Divided loyalties: the Royal Irish Constabulary in county Tipperary, 1919-22

By

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Thesis completed under the supervision of Dr. John Logan in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University of Limerick
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Declaration

This thesis is written to meet the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It is entirely my own work and has not been submitted to any other university or higher institution. Where the work of other people has been used it has been fully referenced and acknowledged.

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John Reynolds

April, 2013
Abstract

The period from 1913 to 1921 in Ireland saw the rise of militant nationalism, the 1916 Rising, the Anglo-Irish conflict and the Civil War. Integral to these events were the men of the Royal Irish Constabulary. The force had already policed Ireland for over a century when the IRA campaign against it began in January 1919 with the Soloheadbeg ambush. During that time the RIC had evolved into an indigenous civil police force which routinely patrolled without arms. Between 1919 and 1922, 493 members of the RIC were killed and hundreds more injured as the force bore the brunt of the IRA campaign. Forty six policemen died in county Tipperary alone, making it one of most violent counties in Ireland, within the most violent province, Munster. When the conflict ended, the RIC was completely disbanded at its own insistence, and thousands of former policemen faced uncertain futures. Many chose assisted emigration while others opted to remain in Ireland, living in relative anonymity.

Nationalist historiography has been overwhelmingly negative about the RIC, portraying the force as the ‘eyes and ears of Dublin Castle’, an oppressive colonial police force subjugating the citizens of Ireland. Atrocities were committed by both sides however, and the grim reality of the conflict frequently differed from the heroic struggle for self-determination subsequently portrayed in historiography. This work is a detailed study of the Royal Irish Constabulary in Tipperary from 1919 to 1922. The IRA operation directed against the police in that county resulted in the deaths of forty-six policemen, the wounding of many more and the destruction of, or abandonment of dozens of barracks. It is intended in this study that the RIC will be placed in an appropriate historical context as a force
comprised primarily of indigenous Irishmen who found themselves in an almost impossible position when the conflict began. Given the critical importance of the RIC in Irish history of this period, it is intended that this work will appreciably add to the historiography of the topic. By contrasting the perception of the RIC against the reality of the guerrilla campaign waged against them, this thesis will critically assess the role of the RIC in Tipperary during this time, and examine the experiences of ordinary members of the constabulary.
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<td>Irish Republican Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>RIC</td>
<td>Royal Irish Constabulary</td>
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<td>IRB</td>
<td>Irish Republican Brotherhood</td>
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<td>IV</td>
<td>Irish Volunteers</td>
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<tr>
<td>DMP</td>
<td>Dublin Metropolitan Police</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADRIC</td>
<td>Auxiliary Division, Royal Irish Constabulary</td>
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<td>ROIA</td>
<td>Restoration of Order in Ireland Act, 1920</td>
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<td>CI</td>
<td>County Inspector</td>
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<td>DI</td>
<td>District Inspector</td>
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<td>IG</td>
<td>Inspector General (RIC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>TN</td>
<td>Tipperary North RIC District</td>
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‘It is far more profitable to kill for Ireland than to die for her’

\[An t-Óglach,\] the journal of the Irish Volunteers 15 August 1920.
Chapter One – Introduction

“The Royal Irish Constabulary resembles a noble mansion of the Victorian era, still occupied but showing visible signs of decay.”

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) performed a key role in maintaining the social order of Ireland. For almost a century, from its earliest manifestation as the Peace Preservation Force (PPF) of 1814 until its complete disbandment in 1922 the men of the RIC and the institution itself were intricately woven into the fabric of Irish society. In excess of 85,200 men served in various incarnations of the Irish constabulary between 1814 and 1922. Through the tragic years of the Famine (1845-53), rebellion against British rule, agrarian disputes and the gradual escalation of militant nationalism in the early twentieth century, the RIC was pervasive and omnipresent.

Anglo-Irish tensions escalated following the 1916 Rising, erupting into open conflict in 1919. The struggle for moral authority and military supremacy between the RIC and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) became a key factor in determining the eventual outcome. In the IRA campaign which took place from 1919 to 1922, attacks on policemen and their barracks became the primary objective of militant nationalists and almost 500 members of the force were killed. Apart from military operations carried out by the IRA against the police, a parallel campaign of intimidation and boycotting was directed at policemen, their families and others associated with the force such as landlords, suppliers and shopkeepers. Such measures proved effective and harked back to similar tactics used by previous generations of Irish revolutionaries.

This work is a detailed study of the Royal Irish Constabulary in Tipperary from 1919 to 1922. The IRA operation directed against the police in that county resulted in the deaths of forty-six policemen, the wounding of many more and the destruction of, or

1 Royal Irish Constabulary Gazette, September 1916.
abandonment of dozens of barracks. It is intended in this study that the RIC will be placed in an appropriate historical context as a force comprised primarily of indigenous Irishmen who found themselves in an almost impossible position when the conflict began. Given the critical importance of the RIC in Irish history of this period, it is intended that this work will appreciably add to the historiography of the topic. By contrasting the perception of the RIC against the reality of the guerrilla campaign waged against them, this thesis will critically assess the role of the RIC in Tipperary during this time, and examine the experiences of ordinary members of the constabulary. The emphasis of this work will be on county Tipperary, but incidents of significance in other counties and at national level will be referred to where necessary to contextualize events in Tipperary.

The governance of Ireland consistently tested the capabilities and patience of the most talented politicians and administrators in London. Lord Liverpool, Tory prime minister from 1812 to 1827, described the country as ‘a political phenomenon, not influenced by the same feelings as appear to affect mankind in other countries’. Sir Robert Peel, elected as a Member of Parliament for Cashel in Tipperary in 1809 and the politician responsible for introducing a constabulary to Ireland attributed the high level of disorder in the country to ‘a natural predilection for outrage and a lawless life which I believe nothing can control’. The perception of Ireland as having an ever present threat of rebellion did much to ensure that the model of policing which developed in the country would always differ to that which pertained in other parts of the United Kingdom. Peel was also critical of the influence of the Roman Catholic Church, stating that the prevailing religion of Ireland operated as an ‘impediment rather than an aid to the ends of the civil government’.

Following the success of the American Revolution in 1776 and French Revolution in 1789,

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5 Peel to Liverpool, 15 October 1813, (Liverpool papers, B.M., Add. MS38195); Quoted in Broeker, *Rural disorder and police reform*, p. 2.
6 Peel to Abbot, 25 December 1816 in Peel Private papers, i, 236, quoted in; Broeker; *Rural disorder and police reform in Ireland*, p. 25
the revolutionary fervour which followed inspired a new generation of home grown insurrectionists in Ireland, culminating in the 1798 Rising, and then the 1803 United Irishmen rebellion led by Robert Emmet. British success achieved in suppressing revolution in Ireland caused some politicians to believe that uprisings could even be beneficial if they took place in a limited fashion, as rebels would come to the fore and could more easily be dealt with. In 1813 for example Whitworth, lord lieutenant of Ireland wrote to Peel arguing that ‘another revolution would be beneficial to the country … it would lead to an unfortunate loss of life, but the results would be favourable to the tranquillity of the country’.7

Nevertheless, the fear of similar uprisings prompted the British government to embark on an extensive programme of military barrack building throughout Ireland. In 1807 the Duke of Wellington, Sir Arthur Wellesley, remarked that the construction of garrisons ‘afforded a prospect of security’, despite the expenditure incurred by governments and landlords.8 Aside from the fear of further revolution, England was at war with France and the threat of invasion from Napoleon’s army was a real possibility, given that French naval ships had landed soldiers at Bantry Bay in 1786 and Killala Bay in 1798.9 To guard against invasion, over forty Martello towers were constructed around the coast and between 1789 and 1814 the strength of the military garrison in Ireland increased from 40,000 to 225,000.10 The army itself intensely disliked performing such duties. Major-General G.C Mundy of the 43rd regiment of foot wrote when garrisoned in Cork during 1834, that he had ‘no patience with playing police in this unsociable country’.11 To reduce the burden on the army during the turbulent years of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, organisations of voluntary, non-professional soldiers were formed

7 Whitworth to Peel, 18 November 1813, (Peel papers, B.M., Add.MS 40187); Quoted in Broeker, Rural disorder and police reform, p. 6.
8 Con Costello, A most delightful station (Dublin, 1996), p. 23.
with the creation of a militia in 1793 and a yeomanry in 1796. Both organisations carried out quasi-policing functions, but proved to be frequently partisan in nature and less than efficient.\footnote{12 See: Allan Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army, The Irish Yeomanry, 1796-1834* (Dublin, 1998), and Ivan F. Nelson, *The Irish Militia, 1793–1802* (Dublin, 2007).}

In 1785 the ‘London and Westminster Police Bill’ came before parliament in an effort to address the escalating problem of crime in the city. The bill was defeated however, having met opposition from influential members of society, wary of the increased powers which it would give to the government, and significant costs associated with the establishment and maintenance of a police force. The following year a similar measure for the city of Dublin was passed by the Irish parliament which established the Dublin Metropolitan Police (DMP), and the term ‘police’ was enshrined in legislation for the first time in the United Kingdom.\footnote{13 *An Act for improving the police of the City of Dublin, 1786*, 26 Geo. 3, c. 24.} The Dublin Police Act defined the boundaries of the city as the area within the Circular Road and Phoenix Park, and legislated for an unarmed police force within the capital.\footnote{14 *Oxford companion to Irish history* (New York, 2011), p. 172.} While this model of urban policing had been innovative when first introduced, by the early part of the nineteenth century it was in need of reform. One magistrate once refused to parade the force in daylight believing that ‘they would excite so much ridicule of the people that there is a risk of their very appearance causing a disturbance’.\footnote{15 Robert Curtis, *The history of the Royal Irish Constabulary* (London, 1869). Quoted in Breathnach; *The Irish Police* (Dublin, 1974), p. 25.}

The Dublin Metropolitan Police remained unarmed throughout its existence, and was subsumed into the Garda Síochána na hÉireann under the Police Forces Amalgamation Act of 1925.

Outside of the city of Dublin, the Peace Preservation Act of 1814 introduced the Peace Preservation Force, a mounted quasi-military constabulary. Prior to this initiative, a rudimentary system of rural policing had existed in Ireland for centuries. Baronial constables, night watchmen and primarily the military, including the yeomanry and the
militia had been responsible for the preservation of law and order. The Peace Preservation Force was a nascent version of the constabulary which was to follow. Deployment of the force took place to counties categorised as being ‘disturbed’ when local magistrates requested the lord lieutenant to proclaim the area to be in a state of disorder. The costs of deployment of the PPF were defrayed locally by landowners. In command of the new force was a full-time stipendiary magistrate, appointed by and answerable to the government. To fill the rank and file of the PPF, Peel stated his preference that they should be ‘disbanded sergeants and veteran soldiers who were Roman Catholics.\(^\text{16}\)

On the first deployment of the force to the barony of Middlethird in county Tipperary on 6 September 1814, twenty-one heavily armed former cavalry sergeants arrived in the town of Cashel on horseback. As a former member of parliament for the area, Peel was aware that Tipperary had a long tradition of rebellion and lawlessness, which he remarked on when writing to the lord lieutenant in 1813;

You can have no idea of the moral depravation of the lower orders in that county … in fidelity towards each other they are unexampled, as they are in their sanguinary disposition and fearlessness of the consequences.\(^\text{17}\)

Peel realised however, that using the army in a policing role was problematical and in 1814 he informed parliament that ‘the frequent use of solders in that manner made the people look upon them as their adversaries rather than as their protectors’.\(^\text{18}\) Shortly after the establishment of the PPF, agrarian-related faction fighting between secret societies in Tipperary such as the Shanavests and the Caravats was suppressed by the force under the command of Major Willcocks, based in Cashel.\(^\text{19}\) In 1822 the Peace Preservation Force was again deployed to deal with another outbreak of agrarian violence in Tipperary. The

\(^{17}\)Norman Gash, *Peel, a condensed version of Mr. Secretary Peel (1961) and Sir Robert Peel (1972)* (New York, 1976), p. 36.
\(^{18}\)Donal O'Sullivan, *The Irish Constabularies 1822-1922, a century of policing in Ireland* (Kerry, 1999), p. 29.
\(^{19}\)Originating in Tipperary in 1806, by 1811 these groups were active in eleven counties, seeking to halt evictions, regulate rents and raise wages for labourers. Members of such societies were oath-bound to each other, and severe punishment inflicted on those who broke the oath.
success of the force in ‘patrolling, detection and gathering evidence’ in the county caused lord lieutenant, the Marquis of Wellesley, to write to Peel commending the actions of the police led by Major Willcocks.20

The PPF served a useful purpose by introducing the concept of a professional, disciplined police force to rural Ireland, and while consideration was given to extending the force to other counties in Ireland Peel instead brought a bill to parliament on 5 August 1822 which established the ‘county constabulary’. This act formed four provincial police forces in Ireland, with an authorised strength of over 5000 men. Galen Broeker and Stanley Palmer agree that the introduction of organised policing to rural Ireland confirmed the determination of the British government to bring law and order to the countryside in the period following the Act of Union.21 Palmer describes how police and protest were embedded in the social and political history of this turbulent era, thus laying the foundations for inter-generational violence.22 These works augment the classic 1836 study by George Cornewall Lewis in which he addressed the ‘disposition of the Irish peasant class towards organised crime and disturbance’.23 While this historiography predates the era of this study, they are nonetheless beneficial in establishing how the revolutionary credentials of Tipperary in 1919 were firmly rooted in the tradition of agrarian violence and secret societies of previous generations. They also provide insight into the origins and structure of policing in the county. The county constabulary was reformed under the Constabulary (Ireland) Act of 1836, which amalgamated the four provincial police forces into one national structure under the command of an inspector general based at Dublin Castle. The castle would remain as the headquarters of the Irish constabulary until 1922, and was a powerful physical symbol of government, described by the liberal politician and

20 Wellesley to Peel, 1 May 1822 (PRO, HO 100/204), quoted in; Broeker; Rural disorder and police reform in Ireland, p. 141.
historian John Morley as ‘the best machine that has ever been invented for governing a country against its will’.24 The French author Louis Paul-Dubois prosaically defined the Castle as ‘a world in itself, a city within a city. It is at once the palace of the viceroy, a military barrack, the seat of administration, and the office of the secret police … omnipotent and omniscient’.25

The Constabulary of Ireland initially adopted a military bearing, being equipped with carbines and bayonets, and wore a dark green uniform, similar to that of the rifle brigade regiment of the British army. In a letter to the Chief Secretary Viscount Cardwell in 1860, Under-Secretary Thomas Larcom warned of the danger in allowing the police to be too militaristic in nature, arguing that it was very difficult to keep a force of that nature ‘in the right middle way in a country whose social condition has changed and is changing year by year … it demands increasing watchfulness’.26 Policemen were required to live in barracks and actively discouraged from marrying. Discipline was rigidly enforced and regulations prohibited men from serving in their native county or in any county where they had relatives.

In Political violence in Ireland, government and resistance since 1848, Charles Townshend examines the role played by political violence in the development of Ireland from 1848 until the mid-1980s and describes how the constabulary increasingly became the ‘public face of government in Ireland … responsible for everything from the muzzling of a dog to the suppression of a rebellion’.27 This integration, which has been categorised by Lowe and Malcolm as the ‘domestication’ of the RIC took place primarily after 1860 when the force became more representative of the society which it policed.28 The RIC manual of regulations made it clear that it was the constable’s job to acquire a thorough knowledge of

25 Louis Paul-Dubois, Contemporary Ireland (Dublin, 1908), p. 183.
27 Charles Townshend, Political violence in Ireland, government and resistance since 1848 (Oxford, 1983).
his district and ‘good relations with the locals made this easier’. The magazine of the force, the Constabulary Gazette frequently highlighted the importance of acquiring local knowledge, and offered the opinion that on the appearance of any suspicious stranger in any sub-district the constabulary should ‘not rest till they have discovered who or what he is’. County inspectors were instructed not to recommend for promotion any man who was wanting in civility and helpfulness to people making inquiries or in difficulty.

In 1864 Inspector General Shaw Kennedy brought substantial changes to the force by introducing a new rank system and a comprehensive written disciplinary code. The mandatory transfer of policemen to counties where they had no prior connection became a key feature of service in the RIC. Shaw Kennedy stated that ‘men had to be removed from their local connections … amongst whom no policeman can in this country, for any length of time, impartially discharge his duty’. The stringent disciplinary regulations within the force subsequently softened under the tenure of Sir Andrew Reed, a key figure in the history of Irish policing who served as inspector general from 1885 to 1900.

By 1919 therefore, the force contained a substantial body of experienced, reliable policemen with families to support who had served for lengthy periods in their districts. Lowe and Malcolm’s’ detailed analysis concludes that the steady process of domestication and integration ensured that, despite the perception of the RIC as a paramilitary police force, when confronted with a volunteer army of young and dedicated guerrilla fighters in 1919, it was unable to cope. Based on subsequent events in Tipperary and elsewhere, that conclusion will be tested in this work.

The period between 1848 and 1886 saw further consequences for the RIC in Tipperary. In 1848 devastation wrought by the on-going famine combined with the traditions of agrarian violence and allegiance to secret societies led most notably to the

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31 Thomas Fennell, The Royal Irish Constabulary (Dublin, 2003), p. 175.
32 Robert Curtis, A history of the Royal Irish Constabulary, 2nd ed. (Dublin, 1871), p. 43.
abortive Young Ireland rebellion in 1848 which had its epicentre at Ballingarry in south Tipperary. The Young Irelanders were a nationalist group of middle-class university graduates led by William Smith O’Brien, Member of Parliament for County Limerick. Other key members included Thomas Davis, Charles Gavan Duffy and John Blake Dillon. The Young Ireland movement had its own newspaper *The Nation*, which was founded in 1842 to promote the idea of nationalism and campaign for the repeal of the Act of Union.  

Inspired by rebellions which were taking place throughout Europe including the declaration of a republic in France, Young Irelanders denounced the government for not doing enough to end the misery of the famine, and made plans for a similar uprising in Ireland. In July 1848 the government imprisoned Young Irelanders without trial, forcing the hand of Smith O’Brien and the other leaders.

From 23 July until 29 July O’Brien, Meagher and Dillon travelled through counties Wexford, Kilkenny and Tipperary hoping to inspire tenant farmers and tradesmen to revolt. When they reached the village of Ballingarry in south Tipperary, a confrontation took place between the Young Irelanders and forty-six members of the constabulary who had come to arrest them under the command of Sub-Inspector Trant. When the police realised that they were outnumbered, they barricaded themselves in a large two-storey farmhouse owned by local widow Mrs. Margaret McCormack. A tense stand-off ensued between the rebels and the police, shots were fired by the constabulary and returned by the rebels, inflicting casualties and fatalities on both sides. A local Roman Catholic priest, Fr. Fitzgerald tried to mediate between the parties, but police reinforcements arrived, forcing the rebels to flee from the area, thus effectively ending the Young Ireland movement. Smith O’Brien, Thomas Francis Meagher, Terence Bellew MacManus and Patrick O’Donohue were captured and tried for high treason, for which they were found guilty. The jury recommended clemency, and while they were initially sentenced to death, this was later commuted by act of parliament to penal imprisonment for life in Van Diemen’s Land,

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Australia. There, they were joined by other Young Irelanders including John Martin, Kevin Izod O’Doherty and John Mitchell. Twenty-one local men from Ballingarry and surrounding parishes in south Tipperary were also arrested and imprisoned in Ireland. The so-called 1848 Rising was an abject failure in military terms, and as stated by Robert Kee it was not ‘in any practical sense a rising at all, nor until the very last minute was it ever intended to be one’. It was a significant event nonetheless for later generations of Tipperary nationalists. Many militants were inspired by the events in Ballingarry and other failed uprisings which would take place subsequently, not only in Tipperary but elsewhere in Ireland.

Following on from this tradition of secret societies and agrarian conflict, Tipperary became a fertile area for recruitment to the new Fenian movement established in 1858. It grew steadily and despite internal divisions the leadership set a date of 5 March 1867 for an armed rebellion in Ireland. The military inadequacy of the Fenians combined with bad weather, intelligence received from the American government, and the overwhelming strength of the military and constabulary response ensured that the Rising was over almost as soon as it had begun. Tipperary did see upheaval however, particularly in the countryside between Clonmel and Tipperary town. A railway line was damaged and houses were raided for arms by the police. RIC barracks in Emly and Gortavoher were attacked, but the police were able to repel the Fenians. Responding to reports that ‘the Galtee Mountains were swarming with insurgents’, large parties of military and police carried out extensive searches throughout the Tipperary countryside. Of the 1086 Fenians arrested in Ireland in 1867, the majority came from county Tipperary, with Clonmel described as a ‘hotbed of Feniansim’

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35 On Saint Patrick’s Day 1858 a new revolutionary society, the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) was launched by former Young Irelander James Stephens. The new movement was dedicated to secrecy and the establishment of a democratic Irish Republic. The epithet ‘Fenian’, a reference to ancient Irish warriors originated with a corresponding branch of the organisation in America led by John O’Mahony and by extension, eventually came to describe the movement in Ireland. See; Noel Delahunty, ‘The aftermath of the Fenian rising in county Tipperary’, *Tipperary Historical Journal*, 2009. Also, Bernadette Whelan, *American Government in Ireland, 1790-1913: A History of the US Consular Service* (Manchester, 2010).
by the local police inspector.\textsuperscript{36} The uprising was a military failure, but the Fenian movement gave nationalists a new sense of purpose and ensured that future generations would continue to aspire to separation from Britain. Following the 1867 uprising many of its leaders were captured, tried and initially sentenced to death, but this was usually commuted to transportation. The influence of the IRB/Fenians continued to be felt over the next half century, culminating with the 1916 Easter Rising. As stated by F.S.L Lyons, ‘it kept alive the tradition of armed revolt’.\textsuperscript{37}

The 1867 rebellion was also a significant event in the history of the Irish Constabulary. For its role in suppressing the Fenians, Queen Victorian issued instructions that the force would henceforth be known as the Royal Irish Constabulary, and thus entitled to have the harp and crown as the badge of the force (see: appendix D). Several policemen, including Constable Patrick Derwan from Emly and Constable Martin Scurry from Gortavoher, both in south Tipperary, were awarded the constabulary medal for bravery.\textsuperscript{38}

The legacy of secret societies, agrarian violence and events such as the 1848 and 1867 uprisings did much to ensure that by 1871, Tipperary had the highest ratio of police to population of the seventy county forces located throughout Ireland and England, with a ratio of 1:194 based on a population of 216,210. The county with the lowest ratio of police to population was Shropshire, with a ratio of 1:1,752. There were 1,600 police barracks throughout Ireland, ranging from a low of sixteen in county Londonderry to a high of 153 in Tipperary.\textsuperscript{39} Thus, by 1870 Tipperary had become heavily policed due to its radical nationalist composition.


\textsuperscript{37}F.S.L Lyons, Ireland since the Famine (London, 1971), p. 28.


During the period of the land wars and consequent resurgence in agrarian-related conflict, the RIC were heavily involved in the policing of Land League meetings and performing duty at the scene of evictions. During a speech made in Ennis, county Clare on 19 September 1880, Charles Stewart Parnell, leader of the Land League and Member of Parliament for Meath, expressed his views on how a boycott against the police should be implemented. He exhorted people to put policemen into a ‘moral Coventry, by isolating him from the rest of his kind as if he was a leper of old … you must show him your detestation of the crime he has committed.\textsuperscript{40} Intimidation and boycotting of policemen and their families thus became effective strategies during this period.\textsuperscript{41}

For many policemen, assisting at evictions and associated duties were deeply unpleasant duties. In the latter decades of the nineteenth century, the socio-economic background of the average constable was modest. Most were the sons of small farmers, shopkeepers, tradesmen or artisans. Members of the RIC used the stability of their employment to pay the rent on their parent’s farms, thus protecting them from the threat of eviction. For the remainder of its existence however, the force would be stigmatised by its association with such events. Agrarian related policing duties placed onerous demands on the police, with even the usually pro-nationalist, anti-government \textit{Freeman's Journal} describing the position of the RIC in 1882 as ‘intolerable’.\textsuperscript{42} The strain of performing such duties for lengthy periods eventually led to an unprecedented situation where several hundred policemen from a body renowned for rigid discipline and dedicated service briefly

\textsuperscript{41} Boycotting was a powerful weapon in rural Ireland. In 1828 for example during a speech at Clonmel Assizes, Richard Lalor Shiel, an associate of Daniel O'Connell, campaigner for Catholic emancipation and co-founder of the Catholic Association, referred to the practice; ‘The government may withdraw their witnesses from the country and afford them protection; but their wives, their offspring, their parents, their brothers and sisters, nay, their remotest relatives cannot be secure, and the vengeance of the ferocious peasantry, if defrauded of its more immediate and natural object, will satiate itself with some other victim, Thomas MacNevin, \textit{The speeches of Richard Lalor Shiel} (Dublin 1845), p. 62.
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Freeman's Journal}, 5 August 1882.
engaged in a public protest in 1882 for improved pay and conditions.\textsuperscript{43} Michael Hopkinson believes that the tactical use of intimidation and boycotting by land war leaders, particularly Parnell, fulfilled the dual purpose of appeasing both the advocates of physical force republicanism and those who preferred more passive resistance.\textsuperscript{44} It was a strategy that would be repeated to significant effect when hostilities erupted in 1919, with deadly consequences for hundreds of members of the RIC.

By the turn of the twentieth century the Royal Irish Constabulary was divided by class, religion and social status, reflective of the society that it policed. Junior officers joined the force as cadets and graduated as third class district inspectors, the lowest officer rank. Cadets were almost exclusively Protestant, and expected to be ‘officers and gentlemen’ in a similar fashion to military officers, which included the use of the suffix ‘Esq.’ after their names in all official correspondence. The religious composition of the force also mirrored that of Irish society and consistently, more than seventy per cent of the force was Roman Catholic.\textsuperscript{45} Promotion to the officer corps however, which included any rank above that of head constable, was almost impossible for any Roman Catholic to achieve until well into the twentieth century.

In the course of the 1916 Rising fourteen RIC members were killed and a further twenty-three injured. Eight policemen were killed in a single ambush at Kilmoon, near Ashbourne in county Meath. In Tipperary, Sergeant Thomas O’Rourke and Constable John Hurley were shot dead by volunteer Michael O’Callaghan when they tried to arrest him at Lisvernane in the Glen of Aherlow. O’Callaghan subsequently escaped to America, only returning in 1922 after the cessation of hostilities.\textsuperscript{46} Despite these significant events, as

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\textsuperscript{44} Michael Hopkinson, \textit{The Irish war of independence} (Dublin 2002), p. 71.
\textsuperscript{46} Statement of Edmond O’Brien, BMH/WS.597, p. 15.
\end{flushleft}
an organisation the force was unprepared for the escalation of militant nationalism and the associated growth in intimidation and violence which followed thereafter. \(^\text{47}\)

When conflict broke out in 1919 the structure of the RIC in county Tipperary owed much to the policing necessities and agrarian violence of previous generations. The number of RIC barracks in Ireland had steadily decreased from 1,600 in 1871 to 1,397 in 1913, with the most heavily policed areas being the south and the west of the country. The number of barracks in Tipperary declined from 153 in 1871 to seventy-nine by 1913, and the county had an average population per policeman of 330, as compared to a ratio of 1:732 for county Down, (see: appendices A and B for a list of RIC barracks). \(^\text{48}\) As secessionists reorganised and prepared to intensify the conflict, the RIC had a total of 12,900 policemen located throughout the thirty-two counties of Ireland, a strength which was largely unchanged from the 1852 figure of 11,286. \(^\text{49}\) By contrast, the strength of the Irish Volunteers was estimated by the RIC to be 112,000 just before the outbreak of conflict in 1919. \(^\text{50}\)

Nationalist historiography frequently depicts the RIC as a paramilitary police force which ruthlessly suppressed the people of Ireland on behalf of a colonial oppressor. Writing about the force in 1937, fifteen years after it had been disbanded, the nationalist historian Dorothy Macardle argued that the key role of its members was to investigate, suppress and report disaffection of every kind, rather than perform routine policing duties. She also contended that it was indicative of the ‘extremities to which to the Irish people had been reduced’ that the government was able to constitute the force entirely of Irishmen. \(^\text{51}\) In 1952 the historian, civil servant and separatist P.S O’Hegarty wrote of the RIC that the loyalty of the force lay not with Ireland but with England, and by virtue of

\(^{50}\) RIC Inspector General’s monthly report, December 1918, NALCO 904/107.
\(^{51}\) Dorothy Macardle, *The Irish Republic, a documented chronicle of the Anglo-Irish conflict and the partitioning of Ireland, with a detailed account of the period 1916-1923* (Dublin, 1951), p. 42.
that loyalty, they ‘bullied, terrorised and when ordered, murdered their own people without compunction for nearly a hundred years’. To members of the militant separatist movement the RIC represented the physical and symbolic embodiment of British rule in Ireland. For some periods of its existence, the constabulary did function as an armed quasi-military force due to the political circumstances which prevailed at those particular times. By the first decade of the twentieth century however, the RIC was an indigenous civil police force which habitually policed without arms, and carried out routine policing functions.

