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Transcript - Dog-Fighting Undercover

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PANORAMA

DOG-FIGHTING UNDERCOVER

Reporter: MANDY McAULEY

RECORDED FROM TRANSMISSION: BBC ONE

DATE: 30:08:07

CHRIS HAMMELL: Release the dogs! MANDY: Dog fighting is brutal, illegal, impossible to expose without penetrating the organised gangs that keep this so-called sport alive. For more than a year the BBC has gained the trust of the dog fighters who breed and match pit bulls to the death.

MAN: He f***ing wrecks them big dogs boy, so he does. Get in underneath 'em and f***ing wreck 'em. We've brought dogs down at f***ing 60lb, he would wreck 'em.

MANDY McAULEY: We were the only link between dog fighting gangs and dangerous dogs on inner city streets.

NORA KELLY: I said there's no way a dog's done that to Nikkita's leg. It was just like a shark had got her leg.

MANDY: And how one little girl's death finally forced the authorities to act.

STEVE: It was on the news that they've seized eight or nine dogs in Liverpool.

MANDY: But now there's no hiding place for some of the most notorious dog fighters in the UK.

MANDY McAULEY: This is a child, Mr Boscomb. Look, his leg was torn down to the bone, chewed right out by a pit bull like the ones you've been breeding.

MANDY: The American pit bull terrier, an explosive cross breed created by dog-fighters to be the ultimate canine gladiator. A brick-like head, powerful jaws and an athletic, whippet-thin body. Tenacious, agile, it is genetically programmed to inflict terrible injuries, as the UK is finding out.

CCTV footage [pit bull attacks dog on leash]

It seems more and more illegal pit bulls are on our streets than ever before. Imagine if this was a child.

RUKHSANA KHAN, pit bull attack victim: It got hold of me and just completely went mad basically. It just started banging me on the floor and just throwing me all around. You wouldn't even think it was a live person in its mouth at the time.

MANDY: Rukhsana Khan was just six years old when she was savaged by a pit bull outside her Bradford school in 1991.

May 1991

NASREEN BI, Rukhsana's aunt: This is where it happened, it came out from over there. The dog came from that way and it got her from there, and it bashed her here and there and here and there and on the railings.

MANDY: One bite was so deep it exposed a lung. She lost half her blood and was left with shattered ribs, missing teeth, and a broken nose. Doctors said Rukhsana's wounds were within an inch of killing her.

What's it like being in the jaws of one of these animals?

RUKSANA: Painful. You don't really know what to suspect actually, it's just... in his jaw, he's going to do whatever it wants to do. You can't stop it. You just have to go along with everything that's happening. You have to go with the pain, the blood and all the injuries afterwards.

MANDY: The attack on Rukhsana provoked a public outcry and was a major factor in the creation of the 1991 Dangerous Dogs Act.

May 1991

JOHN MAJOR Prime Minister, 1990-97 I can tell the House from midnight tonight the import of dogs bred for fighting such as the American pit bull terriers and Japanese Tozers will be banned. Such dogs have no place in our homes. [Applause]

[Video ↵ dog fight] Source: YouTube

MANDY: The Dangerous Dogs Act was designed to outlaw pit bull types as a banned breed, but is it failing? That question needs to be asked on Merseyside. For Liverpool's young criminal class pit bulls are a status symbol. The gang's even post videos on the internet boasting about their dogs. Anyone caught possessing a pit bull will usually have their dog destroyed, but if owners convince the courts their pet

isn't a danger and will be neutered, microchipped, muzzled and leashed in public, only then will they be spared. Rukhsana Khan believed she'd be the pit bull's last child victim & she wasn't!

[NEWS] This is BBC Radio Merseyside A 5-year-old girl has been mauled to death by a pit bull Terrier at this family home on Merseyside has been named as Ellie Lawrenson.

MANDY: It was here on Merseyside in the early hours of New Year's day that the pit bull ripped its way into the public consciousness again with the death of Ellie Lawrenson.

MANDY McAULEY Panorama has been given access to statements made by police and the paramedics who were here at the scene on the night Ellie died. The content is horrific. But if you want to know how seriously pit bulls need to be taken, then you should listen.

Police and Paramedic statements

I walked into the house and there was blood in the hallway. I looked in the front room, and the laminate flooring was covered in blood. I saw a dark coloured suite and a large chair by the window. I saw a girl's body, her head was near the large chair. I covered the child's body with blankets.

MANDY: Christian Duncan is a plastic surgeon at the Alder Hey Children's Hospital in Liverpool. He operates on those children that survive dog attacks, and over the last year he's been kept extremely busy.

CHRISTIAN DUNCAN Consultant Plastic Surgeon Alder Hey Children's Hospital In this hospital we have averaged over the last year approximately one admission to the Accident and Emergency every day.

MANDY: Around 70 of those suffered wounds so serious they underwent plastic surgery, and disturbingly more and more of Christian Duncan's patients are turning out to be very young children.

DUNCAN: We get an increasing number of children between around about the age of one and the age of six.

MANDY: Around a quarter of these children will be victims of pit bulls.

DUNCAN: An American pit bull Terrier, or a pit bull dog can inflict very serious damage on a child. The bite force that's generated is very significant and usually involves puncture wounds and that'll be multiple puncture wounds because there are a lot of teeth involved. The way the injury takes place often involves a certain amount of traction and what happens is you get the teeth puncturing the skin, digging in, and then pulling.

[Video & dog fight] Source: YouTube

MANDY: Somebody is breeding these pit bulls. The question is, who are they and how do they operate? Behind the inner city teenage gangs and their street status symbols is a

supply chain which has its roots in organised dog fighting. A criminal network in a different league to the pseudo gangsters.

Over the years I've reported extensively on Paramilitary violence here in Northern Ireland. The world I'm about to enter is just as dangerous. I'll require specialist help from someone with the skill and training to win these people's confidence, someone they will never suspect. We first met Steve in his home town of Newcastle, an undercover operative he spent many years serving with an elite British Army unit.

