The Collapse of the Royal Irish Constabulary: Policing Insurgency in Ireland, 1914-1921

by

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For Dad

Michael Patrick Stafford
1943-2002

Climbing up on Solsbury Hill
I could see the city light
Wind was blowing, time stood still
Eagle flew out of the night

*****

Today I don't need a replacement
I'll tell them what the smile on my face meant
My heart was going boom boom boom
"Hey," I said, "you can keep my things,
they've come to take me home."

-Solsbury Hill (Gabriel)

Abstract

The story of the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) cannot be fully understood without taking a penetrating look at 20th century British government policy in Ireland and its subsequent treatment of the police there. This thesis argues that poor management and neglect on the government's part proved just as detrimental to the RIC's ability to continue to function as the guerrilla campaign launched against it by the Irish Republican Army in 1920-21. The RIC's breakdown was gradual, changing from a position of strength before the Easter Rising in 1916 to one of disarray during the height of the Troubles in 1920. The government in Ireland had at its disposal this indigenous force thoroughly embedded within the civilian population and failed to take advantage of it. The Constabulary's capacity for ferreting out 'political intelligence' provided the government with a valuable tool that went largely unnoticed, unappreciated, and most significantly, unused by those in power.

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Chapter 1

The Royal Irish Constabulary and the Irish Troubles, 1916-1921: An Introduction

How deep in Irish hearts lies this passion for insurrection.
-Augustine Birrell

There's something happening here,
What it is ain't exactly clear
There's a man with a gun over there
Telling me I've got to beware...
For What It's Worth
Buffalo Springfield

Introduction

The standard and popular narrative of the intelligence war waged between Britain and Ireland (1916-1921) highlights how Michael Collins masterminded a network of spies that infiltrated Dublin Castle and assassinated Irish Republican Army (IRA) pursuers. These infamous killings included not only members of the 'G' Division Dublin Metropolitan Police (DMP) Detective Branch, but in an exceptional coordinated plot, the simultaneous execution of a dozen suspected British intelligence officers on 21 November 1920. This crowning glory of the entire intelligence war became known as Bloody Sunday. It imbued Collins with legendary status and, by proxy, the IRA with a level of sophistication that several noted historians have since called into question. In a 1979 article published by the *English*

Historical Review, Charles Townshend revises his original conclusions about Republican success and British failure, arguing "the legendary omniscience of the IRA begins to seem more and more mythical."[1] In his work *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare* (1996) historian Joost Augusteijn also shows a side of the IRA that diverges from the 'glorious freedom fighters' image. He paints a picture of untrained, inexperienced young men often vulnerable to high levels of uncertainty and error.[2] In *The IRA and its Enemies* (1998), Peter Hart argues that it was only very late in the war, when hardened by the violence, that both sides achieved a degree of consistent proficiency.[3]

Much of the historiography that deals with the Troubles of 1916-1921 depicts Collins as the reason for Irish victory. Quite often he is portrayed as an organizational genius, and the founder of modern guerrilla warfare.[4] Herein lays the problem. Collins and the IRA, while inarguably linked, are not one and the same. Too often historians have failed to treat the organization as separate from the man. The mythology surrounding Collins' achievements has prevented a clear picture of IRA capabilities from

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[1] Charles Townshend, "The Irish Republican Army and the Development of Guerrilla Warfare, 1916-1921," *English Historical Review* April 1979, 329. Charles Townshend is senior lecturer at the University of Keele. He has since written extensively on political violence in Ireland and the nature of British counterinsurgency. By far, he is considered one of the foremost historians writing on this period of Irish history.

[2] Joost Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare: The Experience of Ordinary Volunteers in the Irish War of Independence, 1916-1921,* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1996), 245-51.

[3] Peter Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies,* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1998), 174-183.

[4] Tim Pat Coogan, *Michael Collins: A Biography,* (London: Hutchinson, 1990), xi-xii.

emerging. Historian Peter Hart points out that biographers of the man continue to be our main source of information relating to IRA intelligence.[5] Since the tendency has been for historians to concentrate on Collins, his ties to Dublin Castle and his specially trained 'squad' of killers, conclusions about the intelligence war have often been skewed at best, completely misrepresentative at worst. Collins fought his battle in the narrow cobble-stoned streets of Dublin and, though his is an important part of the intelligence war, the study of Collins precludes analysis of the test of wills carried out in the countryside between rural IRA brigades and members of the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC). This is a part of the intelligence saga that has received very little attention up to this point.

Concerning what has been written, the overall consensus is that the RIC fared no better than its British counterparts.[6] Some historians have even argued that the RIC failed miserably in its attempt to counteract the IRA, outmatched by the experienced guerrilla fighters. By the end of 1920, it was the Republican Army, not the Royal Irish Constabulary, that emerged from

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[5] Peter Hart (ed), *British Intelligence in Ireland, 1920-21: The Final Reports*, (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002), 3.

[6] An analysis of the major themes of the historiography of the Troubles follows shortly. Historians who have written about the failures and limitations of the RIC in reference to IRA successes include: David Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life 1913-1921: Provincial Experience of War and Revolution*, (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1977); Charles Townshend, "Policing Insurgency in Ireland, 1914-23," in David M. Anderson and David Killingray (eds.), *Policing and Decolonization, Nationalism and the Police, 1917 – 1965*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992); Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*.

the ensuing intelligence fray obvious victors.[7] But is this analysis altogether accurate? The following chapters will show that in terms of RIC intelligence-gathering capabilities, the breakdown was gradual rather than abrupt. The force started out proficient and strong, but it was poor management and neglect that brought about the Constabulary's undoing. British policy-makers were just as forbidding an enemy to the force as the IRA. Government in Ireland had at its disposal this indigenous force deeply embedded into the civilian population network and failed to utilize the RIC to its maximum benefit. Not only did those in power ignore the Constabulary for the most part, when the Troubles in Ireland continued to escalate, government policy left the force unprotected and grossly mismanaged. Ultimately, defeat of the RIC was the result of a double onslaught: IRA subversive violence on the one hand, and the equally devastating impact of government negligence on the other.

Colonial Policing: Background and Context

In an insurgency situation the importance of *civil* rather than *military* intervention cannot be underestimated. It is the civilian body of the police, its links to the local community and the quality of its intelligence services that is critical to the resolution of conflict and the preservation of government

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[7] Tom Bowden, *The Breakdown of Public Security: The Case of Ireland 1919-1921 and Palestine 1936-1939*, (London: Sage Publications, 1977). Eunan O'Halpin, "British Intelligence in Ireland 1914-1921," In C. Andrew and D. Dilks (eds.), *The Missing Dimension, Governments and Intelligence Communities in the Twentieth Century*, (London: Macmillan, 1984).

authority. When the police are no longer functioning in the community, unable to maintain law and order and with little or no intelligence-gathering capabilities, resistance is strengthened while government legitimacy and control is weakened. At the center of any counter-insurgency success story or failure is the police.[8] In his comparative study of insurgent movements in both Ireland and Palestine, political historian Tom Bowden concludes: "so crucial were the police forces for the continued functioning of the respective systems that their failure seriously undermined governability."[9] In the case of Ireland, government authority collapsed completely, the British seceding control of the country in 1921 (barring six provinces of Ulster which remained within the Union).

The nature of colonial policing is critical to understanding the patterns of decolonization. Historians of Britain's surrender of empire show that as nationalism engulfed each colony, the colonialists struggled to secure their immediate and longer-term interests. Managing an orderly retreat from empire was, in almost every case, an essential part of the political strategy developed by the British. The role of the colonial police in this process was

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[8] David M. Anderson and David Killingray, *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority and Control, 1830-1940,* (Manchester University Press, 1990) and *Policing and Decolonization: Politics, Nationalism and Police, 1917-1965,* (Manchester University Press, 1992). See also: Thomas R. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency, 1919-1960,* (London: MacMillan Press, 1990), Keith Jeffery, "Intelligence and Counterinsurgency Operations: Some Reflections on the British Experience," *Intelligence and National Security* [hereafter referred to as *INS*], 2 (1): 1987.

[9] Bowden, *Breakdown of Public Security,* 301.

absolutely pivotal, as they found themselves in closer proximity to the forces of nationalist politics and anti-colonial protest than any other arm of government. For this reason, the police experience is perhaps the most intimate portrait we have concerning the nature of unfolding events and the impact of British decision-making policy.[10]

The decisive role played by police forces during the era of British decolonization has not generated a lot of attention from scholars. Very little information has been put forth that offers a detailed depiction of the police experience throughout *any* of Britain's colonial insurgent conflicts, including the Troubles in Ireland. To address this gap in the historiography, Birbeck College, University of London hosted a conference in May 1988 entitled, 'Policing the Empire.' From the twenty-seven papers presented there, two important volumes emerged which looked specifically at colonial policing within the context of the British Empire. In particular, *Policing and Decolonization: Politics, Nationalism and the Police, 1917-1965* (1992) edited by David M. Anderson and David Killingray. This volume details accounts of policing in specific territories, focusing upon such related themes as the impact of nationalist politics, the complexities of policing communal disputes, the militarization of police forces and their use in counterinsurgency measures, political-intelligence gathering and its uses, and the reform,

[10] David M. Anderson and David Killingray, "An Orderly Retreat? Policing the End of Empire," in Anderson and Killingray (eds.), *Policing and Decolonization*, 1.

development and shifting ideologies of policing.[11]

In the context of the book's analyses, Ireland is noted as a benchmark case and the key to any further discussion of the policing of decolonization. Despite the fact Ireland's independence struggle occurred earlier and during a different era than the other examples cited, the British visibly adopted a 'colonial' solution to their problems in policing insurgency in that country.[12] Nor is there any doubt as to the significance of the Irish example for later decolonization. For the military especially, Ireland marked the beginnings of a new learning curve in the handling of insurgency. However, though it is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to note that there is debate amongst historians concerning the inter-war British Army's ability to institutionalize learned experience. Further, the case of Ireland proved such a military disaster and a political hot potato that, during later counterinsurgency emergencies, it was often deliberately overlooked as a useful example.[13] Weighing in on the other side of the debate, Thomas Mockaitis argues that British success in Malaya compared to American

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[11] Anderson and Killingray, "An Orderly Retreat?" 2. The cases examined include: Ireland, 1914-23; India, 1930-47; Palestine, 1936-48; Ghana, 1940-59; Malaya, 1948-60; Kenya, 1939-63; Malawi 1891-1959; Cyprus, 1954-60.

[12] Charles Townshend, "Policing Insurgency in Ireland," 22-39. For a more involved analysis consult Townshend's seminal study, *The British Campaign in Ireland 1919-1921: The Development of Political Military Policies,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

[13] Dr. David Charters, Professor of History UNB, written comments to the author, May 2004. See also his book, *The British Army and Jewish Insurgency in Palestine 1945-47,* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 134-136.

failure in Vietnam is explainable in terms of English long-term exposure to insurgent wars. He states: "the British had been conducting internal-security operations very similar to counterinsurgency for at least 30 years prior to... [Malaya]" developing methods to defeat insurgents and defining "principles upon which those methods were based."[14] While this is true up to a point, it is helpful to remember the British Army's capacity historically to keep 'reinventing the wheel.'

What is certain, from the 1920s to the 1950s both the methods of policing used in Ireland, and the personnel involved, extended their influence to other parts of the empire. Once Ireland gained Dominion status in 1921, a consistent supply of ex-officers of the RIC moved into the Indian and Colonial Police forces. The men brought with them the valuable experience they gained during the Troubles, were appreciated for their level of training (which was usually of longer duration and higher quality than that available to ordinary recruits), and noted for their relative discipline. RIC men 'stiffened' the ranks of many colonial forces during the 1920s.With the independence of India and the relinquishing of the Palestine mandate in 1947-48, a second wave of migratory police officers found their way from these territories to Malaya, Nyasaland and to West Africa. By the mid-1950s, Police Commissioners in trouble spots like Kenya and Cyprus inevitably

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[14] Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency,* 10. See also Charles Townshend, *Britain's Civil Wars: Counterinsurgency in the Twentieth Century,* (London, 1986).

sought to use officers possessing experience drawn from other campaigns.[15] Major-General Sir Henry Tudor, the former chief of police during the Troubles in Ireland, arrived in Palestine in 1922. Of this period one historian points out that Tudor proceeded to staff the British gendarmerie with men he knew and trusted. Approximately three-quarters of the gendarmerie came from the disbanded Royal Irish Constabulary and its Auxiliary Division (ADRIC). Two of the most influential of all Palestine policemen learnt their trade in Ireland. By 1943, ex-'Black and Tan' men held five of the eight positions of district commander in the force.[16] This does not mean that all of the same individuals followed a chain of transfers from Ireland to Cyprus, but it is evident persons and ideas traveled the line. The movement of police officers, even of junior rank, seems to have exerted a greater influence upon policing practice than any build-up of learning amassed by senior commanders and applied to colonial policing as a matter of policy.[17]

In their introduction to *Policing and Decolonization*, Anderson and Killingray explain:

> with regard to Emergency Powers, to military-civil relations in the organization of counterinsurgency, and to the nature and extent of the problems confronting the police in a political situation of this sort, the Irish example has a pertinence for later colonial experience

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[15] Anderson and Killingray, "An Orderly Retreat?" 8. For in-depth analysis of this pattern, consult specific chapters from *Policing and Decolonization.*

[16]Charles Smith, "Communal Conflict and Insurrection in Palestine, 1936-48," in Anderson and Killingray eds., *Policing and Decolonization*, 63-64, 79.

[17] This observation is made by Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency*, 180-89.

> that is now glaringly apparent with hindsight, but that was also consciously drawn upon at the time.[18]

In this respect, the study of policing in Ireland is essential not only for its own sake and for what it reveals about the Troubles specifically, but for the appreciable insight it offers into the realities of policing insurgency as it applies to the larger historical context of British decolonization. For example, like the RIC, most colonial police forces suffered from a schismatic make-up, an inherent duality that blurred the nature of their exact role and responsibilities. On the one hand, police were expected to be upholders of the law and fulfill their civil duties of detecting crime and regulating society; on the other hand, police were expected to adopt a militarized stance to satisfy an increased need for security when dealing with unrest incited by nationalist politics.[19] In Ireland, this wavering vision of the Constabulary's role in society plagued the force from its inception in 1836 to its demise in 1922. Essentially, the RIC was painfully twisted into a pseudo-military body when the situation demanded it, leaving the force acutely aware of the constant dilemma of their actions: too military or not military enough?[20] Add

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[18] Anderson and Killingray, "An Orderly Retreat?" 3.

[19] This theme appears throughout the essays presented in Anderson and Killingray eds., *Policing and Decolonization.* See also, Jeffery, "Intelligence and Counterinsurgency Operations," *INS,* 118-123. Mockaitis uses this argument repeatedly in *British Counterinsurgency.*

[20] This is a major theme in the historiography of the Troubles. See especially, Charles Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland: Government and Resistance since 1848,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 67-84; Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life,* 17-28; Bowden,

to this the additional burden of maintaining a cordial and cooperative relationship with military personnel, and colonial police forces walked a tight line indeed. In fact, the sharing of intelligence between the two bodies was often wrought with problems of mutual hostility, mistrust, and feelings of territoriality.[21]

Yet another common experience shared by colonial police in these circumstances was the addition to their ranks of new units created to perform 'special duties.' These Special forces ranged from highly trained riot squads and special operations teams to untrained men recruited for guard and escort duties. Among such units were the Police Mobile Force in Nyasaland, the General Service Unit in Kenya, the Mobile Police Reserve in Cyprus, the Police Mobile Force in Palestine as well as auxiliaries and Special Constables almost everywhere. The problem with these special units was that they often grew out of ill-defined government policy and therefore, their precise role remained unclear. As Keith Jeffery notes, unfortunately: "freedom from close definition and control can turn into license." [22] Thomas Mockaitis concurs

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The Breakdown of Public Security, 19-20, 29; Townshend, "Policing Insurgency in Ireland," 26-27.

[21] For an excellent analysis of this see Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency*, 63-95. Also, Eunan O'Halpin, "British Intelligence in Ireland, 1914-21," 75-77; Jeffery, "Intelligence and Counterinsurgency Operations," *INS*, 120-123, 142-145; Bowden, *The Breakdown of Public Security*; Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, 26-28; Townshend, "Policing Insurgency in Ireland, 34-35.

[22] Jeffery, "Intelligence and Counterinsurgency Operations," *INS*, 127; the incidence of 'special forces' is a major theme of each of the chapters in Anderson and Killingray, *Policing and Decolonization*.

when he points out that since these 'special forces' were neither military nor police and lacked the training and discipline of both, their actions were often unpredictable, chaotic, and counter-productive.[23]

This was clearly the case in Ireland upon the addition of 'Black and Tan' and Auxiliary Division forces to the ranks of the RIC in 1920.[24] It soon became obvious to the new recruits that much of their efforts achieved little tangible results, and that mounting operations by Republican nationalists had in effect, rendered the men impotent. In response, both groups unleashed their frustration and rage by committing errant acts of sabotage and murder, collectively known as 'reprisals.'[25] Historians studying this period attribute the escalation of the conflict in 1920 to these reprisals. Peter Hart in particular gives special attention to the nature of revenge in a tit-for-tat cycle; once that first impetus to violence was initiated, the cycle was set in motion whereby action led to reaction and the conflict spiraled to new heights of outrage. Hart argues that the more violent role played by the Black and Tans and Auxiliaries grew out of the reality that the British ex-soldiers shared "none of the RIC's traditional sense of discipline, restraint or

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[23] Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency*, 43-48

[24] James Joseph Gleeson, *Bloody Sunday*, (London: Peter Davies, 1962), 44, 46, 54; Townshend, *The British Campaign in Ireland*, 110-11.

[25] Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency*, 19-20; Townshend, "Policing Insurgency in Ireland," 32-37; Richard Bennett, *The Black and Tans*, (London: Severn House, 1976), 92-112.

Irishness."[26]

The story of the Royal Irish Constabulary does not exist in a vacuum. The ordeal these men faced, the difficult nature of their work, became a legacy, a mantle of experience inherited by other police forces in other lands. The geography might have changed, along with the names and structure of the police forces involved, but the stories remain remarkably similar. What can be learned from the Irish experience and derived from the details of the RIC, can be applied to encompass colonial policing as a whole.

Historiography

Ireland's revolutionary struggle, which liberated the country from British rule and established an independent nation has not yet produced an exhaustive body of literature. Interestingly, what was a climactic moment in that nation's history, failed to capture any significant attention from academics in the field until the Troubles were revived in Ulster in 1969. Upon the reintroduction of British troops into the North, it evidently became desirable to place new emphasis on the nature of the original Troubles marked by the guerrilla war of 1920-21. For the most part, the historiography of Ireland's Independence war has remained separate and autonomous from the unfolding ordeal in the North (essentially mirroring the nature of the relationship shared between Ulster and the Republic post-partition). Few

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[26] Peter Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies,* 162-73, 203-07; see also Joost Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare,* 189, 209-47; Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life,* 32, 217-18.

parallels or chronological links are ever made between the two. What's more, there is little attempt by scholars of the revolution to look for the seeds of Ulster's turmoil in the struggle for independence or vice versa. The historiography of the revolutionary period (1916 – 1921) has maintained its distinct integrity and importance, consumed by individual debates and problems entirely removed from the Northern conflict. The exceptions include works by J. Bowyer Bell and Tim Pat Coogan. Both authors study the Irish Republican Army as an *institution* and trace its evolution and development from this period into the contemporary Troubles of the North today. However, the continuity of ideals and traditions apply only to the IRA here, not Ulster and the Republic.[27] Bowyer's and Coogan's most recent studies have taken to studying the IRA largely from 1968 onwards recognizing that this IRA and the conflict in Ulster pose very different problems and questions than the original Troubles of 1920.[28]

The principal primary sources consulted for this study include first and foremost the monthly confidential reports of the Inspector General and County Inspectors. These summary reports submitted to the Crimes Special Branch in Dublin are an invaluable tool to any historian researching this

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[27] See especially J. Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army: The IRA 1916-1979,* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1980) and Tim Pat Coogan, *The I.R.A.*, (London: Pall Mall Press, 1970).

[28] See J. Bowyer Bell, *The IRA, 1968-2000: Analysis of a Secret Army,* (London: Frank Cass, 2000) and *The Irish Troubles: a Generation of Violence, 1967-1992* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993). Also Tim Pat Coogan, *The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal 1966-1996 and the Search for Peace,* (London: Arrow, 1996).

period and form the backbone of intelligence-gathering in Ireland. Especially in the context of this thesis, these reports offer an insightful view into the inner workings of the RIC in regards to what it was reporting and what it ear-marked as important.[29] Second is the *Royal Commission on the Rebellion in Ireland Report* (including the *Minutes of Evidence and Appendix of Documents*).[30] This lengthy and detailed report provides tangible evidence of the RIC's sensitivity to the rising temperature in Ireland leading up to the Easter rebellion in 1916. Two critical compilations of primary source material available in published form include: *Intelligence Notes, 1913-1916* (1966), edited by B.M. Choille, and Peter Hart's *British Intelligence in Ireland, 1920-21: The Final Reports* (2002). This latter includes Irish Command's, *A Record of the Rebellion in Ireland in 1920-1921, and the Part Played by the Army in Dealing with It (Intelligence).*

Scholars who have delved into this period in Irish history have not been military historians by definition and very rarely has the subject been approached in a strict military sense. How they choose to portray the Troubles is directly dependant upon the conceptual framework selected to do so. In this, three over-arching themes in the historiography are apparent: comparative surveys that place the Troubles into a larger context as simply

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[29] Available on Microfilm, Public Records Office (Kew, London), Colonial Office Papers, Dublin Castle, PRO CO 904.

[30] Public Records Office (Kew, London). Parliamentary Papers [Cd. 8279] and [Cd. 8311].

the first of many 'colonial' wars England confronted in the 20th century;[31] political surveys which view the war from Westminster and Dublin Castle, seeking to lay direct responsibility for the escalation of events on political misunderstandings and a flawed decision-making process;[32] and finally, military surveys, which are more concerned with analysing the exact nature of the war itself, its insurgency form and the reasons behind British failure to counter it.[33]

Comparative surveys of the Troubles are indispensable because they provide insight into what was both unique and similar about Ireland compared to other insurgency wars the British faced post-1945. More than any other military power in recent history, Britain has met and attempted to *counter*, with varying degrees of success, involved insurgency campaigns. Between 1945 and 1982 the British Army carried out ninety-four operational commitments world-wide. Of these, only three - Korea, Suez, and the

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[31] Bowden, *The Breakdown of Public Security*; Charles Townshend, *Britain's Civil Wars: Counterinsurgency in the Twentieth Century*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1986); Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency 1919-1960.*

[32] The principal contributors to this theme include: Tom Garvin, *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics*, (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1981); D.G. Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland*, (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1982); Sheila Lawlor, *Britain and Ireland 1914-1923*, (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1983); Eunan O'Halpin, *The Decline of the Union: British Government in Ireland 1892-1920*, (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1987).