Plate 1.1: Satirical cartoon depicting the perceived role of the RIC in Irish society

Source: The Republic, 31 January 1907. Illustration by Jack Borrow

Many nationalists based their loathing of the RIC on their perception of the involvement of the police in dealing with agrarian violence of the previous century, or their presence at the scene of evictions during the land war in the 1880s. Eamon O’Duibhir, a Tipperary

member of the IRB and IRA recalled in later life his anger towards policemen ‘protecting the evictors throwing the poor people of their own race out of their homes’.\(^{53}\) Even hardline separatists such as O’Duibhir however, acknowledged that by 1919 as an organisation, the RIC contained disparate types within its ranks. He categorised four distinct groupings of policemen as he saw it. Firstly, there were ‘decent Irishmen’ who provided information to the IRA, then a percentage who feared poverty too much to leave the constabulary, but avoided conflict. He characterized a third group of ‘decent men loyal to Britain’ and finally a ‘percentage of hellishly anti-Irish ruffians who were the guides and masked killers of the British murder gangs’.\(^{54}\) O’Duibhir does not refer to the religion or class of policemen, but his recollections make it clear that at local level, personal animosity and past relationships between individual policemen and volunteers was commonplace.

Aspirant revolutionaries such as Dan Breen and Séan Treacy in Tipperary and Tom Barry in Cork believed that the constabulary were the ‘real power behind the British grip on Ireland’, and had been responsible for the collapse of the 1916 Rising outside of Dublin. Breen characterized the RIC as ‘a pack of deserters, spies and hirelings … the eyes and ears of British intelligence, and as natives of the country, they had an intimate knowledge of the people and ferreted out vital information for the army of occupation’.\(^{55}\) Brewer, Lowe and Malcolm disagree with Breen and suggest that it is not unusual in post-colonial societies for scholars to look closely and perhaps somewhat more sympathetically at those citizens who served the British empire or other ‘occupying power’ such as civil servants, magistrates and soldiers.\(^{56}\) Given the passage of time and the transition of the RIC from living memory into history it is opportune to give a more balanced view of events of the period and the role of the RIC in those events. The military historian M.L.R Smith suggests that the notion of colonial subjugation is the strongest theme in Irish nationalism, and that

\(^{53}\) Statement of Eamon O’Duibhir, BMH/WS.1403, p. 25.
\(^{54}\) Ibid.
\(^{55}\) Dan Breen, *My fight for Irish freedom* (Dublin, 1924), p. 34.
it forms the ‘central hypothesis of republican political analysis’.\textsuperscript{57} Stephen Ellis argues that the perception of the British-Irish relationship as a colonial one is merely a matter of opinion, as colonialism as a concept was ‘developed by its modern opponents and constitutes a value judgment which cannot be challenged on its own grounds’.\textsuperscript{58} The characterization of the Royal Irish Constabulary as a colonial police force therefore, can be pejorative. It is clear from the analysis of historians such as Brewer, Lowe and Malcolm that while it suited the purposes of militant nationalist to portray policemen as mercenaries, the rationale behind an aspiration to join the RIC was quite unsophisticated. It lay in the acquisition of a secure job with prospects and a pension at the end of service. In the heat of conflict however, and following the introduction of the Black and Tans and Auxiliary Division, bitterness, enmity and revenge became key factors for men on both sides.

In contrast to the body of literature which exists on the IRA and the 1913-23 period in general, there is a dearth of material about the Royal Irish Constabulary. As key protagonists, the question arises as to why the experiences of ordinary rank and file members of the RIC have thus far been largely omitted from the historiography of the period. Policing during the revolution is a contentious subject which requires ongoing research and debate. A complete history of the force is yet to be written, with the sole official volume, \textit{A history of the Royal Irish Constabulary} by District Inspector Robert Curtis published in 1871. This work concludes with the 1867 Phoenix Park ceremony which saw the Constabulary of Ireland being renamed as the Royal Irish Constabulary. Consequently, Curtis’ narrative is far from a complete history of the force. Nonetheless, this work gives some interesting insights into the foundation and earliest deployments of the constabulary.


\textsuperscript{58} Stephen Ellis, \textit{Tudor Ireland; crown, community and the conflict of cultures, 1470-1603} (London, 1985), p. 9, quoted in Howe, \textit{Ireland and Empire}, p. 7.
Edited by Joost Augusteijn, *The Memoirs of John M. Regan, a Catholic officer in the RIC and RUC, 1909-1948* is a significant addition to the historiography of policing in Ireland. Regan wrote about his forty-year police career which included serving in Cork and Limerick during the 1919-22 conflict. While this work provides useful insight into the inner workings of the RIC and some key events such as the 1916 Rising and Listowel police mutiny, he is circumspect about some of the actions carried out by men under his command. Following the disbandment of the RIC in 1922 Regan went on to serve in the Royal Ulster Constabulary, and retired in 1948 as the highest ranking Catholic officer in the RUC.

*The Royal Irish Constabulary, a history and personal memoir* is the autobiography of Thomas Fennell, who joined the RIC in 1875 aged eighteen, and by 1897 had reached the rank of head constable, the highest non-commissioned rank in the force. Fennell had already spent many years in retirement by the time that the conflict began in 1919. His memoir displays his pride in having served in the RIC and also his inherent nationalist sympathies, which he states were shared by most members of the force that he served with. A well-read, articulate and ambitious man, Fennel worked his way steadily upwards in the force, and passed the written examinations for promotion to the rank of district inspector. When he reached the age of forty-eight however, he was no longer eligible for promotion as this was the upper age limit for advancement to the rank of head constable, a regulation which was deeply unpopular amongst the Roman Catholic majority of the force. His memoir notes the sharp contrast between his experiences as a Roman Catholic vying for promotion, and how promotions were much more easily available in the years before the force was disbanded. This work provides a valuable first-hand perspective of service in the

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60 Thomas Fennell, *The Royal Irish Constabulary, a history and personal memoir* (Dublin, 2003). In this memoir, Fennell wrote an addendum just before his death in 1948 which strongly defended the integrity of the RIC from 1919-22, and was heavily critical of historians such as Dorothy Macardle and Piaras Béasláí for the anti-RIC sentiments expressed in their works.
RIC, but is hindered by a lack of contemporary references, and much of the content predates the period of this study.

A similar work to Fennel’s is *A Policeman’s Ireland, recollections of Samuel Waters, RIC* edited by Stephen Ball. This autobiography narrates over forty years of service in the constabulary during which Waters served in all four provinces. Waters was involved in the policing of key events such as the Fenian uprising, the land wars, and the 1916 Rising. Waters followed his father and grandfather into the constabulary and achieved the rank of assistant inspector general. His work offers an interesting dimension on service in the RIC, relationships with the community and the social and sporting benefits associated with being an RIC officer. While his reminiscences do not deal with the 1919-21 period per se, they nonetheless provide a unique perspective due to the high rank that he held, and help to contextualise the role of the RIC in contemporary Irish society.\(^{61}\)

One autobiography which offers an alternative perspective to that of the regular RIC member is that of Douglas V. Duff, who joined the Black and Tans in 1920 after serving in the Royal Navy. Arriving in Ireland where he had spent much of his youth, Duff was posted to Mayo and Galway where he was involved in numerous engagements with the IRA. Duff’s work is hindered by his credibility as a former Black and Tan, and also as a prolific author of fiction, writing over one hundred books during his lifetime, many under pseudonyms. Nonetheless, Duff brings an interesting perspective to the historiography of the period, as he was well schooled in Irish affairs and believed the conflict to be a ‘fratricidal civil war, the worst of all wars’ rather than a war of rebellion against British rule in Ireland.\(^{62}\)

A ground-breaking work in the historiography of the RIC during the 1919-22 period is *The Royal Irish Constabulary, an oral history*, by John D. Brewer.\(^{63}\) This work is an important social history of the RIC, as Brewer conducted oral interviews with fifteen

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remaining survivors of the force, including two former Black and Tans, all of whom have since died. Brewer sheds new light on issues including the reasons why young men joined the RIC, station life and routine police work. There are also chapters on policing in violent counties from 1919-22, serving alongside the Black and Tans, and the consequences of disbandment of the force. Oral history serves a useful function in allowing the stories of individuals to be heard, but caution must be exercised as such recollections can be partisan in nature, and the passage of time can distort the actuality of events. Brewer provides only a brief conclusion, stating that the oral testimony should stand by itself. Nonetheless, he offers the valid conclusion that the standards of entry to the force were greatly relaxed after 1919 and the membership of the RIC was largely depoliticized. He also shows that most policemen were unprepared and unfit for the role which the conflict of 1919 thrust upon them. Routine policing functions and crime investigation carried on throughout the 1919-22 period, even in violent counties such as Tipperary. Brewer concludes that the RIC was forced to operate as a heavily armed entity in the latter years of its existence, and while it was a model of policing that was dictated by the prevailing circumstances, it was not a model that the majority of the membership endorsed. These findings will be tested in this study.

The 2006 work of Elizabeth Malcolm, *The Irish policeman 1822-1922* is a major addition to the historiography of policing in Ireland, and draws on a wide range of sources including correspondence between the author and over 200 descendants of policemen, along with unpublished memoirs and personal papers.64 This work offers valuable insight into how Irish policemen lived and worked in Irish society, and expands on her previous analysis of the integration of the RIC. Malcolm concludes that service in the constabulary was an alternative to emigration for most members, and that policing was viewed as a job

rather than a vocation. Malcolm believes that members of the RIC were generally well accepted and respected in the communities in which they served, except during periods of conflict in Irish society such as the Land War and post 1916 period, which will be explored in this work.

Police casualties in Ireland 1919-1922 by Richard Abbott lists all known RIC fatalities from the outbreak of conflict in 1919 until the disbandment of the force in 1922. Abbott’s analysis provides much useful information as it gives a short biography of each policeman killed and the reported circumstances in which they died. It is an incomplete record however, as the full list of RIC casualties may never be known. For example, Abbott lists eighteen policemen who disappeared between 1919 and 1922 that may have been abducted and killed by the IRA, but whose deaths were never claimed by that organisation or otherwise explained. Abbott provides a clear insight into the reality of the conflict, chronologically identifying the humanity behind the casualty statistics. In respect of Tipperary, Abbott describes each of the forty-six RIC deaths which took place in the county. This provides important contextual information which, when combined with other primary and secondary source material allows for an in-depth analysis of each police fatality in Tipperary for the purposes of this study.

Voices and the sound of drums, an Irish autobiography was written by Patrick Shea, the son of an RIC Sergeant serving in Tipperary in 1920. Shea’s narrative focuses on the effect of the IRA campaign of boycotting and intimidation on families of policemen, and how they gradually became unsuspecting participants in the conflict. Given the experience of his family, Shea admits that his judgment of the RIC is subjective, but concludes that his father stayed in the force during the conflict not because of allegiance to the King or to the

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67 Patrick Shea, Voices and the sound of drums, an Irish autobiography (Belfast, 1981). Shea became one of only two Catholics to attain the highest position in the Northern Ireland Civil Service, that of permanent secretary.
government, but because of a sense of loyalty and comradeship to his fellow members of the force. Shea’s works is also slightly dramatized but much less so than the anonymously authored *Tales of the RIC*, first published in 1921. This work gives a sensationalized narrative of incidents such as ambushes and barrack attacks, but is believed to have been written by a serving member of the force. As such, it adds to the historiography of policing and provides a contemporary viewpoint of the conflict, but should be considered as a work of fiction rather than as a secondary source.68

Memoirs by former military officers include the 1924 two-volume memoir of General Sir Neville Macready, commander-in-chief of British forces in Ireland from 1918-20.69 A career soldier and former commissioner of the London Metropolitan Police, this work provides insight into the conflict from military, policing and political perspectives as Macready was involved in the truce negotiations and supervised the orderly withdrawal of British troops from Ireland in 1922. Another useful work for this study was that of Brigadier General Frank Crozier, who arrived in Ireland during July 1920 to take command of the Auxiliary Division. A former member of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), he commanded the 36th Ulster Division during the battle of the Somme in 1916. Following the robbery of a creamery at Kells and the looting of a grocery store at Robinstown, both in county Meath, Crozier had five temporary cadets arrested, and a further twenty-one dismissed. Critical of the lack of military discipline amongst members of the Auxiliaries, when these men were reinstated by Crozier’s superiors, he resigned as commander of the division in February 1921, and was replaced by Brigadier-General E.A Wood. Written in 1932, Crozier’s memoirs give a viewpoint of the activities of the division and the government sanctioned policy of official reprisals in response to IRA violence.70 By that time however, Crozier had become a noted pacifist and a critic of the establishment, and

this should be borne in mind when analysing his retrospective view of the events of 1920 and 1921.

In *The Black and Tans, British Police and Auxiliaries in the Irish War of Independence*, David Lesson deals at length with the circumstances of Croziers’ resignation amongst other topics. Leeson contextualises the British government’s responsibility for reprisals in Ireland, and justifiably argues that it was inappropriate for the British government to deploy police in an insurgency situation. Leeson accurately counters the stereotypical view that members of the Black and Tans and Auxiliary Division were criminals released from English jails, and concludes that the British government and IRA had one thing in common from 1919-21, in that neither objected in principle to reprisals. Leesons’ analysis augments and supersedes the 1959 work of Richard Bennett, *The Black and Tans*, which is hampered by a misleading title as it is not specifically about the Black and Tans, but is instead a more general history of the 1919-22 period, and suffers from a lack of adequate references and a detailed bibliography.

*The Memoirs of Constable Jeremiah Mee RIC* by J. A Gaughan was first published in 1975 and reprinted in 2012. While serving as an RIC constable in Listowel, county Kerry during February 1920, Mee acted as a representative for discontented policemen during an incident which subsequently became known as the ‘Listowel police mutiny’. This took place when the British army was refused access to the RIC barracks by the station party, and several policemen resigned in protest following a speech given by the divisional police commissioner for Munster, Colonel Gerald Bryce Ferguson Smyth. While visiting the station, Smyth told the station party that the martial law then in force in Munster could be used to allow the RIC and military to engage in a ruthless campaign against the IRA and even if innocent people were killed as a result, no policeman would be held accountable.

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Mee protested and called Smyth ‘a murderer’, following which Smyth ordered Mee’s arrest, but no other RIC members present were willing to obey his order. Following an impasse, Mee and several other constables left the barracks and resigned from the force. Following his resignation, Mee made contact with IRA members and was summoned to Dublin where he briefed senior Sinn Féin figures including Michael Collins and Countess Markievicz on the circumstances of the Listowel mutiny. Mee was subsequently given employment with the Department of Labour of the first Dáil, and formed an association to encourage RIC members to resign. Bryce Ferguson Smyth was subsequently shot dead by the IRA in Cork city on 17 July 1920.

A work which gives a unique perspective on police operations during the 1919-22 period is *The spy in the castle* by David Neligan, who joined the Dublin Metropolitan Police in 1917.⁷⁴ Neligan joined ‘G’ Division, the political section of the DMP in 1919, but resigned from the force in 1920 at the behest of his brother Maurice, an IRA member. Michael Collins, a friend of Maurice Neligan, persuaded David to re-join the DMP and provide intelligence to the IRA, which he did until the truce. Neligan went on to serve as director of intelligence for the Free State army and also as a Chief Superintendent in An Garda Síochána. While Neligans’ memoir does not refer to the conflict in Tipperary, he does acknowledge that many policemen serving in the RIC and DMP helped the IRA in a variety of ways, indicative of the divided loyalties of many Irish policemen during the conflict. Neligan knew that information which he provided would result in the death of his colleagues from G Division, but stated in later life that he acted in the role of double-agent because of his nationalist beliefs and his admiration for Michael Collins.

Edited by Peter Hart, *British Intelligence in Ireland 1920-21, the Final Reports* is a detailed narrative by Sir Ormond de L’Épée Winter, director of Intelligence at Dublin Castle who functioned under the codename ‘O’. Of particular relevance to this study, Winter outlines the difficulty of police and military operations in rural areas such as county

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Tipperary. Winter described such counties as containing ‘sparsely populated mountain districts and uninhabited bogs which secure a certain immunity for active service units which have been operating as roving guerrilla bands’.\(^{75}\) As will be examined in this study, the geography and topography of Tipperary was of fundamental importance during the 1919-21 conflict.

The British campaign in Ireland 1919–1921, the development of political and military policies by Charles Townshend is a meticulous examination of the military and parallel political campaign by the British government in Ireland until the truce of July 1921. Given the time period covered, this work is selective and focuses primarily on communal violence in Northern Ireland and legal coercion by the state, but nonetheless it is a significant work which deals with the deployment of military and paramilitary forces in Ireland and the historical context of the conflict in terms of the British presence in Ireland.\(^{76}\)

Hopkinson has shown that IRA volunteers in rural areas often improvised military action and then sought retrospective sanction from their leadership in Dublin, and also how the events of 1919-21 related to the wider context of the Ulster Crisis of 1912-14 and the First World War.\(^{77}\) The experiences of IRA volunteers during the conflict provide an insight into the mind-set of those engaged in the conflict. In Turning points of the Irish revolution, Benjamin Grob-Fitzgibbon details the use of intelligence in Ireland by the British government from the onset of the Ulster Crisis in 1912 to the end of the conflict in 1921. He asserts that the government lost power in Ireland partially through indifference and a failure to use the intelligence which it was receiving from the RIC and military.\(^{78}\) In Michael Collins’s intelligence war Michael Foy details the role of the men who worked for Collins and

\(^{75}\) Peter Hart (ed.), British intelligence in Ireland 1920-21, the final reports (Cork, 2002), p. 64.  
\(^{76}\) Charles Townshend, The British campaign in Ireland 1919–1921, the development of political and military policies (Oxford, 1975).  
\(^{77}\) Michael Hopkinson, The Irish War of Independence (Dublin, 2004).  
\(^{78}\) Benjamin Grob-Fitzgibbon, Turning points of the Irish revolution, the British government, intelligence and the cost of indifference, 1912-1921 (New York, 2007).
some of the ruthless methods employed by the IRA during the conflict and to produce a balanced and informative account.  

In his 1996 work *From public defiance to guerrilla warfare, experiences of ordinary volunteers in the Irish War of Independence*, Joost Augusteijn provides an insight into the propensity for violence in certain parts of the country, particularly in counties such as Tipperary and Cork. Articles written by Augusteijn for the *Tipperary Historical Journal* in 1996 and 2006 focused specifically on south Tipperary and shed new light on historical, cultural, social and political factors as well as personalities within the volunteer movement. Augusteijn argues that the high level of violence can be attributed to two key factors, the loss of control over the countryside by the RIC as the conflict escalated, and the fact that many volunteers went on the run in 1920, and were thus free from the constraining influence of home and community. Augusteijn’s detailed analysis concludes that the prominence of the Tipperary IRA on the national stage was due to the presence of a solid base of committed activists, public support in the locality and the heavy police and military presence which provided conditions conducive to confrontation and radicalisation.

This view is shared by Peter Hart who quantifies violence by city, county and province, and also by demographic changes which took place during the conflict. Hart’s work has generated significant debate in recent years with some academics and researchers disagreeing with his conclusions, which are based on a comparative and statistical analysis of what he termed the ‘revolutionary period’. Hart focuses on civilian casualties of the conflict, who were killed on suspicion of being ‘spies or informers’. A controversial aspect of Hart’s work is his assertion that some Protestants were deliberately targeted for

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79 Michael T. Foy, *Michael Collins’s intelligence war, the struggle between the British and the IRA 1919-1921* (Gloucestershire, 2006).
80 Joost Augusteijn, *From public defiance to guerrilla warfare, experiences of ordinary volunteers in the Irish War of Independence*, (Dublin, 1996).
assassination because of their religion, and that a form of ‘ethnic cleansing’ was carried out by the IRA in Cork. Other local studies of the conflict in Longford, Monaghan, Cork city and Clare, have not supported this contention. Hart concludes that in counties where IRA violence was prevalent such as Cork and Tipperary, two key factors prevailed. The first was a successful boycott of the RIC which alienated them from the population. The second was a level of response which forced volunteers to go on the run, thus freeing them from communal and parental disapproval. Hart contends that this combination existed in South Tipperary in 1919, which led violence to become a self-perpetuating mechanism. That conclusion will be examined in this work.

John Borgonovo’s *Spies, informers and the anti-Sinn Féin society* is a detailed case study of the intelligence war in Cork city during 1920-21. It catalogues reprisal attacks carried out by crown forces and the deaths of civilians suspected of being spies or informers by the IRA. Some of the conclusions reached by Borgonovo challenge those of Hart in his analysis of those same events. Borgonovo argues that of the several dozen people executed by the IRA, some were actually informers, some were under genuine suspicion of informing, but in the majority of cases, there was a direct correlation between their deaths and the intelligence war in Cork City. Rather than some people being targeted because of their religion as Hart contends, or pretexts being used to justify the execution of people, Borgonovo’s interpretation is that the IRA were very effective at identifying informers in their midst, and that decision to execute people was based on evidence, rather than being random. Another work dealing specifically with the issues researched by Hart and Borgonovo is *The Year of Disappearances, Political Killings in Cork 1921-1922* by Gerard Murphy, who claims that after the truce the IRA deliberately and systematically targeted specific organisations whose membership was exclusively Protestant. This work suffers

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83 John Borgonovo, *Spies, informers and the anti-Sinn Féin society, the intelligence war in Cork city 1920-1921* (Dublin, 2007).
from a lack of primary sources and supporting evidence for this contentious view however, and there is a substantial reliance on anonymous sources and hypotheses.84

Dan Breen is a notable character in the narrative of the revolution in Tipperary. Born in 1894 at Donohill in South Tipperary, Breen grew up steeped in the nationalist folklore of previous generations which centered on the famine and the Land Wars. A volatile character, Breen became immersed in the volunteer movement and was heavily influenced by his friendship with Seán Treacy. Both were angered that their planned involvement in the 1916 Rising had been cancelled when Tipperary volunteers were stood down by volunteer leader Eoin Mac Neill, and their determination to redress this led to the planning and execution of the Soloheadbeg ambush of 21 January 1919. In his autobiography which was first published in 1924, Breen narrates many of the incidents and ambushes in which he was involved as a member of the third Tipperary IRA brigade.85 While this memoir is regarded as a classic of the type in nationalist historiography, it differs substantially from the comprehensive statements made in later life by Breen to the Bureau of Military History. Such discrepancies illustrate the caution which must be exercised by historians and researchers when using memoirs and witness statements by IRA members as primary source material. Seán Treacy, a close associate of Breen and key figure in the third Tipperary brigade of the IRA was the subject of a biography first published in 1945. This work provides useful secondary source information about the rationale and execution of the Soloheadbeg ambush, which is considered by many historians to be a pivotal event in Irish history.86

Tom Barry is a well-known figure within militant nationalism as he commanded a flying column of the third West Cork IRA brigade at the Kilmichael ambush on 28 November 1920, during which seventeen members of the Auxiliary Division, RIC were killed. This ambush was politically and militarily significant as it resulted in the largest

84 Gerard Murphy, The Year of Disappearances, Political Killings in Cork 1921-1922 (Dublin, 2010).
85 Dan Breen, My fight for Irish freedom (Dublin, 1924).
86 Desmond Ryan, Seán Treacy and the 3rd Tipperary Brigade (Tralee, 1945).
number of RIC deaths in a single ambush during the 1919-21 period, and was particularly symbolic given that the casualties were members of the Auxiliary Division, the most potent adversaries of the IRA. Barry’s 1949 autobiography was augmented in the 2003 biography of Barry by Cork historian Meda Ryan. The military tactics and strategy employed by Barry against the police and military in Cork serves a useful purpose in allowing a comparison with the tactics deployed in other counties, including Tipperary. Both counties shared similar characteristics in terms of geography and topography, and had strong characters in leadership positions within the IRA.

In Nationalism and socialism in twentieth-century Ireland, Rumpf and Hepburn set out to dispassionately explain Irish nationalism and radicalism which has ‘too often been analysed in terms of its’ own rhetoric’. Of relevance to this study, Rumpf and Hepburn use a number of different statistical indicators to address the important issue of the geography of violence, and which counties in Ireland had the highest level of incidents during the conflict.

Many biographies have been written about Michael Collins, the military strategist behind the IRA’s military campaign. The most recent addition to the body of literature on Collins is Peter Harts’ Mick, the real Michael Collins, in which he concentrates on Collins multiplicity of roles in the provisional government as minister for finance, director of intelligence and commander in chief of the IRA. Hart attributes the secret of Collins success to the fact that he worked harder and took on more tasks than any of his contemporaries. The fusion of myth and legend surrounding Collins however was recognised by Collins himself during his lifetime. In a letter written in May 1921, Collins wrote ‘I would not matter very much to anybody were it not for the things the English are saying about me’.

87 Tom Barry, Guerrilla days in Ireland (Dublin, 1949).
88 Meda Ryan, Tom Barry, IRA freedom fighter (Dublin, 2003).
Similarly, the impressive biography of the controversial Eoin O’Duffy by Fearghal McGarry traces the ascent of O’Duffy from local government official to guerrilla fighter as a protégé of Michael Collins. O’Duffy is a pivotal character of the period and comes from a unique perspective given that he subsequently became commissioner of the Garda Síochána na hÉireann, the new police service which replaced the disbanded Royal Irish Constabulary.91

With the passage of time events which occurred between 1919-21 have become somewhat sanitised. Policemen who died during the conflict are portrayed in statistical terms rather than as individuals and in the majority of cases, fellow Irishmen of IRA volunteers responsible for their deaths. The passing of time has also allowed for a more balanced, reasoned and perhaps more detached debate about the role of republicanism and the reality of the war, from which it can be argued, none of the participants emerge morally untainted.