Reconstruction

But this time, instead of guns, Steve will be relying on his wits. I would later meet up with him in Northern Ireland because as we reveal, it is a major pit bulls supply route to UK cities like Liverpool, as others have discovered.

STEPHEN PHILPOTT Chief Executive, Ulster Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Northern Ireland is the epicentre of dog fighting in the UK if not Europe. You have two of the biggest dog fighting kennels operating in this country and they are absolutely paramount to the supply of pit bulls over to England.

MANDY: Stephen Philpott and his team have been battling dog fighters for years. There were local successes but something was to happen in April last year which opened the door on this secret world, not just in Northern Ireland, but right across the rest of the UK and Europe.

USPCA surveillance footage

MAN: Let me know if any vehicles are out at the front, okay?

MANDY: The USPCA were tipped off that a pit bull imported into the Irish Republic, where the breed is legal, would be smuggled illegally over the border into Northern Ireland.

PHILPOTT: As that animal was being unloaded, I was satisfied that that dog was a heavily scarred pit bull Terrier.

MANDY: A USPCA team trailed two men to this house in the town of Dungannon. With police backup they raided the property, seizing the smuggled pit bull and discovering three other unlicensed dogs.

USPCA raid footage

PHILPOTT: In a shed we found training equipment, mainly treadmills, mechanised treadmills that I know are used by organised dog fighters to condition their dogs and stamina train their dogs for fighting.

MANDY: But Stephen Philpott wasn't prepared for what happened next. The man whose house he'd raided is an Irish sporting legend.

PHILPOTT: I suddenly thought to myself here's a guy whose picture was up on my kid's bedroom wall, and all along he

was nothing better than a scummy dog fighter.

USPCA raid footage

MANDY: Gerard Cavlan is a Gaelic football star, a half-forward for County Tyrone. He's played in front of 83,000 fans to win the all Ireland final, Gaelic football's version of the FA Cup.

The heavily scarred pit bull seized from Cavlan's house was a finished fighting dog called Cannon Ball, but it wasn't just the capture of Cannon Ball which excited Stephen Philpott, it was the discovery of dog-fighting literature in Cavlan's house. The BBC has been given unique access to the documents discovered in Cavlan's house. They read like a Who's Who of the dog-fighting fraternity. Some of the top fighting gangs in the country are listed here. They have names like Bone Yard Kennels, Prize Fighter and Cavlan's own outfit The Bulldog Sanctuary Kennels. There were also blow by blow accounts of major dog fights in Ireland, the UK and Europe in the last ten years. Some of the dog fighters are even pictured posing with their pit bulls, and children are included in some of the snaps.

PHILPOTT: And the tale at Gerard Cavlan's house showed us that dog fighting was more organised, more lucrative and bigger than we had ever, ever thought possible. This was an absolute Aladdin's cave of material for anyone who now wanted to go and investigate dog fighting.

MANDY: And that's exactly what we wanted to do. Clearly Cavlan had international connections. As we sifted through the box of evidence seized from the football star's home, two names stood out. A Fin called Robert Gonzales, the man named on Cannon Ball's pet passport, and Paul Dunkel, the boss of a pit bull breeding business based outside Helsinki. Posing as a couple, Steve, the undercover operative and I, travelled to Finland to investigate the possibility of buying a fighting pit bull from Paul Dunkel. We found his house hidden away at the end of a long lane surrounded by forest.

STEVE: Hi Paul.

PAUL DUNKEL: Hello. How are you?

MANDY: Dunkel led us on a kennel tour, assuring us his dogs had impeccable fighting credentials. We used secret cameras on this trip, but Dunkel did allow us to use a camcorder. pit bulls are legal in Finland, dog-fighting is not.

DUNKEL: Usually we have about 40 dogs here and right now I guess the exact count is something like 35 or something like that, more or less. If you are searching for a fighting dog, then I suggest that we do some deal like this, that we test him here before you even talk more. This could be a little bit what you are searching for: wild, crazy, active, sporting dog, and he has been in some action, and this is almost a guaranteed he could be something that you are looking for.

STEVE: He's a Tasmanian devil on a lead.

DUNKEL: Hey, he kicks the other dog's ass.

MANDY: Being a Dunkel pit bull can't be much of a life.

DUNKEL: If you put him in a dog-fight he will probably.. no matter if he's in good or bad condition, he will fight from the beginning to the end and probably he will die.

MANDY: As pit bull after pit bull was introduced it was clear we were standing in the middle of a dog-fighting factory.

DUNKEL: She bites hard and she has good skills. From all our dogs, she has the most biting power. It's like crushing bones ability.

MANDY: Then out of the blue came the link to Cannon Ball, the pit bull seized at Gerard Cavlan's home. Dunkel told us he knew Robert Gonzales, the name on Cannon Ball's pet passport. In fact Gonzales had tested Cannon Ball against one of Dunkel's pit bulls. Dogfighters call it a roll.

DUNKEL: Cannon Ball was the first time beaten up about 20 metres down there and Bobby Gonzales came with his friends and he had Cannon Ball, it was really in peak condition, and he said: "Hey, let's take a roll with Cannon Ball and Tistro.¿ I said: "Hey, what the heck, let's try.¿ Then we had a roll here and it was really devastating for Bobby Gonzales.

MANDY: No wonder Cannon Ball was found to be heavily scarred when he was captured by the USPCA. But back to the business of choosing a fighting dog.

DUNKEL: The most good choices would be for example Nipper. He's a super dog and he is already rolled. He is a good one.

MANDY: Nipper could be ours for 2000 euros. Dunkel also offered to export the potentially lethal pit bull. We wanted to test the UK ban on importing dogs bred for fighting. We told Dunkel we'd be back in a few months to buy Nipper.

