

## FEATURE

# it has to be kept top secret'

*in Derry in 1977 and the undercover orders he took to transfer the base to the British Army*



Navy's base in Derry. Included, from left, are Rev. Gordon Anderson, Rear



Derry's US Navy base which was located at Limavady Road. Note the baseball diamond to the left of the photo.

## Campaign to keep the navy base open

In the middle of the political problems, the city sensed economic problems ahead if the base closed and embarked on an extensive marketing campaign to influence the US Navy to keep the base.

There was good reason to keep the base open. Apart from its contribution to the economy of the city, it had become part of the personality of the city, much more like another suburb than an isolated military base.

I became the key person in the area to be wined and dined and influenced in any way to keep the navy base in Londonderry. The city had some events in the late autumn and invited me and my staff to attend. A local choir always sang, "God Bless America".

The town and its elected officials took a different point of view and decided to fight for their livelihoods by showing how much they loved Americans, how much they needed us. It was important for them to do so for the city's economic welfare, especially with the financially draining troubles going on.

The strategy of the town was to execute a continuous display of acts of endearments to Americans. They wanted to show us how much they respected us, how important we were to Derry, and let us know that no one would ever hurt an American.

was beginning to realise why all the faces were so grim.

The admiral addressed me again: "Take a few days off to discuss all this with your family. We need you there in three or four weeks to take over."

My head was swirling as I walked back to my office. In some ways, I longed to escape from my new prison behind

the heavy wooden desk surrounded by photos from the past. But the Pentagon prison offered a home life. I had to weigh this need for home life against the challenge of command. Taking the family with me to Ireland was dangerous - but it seemed that it was the only option to keep the family together.

## from villains'

doesn't change your mission. Be careful how you word your report. We'll send someone to evaluate your security. That is all, Captain McKeown."

I seemed caught in a no-win game. I was little more than a hatchet man, here to do the navy dirty work of closing down a beloved facility and putting many families out on the streets.

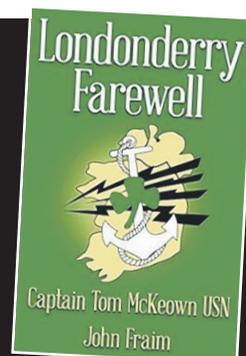
"At the same time, I was a loyal officer in the US Navy with a mission ordered by the president himself. Things were becoming more complicated and it was getting difficult to separate the heroes from the villains in this affair."



Captain Tom McKeown.



Captain Thomas McKeown, commander of the US Navy's communications base in Derry (on left), pictured with Rear Admiral RE Rumble, Deputy Commander in Chief, US Naval Forces, Europe, as they present a memorial plaque to Mayor Hugh Doherty to mark the closure of the US Navy base in Derry.



'Londonderry Farewell', by Captain Thomas McKeown with John Fraim, is available to purchase online.