David Fitzpatrick’s Politics and Irish life 1913-1921 is a local study of county Clare, and was one of the first works to examine the social context of the conflict. The personal experiences of policemen and soldiers were analysed along with those of IRA members, and members of the public.92 Fitzpatrick documents the influence of the Great War on Irish political discourse, the similarities between old and new forms of nationalism and argues that local issues took priority over national issues during the Irish revolution. Fitzpatrick also describes the powerlessness of IRA headquarters in Dublin to enforce military discipline on local units in the early part of the campaign, many of which were remained fiercely independent for the duration of the conflict. The third Tipperary brigade for example carried out the Soloheadbeg ambush without permission, declared South Tipperary a ‘military area’ and ignored Dublin’s refusal to retrospectively sanction these actions. Fitzpatrick concludes that as the chief visible representatives of the Crown in rural

Ireland, no victims of the Irish Revolution suffered keener humiliation than the police and military forces, and while his study focused on Clare, insofar as the RIC in Tipperary is concerned, that analysis is equally valid.

Two focused local studies by Marie Coleman and Michael Farry on the revolution on counties Longford and Sligo respectively are comprehensive additions to the historiography of the subject. Coleman gives an insight into political aspects of the revolution by examining the importance of Sinn Féin and the Dáil courts in usurping the functions of the courts and local government as the conflict escalated. She also notes how IRA GHQ prioritised operations in the ‘war zone’ of southern Ireland which included Tipperary, thus leading to a shortage of arms and ammunition for volunteers in other counties. Coleman analyses the local factors which prompted ordinary people to become revolutionaries, which included the weakness of the Home Rule campaign and the success of Sinn Féin in local and national elections. The military side of the conflict and subsequent Civil War in Longford are also examined in depth. Farrys’ detailed study commences with the truce of July 1921 focuses on the aftermath of the conflict and on the wider social issues that affected the residents of Sligo during the Civil War. Farry explains that, in sharp contrast to counties such as Cork and Tipperary, the ostracising of the RIC was not completely achieved in Sligo, and that policemen never became legitimate targets in their own right.

Another comprehensive localised study is Revolutionary Limerick, The Republican Campaign for Independence in Limerick, 1913-1921. In this work John O’Callaghan explores the course and significance of the republican campaign in Limerick, one of the most violent counties in Ireland during the period, and a county which shared a border with Tipperary. O’Callaghan describes the social composition and motivations of IRA members, and the

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95 John O’Callaghan, Revolutionary Limerick, the Republican Campaign for Independence in Limerick, 1913-1921 (Dublin, 2010).
influence of geography and topography, factors shared by the most active counties for IRA violence. He concludes that in common with volunteers in other counties, the relative success achieved by volunteers in Limerick was due to the guerrilla tactics employed, strong local leadership, and a significant level of popular support. O’Callaghan concludes that reasons for membership of the revolutionary movement included alienation from British rule, nationalist ideology and a sense of camaraderie and those conclusions will inform this study.

In *Land and Revolution, Nationalist Politics in the West of Ireland 1891-1921*, Fergus Campbell explores the relationship between agrarian conflict and nationalist politics in Connaught during the period from 1891 to 1921. This narrative focuses on Galway, a county which shares a border with Tipperary, and examines agrarian conflict in the period between the death of Parnell and the Anglo-Irish treaty of July 1921. Campbell concludes that there was symmetry between agrarian violence and republican violence in Galway, given that the membership of the IRA and Sinn Féin consisted largely of small farmers. Garvin found however, that while there are analogies between the Land War violence of the late nineteenth century and the 1919-21 conflict, the tradition of agrarian violence was observed more in memory than in actuality during the latter period. Similarly, this study will examine if the folklore surrounding agrarian conflict was influential with those who joined Sinn Féin and the IRA in Tipperary. The case of Offaly is examined by Brendan Ryan in *Policing in West Offaly, 1814-1922*. It is primarily a genealogical guide, but offers a useful short biography of almost 1,000 RIC members who served in Offaly, as well as men from the county who joined the Dublin Metropolitan Police and the RIC. Similarly, *The RIC and the Black and Tans in county Louth 1919-1922* by Stephen O’Donnell is a localised

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study of policing in the county but is hindered by a lack of references and is compiled primarily from newspaper reports.\textsuperscript{99}

There is a deficit of historiography relating to the conflict in Kerry, a county which saw more activity during the Civil War than 1919-21. In \textit{The IRA in Kerry, 1916-1921}, Sinéad Joy analyses the conflict in the county and also the reasons why people became revolutionaries. As demonstrated by Coleman, Augusteijn and Hart, significant influences included peer pressure, the absence of parental opposition and the presence of a republican tradition in counties such as Cork, Kerry and Tipperary.\textsuperscript{100} Joy provides local evidence of the effect of the conflict on the civilian population. A more comprehensive work on Kerry which also includes the Civil War period is \textit{Tans, Terror and Troubles} by T. Ryle Dwyer. Dwyer provides useful contextual material on RIC resignations and the social ostracisation experienced by members of the force in that county. Such tactics were replicated in other counties including Tipperary as will be shown in this study.\textsuperscript{101}

The establishment of Dáil Éireann in 1919 created a de-facto alternative government in Ireland, complete with an alternative system of justice. The withdrawal of the RIC from large parts of the country as the conflict escalated in 1920 led to a policing vacuum and facilitated the establishment of the Republican Police and Dáil courts.\textsuperscript{102} In \textit{Revolutionary Government in Ireland, Dáil Éireann 1919-22}, Arthur Mitchell provides a comprehensive account of Dáil Éireann, the operation of various government departments and relations with external organisations of influence, namely the Roman Catholic Church and trade union movement. Mitchell justifiably concludes that significant aspects of government practice and administrative procedures were carried over into the Irish Free State following the treaty, including the transition from the Royal Irish Constabulary to the Civic Guard, which was renamed as the Garda Síochána in 1923.

\textsuperscript{100} Sinéad Joy, \textit{The IRA in Kerry, 1916-1921} (Cork, 2005).
\textsuperscript{101} T. Ryle Dwyer, \textit{Tans, Terror and Troubles} (Cork, 2001).
The importance of the Garda Síochána in filling the void left by the disbandment of the RIC and establishing itself as an unarmed police force during the Civil War cannot be overstated. In Guardians of the Peace Conor Brady provides a narrative for the formation and establishment of the new police force, and the significant influence of its first two commissioners, Michael Staines and Eoin O’Duffy.103 This work has been augmented in recent years with volumes about An Garda Síochána by Gregory Allen and Liam McNiffe.104 While McNiffe’s work A History of the Garda Síochána is primarily a social history, it details the foundation of the force and analyses the significant influence which the RIC brought to the emerging Garda Síochána. Garda John Hartigan for example, who was stationed in rural county Tipperary during 1928 described his duties in a diary entry as ‘duty in the village … entered several houses, met and conversed with people, made enquiries, nothing of importance occurred’.105 Such routine policing duties would perhaps have been familiar to any member of the RIC who had served in the same county between 1814 and 1919.

The primary sources for this work are the Royal Irish Constabulary records of the United Kingdom National Archives at Kew in London. There are several series within this archive including the HO 184/1-43 series, known as the RIC general register. The HO 184/50-51 series deals with the Black and Tans and temporary cadets of the Auxiliary Division. These registers contain the service records of policemen between 1816 and 1922 and are searchable using the individual service numbers allocated to RIC recruits upon enlistment. A detailed list of those service numbers is contained in a book, the Royal Irish Constabulary: a complete alphabetical list of officers and men 1816-1922 by James Herlihy.106 The registers contain personal information garnered upon recruitment including age, height, religion, native counties, previous trade etc. As these records were maintained throughout

103 Conor Brady, Guardians of the Peace (Dublin, 1974).
106 James Herlihy, the Royal Irish Constabulary: a complete alphabetical list of officers and men 1816-1922 (Dublin, 1999).
the career of RIC members, they also contain details of transfers, promotions, marriages,
length of service, retirement and/or death. Consequently this archive provides an
invaluable social history of the Royal Irish Constabulary from foundation to disbandment.

The disbandment of the RIC in 1922 is dealt with comprehensively in this study,
and in consequence the PMG 48 series is of particular relevance as it contains pension or
disbandment details for men who served in the force between 1873 and 1922. Each
policeman was required to complete a ‘form of option’ when the RIC was disbanded,
giving their intended future address, and these are arranged alphabetically on a county basis
in the CO 904/175-176 series. The disbandment of the RIC came at a huge financial cost
to the British exchequer which became liable for pensions, commutations and other
expenses connected with the disbandment of the force. These records are located in
series HO 340. Of particular relevance to this work are the Dublin Castle records, or CO
904/906 series. These are the annals of the British administration in Ireland prior to 1922.
Most of this material relates directly or indirectly to the methods adopted by the
authorities, using civil and military forces, to combat the efforts of the nationalist
organizations to secure Irish independence. Commencing in 1795, the archive includes
material various Nationalist movements, including Ribbonism, the United Irish League,
Sinn Féin, and with particular reference to this study, monthly reports of district and
county inspectors of the Royal Irish Constabulary from 1919-22. Reports submitted
categorised crimes as either ‘crime ordinary’ or ‘crime special’, the latter meaning that they
were believed to be politically motivated. By 1919 however, the Special Branch of the RIC
had become outmoded and ineffectual, primarily acting as a repository for information
submitted by uniformed members throughout Ireland. Attacks on policemen were
regarded as ordinary crimes and categorised accordingly, and militant nationalists regarded
as criminals rather than revolutionaries.
As reports were submitted on a county by county basis, incidents which took place in Tipperary such as ambushes, barrack attacks and other incidents are referred to in detail, as is a significant archive contained within the CO 904 series, the ‘weekly outrage reports’, first introduced in 1920. This material lists incidents where policemen were killed or injured and police pensioners or RIC candidates threatened or intimidated. These records provide a valuable chronological and contemporary outline of individual incidents by county. Due caution must be exercised when referring to this material however, as the collection contains propaganda reports, and the exact circumstances of some individual incidents were misreported for a variety of reasons. For this study, source material has been cross-referenced with other sources such as contemporary newspaper reports, IRA veteran statements and secondary source material to ensure the accuracy of information when referring to the specifics of ambushes and the circumstances surrounding the deaths of policemen in Tipperary.

Other miscellaneous records in the Royal Irish Constabulary collection include correspondence with the Treasury in series HO 184, intelligence notes in series CO 903, papers relating to RIC involvement in combating disturbances throughout Ireland between 1916 and 1922 in series WO 35. The T 192 series contains information about the expenditure on the force for the period 1920-1922.

Also in the United Kingdom, the archives of the Northamptonshire Regiment were accessed at the central library in Northampton. The first battalion of the regiment were based at Richmond Barracks in Templemore from 1919-1922 and also had smaller detachments located elsewhere in north Tipperary including Nenagh, Thurles and Castlefogarty. The regiment had numerous engagements with the IRA and was twice responsible for carrying out serious reprisals in Templemore. The operational diary of the regiment offers valuable contemporary primary source material.

Another significant primary source for this work is the archive of witness statements of IRA volunteers from the three Tipperary brigades located at the Military
Archives in Cathal Brugha barracks, Dublin. These statements were made during the 1950s to officers of the Irish Defence Forces representing the Bureau of Military History. The bureau was established in January 1947 by Oscar Traynor T.D., then Minister for Defence and a former captain in the Irish Volunteers. The creation of the bureau gave individuals involved in key events from 1913 to 1923 a chance to narrate their own detailed personal accounts of the conflict. Statements were not released to academics, researchers or the wider population until the last surviving person who had made a statement had died. The collection contains 1,773 witness statements including some made by RIC members who had worked as double-agents for the IRA during the conflict. Other primary source material included in the bureau collection are 334 sets of contemporary documents which include items such as diaries, pamphlets, photographs, letters, dispatches, drawings and sketches, posters, legal documents, newspaper clippings etc.

The release of this material, while resulting in a substantial increase in the amount of literature relating to republicanism and the IRA in particular, has not been without controversy. Some files for example, contain blank sections where material was redacted under the provision of the National Archives Act of 1986 on the basis that their release ‘might cause distress or danger to living persons on the grounds that they contain information about individuals … or might lead to action for damages or defamation’.¹⁰⁷ IRA witness statements provide excellent primary source material, albeit with the caveat that some can be self-serving. Statements were made over thirty years after events had taken place, meaning that caution should be exercised regarding the accuracy of such recollections by academics and researchers. Notwithstanding these reservations, the statements provide valuable first-hand perspectives from persons who took an active part in the conflict.

Ernie O’Malley is regarded as one of the key intellectuals and strategists of the IRA, and wrote a three-volume set of reminiscences which were published between 1936 and 1982 which are regarded as classics of the genre.\textsuperscript{108} His memoirs were written as he travelled throughout South America between 1929 and 1932, and they provide a remarkable insight into the thought processes of a senior IRA commander. The O’Malley papers are located in the archives of University College Dublin. This archive include hand-written notebooks which contain approximately 450 interviews with veterans of the 1919-1923 period, and form an essential primary source for historians and researchers.\textsuperscript{109} O’Malley was sent by IRA headquarters to Tipperary in late 1920 to reorganise the brigade and company structure and impose military discipline on local units. He also took part in military operations in the county; consequently his papers are of particular relevance to this study.

The UCD archives also contain the papers of Con Moloney, a member of the third Tipperary Brigade of the IRA and a close associate of Seán Treacy and Dan Breen.\textsuperscript{110} On the formation of the second Southern Division in February 1921, Moloney became adjutant and a full time member of O’Malley’s’ staff. The Moloney papers provide much useful information on the activities of IRA headquarters in south Tipperary, training and disciplining of volunteers, and the role of truce liaison officers after July 1921. Contemporary reports in local, national and international newspapers also provided valuable source material for this study.

This work is structured into six chapters, including the introduction which is chapter one. Chapter two deals with the period from December 1918 to March 1920. Tensions between the RIC and the Irish Volunteers escalated following the 1916 Rising, and on 21 January 1919 an ambush took place near Soloheadbeg quarry in South Tipperary. Two RIC constables escorting a shipment of explosives, James McDonnell and

\textsuperscript{108} Ernie O’Malley, On another man’s wound (Dublin, 1936), The singing flame (Dublin, 1978), and Raids and rallies (Dublin, 1982).

\textsuperscript{109} University College Dublin Archives, Ernie O’Malley papers, IE UCDA P17.

\textsuperscript{110} University College Dublin Archives, Con Moloney papers, IE UCDA P9.
Patrick O’Connell were shot dead by members of the third Tipperary brigade of the IRA. While some RIC members had been killed since 1916, there is consensus amongst many historians and academics that the Soloheadbeg event largely prompted the 1919-21 conflict, and is therefore worthy of a detailed study in its own right, which is included in chapter two. The chapter ends with the arrival of police reinforcements to Ireland in the guise of the Black and Tans and Auxiliary Division, a decision which was to have profound and lasting consequences, both for the civilian population and members of the Royal Irish Constabulary. Chapter three examines the period from March to December 1920, which was the most violent period of the conflict in Tipperary. As fighting intensified a parallel campaign of intimidation and boycotting of RIC members and their families took place. Both sets of opponents engaged in reprisals and counter-reprisals, and neither side had a monopoly on the commission of atrocities.

Chapter four analyses the period from January to July 1921 when, after lengthy and secretive negotiations involving the use of intermediaries, a truce was agreed between the British government and representatives of the IRA. Fourteen policemen had been killed in Tipperary since the start of 1921, but for members of the RIC in the county their relief at the cessation of hostilities was replaced with apprehension as to what the future might bring.

Chapter five deals with the post-truce period from July 1921 to August 1922 which saw the Anglo-Irish treaty of December 1921, followed by the disbandment of the Royal Irish Constabulary. In the aftermath of the truce an uneasy peace prevailed, and in Tipperary as in other counties, the RIC were confined to barracks and truce liaison officers appointed by both sides to monitor proceedings and report on apparent breaches. To the frustration of RIC members, the IRA was formally recognised and acknowledged, giving the militant movement the status and recognition it sought, and its members appeared openly wearing military uniform. Chapter five analyses the implications of the Anglo-Irish treaty which was signed on 6 December 1921 for the RIC, and outlines how the complete
disbandment of the force took place in Tipperary and other counties. To manage the significant logistical task of disbanding the RIC in its entirety, the British government established a resettlement branch to assist former policemen and their families to relocate elsewhere within the empire. The cost of assisted passage to other countries, pensions and compensation placed a substantial burden on the British government, which retained the resettlement branch until 1928.\footnote{111} This process will be examined in detail in chapter five.

Chapter six deals with the aftermath of disbandment and the establishment of a new police force to replace the RIC, the Garda Síochána na hÉireann. This chapter also contains statistical analyses of the level of violence in Tipperary in comparison to other violent counties within Munster, the most violent province in Ireland from 1919-21. Chapter six also outlines the conclusions reached in consequence of this research. It will be argued that the military campaign waged by the IRA against the RIC while termed an Anglo-Irish conflict, or war of independence, was in fact more analogous to a civil war.\footnote{112} It will investigate how a civil war, defined as a war between political factions or regions within the same country is different from the accepted concept of war as a state of usually open and declared armed hostile conflict between states or nations.\footnote{113}


\footnote{112} \textit{Random House Unabridged Dictionary} (New York, 2006).

Chapter two

The outbreak of conflict - December 1918 – March 1920

‘That the harp of green Erin may never be without a string while there is a gut in a peeler’.1

Writing about the 1919-21 conflict, David Fitzpatrick concluded that policemen, and to a lesser extent soldiers, were not merely functionaries but also citizens, and therefore ‘not immune to the psychological power which popular movements exerted upon the individual.’ He also contended that ‘appalling strain’ was placed upon the police by an increasingly co-ordinated campaign during the period which he categorised as the Irish Revolution.2 In the immediate aftermath of the 1916 Rising the prominent war correspondent and journalist H.W. Nevinson wrote in Atlantic magazine, ‘we execute a worthless rebel, and for Ireland a heroic saint emerges from the felon’s grave’.3 Nevinson astutely predicted that the decision to execute the key figures behind the Rising such as P.H Pearse and James Connolly would generate profound sympathy amongst nationalists, and provide additional iconic martyrs to the republican movement.

In Tipperary there seemed to be little public support for the Rising with the Tipperary Star newspaper describing it as ‘inexplicable imbecility – how any body of men could embark on such a desperate enterprise passes common-sense comprehension. It is the old story … everything lost, nothing gained’.4 The execution of the leaders of the Rising radically changed public perception however, particularly for those who believed in the concept of militant nationalism. James Leahy, a member of the Thurles company of the Irish Volunteers later recalled that the executions had a profound effect on public feeling,

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1 Republican prisoner in Spike Island prison, 13 October 1921, quoted in Fitzpatrick; Politics and Irish life 1913-1921, provincial experiences of War and Revolution (Cork, 1998), p. 3.
2 Fitzpatrick, Politics and Irish Life 1913-1921, p. 3.
4 Tipperary Star, 6 May 1916.
and the executions were strongly condemned … ‘the men who had lost or risked their lives in the Rising were now being regarded as heroes’.5

Notwithstanding the absence of an insurrection in Tipperary during 1916 two members of the RIC, Sergeant Thomas Rourke and Constable John Hurley were shot dead on 25 April of that year while trying to arrest volunteer Michael O'Callaghan for making a ‘seditious’ speech near Tipperary town. O'Callaghan went on the run and later fled to America. He acquired retrospective fame when Tipperary militants such as Dan Breen and Séan Treacy regarded O'Callaghan as ‘having saved the name of Tipperary during Easter week’ for his actions.6

Radicals gradually came to the conclusion that their aims could only be achieved by what was termed ‘positive military action’.7 Nonetheless, in the immediate aftermath of the Rising overt volunteer activity had diminished, and almost 2,000 men were interned.8 The public empathy which manifested itself after the executions of the 1916 leaders was capitalised on however and the volunteers gradually reorganised, increasing in number and engaging openly in acts of defiance. During late 1916 and early 1917 those arrested after the Rising were released and returned home to a rapturous reception. In 1917 Sinn Féin clubs and additional volunteer companies were formed in Tipperary with commensurate sharp increases in volunteer activity and membership.9

In August 1917 Eamon de Valera visited Tipperary town following his victory in the east Clare by-election where he had been elected as a Sinn Féin member of parliament. A large crowd of volunteers assembled and in defiance of an official proclamation, paraded in military fashion wearing volunteer uniform and carrying hurleys in place of rifles. One volunteer recalled that relatives of the soldiers, who were fighting in Europe ‘flung rotten eggs and various classes of filth’ at them, and there were scuffles. He also stated that the

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9 Statement of Edward McGrath, BMH/WS.1522, p. 4.
RIC, apparently considering discretion the better part of valour, ‘made no attempt to interfere’.\(^{10}\) From that point forward in Tipperary parades were held openly and in defiance of police attempts to prevent them.

An uneasy peace prevailed, but in December 1917 a British military intelligence officer felt able to describe the growing and increasingly militant nationalist movement as ‘peculiarly well disciplined, in comparison with similar political organizations in the past.’ He went on to say that drunkenness was almost unknown amongst those deeply implicated, and was apparently severely dealt with. He found this to be ‘in sharp contrast to the usual state of things in similar movements.’\(^{11}\) Tipperary proved to be fertile ground for recruitment to the militant movement, and during the conscription crisis of early 1918 parades and field exercises were frequently held and plans formulated for the acquisition of arms. In January 1918 IRA headquarters formed brigades to replace the previous inefficient command structure whereby each company reported directly to GHQ in Dublin. In Tipperary three brigades were formed, number one in north Tipperary, number two in mid-Tipperary and number three in south Tipperary. Brigade officers and staff were elected by the membership and volunteers such as Séan Gaynor believed that the organisation was gradually becoming an effective military force.\(^{12}\) Following the electoral success of Sinn Féin in December 1918 which saw it take seventy-three parliamentary seats out of a possible 105, many volunteers had grown frustrated with politics and were anxious to continue the struggle for independence which they believed had begun with the Rising.\(^{13}\)

Despite the prominence of Séan Treacy and his strong belief in physical-force nationalism, he chose not to become the officer commanding the new south Tipperary brigade. That role went instead to Séamus Robinson, originally from Belfast who had been

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\(^{10}\) Statement of Tadgh Crowe, BMH/WS.1658, p. 2.
\(^{13}\) Augusteijn, *From public defiance to guerrilla warfare*, p. 83.
active in the Gaelic League and volunteer movement while living in Glasgow for several years prior to his arrival in Tipperary. Robinson, Dan Breen, Seán Treacy and Seán Hogan were known to their comrades as the ‘big four’ of the third Tipperary brigade, and while Robinson was respected for having taken part in the 1916 Rising, he was to experience problems with the other men who all came from the ‘close, clannish world of south Tipperary’.14

In later years militant nationalists in Tipperary including Breen and Treacy would claim that that they had come to the conclusion that ‘positive military action was necessary’.15 They strongly believed that 1916 had been ‘another 1798’, referring to the United Irish rebellion which was viewed by them as a heroic enterprise which had also ended in failure. Treacy was insistent that something could be done to redeem this perceived failure … and Tipperary should ‘distinguish itself in the national cause’.16 Treacy later recalled telling the others ‘we have had enough of being pushed around and our men being killed by the enemy forces, and it is time that we did a bit of pushing around and killing on the other side’.17 Militants were frustrated that the events of 1916 had not led to a full scale rebellion and also at their own lack of involvement in the Rising.18 The conscription crisis of early 1918 had passed and that fact, allied to Sinn Féin electoral success meant that less militant members assumed primacy. During one brigade meeting at the end of 1918, Treacy was angered by the lack of enthusiasm displayed by some volunteers for drill and parades and asserted ‘if this is the state of affairs, we will have to kill somebody and make the bloody enemy organise us!’19

Individual RIC members deemed to be a particular threat were specifically targeted for assassination. In Templemore in 1918 for example volunteers made a determined effort

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16 Ibid, p. 15.
17 Ibid, p. 20.
18 Ibid, p. 18.
to kill District Inspector William Harding Wilson. Having joined the RIC in 1882 as a constable, he had advanced steadily through the ranks, arriving in Templemore in 1912 as district inspector. Significantly, he had served at RIC headquarters in Dublin Castle, where he had worked in the office of the inspector general, gaining significant knowledge of politically motivated cases.\(^20\) Having been in charge of Templemore police district during the period when overt displays of defiance and militancy had escalated, he had an intimate knowledge of the volunteer movement and its members in north Tipperary. The killing of Wilson became a priority for local volunteer commandant James Leahy, who categorised him as ‘being on our black books because of his ruthless conduct in the treatment of Republicans’.\(^21\) Consequently, on Armistice Day 11 November 1918, volunteer Edward McGrath received orders to go to Templemore and kill Wilson if the opportunity arose. After waiting for several hours, McGrath saw Wilson and followed with the intention of shooting him. However, the town was full of drunken soldiers celebrating the cessation of hostilities in France. McGrath abandoned his assassination attempt, concluding that on the evening in question Templemore was ‘no place for a lone armed IRA man’.\(^22\)

In December 1918 volunteers in Templemore formulated a plan to raid Richmond military barracks in the town and seize the contents of its arsenal, as weapons and ammunition were in critically short supply. Richmond was a formidable bastion, and since construction in 1813 had been the third largest barracks in Ireland with accommodation for 1,200 soldiers. Intelligence was received to the effect that on Sunday afternoons it was customary for officers from Richmond to dine at Hickey’s Hotel in the town while a military band played outside, and enlisted men went for walks in the surrounding countryside. This left the barracks virtually undefended. Sunday was therefore the obvious day for an attack. Plans were made to cut railway tracks and telephone lines before storming the barracks, but to the anger of local volunteers, IRA headquarters refused to

\(^{20}\) *Tipperary Star*, 21 August 1920.
\(^{21}\) Statement of James Leahy, BMH/WS.1454, p. 35.
\(^{22}\) Statement of Edward McGrath, BMH/WS.1522, p. 10.
approve the operation. In another step towards overt militancy, during January 1919 the name ‘Irish Republican Army’ was adopted by the volunteers.

In Tipperary, as in a number of other counties, militant republicans moved inexorably towards conflict with the police and military. Hard-line attitudes were also fostered by the official organ of the Irish Volunteers *Án t-Óglach*. In November 1918 it opined that anyone, civilian or soldier, who assists directly or by connivance against them, ‘merits no more consideration and should be killed without mercy or hesitation as opportunity offers’. Just before the Soloheadbeg ambush of January 1919, the RIC estimated the membership of what were categorised as ‘nationalist organisations’ in Tipperary as follows:

### Table 2.1 Nationalist organisations in county Tipperary, December 1919

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Branches</th>
<th>Membership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sinn Féin</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>7049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish National Volunteers</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>4316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Irish League</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>4611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaelic League</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaelic Athletic Association</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancient Order of Hibernians</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish Land and Labour Association</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish Volunteers</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish Transport and Workers Union</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1301</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: RIC county inspector’s monthly report for Tipperary, December 1918. NAI.CO 904/107

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In January 1919 the inspector general of the Royal Irish Constabulary introduced a policy of compulsory retirement to rid the force of men who, for one reason or another were no longer up to the required standard.\textsuperscript{25} One former constable who was forced to retire under this provision later wrote that this policy had the effect of removing ‘loyal, seasoned men and injuring morale.’\textsuperscript{26} The Unionist MP and Colonial Office minister, Walter Long had perhaps been prescient when he commented in 1918 that it was going to be a fair and square fight between the British Government and Sinn Féin as to who is going to govern the country.\textsuperscript{27}

The formation of an aspirational counter state commenced with the inaugural public meeting of Dáil Éireann in Dublin on 21 January 1919 at 3.30 p.m. This would prove to be an historic event, but just one hundred miles to the south at Soloheadbeg in south Tipperary an IRA ambush took place which overshadowed those proceedings. Just before Christmas 1918 Breen, Treacy, Robinson and Hogan received information via an intercepted military communication that a shipment of gelignite destined for use at a local authority quarry at Soloheadbeg was about to be sent to Tipperary town military barracks. The explosives were to be taken by county council employees from the barracks under RIC escort to the quarry. The IRA estimated that the escort would consist of about six policemen. Volunteer Lar Breen, brother of Dan Breen gained employment at the quarry and provided intelligence back to other brigade members. Breen and Treacy were on the run at the time and moved constantly around the county where they stayed with sympathisers. A rudimentary headquarters was also established at a disused house on Hogan’s farm near Greenane, Soloheadbeg which became known as the ‘tin hut’. Twelve members of the brigade were selected to participate in the ambush and from 15 January

\textsuperscript{26} P. Lyons to G. Orpen, 22 November 1931. (NLI Orpen Papers, Ms 17785). Quoted in; Lowe and Malcolm, ‘The domestication of the Royal Irish Constabulary’, \textit{Irish Economic and Social History}, (Vol. XIX, 1992) p. 36.
onwards, two scouts were posted along the anticipated route each day to watch for the shipment. Another scout kept watch on the military barracks with the intention of informing the ambush party when the escort left, the strength of the RIC party accompanying it, and which of two potential routes, the Donohill or Boherkine roads would be used. The remaining members of the ambush party concealed themselves nearby and lay in wait. The party spent each night in the ‘tin hut’, and while this routine was repeated over six consecutive days, the consignment did not appear.

