast and Dublin. Here McVicker talks about his career on the road with the Irish Show Bands, The Witnesses, The Clipper Carlton, and The Fred Hanna Showband.

BJ: I am also interested in your musical career, and if we could talk a little bit about that now. You had learned how to play guitar from-uh Mr. Lowry, and—and were these traditional Irish folk tunes or what—

SM: Oh, no! I wanted to do the Beatles. Although, before that it was all jazz, forties and thirties—so I learned all that. My mother was a recording artist, believe or not, in the thirties. Yeah, and she taught me the songs of her era. At that time Irish Music wasn't cool. And, I was on the pro circuit at home for nine years. Yeah, I worked all over Europe playing that—the music, bought our homes. Some of the top artists in the world come from Ireland. I worked with—I backed up a lot of the big stars, Gerry Dorsey, who became Engelbert Humpredinck. Uh, I'll tell you about him. Wonderful, wonderful kid. I had a ball with him! Thank god, he couldn't play poker. Uh, what else about that period?

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McVicker, second from the left in front, is seen here posing with the Fred Hanna Showband during the 1960s.

We were owned by a company in Northern Ireland, and like I say you don't get a choice. You don't even get your wages but sixteen percent. Sixteen percent was given you at the end of the month. The rest of the money went back to your family or the corporation. There's no screwing around. You show up drunk, hangover, you get fined. You lose a week's wages. And, your family's back home, and they know all about it. The way the unions worked, you couldn't go back to Europe and just bring your outfit with you. There were no groups in those days; there were orchestras.

Our lead singer was Colm Wilkinson from the south of Ireland. The last gig I worked with him was in Montreal, Quebec, Canada and we played in the Hotel Bonaventure, Penthouse. After that, Colm was picked to play on Broadway. He was the first lead in "Les Miserables" and he later performed in "Jekyll and Hyde", and "Joseph's Technicolor Dreamcoat." And of course, because of his surname, he was nick named "The Blade". I am very proud of the fact that I backed him up on guitar.

Later when American Artists started working in Britain or Ireland, they had to use Union Musicians. And, if you wanted—what you done was you came back with your MD, musical director, and you had your music library, we called it, and you used a union orchestra, and they were top dog in the world. And, that's how it worked, but then in the sixties and the Beatles and the rockers and all, I was one of the guys that would be used on the gigs.

So, there was a young fella—'63, '64, and they got EMI, biggest in the world at the time because they owned the Beatles. They-uh got this young fella. His name is Gerry Dorsey. Ah! Oh, man! Truthfully, you know, Brent if I had-uh looked like that, I would've ruled the world. So, EMI told him or told me you're goin' on—take him out to the strips, so we done Northern Ireland, Southern Ireland, Scotland, a couple of gigs here and there. They're all pubs and lounges, you know, get him goin' and that. Man, he used to swing the mic, and it was all his. He copied nobody, swinging the mic, catch it at the end, rock and roll. He was fabulous! And, they made him. And, they told him, No more rock, frilly shirt, dress up, no more movin'. You're it. They already had Tom Jones. We don't need another. You're it. And then, they changed his name—and everybody laughed—from Gerry Dorsey to Engelbert Humperdinck. Then came his first recording, I could not believe they picked a very old country song. It was an immediate number one on the hit parade, so much for Rock-n-Roll. But, he was great, and he does deserve it. And, he was a nice guy.

Then came 1968 and in the cities of Derry and Belfast, civil rights' marches were being televised in detail in America. Drunken mobs numbering thousands roamed through Catholic districts, burning homes and putting whole families on streets, and brutally beating every person they could grab. In that period I was the guitarist with the Clipper Carlton Showband. We were doing quite a few gigs in England. The activities of the "Troubles" in Belfast had escalated terribly. Bombings and murders were taking place everyday. I hated to be "On the Road" with the band away from my family. When I got back home I learned that my son, Tony, who at the time was only 10 years old, had by inches escaped being killed by a drive-by shooting.

The Troubles

The conflict in Northern Ireland that boiled over in the 1960s, having resulted from voting rights discrimination and unfair housing laws, pitted neighbor against neighbor and resulted in a bloody exchange between the Loyalist Protestants and the Catholic Republicans. When McVicker's family was bombed in 1968, he left Ireland for America, but the conflict followed him across the sea.

SM: There's nobody in the world can circumvent the fact that all we did as Catholics in Northern Ireland was defense because I was there. I came back from overseas from the conflict, and I saw—I was there. So, believe me, everything that happened on the side of Republicans or IRA or Catholic was defense at the start. My brother acted in defense of his family, his home, right? And, for what it's worth, let me tell you one thing. We were selected to represent the North of Ireland in shooting for the world. I was an international shooter, for what that's worth.

But anyway, when the conflict started in 1968, and it was during the period of the bad times in Nam and the political conflict—in America when the Civil Rights broke out. It wasn't just a conflict, but because of cable television everybody in Europe including Ireland saw—they saw about Mr. Mandela. They saw about everything, so they decided it's time to get England out of Ireland. Now, when that started, the other side went

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haywire, drunken—son, if you've ever been frightened, and you turn a corner and see twenty-five thousand drunk rioters coming toward you, it's worse—all right, okay. I'm just saying. Anyway, my brother defended himself and our family. We got 'em out of there, whatever the year, and the American government really helped him and me even while—while it was turned against us.