It's been about an hour since we left Dunkel Kennels and I still quite believe what I saw in there. Some of the dogs he showed us he said had been retired because they'd had to have all of their teeth extracted because they'd got damaged in fights, or they had got broken on some of their toys ¿ which were these boulders. It was just incredible. Forget boulders, this is what happens when pit bulls use their teeth to chew on a child.

DUNCAN: This is a patient who was admitted almost a year ago exactly, and she was attacked by a pit bull. There's a sort of a crescent here, and this crescent represents the bite pattern of the animal with probably a series of bites actually, and a series of wounds characterised by tearing in this direction, and I can tell you, although it's not possible to do with a picture, but if one were to stick a finger into this wound, for example, it would come out this wound.

MANDY: Dog-fighting was banned in the UK in 1835, but all it did was force dog-fighting activity underground. Today they take place in pits like this. Dog-fighting is extremely brutal,

but there's a lot more to it than simply forcing two pit bulls into a ring like this one and waiting for them to tear each other to pieces. The orgy of violence unfolds in a highly controlled environment. For instance, each ring must be at least 15x15 foot and carpeted, and you've got these marks called 'scratch lines' which identify each dog's corner. When you hear that a dog has been 'scratched', it means it's been released from behind these lines to fight. Matches are governed by a strict set of rules. There are 19 in all and each offers a unique insight into how underground fights are conducted. For years dogfighters have tried to keep them secret, but this copy was seized during the raid on Gerard Cavlan's house.

Take rule 5, the pre-match washing of the dogs. It reads like a bizarre ritual. Both dogs to be washed in the same warm water. Both dogs to be rinsed in clean water taken from the same container. One kennel in particular appears time after time in the match reports found in Cavlan's home. They're one of the most notorious gangs of dog-fighters in the UK, indeed in Europe, and they're based here in the town of Tanderagee in County Armagh. They're the Farmers' Boys.

STEPHEN PHILPOTT Chief Executive, Ulster Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals The Farmers' Boys are absolutely huge. They're massive. They're the Manchester United of the Dog-fighting world. Anywhere you go they're talked about with the utmost respect. Over the last 25 years they have established training partners in inner city Britain and they're now selling their dogs to those people in those cities: Glasgow, Edinburgh, Manchester, Liverpool, London.

MANDY: This is London and the sort of place where Farmers' Boys dogs can end up. Police seized 21 pit bulls from this house in Northolt last November. Some were described as pit bull royalty in court, and among the paperwork discovered ζ this pedigree certificate.

LISA HARVEY Former pit bull breeder The Farmers' Boys, they are like very well known, very popular guys in the breeding in the pit bull, definitely.

MANDY: Ricardo Byfield and his wife Lisa were gaoled and banned from owning dogs for life, but Lisa is out now and clearly still involved with dogs. She says she's rearing them for a friend.

But how were we going to infiltrate an international dog-fighting ring? We'd seen pictures of the Farmers' Boys but making contact with the gang wasn't going to be easy. Our intelligence showed us that dog shows in the Irish Republic provided a safe meeting place for fighters. pit bulls are legal here. Then we got lucky. We came across an advert in a local paper for a dog show here at Castle Bellingham, just across the border.

Secret filming

It was a long shot but it worked. Among ordinary members of the public we found some Farmers' Boys.

BARRISKILL: They're the targets we're looking for.

MANDY: Steve had spotted the godfather of the Farmer's Boy ¿ Stephen Barriskill. He caught his attention by talking about our recent trip to Dunkel Kennels.

STEVE: I just moved over from England then and I was looking to get another dog. I've just ordered one there now so it should be ready to go.

BARRISKILL: In what way is it bred?

STEVE: In Finland.

BARRISKILL: In Finland?

STEVE: Aye.

BARRISKILL: There's some good stuff out there so there is. I haven't been there but a couple of my mates have been there.

MANDY: Legend has it that Barriskill imported the first pit bull into Northern Ireland in the 1980s when the dogs were still legal. The Dangerous Dogs Act was meant to stamp out pit bulls as a breed, but dog-fighting still thrives attracting some very dangerous people as the USPCA has discovered.

PHILPOTT: Sledgehammer attacks on our properties, arson attacks on our properties, and on numerous occasions these people just steal the dogs straight back off us again. It's a very, very, very difficult world to bring to an end.

MANDY: A world our undercover operative was being drawn into. Steve's exchange at Castle Bellingham was enough to get him invited to another show on the Farmers' Boys home turf in Northern Ireland. pit bulls are banned here but the gang openly paraded fighting dogs among legitimate breeds, and Stephen Barriskill had a surprise in store.

BARRISKILL: Could you do me a big favour today here?

STEVE: Yeah?

BARRISKILL: Could you judge the dogs ¿ pit bulls?

STEVE: I don't see why not, as long as you keep us right, like.

BARRISKILL: Well there'll be a ring steward in with you, you know. We're showing our own dogs.

MANDY: What was Steve supposed to do, it had to be a test. But would he pass?

BARRISKILL: Right you see in this class here?

STEVE: Aye.

BARRISKILL: Staff dogs and bitches, and then you have a small type Staff.

STEVE: Yeah.

BARRISKILL; Well that's a show type Staff.

STEVE: Yeah.

BARRISKILL; That's the Irish Staff.

STEVE: Yeah.

BARRISKILL: American Staff dogs and American Staff bitches, that's just slang for pit bulls.

STEVE: Yeah, yeah.

BARRISKILL: Well, now, if you're going to be judging, I'll not be seen talking to you. It would be better if you stayed away from me. If you know what I mean.

STEVE: Aye.

BARRISKILL: In case you put any of my dogs up. (laugh)

MANDY: Barriskill could relax. Whatever happened, the Farmers' Boys would take away the top prizes that day.

LOUD SPEAKER: American Staff dogs.