[33] Charles Townshend, *The British Military Campaign in Ireland*; Townshend, "The IRA and the Development of Guerrilla Warfare; Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*; Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*; Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies.*

Falklands - involved combat in conventional terms. All but fourteen of the remainder consisted of counterinsurgency operations, which David Charters explains: "spanned a considerable period of time, a diverse collection of countries, cultures, terrains and climates, and a wide variety of political circumstances and operational environments." For this period, the nine principal conflicts have been in Palestine, Malaya, Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, South Arabia/Aden, Northern Ireland, and Oman (twice).[34]

The insurgent war the IRA waged from 1919-1921 was a baptism by fire for Britain, and a bitter introduction to the realities of counterinsurgency. Even though the Boers had utilized guerrilla tactics at the end of the 19th century, they were not coordinated with the kind of sophisticated political and propaganda campaigns which became so characteristic of 20th century insurgency warfare. In *British Counterinsurgency 1919-1960* (1990), Thomas Mockaitis points out that "the similarity between the military tactics of the guerrilla and those of the insurgent has led many observers to blur the distinction between the two." Mockaitis marks the distinction this way:

> The insurgents first rely on subversion to broaden their base of support within a country. Subversion involves the dissemination of propaganda and the creation of an infrastructure, both aimed at driving a wedge between the people and the government. Propaganda takes advantage

[34] For this and quote, see David A. Charters, "From Palestine to Northern Ireland: British Adaptation to Low-intensity operations," in *Armies in Low-intensity Conflict: A Comparative Analysis*, David Charters and Maurice Tugwell ed, (London: Brassey's Defence Publishers, 1989), 171.

> of sources of discontent within a society. It seeks to convince people that the insurgents will be better able to meet their needs than can the existing government... While subverting the allegiance of the people, the insurgents will also attack the government's institutions, undermining its effectiveness and thus its credibility. In conducting these attacks, the insurgents will use the same tactics as traditional guerrillas, [the important difference being] the targets of insurgent violence are political rather than purely military.[35]

In many respects then, the IRA campaign of the '20's is a textbook case, and has been recognized as such in the subsequent literature.

The comparative studies, by placing the Troubles into a larger framework, essentially crystallize the exact *nature* of the conflict, illuminating why the tactics used to counter the IRA failed, and at the same time, why the IRA was able to succeed. In this sense, the military surveys which look at the war in isolation and these comparative surveys which place the insurgency into a larger context, show a clear enthusiasm for a didactic approach. Thomas Mockaitis and Tom Bowden both see a corresponding failure to mount a successful counterinsurgency campaign with the failure to build an apparatus for civil-military cooperation and intelligence-gathering. Both agree that effective counterinsurgency requires a strong police establishment operating and closely communicating with the military forces.[36] This proved to be one of the major obstacles to the campaign in Ireland in 1919-1921. Deep-seated mutual animosity shared between the

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[35] Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency*, 2, 3-4.

[36] Bowden, *A Breakdown in Public Security*; 43-47; Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency*, 69.

native police force (RIC), the foreign auxiliaries sent from Britain to supplement their dwindling numbers (ADRIC and Black and Tans) and the British Army itself, made it impossible to support and maintain any kind of intelligence network. This theme was first introduced by David Fitzpatrick and has since been given a more in-depth analysis by Peter Hart, who argues that the alienation experienced by the auxiliary forces who kept mostly to themselves, and the hostility they projected and received, only hindered the intelligence task and made them easier targets of IRA violence while the guerrillas themselves remained elusive.[37]

Unable to separate the innocent from the guilty, the British perpetrated a blanket counter-terror program upon Irish civilians, forced to do so because of a dearth of reliable, effective intelligence regarding the movements and identity of IRA soldiers. Bowden argues that the crucial importance of intelligence is that without it you are "reactive rather than preventative."[38] Discussed in the Irish context above, the comparative studies of British counterinsurgency show that 'reprisals' have been the downfall of all campaigns; they are a strong indicator that the strategy of the government and military is bankrupt. Charles Townshend briefly makes this point in his comparative survey, *Britain's Civil Wars: Counterinsurgency in*

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[37] Hart, *IRA and its Enemies,* 165-177.

[38] Bowden, *A Breakdown in Public Security,* 22

the Twentieth Century (1986),[39] but Mockaitis and Bowden build their entire studies around this concept.

Mockaitis calls it the 'principle of minimum force' and he argues that British adherence to this maxim has greatly contributed to their success in countering insurgency warfare. Where they have failed to uphold this tenet, they have failed in their campaign, Ireland in 1921 being the principal example. Mockaitis makes evident that security forces must avoid reprisals against an area or a group of people. It is a mistaken belief that such action dissuades the inhabitants from supporting the insurgents. Even when they have clearly identified insurgents and their collaborators, troops and police should resist inflicting undue severity in handling them. Torture, summary execution, and similar atrocities are always counter-productive in the long run. They undermine the credibility of the government and give the insurgents valuable propaganda material. Mockaitis concludes: "To maintain the moral advantage government forces must not only avoid wrong-doing but the appearance of wrong doing."[40] British defeat in Ireland in 1921 stemmed in large measure from its failure to exercise restraint in a conflict that occurred in a window front, the 'lesson' being that no matter what the provocation, the government cannot act with the same recklessness as the insurgents without undermining the legitimacy of its own rule. While fully

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[39] Townshend, *Civil Wars,* 65

[40] Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency,* 37

recognizing the inherent value of the 'minimalist doctrine,' Townshend argues that a major disadvantage is that it leaves soldiers painfully exposed to a double-edged sword of being condemned for using either too little or too much force.[41]

Tom Bowden's study is interesting because it is an attempt to explain the success of the IRA in 1921 by comparing it to the failure of the Arab Revolt in Palestine in 1936-1939. Bowden argues that the Arabs failed because they lacked a single binding political objective, and a popular political arm, unlike the IRA and its political counterpart *Sinn Fein.*

> The overall threat to public security in Palestine was less sophisticated and thorough. Arab guerrillas lacked a formalized political component and coherent, binding political objectives.[42]

Furthermore, the Arab rebellion was unsystematic, unstable and prone to anarchic relapses, deeply rooted as it was in tribal brigandage. But to make this point Bowden overestimates the actual cohesiveness and military and political prowess of the IRA in 1920.

Historians who have utilized a political framework to analyse the Troubles are primarily concerned with laying blame and illustrating the correlation between the direct effect decisions made at the top have upon the conflict being waged at the bottom. For example, as insightful as Sheila Lawlor's study is, *Britain and Ireland 1914-1923* (1983), it is very specific and

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[41] Townshend, *Civil Wars,* 19-20

[42] Bowden, *Breakdown in Public Security,* 78

one-dimensional in its analysis of the period overall. Lawlor is entirely consumed with events as they unfolded in London. She blames the escalation of the conflict wholly on those serving in Westminster at the time for their inability to recognize the severity of the problem, and their failure to define an appropriate solution. They possessed neither certainty nor resolution as to what ought or ought not to be done. From Lawlor's point of view, the English stalled, completely indecisive about how to proceed, lacking a defined political and military strategy. According to Lawlor, herein lies Britain's ultimate defeat. Leaders allowed tensions in Ireland to fester and grow more serious with each passing day as they haggled over how to proceed. Of Lloyd George's views on Ireland Lawlor argues that, "when he chose to have them," they amounted to "bored and resentful repulsion."[43]

Lawlor's condemning account of Westminster's role in the events gives the impression that those responsible in London were remarkable for their dullness, and that they arrogantly believed nothing more important was occurring in Ireland than a few isolated skirmishes. By not committing either way to a truce or a declaration of war, English leaders ensured the situation remained in a state of suspension. Much to their detriment, they were unable to formulate a clear, concise picture of events viewing the affair from London and thus, entirely removed from conditions. Ironically, Lawlor condemns herself to the same limited vision by choosing to analyse events from only the

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[43] Lawlor, *Britain and Ireland*, 41.

British political point of view. However important is her contribution, its narrow focus means she also failed to formulate a complete profile of events.

Such a politicized view of the war, however, really begins with work done by Tom Garvin and D.G. Boyce, *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics* (1981) and *Nationalism in Ireland* (1982) respectively. Garvin in particular explains the nature of the conflict as part of the evolutionary process of political awareness within Ireland itself, marking the ensuing rise of Nationalist and Unionist parties. His thesis is that every action of the state in Ireland had a political dimension. For the Nationalists, it mattered only whether it helped or hindered Home Rule (the precursor to independence), and for the Unionists it came down to whether it signalled a lessening of British control over Irish affairs. The Nationalists and Unionists, divided in every other respect, were united in their distrust of the existing administrative structure. For the former it was repressive and hostile towards the majority of Irish people failing to develop the Irish economy. For the latter it was ineffective in its securing the Union and enforcing the law. Therefore, any significant change in the organization of government departments each viewed with suspicion. Garvin argues that before independence, as after it, Irish politicians showed no appetite for improving the machinery of government, only in controlling it. Unlike Lawlor, who places the blame on Westminster, Garvin illuminates the inherent flaws that were present in the governmental structures in Ireland at this time, referring

to it as "Irish bureaucratic decay."[44] In his comparative study of Ireland and Palestine, Tom Bowden also blames the atrophy of Dublin Castle and the deterioration of its apparatus, referring to the Government in Ireland at this time as "a mere holding operation."[45]

Eunan O'Halpin echoes this sentiment in his work *The Decline of the Union: British Government in Ireland 1892-1920* (1987). He argues that the situation in Ireland might have played out differently if the entire structure of Irish government had been over-hauled. Combining the perspectives of Lawlor, Garvin and Bowden, O'Halpin blames London for letting the administrative structures in Dublin go to seed. All effective power lay in London and it was not practical to rule from there; more power should have been conceded to Dublin Castle. Further, the governmental structures should have been more centralized into a nervous system with a definitive, recognizable 'brain'. For O'Halpin, the impotence of Dublin Castle, largely ignored by Westminster, contributed significantly to the escalation of hostilities. The Castle was incapable of dealing with the rise in violence and unrest during the years leading to the Easter Rising. Intelligence in London concerning the plausibility of open revolt was not communicated to the Castle which, he argues, was caught off guard for the Rising in 1916 and was doubly

[44] Garvin, *Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics*, 76.

[45] Bowden, *Breakdown of Public Security*, 39.

oblivious of the seriousness of escalating hostilities post-1918 as a predictor of the guerrilla campaign launched by the IRA.

The work of Garvin and Boyce is concerned primarily with the political war, not the military one. Nationalists and Unionists shared a mutual mistrust of the other that prevented an agreement on the Home Rule issue and gave impetus to the more radical push for a Republic. Unionist groups were unbending, locked as they were in fear and paranoia, convinced that Home Rule meant 'Rome Rule' and that any amount of conciliation to the nationalist Catholics would necessarily lessen the stability of both Ireland's place, and Protestant ascendancy, within the United Kingdom. Boyce's main contribution to the literature is that he addresses how the Irish question actually defined British party lines: as the Liberals were largely proponents of Home Rule, and the Conservatives adherents of Unionism. This political contest of wills oscillated between what England was willing to concede and what Ireland was willing to accept.

Even though a political analysis is crucial when discussing an event that was so politicized in nature, the military aspects of what was a *war* are overlooked and considered peripheral. These surveys of the Troubles are handicapped in that regard; politics is paramount which means military details become unimportant. Historians writing in this tradition portray the conflict and its participants as outside of the motivating forces that shaped the war. They were mere *military reactors* to the *political actors* of the

conflict; what happened on the ground hinged directly on the decisions made in Parliament. Even though these studies take an overtly critical view of English response to the Troubles, they fail to consider the ramifications such negligence had upon the RIC and that it was *its breakdown* that played a determining role in the outcome of the Troubles. Strict political surveys of the Troubles, though invaluable, ignore the validity and importance of conditions in Ireland and the decision-making process of insurgents on the ground. Politics and war are inextricably linked; they co-exist and interact simultaneously. It is acceptable to concentrate on one or the other, but the most valuable studies of the Troubles combine both aspects and balance the two quite well.

The tradition of intimate military surveys of the period addresses both the political dimension and insurgent nature of the Troubles with particular emphasis on the intricacies of the campaign itself. The seminal work by Charles Townshend, *The British Campaign in Ireland 1919-1921: The Development of Political and Military Policies* (1975),[46] was quickly followed by David Fitzpatrick's *Politics and Irish Life: Provincial Experience of War and Revolution* (1977). Both of these works illustrate the interactive, inter-dependent aspect of military policies and political decisions. Townshend paints a multi-dimensional canvas that includes not only the political

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[46] Charles Townshend has since written extensively on political violence in Ireland and the nature of British counterinsurgency, ranking as one of the foremost contributors to the period.

analysis of later works published in the 1980's (discussed above) but, remarkably, the first attempt to delve into the war's exact nature. As Townshend explains in his preface, "the conflict had importance not only in itself but also in the example it set."[47]

Townshend's analysis moves chronologically from the fallout of Easter Week to the declared truce in July of 1921. In it he views the developing crisis from the perspectives of Westminster, Dublin Castle, the IRA insurgents, and the Crown Forces deployed to combat them (which included the RIC, the Auxiliary Division of the RIC, the Black and Tans and the British military). In *Politics and Irish Life* Fitzpatrick takes this approach one step further and examines the revolution in minute detail, as it unfolded specifically in Co.Clare, from the perspective of all participants: Nationalists in the south, Unionists in the north, Crown Forces, the RIC and Westminster.

One of the main tenets of Townshend's work is that the major stages of the Irish campaign were spontaneous and unplanned, and that slender resources created the style of warfare rather than a conviction that it held any real hope of success.[48] Fitzpatrick also accepts that it was a "drift" towards guerrilla war brought about with very little foresight or

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[47] Townshend, *British Military Campaign in Ireland*, vii.

[48] Townshend, *The British Military Campaign*, 27-32; Townshend narrowly focuses this thesis in his article "The IRA and the Development of Guerrilla Warfare," 321, 329

manipulative skill.[49] Townshend stresses the *evolutionary* stages of the conflict, the first of these being the transition from the arms raids to attacks on RIC barracks in the winter of 1919-1920. He argues that the barracks attacks offered the best chance of tactical success with the promise of obtaining more of the weapons so desperately needed and were thus, all but inevitable. When the police barracks became less numerous and better defended in response to these assaults, the guerrillas changed tactics and took on the more daunting task of ambushing the RIC patrols and military lorries that travelled along deserted countryside roads. The diffuse and mobile properties of the Flying Columns made feasible this type of IRA operation which began in earnest in the fall of 1920.[50]

Townshend explains that very few Columns were capable of overcoming the extensive obstacles involved in mounting a successful ambush. They required thorough preparation and near flawless execution; one mistake could prove lethal for the ambushing party. For this reason, it is not surprising that the surviving reports of units operational in the winter of 1920-21 show evidence of "widespread ineffectiveness and failure." Joost Augusteijn explains how many smaller battalion columns occasionally attempted ambushes and were repeatedly foiled by the almost complete lack

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[49] Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, 215

[50] Townshend, *The British Military Campaign*, 73-82

of intelligence about enemy movements.[51] As mentioned earlier, this thesis has overwhelmingly replaced the argument Tom Bowden put forth. In *The Breakdown of Public Security* he argues that by 1919 the IRA was a unified, cohesive, military force ready for action and that as a guerrilla army it was tactically and organizationally sound.[52] What Townshend's early work and Augusteijn's later work have shown is that the IRA was neither omnipotent nor infallible. Augusteijn argues that fear often afflicted the men during their first fights and revealed itself in various ways.[53]

The exciting accounts of IRA ambushes that dominate the memoir literature of the participants tend to give a skewed vision of how the war was fought, painting it as a succession of open conflicts between the guerrilla soldiers and Crown Forces, a tense pattern of ambush, counter-ambush and round-ups. Peter Hart with *The IRA and Its Enemies* (1998), the most recent analysis of the Anglo-Irish War, points out that only one-third of the 566 casualties for County Cork in 1921 (by far the most volatile area during the struggle) occurred in combat; that is, the victims were part of an armed and active unit when attacked rather than defenceless and alone. Hart concludes: "the reality behind the myths of battle was that most planned ambushes never made contact with the enemy and most operations were aimed at one

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[51] Townshend, "Development of Guerrilla Warfare," 329-330; Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, 136.

[52] Bowden, *Breakdown in Public Security*, 88, 110

[53] Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, 140-141

or two 'enemies' (civilian or uniformed) and had little to do with combat." Furthermore, "IRA units spent most of their time avoiding the enemy or waiting, often fruitlessly, for an opportune target."[54]

Joost Augusteijn, the author of one of the latest studies on the IRA, provides an in-depth study into the geographic nature of the war, investigating its varied rate of development in different areas. Like Townshend and Fitzpatrick, Augusteijn traces the Volunteer transformation into a guerrilla force and represents it as an evolutionary process. *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare* (1996) examines each phase the Volunteer movement passed through to ultimately overcome what Augusteijn calls a "threshold of violence" and begin to carry out the organized terror characteristic of a guerrilla body. He stresses the importance of the boycott of the RIC, the original thesis of Townshend's and Fitzpatrick's work, which ostracized the men and their families from the community and made them legitimate targets of violence. As the instrument of British power in Ireland, the Constabulary was painted by nationalists as an army of occupation and traitors to the Republican cause. The nationalist population in general became hostile and refused to cooperate with the authorities, at which time the RIC lost its ability to gather effective intelligence.[55]

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[54] Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies,* 180-183

[55] Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare,* 200-209

David Fitzpatrick's formative book *Politics and Irish Life 1913-1921*, gave rise to this interpretation. Fitzpatrick sets out with the hypothesis that it was the unique social experience of the combatants involved which determined what choices were made and thus influenced greatly the escalation of the war. His analysis of the Royal Irish Constabulary is especially insightful. One of the more important conclusions Fitzpatrick draws from his analysis of the police in Ireland is that the social make-up of the RIC changed drastically from 1913-1921 with the infusion of British soldiers into the force beginning in 1920. He compiled a sample of 201 RIC officers from Clare in 1916 and discovered one hundred percent of them were Irish born, eighty-nine percent were Roman Catholic and none of them were ex-soldiers. Four years later these percentages changed to forty-seven percent, forty percent and seventy-eight percent respectively. By the spring of 1921, only ten percent were Irish born, thirteen percent were Roman Catholic and eighty-seven percent were ex-soldiers.[56] Fitzpatrick attributes the escalation of the conflict in 1920 to this shift in the social composition of the RIC. Hart concurs. Because the new recruits shared none of the RIC's traditional sense of discipline, restraint or "Irishness," they were hostile outsiders which made them legitimate targets of IRA guerrilla soldiers. As the re-shaped RIC (consisting of British ex-soldiers called Black and Tans and Auxiliaries) discovered their impotence in the face of terrorist operations,

[56] Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life,* 23-25

their rage spilled over in a series of vengeful acts against civilians and any guerrillas that could be captured. The killings, beatings, burnings and other forms of sabotage became a regular feature of the way this new "police force" handled the growing conflict. Fitzpatrick concludes it was these reprisals which added fuel to the fire and alienated the nationalist population, effectively destroying intelligence channels.[57]Aside from Augusteijn, other historians have developed this idea further. Peter Hart in particular, gives special attention to the nature of revenge in a tit-for-tat cycle. Once that first impetus to violence was initiated, the cycle was set in motion whereby action led to reaction and the conflict spiralled to new heights of outrage.[58]

Fitzpatrick applies the same methodology to explain the radical and violent nature of the IRA, work which is built upon by historian Joost Augusteijn who looks at these developments for all of Ireland. Like the shift in the social composition in the RIC, the changing social background of the IRA volunteers leads to an increase in violence. The vast majority of pre-revolutionary Volunteers were in their mid to late twenties, who were the eldest sons from farming families. These were, for the most part, temperate individuals who found themselves burdened with the responsibilities of farming and family life. Things changed when by the summer of 1920, twenty-three percent of the IRA's volunteers were less than twenty years old

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[57] Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, 1-2, 7-18, 32; Hart, *IRA and its Enemies*, 4.

[58] Hart, *IRA and its Enemies,*162-73, 203-207

and another sixty-one percent were in their early 20s. To avoid the relentless pursuit of the law, these men went on the run to escape incarceration or brutal interrogations. As youthful fugitives, they were cut off from the restraining, stabilizing hand of family and community life. Living outside the boundaries of this moral world, the men became radical and more willing to participate in violent activity. Those who were not so willing were forced to do so in order to survive. Full-time soldiers of a guerrilla army, they acted against Crown Forces (especially the RIC) with increasing skill and ferocity.[59]

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In light of the contributions that scholars have made to the historiography of the Troubles, this thesis is an attempt to weigh both the political and military ramifications of the period, and measure their impact upon the performance of the Royal Irish Constabulary. Historian David Fitzpatrick claims "No victims of the Irish Revolution suffered keener humiliation than the police...."[60] Who were these men? What does their experience say about the nature of the Troubles in Ireland and about British policy in handling it? In essence, how did the period 1914-1921 directly affect the Constabulary as not only an intelligence-gathering body, but as enforcers of law and order? To fully appreciate the RIC's role in events in Ireland, it is

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[59] Statistics from Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life,* 222-224. For an excellent analysis of Volunteers "on the run" see Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare,* 247, 312-332 passim.

[60] Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life,* 1.

crucial to examine matters as they unfolded from its point of view, to uncover the Constabulary's ability to monitor the country, disseminate information, and communicate its conclusions to Dublin Castle. Such an investigation will not only give a clear indication of the state of the RIC's intelligence capabilities, but more importantly, will provide a critical portrait of how this principal arm of British power in Ireland, either rightly or wrongly, interpreted the events confronting them. As the sobriquet implied, these men constituted the 'eyes and ears of Dublin Castle.' What did they see and hear? Ireland was their country after all and they were well entrenched in it. For this reason the unique and much overlooked perspective of the Royal Irish Constabulary is paramount to a full understanding of the Troubles and the ramifications of policing insurgency.

Chapter 2

From Militarized to Civilized:

Origins and Evolution of the Royal Irish Constabulary, 1836-1900

> **Let us not forget that [joining the ranks of the RIC] was the height of ambition of most young fellows who happened to be 5'9 or thereabouts**
> **Kevin O'Higgins, 1922[1]**

Before commencing an analysis of the Royal Irish Constabulary's (RIC) performance leading up to and during the Troubles' (1916 – 1921), it is necessary to first establish *why* the RIC was created and *what* it was created to do. This chapter places the Constabulary in its historical context, briefly examining how England policed Ireland in comparison to itself and the rest of the Empire. It traces the RIC's evolution from its paramilitary origins as a colonial force designed to 'hold' Ireland for England, to its transition into a largely domesticated civil body. This progression is critical to note for two reasons. Firstly, the RIC's paramilitary beginnings is the key to shedding light on its primary function as an intelligence-gathering body, that this was in fact its *raison d'etre* and why it continued to excel at it under poor conditions; it had a lot of practice. More importantly, the RIC's transformation into a domesticated civil body illustrates how profoundly

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[1] Cited in Patrick O'Shea, *Voices and the Sound of Drums*, (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1981), 29.

rooted in Irish life the RIC had become.[2] While this was advantageous for several reasons (not the least of which was an even greater connection to Irish 'happenings') it resulted in the Constabulary decidedly losing its military edge heading into a period when it would need it most.

