

JH: And we spoke about Germany and we spoke about that famous incident in Germany, but I would just like to take you back a step or two and to ask you again. It's been written somewhere that you were the first or second person to train in hotel management at that time in Ireland.

BO'R: Yes, there was one other man whose father owned a hotel in Dublin, its name won't come to me now, but it was in Howth, on the way into Howth, and he was a month or two ahead of me. My father had decided that he would exchange me for a a young German. He came with me to visit the place, first of all, where I was going, which was in Immenstadt, which was in Bavaria. I knew no German at all so when I eventually went out there and got the train and Mrs. Birzle who was the proprietress, greeted me with " You're welcome we are delighted you are here", and I said "oh I'm delighted Mrs. Birzle I didn't know any of you could speak any English." (Speaks German) That was all she knew, that little welcome for me. In about five months I was speaking more German that I could speak in five years studying French, because I had to, I had to speak it. I remember buying a notebook and calling in 'mein gehirn' which is my brain and writing some word down every day so it equals that in German. I was in an old-fashioned hotel in Bavaria where there were three rooms, one was called "der Mittlere Raum", meaning the middle room, the other the Hoch- Volkszimmer the 'high people's' room and the Warren Raum(?). So, it was that kind of country hotel, which tourists came through alright, but by the time I was there, tourists weren't coming so often and the wine list had been let go into disuse. They

still had it, so that when a tourist came he was still presented with the wine list, and he would say, "I'll have that one" and I would go down into the cellars and fill the appropriate empty bottle that was there, whether it was white wine in one barrel and red wine in another. It was good wine anyway but this will show what kind of a hotel it was. There was also an upper room, next to the dining room. There was a place there where there was trout swimming around and you could go in a say, "I'll have that one" and you would put it in a net and bring it up to him.

It was a very interesting hotel and right up and the top of their house there was a room where I used to box with the Birzle children Herman and Oskar and I was very good with the boxing gloves on me. I could defeat either of them (laughing) One day after I had being skiing up the mountain with them and I was pretty exhausted because they were well able to ski and I couldn't, Oskar, because his father was up looking at what we were doing, began his attack on me when I was tired and he really levelled me. I could think of it afterwards as German aggression but I remember picking an appropriate day, one or two days afterwards when I was fresh again giving him a good leathering (laughing)

JH: Can I just ask you, whatever happened to him afterwards? Did he get caught up in the war?

BO'R: He was killed in Stalingrad, that I found when I was on my honeymoon. I called there with Rita and we knocked at the hotel door and Albert came to the door. They were gone to bed and of course I

got a great welcome. They got up and we drank German wine, I forget what it was, at nighttime, he had survived. Oskar, he had been very successful in The Old Ground, everybody liked him. He was slightly anti-Hitler. That was possible when he was in Ireland, I suppose. He is still alive (?). After the war I sent them packages of food, they were very short of food. Now before I go on is this, am I going....

JH: This is perfect, it's absolutely grand because it brings us back. It's all part of the picture. We are interested in that, it's a patchwork quilt we are interested in that. I suppose that part of Germany would have been a Catholic part of Germany?

BOR: Immenstadt in Bavaria very Catholic but the Catholic Church was having a bad time with the government at that stage. The Hitler Youth used to always appear singing their songs when the mass was on a Sunday. I can remember also that there was an exhibition, which was anti-comminterm, which was the anti-Russian communism. The exhibition was anti-Catholic Church really. It was taken from the Russians anti-God situation. The Eucharist in particular was shown as almost a cannibalistic kind of a thing. But I was very fond of the Germans, they were a very nice people. They were caught up in situation, where they seemed to think that they were being denied liberty by the British, and the Americans and the French, that they had no *lebensraum*. That they were pressed, but I remember Herr Birzle saying "we don't want any war come until I show you what happened to me the last time" and we went up into that room where we used to do the boxing and he showed me two big trunks both filled with notes, dud notes, thousands of them. My father told me

that he was... in the first war that he visited Berlin and that he walking Berlin one day, and that a local man from Sixmilebridge who was in the British army came up to him and shook his hand: "James O'Regan from Sixmilebridge". He was delighted he was travelling there with a priest, a Father O' Shea I think it was, and they both had a problem. The Germans didn't want to take money from foreigners because they realised that their money was debased or gone bad. In order to keep going they had to, because neither of them were good German speakers, they pretended they were dummies and that they couldn't speak. They got back alright anyway.

JH: How long did you spend in Germany at that time?

BO'R: Ten months, I was there from the end of the winter, the place when I arrived the place was snowbound. Then for a period everything was slushy, so I was there over Christmas time, but it was my first of a number of training things that I went through. They gave me confidence, although they weren't making me an expert hotelier, or anything like that, at the end of them especially the one in London I knew a lot of things. I was able to apply them in The Falls which already had a very good reputation.

JH: We will come back to The Falls again, very, very definitely. You said you learned a lot from...in all your experiences, you learned in Germany then I think you were also in Switzerland.