On the morning of 21 January the ambush party reassembled. Now reduced to eight in number because of the prolonged nature of the operation, it consisted of Robinson, Breen, Hogan, Treacy, Patrick O’Dwyer, Michael Ryan, Patrick McCormack and Tadgh Crowe. At about noon their scout signalled that a horse and cart containing the gelignite had left the barracks in Tipperary and was approaching. Two council employees, driver James Godfrey and his assistant Patrick Flynn were on the cart. The police escort consisted of two RIC constables, James McDonnell and Patrick O’Connell who walked behind the cart with carbines slung on their shoulders. Crowe later stated that they had been given instructions not to fire without orders from Treacy or Robinson.\(^{28}\) O’Dwyer recalled that it was definitely the intention to hold up the escort, ‘disarm them and seize the gelignite without bloodshed if possible’.\(^{29}\) Breen recounted that he and Treacy had decided before the ambush that they were going to ‘shoot whatever number of police came along as an escort, but we did not tell Robinson anything about this’.\(^{30}\) The order ‘hands up’ was shouted by Treacy, but volleys of rifle and revolver shots rang out simultaneously and both constables were killed instantly. O’Dwyer recounted that after the long wait, the whole thing happened very suddenly ‘in much less time than it takes to relate’. He also stated that both of the council employees were very frightened, but Breen assured them that nothing was going to happen. He also recalled that Godfrey knew both Breen and Treacy well, and

\(^{28}\) Statement of Tadgh Crowe, BMH/WS.1658, p. 8.
\(^{29}\) Statement of Patrick O’Dwyer, BMH/WS.1432, p. 9.
believed that Flynn must have known them too.\textsuperscript{31} The bodies of the dead policemen were searched and their weapons, handcuffs and ammunition taken. Breen, Treacy and Hogan drove away in the horse and cart with the gelignite. Ryan and McCormack remained on the road with Robinson, guarding Godfrey and Flynn until such time as the gelignite was a safe distance away. Crowe and O’Dwyer later greased and carefully wrapped the carbines before hiding them in a field near Crowe’s house. As the Crowe family was known to the RIC, the house was subsequently searched on several occasions, but the police equipment was not discovered and it was subsequently passed to the brigade quartermaster.\textsuperscript{32}

In later life Breen expressed his regret that there had been only two policemen on the escort instead of the six that were anticipated, reasoning that ‘six dead policemen would have impressed the country more than a mere two’.\textsuperscript{33} In the aftermath of the ambush, which was carried out against the express orders of IRA headquarters, and led to the county being declared a special military area, Breen, Treacy and the others went on the run. The fact that the Soloheadbeg ambush took place on the same day as the Dáil met in Dublin was entirely coincidental, as the ambushers had lain in wait for six days. Nevertheless, for militants, this concurrence gave the ambush added symbolism. IRB member and adjutant of the third brigade Phil Fitzgerald believed that it ‘set the heather on fire’.\textsuperscript{34} The gelignite captured during the Soloheadbeg ambush was subsequently divided amongst the first, third and fourth battalions of the third Tipperary brigade.

While there had been sporadic attacks on the RIC since 1916, Townshend suggests that the Soloheadbeg ambush had a new element of ruthlessness which distinguished it from attacks of previous years.\textsuperscript{35} The brutal nature of the ambush came as a shock to many moderate members of Sinn Féin and the volunteer movement as well as the wider population, not only in Ireland but internationally. Constable O’Connell from Coachford in

\textsuperscript{31} Statement of Patrick O’Dwyer, BMH/WS.1432, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{32} Statement of Edmond Crowe, BMH/WS.599, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{34} Statement of Phil Fitzgerald, BMH/WS.1262, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, p. 16.
county Cork was thirty years old and engaged to be married. A widower with seven children, Constable McDonnell was fifty-six and from Belmullet in county Mayo. He had served in Tipperary for over twenty-six years. Several days before the ambush, he had asked a friend in jest ‘do you think the Sinn Féiners would shoot me? I don’t think they would myself!’

An inquest into the deaths of Constables O'Connell and McDonnell took place on 22 January 1919. Council employees Godfrey and Flynn were called as witnesses and questioned closely by District Inspector Browrigg as to the circumstances surrounding the ambush. The police believed that one or both of them may have known the killers, and Inspector General Byrne stated in his report on the incident that neither man ‘could or would identify them’. At the inquest Godfrey and Flynn provided no information as to the possible identity of the gunmen. Their evidence was reported in newspapers as being of the ‘most confusing character’ and it was stated that Flynn fainted while giving evidence. A poignant moment occurred during the inquest when the son of Constable McDonnell intervened and asked Godfrey whether his father had ‘been given a dogs’ chance, and if the policemen had been given time to hand over the explosives’. The coroner intervened to point out that the purpose of the inquest was only to ascertain the cause of death, but did express his opinion that both constables had been ‘nailed on the spot’. He described the tragedy as one of the saddest cases that had happened in Tipperary or any part of Ireland for many years. He went on to say that he had known both policemen well and it was terribly sad to see them shot down while doing public duty and not doing anything that would injure anybody. The jury returned a verdict that the deaths of the two policemen were due to shots fired by masked men, and added a rider expressing sympathy with their

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38 Irish Independent, 23 January 1919.
39 Tipperary Star, 23 January, 1919
40 Irish Independent, 23 January 1919.
relatives. On 22 January public gatherings including fairs and markets were prohibited and wanted posters of Breen were posted outside every police barracks in the country offering a reward of £1,000 for his capture. Descriptions of Treacy, Breen, Hogan, and Robinson were published in *The Police Gazette*, also known as the ‘*Hue and Cry*’.

Plate 2.1: Reward poster for Dan Breen issued following the Soloheadbeg ambush, February 1919

![Reward poster for Dan Breen](source)

Source: Garda Síochána Museum and Archives

Shortly after the Soloheadbeg ambush the death of both constables was raised in the House of Lords during a series of parliamentary questions from Tipperary landowner the Earl of Donoughmore. Seeking to clarify the amount of compensation to which their dependents might be entitled, Donoughmore referred to the policemen as victims of a brutal assassination, the perpetrators of which ‘we are all very sorry to see no sign of finding’. He also expressed his desire that His Majesty's Government would see their way to deal generously with the issue of compensation. He added ‘there is no question whatever

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that the spirit and loyalty to the public of the RIC is absolutely incontestable’. Owing to
the exceptional circumstances of the case, the treasury sanctioned the payment of a gratuity
of £100 for the children of Constable McDonnell, and the payment of a compassionate
grant of £25 to the parents of Constable O’Connell.

Several days after the ambush IRA Commandant Jerome Davin of the first
battalion, third Tipperary brigade visited Rosegreen village and saw a police notice offering
a substantial reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the IRA
members responsible for the ambush. Davin replaced this poster with one of his own
threatening anyone who gave such information that they would meet a similar fate to the
dead policemen. He signed the notice using the Latin term ‘Veritas’. It was subsequently
noticed by volunteers in Tipperary that when the police and military conducted searches of
houses which they suspected were occupied by IRA members or sympathisers, particular
interest was shown in Latin textbooks, apparently searching for any reference to that
particular word.

Assistant quartermaster of the third brigade Eamon O’Duibhir was incarcerated
with other nationalist prisoners in Durham Jail when the ambush took place. When news
of Soloheadbeg reached them, opinion was divided as to whether it was the right or wrong
course of action. Knowing the Tipperary men involved, O’Duibhir took the side of the
volunteers but later recounted that the majority of the prisoners did not seem to think that
it was a very good thing, which he believed reflected the feeling of the wider nationalist
community. When he was later released from jail, he found a great deal of ill-feeling
against the men that had taken part in this attack, and that local newspapers had strongly
condemned the ambush. O’Duibhir wrote to the Tipperary Star newspaper to complain,

42 Richard Hely-Hutchinson, 6th Earl of Donoughmore of Knocklofty (1875-1948) was deputy lord
lieutenant for Tipperary and became a member of the Senate following independence.
(http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1919/mar/20/the-tragedy-at
soloheadbeg#S5LV0033P0_19190320_HOL_166) (Accessed, 22 November 2011).
43 Statement of Jerome Davin, BMH/WS.1350, p. 5.
44 Ibid.
45 Statement of Eamon O’Duibhir, BMH/WS.1474, p. 43.
asserting that while nobody liked to see men killed in any shape or form ‘those RIC men
were holding the country down for England … it was regrettable but the men who did the
firing could not be blamed. They were serving the Irish nation and they were fighting for
its independence’.\textsuperscript{46} Others disagreed however, and during the requiem mass for Constable
McDonnell at St. Michael’s church in Tipperary town, Monsignor Arthur Ryan read out a
letter from Dr. Harty, archbishop of the diocese of Cashel and Emly in which he
condemned the killings as cold blooded murder for which there was no justification. Harty
went on to say that ‘it used to be remarked that where Tipperary leads, Ireland follows …
but God help poor Ireland if she follows this deed of blood’.\textsuperscript{47}

The Soloheadbeg ambush was carried out in contravention of instructions which
had been issued by IRA Chief of Staff Richard Mulcahy, thus causing tension between
GHQ and those who carried it out. In later life Mulcahy wrote that he ‘frequently
despaired’ of volunteers in south Tipperary as they failed to respond to his efforts at
instilling military discipline.\textsuperscript{48} He also believed that as the ambush had been taken entirely
on the initiative of Tipperary volunteers, they could not be endorsed by the IRA leadership,
and if they were captured or killed by the police, it could not be acknowledged that they
had acted with authority and that they would therefore be branded as ‘common
murderers’.\textsuperscript{49} Mulcahy ordered Robinson, Breen, Hogan and Treacy to leave Ireland for
America, but they refused to do so. Following the intervention of Michael Collins, the ‘big
four’ came instead to Dublin and joined a group of IRA volunteers colloquially known as
‘the squad’. These men were recruited by Michael Collins to carry out targeted
assassinations of key military, political and police personnel. Mulcahy believed that insofar
as the Tipperary men were concerned, ‘their services were not required and their presence

\textsuperscript{46} Statement of Eamon O’Duibhir, BMH/WS.1474, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{47} Irish Independent, 27 January 1919.
\textsuperscript{48} Note on the IRB and the south Tipperary brigade. University College Dublin, Mulcahy papers,
P7b/181; Quoted in Hopkinson, The Irish war of independence, p. 117.
was often awkward’ in Dublin.\(^{50}\) Shortly after the ambush officers of the third Tipperary brigade met in Cashel, and drafted a proclamation signed by Séamus Robinson, threatening soldiers and the RIC that if they did not leave the county, they would ‘forfeit their lives’.\(^{51}\) GHQ refused to sanction this proclamation or to give permission to the Tipperary men to carry out their threats, adding to the on-going tension which existed.

In the aftermath of the Soloheadbeg ambush, the gunmen of the third Tipperary brigade assumed iconic status for militant volunteers. Volunteer Séan Fitzpatrick later outlined the powerful symbolism of the fact that Breen and Treacy had refused to leave the country after Soloheadbeg, and regarded this event as a beginning and a baptism of fire ‘to stay in the country of their birth and to rely on the plain people to keep them safe. Thus was substituted the guerrilla method for the rising-out and in fact, began the Black and Tan war’.\(^{52}\) Collins believed that ‘the sooner fighting is forced and a general state of disorder created throughout the country, the better it will be for the country. Ireland is likely to get more out of a general state of disorder than from a continuation of the situation as it now stands’.\(^{53}\) On the contrary, C.S Andrews ‘doubted very much’ Breen’s assertion that Soloheadbeg was a deliberately considered act taken on his own initiative, to get the guerrilla campaign started. Rather, he believed it to be ‘an operation that just went wrong, as elsewhere many RIC had been disarmed without being killed’.\(^{54}\) Within the ‘big four’ themselves, there was division and animosity in later years about the reality of the Soloheadbeg ambush. In 1950 Séamus Robinson refused an invitation to attend the unveiling of a memorial at the site of the ambush. He was heavily critical of the version of events contained in Breen’s autobiography, and cited his belief that, despite being the officer in command of the third Tipperary brigade and a veteran of the 1916 Rising, his

\(^{50}\) Risteárd Mulcahy, *My father, the General, Richard Mulcahy and the military history of the revolution* (Dublin, 2009) p. 52.


\(^{52}\) Statement of Sean Fitzpatrick, BMH/WS.1259, p. 6.


\(^{54}\) C.S. Andrews fought with the Dublin brigade during the 1919-21 conflict and served as adjutant to Liam Lynch, leader of the anti-treaty forces during the Civil War. See C.S Andrews, *Dublin Made Me* (Dublin, 2001), p. 119.
part in the conflict had been minimised. After the Soloheadbeg ambush many volunteers believed that the police became more aggressive, and those suspected of involvement frequently had their houses raided. For many militant activists however, the increased activity on the part of the RIC only had the effect of stimulating members of the volunteer companies to action. IRA member Michael Fitzpatrick recalled that many volunteers were taken by surprise at events and took some time to recover from the shock caused by the shootings. He believed however that Treacy was a ‘true prophet’ and that raids and greater police attention which ensued served only to raise the morale of officers and men. He recalled that even those who had been shocked and alarmed after Soloheadbeg became active in the movement again. Prisons were rapidly filled with volunteers arrested for drilling and other activities and Tipperary men ‘were to the fore again’.

Reporting on the Soloheadbeg ambush the Manchester Guardian editorialised that English people would misunderstand the situation entirely if they thought that ‘such casual and cold blooded murders formed any part of official Sinn Féin policy … on the contrary, they are utterly repudiated and detested in Harcourt Street’ (the location of Sinn Féin headquarters). The Daily News reported on the wider significance of the killings and what might result from them stating that the ‘well-meaning idealists in Dáil Éireann were utterly unable to control the physical-force men in the provinces’. It further reported that Dáil Éireann was less important than it looks, ‘it has the appearance of power while the reality lies in the hands of men who hold, in the spirit of all past experience that the salvation of Ireland is to be found in gelignite and revolvers.

The Soloheadbeg ambush also caused profound shock within the RIC and was viewed as an ominous escalation in the recent pattern of attacks on the police, and as a sign

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55 Statement of Séamus Robinson, BMH/WS.1721, p. 6. Robinson also wrote a series of letters to the Irish Press and Irish Times on the subject using the alias ‘Dalriada’.
57 Statement of Michael Fitzpatrick, BMH/WS.1433, p. 6.
58 Ibid.
59 Manchester Guardian, 24 January 1919, quoted in; Maurice Walsh, the news from Ireland, foreign correspondents and the Irish revolution (London, 2008), p. 64.
60 Daily News, 24 January 1919, quoted in; Walsh, the news from Ireland (London, 2008), p. 65.

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of approaching danger. Patrick Shea, the son of an RIC sergeant serving in Tipperary recalled that with the barracks where he lived there was ‘incredulity, fear, horror, and angry words.’ The dead constables were known to most of the policemen and there was nervous speculation about what the future might hold. Father was ‘silent and grim … mother could not conceal her anxiety’.\textsuperscript{61} Even though Shea was only eleven years old at the time, he realised that his father’s occupation had become a dangerous one, and if his father was late coming home the family lay awake and listened for the sound of his step. ‘Father became the centre of our thoughts and we were frightened and sorry for him’.\textsuperscript{62}

Inspector General Byrne of the Royal Irish Constabulary reported that there had been no improvement in the attitude of the people towards the police who in the more disaffected counties, were treated with bitter hostility and boycotted in various ways. He stated that this was in pursuance of a conspiracy to undermine their loyalty and sow discontent by making it appear that their loyalty to duty is condemned by nationalist opinion as unpatriotic. Byrne did not seem to realise the gravity of the situation however, commenting that the intelligence in his possession did not amount to definite information that an outbreak would actually take place. He did acknowledge that a state of dangerous unrest existed ‘to which I feel bound to invite the attention of Government’.\textsuperscript{63}

The situation escalated dramatically on 31 January 1919 when \textit{An t-Óglach}, the journal of the Irish Volunteers ominously declared a state of war to exist between Ireland and England. ‘Every volunteer is entitled to use all legitimate methods of warfare against the soldiers and policemen of the English usurper and to slay them if necessary’.\textsuperscript{64} While Byrne felt able to dismiss the material in \textit{An t-Óglach}, as containing ‘pernicious material’ such as instructions for demolishing railways, bridges etc., the implications of this

\textsuperscript{61} Patrick Shea, \textit{Voices and the sounds of drums, an Irish autobiography} (Belfast, 1981), p. 27.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{63} RIC Inspector General’s monthly report, January 1919. NALCO 904/108.
\textsuperscript{64} \textit{An t-Óglach}, 31 January 1919.
pronouncement were clear. The IRA had declared war on the British Empire, and their fellow Irishmen of the RIC were clearly identified as the primary targets of that campaign.

In March 1919 Byrne reported his concern at the tone of speeches given by recently elected Sinn Féin members of Parliament, which showed an increasing hostility towards the RIC. One such speech was given by Seamus Bourke, Sinn Féin TD for mid-Tipperary who asserted that the correct way to deal with the police was not to shoot them as it would be inexpedient, ‘but to make their life unbearable, treat them as outcasts of society, as we cannot be in any place that some of these vipers are not in our midst.’\footnote{Barrister Seamus Bourke (1893–1967) was elected as a Sinn Féin MP for mid-Tipperary in 1918. He served in eight further Dáils as a Sinn Féin TD, Cumann na nGaedháil TD and finally as a TD for Fine Gael. He was Minister for Local Government and Public Health from 1923 to 1927. Defeated in the 1939 election, he moved to England, and died in 1967. Bourke was prosecuted by the RIC for these inflammatory remarks. The arresting officer was District Inspector Hunt from Thurles, who was shot dead by the IRA on 23 June 1919. The RIC county inspector believed that his involvement with the case against Bourke was the main reason why Hunt was targeted for assassination. (www.oireachtas.ie) (Accessed, 11 April 2012).} Byrne went on to say that such inflammatory speeches were ‘indicative of an intention to make governance impossible by intimidation of the police’. He finished his report by saying that Ireland was unquestionably in a highly inflammable condition and, in his opinion, at no time was there more urgent necessity for the presence of an overpowering military force.\footnote{RIC Inspector General’s monthly report, March 1919. NALCO 904/108.}

As argued by Michael Hopkinson, to attack the RIC served to undermine the crucial arm of British control in Ireland.\footnote{Michael Hopkinson, The Irish war of independence (Dublin, 2002), p. 26.} A significant escalation of the campaign against the RIC occurred on 10 April 1920 when the Dáil formally authorised a boycott of the police. This policy had been followed by volunteers at local level for the previous two years, and the formalisation of this strategy formed the basis for the campaign of the IRA thereafter (see: appendix E). The resolution moved by Éamon De Valera called on people to ostracise publicly and socially members of the police forces acting as part of the forces of the British government and as agents of the British government.\footnote{Desmond Ryan, Séan Treacy and the third Tipperary Brigade (Tralee, 1945), p. 53.}
Irish Volunteers Eoin MacNeill seconded the motion, opining that the police in Ireland were a force of traitors. A definition of ‘social ostracization’ was presented to the Dáil which declared that the police should be treated as persons who were guilty of treason to their country, to be regarded as unworthy to enjoy any of the privileges or comforts which arise from cordial relations with the public. It went on to stipulate that policemen and their families should receive no social recognition from the people except such as was absolutely necessary and that they should not be saluted nor spoken to in the streets or elsewhere nor their salutes returned. They should not be invited to nor received in private houses as friends or guests; debarred from participation in games, sports, dances and all social functions conducted by the people … and ‘that intermarriage with them be discouraged’.

A fortnight later, on 26 April 1919 the executive committee of Cumann Na mBán instructed its members not to be in company with nor speak to a policeman, not even to occupy the same bench in church. To accompany these declarations a document under the title ‘Aceldama’, a biblical term for a place associated with slaughter and bloodshed, was circulated with the instruction that is should be copied four times and sent to four additional people.

For money their hands are dipped in the blood of their people
They are the eyes and ears of the enemy
Let those eyes and ears know no friendship
Let them be outcasts in their own land
The blood of the martyrs shall be on them and their children’s children, and they shall curse the mothers that bring them forth

Addressing the Dáil in April 1919 Éamon De Valera described the RIC as ‘spies in our midst’ and went on to say that they should not be tolerated socially as if they were law

73 A biblical reference which refers to the field purchased by Judas with the thirty pieces of silver he received for the betrayal of Christ.
abiding citizens, ‘they should be made to understand that the people of Ireland loathed them and their vocation’.75

Inspector General Byrne also reported extensively on the unabated energy shown by Sinn Féin and the significant increase in the number of public meetings, concerts and lectures attended by Sinn Féin politicians ‘in pursuance of the policy to undermine and corrupt the loyalty of the force’.76 He referred to a speech given on 20 April 1919 where the Sinn Féin MP for Cork north Patrick O’Keefe referred to the RIC as a ‘black army’, alleging that if it was not for that force, Ireland would have its freedom. He urged parents with sons in the police to write and ask them ‘for God’s sake to come home … they are decent fathers and mothers sons but the moment they go inside the gate of that depot they are completely changed’. Byrne believed that organised hostility to the police, besides endangering their lives, was part of the scheme to ‘make British government in Ireland impossible’.77

A significant sequel to the Soloheadbeg ambush occurred on 13 May 1919 when Séan Hogan was captured by the police while attending a dance at the house of Eamon O’Duibhir. Breen and Treacy formulated an audacious plan to rescue him while he was being moved from Thurles RIC Barracks to jail in Cork city, the usual destination for prisoners arrested under the Defence of the Realm Act. Hogan was escorted by four policemen including the arresting officer Sergeant Peter Wallace and Constable Michael Enright. When the train stopped at Knocklong railway station, Wallace reportedly taunted Hogan with the remark ‘where are Breen and Treacy now’?78 At that moment several IRA members including Breen and Treacy boarded the train and fired a number of shots at the police escort, which resulted in the deaths of Wallace and Enright. Despite being seriously injured in the exchange of fire, Breen and Treacy managed to rescue Hogan and both men

77 Ibid. 
78 Philip Fogarty, *The parish of Thurles, a civil and ecclesiastical history*, Vol. 66, pg. 5. (Tipperary, 1967)
subsequently recovered from their wounds. Treacy later received a message from Michael Collins which congratulated him on a ‘magnificent achievement’. Breen recollected that for IRA volunteers such praise from Collins was comparable to the ‘awarding of a Victoria Cross to a British soldier’.79

In his report on the incident, Inspector General Byrne stated that local people had been ‘perfectly callous’ and gave no assistance to the police in tracing the men responsible.80 In Thurles the slogans ‘Knocklong Aboo!’, ‘Up Knocklong’ and ‘Wallace bowled over, RIP’ were chalked on the road, and the widow of Sergeant Wallace was heckled while on her way to mass.81 IRA volunteer Michael Davern reminisced that when he informed Breen’s mother about Knocklong, the injuries to her son and that two members of the RIC had died her reply was ‘Christ isn't it a pity that they did not kill all four of the bastards’.82 Following a trial at Armagh Crown Court on 9 March 1920 three men were found guilty of the killings at Knocklong. Edmund Foley and Patrick Maher were subsequently executed by hanging in Dublin on 7 June 1921.83 Following the Knocklong incident, Tipperary remained designated as a special military area. Inspector General Byrne stated that the police were regarded by the extremists as the great obstacle to the realization of their political aims, and also expressed his opinion that the most effective means of preventing further similar incidents was the retention of a powerful military force in Ireland.84

Increased activity and tactics employed by the police as hostilities escalated were viewed by many IRA members as being beneficial to their cause. Séamus Babington, engineering officer of the third brigade believed that if the deaths of RIC men had been used by the police as propaganda instead of engaging in ‘manhunts and the wholesale

79 Statement of Dan Breen, BMH/WS.1352, p. 11.
81 Ibid.
82 Statement of Michael Davern, BMH/WS.1348, p. 11.
83 Abbott, Police casualties in Ireland, p. 39.
raiding and opening up of the floodgates of fury it was possible the spirit of Republicanism would not have rekindled’. \(^{85}\) He also felt that insofar as IRA volunteers were concerned, ‘police hostile action, ruthless treatment of the civil population and their unbridled hatred of any suspects or genuine republicanism and nationalism … their open tyranny was a Godsend’. \(^{86}\)

There is general consensus amongst historians that the Soloheadbeg ambush was the key incident which triggered the 1919-21 conflict, which has been variously described as the Anglo-Irish War, the War of Independence, the Black and Tan war or the Irish Revolution. The fact that two long-serving policemen were killed on the same day as the Dáil met for the first time was seen by many militant volunteers as the physical embodiment of an aspiration expressed by that Dáil to achieve Irish independence. Cathal Brugha believed that the volunteers could only be used to influence the outcome of events, and not to actually fight, whereas others such as IRA chief of staff Richard Mulcahy believed that they would have a more active role in the forthcoming conflict, describing them as ‘an armed military force … which would defend the growth of the parliament and secure and maintain its prestige and authority’. \(^{87}\)

Tensions were heightened significantly on 23 June 1919 when, in front of a large crowd returning from a race meeting in Thurles, District Inspector Michael Hunt was shot dead at Liberty Square. Hunt and his colleague District Inspector Wilson from the adjacent Templemore RIC district had been particularly active against the volunteer movement for several years. In March 1918 they had both been involved in a mass arrest of local volunteers including Commandant Seán Gaynor of Tipperary number one brigade, who later recalled being ‘hailed out of bed at 4 a.m. by a large force of police under Hunt and


\(^{86}\) Statement of Séamus Babington, BMH/WS.1595, p. 22.

\(^{87}\) Francis Costello, *The Irish revolution and its aftermath 1916-1923, years of revolt* (Dublin, 2003), p. 39, Michael Hopkinson, *The Irish war of independence* (Dublin, 2002), p. 25. Costello states that Breen and Treacy ‘would serve as catalysts for the most protracted and effective revolt yet against British rule in Ireland’. Hopkinson argues that the ambush resulted from ‘impatience felt by the gunmen with what they perceived to be the slowness and lack of action of the Sinn Féin leadership’.
Wilson’. In the weeks leading up to his death Hunt had been particularly assiduous in
directing the law against volunteers and had broken up several Sinn Féin meetings, for
which he had received a first class commendation. Commandant Patrick Kinnane of
number two brigade recalled that much concern had been caused to brigade and battalion
officers by the ‘villainy of Hunt and his unscrupulous and ruthless tactics’.