Beginnings:
Strange Force in a Hostile Land

Chiefly, the Irish Constabulary[3] was created to 'hold' Ireland for Britain. In a country where armed insurrection and unrest was woven into the very fabric of society, the need for political intelligence was immediate, as was a body of trained men to collect it. From the English perspective, "Irish chaos evoked and validated an English civilizing mission."[4] To this end, England's goal was to control the island that neighbored her in such uncomfortable proximity. This geographic propinquity made Ireland an undeniable strategic asset (and liability) critical to England for the very reason it made her vulnerable. Undeniably, Ireland was a back door to Saxon shores, an "Achilles' Heel" of sorts and a grand launching point for England's enemies to attack her. Throughout continental French-English wars, Ireland's nearness only served to remind England of her vulnerability in this regard. For example, during the United Irishmen revolt in 1798, leader Wolfe

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[2] My discussion of the RIC's domestication is based largely on the following seminal article: W.J. Lowe and E.L. Malcolm, "The Domestication of the Royal Irish Constabulary, 1836-1922," *Irish Economic and Social History*, 19, 1992.

[3] The prefix 'Royal' was added to its name in 1867, a token of appreciation following the Constabulary's loyalty and discipline during the Fenian Uprising that same year.

[4] Charles Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland: Government and Resistance since 1848*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1.

Tone attempted to convince the French to unleash an assault against England from Ireland. This awareness remained acute into the 20th century. During World War I, a German attack launched from Ireland was feared to be a distinct possibility and Roger Casement was arrested and hanged for his part in an alleged Irish-German conspiracy.[5]

From its inception then, the primary function of policing in Ireland was to keep the fractious country quiet. Political historian Tom Bowden refers to the RIC as "a force born out of crisis", its underlying principle to suppress subversion and guarantee law and order. He correctly observes: "Policing in Ireland was thus…more a military than a civil exercise."[6] Not surprisingly, the relationship between police and community was characterized by overt coercion, so much so that when the Irish Constabulary emerged in its finalized form in 1836, there was no doubt it would be armed.[7]

At the outset, the Constabulary's *militarized* make-up was a contentious issue. There could be no denying that the strongly centralized body, rigidly disciplined and devoid of any individuality, was anything but a para-military group. One historian notes that: "Every aspect of life, from marriage to the cut of pockets, was controlled with a parsimonious fussiness

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[5] F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine,* (London: Fontana Press, 1985), 77, 301-324.

[6] Tom Bowden, *The Breakdown of Public Security: The Case of Ireland 1919-1921 and Palestine 1936-1939*, (London: Sage Publications, 1977), 20. See also John D. Brewer, "Max Weber and the Royal Irish Constabulary: a note on class and status," *British Journal of Sociology*, 40(1), 82-83; G.J. Fulham, "James Shaw-Kennedy and the Reformation of the Irish Constable," *Eire-Ireland*, 16, 1981, 93-106.

[7] Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland*, 68.

bordering on the absurd."[8] Viewing the Constabulary from a 19th century perspective, HA Blake explains that: "...the sub-constable in the wilds of Donegal will answer the same questions...as to his knowledge of police duties, get up at the same hour, parade at the same time and fold his barrack bedding in exactly the same pattern as his brother stationed in...Wicklow or...Cork."[9] As Blake points out, this kind of military set-up and training did present one advantage, in that it allowed for men to be transplanted from one trouble-spot to another with very little dislocation. This likely formed the motivation behind such strict regulation in the first place.

It is not difficult to see why many contemporaries, and not all of them hostile critics, considered the force 'too military'. In 1864 there existed legal criticism of the police force because it resembled too closely a military rather than a civil body. One such complaint stated: "the constabulary has become more and more a military force and in exact proportion as that system has been established their usefulness and efficiency as a domestic force has been weakened and impaired."[10] A contemporary writing in 1869 points out complaints became even more strident upon the addition of the long Enfield rifle and sword bayonet, that it was the Constabulary's blatant military appearance that formed the "head and front of their offending."[11] Another

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[8] Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland,* 71.

[9] H.A. Blake, "The Irish Police," *The Nineteenth Century,* (February 1881), 393.

[10] Cited in Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland,* 72

contemporary, Clifford Lloyd writing in 1892, commented on the Constabulary calling it "an army of occupation upon which is imposed the performance of certain civil duties."[12] It did not take long for this vivid descriptor to become rooted within nationalist dialogue. The accusation held real meaning launched against a police force that, while drawn from the indigenous population of Irishmen, was neither *of* Ireland nor *for* Ireland. An undated pamphlet distributed by Republican nationalists argued:

> There is in Ireland no police force for the maintenance of the peace such as exists in other countries. The Irish Police, so-called, are the more stationary parts of the army of occupation; they live in barracks and are armed with rifles and revolvers...[13]

It is not surprising that England should have instituted in Ireland a police force very different from what her citizens would accept and what she envisioned for herself. Ireland *was a very different* place from England during the period of police reforms in both countries in the years 1780-1850. Hierarchy, deference, and racial homogeneity marked English society whereas Irish society was cleaved in two along fault lines of race, religion and culture. Politics reflected the social realities. Since 1688 in England, the Protestant aristocracy had developed into a stable, self-confident ruling elite, representing the triumph of Protestantism and the Glorious Revolution. But the fallout of 1688 resulted in a very different reality in Ireland: defeat of the

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[11] Robert Curtis, *The History of the Royal Irish Constabulary*, (London, 1869), 100, 104

[12] C.D.C Lloyd, *Ireland Under the Land League: a Narrative of Personal Experiences*, (London, 1892), 36

[13] Cited in Bowden, *The Breakdown of Public Security*, 25.

people. Roman Catholicism, the religion of four-fifths of the population, was prohibited. Confiscations of natives' land took place in earnest. Catholic ownership fell from sixty percent of the total in 1640 to ten percent in 1720. Whereas the English lower classes were guaranteed poor relief of some sort, all Irish Catholics were subjected to penal laws that abridged their basic civil and political rights.[14] In his analysis of the two countries Palmer argues: "If from the late eighteenth century on Ireland and England were increasingly interlinked in politics and administration, they were societies sharply diverging in economic development and material well-being."[15] This translated into a disparate level of social unrest that manifested itself in a divergent way, Ireland rapidly becoming a society steeped in a tradition of popular armed protest.

What likely had the most far-reaching impact on decisions regarding policing in Ireland was how the English viewed themselves in contrast to the Irish. An Englishman's *liberty* was his classless birthright; E.P. Thompson notes that: "freedom was the coinage of patrician, demagogue, and radical alike."[16] For centuries before 1789, Englishmen associated foreigners with the absolutism and Catholicism of the Continent. Liberty existed of 'being

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[14] Stanley H. Palmer, *Police and Protest in England and Ireland 1780-1850*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 36-37. See also Max Beloff, *Public Order and Popular Disturbances 1660-1714*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1938); WA Speck, *Stability and Strife: England 1714-1760*, (Cambridge, Mass.,: Harvard University Press, 1977), ch. 2, 3; Maureen Wall, *The Penal Laws 1691-1760*, (Dundalk: Dundalgen Press, 1961).

[15] Palmer, *Police and Protest*, 37.

[16] Cited in Palmer, *Police and Protest*, 41.

English.' Frederick Engels however, wrote of the Irish character in 1845: it "is comfortable only in the dirt," and the Irishman himself "but little above the savage."[17] Englishmen of all classes shared this opinion. The English image of Paddy – rustic, rude and filthy – had a history dating to the 11th century and the sheer crushing poverty of the Irish countryside did little to earn the respect of, or sense of brotherliness from, the English. The mud-baked cabins populated by numerous offspring and, very often at the same time, livestock, appalled them.[18] What disturbed the English by far though, was the apparent Irish propensity for violence.

The history of political violence in Ireland forms a large part of its culture and development and certainly has had a tremendous impact on its relationship with England.[19] In Ireland, every generation brought yet another 'revolt,' 'rebellion' or some level of resistance to law and order: the rebellion of 1798 led by Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen, the uprising of 1801 led by Robert Emmet, the 1848 Young Ireland revolt, the Fenian uprising of 1867, the 1880's Land War, the Easter Rising of 1916 and the War for Independence of 1919-1921, highlight the most significant. Numerous 'secret societies' proliferated in rural Ireland in the 18th and 19th centuries, groups with names like Defenders, Rightboys, Carders, Rockites, and Terry

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[17] Cited in Palmer, *Police and Protest*, 43.

[18] Palmer, *Police and Protest*, 40-45.

[19] This is the thesis Charles Townshend puts forth in his seminal survey, *Political Violence in Ireland* (1983).

Alts. Each was so similar in its makeup and behavior however, that the generic term Whiteboys can be applied to all of them. Indeed, they were each often known simply as 'the boys.' While these groups of young men did not have an overtly political agenda and certainly did not share a consciousness of nation or state, it would be remiss to think that their agrarian, secret society guerrilla tactics were entirely apolitical. Historian Charles Townshend argues that the Irish Republican Army (IRA) was heir to this tradition of agrarian terrorism and succession of secret societies, its elemental quality one of its main sources of strength. With such historical precedent in existence, the development of the IRA is not the least surprising.[20]

The issue at heart *was land*, who controlled it, who worked it, the level of rents and the existence of tithes. The perspective of one British military commander in 1871 was that it was: "very evident that the possession of Irish land, on a sort of social principle, by the lower classes is the aim of the Irish...."[21] Land was an explosive issue and spawned the Tithe War of the 1830's. In his study of the politicized nature of violence in Ireland, Townshend argues: "the political implications of resistance to the payment of tithes to a church to which the mass of the population did not belong are

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[20] Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland*, 49; R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972*, (London: Penguin Books, 1988). 88-94; Joseph Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985*, (Cambridge, 1985), 38-47.

[21] Cited in Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland*, 15.

obvious"[22] The controversy regarding land ultimately culminated in a series of events known as the Land War (1879 – 1887). This period had a tremendous impact on the rural population of Ireland, lending them a new political awareness that prior to this was mainly absent. Townshend explains it "created a new consciousness of collective strength." For example, the Land League was founded to politically front the cause and articulate demands. Participants employed sophisticated methods of struggle, such as the coordinated withholding of rents on a community-wide basis and social sanctions against opponents in the form of ostracism or 'boycotting.' The last would prove to be the IRA's most effective insurgency tool some thirty years later. These largely non-violent methods were also accompanied by agrarian crime and more violent offences such as the maiming of cattle by smashing their legs with stones, and the firing of bullets through the windows of homes at night in an attempt to murder sleeping occupants. [23] While the Land War can be considered a "revolution in land tenure,"[24] infused with political awareness, it was not a nationalist crusade nor did its agenda have any desire to see an independent Ireland separate from England. The goal was to

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[22] *Ibid.*, 20.

[23] Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland,* 106.

[24] It forced the British government first to invert the legal relationship between landlord and tenant, and finally to deploy state funds and machinery to bring about a substantial transition to peasant ownership. Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland,* 105-06. See the survey studies of F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland since the Famine,* (London: Fontana Press, 1973) and Foster, *Modern Ireland.*

have the present situation in rural Ireland *changed* and thus improved, not *replaced.*

There were elements within Irish society all the same, whose agenda it was to see the established English authority in Ireland overthrown and an independent Irish nation emerge. In effect, nationalist resistance can be traced back to the Conquest itself. Centuries passed before it became its 20th century realization however, undergoing a metamorphosis from a movement made up primarily of Protestant Ascendancy to one comprised mainly of indigenous Catholic (Gaelic) Irish. Whether or not, as some historians have argued, there has always been an innate national consciousness in Ireland or whether such awareness was "gradually but remorselessly constructed by intellectuals"[25] and inherited by the Irish people, one thing remains clear: every foiled attempt at armed rebellion against British authority in Ireland served only to fuel further attempts by successive generations. In fact, a survey of national resistance in Ireland shows that each time a rebellion was quashed, subsequent attempts, while without military victories (until 1921), gained in political sophistication, ideology and momentum, responsible for creating the romantic notion of a "phoenix flame." "Phoenixism" allowed that though Irish nationalism may be quelled through force of arms by English military might, it would always persist in "rising from the ashes" to try again until victory lay in the hands of Ireland's people. Even modern historians

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[25] Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland,* 26

write with this vision in mind. Take for example F.S.L. Lyons who writes of one particular rebellion: "The embers of Irish identity had been subdued, they had not been extinguished; and out of them, as dedicated men blew on the coals, rose once more the deathless phoenix of independent nationality."[26]

If England was going to keep Ireland calm and 'hold' her, its leaders were going to have to employ methods questionable in their libertarian make-up and perhaps even entirely odious to English sensibilities regarding 'freedom' and the 'rights of man'. According to Tom Bowden, the Irish Constabulary was a *political* police force whose structure and role echoed the counter-revolutionary traditions of the continental gendarmeries "sired by anxious enlightened despots." In Machiavellian terms, the Constabulary was very much a 'police of the Prince,' its prime task to locate, isolate and then defuse the whole spectrum of political discontent running from localized sporadic dissidence through to widespread revolutionary subversion.[27] In this Roman style of policing, government and its agencies were at one, and far more pervasive and paternalistic. This is in direct contrast to the common law policing style historically adhered to by the English, where the policeman serves as little more than a professional citizen and is armed with little more

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[26] Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, 21.

[27] For this and quote see, Bowden, *The Breakdown of Public Security*, 18. See also GJ Fulham, "James-Shaw Kennedy and the Reformation of the Irish Constable," *Eire-Ireland*, 16, 1981, 93-106.

than an unobtrusive club.[28] The distinction often made by police historians is between: 'low' policing, concerned primarily with crime and public order (what became the British 'bobby' model) and the European practice of 'high' policing, concerned principally with counter-subversion in an effort to keep the regime in power.[29] The RIC clearly fell into the latter category and tradition.

It is something of an anomaly that England, the initiator and protector of the common-law (or 'low') approach to policing, should have adopted the European model in almost all of its colonies, beginning in Ireland. This cut to the heart of the RIC's initial problematic nature and controversial role in Irish society; it was a force fashioned along the lines of the Roman law 'police of the Prince', administered by a common law country. The result was a very inadequate and confusing half-way house.[30] The inherent duality in the Constabulary's role and function created no small amount of uncertainty concerning its exact nature; was it a civil police force with military training and equipment, or a military force with civilian responsibilities? The

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[28] Tom Bowden, *Beyond the Limits of the Law: A Comparative Study of the Police in Crisis Politics,* (Pelican: Harmondsworth, 1978), 168-169.

[29] See for example, Clive Emsley, *Gendarmes and the State in Nineteenth-Century Europe,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); His-huey Liang, *The Rise of Modern Police and the European State System from Metternich to the Second World War,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[30] Bowden, *The Breakdown of Public Security,* 20. An interesting aspect of Palmer's study is that it addresses the long debate over the style of police England was prepared to accept. Ireland became something of a testing ground for police reforms and innovations later applied to England as well as throughout the Empire. Palmer, *Police and Protest,* see esp., 11-34.

question, never satisfactorily answered, left room for the constant 'reshaping and revising' of the force that during the extreme stress of the Troubles in 1920-21 immobilized its efficacy entirely.

From Militarized to Civilized: The Domestication of the RIC

Certainly, life in the early days of the RIC was not easy. A long list of grievances grew organically that in times of relative calm, was almost bearable, but in times of stress, became intolerable. For instance, the pay was inadequate, promotion procedures were random and tardy, and barracks accommodation was shabby and depressing (the central RIC barracks in Dublin had three baths for 500 men). The men needed permission to marry and could only do so after ten years of service and with the commanding officer's approval of the bride. Constables were not allowed to serve in the district from which they had been born or recruited. There existed no recognized off-duty period, day of rest or annual leave; the men were confined to barracks at night, could not vote and discipline remained extremely authoritarian.[31] Despite its problematic nature, this did not discourage men from joining. By far the most common background of new recruits was that of the sons of farmers. This category far exceeded any other such as laborers and shop assistants.[32] Taking into account the explanation made by Sir

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[31] Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, 4.

[32] Bowden, *The Breakdown of Public Security*, 33.

Edward Henry, Commissioner of the London Metropolitan Police, the reasoning behind such recruitment policy is plain: "we like to take them right from the plough...they are slow but steady; you can mould them into any shape you please."[33] Certainly, there was no shortage of recruits from the English countryside, or the Irish one either. Eldest sons took over running the farm from their fathers; this left the younger males to make their own way. In Ireland, the choices were simple: emigrate, become a priest, or join the Constabulary.

Between 1867 (after the Fenian Uprising) and the turn of the century, two important amendments were gradually introduced to the RIC's administration that irrevocably changed its nature and planted it firmly on the road to domestication. First of all, promotions within the ranks became commonplace. In the beginning the RIC had drafted its officers exclusively from among the British via a cadet scheme aimed at English public schools, but by 1914 half of the officers serving had to be drawn from within the Constabulary itself.[34] This translated into the development of an 'Irish', indigenous force, particularly since by now most new recruits were not only Irish born, but Catholic. Of the 178 recruits in 1913, ninety-eight percent were natives of Ireland and eighty-six percent were Catholic. The 'Irish face' of the force went a long way towards normalizing relations between itself and

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[33] Cited in Raymond Fosdick, *European Police Systems*, (Montclair: Patterson Smith, 1969), 201.

[34] Lowe and Malcolm, "Domestication of the RIC," 42.

the local population. Now the RIC did not seem so alien, filled as it was with Irish (and more importantly) Catholic men.[35]

Secondly, working conditions of the RIC improved tremendously and joining the Constabulary meant a career with real prospects.[36] For example, restrictions on marriage were lifted, a pension was introduced, and transfers of its men were minimized. This last ensured officers and constables spent increasingly longer periods in the same place and by so doing, were able to acquire immense local knowledge and gain the familiarity and respect of the community. From 1891 to 1900, fifty-eight percent had careers of more than twenty years duration and even during the period 1901 to 1910, sixty percent remained in the ten- to twenty-year range, with seven percent having served over twenty years. Altogether, this added up to an impressive element of continuity, experience and stability in the ranks of the RIC. Men joined with the goal of staying a long time. And thanks to the population's growing acceptance of them, individual constables enjoyed genuine high esteem in their adopted districts.[37]

RIC men lived strict and disciplined lives and this also helped build strong and worthy reputations. Furthermore, the education levels of RIC

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[35] Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, 24.

[36] Anonymous, *Tales of the R.I.C.* (Edinburgh: Blackwood Press, 1921), 11-13; George Garrow-Green, *In the Royal Irish Constabulary*, London: J. Blackwood and Co., 1905), 23.

[37] John D. Brewer, "Max Weber and the Royal Irish Constabulary: A Note on Class and Status," *British Journal of Sociology*, 40(1), 82-83; John D. Brewer, *The Royal Irish Constabulary: an Oral History*, (Belfast: 1990), 23-28; Lowe and Malcolm, "Domestication of the RIC," 30, 41-42, 45-46; Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, 11-17.

constables tended to be well above that of the community. In addition to the parish priest, policemen often provided the only source of literacy and numeracy skills for illiterate locals to call upon when needed. Constables often read and composed people's letters, did the account books for shopkeepers, and completed various official forms for the public.[38] Performing these tasks was a show of good will on behalf of the RIC to garner the trust of the people it oversaw. It also served another purpose. Cordial ties to the community ranked as critical in a 1909 RIC manual relating to the discharge of police duties; it was a constable's primary job to acquire a thorough knowledge of his district and good relations with the locals made this possible.[39] To a greater extent than his English counterpart, the Irish constable was expected to 'anticipate' political unrest and criminal intent and be ready to act accordingly. Historian David Fitzpatrick explains: "As prophets, pursuers and prosecutors, [the RIC] needed to know the people of their adopted districts as intimately as a postmistress might....The routine work of the...RIC involved observation of human character no less exact than that expected of a novelist."[40] Every person in a community was accounted for, as were their activities and movements. It is not surprising the force became known as "the eyes and ears of Dublin Castle." Local goodwill went a

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[38] Brewer, "Max Weber and the RIC," 84.

[39] Lowe and Malcolm, "Domestication of the RIC," 29.

[40] Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, 3-4. It is interesting to note here that a section of each week's *Constabulary Gazette* comprised arithmetical tests.

long way towards securing information pertaining to criminal and political matters. Without the cooperation of the public, the RIC would have been unable to operate at even minimal efficiency, which they found out in 1920.[41]

This 'softening' of the RIC and its 'melting' into the community came at a price. As the Constabulary settled in and settled down, it lost much of its military edge. The Irish police did not fully disarm until their disbandment in 1922, but the carbine became increasingly less visible. From the 1870s, most regular policing and patrol duties did not call for firearms.[42] A generation after the famine, Ireland was a much quieter country, less violent and more orderly. While the police partly contributed to this development of law-abiding Irishmen, greater literacy and tighter clerical control shared the greater responsibility.[43] There was a feeling within the force that the seldom-seen carbines were a pointless trapping and that the RIC was no longer properly trained in their use. Patrick Shea recalled seeing policemen at his father's barracks doctoring their practice targets.[44] By the First World War, those sitting in Westminster and Dublin Castle shared grave doubts

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[41] Lowe and Malcolm, "Domestication of the RIC," 29-30.

[42] Brian Griffin, "The Irish Police, 1836 – 1914: a Social History," (unpublished PhD dissertation, Loyola University of Chicago, 1990), 51.

[43] Lowe and Malcolm, "Domestication of the RIC," 28; W.E. Vaughan, "Ireland c. 1870," in W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A New History of Ireland V: Ireland Under the Union, I, 1801-1870,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 767, 769.

[44] Shea, *Voices and the Sound of Drums,* 9-10; Lowe and Malcolm, "Domestication of the RIC," 31.

concerning the effectiveness of the RIC in the event of a German invasion.[45]

The Constabulary's relentless pursuit for information brought it to the brink of being an over-bureaucratized, administrative apparatus. In 1918, the *Constabulary Gazette* noted that the principal aim of the force was to: "use two men for one man's work and underpay both."[46] By 1865 the Constabulary was very much the master at collating statistics (its members bona-fide civil servants, experts in the proliferation of red-tape). For instance, its tasks included inquiring into the size of potato crops in relation to the harvest before it, compiling a registry of householders, amassing comprehensive agricultural statistics and census data, serving and collecting poor-law notices, escorting prisoners, performing customs duty, weights and measure inspections and enforcing new fishery and liquor control regulations. There was even a register of prostitutes.[47] Such tedious and time-consuming work placed a heavy strain on senior officials. The Inspector General and his County Inspectors often found themselves buried, literally, in piles of paper work. Contemporary accounts argued that the only thing such voluminous reporting accomplished was to reduce senior officials to the level of

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[45] On RIC military ill-preparedness in case of a German invasion: Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life,* 28; Townshend, *British Campaign in Ireland,* 42; Eunan O'Halpin, *Decline of the Union: British Government in Ireland, 1892 – 1920,* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1987), 21.