One of the family printing factories had been torched and destroyed, because it was situated in a district that was predominately Protestant. Years before I had purchased a new home away from the streets of my childhood. But I was dangerously located and I had made a heartbreaking decision to sell, my wife was a Canadian, and did not deserve to live and raise five children in this terrible environment.

Years later, in America, I had gotten Pleurisy for about nine weeks. And, one year— I was down, and Bonnie said to me, "There's some gentlemen at the door that wants to talk to you." I said, "Well, tell 'em to come in." She said, "They won't come in." Right? So—I went to the door, and as God is my judge, it was the men in black. I looked, right? There was three. One on the walkway, one on the first stoop, and one at the door, black glasses, black suits, the whole—(laughs) Like the Blues Brothers! And, I looked at them, and I said, "Oh, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, I'm being deported." And, I had a temperature of 104 or somethin'. I didn't want to be there. If they had-uh given me trouble, I would've killed 'em. So, I looked, and I said, "Sir, what can I do for you?" And, he looked at me, and he looked me up and down. And, I knew he was sayin' this is a joke, you know? But, we had just done the first (St. Patrick's) parade. Oh, the Queen was coming to visit America. And, he looked at me, and he was smilin', big guy like you. And, he said-uh—he didn't even want to say this. It's as if he was reading it, and he said, "Uh, Mr. McVickers—" I said, "Sorry Son, I'm not plural. It's McVicker." And, he smiled, and he said—"Do you intend to protest the Queen's visit? "In Los Angeles?" (laughs) And, some of the Irish were camping outside the consulate, but they had seen us. And, they'd filmed the Saint Patrick's Day Parade, where I had been the headliner for the entertainment, and all the idiots and wannabes. So, I said-uh—I could hardly stand up straight, so I held the door, and I stood up and I said, "Tell her Majesty—" and it was not in disrespect, believe me, because I served. And, I gave it proper, and I said, "Tell her Majesty—" which that was the joke end, of course you wouldn't. "Tell her Majesty I said to have a happy holiday." And, remember? They walked away, and they were laughing all the way down the pathway.

Colonel Paddy

Sean McVicker's military career is shrouded in mystery. After quadruple bypass surgery saved his life last year he is reluctant to discuss details of his service, which brings forth strong emotion and painful memories. However, he felt that was important to go on record and celebrate the life of someone who he fears will be lost to history. In the following exchange he talks about the modern inventor of the Special Forces, Colonel Blair Mayne.

BJ: Well, I think that we've covered-uh a lot of the things that I wanted to talk about. I know you'd rather not talk about your military service. Um so, we can just leave that alone.

SM: Well, I can—I can go so far. To get the money from the British Government as an apprentice, you become a military apprentice. And, there were men that taught me in the military that I respect so much. I would love his name to be known. It's not right, and in the whole world I never heard one person praise his name. And son, that's got to be wrong, okay? I've got to praise him because a week after he gave us a lecture, he wrapped himself around the telegraph pole. And, he couldn't live with himself, but there is no one now. I have a colonel—nobody's even heard of—even the Irish. He was a drunkard, an alcoholic, but while I tell you—he was not obnoxious. He was very quiet.

BJ: Is he the one who trained you or what is his role with you?

SM: He lectured my reserve units. He won the International Boxing Championships. He took the first national's wrestling. The reason they called him "Paddy" because he was an Irishman. There he is. (shows photograph of Colonel "Paddy" Mayne.)

And, he designed the badge that you see there, and it says, "He who dares, wins." And, there was no Special Forces in America, and they copied him—President Kennedy asked for a Special Forces unit. He was the first, and it was the Second World War. He always served—every year was always behind German lines. He was never out of it. They would ride up in the jeeps and hit the planes and then ride out, and they were never caught. But, he stopped one time because of the officer's quarters, and he wanted to kill most of them in it. But, when he went up, they had been torturing a young French guy. So, he went in, stopped, and asked the officers. And, they brought the kid out. They (the Germans) had been putting hot cigarettes and cigars on him, so he came out. And, he didn't write this by the way; he did not write this, and he didn't like it. But, he went out, and he brought the kid outside. And, he said to him—and he didn't know that his senior was watching him. And, he said to the kid, "Do you want to go back in?" And, the kid said, "Yes." And he gave the boy his own Sterling; I handled this Sterling that he done it with. He said to the kid, "Here, go on." And, kid went in and killed six of them and came out and handed it back. And, when I heard that, I—way to go! Way to go! Way to go. Well, that's Colonel Paddy.

He was literally telling stories of the Second World War. And, I notice now—the ones that I remember—never spoke about himself. It was always—the other guy, by the way, was a man called Bob Sterling. Sterling was the innovator in history of the first Special Forces. But, in the 60's they were flown into Belfast where they disgraced the memory and honour of Colonel "Paddy" Mayne. They went into Northern Ireland and they murdered a lot of people, and they killed my friends. They killed my people. And, sort of cut them in my eyes. But, I respect that man with the Second World War, but—when it got to the sixties, and these ones went in. They're just murderers.

Sean McVicker's work can be viewed at the Gene Autry Museum of Western Heritage In Griffith Park, Los Angeles. He also gives live engraving demonstrations and musical performances at the Veterans Museum and Memorial Center at the Old Navy Chapel in Balboa Park, San Diego. For a calendar of his upcoming events go to www.storiesinsteel.com