Following the arrest by Hunt of IRA member ‘Mixey’ O’Donnell in Thurles in
connection with the Knocklong killings, Commandant James Leahy of the second
Tipperary brigade discussed with other brigade members the proposal that Hunt should be
killed. It was pointed out to Leahy that if Hunt continued to operate with impunity it
could have disastrous results and that his shooting ‘would have a salutary effect on other
policemen who might be inclined to follow his example’. Jerry Ryan, another
commandant in the second brigade area stated that Hunt was specifically targeted because
of raids and searches he had been involved in, where he had ‘made himself most
obnoxious to the people because of the brutal manner in which he carried them out’.
Hunt had also been involved in the arrest of Sinn Féin MP Ernest Blythe in May 1919 at
Inchivella near Thurles for being in possession of seditious documents while addressing a
meeting. The documents contained instructions as to how the boycott should be carried
out against the RIC and their morale damaged. An extract from the documents given
during Blythe’s subsequent trial concluded that an energetic ‘bad lad’ of a peeler could be
made quiet if it were discovered where he was from and word sent to local volunteers or
Sinn Féiners of his native place with a view to making things ‘unpleasant for his people

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88 Seán Gaynor, ‘With Tipperary No. 1 Brigade in North Tipperary 1917-21, Part 1’, Tipperary
Historical Journal (1993), p. 34.
89 James Herlihy, Royal Irish Constabulary Officers, a biographical dictionary and genealogical guide, 1816-1922
(Dublin, 2005), p. 171.
90 Statement of Patrick Kinnane, BMH/WS.1475, p. 10.
91 Statement of James Leahy, BMH/WS.1454, p. 18.
92 Ibid.
93 Statement of Jerry Ryan, BMH/WS.1487, p. 5.
who will not fail to inform him of how they suffer for his activity'. Plans were made to assassinate Hunt while he was on duty at a race meeting, but a suitable opportunity to do so did arise at the racecourse. As he returned to the RIC barracks in town along with the rest of the RIC party he was shot three times at close range by ‘big Jim’ Stapleton who, along with several other IRA volunteers had mingled with the large crowd returning from the races. The crowd initially panicked and fled in all directions, allowing the killers to escape without difficulty. As Hunt lay dying on the roadway a considerable crowd collected about ‘jeering and laughing but did not assist’.

Leahy stated that for some hours after the shooting the police appeared to be a bit nervous, but as the evening wore on they got intoxicated, and their fury began to demonstrate itself by ‘beating up anyone who they could get their hands on, especially any supporter of Sinn Féin’. Later that night Leahy was in O’Connell’s bar in Thurles when an RIC head constable that he knew came into the bar. Leahy recalled that the policeman was a ‘good sort and advanced in years, and had no interest in the actions of his colleagues outside on the streets, nor did he approve of them’. When offered a glass of whiskey by Leahy, the policeman readily accepted. Leahy took this as a sign of the salutary effect the IRA had anticipated that the death of Hunt would bring to other local members of the RIC. At the inquest which took place in Richmond Barracks Templemore on the day after the killing, the jury returned a verdict of ‘wilful murder by a person or persons unknown’.

County Inspector Mulliner reported that this verdict had only been reached after considerable hesitation and a grudging expression of sympathy to the relatives of the

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95 Irish Independent, 25 June 1919.


97 Ibid.

98 Irish Independent, 25 June 1919.
deceased made by the jurors. Mulliner linked the death of Hunt to the previous RIC deaths at Knocklong and Soloheadbeg which he described as the ‘first blows’ and also to the recent arrest by Hunt of O’Donnell, which had incurred ‘bitter hostility’ in the locality. Hunt left behind a wife and five children and Archbishop Harty condemned his murder as a flagrant violation of the fifth commandment. But, he also strongly criticized the provocative action of the government and gave his opinion that the military domination of Ireland should cease at once.

Notwithstanding the killing of Hunt, restrictions imposed under the Defence of the Realm Act which had been imposed after the Soloheadbeg ambush were lifted on 14 June. On 26 June however, the lord lieutenant sent a telegram to the government in London stating his belief that Sinn Féin was ‘an organised club for the murder of police’. He went on to demand that Sinn Féin in Tipperary should be proclaimed an illegal organisation. While there was sporadic IRA activity throughout Ireland, the inspector general identified Munster as the most difficult province to police. It was necessary for the military to assist the police with most of their duties, particularly when duties of what he termed a ‘political nature had to be performed’. Byrne reported the conviction of IRA members that because their self-declared Irish Republic was at war with the British Empire, they were fully justified in killing policemen. He described it as an ‘absurd doctrine … but evidently one that is accepted by many of these fanatical young men’. Byrne also referred to an incident where an RIC sergeant had been warned by a priest that there were ‘a class of men going

100 Ibid.
101 Irish Independent, 30 June 1919.
103 Lord John French, commander in chief of British home forces served as lord lieutenant of Ireland from 1918-21. He survived a number of assassination attempts including the Ashtown incident of December 1919, and proclaimed martial law on 10 December 1920. He was named by a coroner’s jury as being responsible for the death of Mayor Thomas MacCurtain of Cork. See, O’Farrell, who’s who in the Irish war of independence 1916-1921, also, Townshend, the British campaign in Ireland 1919-1921 (Oxford, 1975), p. 26.
about who think it is no sin to shoot a policeman because they say that they are at war with England … no policeman’s life is safe at present.\textit{104}

A week after French’s request a proclamation under the criminal law and procedure (Ireland) act was issued. This suppressed all Sinn Féin organisations in Tipperary as well as the Gaelic League, Cumann na mBán and the Irish Volunteers.\textit{105} Byrne reported that the proclamation was ‘received with indifference by the inhabitants’ who appeared relieved that further restrictions on fairs and markets had not been imposed.\textit{106} Additional police and troops were drafted into the county. This may have had a temporary calming effect, but a key factor for the relatively quiet state of Tipperary following the dramatic events of Soloheadbeg, Knocklong and Thurles may have been the absence from the county of some its most violent activists. Breen and Hogan had been badly wounded at Knocklong and spent time recuperating in Kerry. Treacy and Robinson went to Dublin and by the late summer of 1919 Breen and Hogan had also joined them in the city at the request of Michael Collins. As suggested by Francis Costello, Collins admired what he believed to be ‘men of action’, so the Tipperary volunteers were ‘taken under his wing … with the combination of his brains and their brawn proving to be a lethal combination’.\textit{107}

Breen and Hogan would not return to Tipperary until 1920, having first taken part in an audacious assassination attempt on Lord Lieutenant French near his Phoenix Park lodge on 19 December 1919. Collins had arranged that the Tipperary men would assist the members of the Dublin Brigade in this attack. It was believed that if French were killed ‘his death would arouse all peoples to take notice of our fight for freedom’.\textit{108} Reporting this ‘dastardly attempt’ on the life of French, the inspector general referred to the ‘these seditious and truculent volunteers’, saying that they had sufficient arms and explosives

hidden away for committing outrages, or guerilla warfare as they call it'. He also reported that at a recent meeting of the Dáil, the taking of an oath of allegiance to the Irish Republic was made incumbent on all members of the Dáil, and all IRA volunteers. The oath included the words ‘I will support and defend the Irish Republic, and the government of the Irish Republic which is Dáil Éireann, against all enemies, foreign and domestic … so help me God’.

It was obvious that insofar as the IRA was concerned, members of the Royal Irish Constabulary were the domestic enemies referred to. To accurately record escalating lawlessness a new category entitled ‘outrages against the police’ were added to the existing comprehensive monthly reports submitted by each district and county inspector to the inspector general. These detailed attacks not only on RIC members and police stations, but also incidents of intimidation, boycotting and threats towards barrack servants, merchants and suppliers, landlords, RIC applicants and pensioners. Also included in the outrage reports were cases of local women who had their heads ‘bobbed’ or forcibly shaved as a public humiliation for what was termed ‘keeping company with policemen’. The provinces of Munster and Connaught were regularly cited as being particularly hostile to the police. Byrne said that the IRA was ‘committed in pursuance of a deliberate campaign to break the morale of the police which is often referred to as the last obstacle in the way of an Irish Republic’.

In Tipperary, the brief lull in hostilities which took place following the killing of District Inspector Hunt ended violently on 2 September 1919 when another policeman met his death. IRA volunteers from the Lorrha area planned an ambush on a patrol of RIC cyclists, but a dispute with IRA headquarters was ongoing. The Lorrha company had been

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110 Ibid.
111 RIC ‘Outrages against the police reports’, which commenced in April 1920. NALCO904/148 series.
114 Ibid.
placed in the Birr battalion area as part of the second Offaly brigade, but as Tipperary men the volunteers themselves wanted to be under the control of the first Tipperary brigade. Breen and Treacy were asked to use their influence with GHQ to have the battalion transferred and Breen undertook to assist. He also sent word that the ambush should take place, informing the volunteers that he had received sanction for it from headquarters.\textsuperscript{115} Despite their absence from Tipperary, the influence of the so-called big four continued to be felt. The police patrol in question took place on a nightly basis, when one sergeant and two constables from Lorrha barracks patrolled from Lorrha village towards the townland of Carrigahorig.

Plate 2.2: Contemporary IRA sketch of the Lorrha ambush, 2 September 1919.


The ambush party consisted of seven IRA volunteers, Jack and Michael Joyce, James Carroll, Timothy Haugh, William Boucher and Martin Needham, under the

\textsuperscript{115} Statement of Martin Needham, BMH/WS.1323, p. 5.
command of Felix Cronin. They were armed with an assortment of revolvers and shotguns, but very little ammunition. The RIC patrol left their barracks at nine p.m. and it was decided to attack them as they returned around ninety minutes later. The ambushers lay in wait behind a wall and as the patrol cycled past the command ‘hands up’ was given, accompanied by simultaneous gunfire. Sergeant Brady and Constable Foley were badly wounded in the initial fusillade, with Brady calling out ‘my God, I am shot’, before collapsing on the roadway where he died shortly afterwards. Brady was aged forty-six at the time of his death and married with six children. He had only arrived in the village two days before the ambush, having been previously stationed in Enniskillen. Constable McCormack managed to find cover and return fire on their attackers. Needham recalled in later life that the accurate shooting of the policeman sent ‘bullets uncomfortably close’ to the volunteers, forcing them to retreat.

In the aftermath of the ambush, extensive searches took place and the police questioned all known local volunteers, including most of the actual ambush party. After being identified by Constable Foley as one of the gunmen, John Madden was subsequently charged with the murder of Sergeant Brady. Other volunteers believed that Madden was charged because he was a ‘talkative and boastful type, and on that account was not the class of man who could be trusted’. Following the killing Father Gleeson, parish priest of Lorrha strongly condemned it from the pulpit, denouncing the killers as criminals. He stated that the ‘brand of Cain lay upon the assassins … the shadow of the crime would hang over the parish for many generations’. This denunciation caused concern to the some of the volunteers involved as they were ‘devout Catholics … attentive to their religious duties’. Needham then approached a priest in the nearby town of Portumna in county Galway who was more sympathetic to the volunteer cause. This priest subsequently heard confessions

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116 Statement of Martin Needham, BMH/WS.1323, p. 5.
119 Irish Independent, 9 September 1919.
120 Statement of Martin Needham, BMH/WS.1323, p. 8
and gave absolution to all of the men who had been involved in the ambush. Following his condemnation of the killing it was reported that Father Gleeson received abusive and threatening letters.\textsuperscript{121} It was further reported that a series of threatening notices were placed in the area directed ‘at the police or those that have shown any friendly disposition towards the police’.\textsuperscript{122} On 15 September 1919 for example, a horse was shot dead and the local police believed it was because the owner had delivered turf to the RIC barracks in Lorrha.\textsuperscript{123}

The Lorrha ambush resulted in a severe reprimand for those involved from the senior officers of the second Offaly brigade as, contrary to what Breen had told Needham and others prior to the ambush, it had not been authorized by GHQ. The maintenance of military discipline within the ranks of the IRA was an ongoing serious issue for GHQ and local commanders at that time, as many attacks were carried by local units without the advance approval of brigade staff.\textsuperscript{124} Sinn Féin had been suppressed in Tipperary following the killing of District Inspector Hunt, and following the death of Sergeant Brady public assemblies including fairs and markets were also prohibited. County Inspector Mulliner reported that this prohibition was received with ‘dismay as it directly affected the local population, particularly in financial terms’.\textsuperscript{125} Despite the reprimand from GHQ the Lorrha company was subsequently transferred into the first Tipperary brigade area at the request of Breen, becoming part of the fourth battalion of that brigade.

On 7 September a notice was posted near Rearcross RIC barracks stating that those associating with the police would forfeit their lives, and that animals and vehicles placed at their disposal would be destroyed. Describing this incident, the Lorrha ambush and other similar incidents which were taking place throughout Ireland, the inspector general stated that they were ‘eloquent of the difficulties and danger with which the constabulary has to

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{121} RIC Inspector General’s monthly report, September 1919. NAI. CO 904/110.
  \item \textsuperscript{122} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{124} Statement of Séan Gaynor, BMH/WS.1389, p. 25.
  \item \textsuperscript{125} RIC County Inspector’s monthly report, September 1919. NAI. CO 904/110.
\end{itemize}
contend with in the discharge of their duties’.\textsuperscript{126} In a military context, when the conflict initially erupted in Tipperary, attacks carried out against the RIC were disorganised and primarily opportunistic in nature. Gradually however, as the IRA became more organised and effective as a fighting force, a systematic guerrilla campaign developed. The tactic of combining physical violence with intimidation and ostracisation proved to be highly effective and quickly spread throughout the country, albeit to greater effect in counties such as Tipperary, Cork and Clare.

As 1919 drew to a close the British government struggled to define the disparate roles of the police and army in the conflict, apparently unwilling to concede that Ireland was in a state of rebellion and that in many counties, the Kings’ writ had effectively ceased to function. Prime Minister Lloyd George stated that counter-insurgency was a job for the police supported by the military and not vice versa.\textsuperscript{127} He also made the assertion that ‘war could not be declared on rebels’.\textsuperscript{128} The inspector general requested the deployment of a substantial number of additional troops to Ireland as Sinn Féiners were ‘saturated with hostility to British rule and should they receive a general order to give trouble it would no doubt be obeyed, the police would be overwhelmingly outnumbered and the situation would necessitate strong military action’.\textsuperscript{129} Again, he singled out the province of Munster where ‘the spirit of lawlessness was particularly manifest … and where the police would not be strong enough to cope with it but for the assistance afforded by the military’.\textsuperscript{130}

The government decided that a change of leadership within the RIC was required, so Inspector General Byrne was first placed on leave and then replaced by his deputy, Thomas J. Smyth. As acknowledged by Keith Jeffery, the Royal Irish Constabulary had a

\textsuperscript{126} RIC County Inspector’s monthly report, September 1919. NAI.CO 904/110.
\textsuperscript{127} W.J Lowe. ‘Who were the Black and Tans?’ in \textit{History Ireland} (autumn, 2004), p. 47.
\textsuperscript{128} Cabinet conversation, 30 April 1920.CAB.23 20. Quoted in; Townshend, \textit{The British campaign in Ireland}, p. 40.
\textsuperscript{129} RIC Inspector General’s monthly report, October 1919, NALCO 904/110.
\textsuperscript{130} RIC Inspector General’s monthly report, November 1919, NALCO 904/110.
byzantine structure which left the force ill prepared for the situation which had arisen. Townshend argues that Byrne had resisted suggestions that significant numbers of ex-servicemen should be recruited into the RIC to bolster the force. Prime Minister Lloyd George already believed that war could not be declared on rebels and he now told the Cabinet that the 'Irish job would fail if it became a military job only'. The Irish garrison could not provide the number of troops needed to assist the police, who were finding it increasingly difficult to cope with a full scale guerrilla campaign. George believed that Byrne should now be replaced by a man of 'less intelligence and stolidity' as head of the RIC. As suggested by Hopkinson, religious considerations may also have played a part in Byrne’s removal as he had been the first Roman Catholic to hold the position of inspector general. He had failed to hold the confidence of powerful figure Walter Long, chairman of the cabinet committee given the mandate of arriving at a settlement to the Irish problem, who stated that 'having a Catholic at the head of the RIC had caused a leakage in high quarters which has led to the defeat of justice'.

On 25 November 1919 the prohibition order under the Criminal Law and Procedure Act which had hitherto only applied to certain counties was extended to all of Ireland. As Christmas approached in what were categorised as the ‘more disturbed areas’, the practice of having isolated RIC barracks and police huts in rural settings manned by three or four policemen ceased and constables were concentrated in larger barracks which were easier to fortify. As outlined by Townshend, this had the effect of ‘physically isolating

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131 Jeffrey argues that the RIC was unique within the empire as it was an armed force with its own peculiar regulations and not governed by the Army Act, coming under the control of the Chief Secretary. The government of Ireland was entrusted primarily to three officials, the Lord Lieutenant or Viceroy, the Chief Secretary and the Under-Secretary. This structure was criticized by a Royal Commission which had found that if the ‘Irish system of government be regarded as a whole, it is anomalous in quiet times and almost unworkable in times of crisis’. See Keith Jeffrey, *The British army and crisis of empire, 1918-22* (Manchester, 1984), p. 77.


the RIC from the population from which they were already morally isolated'.\textsuperscript{135} The Constabulary Gazette printed an editorial which reflected the frustration of many rank and file members of the force:

Why wear uniform? Why proceed on patrol according to red tape? Why continue to occupy ridiculous little arsenals in sparsely populated districts? Why pursue the old methods, now obviously clumsy and obsolete? The men who shoot the police are very clever, of this there is no room for doubt.\textsuperscript{136}

As 1919 ended the men of the constabulary in Tipperary and throughout Ireland reflected on what had been a harrowing year. War had been declared on the force by the IRA, and fifteen of its members had been killed. Intimidation and ostracisation were rife, and large swathes of the country were left without a visible police presence as the RIC retreated to fortified barracks in larger towns. Ireland was on a knife-edge, and members of the constabulary faced a dangerous and uncertain future. Tipperary was a violent county within a particularly violent province. As noted by Hart, Munster contained a quarter of the population of Ireland, but would consistently account for more than half of attributable police casualties for each year between 1919 and the end of the conflict in 1921. Hart argued that as revolutionary violence tends to be cyclical or reciprocal in nature, timing was a key factor in the outbreak of conflict.\textsuperscript{137}

Geography and topography were also of fundamental importance in the IRA campaign. Military intelligence reports for the sixth division area, headquartered in Limerick and which had responsibility for Tipperary, referred to the vast number of sparsely populated mountain districts and the extensive expanses of uninhabited bogs, which gave a certain immunity for roving guerrilla bands, ‘while the numerous banks, hedges and sunken roads afford nearly every route with an ideal site for an ambush on the

\textsuperscript{136} Fitzpatrick, \textit{Politics and Irish life 1913-1921}, p. 15.
The RIC rather than the military were now firmly in the front line against an increasingly powerful and emboldened IRA.

Inspector General Smyth continued the policy of evacuating isolated RIC barracks and temporary posts which had commenced during the summer of 1919. This measure enabled the augmentation of barracks which remained open, and allowed patrols to be strengthened. Smyth signalled that while this policy was necessary for operational reasons, it had caused apprehension among law-abiding citizens in the abandoned districts, who felt that they were being left without adequate protection. Smyth cited Munster as being particularly afflicted with a ‘spirit of lawlessness’ and also admitted that but for the assistance afforded by the military the RIC would not be strong enough to cope. As argued by Lowe, this revealing admission combined with the evacuation of hundreds of RIC barracks throughout Ireland added physical isolation to the growing estrangement of the police from the population they served. If the RIC could no longer police an area, its very existence was in doubt. This ruthlessness and determination of the IRA exposed the deficiencies of the RIC as a civil police force. District Inspector John Regan who was based in Limerick city found that many of the policemen under his command were only suited from a ‘gendarmerie point of view to deal with a few armed moonlighters … dealing with organised bodies of violent men was completely out of the class of most of them’.

Large expanses of Ireland were now under the effective control of the IRA. The danger of this development was highlighted by the inspector general, who held that if country districts could be constantly traversed at night by strong patrols, bodies of IRA volunteers could be detected and dealt with. With the limited numbers of police however,

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138 David Fitzpatrick (ed.), British intelligence reports in Ireland, 1920-21, the final reports (Cork, 2002), p. 64.
139 RIC Inspector General’s monthly report, December 1919. NAI.CO 904/110.
140 Ibid.
they could do little more than defend their barracks.\footnote{RIC Inspector General’s monthly report, February 1920. NALCO 904/111.} Even this was proving to be increasingly difficult and on 8 November 1919 an order was issued that as many barracks as necessary should be closed to ensure that the remaining barracks had a station party of at least six men each.\footnote{Safety of barracks: RIC circular D.94/1919. NALHO 184/125.} Byrne also informed the government that control of the nationalist movement had passed to the ‘extreme section, who may now be regarded as an oath-bound society scarcely indistinguishable from the Irish Republican Brotherhood’.\footnote{RIC Inspector General’s monthly report, December 1919. NALCO 904/110.}

In January 1920 IRA headquarters devolved authority to local brigade commanders to carry out attacks in their respective areas without prior sanction. Prior to this some volunteers had carried out attacks on their own initiative, such as in the case of the Lorrha ambush, which had resulted in the deaths of volunteers or had caused larger operations to be abandoned. There was also concern within the IRA that a volunteer ‘wishing to make a name for himself, might shoot a friendly member of the enemy forces who was doing useful work for our intelligence people’.\footnote{Statement of James Leahy, BMH/WS 1454, p. 22.}

Events in Dublin during January 1920 had major consequences for the evolving conflict throughout Ireland. On 21 January the IRA struck a major blow against an already weakened G division of the Dublin Metropolitan Police. Several detectives had been killed following their refusal to resign as the IRA had demanded of them in threatening letters. Three of the remaining detectives, David Nelligan, Ned Broy and James McNamara were actually working for Michael Collins, supplying information on the activities of other members of the division. In an effort to restore its effectiveness, RIC Inspector William Redmond from Belfast was appointed as assistant commissioner of the DMP, and assigned the role of reorganizing G Division. He was immediately recognized as a serious threat by Collins who observed ‘if we don’t get that man he will get us, and soon’.\footnote{Piaras Béaslaí, \textit{Michael Collins and the making of a new Ireland} (Dublin, 1926), p. 260.} Redmond was subsequently shot dead, an incident which effectively brought about the end of G division.
as potent adversaries for the IRA. Dublin Castle also offered a reward of £10,000 for information leading to the conviction of offenders in five cases of murder of G division detectives and nine other cases of murder involving constabulary members. A reward of £1,000 was also offered for ‘secret information which would assist the police’.

Early in January 1920 members of the second Tipperary brigade met in Thurles to plan a new series of attacks. There were eighteen police barracks in their brigade area and it was agreed to attack several simultaneously in a show of IRA strength. Such attacks also served to sap the morale of policemen, for it was believed that shots fired at their strongholds ‘had a nuisance value … well worthwhile for the few rounds of ammunition expended’. The date chosen was 18 January, and police barracks at Holycross and Drombane were each attacked by ambush parties, while those at Barnane, Borrisoleigh, Roskeen and Templetohy were shot at by snipers. The attacks had the desired effect and caused such anxiety for the policemen inside the barracks that they ‘spent the whole night recklessly firing their rifles at imaginary attackers’. In the course of the Drombane attack, the IRA captured three policemen who were returning from patrol, holding them hostage for the duration of the attack. They were later released after being disarmed.

Less fortunate was Constable Luke Finnegan, stationed in Thurles. Having been responsible for the distribution of the sugar ration in that police district during the First World War, he had extensive local knowledge and was very familiar with local volunteers. More significant perhaps was the fact that Finnegan was an important witness in the case against the IRA volunteers involved in the Knocklong rescue. This involvement was certainly believed by the county inspector to be the reason why he was singled out to be killed. Commandant Jimmy Leahy believed that Finnegan was ‘very hostile to the Republican movement and was known to have been busy making inquiries into the

148 G.H.Q Ireland, Record, ii.5. Quoted in Townshend, The British campaign in Ireland 1919-1921, p. 42.
149 C.J.C Street, The administration of Ireland, 1920 (London, 1921), p. 73.
activities of IRA members'. Just after the barrack attacks of 18 January, Finnegan told Leahy that the RIC knew who had been involved in those attacks and that they would be ‘rounded up shortly’. Leahy however was also receiving information from a police sergeant in Thurles who was on friendly terms with some local volunteers, and he provided information that Finnegan was compiling a list of IRA suspects for the barrack attacks. It was then decided that Finnegan should be killed. On the night of 20 January Leahy, Jerry Ryan, Michael Small and John McCarthy waited for Finnegan near his house at the Mall, Thurles, armed with revolvers. As Finnegan returned home from the police barracks he was shot several times, just yards from his home. Finnegan was hit three times and badly wounded, but managed to reach home before collapsing in front of his wife. It was reported at the time that he said ‘Mary I am done, what will you and the little babies do?’ Finnegan was treated by a local doctor before being removed to Dublin where he was operated on at Doctor Steevens’ hospital, but subsequently died of his wounds.

At the inquest which took place two days later in Dublin, the jury returned a verdict of ‘wilful murder’ and went on to condemn the killing as a ‘dastardly outrage … one of those wicked murders which are unfortunately disgracing the country at present’. A Thurles woman who had gone to the assistance of Finnegan subsequently received a letter threatening her with death, and a shopkeeper who had supplied goods to the police in the town received similar correspondence. Several days after Finnegan’s death, Sinn Féin supporters in the town awoke to find the letters RIP painted on their houses. This act was later characterized by the local IRA leadership as ‘an act of vandalism, rather than a portent of murderous consequences’. Finnegan’s death led to a much more significant shift in the pattern of conflict when a reprisal was carried out by the military and police, which later

154 Ibid.
156 Much attention focused on this story as blood transfusions were a relatively recent development in Ireland at that time. *Irish Times*, 23 January 1920.
157 *Connacht Tribune*, 31 January 1920.
158 RIC Inspector General’s monthly report, January 1920. NAI CO 904/111.
159 Statement of James Leahy, BMH/WS 1454, p. 27.
became known as the ‘sack of Thurles’. Inhabitants were described as being in a ‘state of utmost terror for several hours’ as shots were fired and windows smashed by the RIC and by soldiers of the Sherwood Foresters regiment, then garrisoned in the town.\footnote{Irish Times, 22 January 1920.} The offices of the Tipperary Star newspaper were damaged by grenades and rifle fire. County Inspector Davin reported these incidents to Dublin Castle, significantly admitting that ‘following the murder of Constable Finnegan the police wrecked fourteen houses in Thurles, the property or residences of prominent Sinn Féiners’.\footnote{RIC Inspector General’s monthly report, January 1920. NALCO 904/111.}

Mark Sturgis, assistant under-secretary at Dublin Castle wrote in his diary that in some cases senior RIC officers had given tacit approval to such attacks, and he noted a meeting with a district inspector in Tipperary whom he referred to as a ‘professional reprisaler’. Sturgis believed that the rationale behind the police reprisal was to have ‘the local blackguards marked – they know it and they know that they will personally pay the price if a policeman is shot’.\footnote{Hopkinson, Michael (ed.), The Last Days of Dublin Castle: The Diaries of Mark Sturgis (Dublin, 1999), p. 28.} Responding to criticism of such retaliations, Lloyd George wrote in the Daily Chronicle that ‘nobody can fail to deplore such occurrences but equally obviously nobody can wonder at them’. He went on to say that if the campaign against the police continued by what he described as ‘murderous clubs, counter clubs may spring up and the lives of prominent Sinn Féiners could become as unsafe as prominent officials’.\footnote{Abbott, Police casualties in Ireland 1919-1922 (Dublin, 2000), p. 51.}

The cycle of reprisal and counter reprisal continued, and as outlined by Townshend, IRA volunteers were branded as thugs and murderers by the government, and in turn the police and military were given the same label by insurgents. While such labels may have been partially merited, they were infinitely more damaging when applied to the forces of law and order.\footnote{Townshend, Charles, Britain’s civil wars, counterinsurgency in the twentieth century (London, 1986), p. 59.}
Movements of troops and police were constantly watched with a view to planning opportunities and locations for ambushes. In March 1920 IRA volunteers planned an attack on a joint patrol of military and RIC in Thurles. It had been noticed by IRA scouts that patrols regularly stopped at the market house in the centre of the town for rest breaks during lengthy periods of night duty. An ambush was planned for the night of 4 March. Numerous narrow laneways adjacent to the market house provided potential cover for the ambush and also as a means of escape. More than twenty-five volunteers were scheduled to take part in the attack, but events elsewhere necessitated the abandonment of the ambush.