[46] *Constabulary Gazette,* 10 Aug 1918

[47] Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland,* 70. Also, Bowden, *The Breakdown of Public Security,* 29.

transmitting clerks.[48]

However, such attention to detail went a long ways towards generating a great deal of potentially useful intelligence concerning any and all political movements among the Irish people. The intelligence system turned upon Dublin Castle; the collection, sifting and collation of political information was extremely rigid and centralized. Each District had its own Inspector who answered to the County Inspector. Each County Inspector (of which there were thirty-two) reported to the Inspector General. Every piece of political intelligence went across his desk before being directly transferred to Dublin Castle where it was collected by the Crimes Special Branch section of the RIC. In time all important intelligence was gathered into a monthly report and was forwarded to the Chief-Secretary and Lord-Lieutenant.[49] In this there was a strict hierarchy of communication that one would expect to see within the military in times of war.

Conclusion

England's need to maintain law and order in Ireland resulted in the creation of an Irish Constabulary that took the shape of a centralized, colonial gendarmerie, a 'police of the Prince.' With time, the RIC became the

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[48] Blake, "Irish Police," 396; Lloyd, *Ireland Under the Land League*, 36.

[49] For an excellent summary of how the intelligence channel worked in the Constabulary, see *Intelligence Notes*, xvi-xviii. These monthly confidential reports of the Inspector General and County Inspectors are an invaluable tool to any historian researching this period and form the backbone of intelligence-gathering in Ireland. Especially in the context of this thesis, these reports give a bird's-eye view into the inner workings of the RIC in regards to what was being reported and ear-marked as important.

strong right arm of the English presence in Ireland, earning not only its title 'Royal' but such epithets as 'prime oppressor' and 'army of occupation.' The turbulent atmosphere in Ireland that always seemed, to the British at least, on the verge of exploding, served to justify the armed and militarized make-up of the RIC. While holding tightly to its libertarian ideals within its own country, England justified the policing style of Ireland with the notion that a 'society gets the police it deserves.'

The dawn of the 20th century in Ireland and the changes it would herald in just a few short decades brought with it an Irish Constabulary truly domesticated. While the RIC retained its military *posturing*, neither relinquishing its characteristic discipline or loyalty, its metamorphosis into a civil body was nonetheless complete. The RIC had ceased to be the alien outsider inspiring suspicion and contempt, having become instead an integrated part of Irish life, fully absorbed into the community matrix. The RIC might have gone soft in its soldierly capacity, but its intelligence apparatus was as strong as ever. On the surface, comprised of duplicate and triplicate copies of everything, the system may have seemed unwieldy and impractical. Nothing could be further from the truth. For the Constabulary men who knew it from the inside, the intelligence channel hummed along like a finely tuned engine. It was a well-worn path and the Constabulary's knowledge and experience of it, institutionalized.

But even with the vast improvements made to its administration after 1867, the RIC would continue to be plagued by problems of pay and conditions into the new century. Furthermore, the RIC's very closeness to the community was a double-edged sword – its strength *and* its weakness. It was well-informed, but vulnerable to intimidation and isolation by virtue of its integration into Irish society. The serpent, in effect, had been defanged, leaving its soft underbelly exposed and vulnerable. What this meant in terms of the Constabulary's future remained to be seen.

Chapter 3

The Road to Rebellion

> This force is disloyal and bitterly anti-British and is daily improving its organization....it is now pledged to resist conscription with arms. According to information from a reliable source the Sinn Feiners have already planned a rising and...they might give a serious amount of trouble.
>
> County Inspector RIC, 13 November 1915[1]

> We are satisfied that...[the government] did receive...full and exact reports as to the nature, progress and aims of the various armed associations in Ireland. From these sources the government had abundant material on which they could have acted....
>
> Report of the Royal Commission on the Rebellion In Ireland, 1916.[2]

Introduction

When there is a breakdown in civil order, such as occurred in Ireland during Easter week 1916, questions arise immediately concerning the nature of the disturbance and if it could have been prevented. In line with the issue of accountability, also comes the consideration of who failed to do their job. This chapter is not as concerned with the first problem as it is with the latter. As the gatekeepers of law in Ireland when public order broke down in 1916 the Royal Irish Constabulary merited immediate suspicion. But a Royal Commission investigation held after the Easter Rising showed that the RIC not only foresaw, it amply documented the circumstances in Ireland that

[1] *County Inspector Monthly Confidential Report,* CO 904 / 25, 13 November 1915. From now on referred to as *CI Monthly Report* with record number and date to follow where available.

[2] *Report of the Royal Commission on the Rebellion in Ireland, 1916,* [Cd. 8279], 13.

conspired to bring about rebellion. It did its job; it was others around the Constabulary who failed to do theirs.

The Royal Commission's most revealing conclusion about the Easter Rising was that it was an event principally brought about by its victims. In other words, blame was placed squarely at the doorstep of Dublin Castle and the men within its walls responsible for dictating overall government policy.[3] At this time the executive government of Ireland consisted of three offices. The Lord-Lieutenant was, in theory, the top man, but in reality it was the Chief Secretary, and all power was wielded at his discretion by the permanent Under Secretary. The office of the Lord-Lieutenant was largely a ceremonial one with no executive functions. Without consultation, various state documents could be issued in his name, put before him only to sign. He was furnished with information regarding the state of the country as a matter of courtesy. Politicians of the period often said that the Lord-Lieutenant wore the insignia of command and signed the log, but the Chief Secretary was really the captain of the ship, while the Under Secretary was the man at the wheel.[4] Augustine Birrell arrived in Ireland in 1907 to take over the office of Chief Secretary and his tenure until 1916 lasted longer than many of his predecessors. In 1914, Sir Matthew Nathan, a Liberal with an army background, joined him and took over the office of Under-Secretary,

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[3] *Report of the Royal Commission*, [Cd. 8279], 12-13.

[4] *Ibid.*, 3-4. During the period leading up to the Rising (1905-1915) the office of the Lord Lieutenant was held by John Campbell Hamilton-Gordon, 7th Earl of Aberdeen. Ivor Churchill Guest, 2nd Baron Wimborne, succeeded him (1915-1918).

becoming Birrell's right hand man. Together these two men, inheritors of a 20th century Liberal scheme in Ireland, employed a fateful policy that sacrificed the maintenance of law and order to political expediency, so much so that it enabled lawlessness to embed itself and spread unchecked.

The policy, stripped to its most basic tenet, was that Ireland should be kept quiet at almost any cost. Enforcing the law thoroughly, risked provoking Irish discontent and such confrontations were to be expressly avoided. The simple solution then was that the law was not enforced. This was something new for England, which typically ran its Empire 'walking softly but carrying a big stick'. While Ireland was not strictly one of its colonies, in dealing with it over the centuries, England had never failed to employ the stick effectively when required. It was the impending reality of Home Rule and all that it implied that changed everything.

Home Rule drastically altered England's relationship to Ireland. With the 20th century barely a few years old, it became obvious that the power-holders in Dublin Castle had made a conscious decision to throw the stick away altogether, opting only to tread very carefully. Some have called this 'concealed abdication' on Britain's part.[5] With Home Rule seemingly a foregone conclusion, the Castle system atrophied in the face of its reduced

[5] Hawkins, "Dublin Castle and the Royal Irish Constabulary," 169. See also Tom Bowden, *The Breakdown of Public Security: the Case of Ireland 1916-1921 and Palestine 1936-1939,* (London: Sage, 1977), 39-40. Bowden refers to the Government at this time as a: "mere holding operation."

role in Irish affairs. The effort and financing required on Westminster's behalf to sustain, or otherwise improve upon, a machine about to be dismantled anyway, did not seem worth the effort. [6]

No one suffered more under this apathy than the Royal Irish Constabulary. Demoralized by conditions and pay, the force faced even more challenges with the outbreak of World War when its numbers dropped dramatically due to enlistment, and the options to emigrate or resign were suspended leaving no way out of a worsening situation. Members of the Constabulary were acutely aware of being left behind and that what was once a good and stable career was now filled with uncertainty.[7]

Even so, such conditions did not prevent the RIC from functioning at a high level of competency. Despite a tentative future (Home Rule would likely mean its demise), numbers dwindling, and little if no recognition from Dublin Castle, the RIC did its job well, falling back on doing what it had always done: it tracked seditious speeches and newspapers, it knew who the insurgent leaders were and it could provide critical names and dates. The problem for the Constabulary was not that it was in the dark about an imminent rising of some sort, but that everyone had stopped listening. For once, no one wanted to hear what the police had to say.

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[6] Hawkins, "Dublin Castle and the Royal Irish Constabulary," 167.

[7] Irish Police Committee, *Royal Irish Constabulary and Dublin Metropolitan Police: Report of the Committee of Inquiry, 1914*, (London: A.Thom and Co. Ltd, 1914), *op.cit.*. David Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life Provincial Experience of War and Revolution 1913-1921*, (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan,1977), 11-30. See also, John D. Brewer, "Max Weber and the Royal Irish Constabulary: a note on class and status," *The British Journal of Sociology*, 40.1 (1989): 88-90.

Home Rule

The momentous 1801 Act of Union that dissolved Ireland's parliament and brought the country under direct rule from Westminster, dashed the hopes of all Irish nationals who dreamed of a country altogether free from British power. The dissolution of Ireland's remaining vestige of quasi-independence left a bitter aftertaste amongst the following generations of Irish, who dedicated themselves anew to liberating Ireland from its English colonial shackles. The physical-force tradition had always had a prominent place in Irish history, in turn spawning an equally influential militant core uncompromising in its belief that Irish independence would be achieved only through violent means. The Act of Union itself was a direct response to the 1798 United Irishman revolt led by Wolfe Tone. Rather than face being hanged, drawn and quartered, Tone committed suicide in his cell shortly after capture, but not before he publicly made clear his ambition for Ireland in his writings: "My object was to secure the independence of my country...to which I was led by a hatred of England so deeply rooted in my nature that it was rather an instinct than a principle."[8]

The all-pervasive ideology driving this militant core of nationalists suffered from a kind of republican tunnel vision – nothing but a Republic was acceptable, nothing but a Republic would give Ireland true independence. What began with Wolfe Tone in 1798, carried on with Robert Emmet in 1803, continued with the Young Irelanders in 1848, followed by the Fenian uprising

[8] Cited in Bowden, *The Breakdown of Public Security,* 55-56.

in 1867, culminating with the Easter Rising in 1916 and the Troubles in 1920-21.[9] It was a bloody and grievous path that made failure to realize anything less than a Republic increasingly unacceptable with each life lost fighting for it. This at heart was the issue that haunted Treaty negotiations in 1921. When Michael Collins accepted English terms for an 'Irish Free State' (basically a glorified Home Rule whereby Ireland pledged allegiance to the Crown), to many he had betrayed the Irish cause. His decision precipitated a violent split between Republicans into pro- and anti-Treaty camps, an ideological opposition that eventually spilled over into outright civil war, and cost Collins his life.[10]

In addition to this legacy of gun politics was a constitutional tradition that rallied for independence through a Home Rule bill. Such a bill would restore Ireland's constitution of 1783 and reinstate an Irish parliament independent from that of Great Britain's. Daniel O'Connell and Charles Stewart Parnell were the great architects of this tradition. O'Connell levied subscriptions from his numerous supporters, called mass meetings and insisted on a pledge-bound party, anticipating many of the techniques of modern representative democracy. In 1829 he won the right for Catholics to sit at Westminster, but his attempt to force the Conservatives into conceding

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[9] For an excellent survey see Charles Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland: Government and Resistance since 1848*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972*, (London: Penguin Books, 1988); F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, (London: Fontana Press, 1973); Tom Garvin, *Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland, 1858-1928*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[10] For an excellent account of this see: Michael Hopkinson, *Green Against Green: the Irish Civil War*, (New York: St.Martin's Press, 1988).

Home Rule by threatening massive demonstrations failed in the 1830's.[11]

Parnell's meteoric rise to power coincided with his founding of the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) that served in Westminster as advocates of Irish political affairs. His career peaked in the 1880's, helped by a charisma that reenergized constitutionalism and won over (at least for the time being) many hard-core republicans for whom force was the only route to freedom. Before his downfall in 1890, Parnell succeeded in uniting many of the nationalist factions behind him in a constitutional drive to independence. His cause was greatly helped by Liberal support from party leader William Gladstone. Gladstone had become convinced that Home Rule was inevitable and necessary for Ireland's peace and prosperity. With Gladstone's new conviction, the Liberals and Parnell's Irish Parliamentary Party allied to oust the Conservatives from power and introduced the first Home Rule bill in 1886.[12] The ramifications of this were immediate. Even though the bill would go through several revisions and rejections before finally making it onto the statute book in 1912, Home Rule infected all aspects of the political sphere and affected all subsequent decisions regarding government policy.

Even though Birrell fully supported Home Rule as a concept, the

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[11] T. Hoppen, "Riding a Tiger: Daniel O'Connell, Reform and Popular Politics in Ireland,1800-1847," *Proceedings of the British* Academy, (1999), 100: 121-143; Oliver MacDonagh, *The Emancipist: Daniel O'Connell, 1830-47,* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989).

[12] For a concise account of Parnell's rise and fall see Lyons Chapter, "Parnell: Zenith and Nadir," in *Ireland Since the Famine*, 170-195.

nature of its reality was that it essentially castrated his administration. While waiting to put in his share of the last dying gasps of British power in Ireland, Birrell's government from 1907 to 1916 was nothing less than a lame duck. Especially following the outbreak of war in 1914, the policy instituted from Westminster driving all government action throughout this period was to avoid inflaming Ireland's brewing discontent.[13] To this end, Birrell recommended that the strong arm of the RIC be kept in check, personally urging the Constabulary to maintain a low-key, inoffensive profile.[14]

While Birrell chose to ignore the mounting tensions disturbing Ireland's equilibrium, the RIC did not have that luxury. By 1912, Home Rule had not only effectively split the country into two opposing camps – north and south, Unionist and Nationalist – it placed a moderate strain on the relations between RIC officers and its rank and file. The higher echelons tended to be more conservative, opposed to Home Rule and dissolution of the union, whereas lower ranks could not hide their sympathy towards the nationalist cause.[15]

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[13] *Report of the Royal Commission*, [Cd. 8279], 12-13; Leon O Broin, "Birrell, Nathan and the Men of Dublin Castle," in *Leaders and Men of the Easter Rising: Dublin 1916*, F.X. Martin (ed.), (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1967), 3-4; Eunan O'Halpin, *The Decline of the Union: British Government in Ireland 1892-1920*, (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1987), 88-93. O'Halpin accuses Birrell of being too timid and that as Chief Secretary he did not take seriously the idea of outright rebellion, opting to sit out and tolerate illegalities. See also Bowden, *The Breakdown of Public Security*, 39-40.

[14] Elizabeth Muenger, *The British Military Dilemma in Ireland: Occupation Politics, 1886-1914*, (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1991), 106-107.

[15] *Ibid.*, 111.

Like all tensions aggravated by Home Rule, this one was magnified ten-fold in Ulster where the saga of the Troubles had already set out on a distinct course of history separate from the remaining provinces in the south.[16] Ulster, its own cultural monolith with historical ties reaching back to William of Orange and Battle of the Boyne, was unshakable in its opposition to Home Rule, which it coined 'Rome Rule.' Protestant laborers and merchants whose fortunes so heavily relied on the protection and opportunities assured to them by remaining in the Union as loyal British citizens, easily made the transition from vocal objectors to violent resistors. The mantra they hurled out into the political arena, both challenging and menacing, was 'Ulster will fight, Ulster will be right'. On 28 September 1912, Unionist organizers hosted a huge ceremony in Belfast where they collected nearly a quarter of a million signatures in support of the *Solemn League and Covenant*, a controversial document that threatened outright violent action against the very Union it sought to preserve. It read in part:

> Being convinced in our consciences that Home Rule would be disastrous to material well-being of Ulster...subversive of our civil and religious freedom...and perilous to the unity of Empire [we] do hereby pledge ourselves...to...using all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule parliament.[17]

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[16] Because of this, events as they unfolded in Ulster will be for the most part excluded from this work, touched upon but briefly to help explain events directly impacting the south.

[17] *Intelligence Notes 1913-1916, Preserved in the State Paper Office*, B. Mac Giolla Choille (ed.), (Baile Átha Cliath : Oifig an tSoláthair,1966), 19, 16-37, 94-102. For an excellent historical analysis of Ulster during this period see: A.T.Q. Stewart, *The Ulster crisis*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1967); Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, 285-310; Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland*, 245-255.

The Constabulary became painfully enmeshed in this politicized battle of wills where swords were drawn along clearly defined sectarian lines. This divide was keenly felt within the Constabulary; whereas the majority of the force's makeup was Catholic outside of Ulster (as high as 89% in the southern counties)[18], in areas such as Belfast the majority of rank and file members were Protestant. This created a confusing conflict of interest amongst the men about where to place their loyalty. In the end such crises of identity were moot. Regardless of composition and individual sympathies inside the Constabulary, the Unionists targeted it as a single identifiable entity, at its heart a 'papist' organization now in the hands of Home Rulers. As early as 1887 when the RIC were called in to break up a riot in Belfast, the Report of the Riots Commission concluded: "[it is] an expression of the extraordinary belief...that the late Government was packing the town of Belfast with Catholic policemen, carefully selected from southern counties, and charged with the duty of shooting Protestants."[19] In a tragic twist of irony, both Nationalists and Unionists damned the RIC, each for its own reasons. The former because it considered the force spies and traitors to Ireland, 'the eyes and ears of Dublin Castle', the latter because they believed it had become an instrument of repression to check Unionist loyalty and prevent it from defending itself against Catholic Home Rule.

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[18] Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life,* 24.

[19] Cited in Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland,* 187.

Peace Preservation (Arms) Act 1906

While much of the blame surrounding the events of 1916 can conveniently be laid at Birrell's feet, it pays to remember that his government policy was one Birrell inherited, rather than one he invented. Before he arrived on the scene in January 1907, the Liberal *laissez-faire* approach to Irish affairs had already taken root, amply illustrated by the actions of Birrell's predecessor James Bryce. Perhaps it was the relatively undisturbed state of Ireland since the 1880's that encouraged the Liberals to forge ahead with its hands-off approach. To be sure, the first few years of the new century were some of the quietest the country had ever experienced. This was reflected in the level of domestication seen in the RIC, who by now had traded in its paramilitary edge for a kinder, gentler civil side.[20] Whatever the case, when the Liberals returned to power at the end of 1905, Bryce's primary concern as Chief-Secretary was to recommit his government to Home Rule. This, coupled with Bryce's intrinsic moderate character, ushered in a new era of conciliatory politics.[21]

One crucial decision made by Bryce's government was to allow the Arms Act to lapse in 1906. The Peace Preservation (Arms) Act was the one tangible power the Castle administration possessed to control the use and importation of arms. It had been passed in 1881 at the height of a rash of agrarian disorders. The Act placed severe limitations on the possession of

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[20] See Chapter 2

[21] Muenger, *The British Military Dilemma in Ireland,* 105.

munitions of any kind and greatly expanded search and arrest powers, whereby any suspect could be summarily arrested and houses searched without warning. Most importantly, the Act allowed strict government control over the sale and importation of firearms and ammunition into the country.[22] Bryce, along with his supporters, felt the Act unnecessarily harsh and untenable in light of the relations the Liberals were attempting to cultivate with Ireland.[23]

In 1906 debate ensued in London over whether to retain the Act. The RIC was quite vocal in its recommendation to maintain this critical piece of legislation from which it derived the ability to enforce the law. The Constabulary's biggest concern was losing its power of search; the RIC knew it would be severely hindered in its attempts to regulate or monitor the distribution of arms throughout the country without it. In several letters published in the *Constabulary Gazette*, the RIC articulated its fears that a situation realistically could arise whereby people set out to systematically arm themselves and the RIC would be unable to control it.[24] The Constabulary, voicing its concerns in Confidential Reports to Dublin Castle and in public newsprint, went largely ignored in a trend soon to become all

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[22] *Report of the Royal Commission* [Cd. 8279], 4; *Intelligence Notes*, 22; Charles Townshend, "Policing Insurgency in Ireland, 1914-1923," in D.M. Anderson and D. Killingray (eds.), *Policing and Decolonization: Politics, Nationalism and the Police, 1917-1965*, (Manchester, 1992), 25-28.

[23] O'Halpin, *Decline of the Union*, 60-80.

[24] *Monthly Confidential Reports RIC*, PRO CO 904/23 November-January 1905-06; *Constabulary Gazette*, 16 November 1905; 22 January 1906.

too familiar. At Westminster, English politicians believed the RIC's fears to be unfounded. Instead, Bryce submitted a cabinet memorandum urging that the Act be permitted to lapse and it was.

This decision would have a far-reaching impact on unfolding events in Ireland and on the men responsible for the preservation of peace there. Immediately, there were increases in the number of shooting incidents (any episode involving the discharge of a firearm, not necessarily at another person): 39 in 1906, 87 a year later and in 1908 the number reached 113.[25] The RIC was at first cautious in its reports to Dublin Castle concerning the influx of arms into Ireland, largely interpreting it as the natural result of a country that had been for so long restricted from the possession of any weapons. The Constabulary was not surprised by the increase, knowing its countrymen to be sport-loving and that the ownership of a gun carried with it a degree of social distinction and status. Nonetheless, even though the reports arriving from the various Country Inspectors agreed there were not at present any grounds for serious alarm, many warned the situation would inevitably lead to regrettable consequences if some means of controlling the brandishing of weapons by irresponsible citizens was not adopted.[26] The Constabulary was not alone in its synopsis. In November of 1908, the *Irish Catholic* newspaper lambasted the government's decision with the observation: "those who may be disposed to give illegal expression to their

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[25] These numbers leveled out to an average of 85 up to 1916. See *Intelligence Notes*, 249.

[26] *CI Monthly Reports*, CO 904 / 23, 1908.

sense of injustice have been placed in possession of deadly weapons to an extent unparalleled in Ireland save in time of civil war".[27] Three months later, the newspaper followed up with: "it is nothing short of an astounding evil to repeal the Peace Preservation Act. For months past arms have been pouring into the provincial districts".[28] As will be seen, what was very much an exaggeration early in 1909, had become a shocking truth by 1914. As the RIC had predicted, left to run its inevitable course unchecked, the situation eventually did escalate out of control. Winston Churchill would later refer to the Arms Act issue as: "the most gratuitously stupid thing that old fool Bryce ever did".[29] This was not news to the men of the Royal Irish Constabulary. Standing at the side of a road winding its way to rebellion, the RIC watched with apprehension the rise of Volunteer armies and its country become a breeding ground once again for politics negotiated down the barrel of a gun.

The Road to Rebellion

The third and final Home Rule crisis in 1912 was what really brought matters to a head. While dedicated Unionists would not concede to an Ulster outside of the Union, Nationalists could not conceive of independence that did not include all four provinces. The crisis can be summed up as thus: Ulster did not want to go; Ireland would not leave without her. So it was the Liberal government's attempt to legislate Irish devolution to the satisfaction of both

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[27] *Irish Catholic,* 7 November 1908

[28] *Irish Catholic,* 23 February 1909

[29] Muenger, *The British Army in Ireland,* 223 (footnote 76).