STEVE: Is this small Staffies or...?

BARRISKILL: No, this is American pit bull dogs.

MANDY: First up was a Farmer's Boy with his fighting dog 'Bucky'.

STEVE: How long have you had him?

FARMER'S BOY: Three years.

STEVE: Good dog?

FARMER'S BOY: Aye.

STEVE: Game boy?

FARMER'S BOY: Oh aye, He's been well tested.

STEVE: Yeah?

FARMER'S BOY: So he has. Definite. Few chunks out him there now but..

STEVE: Aye, yeah. All healed up, yeah?

FARMER'S BOY. Yeah, there's another chunk out of the f***ing right leg there. He f***ing wrecks them big dogs boy so he does. He gets in underneath 'em and f***ing wrecks 'em so he does. We've brought dogs down f***ing 60lb and he'd wreck 'em.

MANDY: Next up was another Farmer's Boy, or should that be a Farmer's Girl?

STEVE: What's his line?

GIRL: He's Farmer's Boy with a touch of Chinaman.

STEVE: How long have you had him? Have you had him from a pup?

GIRL: He's Stevie's dog.

STEVE: Oh is he?

GIRL: Yeah.

MANDY: You will be getting a prize then, but one of our biggest prizes of the day was meeting this man, Farmer's Boy Chris Hammell. He had actually watched Cannon Ball fight in Finland with the footballer Gerard Cavlan.

CHRIS HAMMELL: Have you seen Cannon Ball fight, like?

STEVE: Yeah.

CHRIS HAMMELL: F***ing heavy mouth there, but he's a small dog like but he was f***ing eating the chest out but the big dog just came back on him, just finished him then.

MANDY: Steve got his reward for handing out most of the prizes to the Farmers' Boys. Barriskill invited him to join them for a drink after the show. If the judging was a test, Steve had not only passed but he'd started to earn his place in the Farmers' Boys fold.

BARRISKILL: There's a pub in Tandragee we're all going for a drink in tonight called The Paddock. You're welcome to come down.

STEVE: That's great mate.

BARRISKILL: We're down there from 8 o'clock. There'll be a whole lot of dog men there.

MANDY: The Paddock is the Farmers' Boys pub of choice. Located in Tandragee's high street, Steve met the Farmers' Boys there on many subsequent occasions, invariably to hear Barriskill hold court.

BARRISKILL: It's been going on round Tandragee for that many f***ing years, you know what I mean? The inner circle of the game is for serious people, you know what I mean? We're into breeding our own and our own line and all, you know what I mean? It's now accepted as a European line.

STEVE Undercover reporter What it came down to was that the Farmers' Boys Kennel, as they call themselves, was the biggest supplier within Europe for fighting American pit bull Terriers. Their main buyers at the minute is the Asian community from Birmingham. They could buy up to 20 dogs a month, and they're buying them in pup form and bringing them up themselves, or they're buying the dogs at 2, 2 ½ year old ready for fighting.

BARRISKILL: We're into going over and fighting the f***ing Germans in Holland and one thing or another, know what I mean? That's what we are into. We were the first people ever to f***ing fight dogs out on the continent, know what I mean? That's the direction we want to go in, becoming like a world force.

MANDY: The Farmers' Boys had built their name on keeping outsiders out.

BARRISKILL: That's why we have a good reputation, you know what I mean? We don't let people in on us easy.

MANDY: But that's just what they've done. Now Steve needed to buy a pit bull. It would give him credibility with the Farmers' Boys, but we also wanted to find out, despite a ban, how easy it would be to smuggle a fighting dog into the UK. That meant a return to Paul Dunkel in Finland. Since our last visit six months before, Dunkel's pit bull business had been doing well.

Secret filming

BARRISKILL: We run now one of the biggest dog supply business in the whole of Finland.

STEVE: Yeah?

BARRISKILL: Yeah, and fastest growing.

MANDY: Dunkel took us up into the woods to see Nipper again. The dog is descended from Little Killer, a Texan fighting pit bull legend.

BARRISKILL: Here we have one super dog. Say hello to Nipper. He is a really strong built one.

STEVE: But we don't put pit bull down on the passport though, do we.

BARRISKILL: No, no. No, no.

STEVE: That's okay, yeah.

BARRISKILL: There is no... nothing that connects the pit bull that you can use, and I suggest that you really like stick to the plan. I mean in every corner, that even if you are walking in the United Kingdom or England where I guess it's not allowed to have unregistered pit bulls, you just say that this is a Boxer Retriever mix, I bought it from Finland, from Paul Dunkel. That's very easy.

MANDY: Then it was back to the house where Dunkel and his wife, Jonna, talked us through how to illegally import a fighting pit bull into a country like the UK. It seemed like second nature to them.

BARRISKILL: All the documents, the legal documents, doesn't have anything to do with pit bulls or fighting dogs or whatever. Those documents are totally legal. They are official and legal. There is no problem with that.

STEVE: Is he chipped already, yeah?

Jonna: Yes, he is chipped already. There is the microchip number.

STEVE: Yeah, the bar-code.

Jonna: Yes, and there is the breed, the official breed.

STEVE: Boxer-Labrador.

Jonna: Yes. This is the previous vaccinations but now we have this new EU passport which is the one that he has to have. And then this is the paper that you shouldn't keep with the other paper.

(Laughter)

STEVE: Yeah.

Jonna: This is the registration certificate.

MANDY: This is the only document that proves Nipper is 100% American pit bull. It should impress the Farmers' Boys but the Dunkels warned us to keep it hidden.

Jonna: We always do it like that. It's safer. Well, of course the dog is what it is. Papers or no papers. But the fact is that we breed only pure bred American pit bull Terriers.

BARRISKILL: Are you paying now?

STEVE: Yeah.

BARRISKILL: How much are you paying?

STEVE: How much do you want?

BARRISKILL: As much as possible.