While on their way to take part in the attack, Jim Stapleton, Jim Larkin and Pat O’Brien called to Fanning’s public house at the Ragg, Bouladuff near Thurles for a drink. While they were in the bar two uniformed RIC constables from Dovea barracks, John Heanue and John O’Flaherty entered the bar. The volunteers decided on the spur of the moment to attack the policemen and opened fire with their revolvers. There was an exchange of shots during which Flaherty managed to escape, but Heanue was badly wounded and died the following day at the military hospital in Tipperary town. When news of the shooting reached the IRA in Thurles, Commandant Jimmy Leahy knew that ‘it had upset my plans for the attack on the night patrol, and obliged me to abandon it’.

At the inquest into his death some days later, publican Laurence Fanning gave a graphic account of the incident. He stated that three men were at the bar drinking when the two policeman entered and ordered drinks. After a short interval the civilians rushed from their places and the command ‘hands up’ was shouted, but Constable Heanue vaulted the counter and opened fire, which was returned. Flaherty also fired on the IRA men, who following an exchange of shots, retreated. Fanning deposed that eight shots were fired in total, one of which had hit Heanue and caused his fatal injury. Flaherty believed that he had hit one of the IRA men, but this claim is unsubstantiated in later IRA accounts of the

165 Statement of James Leahy, BMH/WS 1454, p. 27.
incident. The Ragg shooting led to a number of raids and reprisals by the police and military in the vicinity. On 30 March local IRA volunteers James McCarthy and Tom Dwyer were shot dead in their homes by masked men, and the IRA claimed that the culprits were policemen in disguise. Dwyer had been questioned by the RIC following the Ragg shooting as he had been seen talking to the three men in the pub prior to the incident. Following these threats Dwyer was warned by his comrades to go on the run, but he had refused to do so. Following the two deaths, Tipperary volunteer Edward McGrath was sent to Cork city to try and identify a specific policeman whom the IRA believed had been involved in the shooting of Dwyer. He spent several days watching police patrols at their assembly point, but when he did not see the policeman he was looking for he returned to Tipperary.  

As observed by Augusteijn, when reprisals began, it was initially well known Sinn Féin members and their supporters who were targeted. As the conflict intensified however and the military and police began to respond in kind, attacks became more indiscriminate. Soldiers and policemen increasingly found it difficult to distinguish friend from foe and reacted by treating the population in general with hostility. This in turn had the effect of turning civilians against them, thereby leading to a cyclical progression of attack and reprisal.

Following the evacuation of smaller RIC stations and police huts in the vicinity of Toomevara, the RIC barracks in the village was the only police station that remained in the area. Commandant Séan Gaynor believed that policemen from Toomevara barracks had been making themselves ‘very obnoxious in the eyes of the local volunteers and were going out of their way to provoke trouble’. Volunteer John Hackett recalled in later life that most of the policemen, in particular Sergeant Begley and Constables Scanlon and Healy,
were ‘viciously antagonistic towards the volunteers’.\textsuperscript{171} The acrimony towards these three particular RIC men arose from incidents during which it was alleged that they had overstepped their authority by assaulting local militants, in particular Jack Harty who had received baton injuries in September 1919.\textsuperscript{172} A request to the IRA brigade council for permission to shoot the policemen linked with the alleged assault on Harty was refused. However, brigade adjutant Séan Gaynor told the Toomevara volunteers that the refusal should not be taken too seriously. Revealing the tenuous control exercised by GHQ over individual companies, he asserted that most prominent headquarters staff would rather see attacks occurring than having them abandoned for want of official approval and directed them to proceed with an ambush.\textsuperscript{173}

During the early weeks of March 1920, a party of volunteers lay in wait each night on roads out of Toomevara village with the intention of ambushing a police patrol if the opportunity arose. It was then noticed that the police had ceased night patrols as they had become too dangerous. However, they felt able to leave their barracks to attend Lenten evening devotions. Thus, a plan was formulated to attack them as they left the church. Second brigade quartermaster Paddy Whelehan along with John Hackett, both armed with revolvers and wearing disguises waited outside the church until the devotions ended at 7.30 p.m. on the evening of 16 March. Constables Charles Healy and James Rocke were amongst the congregation and having left the church, were followed towards their barracks by Whelehan and Hackett who, each targeting a man opened fire. Both policemen were badly wounded in the initial fusillade, and Healy was shot three more times as he lay injured on the roadway. The volunteers fired extra shots to ‘scatter the crowd and prevent themselves from being recognised’ and then made good their escape.\textsuperscript{174} Unintentionally, they also injured fellow IRA volunteer Con Treacy, who had been attending the same

\textsuperscript{171} Statement of John Hackett, BMH/WS 1388, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{174} Statement of John Hackett, BMH/WS 1388, p. 8.
devotions. Despite his injuries Healy managed to get back to his barracks, but collapsed in the doorway. He told colleagues that Rocke had been also been shot, and that he forgave the man who shot him. When Sergeant Begley arrived to the spot where Rocke lay mortally wounded, he found him conscious and continuously saying ‘may God forgive them, because I do’. Rocke was also brought to the barracks where two local doctors attended and did everything possible to save them. Despite their efforts Rocke died at 11.15 p.m. that evening and Healy died the following day in a military hospital in Limerick.

Within an hour of the shootings police and military reinforcements arrived from other parts of the county and widespread raids and searches began. Hackett’s house and outbuildings were among those searched and buildings were set ablaze when he could not be located. The village hall in Toomevara was also targeted and its windows and furniture smashed. At an inquest which took place the next morning on Saint Patrick’s Day, the coroner remarked that it is was ‘sad thing that on the day we all wear the shamrock that we should be here to enquire into the death by violence of fine young Irishmen’.

The fact that two policemen were shot dead as they left a church service caused much controversy and was widely condemned at the time. In his homily during Saint Patrick’s Day mass Toomevara curate Father Dooley, who had attended the scene and administered the last rites to both men spoke of seeing an ‘innocent young man (Rocke) with his head in the gutter, his blood dyeing the sacred sod from where in happier times the prayers of our holy monks arose to heaven’. He went on to condemn the murderers who had branded with their bloody hands the stigma of this crime on the brilliant escutcheon of the parish. In common with other priests who had previously condemned the killing of policemen, he also apportioned blame on the government, stating that

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177 *Connacht Tribune*, 20 March 1920.
‘oppression drives the people to desperate methods of defence and revenge.’ 179 Three days after the killings Hackett and eleven other IRA volunteers, including Whelehan, were arrested and following periods in jails in Limerick and Belfast, were sent to Wormwood Scrubs prison in London. Along with many other Irish prisoners who were being interned without trial, they went on hunger strike which lasted for twenty-one days before they were released. Following their discharge from prison they returned home to a hero’s welcome and rejoined their IRA units. 180

As argued by Lowe, the government’s response to violence, which was to increase the militarization of the RIC, helped to advance the Republican agenda by raising the overall level of violence and discrediting what remained of the public image of the RIC as a civil police force. 181 Reinforcements were urgently needed in Ireland as the conflict escalated but former Inspector General Byrne had resisted a proposal to recruit former soldiers to the RIC rather than deploy additional troops. He felt that such a force could not be controlled by the constabulary code of discipline. 182 Inspector General Smyth however, was a Belfast protestant whose ‘unionist sympathies reflected more closely those of colonial office minister, Walter Long’. 183 Recruitment to the new police forces began in earnest following Smyth’s appointment. As argued by Townshend, the old RIC had passed and was already alienated from the community, now it was to be made truly alien by an influx of foreign recruits. 184

182 RIC Inspector General to Under-Secretary, 4 October 1919, quoted in; Townshend, The British campaign in Ireland, p. 30.
184 Townshend, The British campaign in Ireland, p. 345.
Chapter three

The escalation of violence, March 1920 - December 1920

‘Anyone passing a police barrack with its locked doors and seeing the constables looking out through barred windows will at once realise that no body of men could preserve its morale under such conditions’. 1

The campaign of intimidation against potential applicants ensured that many Irishmen were reluctant to join the police, and in consequence what has been categorised by Townshend as the move to non-Irish recruitment resulted in the creation of two separate and discrete organisations, the Royal Irish Constabulary Special Reserve, colloquially known as the ‘Black and Tans’ and the Auxiliary Division, Royal Irish Constabulary. While Black and Tans were part of the regular RIC, Auxiliary Division recruits, known as ‘temporary cadets’ were primarily former military officers and the division operated in companies of one hundred with their own command structures, acting independently of local police and the military. These measures would have a decisive impact on relations between the police and the people in Ireland, especially in counties such as Tipperary, Cork and Dublin where violence was prevalent.

The vacated mansion of Sir John Carden at Templemore Abbey, was occupied by B Company of the division, the only company in Tipperary, which combined with G Company from Killaloe in county Clare for operations in north Tipperary. South Tipperary was the responsibility of auxiliary companies based in Kilkenny and north Cork. A temporary shortage of complete RIC uniforms led to the new arrivals being temporarily issued with a mixture of army and police clothing, which resulted in the application of the epithet Black and Tans. The appearance of these new policemen generated much interest, with the *Tipperary Star* reporting that police attired in ‘khaki uniform, but wearing police

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caps arrived at Nenagh railway station... their mixed uniform attracted a considerable amount of attention as they marched to barracks'.

The journal of the volunteers An t-Óglach was more outspoken, denouncing the new arrivals as ‘physically and morally degenerate Englishmen’ and asserted that when the IRA came to deal with these men it would ‘make short work of them’. While IRA propaganda portrayed the Black and Tans and Auxiliaries as reprobates, categorising them among other things as the ‘sweepings of English gaols’, many were in fact decorated veterans of the 1914-1918 war. Of the 2,200 men that served in the Auxiliary Division, 633 held gallantry awards including three with the Victoria Cross, 22 with the Distinguished Service Order, 135 with the Military Cross, and twenty three with the Distinguished Conduct Medal. The new reinforcements also had their own outlet for propaganda in the form of the Weekly Summary newspaper, the first issue of which appeared on 5 May 1920. It carried incitements against Sinn Féin members, describing them as murderers and exhorting its readers to make Ireland safe for ‘the law-abiding, and an appropriate hell for those whose method is murder’. It also questioned if the conflict in Ireland was considered a war, would it be less war to shoot in his bed the man suspected of having caused the policeman to be shot? Referring to the arrest of Sinn Féin supporters in Scotland for the possession of arms and ammunition, and the increasing sympathy for the movement internationally, it blamed the worsening situation in Ireland on an ‘outbreak of Shinnerea’.

In parallel with the deployment of the new police reinforcements in Ireland, General Sir Neville Macready, former commissioner of the London Metropolitan Police, was appointed commander-in-chief of all crown forces in Ireland. The press reported that he had been given practically a free hand by the cabinet to suppress the rebellion by

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3 An t-Óglach, 1 May 1920.
4 Weekly Summary, 27 August 1920.
5 Reference made in The Weekly Summary of 7 January 1921 to the arrest of Sinn Féin supporters in Scotland for the possession of arms and ammunition, and the increasing sympathy for the movement internationally.
whatever means may be requisite.6 Birkenhead, the Lord Chancellor stated that special and wholly exceptional steps had been taken to reinforce the police in Ireland.7 Brigadier General Frank Crozier, commander of the Auxiliary Division was informed that the new policing organisations were being ‘camouflaged’ because money could be obtained for police operations, but not for military ones.8

The Black and Tans and Auxiliary Division soon acquired reputations for brutality and indiscipline. William O’Brien, a former member of parliament described them as ‘desperadoes of the vilest type’.9 Sir Christopher Lynch-Robinson, last of the Irish resident magistrates on seeing Black and Tans in person for the first time likened them to a ‘bunch of gorillas with India-rubber looking faces, large ears, big fat lips, and the blank uncanny expression of the cretin’.10 In contrast, Sir Ormonde Winter, chief of intelligence at Dublin Castle emphasised that most of the candidates had been members of the military, and the conduct of each one had been carefully scrutinised before recruitment.11 To many men already serving in the RIC the new arrivals were a ‘revelation, a plague and a Godsend … they brought help but they frightened even those that they had come to help’.12 One policeman in Templemore later recalled that the newcomers had neither religion or morals, and that they used foul language, had the ‘old soldier’s talent for dodging and scrounging, spoke in strange accents, called the Irish natives, associated with low company, stole from one another, sneered at the customs of the country, drank to excess and put sugar on their porridge’.13 Things were getting progressively worse for the rank and file members of the

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7 Macardle, The Irish Republic, p. 341.
10 Holt, Protest in arms, p. 201.
12 Shea, Voices and the sound of drums, an Irish autobiography (Belfast, 1981), p. 45.
13 Ibid.

On 7 April a joint operation of the north and mid Tipperary IRA brigades was mounted to ambush an RIC party that was expected to cycle from Rearcross barracks to the magistrates’ court in the town of Newport. The large IRA ambush party which included Paddy Ryan (Lacken), Jim Stapleton, Jerry Ryan and Michael Small believed that the policemen would pass Lackamore wood on their way to court, so they concealed themselves in the forest. At about 10.30 am three policemen cycled along the isolated and bleak bog road. Constable William Finn and Daniel McCarthy cycled abreast and Constable Thomas Byrne followed closely behind. Byrne later gave evidence that as the policemen passed by the wood, a volley of about twenty shots was fired at them.\footnote{Statement of Constable Thomas Byrne, 9 April 1920, Outrages against the police reports, April 1920, NALCO904/148.} Byrne was hit, receiving a flesh wound in the upper arm but managed to take cover behind a fence. He saw Finn and McCarthy lying on the roadway, and heard McCarthy pleading ‘oh stop, stop’ before more shots rang out. He subsequently reported that he recognized local man John Caplis as one of the attackers. Byrne emptied his revolver into the woods from where he could see muzzle flashes, and after reloading ran from the scene while he heard ‘the whizz of bullets’ passing very close by.\footnote{Ibid.} He again returned fire and managed to escape.

As he made his way across the countryside back towards his barracks, he passed two houses where he asked residents for a drink of water, and some cloth to bandage his wound. He was refused assistance, and told in no uncertain terms to leave.\footnote{\textit{Nenagh Guardian}, 15 May 1920.} Byrne eventually made his way to Lackamore national school where he managed to obtain a bicycle and eventually reach the relative safety of Newport RIC barracks. The IRA volunteers removed weapons and ammunition from the bodies of the dead policemen.
before leaving the scene, using knives to cut revolvers from their lanyards. Later that day a large RIC party under Head Constable Traenor, accompanied by a doctor and priest went to Lackamore to recover the bodies. The police fired numerous shots into the woods to ensure that the IRA had left the scene, fearing that they were being lured into another ambush. The bodies of the two dead policemen were recovered and examined, and it was found that both had been badly disfigured with shotgun blasts. Graphic evidence was later given at the inquest that most of Constable Finn’s head had been removed with a blast, and Constable McCarthy had received multiple gunshot wounds. Treanor reported that he had made several arrests including that of John Caplis, who Constable Byrne alleged had been involved in the attack. His brother Thomas Caplis was also arrested, along with the manager of Rearcross creamery, Timothy Kennedy and Thomas Ryan, who lived beside the ambush site. Treanor described the arrested men as the ‘worst kind of Sinn Féiners’, and singled out Kennedy in particular ‘as the principal ringleader of every local villainy’.

Considerable vitriol existed between the protagonists and Treanor outlined in his report to Dublin Castle that the prisoners were taken to the scene and, having been made to kneel down in the blood of the dead policemen, were then forced to kiss the road and pray for the souls of the dead policemen before being taken to Limerick and placed in military custody. During the inquest the coroner stated that it would be entirely futile to disguise the fact that they met their deaths in furtherance of the campaign of violence waged against the police. The coroner went on to say that while he yielded to no man in his condemnation of the government and their military tyranny, he expressed disappointment that the county of Tipperary should be ‘stained with the blood of young

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18 Statement of Patrick Cash, BMH/WS 1372, p. 5.
19 Outrages against the police reports, April 1920, NALCO904/148.
20 Ibid.
21 Irish Independent, 11 May 1920.
Irishmen’. The jury returned verdicts that the late constables Finn and McCarthy had died from gunshots inflicted by some person or persons unknown.\textsuperscript{22}

Plate 3.1: Constable Daniel McCarthy, RIC Rearcross

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The escalating campaign of boycotting and intimidation also affected those who had ancillary associations with the force. On 29 April Bridget O’Toole, the barrack servant at Rearcross received a threatening letter warning her that unless she resigned she would suffer the ‘extreme penalty’. The letter ended with the sinister remark, ‘remember Finn’s eyes were missing, so mind yours’, a reference to the severe injuries inflicted on Constable Finn.\textsuperscript{23} In another case a young woman in Newport who had ignored IRA warnings to stop keeping company with policemen had her head forcibly shaved as a public humiliation, a practice known as ‘bobbing’.\textsuperscript{24}

The death of Sergeant Patrick McDonnell on 10 May 1920 can be traced back to an incident which took place in March 1920 when the IRA carried out a diversionary attack on a temporary RIC hut at Clonoulty, near Thurles. A party of six volunteers fired at the hut for over two hours under cover of darkness, with a Sergeant Hamilton being wounded in

\textsuperscript{22} Irish Independent, 11 May 1920.
\textsuperscript{23} Outrages against the police reports, April 1920. NALCO904/148.
\textsuperscript{24} Statement of James Hewitt, BMH/WS 1465, p. 8.
the process. The IRA had anticipated that substantial police reinforcements from Thurles would travel towards Clonoulty to relieve the garrison and made elaborate preparations to ambush them. The main IRA group of twenty-six men dug a trench across the road between Clonoulty and Thurles and armed with revolvers shotguns and grenades, waited to ambush the reinforcements. As the telegraph wires had been cut, policemen inside the hut sent up Verey lights to summon assistance, but none was forthcoming. By this stage of the conflict the RIC were guarded about responding to such incidents as many policemen had been killed after being lured into ambushes.

With their elaborate plans for an ambush thwarted, the IRA planned a reprisal and on 10 May Constable McDonnell, who had led the defence of the police hut during the March attack, was shot and killed while on patrol with Constable Hayes near the railway station at Goold’s Cross. McDonnell was stationed in Cavan but had been temporarily transferred to Tipperary when the situation there deteriorated. His tour of duty in Clonoulty should have ended on 5 May but his return to Cavan had been delayed because of the injuries received by Hamilton. During the inquest, Hayes gave evidence that he and McDonnell had been shot at without warning by four unmasked men armed with rifles and revolvers. He stated that he recognized two of the men as locals John ‘Master’ Ryan, who was armed with a rifle and Ned Reilly who carried a revolver. Hayes managed to flee the scene, firing shots at the IRA as he escaped.\textsuperscript{25} He concluded his deposition by saying that he did not know of anyone who had animus towards the sergeant, describing him as ‘the quietest man I ever met’.\textsuperscript{26} The jury returned a verdict of willful murder. Descriptions of Ryan and Reilly were subsequently circulated in the \textit{Hue and Cry}, or police gazette, and while they were not captured by the RIC, their family homes were subsequently burnt down in reprisal attacks.

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Nenagh Guardian}, 15 May 1920.
\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Freemans Journal}, 12 May 1920.
Plate 3.2: Notice from the *Police Gazette or Hue and Cry* seeking information on the whereabouts of suspects John Ryan and Edmond Reilly, 11 May 1920.

Source: Garda Síochána Museum and Archives

On 4 June 1920 IRA headquarters issued a boycott order to all brigades and volunteer companies. An informal boycott against the RIC had been in place for the preceding two years. General order six now stipulated that there should be no ‘intercourse with the RIC’ and that volunteers must support the boycott of this force as ordered by the Dáil. Persons who associated with the RIC were now to be subject to the same boycott, and any association with the force by them publicised.\(^{27}\) All IRA members were required to comply with the boycott under threat of being subjected to the same treatment themselves in a ‘very obvious and public manner’.\(^{28}\) General order six placed considerable pressure upon RIC members and their families and also the IRA volunteers who were required to enforce it. This measure followed a decision of the Dáil of 10 April 1920 which formally authorised a boycott of the police. This measure particularly affected long-serving members of the RIC. As native Irishmen with families and friends living in the country, they were particularly vulnerable to intimidation and boycotting.\(^{29}\)

\(^{27}\) Volunteer Circular General Order six (1920), Terence MacSwiney 1920 files. Cork Archives PR4/1/(File 1).

\(^{28}\) Ibid.

Each volunteer company was expected to complete the questionnaire on a monthly basis and submit it to GHQ, and the RIC came into possession of a copy when a volunteer in Queens County (now County Laois) was arrested. The document contained instructions relating to the compilation of statistics on the police boycott, with returns to be submitted under the following eight categories:\footnote{30}{Court martial documents in the case of R v William Tynan. Quoted in; C.J.C Street, *The administration of Ireland, 1920* (London, 1921), p. 130.}

1. How has the boycott been declared in your area?

2. What are the visible results of the boycott order?

3. Does the general population speak to members of the RIC?

4. Has a list been compiled of persons who are friendly with the police?

5. Are police forced to commandeer supplies?

6. Have merchants been ordered to refuse supplies?

7. What steps have been taken to deal with persons who disobey the boycott order?

8. Have you any suggestions to offer as a means of intensifying the boycott in your area?

Lowe argues that the boycott was a potent expression of the isolation of policemen from their communities and added to their beleaguered posture in response to real threats and dangers. The inspector general wondered how much longer the force could withstand such strain.\footnote{31}{Street, *The administration of Ireland*, p. 276.} So too did Limerick based District Inspector John Regan who believed that the constabulary was now on the defensive and that the momentum of the IRA was
As police morale deteriorated the number of resignations increased, from an average of eleven each week in January 1920 to fifty-two weekly by June 1920. 

Reasons given for resignations from the force varied considerably with some stating that left because of intimidation or fear, while others responded to pressure from family or friends. Other policemen cited ethical or moral reasons for their resignations, such as Constable Daniel Crowley of Clogheen barracks, near Clonmel. Crowley subsequently gave evidence to an American Commission which was investigating allegations of atrocities taking place in Ireland. Crowley claimed that on one occasion while out on patrol with Black and Tans in an armoured Crossley tender, they received orders that houses of prominent Sinn Féin members were to be machine-gunned. He further stated that the patrol carried 120 cans of petrol and 120 hand grenades to be used for the burning of houses and other property in reprisal attacks.

RIC morale suffered another serious setback when a transport embargo commenced in June 1920. Stevedores issued a declaration that they would not handle goods arriving at Irish ports which they regarded as ‘war material’. The dockworkers received support in their stance from the Irish Transport and General Workers Union which led to a railway blockade. The actions of the ITGWU were supported by the English National Union of Railwaymen, and James Henry Thomas, Labour MP and general secretary of the NUR was the subject of much criticism in the English press for endorsing the embargo against the RIC and military. The police were heavily dependent on rail

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34 The Interim Report of The American Commission on Conditions in Ireland contains oral and written evidence gathered from witnesses in Ireland during 1920-21. Evidence collected by the commission was presented to its parent body, the American Committee of 150 on Ireland, and published under the title ‘Evidence on Conditions in Ireland’. It was published ‘without colour or comment’ in order to allow the public to judge what events were taking place in Ireland, but had an acknowledged nationalist bias due to the refusal of the authorities to cooperate with the commission. *Interim Report of The American Commission on Conditions in Ireland* (Washington, 1921).
34 RIC Inspector General’s monthly report, June 1920. NALCO 904/112.
transport for the supply of materials and reinforcements, and the blockade caused serious
disruption. On 21 June, for example, a party of policemen boarded a train at Cloughjordan
to travel to Templemore. The driver and guard refused to proceed, citing that they had
been directed to do so by their union. The police were ordered to remain on the train so as
to break the blockade, but the train remained static at the station for ten days, thus
blocking all rail traffic between Roscrea and Limerick.
Plate 3.3: Illustration from *Punch* magazine 30 June 1920, ‘the blameless accomplice’, criticising J.H Thomas of the National Union of Railwaymen for supporting the RIC boycott.

**THE BLAMELESS ACCOMPLICE.**

I**rish Railwayman** (to Sinn Fein Assassin), “YOU’LL BE ALL RIGHT, DETESTING MURDER, AS MR. THOMAS SAYS I DO, I’VE TAKEN CARE THAT THAT FELLOW SHOULD HAVE NO AMMUNITION.”

["The Irish members of the N.U.R. expressed publicly their feeling of disgust at murder and outrage."—Mr. J. H. Thomas.

Source: Reproduced with the permission of *Punch* magazine archives, London, © Punch magazine.
In July 1920 intelligence was received by the IRA in south Tipperary that a party of policemen regularly travelled from their barracks at Ballinure to the nearby town of Cashel to collect pay for distribution. An ambush was planned for the morning of 2 July when a group of six volunteers concealed themselves in a meadow surrounded by a wall at Newtown and lay in wait. Shortly afterwards a patrol consisting of six RIC constables on bicycles approached. Shots were fired at the patrol, killing Sergeant Robert Tobin and wounding Constable Brady, but fire was returned by other policemen who had managed to find cover. Brady managed to cycle away from the scene, but the other four policemen surrendered. They were relieved of their arms ammunition and bicycles and then allowed to leave the scene.\(^{37}\) An IRA volunteer was ordered to follow Brady and shoot him, but when Brady reached a nearby public house he collapsed outside and was surrounded by a large crowd so the order was not carried out.\(^{38}\) One of those who had been captured at the scene was a Black and Tan named Ross, described in the press as a ‘Scotsman dressed in khaki’.\(^{39}\) Ross later gave evidence at the inquest and deposed that the IRA volunteers had been masked and armed with an assortment of rifles and revolvers, some of which appeared to have been captured RIC weapons. Several of the volunteers involved in the ambush went on the run immediately afterwards but Michael Burke, who had been involved was arrested in August 1920 and later tried by court martial for his involvement in the ambush.