Unionists and Nationalists that triggered a grave political paralysis within Birrell's administration. The situation was left to escalate in the belief the days of Dublin Castle were numbered and to unduly interfere in matters now could only reap negative consequences. Politically, it was expedient to tread very carefully. To Birrell, this translated into a policy of see nothing, hear nothing, do nothing.[30]

The imminent reality of Home Rule threatened the Union and therefore, Ulster's very existence. At least, this is how Unionists felt and it did not take them long to respond to such an alarming threat in kind. In January of 1913, local Unionist groups in Belfast announced the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), 100, 000 men strong, aged between 16 and 65, all who had signed the *Covenant* three months prior. Within half a year, a full command and staff structure was created, and a Commander-in-Chief appointed. The purpose of the new force remained ambiguous. Was it mainly a bluff to intimidate the government and nationalist Home Rulers, or was it an attempt to defend the realm of Ulster once granted its own Provisional Government within the Union? What wasn't so ambiguous was the UVF's preparedness to fight if any overtures should be made at all to coerce Ulster to be part of an independent Ireland run by 'papists' and 'rabid republicans'. In this vein the UVF began arming itself immediately through a series of successful gun-running schemes that brought an alarming number of

[30] O'Halpin, *Decline of the Union*, Chapter "Augustine Birrell in Ireland, 1907-1916," 81-117; Bowden, *The Breakdown of Public Security*, 39-41; Muenger, *The British Military Dilemma in Ireland*, 104-114.

firearms into the province.[31] Its greatest coup here happened the 24th of April 1914 where it is estimated the UVF smuggled 20,000 Mannlichers and Mausers, 4600 Vetterli-Vitalis and three million rounds of ammunition into the country at Larne.[32]

Not to be left out, the Nationalists were quick to respond by forming its own citizen army, the Irish Nationalist Volunteers (INV). Of course, its formation was never designed to intimidate Ulster (at least not directly). The Nationalist Volunteers were gearing up for a showdown with Britain. Actually, it was only a very small core of militants within the INV who envisioned force, but they were a vocal minority not the least bit shy about expressing their intentions.[33] This is epitomized in the now famous piece written by martyred hero of the Easter Rising, Patrick Pearse, in November 1913:

> I am glad that the Orangemen have armed, for it is a goodly thing to see arms in Irish hands. We must accustom ourselves to the thought of arms, to the use of arms. We may make mistakes in the beginning and shoot the wrong people; but bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing, and the nation which regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood. There are many things more horrible than bloodshed, and slavery is one of them.[34]

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[31] *CI Monthly Reports* CO/904/ 28-29; *Intelligence Notes*, 33-34, 178-179; Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland*, 245-255; Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, 303-310; Stewart, *The Ulster Crisis*, 88-104.

[32] Stewart, *The Ulster Crisis*, Appendix, 244-249; Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland*, 253.

[33] *Intelligence Notes*, 104-114, 221-228; F.X. Martin (ed.), *The Irish Volunteers 1913-1915: Recollections and Documents*, (Dublin, 1963). Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, 313-348.

[34] Patrick H. Pearse, "The Coming Revolution," *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 8 November 1913.

The INV and UVF busied themselves not only with gun-running, but also drilling and marching exercises, to promote discipline and confidence within the ranks. While most Volunteers trained with hurley sticks (firearms were still hard to come by) the impression left to the on-looker was a dramatic one. No one looked more closely than the men of the RIC. Evident in the confidential monthly reports that made their way to Dublin Castle in the period leading up to the Rising (and eventually to Birrell himself), what the Constabulary witnessed disturbed and unnerved it.[35] The 'eyes and ears of Dublin Castle' continued to see and hear pretty much everything; the problem was they were ignored by those at the top who were in control.

The outbreak of war on the continent in 1914 at first seemed like a godsend to ease the political tensions worsening daily in Ireland.[36] The Home Rule issue was put off indefinitely and both Unionists and Nationalists clamored to show their support of the war effort. Enlistment (though not at the levels of Britain itself), remained high throughout 1914 and 1915.[37] But war for the RIC only served to exacerbate both the internal problems and external tensions it had been dealing with for quite some time.

By 1914, the Constabulary had come to feel exceptionally unappreciated and ill-rewarded for its many-faceted efforts. Basic rates of

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[35] *Intelligence Notes*, passim. *CI Monthly Reports* and *IG Monthly Reports*, CO/904, passim.

[36] In his memoirs Birrell facetiously admits to heaving a great sigh of relief upon the news of war. He cried, "Thank God, now maybe we will all get some peace and quiet away from these damnable Irish affairs." Augustine Birrell, *Things Past Redress*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), 221.

[37] Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland*, 278-280.

pay had not increased since 1872, mainly due to persistent complaints in the British press and among constituencies about the cost of maintaining so large and expensive a force as the RIC.[38] The war, which brought prosperity to the farmer and rising wages to the laborer, brought the Irish policeman fear of poverty and of subsiding status. The men were decidedly aware of being left behind, and that a career that had once held such promise was now fraught with uncertainty.[39] There was also no ignoring the distinct possibility that Home Rule would inevitably mean the Constabulary's demise.

It was not surprising then that with the outbreak of war, many younger recruits opted to join the army. Recruitment on the whole had been declining steadily before this though. In 1901, 721 candidates were recruited into the RIC, a number that had dropped to 19 by the start of the war. The resignation rate was worrying too. Taking into account the same period, resignations had increased by 53.7%. The result was that the RIC was rapidly becoming insufficient in numbers for the work it had to do.[40] In 1915, the Constabulary's operational strength had dropped below the 10,000 mark; compare this to 1883 in which the force numbered 14, 559 and the years 1885-1892 through all of which the Constabulary's numbers remained above

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[38] CO 904/174/1

[39] Irish Police Committee, *Report of the Committee of Inquiry, 1914,* 19-27. See also, Brewer, "Max Weber and the Royal Irish Constabulary," 88-90.

[40] Irish Police Committee, *Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Irish Police Committee, 1914,* [Cd. 7637], minute 4246.

12, 000.[41] Even Birrell, always the last to panic or express concern over anything, observed of the RIC: "There are practically no recruits and the resignations are pouring in. They are undoubtedly worse paid than any other police force in the three kingdoms and we simply must...increase their pay."[42]

In May 1914 a parliamentary committee of inquiry on the state of the RIC concluded what the Constabulary men already knew; that the principal causes of reduced recruitment and increased resignations were inadequate pay, the uncertain future of the police in view of impending political changes (i.e. Home Rule) and the better pay in civil life and in the British and colonial police forces. As well, farming and laboring conditions had so improved in Ireland in the previous decade that it was now thought feasible to get ahead in those fields. While the result of this inquiry was a modest increase in pay, the committee did not recommend any other changes believing it was just not the time "for considering or suggesting reforms of an unsettling character."[43] Instead, to address the problem that enlistment into the army presented, threatening to deplete RIC resources, the government quietly made the inducements to enlist less attractive for policemen. By so doing, remaining in the Constabulary seemed slightly better than leaving it behind.[44] What's

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[41] For these figures see Bowden, *The Breakdown of Public Security,* 31. This drop in the Constabulary's numbers was not too surprising though considering a similar trend was occurring elsewhere in the UK during this time due to a significant decrease in crime levels.

[42] Cited in Muenger, *The British Military Dilemma in Ireland,* 108.

[43] Irish Police Committee, *Report of the Committee of Inquiry,* 33-34.

[44] Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life,* 6.

more, the Police (Emergency Provisions) Act of 1915 stopped all resignations and retirements during wartime except on grounds of health. Emigration was suspended too, removing from younger constables any opportunities to obtain better jobs abroad.[45] As it happened, the RIC did not have much time to dwell on its own internal problems; things were heating up on the Nationalist front, requiring the Constabulary's undivided attention. No longer was it focused on Ulster and what it might do; suddenly developments in the southern counties took precedence.

The first major development upon the outbreak of war was the split in the ranks of the National Volunteers. The breakaway group, renaming itself the Irish Volunteer Force (IVF), opposed any participation in a foreign war on behalf of the British Empire when no national government was permitted to exist in Ireland. It took with it only 2 – 3,000 supporters, the other 150,000 volunteers choosing to remain in the INV under John Redmond; but this numerical disparity was more than compensated by the deeper level of ideological commitment of the smaller group. Fronted by political party Sinn Fein, supported by James Connolly's labor organ, the Citizen Army, and driven from within by the secretive and militant Irish Republican Brotherhood, the Irish Volunteers emerged in 1915 as a formidable body.[46]

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[45] Hawkins, "Dublin Castle and the Royal Irish Constabulary," 177.

[46] Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland*, 279-280; Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, 328-341; M. Tierney, *Eoin MacNeill, Scholar and Man of Action,1867-1945*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 153-154.

Each week brought new members into its ranks. Drilling and marching intensified as did the gun-running. The Constabulary all over Ireland reported on these developments extensively.

Throughout 1915 the RIC was kept busy monitoring all movements of the IVF which was active in its efforts to encourage sedition. The Volunteers published extensively in newspapers and pamphlets, material violent in tone, and paid organizers were sent to enroll and drill new recruits. At any given time the Constabulary knew which counties were most active, the exact numbers of all branches of the Volunteers, and who within the organization were the most prominent and influential leaders.[47] Constabulary men shadowed every marching exercise and attended every public meeting. They relied on a system of informants to report on the inner-workings and developments of Volunteer activities.[48] A report submitted in September of 1915, relayed information "confidentially obtained" that Sinn Fein[49] was receiving money to continue its campaign from the American organization Clan-na-Gael. The report makes it clear that even though the IVF bore a resemblance to the old Fenian movement, unlike the latter it was ready to

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[47] This information has become invaluable to modern historians compiling social and demographic profiles of the Troubles. In his study of the rise of the guerrilla in rural Ireland, Joost Augusteijn relies heavily on the RIC's accounts of the rate and spread of Volunteerism in the countryside. Joost Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare: the Experience of Ordinary Volunteers in the Irish war of Independence, 1916-1921*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1996).

[48] *CI Monthly Reports* CO 904/120/ 1-10, 1914-1915; CO 904 / 23, 28-29; *Intelligence Notes 1913 – 1916*, in particular pp. 104-116, 159-165, 205-220.

[49] Quite early on the RIC began interchanging Sinn Fein to refer to the Volunteers and its campaign.

drill and arm its members and was not regarded as a secret society. Most revealing of all is the report's account of a private meeting of the Military Council of the Irish Volunteers held in Dublin 30 May 1915 at which IRB man Bulmer Hobson put forth a proposal in favor of immediate insurrection. This proposal was only defeated by the casting vote of Professor McNeill. By far, the singular most important piece of intelligence acquired at this time was who the twelve members of the Military Council of the IVF were and where these men resided in and around Dublin.[50]

The Constabulary men laboriously recorded all of this intelligence and County Inspectors meticulously compiled it into monthly confidential reports. They would then forward this information on to the Crimes Special Branch in Dublin Castle. From here, the reports were reviewed by the Inspector General of the RIC and passed directly from him to the Chief-Secretary.[51] In this way, Birrell received a month-by-month account of goings on in the country, but even when these reports began to offer dire warnings about the consequences soon to be faced by the government's will to do nothing, Birrell elected to ignore it all. In fact he had become quite annoyed by the exhausting burden of perusing the many police dispatches he was expected to sift through, commenting: "The reports of the Royal Irish Constabulary... revealed to an eager reader, not yet palled by their prolixity, the habit,

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[50] *Intelligence Notes*, 222.

[51] For an excellent summary of how the intelligence channel worked in the Constabulary, see *Intelligence Notes*, xvi-xviii.

customs and pastimes of almost every village in the land,...even if they did not teach me very much."[52] Had Birrell bothered to look at the reports being sent to him more closely, he would have realized they were comprised of more than village pastimes.

As early as June 1914, a report from Inspector-General Neville Chamberlain at Dublin Castle eerily predicted what would come to pass by 1920:

> If the people become armed and drilled, effective police control will vanish. Events are moving. Each county will soon have a trained army far outnumbering the police, and those who control the Volunteers will be in a position to dictate to what extent the law of the land may be carried into effect.[53]

Very much aware of the Volunteer ambition to strike for Ireland's independence with England otherwise engaged in war, the Constabulary also knew the real action was unfolding in Dublin. Even though the capital city was technically under the jurisdiction of the unarmed Dublin Metropolitan Police (DMP), the Constabulary could not fail to be aware that it would be the hotbed of any rebellion (which it referred to as "the center of the movement").[54] Even the DMP was submitting its own reports to the Castle warning that the Volunteers were "not without hope of being able to assume and establish control of the Government," and that before the war was over,

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[52] Augustine Birrell, *Things Past Redress,* 199.

[53] *Royal Commission Report,* [Cd. 8729], 7.

[54] *Inspector General Monthly Confidential Report,* CO 904 / 23 / Part 2A, 18 March 1916, reproduced in *Report of the Royal Commission* [Cd. 8279], 10.

it was likely "they may attempt some escapade before long."[55]

Finally, the Volunteers held a public meeting on the 7th April, two weeks before the Rising, to protest against deportation orders and to enlist recruits. The speeches given at the meeting were violent and threats were issued that any person attempting to disarm the IVF would be "shot dead." At the end of its tether, the RIC was in consensus; if anything was to be done, it should be done now. In one last plea made by Chamberlain upon reviewing the reports sent to him by his various County Inspectors, the following was submitted in a memo to the Under-Secretary:

> The Sinn Fein party are gaining in numbers, in equipment, in discipline and in confidence and I think drastic action should be taken to limit their activities. The longer this is postponed the more difficult it will be to carry out.[56]

The memo reached Nathan on 10 April. He then passed it on to Birrell who scratched on it: "Is it thought practicable to undertake a policy of disarmament?" The same day the Lord-Lieutenant inquired in writing on the report: "Could the disarming be satisfactorily effected?" No answer was forthcoming and the memo did not find its way back to Chamberlain until the 24th of May.[57] By then it was too late.

The Easter Rising took place from the 24th to the 29th of April 1916. Ostensibly a Sinn Fein / Irish Volunteer production, the rebellion was led by

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[55] *Report of the Royal Commission* [Cd. 8279], 8.

[56] *Ibid.*, 11.

[57] *Report of the Royal Commission* [Cd. 8279], 10-11.

Patrick Pearse of the Irish Republican Brotherhood and James Connolly of the socialist Citizen Army and was largely confined to Dublin. Was it a surprise? The perceived control of Eoin McNeill over the entire Volunteer structure was the one tangible RIC misconception and the one wild card that solely contributed to any 'surprise' element of the Easter Rising. The ability of militant IRB men within the Volunteer's Council like Bulmer Hobson, Eamon DeValera and Patrick Pearse to close ranks on McNeill happened without his knowledge. Therefore the coup was not readily apparent to anyone – the RIC or the remaining Volunteers – until it was too late. On the eve of Easter, when everyone expected a Rising, even in Dublin Castle, McNeill issued a counter-order canceling the whole operation.[58] The government fully expected Volunteers to follow this command; the ones who did not receive the follow-up order from Dublin that the rising was still on, actually did. The confusion caused by MacNeill's countermanding order meant that even in the capital the rising went off half-cocked, rather than at full-throttle.[59]

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[58] MacNeill canceled insurrection plans for Easter when the attempt by Roger Casement to procure German aid failed.

[59] For the Constabulary account of the Rising see, *Intelligence Notes 1913-1916*, 221-41 passim. For an excellent historical analysis consult Lyons, *Ireland since the Famine*, 328-379. Also, O Broin, *Dublin Castle and the 1916 Rising*.

The Betrayal of the R.I.C.

To say the Constabulary was frustrated by government refusal to take any action against the growing lawlessness in Ireland would be a gross understatement. For all of the RIC's diligence tracking seditious speeches and shaking down informants regarding secret movements and meetings, in the end the Constabulary's efforts added up to a crushing disappointment. At its most valuable, the RIC possessed both the capability and placement to act on the intelligence it generated; in spite of this, government policy forced the RIC into a situation that rendered it powerless and obsolete.

The most devastating example of this development surrounds the Nationalist gun-running at Howth in July of 1914. Assistant Commissioner Harrel of the Dublin Metropolitan Police (DMP) called out military troops to support the attempt to seize the firearms. The attempt failed. Worst still, on its way back into Dublin, the army was drawn into a confrontation at Bachelor's Walk where three civilians were killed and many more wounded. What mattered to the RIC was not so much the failure of the attempt, from which lessons could have been extracted, but the government's reaction. Birrell was infuriated by the rude chaos he considered to be the result of resounding police stupidity injected into a tense political scene. Harrel was immediately suspended and his response was to quit. Birrell's administration refused to deal head-on with the escalating crisis of gun-running, believing that the predictions of civil war or insurrection were greatly exaggerated. This despite the obvious conclusion offered by Harrel's superior, Sir John

Ross: "...a body of more than 1000 men armed with rifles marching on Dublin... constitutes an unlawful assembly of a peculiarly audacious character."[60] Ross went on to argue that the government's reaction (or lack of one) could only be taken as ample proof it was willing to tolerate illegal activity for political reasons.[61]

The RIC was in definite agreement. The most damaging of the entire affray was how it, according to one Constabulary veteran, "thoroughly disheartened every police official in Ireland."[62] One contemporary assessment reasoned:

> Harrel had acted to the best of his judgment and discretion upon a difficult and critical occasion but he was sacrificed to popular clamor in circumstances which shook the confidence of the RIC in the government to its very foundations....The police...completely lost heart, and every officer of the force realized that if he got into conflict with political movements he imperiled his position.[63]

The Constabulary was left feeling not only betrayed but painfully hobbled by the government's policy to do nothing. The RIC was prevented from carrying out its duties by a political agenda courting disaster, enforced by a government too stubborn to realize it. In testimony to the Royal Commission following Easter week, Col. Edgeworth Johnstone of the RIC explained how

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[60] For Ross quote: *Report of the Royal Commission*, [Cd. 8279], 6.

[61] When he was unable to get Harrel reinstated with the DMP, Ross himself resigned. Gun-running at Howth, *Intelligence Notes,* 113-114; Townshend, "Policing Insurgency in Ireland, 1914-1923," 28-29.

[62] Cited in Stephen Ball ed., *A Policeman's Ireland: Recollections of Samuel Waters, R.I.C.*, (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999), 17.

[63] Rt. Hon. Sir Henry Robinson, *Memories: Wise and Otherwise*, (London: Casell and Co., 1923), 220-21.

the stifling atmosphere leading up to the Rising gravely affected the Constabulary's ability to perform "in cases where there is any political tinge of any kind....I daren't move of my own initiative."[64]

Conclusion

The Arms Act issue was just one visible symptom of the overall malaise that had infected government policy in Ireland. The Royal Commission was correct in its observation that had the government wanted to take control of matters, there were at its disposal numerous other legal powers it could have feasibly employed to do so. The Explosive Substances Act 1883, which applied to the whole of the UK, gave drastic powers for dealing with the possession of explosives, including dealing with stores of ammunition. The Unlawful Drilling Act 1819 was designed to prevent the training of persons to the use of arms and to the practice of military exercise.[65] After 1913, this Act carried with it extensive legal powers to prohibit drilling and military exercises not expressly authorized by the Crown. Yet neither of these Acts, or any others, was called upon to curb the rise of volunteer armies amassing with startling rapidity.

At a vital time in Irish affairs, Birrell patently lacked both the will and conviction to fight the increasingly violent and organized opposition bodies. He was loathe to take an out-and-out stand against them, convinced that to do so would be to disrupt the growth of loyalty in Ireland he perceived to be

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[64] Royal Commission, *Minutes and Evidence,* [Cd. 8311], 51

[65] *Report of the Royal Commission* [Cd. 8279]

cultivated by his middle of the road policy. Birrell believed that to proclaim the Irish Volunteers as an illegal body and put them down by force would have been reckless and foolish.[66] He was inclined to minimize disturbances in Ireland regardless of the innumerable police reports dispatched to him stating otherwise, insisting "Ireland is always quiet and peaceful. It is in England that all the fuss is made."[67] Birrell's testimony to the Royal Commission in 1916 is one of a demoralized and fatigued man, willing to concede failure. He readily admits, with no little amount of regret, that he did not know the full ramifications of events as they unfolded, having failed to listen to the "men on the street" (i.e. the RIC).[68]

In support of the RIC, the Royal Commission called government policy into question, blaming it, rather than the Constabulary, for the damaging spiral of sedition and violence post-1914. The Commission argued that it was the government's responsibility to strictly prohibit such expansive drilling and open carrying of arms by unrecognized bodies of men. While it may have risked collision, early intervention and extensive measures should have been taken to arrest and prosecute leaders and organizers using intelligence

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[66] O Broin, "Birrell, Nathan and the men of Dublin Castle," 4; Muenger, *The British Military Dilemma in Ireland*, 105-106.

[67] Cited in Bowden, *The Breakdown of Public Security*, 46.

[68] *Royal Commission on the Rebellion in Ireland, Minutes of Evidence and Appendix of Documents*, [Cd. 8311], 57-61.

supplied by the RIC.[69] This did not happen. Arrests were piece-meal and sporadic, with no definite purpose to break the back of Volunteer organizations. What's more, most of those arrested were quickly released again due to political pressure brought about by hunger strikes.

Unquestionably, Birrell's government policy of inaction, applied with such dedication in the face of mounting disturbances, can only be seen as blatant negligence. It is remarkable that in time of war such obvious showing of arms and issuing of threats were permitted to occur. To his detriment, Birrell sat back, waited and watched; rather than risk being provocative, his administration failed to be preventative. Whether or not the Rising could have been prevented is debatable. What is for certain, early action, taken before Volunteers had the opportunity to organize, plan and arm itself, could have delayed the Rising indefinitely.

More important to this study, it was the Constabulary men who did their job to the best of their ability under frustrating conditions, perpetuated by a government policy of inaction. The force emerged from 1916 with its reputation largely intact and undamaged by the Rising, helped a great deal by the Royal Commission's conclusion: "For the conduct, zeal and loyalty of the RIC...we have nothing but praise."[70] It is a testament to the Constabulary as an institution that while plagued by frustrating issues

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[69] *Report of the Royal Commission,* [Cd. 8279], 13.

[70] *Ibid.,* 13.

concerning pay and conditions it was capable of maintaining such a high level of proficiency among its ranks. However, it would not take long for circumstances in Ireland, combined with shortcomings in the force itself, to catch up with the RIC. Lessons that should have been learned by those in England were not, and it would be the men of the Constabulary who would suffer the most because of it.

Chapter 4

"The Spies in our Midst…":

The Irish Republican Army's Campaign against the Royal Irish Constabulary, 1916-1921

The police, who came from among the Irish people themselves, are traitors to their own flesh and blood, sworn to spare neither parent, brother, sister, or wife in the discharge of their degrading duty, the overthrow of the God-given rights of their fellow countrymen.

