



**FIERCE:** Syria fighting violent clashes in Syria

By NEIL FETHERSTON

SYRIAN government forces and the Lebanese guerrilla group Hezbollah launched a fierce campaign to seize the border town of Qusair yesterday.

Rebels fighting the Bashar al-Assad regime said extra tanks and artillery had been deployed around the town close to the Lebanese border.

**Violent**

"I've never seen a day like this since the battle started," said an activist. "The shelling is so violent and heavy. It's like they're trying to destroy the city house by house."

Rebels are surrounded in Qusair, a town of 30,000 that has become a strategic battleground.

# QUACK FROM THE BRINK



**IN FINE FEATHER:** Milton, Geraldine and Mary with Hannibal the duck  
Pics: Willie Farrell



## Lucky duck Hannibal gets clean bill of health

### HE IS IRELAND'S very own Duck-tor Doolittle.

When vet James Victory was asked to cure a drake with a broken leg, he could have quacked up.

The bird was all set to waddle off to the great pond in the sky – but his heartbroken owner refused to give up on him.

Neighbours thought Milton Hardcastle was quackers when he brought his pet drake to the vet for an operation, but the Longford vet performed a two-hour operation – and it was a total success.

"When a bird breaks its leg the usual thing to do is put him down, because there's nothing you can do. But Milton was so attached to his that I said I'd do my best," James said.

"He had a fractured tibia. I used orthopaedic putty and tungsten pins because they're really hard for their size. But the biggest danger during the operation was the general anaesthetic. I've never knocked out a duck before."

**Furry**

As our exclusive photos show, the lucky duck has made a great recovery. There was not a feather off him when we visited him at his home on the Longford-Leitrim-Cavan border, where he lives with country 'n' western star Milton and his wife Mary.

The animal-crackers couple, who have no kids, have their hands full looking after their feathered and furry friends, including a 19-year-old dog and three cats. Until recently, they had a 22-year-old billy goat.

But duck Hannibal Hayes – named after the character in cult '80s TV series Alias Smith and Jones – is clearly the boss.

"He chases after the cats and takes their food – he loves cat food," Milton laughed. "He's very picky – he won't eat slugs or anything like that. He has to have his



**SUCCESS:** James and Milton

By GERALDINE COMISKEY

food handed to him in a bowl."

Hannibal also has his very own paddling pool and a shed with his name over the door, making him one of Ireland's most pampered pets.

"He's 12 years old and that's very old for a drake. They usually live up to eight years. He was just a little chick when I brought him home in my pocket," says Milton.

But it was Hannibal's habit of walking behind Milton that nearly killed him.

"He was following me into the garage and I didn't see him behind me and he got his leg caught in the door. It was awful –

I knew I'd never get over it if the little fella died because of me."

Hannibal keeps his master company while he's broadcasting his radio station from the garden shed. His local radio show, Radio Chapparral, which goes out every Tuesday and Friday from 8.30-10 pm, is popular with the likes of Big Tom, Mick Flavin, Declan Nerney and Noel Cassidy – who have all popped in for on-air chats.

**Critic**

Milton – aka DJ Hardcastle – also gave Daniel O'Donnell a big break on Longford Community Radio in 1984 when the *Sunday World* columnist's singing career was just taking off.

Milton is also the TV critic on lots of local radio stations and was once a singer, accordionist and keyboard player in his own five-piece band.

He still does the occasional gig in local venues – and put on a special performance especially for the *Sunday World*.

But his number one fan is Hannibal the duck. And that's a feather in any singer's cap.

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