Following this incident, which subsequently became known as the Newtown ambush, the county inspector for Tipperary reported his belief to Dublin Castle that the renewed and more aggressive IRA campaign in the county arose from the fact that volunteers in the area had received orders to display more energy from their headquarters.\(^{40}\) He also noted that boycotting of the RIC in Tipperary was intensifying. In Templemore for

\(^{37}\) Statement of Séan Walsh, BMH/WS 1363, p. 4.
\(^{38}\) Statement of Paul Mulcahy, BMH/WS 1363, p. 10.
\(^{39}\) Irish Independent, 5 July 1920.
\(^{40}\) RIC Inspector General’s monthly report, July 1920, NAI.CO 904/112.
example, barrack servant Mrs Matthews received a letter ordering her to stop working for
the police, and if she failed to do so, she and her family would suffer the consequences.\textsuperscript{41}
Shopkeepers in Thurles were also warned against supplying or having any contact with the
RIC, otherwise they too would be subject to the same boycott.\textsuperscript{42} Policemen responded to
boycott by commandeering whatever supplies they needed, but the county inspector
believed that such tactics combined with the on-going attacks were having a ‘deplorable
effect on government prestige’.\textsuperscript{43} By the summer of 1920 a pattern had been established
whereby isolated rural RIC barracks had been evacuated and policemen withdrawn to
larger garrisons which were heavily fortified and easier to defend. Thus, such abandoned
and unguarded barracks were usually destroyed by the IRA. To locals and the authorities
alike, this was a potent illustration of the effectiveness of the IRA guerrilla campaign. As
Michael Hopkinson has outlined, abandoned or destroyed barracks were potent and visible
symbols of the collapse of British administration in Ireland.\textsuperscript{44} By July 1920, 343 RIC
barracks had been burned. Other buildings associated with the government such as
courthouses and revenue offices were also targeted.\textsuperscript{45}

As the police withdrew to larger garrisons they recruited men specifically to defend
their barracks. Thirty-three former army officers who had served in the Royal Engineers
and other specialised regiments were recruited, and given the role and title of ‘defence of
barrack sergeants’. They were not used for regular policing duties but worked exclusively
on defensive measures. Barracks were heavily fortified and surrounded with barbed wire,
sandbags, booby traps, and steel shutters and doors installed. While such measures
provided a measure of safety to individual policemen, it made their quarters claustrophobic
and cramped. To venture outside risked death but to remain inside brought the threat of

\textsuperscript{41} Outrages against the police reports, July 1920, NAI.CO904/148.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{43} Outrages against the police reports, July 1920, NAI.CO904/148.
\textsuperscript{44} Hopkinson, \textit{The Irish war of independence}, p. 119.
\textsuperscript{45} C.S.I. Weekly Surveys (1920) Cabinet Irish Situation Ctee. papers II (Memoranda), CAB.27 108.
Quoted in Townshend, \textit{The British campaign in Ireland}, p. 214.
sieve or other forms of attack. Constabulary reports for the summer of 1920 highlight significant levels of demoralization because of the boycott, with some policemen even openly calling for the RIC to be disbanded. The inspector general reported that conditions were irksome, depressing, and hazardous, a strain which few bodies of men, however highly disciplined, could be expected to bear.\textsuperscript{46} He noted the sharp decline in living conditions, the ever present danger, and being subjected to the appeals of parents and their families to leave the force … ‘they could do little more than defend themselves and their barracks. Their lives were a misery’.\textsuperscript{47}

A series of large scale attacks on fortified barracks throughout Ireland occurred during the first half of 1920. The first successful assault took place at Ballylanders, county Limerick on 27 April, when thirty IRA volunteers were involved. The house next door to the police station was entered, and used to gain access the roof of the barracks. Holes were then made in the roof allowing petrol bombs to be thrown inside. With the police station ablaze, the garrison would be forced to surrender or perish. This tactic worked well at Ballylanders and the IRA party was able to capture all of the police weapons and ammunition when the occupants surrendered. That same day, a similar attack took place at nearby Kilmallock during which neighbouring IRA brigades combined forces. Two policemen were killed before the garrison finally surrendered. The first large-scale attack in Tipperary took place on 26 June in the town of Borrisokane. Elaborate preparations were made in advance which included the cutting of telephone wires and trenching of all roads leading into the town. Over 200 volunteers took part in an engagement over the course of several hours, but they were forced to withdraw when two of them were wounded by the police, one receiving fatal injuries.

Internecine feuding within local IRA units was widespread, and some units refused to comply with standing orders from GHQ not to operate within the geographical area of

\textsuperscript{46}RIC Inspector General’s monthly reports, July and August 1920, NALCO 904/112.

\textsuperscript{47}Ibid.
another. As a result, headquarters was forced to send full-time organisers to the provinces to professionalize local brigades and battalions. Senior IRA commanders insisted that all plans for attacks on the police or military must first be submitted for approval. This was prompted by the loss of life of some volunteers who had engaged in what were described as ‘half-hearted attempts on posts without proper planning’.\textsuperscript{48}

Thus Ernie O’Malley was sent by GHQ to Tipperary to plan and lead an attack on Rearcross RIC barracks. On the night of 12 July 1920, he was in command of over fifty volunteers including two of the ‘big four’ of the Tipperary IRA, Dan Breen and Séan Treacy. As had happened both at Ballylanders and Kilmallock, the adjacent residence was entered and its occupants roused from their sleep. Commandant Paddy Kinnane later recounted that when the residents were told of the intentions of the IRA, they accepted the position ‘cheerfully enough’.\textsuperscript{49} Some of the raiding party including O’Malley and Treacy went to the roof of the barracks, removed slates and poured paraffin through the hole. When policemen came to investigate, shots were fired at them, forcing them to retreat. Other volunteers opened fire to prevent the RIC from venturing outside. Despite this fusillade the barrack door opened and John Stokes, defence of barrack sergeant emerged, returning fire at the IRA. This action caused one volunteer to remark to his colleagues that the policeman was a ‘daring devil’. Volunteer Paddy O’Dwyer later recalled that as Stokes returned fire, he collapsed and was dragged back inside by another policeman.\textsuperscript{50} Stokes died shortly after. His bravery and daring was remarked upon by his opponents who later

\textsuperscript{48} Ernie O’ Malley, \textit{Raids and Rallies} (Dublin, 1982), p. 42. O’ Malley (1897-1957) was born in Mayo and took part in the 1916 Rising while a medical student in Dublin. From 1918 onwards he worked as a full-time organiser for the IRA and commanded their second southern division. Strongly anti-treaty, he was one of the last prisoners to be released in 1924. His literary abilities set him apart from other IRA veterans who wrote accounts of the period. On Another Man’s Wound, his account of the Anglo-Irish war was published in 1936, \textit{The Singing Flame}, dealing with the Civil War, was published in 1978, and \textit{Raids and Rallies} published was in 1982. See Padraic O’ Farrell, \textit{Who’s who in the Irish War of Independence 1916-1921} (Dublin, 1980), p. 128.


\textsuperscript{50} Statement of Patrick H. O’Dwyer, BMH/WS 1432, p. 22.
described him as ‘courageous to the point of recklessness’. Despite the best efforts of the IRA, the fire which they started did not take hold. Each time the garrison was called on to surrender, the policemen inside responded with volleys of shots. Several members of the raiding party went to the rear yard of the barracks and threw bottles of paraffin on the roof in an attempt to reignite the blaze, but were injured when grenades were thrown from inside. Shrapnel injuries were received by several IRA volunteers including Breen, Treacy and O’Malley, who received the most serious injuries. Realising that the police were not going to surrender, the IRA withdrew after a siege which had lasted for several hours. A twenty-one year old single man from County Down, Stokes had only one month’s service in the RIC, having formerly been an army officer.

Closing his monthly report for July the RIC inspector general stated that both ridings of Tipperary continued to be in a disturbed state, and that the efforts of Sinn Féin were almost wholly directed against the police in the endeavour to make life unbearable for them and break down the force. He described Munster as by far the worst of all provinces, with fifteen members of the force murdered during July alone. He referred to threats, boycotting notices and the necessity for policemen to commandeer food. He also stated that the recent establishment of so-called ‘Republican Police’ and Sinn Féin courts had a serious effect on in Tipperary and persons who were ‘hitherto loyal were obliged to have recourse to the illegal tribunals’. He cautioned that if these courts were allowed to continue with impunity the ordinary law of the realm would be set at nought.

William Harding Wilson, a native of Ballycumber, Kings County, joined the Royal Irish Constabulary in 1882 as a constable, and advanced through the ranks, arriving in Templemore in 1912 as the district inspector. At one stage in his career he had been assigned to the office of the inspector general at RIC headquarters in Dublin Castle. These

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51 Desmond Ryan, Séan Treacy and the 3rd Tipperary Brigade (Tralee, 1945), p. 139.
53 RIC Inspector General’s monthly report, July 1920, NAI.CO 904/112.
54 Ibid.
duties involved him in what were later categorised as ‘a good deal of political cases’. Wilson had been in charge of Templemore police district during the period 1913 to 1919 when overt displays of defiance and militancy had escalated. Consequently, he had an intimate knowledge of the volunteer movement and its members in north Tipperary. A contemporary of District Inspector Hunt in Thurles, both men were deeply resented by the local IRA and were targeted for assassination. Following the killing of Hunt in Thurles on 23 June 1920, the assassination of Wilson took priority for local IRA commandant James Leahy, who later described him as ‘being on our black books because of his ruthless conduct in the treatment of Republicans’. The death of volunteer Captain Michael Small from Borrisoleigh on the night of 3 July 1920 sealed Wilson’s fate.

An IRA party lay in wait for several hours to attack Shevry RIC barracks, but a military convoy arrived unexpectedly from Templemore to reinforce the barracks, forcing the attack to be abandoned. Small asked Leahy for permission to return to his home in Upperchurch to attend confession, but as he was travelling across open fields he was observed by a joint RIC and military patrol which opened fire, wounding him fatally. His body was removed to the morgue in Richmond Barracks in Templemore, and during the inquest medical evidence was given that that Small had several gunshot wounds. Commandant Jimmy Leahy attended the inquest and believed from the evidence given that Wilson, who had been in command of the RIC and military patrol had ordered the firing to begin and was therefore directly responsible for the death of Small. Leahy discussed the issue with other brigade officers and the decision was taken to shoot Wilson ‘at any cost and as soon as possible’.

On Monday 16 August 1920 a party consisting of Commandant Paddy Kinnane, Leahy, and volunteers ‘big’ Jim Stapleton, John Fahy and Jack Ryan travelled to Templemore with the intention of killing Wilson. They waited for several hours in various

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56 Tipperary Star, 21 August 1920.
57 Statement of James Leahy, BMH/WS.1454, p. 35.
58 Ibid.
locations near the RIC barracks on the main street. Eventually, they saw Wilson leaving the barracks to walk home. Stapleton, who had also been responsible for the killing of District Inspector Hunt, shot Wilson in the head only yards from the police station, killing him instantly.\(^{59}\) That night ‘wild scenes were witnessed’ as reprisals took place in Templemore and surrounding areas. The *Tipperary Star* reported that soldiers joined in the outbreak … volleys were fired along the streets, several houses were attacked, and one shop was looted.\(^{60}\) The town hall in Templemore was burned to the ground, and the creameries at Castlerea, Loughmore and Killea destroyed.\(^{61}\) Creameries were a popular target for reprisals by the police and military as their destruction caused disproportionate hardship for a rural population primarily dependent on agriculture. Over one hundred Irish creameries were destroyed between 1919 and 1922.\(^{62}\)

The burning of Templemore town hall resulted in the deaths of two members of the Northamptonshire Regiment, Captain Sidney Beattie and Lance Corporal H.J Fuggle. The regimental diary noted that Beattie ‘died of accidental injuries’ and that Fuggle had ‘accidentally burnt to death’.\(^{63}\) The *Irish Times* reported that Beattie had entered the burning town hall to rescue a trapped civilian with complete disregard for his own safety.\(^{64}\) The *Northampton Daily Chronicle* reported that Beattie had died heroically ‘attempting to rescue a man from a fire’.\(^{65}\) The *Tipperary Star* gave a different version of events however, and reported that the military had taken petrol at gunpoint from Moynan’s garage and when the town hall was set ablaze a cheer was given and a voice shouted ‘Sinn Féiners all lie down’.\(^{66}\)

The IRA volunteers responsible for killing Wilson saw the town hall in Templemore ablaze from their hiding place on the slopes of the Devil’s Bit Mountain near the village of

\(^{59}\) Statement of James Leahy, BMH/WS.1454, p. 35.

\(^{60}\) *Tipperary Star*, 21 August 1920.

\(^{61}\) RIC county Inspectors report, Tipperary North Riding, January 1920, NAI.CO 904/112.

\(^{62}\) Hopkinson, *The Irish war of independence*, p. 80.

\(^{63}\) Operational diary of the Northamptonshire Regiment in Ireland, 1919-23.

\(^{64}\) *Irish Times*, 12 November 1920.

\(^{65}\) *Northampton Daily Chronicle*, 21 August 1920.

\(^{66}\) *Tipperary Star*, 21 August 1920.
The following day volunteer James Duggan viewed Templemore and later described the ‘gruesome spectacle’ of the town hall in ashes and the streets strewn with broken glass and debris.  

Plate 3.4: Ruins of Templemore Town Hall, 17 August 1920

Reporting the death of Wilson to Dublin Castle, County Inspector Dunlop stated his belief that it was his ‘fearless manner in dealing with Sinn Féin that led to his death’. He went on to say that the whole efforts of Sinn Féin were directed against the police … everything conceivable was being done to make the life of policemen ‘unbearable’. An inquest was held on 17 August and nineteen locals were summoned to act as jurors, but

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68 Statement of James Duggan, BMH/WS.1510, p. 15.
69 RIC Inspector General’s monthly report, August 1920, NALCO 904/112.
70 Ibid.
only six turned up and fines imposed on those who had absented themselves.\textsuperscript{71} Wilson was buried at the Church of Ireland cemetery in Templemore on 19 August with full military honours provided by the Northamptonshire Regiment, then garrisoned at Richmond barracks. Wilson left behind a widow, three sons and a daughter, one of whom was to have been married the following week.\textsuperscript{72} His headstone carries the epitaph 'his life for Ireland, his soul for God'.

The death of Beattie generated much interest as he was a member of a prominent Dublin family, the son of Sir Andrew Beattie and Lady Beattie of 46 Fitzwilliam Square West.\textsuperscript{73} Beattie had been wounded several times during the Great War and awarded the Military Cross while serving with the Northamptonshire Regiment in France in 1917.\textsuperscript{74} Sir Andrew was deputy lieutenant of Dublin, a former lord mayor and also a member of Dublin Corporation, and the death of his son led to the passing of resolution of sympathy by the Corporation. Richard Mulcahy, chief of staff of the IRA was a member of the Sinn Féin group which controlled the corporation. When news of the resolution reached Tipperary, it ‘dumbfounded’ local volunteers.\textsuperscript{75} A strongly worded letter of protest was sent by Jimmy Leahy to Mulcahy in which he was criticised for not knowing that Beattie’s death had occurred while he was involved in a reprisal attack rather than in the heroic rescue of a civilian as had been portrayed in some reportage of the incident. He was further criticised for agreeing to support the vote of sympathy.\textsuperscript{76} The relationship between Mulcahy and the IRA in Tipperary was already fractious as the Soloheadbeg ambush had been carried out against the express orders of Mulcahy and IRA headquarters. Leahy subsequently heard no more about the matter, though he later recalled his feeling that Mulcahy did not like him,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{71} Tipperary Star, 19 August 1920.
\item \textsuperscript{72} Irish Times, 18 August 1920.
\item \textsuperscript{73} Thom’s official directory of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, 1920 (Dublin 1920)
\item \textsuperscript{74} London Gazette, 25 August 1917.
\item \textsuperscript{75} Statement of James Leahy, BMH/WS.1454, p. 38.
\item \textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
even though they once had been friendly’. As argued by Michael Hopkinson, personal antipathies and clannish feuding within the IRA frequently led to tense relationships between GHQ and local commanders.

Concluding his report to Dublin Castle for the month of August, the RIC inspector general again referred to the bitterness of feeling displayed in Munster and the commitment of the IRA to break the morale of the police. He reported his belief that the IRA viewed the police as ‘the last obstacle in the way of the establishment of an Irish Republic’. Printed notices were posted in several counties denouncing the police as spies and traitors, and warning persons not to speak to them or in any way tolerate their existence under penalty of death. As the cycle or reprisal and counter reprisal continued the military occasionally found innovative ways to turn the tables on the enemy. For example, the IRA regularly engaged in the practice of blocking roads by digging trenches and felling trees prior to staging an ambush. The military tried to discourage this practice by forcing the nearest inhabitants to saw up the wood and deliver it to barracks. In Templemore an officer of the Northamptonshire Regiment noted that while the innocent may have suffered for the guilty, it was noticeable that tree-felling rapidly became less popular.

After the death of Wilson and consequent reprisals, fear prevailed amongst the local populace as to what might happen next. The town was thrown into further turmoil when it was reported that sixteen-year old local farm labourer James Walsh was experiencing Marian apparitions. It was alleged that religious statues owned or touched by him were shedding tears of blood. Thousands of pilgrims visited the town each day and for a short time it seemed that Templemore might become a place of pilgrimage on a par with Knock or Lourdes. Attention focused on Templemore and a cottage where Walsh lived in the townland of Curraheen near Gortagarry. It was alleged that statues in the Templemore

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77 Statement of James Leahy, BMH/WS.1454, p. 38.
premises of newsagent Thomas Dwan, the nearby RIC barracks and also the cottage at Curraheen owned by Dwan’s sister-in-law Miss Maher were shedding tears of blood.

James Walsh also alleged that a ‘holy well’ had appeared in the floor of his bedroom. The *Tipperary Star* reported that after the reprisals on Monday 16 August some of the statues from which blood had been oozing had been taken by Walsh to Templemore, and many people believed that this action had saved the town from destruction.81 The *Limerick Leader* reported that prominent townsmen assembled around the statues and prayed aloud, thanking God that the town was saved, and that none of the inoffensive townspeople suffered any further.82 Devout locals claimed that ‘our Lady had saved Templemore’.83

On 31 August 1920, County Inspector Dunlop from Nenagh reported the bizarre situation in Templemore to Dublin Castle. He stated that on 20 August ‘miraculous apparitions’ were alleged to have appeared in Templemore and Curraheen. Sacred statues belonging to a man named Walsh and a constable stationed at Templemore were alleged to be bleeding, and several miraculous cures claimed.84 Thomas Wimsey of Templemore barracks was the constable referred to and the *Tipperary Star* reported that the statue had been given to Wimsey by Jimmy Walsh several weeks earlier, and had been kept in his room in the police station. On one occasion the barracks was inundated by a large crowd of pilgrims when news spread that a bleeding statue belonging to Wimsey was inside.85 Many people entered the premises and had to be forcibly removed by the police. Dunlop had the statue removed from the barracks and placed with the other statues on an improvised altar which had been erected in the yard beside Dwan’s shop on Main Street. Soon after this incident the *Tipperary Star* reported that Wimsey left the RIC to join a

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81 *Tipperary Star*, 20 August 1920.
82 *Limerick Leader*, 3 September 1920.
83 Ibid.
84 RIC county Inspectors report for Tipperary North Riding, August 1920. NALCO 904/112.
85 *Tipperary Star*, 20 August, 1920.
religious order.\textsuperscript{86} The relevant extract from the RIC service register shows that Wimsey, a Catholic from county Mayo who had joined the RIC in 1913 resigned from the force on 7 September 1920.\textsuperscript{87}

Walsh had not been known to the local police or to have had any overt involvement with the Irish Volunteers or Sinn Féin before these incidents began, but his brother had been arrested for militant activity and imprisoned without charge or trial in Wormwood Scrubs gaol in London, where he had undergone a ‘trying hunger strike’.\textsuperscript{88} Dunlop reported that a pilgrimage to Templemore had started from all parts of Ireland with many thousands thronging daily into the town.\textsuperscript{89} He further reported that the alleged miracles were having a positive effect on the locality, describing the conduct of the large crowds as exemplary, while newspapers renamed Templemore as ‘Pilgrimville’ or ‘Pilgrimstown’. To cater for thousands of visitors described by one newspaper as ‘the halt the maim and the blind,’ additional trains originating from Kingsbridge station in Dublin were added to the normal rail timetable.\textsuperscript{90}

By 4 September upwards of 15,000 people were making the pilgrimage daily to Templemore. Pilgrims visiting Templemore travelled on to Maher’s cottage at Curraheen which was regarded as much a place of pilgrimage as the house in Templemore because of the reported existence of the holy well in the floor of Walsh’s bedroom.\textsuperscript{91} The throng of pilgrims prompted one elderly local to make an analogy with the Alaskan gold rush of 1897-98 that he had experienced, remarking that ‘t’was easier to get from Skagway to the Klondike’ than from Templemore to Curraheen.\textsuperscript{92} The influx of visitors brought a significant economic windfall to the area, which one newspaper stated ‘must have done

\textsuperscript{86} Tipperary Star, 4 September 1920.
\textsuperscript{87} RIC general register, NAI.HO184.
\textsuperscript{88} Limerick Leader, 23 August 1920.
\textsuperscript{89} Tipperary Star, 4 September 1920.
\textsuperscript{90} Irish Times, 23 August 1920.
\textsuperscript{91} Harbinston, Peter, Pilgrimage in Ireland, the monuments and the people (London 1991) p. 229.
\textsuperscript{92} Tipperary Star, 4 September 1920.
better than many a seaside town in Ireland this year. Many members of the clergy visited Templemore including Patrick Clune, archbishop of Perth in Western Australia. At this time Clune was acting as an intermediary in negotiations which were taking place between the British government and Sinn Féin representatives. Clune met IRA commanders including Jimmy Leahy during his stay in Templemore, but when the time came to depart he could not leave the town because of the large number of pilgrims. Clune approached the IRA for assistance and Leahy commandeered a car which had brought pilgrims from Galway to Templemore. The driver was ordered to take the Archbishop to Limerick. On arrival Clune offered money to the driver, who refused to accept it. When questioned as to why he would not take the payment he replied ‘sure wasn’t I commandeered in the name of the Republic!’

Reporting to IRA headquarters on the surreal events in Templemore, Edward McGrath, vice commandant of No. 2 Tipperary Brigade later stated that the town was packed with ‘pilgrims, beggars, stall-holders and undesirables’. He noted that the police and military had disappeared off the streets and that the IRA appeared to be in charge. They controlled traffic, introduced regulated parking and restored order. It was as if an informal truce or understanding had been reached between the IRA, the military and police due to the extraordinary circumstances which prevailed. IRA volunteers acted as stewards to control the large number of pilgrims, but did not appear on the streets in uniform.

The IRA used the absence of the military and police to reconnoitre potential targets and suitable locations for future ambushes. Jimmy Leahy imposed a levy of 2/6d per day on all motor cars bringing pilgrims from Templemore to the holy well at Curraheen. The levy was ostensibly imposed to pay for repairs to roads which had been badly damaged by the throngs of pilgrims, and also to pay the expenses of IRA volunteers involved in traffic

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93 The Limerick Leader, 20 September 1920.
94 Western Australia Record, 27 November, 1920.
96 Statement of James Leahy, BMH/WS 1553, p. 43.
and crowd control duty. The imposition of the levy caused an outcry locally. Count O’Byrne, Sinn Féin TD and chairman of north Tipperary County Council met Leahy and other senior IRA commanders. O’Byrne stated that the levy was highly irregular. Leahy replied that ‘everything had to be irregular to deal with the situation that had arisen’.

O’Byrne went on to suggest that the council should take over the collection of the levy. Leahy refused, saying that he intended to buy arms and ammunition with any balance left over after deducting the legitimate expenses of the volunteers. The Limerick Leader reported that pilgrims were loud in their praise of the ‘splendid men’ of the volunteers who maintained order and prevented excessive profiteering by shopkeepers, caterers and hoteliers.

Plate 3.5: People gathered to see the ‘bleeding statues’ in Templemore, 22 August 1920. Photograph by W. D Hogan. (Note the IRA volunteers on either side of the arch.)

Collection boxes on behalf of the IRA and Cumann na mBán were placed along the pilgrimage route, providing a substantial windfall for the brigade, with a total of £1500.

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97 Statement of James Leahy, BMH/WS 1553, p. 43.
98 Statement of Edward McGrath, BMH/WS.1522, p. 15.
99 Limerick Leader, 3 September 1920.
contributed by pilgrims.\textsuperscript{100} Several days after the miracles began Leahy and other Brigade officers arranged a private interrogation of Jimmy Walsh. They had started to view the bizarre incidents with incredulity and were also seriously concerned that volunteer discipline was being compromised.\textsuperscript{101} Leahy later recalled that pilgrims had begun to give lavish tips to IRA volunteers and that some who had previously been abstemious and enthusiastic … took to drink and began to forget that they were engaged in a ‘life and death struggle’ for freedom.\textsuperscript{102} A meeting took place in Dwan’s house between Walsh and an IRA delegation led by Leahy. Walsh told Leahy that when he had last spoken to the apparition, the Virgin Mary had indicated her approval of IRA guerrilla tactics including the shooting of policemen and wished to see the campaign intensified. Leahy recalled that he found it difficult ‘to keep a straight face’ and concluded that Walsh was either ‘mentally abnormal or a hypocrite’.\textsuperscript{103}

Following this meeting the IRA leadership decided that conclusive action should be taken to halt the influx of pilgrims and bring the phenomenon of the Templemore miracles to an end. Leahy then contacted Michael Collins directly and expressed his concern about the situation in Templemore and Curraheen and the detrimental effect it was having on volunteer discipline and military operations in the area. Collins ordered Dan Breen to interrogate Walsh, to which Breen reluctantly agreed.\textsuperscript{104} Neither Collins nor Breen were renowned for their piety or religious devotion, and Collins in particular had a reputation for being actively anti-clerical. His maiden political speech in London in 1908 was described as a ‘violent attack upon the influence of the Catholic hierarchy and clergy’.\textsuperscript{105} Walsh was brought from Templemore to O’Neill’s pub in Dublin, a safe haven for Tipperary IRA volunteers. While waiting to see Breen, some of the more devout IRA

\textsuperscript{100}Statement of James Leahy, BMH/WS.1454, p. 44.
101 Ibid, p. 42.
102 Ibid, p. 44.
103 Ibid.
104 Statement of Dan Breen. BMH/WS.1739, p. 36.
members present insisted on kissing Walsh’s coat and addressing him as ‘saint’. Commandant Dinny Lacey of No. 3 Tipperary Brigade requested of Walsh that the next time he ‘spoke to the Blessed Virgin Mary, be sure to insist on nothing less than a republic’.\textsuperscript{106} Breen interrogated Walsh for fifteen minutes and concluded that ‘he was a fake’.\textsuperscript{107}

Collins was briefed by Breen about his encounter with Jimmy Walsh and his opinion that the apparitions and miracles were not genuine. Collins acerbically replied ‘one can’t take any notice of what you say Breen, because you have no religion’.\textsuperscript{108} Leahy then visited Canon M.K Ryan in Thurles and requested that the alleged apparitions and cures be denounced from the pulpit, so as to deter pilgrims from travelling to Curraheen. This request was refused.\textsuperscript{109} Tensions already existed between the church and the IRA over the conflict with Cardinal Logue, primate of all-Ireland remarking of the volunteers in 1918 that ‘no object would excuse them, no hearts, unless hardened and steeled against pity, would tolerate their cruelty’.\textsuperscript{110}

Having been rebuffed by the Catholic Church, the IRA took violent and decisive action to end the influx of pilgrims. The RIC barracks at Golding’s Cross was on the pilgrimage route between Templemore and Walsh’s cottage at Curraheen. An ambush took place on 29 September 1920 near the barracks, in the course of which Constables Edward Noonan and Terence Flood were shot dead. Constables Marnane and Ferris were wounded but managed to escape. Flood was initially reported missing but later found at Gortalough near Templemore, ‘his body riddled with bullets’.\textsuperscript{111} After the ambush a party of pilgrims were stopped by the IRA and ordered to place the body of Constable Noonan

\textsuperscript{106} Statement of Dan Breen. BMH/WS.1739, p. 112.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{109} Statement of James Leahy, BMH/WS.1454, p. 44.
in their car and deliver it to Richmond military barracks in Templemore. Following the
ambush it was reported that many local residents left the locality fearing a repetition of
reprisals which had taken place after the death of District Inspector Wilson several weeks
earlier.