Posted IRA Proclamation against the RIC[1]

> Boycotted, ostracized, forced to commandeer their food, crowded in many instances into cramped quarters without proper light or air, every man's hand against them, in danger of their lives and subjected to the appeals of their parents and their families to induce them to leave the force and so put an end to the danger and annoyance to which service exposes them all.
>
> Inspector General, RIC August 1920
> on the life of Constabulary men[2]

Volunteers who survived the carnage unleashed in the streets of Dublin during Easter week 1916 emerged from the wreckage with renewed determination to make the Republican dream a reality. The situation was grim however, for the Volunteers released from prison in the summer and winter of 1916. A severe lack of weapons, training and organization – essential ingredients to armed resistance – delayed any hope of waging a conventional conflict indefinitely. The Easter Rising was a military debacle

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[1] Cited in W.J. Lowe, "The War Against the R.I.C., 1919-1921," *Eire-Ireland: Journal of Irish Studies*, Fall-Winter 2002, 68.

[2] *Inspector General Monthly Confidential Report,* CO 904/ 112, August 1920. From now on the Inspector General confidential reports will be abbreviated as *IG Monthly Reports* with record number and date to follow where available.

few wanted to repeat. Realizing the time for poetry and martyrdom had passed, remnants of the Irish Volunteer Force (now referring to itself as the Irish Republican Army (IRA)) began to methodically rebuild their organization. To what end though remained unclear. Resistance of some kind was desirable, but the form it should take was not known.[3] What was clear to veterans of Easter like Michael Collins, Eamon deValera and Bulmer Hobson, was that standing in the way of victory was the Royal Irish Constabulary. Success would ultimately depend on ostracizing these 'defenders of the Crown' from community life in Ireland. Without its 'eyes and ears' British control of the country would weaken, allowing the IRA to strengthen its control. The battle line deliberately drawn by Republicans, was: who would become the legitimate defenders of the Irish people? A polarization developed between the IRA as representatives of the Irish nation on one side, and the RIC as agents of an alien power on the other. Under these conditions it was not surprising that the two forces began to perceive each other as outright enemies.[4] Constabulary men soon found themselves labeled as traitors to Ireland and the Irish people, which the RIC had not

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[3] There is a consensus in the leading historiography that the major stages of the Irish campaign were spontaneous and unplanned, dictated by circumstance rather than a belief it held and real of hope of success. Charles Townshend, "The Irish Republican Army and the Development of Guerrilla Warfare, 1916-1921," *English Historical Review* April 1979, 321 and 329; David Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life, 1913-1921: Provincial Experience of War and Revolution,* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977), 215.

[4] Joost Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare: the experience of ordinary volunteers in the Irish War of Independence, 1916-1921,* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1996), 211.

experienced for many years. Furthermore, the accusation carried even more meaning and fervor than it had when it was applied to the police a century before. The community the Constabulary had put roots into and flourished since 1836, came to view the RIC once again with the mistrust and hostility that characterized the early days of policing in Ireland.

In fact, long before the Easter Rising the Republican camp realized that the greatest threat to its survival was the RIC. With the benefit of hindsight a nationalist journal was able to report in 1911:

> I think we Irish Nationalists have not devoted enough attention to the police....As soon as Irish Nationalists make an active move, either by passive resistance or otherwise against England the first body that blocks the way is not the army but the police....[5]

While the boycott of the RIC would not begin in earnest until 1919, the journal went on to argue that nationalists: "should lose no time in creating...a public opinion in Ireland that the man who joins the police may be branded a traitor for all time...."[6] The meaning was clear: incapacitate these men and the nationalist cause would stand a chance.

Reorganization of the Volunteers *en masse* happened quickly upon the release of hundreds of men who had been imprisoned after the Rising. Arrests following Easter were widespread; anyone even suspected of associating with Volunteer activity prior to 1916 was interned without trial. After the publicized executions of fifteen ringleaders, opinion shifted in favor

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[5] Cited in Tom Bowden, *The Breakdown of Public Security: the Case of Ireland 1916-1921 and Palestine 1936-1939,* (London: Sage Publications, 1977), 98.

[6] *Ibid.,* 98.

of the insurrectionists' cause. Public pressure to free those being held prompted two waves of release in the summer and winter that same year. Michael Collins, who had actually played a peripheral role in events to this point, was among those released.[7]

Almost immediately, hardened Volunteer veterans zealously recruited young men into the ranks of the IRA utilizing the memory and excitement surrounding 1916 and the legacy of the martyred executed leaders as a mobilizing tool. It was a time for marching, drilling, parading, and flaunting the Republican tri-color of green, white and orange at every opportunity. Initially, public opinion in Ireland had regarded the Rising as a foolhardy attempt. More than that, since many families were losing sons to the trenches of Europe, there also existed a palpable anger and resentment towards the insurgents. But the publicized executions and the humiliation of the Volunteers after the Rising changed all that, and a wave of sympathy for the Republican cause swept through the country. Most people considered the arrests and convictions of local Volunteers who had not participated in any violent activity as unjust and oppressive. Admiration developed for those who

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[7] Charles Townshend, *The British Campaign in Ireland, 1919-1921: The Development of Political and Military Policies,* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 3; Kenneth Griffith and Timothy E. O'Grady, *Curious Journey: An Oral History of Ireland's Unfinished Revolution,* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), 82-87; Eunan O'Halpin, *The Decline of the Union: British Government in Ireland, 1892-1920,* (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 1988), 138-140.

had fought during Easter week, particularly among young men. This attitude led to clashes with the police only months after the Rising.[8]

As a precautionary measure Irish constables were ordered to keep a close eye on the parades and drilling exercises. Volunteers out on route marches were followed, their names taken, but arrests were rarely made. One Volunteer noted: "There was always an RIC detailed to keep us under close observation....[giving the impression] that the law was watching every man."[9] Before long, the Volunteers felt confident enough to step up their defiance of the law when they encountered what seemed to be a weak response to their activities by the RIC. In two separate incidents when the RIC demanded that drilling exercises end and that Volunteers supply their names, constables were overpowered, their weapons taken, and the men tied up and left in a field.[10]

Under these circumstances any police action led to increasing animosity. A conviction in court and a prison sentence came to be considered a measure of Republican dedication to the cause and soon lost its deterrent effect. In a new twist, court cases themselves became major propaganda events for the nationalist movement. Riots developed during these cases or

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[8] For general sentiments on post-1916 see Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, 55-56; Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, 131-132 and 200-205; Griffith and O'Grady, *Curious Journey*, 85-103 passim.

[9] Cited in Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, 192.

[10] *County Inspector Monthly Confidential Report*, CO 904 / 37, September and November 1917. From now on the County Inspector confidential reports will be abbreviated as *CI Monthly Report*, with record number and date to follow where available.

during the celebrations that followed dismissals. The violence used by the RIC to disperse the crowds in these protests did not subdue the participants, but quite often provoked an equally violent response.[11]

The most serious offence Volunteers engaged in at this time involved attempts to seize arms from civilians, soldiers or police. In the majority of cases the RIC knew the culprits but were unable to prosecute. Many people were unwilling to testify and jurors would often fail to reach a verdict against obviously guilty defendants. This left the police extremely frustrated. Adding insult to injury, convictions did not deter most activists; strengthened by previous prison experience, they immediately went on hunger-strike to demand political prisoner status. This was granted in most cases after Thomas Ashe died from forced feedings at Mountjoy prison in September 1917.[12] Furthermore, to avoid other prisoners achieving martyrdom, many were released before their sentence was up. In 1918 deValera concisely articulated the benefits of these actions for the Republican cause when he said: "We will break them [British laws] and make it impossible for England to govern us as the prisoners did in Mountjoy."[13]

The Constabulary was not oblivious to the effect this was having on its

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[11] Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, 191 and 193.

[12] Irish Command, *A Record of the Rebellion in Ireland, 1920-1921 and the Part Played by the Army in Dealing With it (Volume I)*, 8-11. From now on abbreviated as *Record of the Rebellion (Volume I)*.

[13] Cited in Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, 195

ability to perform its duties. In January 1918 the Inspector General of the RIC expressed his anxiety:

> The spirit of lawlessness and turbulence is daily becoming more embarrassing to the police....It is...nearly impossible to preserve order when there is no means of enforcing authority. In cases of organized illegality the law-breaker is able to defeat the law by hunger-strike and the constitutional methods of prosecution and imprisonment no longer have any deterrent effect.[14]

The breaking point between Republicans and the RIC came during the Conscription Crisis in April 1918. Until then, many Catholic policemen sympathized with the nationalist cause. This had led to fears in Dublin Castle that the police would refuse to enforce conscription and resign, or worse still, join the IRA as active opposition. However, while the crisis was unfolding, nationalist hostility towards conscription was directed at the RIC, the one visible and accessible symbol of the British Crown. As a result, encouraged and often coerced by the IRA, communities practiced a wide-spread system of boycott against the Constabulary using methods of intimidation and violence that stripped the men and their families of their social standing. Military preparations of the IRA, including raids for arms and explosives, led to numerous assaults on the Constabulary. These attacks destroyed any sympathy existing in the ranks of the RIC for the Republican cause.[15]

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[14] *IG Monthly Report* CO 904 / 92, January 1918

[15] *CI Monthly Report,* CO 904 / 157, August 14, 1917. Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare,* 197-198; Griffith and O'Grady, *Curious Journey,* 116-127 passim.

While war raged on the continent, Sinn Fein (the political arm of the IRA) usurped the aged Nationalist Party in the 1918 elections, making it the principal political body in Ireland. It did so by exploiting the menace of conscription and the fame it had garnered as the organizers behind 1916. The elected Sinn Fein MPs (the party won 73 out of 105 seats) refused to take their seats in Westminster. Instead they formed an illegal, unrecognized Irish Parliament, the Dail Eireann in January 1919. This strategy was all part of a two-front war waged by Republicans in their effort to show they, rather than the British, were the legitimate rulers of Ireland. Sinn Fein waged war on the political front, while the IRA used physical force and intimidation. The two fronts of the conflict supported and reinforced each other, the effects of their sum far greater than if each part had stood alone.

To answer the string of serious assaults committed by Volunteers in all parts of Ireland in the early months of 1919, the government introduced 'special military areas' in clearly defined districts. All public meetings were forbidden (including fairs and markets). This hurt the public considerably in areas with a market-oriented economy. It further antagonized the local population and played into the hands of IRA propaganda.[16] As Volunteers got braver, the stakes for the RIC got higher. In 1919 a large-scale boycott was put in place to complete the social ostracism of the RIC. Soon the IRA were issuing proclamations describing Constabulary men as 'hirelings', 'assassins'

[16] Charles Townshend, "Policing Insurgency in Ireland, 1914-1923," in David M. Anderson and David Killingray, *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority and Control 1830-1940,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 30-31; Augusteijn, *Ibid.,* 198.

and 'traitorous spies' responsible for the sentencing and deportation of thousands of Irish men. Eamon de Valera publicly renounced the RIC as "the spies in our midst...unworthy to enjoy any of the privileges or comforts which arise from cordial relations with the public."[17] Boycotts forbade members of the community "even to sit in the same pew in church" with a policeman, a prohibition that resulted in threats to those who allowed RIC men to sit anywhere near them.[18] A proclamation issued in South Tipperary warned that any constable found in the area "will be deemed to have forfeited his life." This threat also applied to "every person in the pay of England" (i.e. jurors and magistrates). Civilians were warned that should they give information to the police they would be "executed, shot or hanged."[19] Republican threats were not idle threats. Despite the fact the IRA cultivated an image as 'freedom fighters' and 'defenders of the people' it also did not hesitate to enhance its reputation for swift and brutal justice. By 1920 civilians and police were being murdered regularly. In *The IRA and its Enemies* (1998), Peter Hart explains how the 'war on informers' typically targeted those seen as political or socially deviant; Protestants were the chief victims in this hidden war on minorities.[20]

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[17] Cited in Lowe, "The War Against the R.I.C., 1919-1921," 77.

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] Bowden, *Breakdown of Public Security*, 99.

[20] Peter Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies*, (Oxford University Press, 1998), 293-315 passim.

The official boycott of all policemen was intended not only to coerce men to leave the RIC, but to ensure the population turned to the Republican alternative as part of the movement's attempt to replace the British administration. The Inspector General acknowledged in May 1919 that "the organised hostility to the constabulary, besides endangering their lives, renders the ordinary duty of criminal investigation increasingly difficult, and is part of the scheme for making British government in Ireland impossible."[21] The boycott extended to family members and anyone seen fraternizing in any way with a constable. Even the children of retired policemen were shunned, teased, called names and on occasion had stones thrown at them. Young women were not exempt either. Any who associated with police or soldiers were seized and all of their hair was cut off. In some instances, the scalp was tarred for maximum dramatic effect. Few people dared talk to any RIC men and in shops and pubs service was refused to them. So successful was the boycott that in many areas the police were forced to commandeer goods to survive. This type of pressure went a long way towards isolating the Constabulary from its main source of information, the Irish people, and knowledge of the underground Republican Army and its movements became difficult to acquire.[22]

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[21] *IG Monthly Reports*, CO 904/108, 13 May 1919.

[22] Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, 200-201 and 206-208; Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, 1-2 and 7-17 passim.; *Record of the Rebellion (Volume I)*, 14.

In addition to the full-scale boycott of the RIC, by 1919 the IRA had begun raids for arms and attacks on police barracks in earnest. They needed weapons desperately so such a move was not surprising. In Ireland in 1914 there existed a total of about 1400 RIC posts. Most were rural, holding only a sergeant or acting sergeant often with his wife and family and three or four unmarried constables. Many of the barracks were rented accommodations, not designed for defense, spaciousness or comfort. The government's response was to close and evacuate many outlying posts deemed too vulnerable and concentrate more police in fewer places. As a result at least 447 barracks were abandoned before the summer of 1920. In County Mayo almost half of the 63 police posts were evacuated. This reaction played right into the hands of the Republican cause. It contributed to the physical separation of the police from the community, not to mention the psychological impact the men were already suffering under the boycott. [23]

When police barracks became less numerous and better defended, IRA guerrillas changed tactics and took on the more daunting task of ambushing RIC patrols and military lorries that traveled along deserted countryside roads. By mid-1920 many guerrillas had left home and gone underground or were 'on the run' to avoid arrest. During the spring of that year Volunteers started to group together for reasons of security and companionship. Under

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[23] Townshend, *The British Campaign in Ireland*, 65-66 and Appendix V, 214; Townshend, "The Development of Guerrilla Warfare, 329; *Record of the Rebellion*, 8 and 20; Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance and Guerrilla Warfare*, 201-202.

renewed British pressure, these groups were fused and formalized into 'Flying Columns'. These were full-time units, typically comprised of a nucleus of permanent members who could draw upon the larger pool of fighters in their area to carry out operations. Columns usually fielded a dozen or so riflemen, but could reach a hundred or more to meet the demands of specific operations. Once men became part of a Column they were cut off from the stabilizing hands of family and community life. Existing outside the boundaries of this moral world the men became radicalized and more willing to participate in violent activity. Those who were not so willing were forced to do so in order to survive. Now full-time soldiers of a guerrilla army, members of the Flying Columns acted against Crown Forces with increasing skill and brutality.[24]

The diffuse and mobile properties of the Column contributed greatly to the escalation of violence and the onset of ambush attacks. The Column's larger size and greater freedom to act increased the level of activity the IRA could undertake. Men purporting to be peaceful laborers laid ambushes on routes where it was known that small RIC patrols were likely to move. They blocked roads with fallen trees or stone walls in order to hold up lorries

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[24]Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, 247, 312 and 332; Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies*, 85-89; Townshend, *British Campaign in Ireland*,113-116; D. O'Hannigan, "Origin and Activities of the First Flying Column," in *Limerick's Fighting Story*, (Tralee: Anvil Books, 1949), 85-91.

conveying small bodies of troops. Telegraph and telephone wires were cut and trains held up and boarded by armed and masked men who stole the mail.[25]

The period that stretched from the fall of 1920 to the spring of 1921 was a grueling and unforgiving time for those involved in Ireland's struggle for independence, English and Irish alike. The violence fed on itself in a vicious frenzy, deriving momentum from the murders, assassinations, beatings and torture. In the countryside amongst the heather, guerrilla soldiers of the Irish Republican Army meticulously laid traps of death along small rural roads. Most of these attempts failed to connect with the enemy, but the ambushes that did find their targets proved to be very lucrative indeed. Success meant the capture of more weapons, which ensured the continuation of the struggle and made future operations possible. Psychologically, it was a devastating experience for the Crown Forces, especially the RIC who bore the brunt of the attacks. The Constabulary watched many of its best men cut down by an enemy it could not see and mostly was unable to punish. Each successful hit and subsequent reprisal against the civilian population loosened Britain's grip on Ireland that much more and brought the Republic that much closer to being realized.[26]

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[25] *Record of the Rebellion (Volume I)*, 14.

[26] Trudi Stafford, *Death Amongst the Heather: The Ambush Experience of the IRA during the Irish War of Independence, 1919-1921.* Unpublished BA Hons. Thesis (Memorial University of Newfoundland, December 1997), 14-26 passim.

In the eighty-two weeks from January 1919 to July 1920, 73 policemen were assassinated and many more ambushes attempted. A pall fell over much of rural Ireland as Constabulary men struggled to maintain control of an ever-worsening situation. One contemporary noted in his diary at the time that the RIC had become:

> paralyzed by the murders of their comrades. Anyone passing by a police barracks with its locked doors and seeing the constables looking out through the barred windows will at once realize that no body of men could preserve its morale under such conditions....At present the policeman in Ireland is never free from the dread of being murdered.[27]

Even though a siege mentality had infected the majority of serving constables, the reality was that very few Columns were capable of overcoming the extensive obstacles involved in mounting a victorious ambush. Evidence of widespread ineffectiveness is shown in the surviving reports of units operational over the winter of 1920-21. Many smaller Columns occasionally attempted an ambush but were repeatedly foiled by the almost complete lack of intelligence about the movements of Crown Forces (including the RIC).[28]

Ambushes demand thorough preparation and near flawless execution. For the IRA these were challenging and perilous operations more likely to result in failure than success. The possibility of injury and death were

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[27] Statistics and quote cited in Bowden, *Breakdown in Public Security*, 105.

[28] *CI Monthly Report*, CO 904 / 188 / 1, 25 July 1920; Townshend, "The Irish Republican Army and the development of Guerrilla Warfare," 329-330; Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, 136; *Record of the Rebellion*, 12-13.

constants and guerrillas rarely emerged from an attempt unscathed. In his study of Cork, Peter Hart argues that the IRA was the one group *more likely* to be injured in combat in 1921.[29] Anxiety and stress were never in short supply, for these confrontations were unpredictable; no one could control how an ambush ultimately played itself out. Danger was an acute reality for both predator and prey. The capability of the IRA was not only overestimated at the time; a few modern historians writing about the Troubles since have committed the same error. Tom Bowden argues that by 1919 the IRA was a unified, cohesive military force ready for action and that as a guerrilla army it was tactically and organizationally sound.[30] More recent studies, however, do not support the image of an all-knowing, infallible IRA.[31] What does emerge is the more human and realistic portrait of soldiers at the mercy of the unpredictable nature fundamental to the ambush. The IRA guerrilla war launched in the countryside was not impervious to enemy attacks and, in fact, proved to be very vulnerable to counter-attacks by Crown Forces. This is discussed further in Chapter 5. The ambush was a chaotic and merciless way for the IRA to confront its enemies, its random nature a source of constant stress and peril. The youth and relative inexperience of the guerrillas

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[29] Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies*, 87.

[30] Bowden, *The Breakdown of Public Security*, 88 and 110.

[31] See especially Stafford, *Ambush Experience of the IRA*, 10-37 passim. Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, 140-141; Townshend, "The Irish Republican Army and the Development of Guerrilla Warfare," 343-345.

participating in these ventures did not help either. Those taking part were not war-weary veterans numb in body and soul to the horrors of mass violence and death. Most were "green" in the truest sense of the word and wilted in the face of the graphic and sudden nature of hand-to-hand combat. While this would change for many as the Troubles progressed, in the beginning it was the rule, not the exception. Joost Augusteijn shows that fear often afflicted the men during their first fight:

> Many inexperienced members were paralyzed....Many fired too early: others forgot to fire and started praying, one swallowed his cigarette in the excitement, while a number refused to execute their orders. Even experienced fighters had such problems; in the heat of battle many forgot to take the arms or to search the men they shot....The violence often unnerved the men. Most active Volunteers vividly remember their first shooting.[32]

It did not matter that most ambush attempts failed because the psychological impact of the few that succeeded was far-reaching and imposed a heavy mental toll on the men of the RIC. In the next chapter it becomes clear that for this reason each side perceived the other as more deadly and capable than was actually the case. As the war progressed a pattern emerged showing that while ambushes did not become more frequent, they did become more violent.[33]

No one ambush of the entire conflict packed a heavier punch militarily or psychologically than that at Kilmichael on the 28th of November 1920. At

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[32] Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, 140-141.

[33] For this see Hart, *IRA and its Enemies*, 72-108 passim.

the conclusion of this shocking and brutal confrontation, an entire unit of seventeen Auxiliary cadets lay dead, many of their fatal wounds inflicted execution style. In the "official" accounts of Kilmichael the *Irish Times* accuses the IRA of mutilating the bodies of the Auxiliaries with axes, an account that has since been called into question.[34] Kilmichael was a crowning victory for IRA guerrillas, striking a severe blow right through the heart of British power in Ireland. In many respects it certainly was a turning point, escalating the violence and the dangers faced by Crown Forces traveling Ireland's country roads. Suddenly the IRA seemed a lot more sinister and dangerous to the men serving in the RIC, who were not trained soldiers, or to British ex-military officers like the Auxiliary cadets cut down at Kilmichael.

The guerrilla war the IRA waged against Crown Forces in Ireland in 1919-1921 in the form of ambushes may have been dramatic and bloody, and hence more visible and memorable, but the IRA's real success lay in its campaign to ostracize the police from Irish life. In rural areas with a particularly strong or well-developed Volunteer organization a full-scale boycott was wholly enforced. The break between police and community that started with the evacuation of barracks, was completed with the psychological and physical ramifications of the campaign to ostracize the police from the local population. The boycott successfully turned the RIC into

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[34] *Irish Times* 30 November 1920 and 1 and 2 December 1920. Peter Hart's is the most recent and best academic analysis of the Kilmichael ambush. *The IRA and its Enemies*, 21-38 passim.

social pariahs and potential targets of attack, legitimizing the killing of Constabulary men to a community who no longer considered the police as one of them. Even more important for the IRA, the boycott struck the RIC deaf and blind by cutting the force off from its principal source of intelligence, the Irish people. After nearly a century of being embedded into the community matrix, the RIC lost its link to the Irish people, and its ability to generate intimate local knowledge of political movements and activities was sorely diminished. As predicted by the IRA, without its 'eyes and ears' British power in Ireland faltered. Certainly this can be interpreted as an IRA victory whose ultimate goal was to castrate the RIC and sever its control over Ireland. In actuality, the IRA was helped by the most unlikely of sources; government response to the crisis had a far greater impact on the Constabulary's fate. How the RIC responded to this crisis in government control and how it was treated by those in authority is the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter 5

Surviving Insurgency:

The Dark Days of the Royal Irish Constabulary, 1916-1921

> The RIC...have been indomitable and have carried on with fearlessness, courage and initiative; but recent events point to the breaking-point being reached....So far as the RIC are concerned in this Riding, they may be considered to have ceased to function. The most they can do is to try and defend themselves and their barracks. It would seem the time has arrived for the military to supersede the RIC....
>
> West Riding Cork, July 1920[1]

The Easter Rising of 1916 concluded on a high note for the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC). The Rising could have proven disastrous for the RIC and its reputation as the keeper of law and order in Ireland. Not only was it able to avoid being drawn into a conflict largely confined to the streets of Dublin (and thus, out of its jurisdiction), a Royal Commission into the causes of the Rebellion exonerated the force from any responsibility, going so far as to report: "For the conduct, zeal and loyalty of the RIC...we have nothing but praise."[2]. This thorough investigation shone a spotlight on everything the RIC had been doing effectively. It highlighted RIC strengths and capabilities especially in regards to gathering and disseminating enormous amounts of intelligence. Moreover, the Royal Commission showed it was the government

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[1] Cited in David Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life, 1913-1921: Provincial Experience of War and Revolution*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977), 17.