(laughter)

But I remember that we talked about 2000 euros, was it?

STEVE: Yeah, I think it was 2000 euros. (handing over the cash)

BARRISKILL: Yeah, thank you very much. Everything will be okay and legal and keep a.. I don't mean keep a low profile, but don't talk to all your friends.

STEVE: No.

MANDY: Mission accomplished. We'd bought Nipper and would test the UK ban on importing fighting dogs later. But while we were in Finland we also wanted to visit the other man named on the paperwork found in Gerard Cavlan's house ¿ Robert Gonzales.

ROBERT GONZALES: So, what brings you to Finland?

STEVE: Well we came over, we ordered a dog.

GONZALES: Ah, who's helping you?

STEVE: Over here?

GONZALES: Yeah.

STEVE: Paul Dunkel.

GONZALES: Oh, okay, you know what's the worst thing with Dunkel dogs?

STEVE: Yeah?

GONZALES: They're man-biters.

STEVE: It wasn't until I joined the Farmers' Boys, you know the Farmers' Boys?

GONZALES: Yeah.

STEVE: Yeah, that they told me about you.

GONZALES: Right, okay.

STEVE: Once Gonzales had checked our dog-fighting credentials he seemed happy to talk about Cannon Ball, the pit bull seized from Gerard Cavlan.

GONZALES: He's the strongest dog...

STEVE: He is, yeah.

GONZALES: ... people have seen.

STEVE: A real big head.

GONZALES: He will just walk and grab you, pick you up and put you in the corner and finish you.

STEVE: Yeah. No, it's just a shame that they've got hold of him.

GONZALES: What can you do? That was very, very bad luck.

STEVE: Is Gerard keeping you informed on what's happening?

GONZALES: Yeah. I just talked with him a week ago.

MANDY: Gerard Cavlan's legion of fans had no idea their hero has more than Gaelic football on his mind. But we wanted to hear about Cavlan's secret dog-fighting life from the horse's mouth. So through Bobby Gonzales we made him an offer. If Cavlan wanted the evidence to disappear, Steve would steal Cannon Ball back from the authorities. Half an hour after Steve put the phone down to Gonzales, Cavlan bit.

CAVLAN: Tell me, is this a big job, is it? Will it be hard to do?

STEVE: What, to get it away from there?

CAVLAN: Yeah.

STEVE: I don't think it'll be big as what you'd think, like to be honest.

Secret recording 22nd March 2007

CAVLAN: I'd like to get him towards the end of next week if at all possible. My court's... my date's on the 23rd April.

STEVE: Right, so you need it gone for then like.

CAVLAN: Need it gone as soon as possible more or less cos if he's not there, there's no case. I can meet you any time.

MANDY: There he is! There he is now!

STEVE: Standby, standby.

MANDY: Cavlan was more widely travelled than we had imagined. He admitted visiting dog-fighters in Holland and confirmed he'd been to Finland to watch Cannon Ball fight.

Secret filming

STEVE: Did you match over there like?

CAVLAN: No, we just went over.. we went over to Cannon Ball's match you see.

STEVE: Oh, how many were there?

CAVLAN: There was 3 or 4 matches on that day, it was like a convention.

MANDY: The footballer also admitted, despite his looming court case, that he was still involved in keeping fighting dogs.

CAVLAN: Everything's tucked away like, out of the road.

STEVE: Aye.

CAVLAN: Still have a dozen or 15 dogs like.

STEVE: What's the story, anyway? Where is the spot? Is it just outside Belfast?

CAVLAN: Well, we'll go back and I'll show you mate, you can see it from the hill. It's in a place called Palace Barracks.

STEVE: Palace Barracks?

CAVLAN: Yeah, which is an army camp.

[On the road]

STEVE: So you're happy enough that once you get old

Cannon Ball out you can...

CAVLAN: If we get him shifted no bother, he'll never be seen again.

MANDY: Steve drove Cavlan to a country park which overlooked the barracks. Our cameramen were hidden in undergrowth.

STEVE: I don't know if we'll get a view from here, but...that's the place there, see? All that is one camp.

CAVLAN: Yeah.

STEVE: And that's where he'd get exercised there.

CAVLAN: In that yellow place?

STEVE: Yeah. Have a look through, see if you can see anything. Might have to just adjust them (binoculars) a wee bit. Are you seeing?

CAVLAN: He gets exercised in that five-a-side pitch?

STEVE: Yeah, yeah.

MANDY: Then it turned out kidnapping Cannon Ball was not a new concept to Cavlan.

CAVLAN: We had planned to go see him.

MANDY: Yeah.

CAVLAN: And I had boys come in, as soon as I drove out of the place, they were going to drive in and lift him and go, but it never came off.

MANDY: We didn't kidnap Cannon Ball. We never intended to. Cavlan duly appeared in court on the 23rd April.

Secret filming. September 2006

He pleaded guilty to possession of a pit bull type, but the court heard that Cavlan was an innocent who had collected Cannon Ball as a favour for a friend. The footballer walked free with a fine, a five year ban on keeping Terrier type dogs, and ordered to pay costs. On appeal the courts reduced the costs and lifted the ban on owning dogs.

Mr Cavlan, Mandy McAuley from the BBC. I want to ask you some questions. Mr Cavlan, why was the court told that you knew nothing about pit bulls? Mr Cavlan, that's a lie. That's a lie, isn't it. You're an international dog-fighter. You've been travelling to matches across Europe watching animals rip each other apart. How do you think your fans will feel when they realise what you've been doing and that you've been involved in animal cruelty? How do you think the authorities will think.... (Cavlan beats a hasty retreat and makes getaway in car) when everybody realises you've got fighting dogs stashed across the country?

Cavlan may lead a double life but let's get back to the men whose whole life it is to fight dogs, the Farmers' Boys. In the weeks before Christmas Steve met them again at The Paddock. The gang had just won a dog fight.

