

## DESERTERS HONOURED

# HAVE WE FINALLY FIGURED OUT WHO THE REAL TRAITORS WERE?



JOHN Stout did not desert his Irish Army post in 1943 because he was afraid. The threat of a German invasion of Ireland had passed.

The decisive Red Army victory at Stalingrad had turned the tide of the war against the Nazis. Nor was the 18-year-old Cork city lad bored with the routine mundane duties of a lowly private in a force that had been spared the horrors of combat.

John Stout went north to enlist in the Irish Guards not because he wanted to see some action. He went because he was hungry. It was as simple and as basic as that. He joined the British army in the middle of the most ferocious war in history in order to eat.

This week, 88-year-old John told me how his unit in Kinsale was deprived of rations by a spiv in an officer's uniform who was moonlighting on the black market. John was starving while a quartermaster was getting fat selling provisions meant for the troops.

His widowed mother couldn't help him. She had five other children to fend for in a little terraced house in Blackpool on Cork's northside.

## CIVILISATION

So John deserted. He was one of the estimated 5,000 Irish soldiers who left their posts and enlisted in the British army. In doing so, he joined over 100,000 other Irishmen who served in the frontline of the battle for the defence of civilisation against evil.

Within a year, John landed in Normandy after the D-Day invasion. From June 1944 until the bitter end, John Stout was in the thick of it. He was at Nijmegen when the strategic bridge across the Rhine was taken. John also witnessed the hell that was Bergen-Belsen soon after the concentration camp was liberated in April 1945.

John's war did not end there. The hunt was now on for the ringleaders of the Third Reich. The Guards Armoured Division was involved in the operation

## An amnesty granted to 5,000 soldiers who went AWOL to fight Nazism was overdue and contrasts greatly with how we handled the well-connected Irish who supported Nazism

### GERRY GREGG



that captured Admiral Karl Doenitz – the man Hitler chose as his heir – in Flensburg near the Danish border.

The boy from Cork recalls seeing him being led away, ultimately to face judgment at Nuremberg.

While he was doing his bit and making history, his country was getting even. In August 1945 Oscar Traynor, the Minister for Defence, put before the Dail 'Emergency Order No. 362'.

It blacklisted all those who had deserted or went AWOL. They were denied any employment in the civil service or with State agencies. They were also stripped of any entitlements to pensions or unemployment benefit for seven years.

Men like John Stout became non-persons. Order No. 362 did not, however, apply to officers. John came home, put his head down and kept his mouth shut. Only a trusted few in Cork knew anything about his "treason" fighting fascism. Only five of them are left.

It's not every day that a measure taken by an Irish Minister is reported favourably all over the world. This week it happened to Defence Minister



**WISDOM:** John Stout, above, landed in Normandy in 1944; Francis Stuart, right, frolicked with the Nazis in Berlin

Alan Shatter. As the UK, Russia, the US, France and all the other countries that contributed to the Allied war effort remembered VE-Day this week, the Minister had arguably his finest hour.

In the Dail, the Minis-

ter's Amnesty Bill was passed with all-party support. The State admitted that it had been "unduly harsh" in its treatment of those deserters.

This episode ends another sad chapter in our recent past. It also highlights the double standards and hypocrisy we have when it comes to identifying who the real traitors were during the war years.

Take Jim O'Donovan, for instance. He was once a hero. He was the IRA's chief bombmaker during the War of Independence. Both Collins and De Valera would have trusted him as a valued comrade.

But Jim went bad. He regarded both Fianna Fail and Fine Gael as traitors. Jim stayed with the rump of the IRA. He forged links with Nazi Germany, paying three secret visits to Berlin to cement an alliance with Hitler.

Jim looked forward to a Nazi victory. He hid German spies. His home was used to transmit mes-

sages to the Fatherland. Jim was a senior manager in the ESB when he was caught and interned in the Curragh. On his release, he walked straight back to his permanent and pensionable State job.

The writer Francis Stuart also frolicked with the Nazis in Berlin. He made radio broadcasts to Ireland to stir up animosity against the Allies. He, too, was able to resume respectability when he returned home from detention.

Some years ago, President Mary Robinson put a gold torc around his neck to great fanfare from a glittering gathering of Irish artists and writers. This honour signified Stuart was a 'Saoi' – a wise one in the eyes of this State and its intelligentsia.

## GENOCIDE

Stuart was lucky not to get the rope like his buddy Lord Haw Haw. Neither he nor O'Donovan ever repudiated their treasonable war record.

These Quislings never suffered. Unlike John Stout and men like him, Stuart and O'Donovan had powerful friends. They were officer class. They were anti-British. Nazi collaborators got a free pass using that card.

John Stout's story is a reminder of what we tolerated and what we punished. If the Irish Guards had lost, there would be nobody like Alan Shatter – an Irish and Jewish man – around. He would never have existed.

At the infamous Wannsee conference, Ireland's Jews were marked down for destruction as part of the Final Solution.

Jim O'Donovan's Gestapo pals would have seen to that. They were very efficient at genocide.