[2] *Report of the Royal Commission on the Rebellion in Ireland, 1916,* [Cd. 8279], 13.

that was at fault for its failure to sufficiently act on information provided to it by the RIC (See Chapter 3).

However, hope that those in government had learned from 1916 was decidedly dashed in Constabulary ranks just months following Easter. Problems which existed before the Rising (like pay and conditions) remained unaddressed. When the Troubles began in earnest in 1919 the bleak reality faced by the RIC was that it was ill-equipped to deal with the campaign of violence unleashed on it by the IRA. The Constabulary knew very little of operating under conditions of war and combat. It was not the paramilitary body it had once been a century before, but a domesticated civil police force. It did not take long for this short-coming to become painfully obvious, but neither did the realization that it was British policy-makers, as much as the IRA, who posed the genuine threat to the Constabulary's existence.

Before the Troubles, the RIC depended a great deal upon a primitive but effective system of intelligence, otherwise known as the Crimes Special Branch. It had men in every county and most districts, in addition to detectives in all the major cities, like Dublin, Belfast and Limerick. This system was then supported by local policemen who always kept an ear to the ground and their eyes sharp for anything amiss. Local policemen also relied extensively upon paid informers they recruited from the local population, men and women willing to trade gossip for money. It was general practice for

policemen to compile detailed dossiers that included the movements and contacts of any political suspects.[3]

Police reports up to 1919 suggest that identifying and locating offenders were not yet major problems. In March of 1919 the Inspector General of the RIC was able to write that the Constabulary continued to uncover insurgents by drawing upon its "complete and local knowledge supplemented by confidential information."[4] The problem at this point was not identifying insurgents but securing convictions. A failing judicial system and repeated politically motivated releases of prisoners from 1916 through 1920, not a lack of basic intelligence, posed the most frustrating obstacle.[5]

RIC men were not unlike politicians in that they were keenly aware of their place in Irish society and loathed to become the targets of public ridicule upon failing to get lasting convictions. In November of 1917 Clare's County Inspector acknowledged that arrests were doing more harm than good since the government had decreed special status to Sinn Fein prisoners, releasing those on hunger-strike. In response to a policy it found so contrary to its own agenda the RIC often showed a deep reluctance to carry out government orders to arrest large numbers of offenders. On more than one occasion, much

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[3] B.M. Choille (ed.), *Intelligence Notes, 1913-1916*, (Dublin: Stationary Office, 1966). Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, 1-18 passim; Peter Hart (ed.), *British Intelligence in Ireland, 1920-21, The Final Reports*, (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002), 4-10; Charles Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland: Government and Resistance since 1848*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), passim.

[4] Cited in Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, 14

[5] Hart, *British Intelligence in Ireland*, 9-10.

to the government's chagrin, the Constabulary did defy such orders. Most offensive to the men of the RIC was the government's wildly fluctuating approach to dealing with political prisoners. It varied from coercive to conciliatory and the RIC remained in a perpetual state of anxiety that today's convicts would become tomorrow's heroes.[6] In an issue of the *Constabulary Gazette*[7], policemen were encouraged to not think about the official policy, stating: "Nothing...can be more vain or unprofitable than speculating on the outlook. The effect is upsetting if not demoralizing."[8] Government action releasing prisoners undermined RIC authority, leaving it essentially emasculated. Many in the force felt humiliated, and suspected their futile efforts to impose law and order were being laughed at. The timing of all this could not have been any worse. Already the RIC sensed the public's esteem slipping and confidence in the law waning. As it confronted the principal challenge to its existence the Constabulary knew only too well how much it would need public support.[9]

Once the IRA's attacks on RIC barracks began, government response was to close many of them and concentrate more police in fewer areas. The

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[6] Irish Command, "Record of the Rebellion in Ireland in 1920-1921 and the Part Played by the Army in Dealing With it (Intelligence)," in Hart (ed), *British Intelligence in Ireland,* 20-21. From now on Record of the Rebellion (Intelligence); Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life,* 14-15.

[7] Unoffical organ of the RIC, circulated amongst serving constables.

[8] *Constabulary Gazette*, 9 October 1920.

[9] *Inspector General, Monthly Confidential Report,* CO 904/111, March 1919. From now on abbreviated *IG Monthly Report,* with record number and date to follow where available.

result was an even further deterioration of the RIC's bond to the local communities. The policy cut the men off from the population, including their paid informants who had dwindled significantly in number due to the IRA's boycott. Retaliation by the IRA against informants was quick and severe and it served to silence many local spies (see Chapter 4). As a result, Constabulary men felt isolated and unable to protect members of the community from IRA intimidation. Considering the boycott's damaging effects, it becomes clear why the abandonment of so many police postings crippled RIC morale.

The attacks on more than one-third of all police posts was an alarming development that posed a serious worry to the government in London. Panic likely motivated the decision to close so many barracks. But British policy-makers at Westminster, so far removed from events in Ireland, strongly overestimated the IRA's ability to capture occupied barracks. Republican successes had largely relied on inadequate defense. Of 533 barracks destroyed in 1920 only 23 had even been in use due in large part to early evacuation measures. Of those 23, not one was sufficiently defended.[10] Late in 1920 the decision was finally made to put up protection for police barracks in the disturbed areas. Some of the measures taken included the addition of steel shutters to the windows, kept in place by iron bars fitted into cuts in the wall. The top of the window was protected by a net wire frame on the outside.

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[10] For statistics see Charles Townshend, *British Campaign in Ireland 1919-1921. The Development of Political Military Policies*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), Appendix V, 214.

This was to keep out grenades and the frame could be lowered from the inside to permit defenders to throw the grenades out. Once defense was taken more seriously the incidence of captured barracks dropped dramatically, and in 1921 only two occupied posts were lost. But by the time the decision was made to 'beef up' barracks defense, it was little more than "shutting the barn door after the horse had gone". The damage had already been done.[11]

In recent generations Constabulary members had become a recognized and largely accepted presence in Irish life, wholly integrated into the community. Men were stationed to a particular area and with few exceptions that is where they stayed for the duration of their careers. The system enabled them to build a rapport with the locals and a level of trust. For years the RIC relied almost exclusively upon its ties to the local population. This relationship formed the lynchpin upon which RIC intelligence-gathering rested (See Chapter 2). Early in 1920 in direct violation of this principle, government policy instituted a system of frequent transfers, moving the men from community to community, all in an effort to prevent individuals from becoming marked targets in a particular locale. The policy consequently severed the deep roots Constabulary men had cultivated in specific areas, and emphatically reduced their ability to acquire local intelligence after

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[11] Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, 210-211; Townshend, "The Irish Republican Army and the Development of Guerrilla Warfare 1916-1921," *English Historical Review* April 1979, 323-324.

1919.[12] Combined with the psychological and isolating ramifications of the IRA-led boycott, the transfers effectively cut the men off from the community and created a deafening silence. The well of information that had flowed so freely for so long dried up almost completely. By 1920 it was clear to those in power and to the RIC that it was no longer in touch with the currents of crime and sedition in Ireland, forced to rely on outdated recollections and assumptions based on the days before the Troubles.[13] With an insightful analysis of the period, historian David Fitzpatrick explains: "In self-protection the force drew into itself and its 'eyes and ears', already hooded, ranged over an ever-contracting domain."[14]

The word that most accurately sums up the government's treatment of the RIC during the years leading up to and for the duration of the Troubles is neglect. Liberal policy after 1902 had dictated a less aggressive approach to political policing, and their Irish budgets made 'secret service' funds a low priority along with police pay and recruitment. Despite the conclusions arrived at by the Royal Commission's investigation into the causes of the Easter Rising, and lessons that should have been learned from their predecessors' mistakes, Lloyd George's coalition government and a succession

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[12] Gen. Sir Neville Macready, *Annals of an Active Life, II,* (London: Hutchinson, 1924),482-483. See also Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare,* 215; Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life,* 9-17.

[13] Record of the Rebellion in Ireland (Intelligence), 19-21; Townshend, *British Campaign in Ireland,* 41; Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life,* 16.

[14] Fitzpatrick, *Ibid.,* 17.

of new Irish administrators changed almost nothing. The police were no better treated; they remained underpaid, under-funded, and undermanned. The situation was not helped by England's preoccupation with its situation post-World War I. It is no surprise Ireland remained such a low priority when those sitting at Westminster were distracted by such issues as a staggering national war debt, the mass return of battle-weary soldiers, the Paris Peace Treaty, and a devastating pandemic flu.[15]

By mid-1920 the RIC was on the verge of collapse. It was under attack. Many of its barracks were indefensible, matters of pay and pension were long overdue for settlement and the gathering of intelligence entirely ignored. 'Secret service' funding did rise somewhat in 1917-1918 due in large part to the war, but fell again after the war ended; this despite the lesson afforded to government by the Rising that ignoring the warnings of its police intelligence apparatus resulted in serious consequences. It is astonishing to note that as late as 1919 the extra allowance to the Crimes Special Branch Department was cut altogether.[16] Faced with these developments and the outright danger inherent in battling IRA insurgents with little or no support from those in government, many RIC took early retirement or resigned from the force, particularly over the summer of 1920. During mid-June through mid-

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[15] For an excellent summary of British government in relation to Ireland during this period see: O'Halpin, *The Decline of the Union*, 24-118 passim. On the poor condition of the police see Hart, *British Intelligence in Ireland*, 4-5; Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, 13-21.

[16] Hart, *British Intelligence in Ireland*, 5; Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, 17; Bowden, *The Breakdown of Public Security*, 41-43.

September over 1,300 policemen left the constabulary (51% by resignation and 43% by retirement). While there were about 1,400 retirements in the five years 1910 through 1914, there were 1,200 in the thirteen-month period from mid-June 1920 to mid-July 1921. The rate of resignations compared to the rate of recruitment barely kept the Constabulary's numbers clinging to 10, 000.[17] Compare this to 1883 in which the force numbered 14, 559 and the years 1885-1892 through all of which the Constabulary's numbers remained above 12, 000.[18] The majority of those resigning were younger men who had less to lose by doing so having neither a pension nor a higher wage at stake, not to mention a family to support. Furthermore, remaining constables left to staff RIC stations were by and large older, married men and therefore much more susceptible to IRA intimidation of their families. Once the Troubles intensified and men began to die, senior constables did resign though never at the same rate as younger officers. This development translated into a loss of experienced and trained policemen, to be replaced by raw recruits.[19] In June 1920 the Inspector General warned that "the boycott of the police is growing and it is questionable how much longer the force will stand the strain…."[20]

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[17] For statistics see W.J. Lowe, "The War Against the R.I.C., 1919-1921," *Eire-Ireland Journal of Irish Studies*, Fall-Winter 2002, 65.

[18] For these figures see Bowden, *The Breakdown of Public Security,* 31 and Townshend, *British Campaign in Ireland,* 92 and Appendix III, 211-212.

[19] Lowe, "The War Against the R.I.C., 1919-1921,"71-73.

Over and above a lack of manpower the Constabulary was hindered by a shortage of transport vehicles. In November 1920 the entire police force for County Mayo had at its disposal two lorries and one Crossley tender, while two others waited to be repaired – a paltry number. Contrast these figures with the military's; that summer it was equipped with 193 vehicles, yet assessed it needed twice that amount. The RIC's lack of transport and the government's reluctance to invest in the Constabulary immensely hampered its ability to combat the IRA on equal footing.[21] So desperate did the situation appear, the Inspector General reported to Sir John Anderson of the Chief Secretary's Office in July 1920

> ...that he was in daily fear of one of two things...wholesale resignation from the force or his men running amok. Either, he said, would mean the end of the RIC. They had practically no motor transport and were stationed in many cases in indefensible barracks without means of securing aid in the event of an attack....The all important matter of intelligence and secret service had been entirely neglected.[22]

In the spring of 1920 the Constabulary was in a state of flux and flirting dangerously with collapse. The government's response to this crisis was an all-out attempt to twist the RIC into the shape of a paramilitary army and the men into pseudo-soldiers. This would not happen easily. The Constabulary had been chiefly a domesticated civil police force for decades. The previous generation of constables had found little use for firearms in

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[20] *IG Monthly Report*, CO 904/11, June 1920.

[21] For numbers see Townshend, *British Campaign in Ireland*, Appendix VI, 215; Lack of transport *CI Monthly Report*, CO 904/25, 191, Nov-Dec 1920 Co. Mayo and Co. Tipperary; Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, 202-203.

[22] Anderson papers, CO 904/188/1, 1-4.

their jobs, and military training was outdated and applied indiscriminately. Although it was armed, the RIC was not guided by military law or expertise. Its weapons were not rifles but Martini-Metford carbines, and the standard of musketry was anything but rigorous.[23] The army regarded the military capability of the RIC with no small amount of skepticism, and in some cases, contempt.

> Their musketry training was almost non-existent, their fire discipline nil and our officers had to go round their barracks to help them as much as possible in the effective use of the rifle...hand and rifle grenades, rockets and Verey light signals and in defense arrangements of their barracks.[24]

In both practice and experience the RIC was a civil force, which is why even the simplest steps to enhance its military capacity late in 1919 proved intrinsically alien to its members.

In September and November 1919 the RIC ordered large quantities of revolvers and Colt automatics; hand grenades were issued; and there was even a request for supplies of body armor. Motor transport, however, was much more difficult to come by. Even when Lord French himself declared that vehicles were "absolutely necessary for the efficient working of the already weakened Police forces,"[25] transport was not forthcoming. The Irish government had to bid for them on the open market like anyone else and in

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[23] Richard Hawkins, "Dublin Castle and the RIC," in Desmond T. Williams (ed.), *The Irish Struggle, 1916-1926*, 174; Townshend, *British Campaign in Ireland*, 42.

[24] Cited in Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, 28.

[25] Cited in Townshend, *British Campaign in Ireland*, 43.

December an RIC officer was sent to England to purchase forty-five motor vans and five lorries.[26] It requires more than an injection of military hardware to make an army however. In the RIC's case, the inertia of domestication had taken a firm hold. The push to reshape the Constabulary into what it was a century before was not unlike trying to turn the Titanic around. The men were much more comfortable playing the roles of politician and civil servant than that of soldier. By and large the demographic of the force post-1918 was that of middle-aged family men with 15-plus years of experience. This knowledge worked for the Constabulary in one sense – it translated into an overall maturity that bolstered discipline under duress. Nonetheless, any advantage was far outweighed by the RIC's unfamiliarity with violent insurgency. The role of light infantry was foreign to it. Knowledge and discipline were also accompanied by tradition and habit, making the men careless. Even at the height of IRA ambushes, RIC patrols often followed the same routes at the same time every day, making them a predictable target for the IRA.[27] The *Weekly Summary* newspaper, issued by the Dublin Castle Press Bureau and circulated mainly among Irish constables, summed up the RIC's problem this way:

> Men whose training has been entirely that of a civilian police are to a great extent unfitted for the present conditions, which are those of a

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[26] *Ibid.*, 43.
[27] On the demographics of the RIC, WJ Lowe and EL Malcolm, "The Domestication of the Royal Irish Constabulary, 1836-1922" *Irish Economic and Social History*, 19, 1992, 31-32, 48; *Record of the Rebellion* Volume I, 20-21; Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies*; Stafford, *The Ambush Experience of the IRA* (unpublished), 17-18.

> singularly difficult war. All their tradition grown into instinct makes them slow to use firearms.[28]

Writing in 1931, an ex-officer of the RIC explained the dilemma this way: "We had the military efficiency when we did not really want it. When we required it, it was not forthcoming...."[29]

In spite of the Constabulary's ill-preparedness to counter IRA violence, the government remained stoic in its reluctance to use the military. Prime Minister Lloyd George was unyielding in his opinion that "You do not declare war against rebels," unwilling even to admit that an insurgency situation existed in Ireland in dire need of military methods to contain it. When the Army arrived in Jan 1920, they were introduced into the system as virtually a supplementary department of the administration, with powers that fell far short of martial law most of the time, although they too would eventually bear the brunt of the IRA's campaign.[30]

Instead of 'declaring war', the government's decision was to render the police more military-*like*. Over the summer of 1920, recruitment from outside Ireland got under way to address the shortage of manpower issue. First, there were the 'Black and Tans'. These new British recruits were ex-soldiers back from the horrors of the Western front, eager to be employed in any field.

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[28] *Weekly Summary*, 20 August 1920.

[29] Cited in Lowe and Malcolm, "The Domestication of the RIC," 31.

[30] Charles Townshend (1975) continues to offer the most detailed portrait of the British military's involvement in Ireland. See especially *British Campaign in Ireland*, 40, 49, 133-171 passim.

They were offered good pay as members of the RIC. Because of a paucity of supplies they initially wore a mixture of khaki with the deep green, almost black, uniform of the Constabulary, hence the nickname Black and Tans.[31] Quickly and forcefully integrated into RIC ranks with very little preparation or proper police training, the Black and Tans had little respect for older officers and were difficult to manage. Furthermore, average Irish constables were offended by the Tans' appointments to sergeants after only an abbreviated and blithe stint at depot. Normally that rank demanded an exhaustive twenty years of unblemished service.[32]

In addition to the Black and Tans, the formation of a special 'gendarmerie' to act in conjunction with the Constabulary had been in the air since May. The Auxiliary Division of the RIC (ADRIC, as it was pronounced), was substantially more independent than regular police and even though it was garbed in the RIC uniform, earned higher wages. Brought into existence under Sir Henry Tudor (hence the soubriquet 'Tudor's Toughs,'), the Temporary Cadets of ADRIC were viewed by its creators as a *corps d'elite*, and given enough Crossley tenders to make them fully mobile. ADRIC was organized into Companies A through K averaging 100 Cadets per company and comprised of ex-officers who had held commissions in the British armed

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[31] Record of the Rebellion (Intelligence), 24; Gleeson, *Bloody Sunday*, 44-46, 54.

[32] *Constabulary Gazette*, 21 Aug and 9 Oct 1920; Gleeson, *Bloody Sunday*, 56; Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, 25; Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies*, 4.

services. Yet what role they were to play was not exactly understood by anyone involved.[33]

Native RIC members were overwhelmed by this turn of events and the divide between 'old' and 'new' was sharp from the beginning. The new British recruits tended to be belligerent, badly trained, ignorant of the country and rarely behaved like policemen. Their only service experience had been trench warfare, which carried with it a brutalizing effect, but also left them shockingly unqualified to fight against the IRA's hit-and-run guerrilla tactics. Veterans of the Great War, they arrived in Ireland ready to fight another. Characteristics that had defined the old order of police began to disintegrate. The new recruits shared none of the RIC's traditional sense of restraint. Police riots and looting became routine, beatings, arson and even murder not infrequent.[34] One old Irish constable said of the new men: "They weren't as disciplined as the RIC, not at all. They were on their own, hurt one and you hurt them all."[35] As the new recruits discovered their impotence in the face of escalating operations by the IRA, frustrations mounted. The new men reacted against the insurgency with uncontained rage that spilled over in a series of

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[33] See especially the memoir "The Auxiliary's Story" reproduced in James Joseph Gleeson, *Bloody Sunday*, (London: P. Davis, 1962); Townshend, *British Campaign in Ireland*, 110-111; Richard Bennett, *Black and Tans* (London: Hutchinson, 1976), 37-38.

[34] Macready, *Annals of an Active Life*, 488-490; Bennett, *Black and Tans*, 38; Hart, *IRA and its Enemies*, 4; Lowe, "The War Against the R.I.C., 1919-1921,"69-72.

[35] Cited in Brewer, *The Royal Irish Constabulary*, 111.

vengeful acts committed against civilians, their property and any captured guerrillas. The killings, assaults, arson, and other forms of sabotage were collectively known as 'reprisals' and became commonplace.[36]

General Sir Neville Macready, commander-in-chief in Ireland, was uneasy from the start about the behavior of the new recruits. Not so much because he thought it was wrong, but because he did not want the negative press reflecting poorly on the discipline of his soldiers.[37] The issue of reprisals was a thorny one. No senior official really blamed the police for 'going off.' After all, they felt, what man would not do the same after seeing his comrades wounded or killed right in front of him? Even Macready admitted privately that troops without enough spirit to retaliate under these conditions were "not worth a damn" and harsh punishment might take the heart out of them.[38] The answer it seemed was to introduce a system of 'official' reprisals in an effort to maintain the morale of all Crown Forces involved in the fight against the IRA, and to repress the 'unofficial' reprisals engaged in by frustrated members of police and military. Even the Prime Minister's office was not untouched by this controversial decision. Lloyd George made it clear to Macready that he favored "gunning" as opposed to

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[36] Lowe, "The War Against the R.I.C., 1919-1921,"73-75; Hart, *IRA and its Enemies,* 81-83. See also, Tom Barry, *Guerrilla Days in Ireland,* (Dublin: Irish Press Ltd., 1949), 115-121; K. Griffith and T. O'Grady, *Curious Journey: An Oral History of Ireland's Unfinished Revolution,* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), 152-157; David Hogan, *The Four Glorious Years,* (Dublin: Irish Press Ltd., 1953), 270-274; *Irish Times,* 20 Oct 1920, 5;

[37] Macready, *Annals of An Active Life,* 490.

[38] Cited in Townshend, *British Campaign in Ireland,* 112.

"burning" since the latter too often affected landlords as much as rebels. He resolutely believed the apparent indiscipline of the RIC could be discreetly channeled in this desirable direction. There was also a growing acknowledgement in the higher echelons of command that reprisals often changed the atmosphere of a particular district from "hostility to one of cringing submission."[39]

Following the notorious ambush at Kilmichael in November 1920, a system of official reprisals was indeed introduced in the south-western counties - Cork, Kerry, Limerick and Tipperary - together with martial law. Under this system the property of those implicated in or cognizant of an outrage was confiscated and destroyed. Due to lack of effective intelligence, this simply meant that a fixed number of houses closest to an incident were demolished. Despite some successes, many officers in the police and military were dissatisfied with the official reprisals, which were so methodical and consistent the population turned against them. They considered the unofficial reprisals far more effective, since their unknown quality of severity and timing terrified the local communities and made them less willing to cover for the IRA or participate in its campaign.[40]

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[39] Quote cited in Townshend, *British Campaign in Ireland*, 120; Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, 213

[40] For this see Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, 214-215; For eye-witness accounts see Griffith and O'Grady, *Curious Journey*, 181-182, 221-222; O'Malley, *On Another Man's Wound* (London: Rich and Cowan, 1936), 113-117, 163-171.