Secret filming

This is Tom Bell. He is Stephen Barriskill's right hand man and the breeding backbone of the Farmers' Boys.

STEVE: [in pub] You got on alright yesterday then?

BELL: We won in 26 minutes.

STEVE: Long enough like, ain't it?

BELL: Well f***, that's a quick one. That was quick enough, 26 minutes.

MANDY: Then the godfather himself, Stephen Barriskill turned up.

STEVE: Did you make any money yesterday?

BARRISKILL: No, I hadn't a lot of money on it. Some of the other boys had a lot on. I'm not really a gambler.

STEVE: (laugh) Turned the atmosphere a bit bad at the end, yeah.

BARRISKILL: It's just pure sport for me, you know.

STEVE: Aye. And were they injured bad or...?

BARRISKILL: Our bitch wasn't.

BELL: F***ing, a couple of boys from Liverpool were there, and I think they had 1,000 euros each on our dog.

STEVE: On your dog?

BELL: Aye. It was lucky enough to have won like.

MANDY: There was also news of a forthcoming fight hosted by the Farmers' Boys.

BELL: It's 100%. It's a new place that I'm going to use so it'll be their honour.

STEVE: So you're going to host it like.

BELL: It's the house right beside it, yeah.

STEVE: But are you going to host it... Is it your match to host like?

BELL: Oh it's me hosting it, aye.

MANDY: Two days before the fight, Barriskill rang with the news we'd been waiting for. Steve had been invited, security

would be very tight, even on the morning of the fight Steve didn't know where he was going, or who would be there.

Reconstruction

Steve would be picked up in a transit van from The Paddock Bar that evening. From there he would be taken to a secret location, a ramshackle barn on land outside Tanderagee owned by Tom Bell. The Farmers' Boys call it 'The Party House'. It was an ideal venue for a dog fight. It's also where the gang have been breeding prime stock. We were convinced Steve would be frisked so decided not to take secret cameras to film this dog fight.

MANDY: Who was in there?

STEVE: Oh there was people from Liverpool, people from Middlesbrough. The Scousers seemed to be putting big bets on. The Scousers are real big into it like, just for the money side of it.

MANDY: Would they have been putting hundreds on do you think?

STEVE: Yeah, 2,500.

MANDY: They put 2,500 on the match?

STEVE: Yeah.

MANDY: Between them, yeah?

STEVE: No, that was just one person. It was medieval. The blood started probably was in the first... probably was in the first two minutes.

MANDY: And what kind of injuries were these dogs be sustaining?

STEVE: Deep puncture wounds from the dogs' teeth, and I saw the puncture injury hitting like vital arteries, like veins and they must have been real pumping.

MANDY: Pumping blood?

STEVE: Yeah, pumping blood. When the dogs were hitting the Perspex side of the wall, then they were leaving these big smears down the wall, big smears on the carpet.

Seven weeks after this fight Ellie Lawrenson was killed

MANDY: Ellie's grandmother, Jackie Simpson, was also injured during the attack by a pit bull called Ruben. Her son, Kiel Simpson, Ruben's owner, was gaoled for eight weeks in May after admitting owning the illegal pit bull Terrier. He served four weeks. Simpson said he bought the dog from a man in pub and now feels morally responsible for Ellie's death. The court was told Ruben had immeasurable bite, strength and shake, and was one of the most powerful pit bulls a police expert had ever seen.

Source: Merseyside Police

In the aftermath of Ellie's death, with moral panic about pit bulls in full flow, police mounted raids. But what was the impact on the Merseyside man who had attended the Farmers' Boys dog fight? One of them was a man called Mick. As the father of one of his associates explained, Mick simply shipped his pit bulls to Spain.

Secret filming

ASSOCIATE: Well Mick's been getting them away, bit by bit, you know.

STEVE: Yeah. Mick's over in Spain now is he?

ASSOCIATE: Mick, yeah, he was over here a week ago. Mick's got loads of room over there you know, apparently.

STEVE: Is he in Malaga or somewhere like that then?

ASSOCIATE: Some little place, he's building a thing there, he's building something there, and it's not like a tourist attraction, it's where you just said right by Malaga. It's nice and quiet, you never have a problem there, you know. Mick's been backwards and forwards nearly all the time 'til he got his dogs clear, you know. They were going over there with f***ing vans, mini-busses and everything full of dogs.

MANDY: For most of us, Ellie's death came out of the blue. It seemed like a freak accident. But in the months before Ellie died, the writing was already on the wall in Merseyside. pit bulls had been regularly making their horrific mark here. Eight year old Nikkita Douglas was attacked by a pit bull in a park near her home 7 months before Ellie Lawrenson died. The bite just missed a main artery. The wound was so bad, Nikkita had to undergo extensive plastic surgery.

NORA KELLY Nikkita's grandmother She was lying on her stomach and her dad asked me did I want to see Nikkita's leg. Thinking it was just going to be a bite, I said yes. As soon as he pulls the surgical cloth from Nikkita's leg, I had to reach over Nikkita's bed and get a bowl, because I was literally sick, and I cried and cried and cried and said there's no way a dog's done that to Nikkita's leg. It was just like a shark had got her leg. I couldn't talk to her because all I was doing was crying. I couldn't answer her questions. All she kept saying to me: "Nan, why did the dog pick me? Why?¿ How can you explain to an 8-year-old child when I don't know the answer of it.

MANDY: It was Christian Duncan who operated on Nikkita. For him the 1991 Dangerous Dogs Act has made no difference. For surgeons it's been business as usual for the last 15 years.

CHRISTIAN DUNCAN Consultant Plastic Surgeon Alder Hey Children's Hospital There is evidence in the medical literature that the rate of dog bites, and in fact the type of dogs that engage in dog bites or cause dog bites, hasn't actually changed pre 1991 by comparison with post 1991 when the Dangerous Dogs Act came in. So I think it's reasonable to

say that not enough was done 15 years ago, let along what we're doing now.