BO'R: Well, I was in Switzerland really studying rather than working. In Switzerland I got the idea, which lead to the hotel school in

Shannon, because they are two famous hotel schools in Switzerland. Indeed, I went in the beginning to get a man Wickenhagen who would help to set up the hotel school in Shannon. After a while I got another Swiss who ran it very well and made it such a famous school, that it's at a high level now worldwide. There are a thousand hoteliers spread all over the world running hotels who have come through the Shannon school. Recently Garrett Fitzgerald and de Valera's daughter (?) and the top people from Galway University came there and declared it a University course. So, it's a very important part of Shannon. It's the only airport in the world that has not just a hotel school, but also one that is recognised by the universities as having being first class and they have now agreed to add onto it a course on peace, world peace, which I asked them to do, because it would make it possible for wherever there was a hotel with a manager who had done this extra degree, he could help to establish a peace operation in whichever town he was in. That's the only way it will be done, I believe. So that Shannon now is not only just the world's first free airport but it is all the world's first airport to have a university, recognized hotel college in it, and one that recognises that tourism is only going to survive, if the world gets rid of war.

JH: Can we move onto London then, and your experience in London? What hotel was that in?

BO'R: It was in the Haymarket, it was London's best hotel. It was in the Haymarket it was called The Carlton and the Germans dropped a bomb on it. Knocked it out. My father got me in by bringing me to

Kettner's restaurant in Soho which he had been in. Albert Mayer the owner, no, the manager of Kettner's restaurant. I was having dinner with my father and my father persuaded him to get me a position in the Carlton. Now that's the name of it. ... the Carlton was one of ...the Ritz. The Ritz and Escoffier, who is the great chef, established the Carlton as a great place in London for food. The Prince of Wales who got messed up with Windsor operation that one, used to come there regularly for meals and I was a commis waiter there. I was staying with Albert Mayer whom my father had talked into, not just getting me the job there but getting me to stay in his house as well. I was a lodger with him and I can remember at Christmas time I could hardly get into his house because there were so many gifts being given to him by wine merchants and others who apparently were the suppliers to Kettner's restaurant in Soho. It was a very good restaurant. Now I'm not quite sure where I was in this

JH: That lasted then, that job lasted until how long?

BO'R: That lasted for eight months, and at the end of it, which was.... I gone down to Tilbury and I got a job on the SS Narconda as a waiter or steward. That would have got me out to Australia and after getting the interview there, because I had been working in the Carlton, I was number one. I mean I was in the best restaurant even though I was only a commis waiter really but I was alright as a steward on the SS Narconda. A few days after I came back, delighted that I was going to on this boat, a letter from my father: "Come home as quickly as you can I have rented it, The Falls Hotel for you to run". I meant it flung

me in at the deep end showed me how to write a cheque and so on and left me there.

JH: Had you any inkling that might have happened?

BO'R: I had no idea... no idea that that was in his mind. I knew eventually I was going to run The Old Ground and of course in between being in Germany, Switzerland and in Wales, in the Rock, The Rock Hotel in Wales. I had helped to run The Old Grand in breaks in between. So, I knew where I was going alright but where I was still partly lingering after the idea of doing Law. I'm sorry I didn't.... I'm glad I didn't do that. I would have been hopeless at that.

JH: We'll return to The Falls Hotel now in Co. Clare in about 1937-1938

BO'R: Yes, it was during the war that period and it was my first management job. I knew we were paying £500 a year rental for it, which seemed very little, but I think McNamara had to get out because he was losing too much on it. It had a bohemian atmosphere because Francis while he would have regarded himself as the leading Irishman in Co Clare because he was... the MacNamaras of course are, the past history of Clare says about them even to this day you can still see the nobility on the face of a McNamara.

JH: Exactly yeah

BO'R: My father must have talked him into leasing it, he leased it for five years and at the end of the five years I would have liked to have stayed on there because I felt ...fortunately I wasn't...We didn't have the kind of money that was necessary to buy it from him and I'm glad because I would have missed the airport job.

JH: Can I just ask you about The Falls, it was a long-established hotel, was it?

BO'R: Yes, It was the original home of the MacNamaras. During the troubled times, as we call them, it was used at the end by the Free State troops and there was evidence of that event even. MacNamara then came back and got compensation and he married one of the O'Callaghan-Westropp. She was a woman from Co Clare, she was a very good cook and she ran it very well for him. He ran the bar they had long sessions and a very bohemian group would have come from London. Augustus John was one of them, I was running it without very much knowledge of the bohemian life even though I would have seen some of it in London. I remember Dr. McQuaid writing to me saying that he was going to see the Bishop of Galway and that he heard I was running a place that was beautiful from the doorstep in and that he would come on such and such-a date. I was horrified because I had been supposed to be one of the good boys in Sixmilebridge, that had come from Sixmilebridge to Blackrock and here I was running a place that had quite a... At that time, we had Mrs. Winterbottom staying. I remember the first night she was there the gay boys collected all the hot water bottles and put them in her bed because of her name Winterbottom. (Laughing)Unbelievable!