Traditional Constabulary men with little or no stomach for the kind of war they found themselves mired in were considerably mistrustful of the special forces. The brutal and erratic behavior of the Black and Tans and Auxiliary cadets created tension in the field between the groups. The uncontrolled behavior of the new men disgusted some of the older constables who recalled calmer times. They considered such outbursts the action of 'goons' in no way contributing to the solution, only forming part of the problem. Having become so sickened by the turn of events some of the men resigned. Ordinary constables occasionally rejected their officers' commands if they encouraged such forms of state terrorism. In the most publicized case, the 'Listowel mutiny' in Kerry, some in the RIC refused to serve after they were told to shoot Sinn Feiners without fear of punishment.[41]

This is not to say that the record of the traditional RIC remained entirely unblemished during these dark days. Black and Tans and Auxiliaries participated in reprisals from the start. Regular RIC men were slower to commit acts of vengeance, but as the war progressed a distinct change began to occur. Some of the men, hardened and embittered by the violence that surrounded them and by their ostracization from the community, carried out retaliations as well. When a popular Constabulary officer was killed with expanding ammunition in the fall of 1920, his men 'broke out of hand' and took part in an hours-long reprisal against the town of Tubbercurry, Co.

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[41] Augusteijn talks about men resigning for this reason but does not provide any actual numbers. *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, 215 and 222.

Sligo. The offending RIC men were eventually rounded up into police lorries and driven away, but not before a creamery in the neighborhood was burned and many other acts of vandalism had been committed. Similar situations had already occurred at Balbriggan, Co. Dublin and Ennistymon, Co. Clare with similar reprisals.[42]

In addition to meeting violence with violence, the Constabulary's response to the crisis before the Truce in 1921 fell into two principal categories: men resigned or took early retirement or, driven by fear and an instinct to survive, men stayed but attempted to remain out of trouble. Staying out of trouble without leaving the force was certainly possible for most RIC men during the early part of the struggle. Nevertheless, when violence became more commonplace, especially following the arrival of Black and Tans and Auxiliaries, staying out of trouble became next to impossible. To avoid conflict and unnecessary casualties senior constables confined the men to their barracks as much as possible. In some areas with either a strong military presence or weak IRA one there was no justification for doing this at all. Cooped up and with little to divert them the men became bored, increasing the likelihood of their over-reacting to minor incidents. Fear also played a large part here. Frequently telegraph wires between stations were cut, rockets used by the RIC to raise the alarm were fired by IRA guerrillas

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[42] For an official account of the Tubbercurry reprisal see, Dublin Castle communiqué, *Irish Times*, 7 October 1920; Townshend, *The British Campaign in Ireland*, 120-121. The first case of unofficial reprisals in Cork, Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies*, Chapter "The Dynamics of Violence," passim; Augusteijn, *From Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, 233, 246-247.

between two police posts, or feint attacks on barracks were made under the cover of night. Such actions naturally caused considerable anxiety amongst the men locked inside. Due to poor intelligence, things tended to look scarier than was actually the case. This meant conservative older RIC men, hunkered in their barracks, sometimes reacted to minor sniping with capricious fusillades. Their random fire killed sheep and cattle and it was not unknown for police and military parties to shoot at one another convinced they were firing at the IRA.[43] Occasions to leave the barracks were restricted to recovering supplies, route patrols and the relief of other stations under attack. When the IRA took advantage of these procedures to harass the police, it created the unshakable impression of its overall presence. The violence that developed in some areas terrified policemen in entirely inactive places, and it supported the false notion of a larger more lethal Republican army. In his study of the geographical patterns of violence during the Troubles, Peter Hart argues that while most towns and parishes had their IRA or Sinn Fein clubs, revolutionary activity was largely confined to particular areas and nearly non-existent in others. For example, the district

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[43] Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, 226-227; Anonymous. *Tales of the R.I.C.*, (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1921), 73-77; Samuel Waters, *A Policeman's Ireland: Recollections of Samuel Waters, RIC*. Stephen Ball (ed.), (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999), 68-69.

of Bandon in Co. Cork produced eleven times as many casualties (190) as the entire county of Antrim.[44]

A percentage of the men, who remained in the Constabulary although frightened by developments, often did so out of financial necessity. In some instances the Constabulary's fear was actually a reluctance to become involved in the crisis, going so far as to allow some insurgents to go free. Their willingness to risk their lives was limited and was further reduced by a survival instinct and family and social ties with Volunteers. It was not unheard of for RIC men to turn a blind eye to illegal activities as long as they were not personally attacked.[45] This attitude was widely recognized by Volunteers. One company using a gymnasium in Dublin for drilling knew that police were well aware of their presence, but did not worry about interference.

> I am sure the local RIC were not in the least deceived as to the purpose of the gymnasium but the sergeant was on the point of retirement, one of the constables was courting the sister of one of the Volunteers and the others...wanted to avoid trouble.[46]

In his study of the Troubles, historian Joost Augusteijn has shown that an unspoken agreement developed between the IRA and RIC and policemen who ignored Volunteer activity were left alone. To reinforce this belief, the IRA

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[44] Peter Hart, "The Geography of Revolution, 1917-1923," *Past and Present*, no.155 May 1997: 143.

[45] Griffith and O'Grady, *Curious Journey*, 195-197; Tom Barry, *Guerrilla Days in Ireland*, (Dublin: Irish Press, 1949), 101-106; Ernie O'Malley, *On Another Man's Wound*, 180-193; Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, 222-223.

[46] C.S. Andrews, *Dublin Made Me: An Autobiography*, (Dublin: Mercier Press), 98.

made it a general policy to attack mainly those in the force who made themselves conspicuous. Of those RIC men unwilling to resign, some even went so far as to supply the IRA with information. There were contacts in the highest ranks of the intelligence sections in Dublin. Each night these people told the IRA who was going to be raided. Constabulary information regarding the movements of its leaders were also passed on. In the provincial areas, the information given was less useful. No systematic raiding took place and only the local sergeant or District Inspector knew where the raids were going to be made. The ordinary constable was told only at the last minute. Even so, in most counties there are reports of policemen supplying information to the IRA. This was often done in the hope that attacks on them or on the barracks might be prevented.[47]

Conclusion

The decline in RIC capability, once it began, was rapid and cannot all be attributed to IRA prowess. Even though the IRA's campaign proved to be intimidating and proficient, government policy was more harmful to the RIC in the sense that it left the force unprotected and mismanaged. It was this more than RIC ill-preparedness or IRA fierceness that dealt the real death blow to the Constabulary and, in effect, forced it to fight with one arm behind its back. Government policy closed many police barracks and instituted a

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[47] Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, 223-225.

program of frequent transfers of constables, the result being in both cases, the Constabulary's defining characteristic as the 'eyes and ears' of Ireland was lost to it forever. The government's policy combined with the IRA's boycott irrevocably severed the RIC's link to the local population. In the end, the demand foisted onto the RIC by government to become a militarized counter-terror group was unreasonable and impossible to fulfill. The Constabulary was simply incapable of the quick metamorphosis expected of it. The situation was made worse by introducing the notorious Black and Tans and the special Auxilary forces that arrived in Ireland with minimal planning or preparation. Given proper guerrilla warfare training, ADRIC would very likely have achieved results out of proportion to its size, but instead it was left to work out its own survival in conditions where experience of the Great War was of limited relevance. The RIC was not helped by their involvement, and remained alienated from the new recruits throughout the war, unable or unwilling to bridge the communication and intelligence gap between them. The incidence of violent reprisals engaged in by the British recruits did little to cultivate confidence in the old RIC and some constables resigned because of it.

Undoubtedly, Westminster neglected the RIC; government policy to bolster a dying force in 1920 was piece-meal and only served to muddy the waters for everyone involved. After battling to survive the long dark days of the Troubles, the Royal Irish Constabulary was still standing at the Truce in

July 1921. But due to the ferociousness of the IRA's campaign, the list of indignities heaped upon it by the local population, and extreme negligence on the government's part, the RIC was only a pale shadow of its former self, and performed accordingly.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The primary ambition of the new leaders of the Irish Free State was to erase from their country all reminders of England's centuries-old authority there. No institution was more historically "English" than the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC). As men employed by and loyal to the Crown, they had fought against the Republic thereby betraying their own countrymen. Hence, the Constabulary's disbandment in August of 1922 came as little surprise to anyone, least of all to the men of the RIC.

Dublin Castle, the centre of British rule in Ireland for nearly 700 years, was formally handed over to the Free State government on August 17th when Commissioner Michael Staines led his new police force, the Garda Siochana, through the Castle gates. Michael Collins, who had orchestrated the demise of the RIC and the creation of the Garda, was shot dead five days later at Béal na mBlath. Ireland's Civil War had already been raging since June between pro- and anti-Treaty Republicans. To complicate matters even further, in the North (comprised of the six counties of Ulster not included in the Irish Free State), the Unionist-dominated government established its own police force modeled very closely on the RIC and called it the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). From the beginning the largely Protestant RUC

was a different creature than its predecessor; it cultivated very strong sectarian ties to the Orange Lodges. As such a sectarian body the force developed a strained relationship with the Northern Catholic community, who viewed the RUC as incapable of impartial policing. In many cases, this was true. The numbers of old RIC Catholics who joined the ranks of the new RUC were very small and stayed that way. By 1969, the Catholic proportion of the force had fallen to a mere eleven percent, while the Catholic population itself comprised nearly thirty-five percent of Ulster's residents.[1]

Following the RIC's disbandment in 1922, a compensation commission was set up in November of that year, but crippling restrictions were placed upon the granting of pensions to policemen who had lost their livelihood. By late 1924 only 408 pensions had been granted, that is to less than ten percent of those who had resigned or been dismissed during the Troubles. Those who had remained loyal to the Crown were humiliated at length during the interminable months following the Truce, forced to coexist with the rival Garda police. The new Republic did allow for compensation to those made to leave their Irish homes in fear of retaliation. Money was put up to allow the men to emigrate or find new employment elsewhere. By December 1923, 1206 men had been assisted in Britain and Ireland, and 1436 were helped to

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[1] Brian Griffen, "A Force Divided: Policing Ireland 1900-1960," *History Today*, October 1999, 25-27. The historiography dealing with Northern Ireland and the RUC is extensive. For example, Chris Ryder, *The Fateful Split: Catholics and the Royal Ulster Constabulary*, (London: Methuen, 2004) and Richard Weitzer, *Policing Under Fire: Ethnic Conflict and Police Community Relations in Northern Ireland*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

emigrate – mainly to Canada, Australia, and the United States. Most Dominions however, refused to accept systematic recruiting of ex-RIC.[2] Despite fear and reluctance, many RIC did join the new unarmed Garda and even became instructors to the new Republican recruits. Tensions in some places ran high because of this, but with the men no longer armed, things soon settled down. However, serving ex-RIC officers remained aware throughout the remainder of their careers of their 'separateness' from pure Garda police who had been drawn from a 'free' Ireland.[3]

The story of the Royal Irish Constabulary is a sad but interesting one and cannot be fully understood without taking a closer look at 20th century British government policy in Ireland and its subsequent treatment of the police there. Since the tendency has been for historians to concentrate on Michael Collins, his ties to Dublin Castle and his specially trained 'squad' of killers, conclusions about the intelligence war and the RIC have often been skewed at best, and completely misrepresentative at worst. Collins fought against British spies in the narrow cobble-stoned streets of Dublin; his was a strictly urban war, and though an important part of the intelligence saga, it precludes analysis of the test of wills carried out in the countryside between

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[2] For a recent analysis of RIC disbandment see Kent Fedorowich, "The Problems of Disbandment: The Royal Irish Constabulary and Imperial Migration, 1919-1929," *Irish Historical Studies*, 30(117): 1996, 88-110. David Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life 1913-1921: Provincial Experience of War and Revolution*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977), 44-45.

[3] Griffen, "A Force Divided," 27.

rural IRA brigades and members of the RIC. This part of the intelligence war has received little attention by scholars of the period. The previous chapters have shown that poor management and neglect on the government's part proved just as detrimental to the RIC's ability to continue to function as the guerrilla campaign launched against it by the Irish Republican Army in 1920-21.

The disintegration of the RIC as an able-bodied police force did not happen all at once. The road to its collapse was gradual, changing from a position of strength and proficiency before the Easter Rising in 1916 to one of disarray and fear during the height of the Troubles in 1920. In addition to the heavy twin burdens posed by the IRA's campaign and government policy, the RIC was also hindered by its own evolution into an entirely domesticated civil force wholly divorced from its paramilitary origins. While the RIC kept its military posturing, its metamorphosis into a civil body was nonetheless complete by the turn of the century. It had become fully absorbed into the community matrix and an integral part of Irish daily life. Even though the RIC became 'soft' in regards to its soldierly capacity, up to 1919 its intelligence apparatus was as strong as ever.

The tragic irony of the RIC's ultimately doomed fate was that the government in Ireland had at its disposal this indigenous force thoroughly entrenched within the civilian population network and failed to utilize it to its maximum benefit. The RIC's capacity for ferreting out 'political

intelligence' provided the government with a valuable tool that went largely unnoticed, unappreciated, and most significantly, unused by those in Dublin Castle and Westminster. Not only was the RIC ignored but, when the Troubles escalated, government policy left the domesticated civil force entirely exposed and vulnerable.

It was said frequently by observers after the Truce in July 1921 that the IRA was reaching the end of its tether and had it been forced to continue with the war would have duly collapsed. Historian Charles Townshend does not agree and there is ample evidence to think otherwise. In his study *The British Campaign in Ireland* (1975) he argues:

> Such a conclusion...seems exaggerated. There is no reason to doubt that given time, strength and public support, the British forces could have reduced rebel operations to negligible proportions. But these quintessential conditions were missing. While the IRA survived, political pressure on the government increased, and though the balance was tantalizingly fine, the IRA held out longer than the government's nerve. [4]

This is what brought about the Truce of July 11th, 1921 and decided matters during the Treaty negotiations that followed. Without the triple luxuries of time, strength and public support, the British government was only too eager to clear the path for a satisfactory resolution. There can be no doubt that Republican success was due in large part to its unerring psychological aim; the physical defeat and eviction of the British forces had never been a possibility. Townshend argues: "The Republic had succeeded by making the

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[4] Charles Townshend, *The British Military Campaign in Ireland 1919-1921. The Development of Political Military Policies*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 186.

price of British military victory too high for British public opinion, and the final arbiter of its success was not its own strength or will, but that opinion."[5] While British public opinion no doubt pressured Westminster to call a truce and negotiate a treaty, the glaring reality of a dysfunctional police force supercedes all other factors in this equation. The RIC's collapse was what essentially broke England's hold over Ireland. The Constabulary formed the backbone and central nervous system of the government's control in that country. Without it, English ability to govern effectively there was crippled beyond repair.

It is tempting to conclude that had the government thrown its support behind the RIC by maintaining its numbers and presence in Ireland, it likely would have stood a better chance at 'holding' Ireland indefinitely (or at least until it instituted Home Rule, which was a foregone conclusion by this time anyway). Joost Augusteijn's geographic analysis of the period certainly provides persuasive evidence for this. In places where the IRA was only marginally organized, a boycott never fully materialized. Despite initial successes it soon became apparent that the IRA was simply unable to sustain a sufficient level of intimidation to prevent the population from talking to and collaborating with the RIC altogether. Augusteijn points out that "In rural towns and villages with a strong police presence, the boycott quickly petered

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[5] Townshend, *British Military Campaign*, 192.

out, and all [the IRA] could do was to avoid the police as much as possible." [6] Only in rural areas where it had established a particularly well-integrated presence could the IRA fully enforce its boycott of the RIC and only then could the break between the police and the community, which started with the evacuation of outlying barracks – a government decision – be completed.[7] In the end, it was a numbers game. Government policy allowed Volunteer forces to swell unchecked before the Rising, leading to the formation of an organized IRA. Yet the government stood back as the RIC withered on the vine; this, in spite of the Constabulary's unqualified intelligence victory in tracing the trajectory of rebel action leading up to the Rising in 1916 (see Chapter 3).

Driving government policy in Ireland into the 20th century was a Liberal *laissez-faire* approach to Irish affairs that sacrificed the maintenance of law and order to political expediency, so much so that it enabled lawlessness to embed itself and flourish unimpeded. Overall policy was that Ireland was to be quiet at nearly any cost. Enforcing the law risked provoking Irish discontent and such confrontations were expressly to be avoided. With the likely outcome of Home Rule, the Dublin Castle system atrophied in the face of its reduced role in Irish affairs. The effort and financing required on

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[6] Joost Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare: the Experience of Ordinary Volunteers in the Irish War of Independence, 1916-1921,* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1996), 209.

[7] *Ibid.*, 209.

Westminster's behalf to sustain, or otherwise improve upon, a machine about to be dismantled did not seem worth the effort.

No one benefited more from this policy than the newly emerging Irish Volunteers; no one suffered more from it than the Royal Irish Constabulary. In support of the RIC, the Royal Commission held after the Easter Rising in 1916 called the government's policy into question, blaming it rather than the police for the damaging spread of sedition and violence post-1914. While it may have risked collision, early intervention could have been taken by those in power to arrest and prosecute Volunteer leaders and organizers using intelligence supplied to it by the RIC. It was not. Rather than risk being provocative, government policy in Ireland failed to be preventative. This is both true of Augustine Birrel's administration leading up to the Rising as well as policy coming from Westminster during Henry Asquith's and Lloyd George's tenures as Prime Minster. Liberal policy after 1902 had dictated a less aggressive approach to political policing and their Irish budgets made 'secret service' funds a low priority along with police pay and recruitment, and in 1919 the extra allowance to the Crimes Special Branch Department was cut altogether.

Lloyd George's coalition government especially, at the height of the Troubles, was particularly opposed to involving the Army and 'declaring war on a murder gang.' His overall disinterest in the fate of the Constabulary was apparent in his government's neglect of it. Government action releasing

political prisoners on a regular basis undermined RIC authority leaving it essentially emasculated. Humiliated, many in the force suspected that their futile efforts to impose law and order without the full support of the government were being laughed at. It did not take long under these conditions for the RIC to sense the public's estimation of the force slipping and confidence in the law waning. The government's wildly fluctuating approach to dealing with the IRA varied from coercion to conciliation and kept the RIC in a perpetual state of anxiety that today's convicts might become tomorrow's heroes upon release. The Constabulary was betrayed and hobbled, prevented from carrying out its duties by a political agenda that courted disaster, and an agenda imposed by a government too stubborn to realize the danger.

The government's response to IRA attacks on RIC barracks – closing many of them and concentrating more police in fewer areas – caused a resounding deterioration of the RIC's bond to the local community. The policy cut off the men from the population, the Constabulary's main source of intelligence, and left the men feeling isolated and unable to protect the community or themselves from IRA intimidation. The Inspector General admitted that since the consolidation of stations had occurred, "large areas were without police barracks and Sinn Fein was able to carry out its plans without interference," with "gangs of armed men moving about at night."[8] For years the RIC had relied on its ties to the local population to do its job

[8] *IG Monthly Report*, CO 904/113, 19 November 1920.

effectively. This relationship formed the lynchpin of RIC intelligence-gathering (see Chapter 2). Early in 1920, in addition to widespread barracks evacuations, government policy instituted a system of frequent transfers whereby constables were moved from community to community in an effort to prevent individuals falling victim to IRA violence. Consequently, the Constabulary's deep roots in specific areas were severed and its ability to acquire local intelligence after 1919 emphatically reduced. Combined with the psychological and isolating ramifications of the IRA-led boycott (see Chapter 4) and the barracks closures, the additional burden of the transfers effectively cut the men off from the community and created a deafening silence. The well that had run so deep and quenched the RIC's thirst for intelligence for so long dried up almost completely.

When conditions in the RIC became intolerable by 1920, resignations skyrocketed proportionately. The government did not attempt to redress the matter by improving the Constabulary's pay, military training or access to transport vehicles. This would have entailed a huge investment on England's behalf without any guarantees of success, not to mention directly violating a policy Westminster had been following for years because of Home Rule. Instead, those in power brought in raw recruits from England to 'stiffen up' the ranks of the RIC. The decision to introduce the Black and Tans and Auxiliary forces into Ireland was an attempt to reshape the Constabulary into what it was a century before, a paramilitary body of pseudo-soldiers, all

in an effort to avoid introducing the Army. In line with a policy that had been on-going for several decades, Lloyd George's government remained resolute in its reluctance to become overtly entangled in Irish affairs at such an inopportune time (post-1918 England), fully aware Home Rule would eventually be instituted. But the situation was only made worse by the new recruits who arrived in Ireland with minimal planning and no preparation. The RIC was not helped by their involvement and remained alienated from the 'outsiders' throughout 1920-21, unable or unwilling to bridge the communication and intelligence gap that existed between them. The frequency of violent 'official' and 'unofficial' reprisals committed by the new men only served to irreparably widen this gap (see Chapter 5).

The turbulence of the Troubles and the onslaught of the IRA's campaign proved to be a nightmare for the men of the Royal Irish Constabulary forced to live through it. The break between police and community that started with the evacuation of barracks was completed with the psychological and physical ramifications of the campaign to ostracize the police. Boycotts successfully turned the RIC into social pariahs and potential targets of attack, legitimizing the killing of Constabulary men to an Irish community who no longer considered the police as one of them. RIC men feared for their own lives as well as for the safety of their families (see Chapter 4).

Constables were disheartened by the lack of support and protection offered to them by the Crown during the Troubles. Having served Ireland for so long with equal amounts of loyalty and deference, in the end with Home Rule on the horizon, the Royal Irish Constabulary was not worth enough to government to merit either all-out protection or preservation. In any case, it was a poor way for Constabulary men to end a career and it was a tragic end for a force that had once been so effective, respected and accepted within Irish society.

In an insurgency situation the importance of *civil* rather than *military* intervention cannot be underrated. It is the civilian body of the police, its links to the local community and the quality of its intelligence services that is critical to the resolution of conflict and the preservation of government authority. When the police are no longer functioning in the community, unable to maintain law and order and with little or no intelligence-gathering capabilities, resistance is strengthened while government legitimacy and control is weakened. At the center of any counterinsurgency success story or failure is the police.

The nature of colonial policing is paramount to understanding the patterns of decolonization. Historians of Britain's surrender of empire show that in almost every case, affecting an orderly retreat was a vital part of the political strategy employed by the British. The role of the colonial police in this process was absolutely pivotal, as they found themselves in closer

proximity to the forces of nationalist politics and anti-colonial protest than any other arm of government. For this reason, the police experience is perhaps the most intimate portrait we have concerning the nature and impact of British decision-making policy. In this respect, the study of policing in Ireland is significant not only for what it reveals about the Troubles specifically, but for the substantial insight it offers into the realities of policing insurgency as it applies to the larger historical context of British decolonization. The story of the Royal Irish Constabulary does not exist in a vacuum. The ordeal these men faced, the difficult nature of their work, became a legacy inherited by other police forces in other lands. The geography changed, along with the names and structure of the police forces involved, but the stories remain remarkably similar. What can be learned from the RIC's experience of the Troubles can be used to encompass colonial policing as a whole.

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