MANDY: How many pit bulls do you think still live in your area?

NORA: I'd say a good few.

MANDY: Ten or twenty?

NORA: Maybe more.

MANDY: In your estate?

NORA: On our estate, yeah, maybe more.

MANDY: American pit bulls?

NORA: American pit bulls.

MANDY: And have you informed the police? Have you informed the authorities that there are maybe 20 pit bulls living on your estate?

NORA: Yes.

MANDY: And what do they say?

NORA: Well they mustn't be proper pit bulls if they've still got them.

MANDY: Has the police ever followed up any of your calls?

NORA: No.

MANDY: Has anybody ever come out to identify the breed?

NORA: No. After Nikkita's attack the authorities should have lifted all the pit bulls then, not wait for a child to be killed. If they would have done that, I really believe that Ellie Lawrenson would still be alive today.

MANDY: Over in Northern Ireland the Farmers' Boys also knew the climate had changed. Steve rang Tom Bell to see how he was reacting to Ellie's death.

BELL: The phone hasn't stopped today ever.

Secret recording

STEVE: Aye, there's some shit hitting the fan like, isn't there.

BELL: F***ing deadly, isn't it.

STEVE: Aye. What about the guys in Liverpool mate, is it... ?

BELL: I haven't... there's no one's been answering their phone. Stevie's been ringing 'em but no-one's answered their phone.

STEVE: It was on the news that they've seized 8 or 9 dogs in Liverpool.

BELL: Holy f***. I'm going to thin out a few, get rid of some dogs maybe tonight.

STEVE: Aye.

Secret filming

BELL: You know.. keep a few small ones just. I could do with a place, if you knew anywhere would keep one dog for me?

STEVE: Is he alright with people like is he?

BELL: Oh he's dead on with people, aye. Just be on the safe side, keep him away from children! (laugh) F***ing hell, keep them all away from children. To get another child dead, that'd be the f***ing next of it.

Secret filming

MANDY: But Bell would soon have his own problems. His party house was raided a few days later. A lifetime of breeding the ultimate fighting dog looked to have disappeared overnight. Twenty-eight pit bulls were seized and taken away in a convoy of council and USPCA vans to be destroyed.

STEPHEN PHILPOTT Chief Executive, Ulster Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals For 30 years the USPCA have asked for the public to give us information on organised dog fights. Where are these dogs kept? We never got it. But one thing happened that was to change that forever - the death of Ellie Lawrenson started our phones ringing and they've never stopped ringing since.

MANDY: Stephen Barriskill had a cynical take on the party house raid and Ellie's death.

BARRISKILL: They can basically do what they f***ing like. I mean, this is supposed to be a free democratic... free like, you know what I mean? We're f***ing over fighting in Iraq for democracy like and we haven't got it at home. You would never think they just waited for that wee girl or something, you know what I mean, or something like that, it's disgusting that they're capitalising on this wee girl being killed. This is basically a f***ing English inner city problem.

MANDY: A problem his gang had contributed to by selling dogs to just those cities. But despite the raids, it was clear the Farmers' Boys had no intention of giving up.

BARRISKILL: Things'll come out you know, but I've been through this before and at the end of the day it's not a f***ing hanging offence. All we can do is weather the storm, but in the meantime, we'll keep an eye for matches in Holland and different things coming up and f***ing do that.

MANDY: With fighting in the UK on hold, some Farmers' Boys were pining for action. No problem for the international dog fighter though. You just hop on a plane to another country.

This time it was Finland, and Bobby Gonzales was the host.

Secret filming

He'd organised a night of dog fighting to which the Farmers' Boys were invited. The first Farmer Boy down the steps was Gary Adamson from Teesside. We'd met him before at the Tanderagee Dog fight. Farmer's Boy Chris Hammall was also game. He'd travelled from Northern Ireland. Next day Gonzales conducted a tour of his yard, located in the woods behind his home. Many of the dogs they would see here would fight later that night, and at least one would die.

Secret filming

All of the fights took place here in Gonzales' barn in a specially constructed pit.

STEVE: The actual ring was brand new when we went into it. It had just been built the day before. It was fresh, it was all clean wood. There wasn't a mark on it. Probably just by about five to three the whole ring was just blood stained.

MANDY: Steve tried to film the fights with a conventional camera, but Bobby Gonzales had other ideas.

GONZALES: Oh you can't do that.

STEVE: Oh, Bobby!

GONZALES: No.

STEVE: No?

GONZALES: No.

STEVE: Not just on the dogs?

GONZALES: You can't do it like that, no, too risky. Okay...

Secret filming

GONZALES: The little guy, he's an outside job, you know.

MANDY: Fight one was a roll between two ten month old pups.

STEVE: It's bred pure through the blood that they know how to fight straightaway. And the first fight that we seen which was the young pups, it was a shock to know that young dogs would be able to do that.

MANDY: As the evening progressed, the dogs got older, bigger and the clashes more violent.

STEVE: The dogs clash like a steam train hitting the wall. You can hear it, you can hear the bone crunching. The heavier the dog, the more the crash; a really significant noise of bone on bone. The sounds are quite graphic, you can hear teeth on teeth as the dogs are chewing at each other's mouths and gums and lips. And if the dogs go onto the legs,

you can hear teeth crunch on bones and rubbing off bones into the skin, ripping sounds. You know that once you hear the sound, within seconds you'll see the blood.

MANDY: After a fight, some pit bulls received crude first aid. But for the more seriously injured the dogfighters used medical kits.

STEVE: The medical kits that these guys were using were pretty similar to what a paramedic would use. Certainly similar to trauma packs that would be used in combat situations. They range from all the drugs that are available to the IV sets and shock relief.