She had arrived in a sports car with three other men with her. Dr. McQuaid was on his way down, I was relieved when he cancelled his visit. I don't know had he learned what was going on there or not but I got a note from him anyway. He had to change his mind. Anyway, where was I?

JH: Other clientele? Would there have been Irish clientele as well?

BO'R: Oh there were, the American....the German ambassador Hempel was one of those who stayed there. I remember one night the Guards raided and the Guard at the door. I said: "Now look if you are going into the bar I mean I can't do anything about it there is the German ambassador there, there is Conor O'Brien five or six very notable top people".

JH: There was a judge? Judge Lavery was there

BO'R: Oh did I tell you that?

JH: Research...Research?? (Laughing)

BO'R: Oh is that right! "Good night" he said. "Good night".

Another night I don't know was it the same guard or not but I came out and petrol was very difficult to get at that time and I thought it was somebody siphoning petrol and I went to tackle him myself and he ran down the avenue and I ran after him as quick as I could. I caught him up just near the gate my arm around him and it was a

guard. (Laughing) I said: "I'm very sorry", he was snooping of course as to whether he should raid or not. They were good friends of mine.

JH: Were there comments from the local clergy about the goings on in The Falls can you recall?

BO'R: No, it was interesting that there was the nuns' convent on the hill across the river where we could see a spiritual position with all the lights on and another not so spiritual position (Laughing). We were in charge of the fishing of course and I had a young Scottish man working on the accounts for me. He and I got out of the car one day; I said I think I see where they are about to...one who is planning to take the fish out of the pool with a net. I am not aggressive I don't think I'm aggressive but he was aggressive, and of course there was a little fisticuffs between the two of them the man whom was getting reading to take whatever Salmon out of the pool that night alright got the worst of the situation. The following day I was in the chemist shop and the chemist said to me you are going to be in trouble with the gang, for interfering with Guttane (?) I think was the man's name. I said, well I said Tony I can't live under a threat here, we are going to have to walk through the village and face up to this especially if it comes What age was I? About twenty-three. We did run into them. They didn't attack me but they attacked him alright knocked him down and as I bent down to try and rescue him somebody else lifted me back off him. Of course, I was immediately involved in the fracas and I hadn't suffered anything nor had he suffered anything. I don't know should I be putting this on tape or not but he had.. His jaw was broken I was responsible. There was a court case about it and there

was no charges brought against either of us anyway but I can remember it was just a lucky punch that was all it was.

JH: There you were it's the early 1940s, you're manager, very young manager in the Falls Hotel and there are people coming visiting the Falls, people coming from Dublin quite well know people, Can we recall some of those maybe?

BO'R: Yes, well I mentioned Hempel; he was interesting to me of course because having being in Germany. At the time he was there Conor Maguire but I'm not going to be able to recall the names now

JH: Well that's ok, I think there was also a Judge Lavery?

BO'R: Oh yes and there was of course Judge Meredith who came with his beautiful daughter, Brenda Meredith whom I got very fond of. He and his other daughter were there and Mrs. Meredith they were Protestant descendant people, very fine people. I should be able to remember but I can't and this is one of the reasons that I held back when you asked me to talk and I should be able to give you a lot of names.

JH: Well that's ok, but then there was Leydon who came?

BO'R: Right, he didn't come and stop there but he regularly visited Shannon. Not only had he visited but he even rang up on Christmas Day to know how things were going which is an unusual thing for a

civil servant to do which will show how interested (he was) in what was happening.

JH: Was it through The Falls that you made the connection with the St. Stephen's Green club, was that how that happened?

BO'R: Yes well what happened was that a number of the Stephens Green club people asked me when the place closed down in winter will you come and help us to improve the Stephens Green Club and I was only there for about six months during the winter. They gave me a gold cigarette case, I remember getting it from them. I succeeded in improving the £.s.d. as well as the meal, but I was a very hard worker. Always looking at everything, 'tis a pity I can't give you names because of course they were the top people in Ireland. Lomas would have been there he used to play poker very often, and the great painter....

JH: Maurice MacGonigal, Barry Kernoff?

BO'R: His name won't come to me now, but he advised me in regards to the Ladies room, what the pictures that should be shown there? What were the paintings that should be shown there? Dr. Dunne pulled a trick on him, because under his advice I had put... they were copies, one was the copy of the Barmaid at the Folies-Bergère looking over the counter in what was called the hole in the wall. Knowing that I was showing this painter how the thing was done pretending that that he couldn't see us at all "Who is advising the manager on this putting up these awful pictures here?" It's a pity I can't

remember that now for you. It was a place of great... very important Stephen's Green club was. I have a book there, which was written during the Stephens Green. The life of Stephens Green I might give you something out of that later on. If you are interested in it.

NOTES:

1. Speakers on disk:

BO'R: Brendan O'Regan

JH: John Heuston

CO'C: Cian O'Carroll

2. ***** indicates breaks between tracks on the disk

3. This manuscript may contain errors in transcribing from the disk and in the interpretation of the spoken word. For external quotation the text above should be checked against the original recording.