MANDY: Then came the final fight of the evening. It was between two pit bulls which were actually smaller than the dog which killed Ellie Lawrenson.

STEVE: It was a very heavy dogfight, both dogs weighing in at 51-52lbs. Hammy, from the Farmers' Boys, agreed to referee the final fight, probably the most horrific fight.

CHRIS HAMMEL: Right boys, ready? Release the dogs!

STEVE: That fight lasted 45 minutes and there wasn't a letup for the 45 minutes.

MANDY: As the fight wore on the ring became increasingly covered in blood and slowly but surely one of the dogs started to weaken. But it wasn't its opponent which moved in for the kill.

STEVE: Bobby Gonzales lifted the dog and took it to a side building; put a crocodile clip onto its tail and a crocodile clip onto its ear and threw a bucket of water over the dog and then plugged it to the main electricity system to kill it. The first that we knew that there was something up was that all the lights in the barn went off. But it hadn't worked because it had fused. The dog was near dead, but not quite complete, so he took it to the house to finish the job.

MANDY: Back inside his house Gonzales didn't seem to be too upset at electrocuting the dog which had just given its all for him. It's death had freed up what he callously called 'chain space'.

GONZALES: What a night!

STEVE: Cheers mate. Good night, cheers mate. That was ah....

GONZALES: Finally got one chain space.

STEVE: It's not bad sometimes to just thin them out like, is it?

GONZALES: Yeah, this summer I'll get rid of most of them. I'd be happy if I just have four or five good match dog.

MANDY: Three weeks ago we caught up with Gonzales outside a restaurant near his home. For our safety we had warned Finish police we were going to confront him.

Mr Gonzales, my name is Mandy McAuley, I'm a reporter with the BBC. I want to ask you about illegal dog-fighting. You've been holding illegal dogfights at your home in Finland. Mr Gonzales, maybe this'll jog your memory. This is a picture of you Mr Gonzales, on your knees in a blood stained ring, goading two ten month old pups on to go in for the kill. Are you proud of that, Mr Gonzales? Why do you do it, Mr Gonzales? Do you get a....

Then the Finnish police arrested him for animal cruelty.

Do you enjoy watching animals suffer? What about the animal that you hooked up to the electricity, Mr Gonzales? You poured a bucket of water over it and you watched while it died. Are you proud of that, Mr Gonzales?

With Merseyside dogfighters like Mick exporting pit bulls to elude capture, you might conclude that in the current climate it's not the best time to import a fighting dog into the UK. But you'd be wrong. It's shockingly easy, despite a ban.

JOHN MAJOR: (replay) The import of dogs bred for fighting such as the American pit bull Terriers will be banned.
[Applause]

MANDY: We visited the Dunkels to arrange for Nipper, our pit bull, to travel to the UK via Dublin. Other pit bulls the Dunkels had sold and exported to dogfighters had been doing well in the months since we had last met them.

Secret filming

Jonna DUNKEL: Recently we had some very good results from Sweden and one of our dogs has been winning now he is a two time winner, so that's really good.

MANDY: Nipper would be travelling on a Dunkel doctored EU pet passport claiming he was a Boxer/Labrador mix.

Jonna: If somebody questions it, then you have to be confident and say... you know: "Shut the f*** up. He is a Boxer/Labrador mix."

MANDY: Nipper was loaded into the aircraft without a hitch. He travelled first from Finland to Frankfurt. A change of planes and then on to Dublin. The Irish Republic is a backdoor into the UK for fighting dogs. pit bulls are legal here, and according to our dog-fighting contacts it would be easy to get Nipper into the country. That's exactly what happened. We weren't questioned once about Nipper's true breed or background, even though he had fighting scars on his backside and front legs. Once we'd overcome some bureaucratic hurdles, it was just a simple matter of popping Nipper into a van and driving him North into Northern Ireland and the UK. It's been a long journey but we're about to cross the border from the Irish Republic into the UK. Bar a few bureaucratic hiccups it's gone very smoothly, in fact I can't believe just how easy it is to import a top fighting dog into the UK.

Mr Dunkel, my name is Mandy McAuley, I'm a reporter with the BBC. I want to ask you why you've been exporting

fighting pit bulls across Europe on false papers. We have been secretly filming you Mr Dunkel. You train pit bulls Mr Dunkel and you sell them to the highest bidder. Do you remember Nipper? You sold Nipper to the BBC on false papers. Mr Dunkel, you told us he was a pit bull. You put down on the papers that he was a Labrador. (rapping on car window) Mrs Dunkel, I want to speak to you. It's Mandy McAuley from the BBC. Mrs Dunkel, why have you been exporting fighting pit bulls across Europe? Mrs Dunkel, we have you filmed walking around your dog-fighting factory. That's what it is, isn't it Mrs Dunkel? It's a dog-fighting factory. Why won't you speak to me? Do you remember telling us that...

Jonna: I've never seen you in my life. Go away now.

MANDY: You saw me last week Mrs Dunkel.

Jonna: Go away. This is not legal.

MANDY: We secretly filmed you. We have been secretly filming you for a year.

Jonna This is not legal! Get the camera away here.

MANDY: The police van drove Jonna Dunkel away. She and her husband, like Bobby Gonzales, face a maximum of two years in prison for animal cruelty. As for the Farmers' Boys, they too kept quiet when we approached them. The USPCA and the Finnish authorities will be following up on our findings.

We took Nipper over the Irish Sea just to be sure there wasn't anything to stop us. There wasn't! Then a drive to Liverpool to take the pit bull for a walk. Afterwards we took him safely back to the Irish Republic, but while Nipper was on Merseyside he was just one of hundreds of the supposedly outlawed breed walking the streets where Ellie Lawrenson died. So much for the ban.

PHILPOTT: The tragic, logical conclusion to all of this is that although Ellie Lawrenson was the first child to be killed in Britain by a pit bull Terrier, she definitely won't be the last.

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