Notwithstanding his preoccupation with national events, Collins remained curious.
He instructed Séan Harling, a commandant in the second battalion of the Dublin Brigade,
Fianna Éireann who worked as a courier for Dáil Éireann to travel to Tipperary and return
with one of the ‘bleeding statues’. Collins had received complaints from a local clergyman
that IRA volunteers had engineered the statues so that they would bleed at specific times.
Harling recalled that when he returned to Dublin Collins examined the statue at length,
then took hold of it and hit it off the side of the desk, at which the works of an alarm clock
fell out. The mechanism had been concealed inside the statue, which was connected to
fountain pen inserts containing a mixture of sheep’s blood and water. When the clock
mechanism struck a certain time it would send a spurt of blood through the statue’s heart,
giving the impression that the statue was bleeding. ‘I knew it’ said Collins.

As the IRA had intended, news of the ambush brought a substantial number of
military and police reinforcements into the area. The *Freemans Journal* reported that they
engaged in a ‘reign of terror’ by indiscriminately firing into houses and across fields.
Soldiers from the Northamptonshire Regiment went to the ‘holy well’ at Curraheen and
also to Dwan’s yard in Templemore where they removed crutches and other items left
behind by pilgrims. Some soldiers mockingly decorated themselves with religious artefacts
while others feigned lameness, and began using the crutches, parading around the streets.
Rumours spread that Templemore would be burned to the ground as a reprisal for the

112 Statement of James Leahy, BMH/WS.1454, p. 42.
114 Kenneth Griffith and Timothy O’Grady, *Curious journey, an oral history of Ireland’s unfinished
revolution* (Dublin, 1998).
ambush, causing the remaining pilgrims, stall-holders and tramps all made a hasty exit.\footnote{RIC county Inspectors report for Tipperary North Riding, November 1920, NAI.CO 904/112.}

Commenting on the effect of reprisals on the civilian population, the RIC county inspector expressed his opinion that when the IRA committed an outrage ‘no steps are taken to protect the locality from the consequences’.\footnote{Ibid.}

Thus, the phenomenon of the ‘Templemore miracles’ ended as suddenly as it had begun. Following his interrogation by Breen, Walsh was taken to the Salesian College at Pallaskenry, Limerick and placed in the care of Fr. Aloysius Sutherland, at the request of clergy from Templemore. In 1923 Walsh emigrated to Australia, initially staying with relatives in Melbourne, and eventually settling in Sydney. The 1932 census for Sydney gives his occupation as ‘medical student’, and shows that by then he was married with three children.\footnote{Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June, 1933. Australian National Archives, CAC Nq 319.4 AUS.} By the 1950s his marriage had ended, his teenage son had died tragically young, and Walsh was employed as a lay teacher in a Roman Catholic school. In a remarkable coincidence, he was recognised by a visiting Irish Christian Brother who had been in Templemore at the time of the miracles over thirty years earlier.\footnote{Correspondence between the author and the Walsh family, Sydney Australia, 12 July 2012.} The matter was reported to the cardinal who expressed his concern that ‘Walsh might be a dangerous type of person to have teaching in one of our Catholic schools’.\footnote{Correspondence between Provincial and General, 5 September 1953, Christian Brothers Archives Sydney, PLD5/09/1953.} The diocese also contacted the New South Wales police seeking information that could be used to dismiss Walsh from his teaching post. The police had no negative information on Walsh, but nonetheless he was dismissed by the Catholic Church. After his sacking Jimmy Walsh was employed as a hospital porter, but spent the rest of his life trying to enter various religious orders, becoming a novice in a Benedictine Monastery. He was unsuccessful in these attempts...
however, because he separated. Jimmy Walsh died after a prolonged illness on 12 March 1977, and was buried in Sydney. He had never returned to Ireland.¹²¹

The brief interlude which had seen Templemore become a world renowned place of pilgrimage had lasted only a few weeks. The Kiloskehan ambush brought a swift and violent resumption of hostilities. On 28 October a military convoy travelling from Templemore was ambushed at Thomastown near Tipperary town. The engagement between the military and the IRA lasted for almost an hour and resulted in the deaths of three soldiers. Newspapers reported that much bitterness prevailed amongst the rank and file of the regiment at the loss of their comrades.¹²² Their anger manifested itself in reprisal attacks carried out in Templemore and Tipperary town. For the second time in a few weeks, Templemore was badly damaged. Masked men wearing trench coats appeared on the streets shouting anti Sinn Féin slogans such as ‘we will have revenge’ and ‘up the Black & Tans’.¹²³

Plate 3.6: RIC patrol at Main Street Templemore, August 1920

Source: Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland. Reference number HOGW 52

¹²¹ Correspondence between the author and the Walsh family, Sydney Australia 21 November 2011.
¹²³ Tipperary Star, 6 November 1920.
Several shops were looted before being set ablaze. County Inspector Dunlop reported that the Thomastown ambush had led to ‘reprisals by armed and disguised men, resulting in serious loss of property’ but no reference was made to the identity of those who led them. The Royal Irish Constabulary, including Black and Tans did not join in the reprisals, but actually intervened to bring them to an end and also assisted in putting out fires. During the attack terrified townspeople were allowed to take refuge in the police barracks, and the police were subsequently thanked by the local urban district council for their actions.

Reprisals carried out by crown forces provoked local and international criticism and led to the perception as articulated in The Times that ‘either the executive authority regards them with a certain leniency or that it is powerless to stop them’. The deteriorating situation in Munster was attributed by the inspector general to an IRA conspiracy to break down British government in Ireland. The government suppressed Sinn Féin and what were described as ‘kindred associations’ under the Criminal Law and Procedure (Ireland) Act. In the martial law areas of Clare and Tipperary public assemblies, including fairs and markets, unless with a permit, were prohibited under the defence of the realm regulations.

Several key events took place during this period on the national stage which had implications for the conflict in Tipperary. In Dublin, eighteen-year old medical student Kevin Barry was executed in Mountjoy Jail for his involvement in an attack on a military patrol which resulted in the death of a soldier. His youthfulness and background made him a cause célèbre and generated widespread sympathy, thus adding to the pressure on government to reach a negotiated settlement. Then, Séan Treacy, one of the ‘big four’ of the Tipperary IRA and a pivotal figure in the development of the militant nationalist

124 RIC county Inspectors report, Tipperary North Riding, August 1920, NAI.CO 904/112.
125 Ibid.
128 RIC Inspector General’s monthly report, October 1920, NALCO 904/110.
movement in the county, was shot dead in an exchange of fire with members of the Auxiliary Division at Talbot Street in Dublin on 14 October. Three other people including a child were also killed in the crossfire. In London the lord mayor of Cork, Terence MacSwiney died on 25 October after spending seventy-three days on hunger strike. As outlined by Francis Costello, these events ‘served as a catalyst for a renewed IRA offensive in both Munster and Dublin’.  

In Tipperary, orders were received from IRA headquarters that in reprisal for the actions of the British government in allowing MacSwiney to die while on hunger strike, at least one policeman should be shot in each battalion area. In the town of Cloughjordan local IRA volunteers had great antipathy towards some local policemen. Commandant Séan Gaynor later recounted his belief that they had been ‘overly aggressive’ towards volunteers as the conflict escalated. Information was received that some policemen were in the habit of drinking at night in Tooher’s hotel in the town, and a plan was formulated to ambush them. It was intended that a local volunteer would identify out particular policemen believed to be ‘objectionable characters’, who would then be shot.

On the night of 2 November four IRA volunteers entered the hotel but were noticed by two policemen who were drinking inside the premises. Constable Savage managed to escape but Constable William Maxwell was shot dead while attempting to draw his revolver. The houses of those volunteers involved in the killing were searched later that night, but all had gone on the run, thereby escaping capture. Aged twenty four, Maxwell had only been a policeman for five months, having spent several years in the army. A single man, his body was returned to his native county Down for burial.

That same evening, Constable McCarthy was shot and wounded in Nenagh in consequence of the same GHQ order to avenge the death of MacSwiney. Following this incident two houses belonging to prominent IRA members in the town were destroyed in

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130 Statement of William Meagher, BMH/WS.1391, p. 6.
retribution. Other houses were searched, including the presbytery of local curate Father O’Halloran an ‘outspoken critic of British rule, even from the pulpit’. During the search of the presbytery it was alleged that Lieutenant Henry Hambleton, intelligence officer of the first battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment had threatened to shoot O’Halloran. This allegation was sufficient to ensure that Hambleton was targeted for assassination. He was known to use a motorcycle to travel from Summerhill barracks in Nenagh where he was based to regimental headquarters at Richmond Barracks in Templemore. An ambush was swiftly arranged when an IRA volunteer working in fields saw Hambleton travelling towards Templemore. On his return journey an IRA party was waiting at Lisstunny on the Templemore road, one mile from Nenagh. Hambleton was wounded by the first volley of shots and attempted to return fire but was shot again as he lay on the ground. Patrick Cash, a member of the ambush party reported that his dying words were ‘you bastards, you got me at last’. When volunteers searched his body for documents and ammunition, he was found to be wearing steel body armour, similar to the type which had been worn by British troops in the trenches. The official history of the Northamptonshire Regiment records that in his role of intelligence officer, Lieutenant Hambleton had ‘shown himself to be absolutely fearless and had become a marked man’.

The volunteers looked upon his death as ‘good riddance’ as he had worked closely with a local RIC district inspector. As a result of his death local volunteers believed that the inspector appeared to suffer from ‘cold feet’ when dealing with IRA members. When Hambleton’s remains arrived in Nenagh some of the soldiers under his command, incensed by the sight of his dead body left barracks and set fire to several premises, including the local creamery. Shots were fired, grenades thrown, and broken glass littered the streets.

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131 Statement of Séan Gaynor, BMH/WS 1389, p. 32.
133 Gurney, History of the Northamptonshire Regiment, p. 340.
135 Irish Times, 8 November 1920.
135 Ibid.
The cost of the damage was subsequently estimated at £2,000. Protestant and Catholic clergy in the town united with local businessmen and sent a telegram to Dublin Castle asking for ‘protection for panic-stricken townspeople’. In a follow up search by the military for suspects at Knigh Cross, between Puckane and Nenagh, four local men were arrested of whom two; John O’Brien and Thomas O’Brien were killed. Both were members of the Nenagh volunteers. The IRA alleged that both men had been bayoneted to death while under arrest, and their bodies dumped at the roadside. The military issued a standard response of the time claiming that both men had been shot ‘while trying to escape’.

In Dublin ‘the squad’ assembled by Michael Collins delivered a significant blow to the intelligence network in Ireland when twelve British military officers were shot dead and several others wounded on the morning of 21 November in an audacious operation. Army headquarters conceded that ‘temporary paralysis of the secret service had occurred after the killings. Revenge followed swiftly when the Auxiliary Division killed twelve people and seriously wounded a further eleven during a football match at Croke Park. This event has passed into nationalist folklore as ‘Bloody Sunday’ and proved to be a substantial propaganda coup for the militant movement.

1920 had been a very bad year for the RIC in Tipperary. Of the 178 policeman killed in Ireland during the year, twenty were killed in the county. Behind the dramatic statistics of actual deaths, new categories of police reports introduced in April 1920 reveal the extent of intimidation and boycotting against the RIC and those associated with them. Writing about the effect of the boycott on individual policemen, one RIC commander noted that ‘it hits them hard … as it is intended to prevent the necessities of life’. While

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137 Statement of Edward McGrath, BMH/WS 1522, p. 27.
138 Irish Times, 6 November 1920.
139 GHQ Ireland, Record, ii.18. Quoted in Townshend, The British campaign in Ireland, p.40.
140 Outrages against the police reports, April 1920, NAI.CO904/148.
specific figures for Tipperary are not available, national statistics for the period April to December illustrate the scale of the campaign.

Table 3.1: Outrage and intimidation statistics, April – December 1920

- Policemen wounded: 465
- Policeman fired at or attacked (without injury): 408
- Policemen threatened: 215
- RIC candidates intimidated or threatened: 57
- Policemen’s families attacked or threatened: 153
- Police suppliers or landlords intimidated or threatened: 802

As argued by Townshend, such incidents placed the counter-insurgency campaign on a new footing. Internment was reintroduced, curfews extended and a large programme of checkpoints, searches and arrests embarked upon. The inspector general opined to the chief secretary that during November there had been no abatement of the Sinn Féin conspiracy to ‘set the law at defiance’ and render British rule ineffective in Ireland in pursuance of the claim to national independence.¹⁴¹

For rank and file members of the constabulary, morale was difficult to sustain. Aside from the constant fear of death or injury, hundreds of long-serving policemen had resigned or retired. The recruitment of Black and Tans and the Auxiliary Division, measures which had been intended to improve the situation had only made matters substantially worse. The campaign of intimidation aimed at the families, friends and associates of the police made them legitimate targets insofar as the IRA was concerned. The constant threat added to the severe pressures on serving members who did not have the luxury of only having to worry about their own safety. Patrick Shea, the son of an RIC Sergeant in Tipperary later recognized that he had no knowledge of the dilemma of a father

¹⁴¹ RIC Inspector General’s monthly report, November 1920, NAI.CO 904/110.
who had a family to care for, ‘the possibility that he might give up his job was never in my mind. I was at the age when the props of life are permanent and unchanging; my father was a member of the Royal Irish Constabulary and, for better or worse that was that’.\textsuperscript{142}

\textsuperscript{142} Patrick Shea, \textit{Voices and the sound of drums} (Belfast, 1981), p. 29.
Chapter four

The storm before the calm, January 1921 – July 1921

‘Picture constables out of bed every night … and not knowing the moment that a bullet or bomb may come through one of the windows and send them to eternity’¹

The autumn and winter of 1920 brought about a significant change in the tactics of the IRA in Tipperary and other disturbed counties. Richard Mulcahy, IRA chief of staff wrote in later life of his frustration at the lack of military discipline in the three Tipperary IRA brigades.² To counter this he despatched GHQ officers including Ernie O’Malley to rural areas with the intention of professionalising the military wing of the volunteers. Police and military activity had forced many active militants to abandon their homes, leave their jobs and go on the run. These men formed the basis of a full time fighting organisation described as ‘Active Service Units’ by IRA headquarters, or known colloquially as ‘flying columns’. Initially, these columns formed spontaneously in the most violent counties because of the conditions which prevailed at the time, but approval was given by GHQ to extend the concept into each brigade area.

The structure of flying columns allowed great flexibility in the planning and execution of ambushes. Consequently, the number of ambushes deemed successful by the IRA increased, culminating in an ambush on 28 November 1920 at Kilmichael, Cork when eighteen members of the Auxiliary Division were killed by a flying column led by Tom Barry. As outlined by Townshend, volunteers now received professional training in supervised camps, allowing the officer corps of the volunteers to be improved, with competent officers promoted and incompetent ones removed.³

¹ An t-Óglach, 15 March 1920.
² Note on the IRB and the south Tipperary brigade. University College Dublin, Mulcahy papers, P7b/181; Quoted in Hopkinson, The Irish war of independence, p. 117.
The introduction of flying columns led to a change in tactics from somewhat pointless attacks on heavily fortified barracks to strategically chosen ambushes on mobile patrols and convoys. While attacks on barracks had exposed inexperienced volunteers to the use of arms, others such as James Kilmartin felt that even if it was ‘a relief from boredom, it provided little more than firing practice’. The first major operation of the third brigade flying column had been the Thomastown ambush of 28 October 1920, when three soldiers of the Northamptonshire Regiment were shot dead. The county inspector for Tipperary south alluded to the new development in his report of November referred when he referred to ‘bands of men at work … with the exclusive object of ambushing police or military’. He went on to confirm that these bands consisted of men that ‘for various reasons, were on the run’. He also suggested that flying columns were ‘not popular with the majority of the country people, but rule by terror’.

Another large-scale attack was planned for November when it was noticed that a police convoy regularly travelled between the villages of Bansha and Galbally. On 13 November, after several abortive attempts, a flying column under the command of Commandant Dinny Lacey lay in wait at Inches Cross in the Glen of Aherlow. A total of sixteen volunteers took part, and just after 3 p.m. a lorry containing eight policemen drove into the ambush. Lacey blew a whistle, which was the signal to commence firing. The driver was killed in the first fusillade which caused the lorry to crash into a ditch. An exchange of fire ensued during which three more policemen were killed. One managed to escape and sought refuge at a nearby cottage where he requested assistance, but none was forthcoming. The engagement lasted for about ten minutes before the remaining constables surrendered. Their weapons and ammunition were taken and the lorry set ablaze before the column left the scene. Constables Charles Bustrock, Patrick Mackessy, John

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5 RIC county Inspectors report, Tipperary South Riding, November 1920, NALCO 904/113.
Miller and Jeremiah O’Leary were killed, and all of the policemen who survived the ambush were wounded.

Reprisals followed swiftly and several premises were set ablaze including the cottage of John Burke where shelter had been refused to the fleeing RIC casualty.⁷ It was reported in the press that acts of incendiarism had been carried out by armed men in civilian attire.⁸ Officially, the RIC categorised such incidents as rioting without apportioning blame but local volunteers were in no doubt that the damage had been inflicted by the RIC and military.⁹ Dealing with the sensitive and controversial issue of reprisals, Field Marshall Sir Henry Wilson, chief of the imperial general staff wrote to Lloyd George setting out his view that a coordinated plan of official reprisals should be instigated. He concluded that reprisals were being carried out without anyone being responsible and, ‘men were being murdered, houses burnt, villages wrecked … it was the business of the government to govern. If these men ought to be murdered, then the government ought to murder them’.¹⁰

The topography of Tipperary was a critical factor in determining suitable locations for ambushes. Writing about military operations in Ireland, the historian of the British army sixth division wrote that ‘it was indeed noticeable that areas in and around mountains were the most disaffected’.¹¹ Variously described as ‘wild mountain country’ or a ‘bleak and desolate place’, the village of Kilcommon and surrounding area provided the ideal setting for the form of guerrilla warfare which had been adopted and was now being perfected by

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⁸ Irish Independent, 16 November, 1920.
¹⁰ Source: Wilson papers, including the Wilson diary, 29 September 1920, Imperial War Museum. Sir Henry Wilson (1864-1922) from Edgeworthstown county Longford was a close associate of Lloyd George and avowed Irish unionist, being involved in the ‘Curragh mutiny’ of 1914. He rose to become Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS) until his retirement in February 1922 after which he became an MP and chief security adviser to the new Northern Ireland government. In June 1922 he was assassinated in London by two IRA members who were later executed. See Padraic O’ Farrell, Who’s who in the Irish War of Independence 1916-1921 (Dublin, 1980), p. 157.
the IRA. In this rugged area the Rearcross barrack attack, Lackamore Wood ambush and numerous other less lethal encounters had taken place. IRA flying columns had the crucial advantage of comprehensive local knowledge, making this part of north Tipperary home to some of the most dangerous police districts in Ireland.

An important tactic utilised by the IRA throughout Ireland was the interception of mail intended for the police and military, and mailbags were regularly taken at gunpoint from trains or postal deliverymen. Following such seizures, official mail intended for barracks and personal mail for policemen was removed before the mail intended for residents and local businesses was returned. To counteract this development the police began to collect mail from post offices, but doing so presented an opportunity for the IRA to stage ambushes. While the routes taken were regularly changed, the police were at their most vulnerable as they left barracks or approached the post office. On 16 December eighteen men of the IRA first brigade flying column assisted by six volunteers from the local battalion assembled with the intention of attacking the police as they left Kilcommon barracks to make the one mile journey to the post office at Kilcommon Cross. As the ambushers lay in wait snow began to fall, but they had brought several bottles of poitín and one volunteer later recalled that a ‘good swig helped to keep the cold out’. At about 10 a.m. scouts reported that a patrol of eight men on foot had left the barracks and were heading towards Kilcommon Cross. Under the command of a sergeant whom the IRA knew and ‘were most anxious to shoot’ the policemen approached the ambush site in pairs, ten paces apart. A shot was fired prematurely by one volunteer, removing the element of surprise. The police dispersed, with some seeking cover to return fire while others tried to run back towards their barracks. Two policemen were killed in the initial fusillade, and two more died as they tried to reach safety. Police inside the station opened fire at the ambushers and also sent up Verey lights to summon assistance from Newport barracks,

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twelve miles away. IRA volunteers had planned to take all of the rifles and ammunition from the patrol but were forced to abandon this because of the gunfire coming from the police station. Weapons were removed from the bodies of the two policemen who had been killed in the initial volley of shots. The IRA volunteers, most of whom who had also been involved in the attacks on Rearcross and at the Lackamore ambush moved cross country, anticipating the reprisals that would inevitably follow. The four policemen who died in the ambush were Patrick Halford, Ernest Harden, Albert Palmer and Arthur Smith. All had less than nine months service in the RIC. The sergeant who was the primary target of the attack managed to escape, much to the disappointment of the volunteers.\textsuperscript{15} Two wounded policemen were taken to Nenagh hospital for treatment. The anticipated reprisals swiftly occurred and it was reported that ‘panic-stricken people fled from their homes on hearing of the ambush’.\textsuperscript{16} Several buildings in the area including the home of William Hanly, who had taken part in the ambush, were set ablaze in the immediate aftermath of the ambush.

The significant increase in the level of IRA activity in south Tipperary during late 1920 was attributed by the RIC to a belief that Dan Breen had assumed command in the area. The county inspector stated ‘as long as this man is at large constant attacks on police and military are to be expected’.\textsuperscript{17} Having been in Dublin for several months recuperating from gunshot wounds, Breen had returned to Tipperary just prior to Christmas 1920 and re-joined the third brigade, but in a very limited capacity due to his injuries. In his absence the IRA had maintained constant pressure on the police in their respective areas of responsibility. The RIC barracks at Glenbower, five miles from Carrick on Suir was a particularly dangerous posting. Volunteers ‘made it a practice to snipe twice a week at the garrison … to keep their nerves on edge’.\textsuperscript{18} This had the desired effect and led to a tragic

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{15} Statement of William Hanly, BMH/WS 1368, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{16} Freemans Journal, 18 December 1920.
\textsuperscript{17} RIC county Inspectors report, Tipperary South Riding, December 1920, NALCO 904/113.
\textsuperscript{18} Statement of Edward Glendon, BMH/WS 1127, p. 4.
\end{footnotesize}
incident on 19 December when two police patrols opened fire on each other in the darkness, resulting in the death of one policeman and the severe wounding of another.

A patrol of military cyclists travelling from Mullinahone to Carrick on Suir were fired on at Ninemilehouse, with four soldiers being wounded. As the soldiers returned to Mullinahone to raise the alarm a military patrol from Callan and police patrol from Kilkenny set out for the scene of the ambush. Both arrived at the townland of Kilbride simultaneously and the Callan contingent, not recognising in the darkness that the other party were also police, called on the Kilkenny RIC patrol to halt.¹⁹ That patrol believed that they had run into an ambush and opened fire. Sergeant Thomas Walsh was shot dead and Sergeant Thomas Shannon badly wounded in the exchange of fire, which continued for some time before both sides realised what had occurred. Initial newspaper accounts of the incident carried exaggerated claims that there had been three separate ambushes and that many soldiers and IRA volunteers had also been killed or wounded. Owing to official reticence it was difficult to ascertain the facts of what had taken place during this incident, but it was reported that ‘the greatest alarm prevailed in the district’ as residents prepared themselves for possible reprisal.²⁰ Some were reported to be in ‘a state of intense terror … with many fleeing their homes’.²¹ Walsh, a single man aged forty two from Ballyragget, who had twenty years police service had just been promoted to the rank of Sergeant. As his cortège passed through Callan residents were ordered to remain indoors and businesses ordered to close their doors as a mark of respect. One publican who failed to do as directed was shot at and wounded.²²

The conflict which had erupted in January 1919 had been conducted with great intensity in Tipperary and showed no sign of abating. The most active militants of the IRA had now become full time members of flying columns, thus increasing the professionalism

¹⁹ Irish Independent, 23 December 1920.
²¹ Irish Independent, 22 December 1920.
²² Ibid.
and military efficacy of the volunteer army. The RIC admitted that ‘these men were well armed and under effective control’ making them a most dangerous enemy. The counties of Cork, Tipperary, Kerry, and Limerick, together with the cities of Cork and Limerick were placed under martial law. General Sir Neville Macready proclaimed a ‘state of armed insurrection to exist, and declared the forces of the Crown in Ireland to be on active service. He also stated that Great Britain had no quarrel with Irishmen, ‘her sole quarrel is with crime, outrage, and disorder; her sole object in declaring martial law is to restore peace to a distracted and unhappy country; her sole enemies are those who have countenanced, inspired and participated in rebellion, murder, and outrage’.  

In a separate development many volunteers who were also devout Roman Catholics were shocked when Bishop Colohan of Cork announced that the killers of policemen would be excommunicated. In a pastoral letter, he stated that the killing of police was ‘morally, murder, politically of no consequence, and the burning of barracks was simply the destruction of Irish property’.  

The road from Templemore to Nenagh via the village of Borrisoleigh was one of the most dangerous roads during the war of independence period. Twenty-one miles in length, the road meandered through valleys and wooded countryside, making it ideal countryside for ambushes. The Northamptonshire Regiment had a large garrison at Summerhill Barracks in Nenagh, and the county inspector of the RIC was also based in Nenagh. This meant that frequent journeys between Templemore and Nenagh were necessary for both the military and police. Many ambushes took place at various points on the road, leading the soldiers to contemptuously name it ‘happy valley’ or ‘the valley of death’.  

To deter the IRA from attacking army transports or policemen, the military adopted the tactic of carrying ‘one or more prominent Sinn Féiners on all motor convoys’. This tactic was also adopted in other counties with a high level of attacks on the

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25 Statement of Edward McGrath, BMH/WS 1522, p. 27.  
26 RIC county Inspectors report, Tipperary North Riding, December 1920, NAI.CO 904/112.
police and military, though the county inspector for Tipperary north expressed doubts that this practice would bear good results and felt it merely encouraged volunteers to go ‘on the run’. In December 1920 Commandant Edward McGrath was interned in Richmond Barracks under the provisions of the Restoration of Order in Ireland Act. He was visited in his cell by Captain Phipps of the Northamptonshire Regiment who informed him that he would be brought as a hostage on military convoys. McGrath was subsequently taken out several times in military transports and forced to walk in front of the convoy as it travelled between Borrisoleigh and Nenagh. On one occasion the convoy was attacked and McGrath suffered the ignominy of seeking cover in a ditch where he might have been killed by crossfire from his fellow IRA members. From his vantage point McGrath had a close view of the soldiers’ reaction to this form of guerrilla warfare and later observed that the ‘British Tommie’s were simply terrified’.

At Christmas 1920 a large party of IRA volunteers led by Jim Stapleton, the man who had shot both District Inspectors Hunt and Wilson ambushed a military convoy at Collaun, on the Nenagh side of Borrisoleigh. The military convoy consisted of fifteen transports and over 150 soldiers. This engagement lasted from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. when the volunteers withdrew, fearing the arrival of reinforcements from Templemore. Following this ambush the route was no longer used by the military and police. As 1920 drew to a close, an upsurge of violence took place, with the situation in the county being described as ‘most unsatisfactory’ by the RIC county inspector, with numerous ambushes and other incidents taking place. On 6 December 1920 the Provincial Bank in Templemore was raided and over £3,000 stolen. The county inspector attributed this incident to a Sinn Féin fundraising exercise but also made the point that a number of crimes were being

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27 RIC county Inspectors report, Tipperary North Riding, December 1920, NAI.CO 904/112.
28 Captain Hubert Ronald Phipps, M.C (Military Cross), intelligence officer of the 1st battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment, Richmond Barracks Templemore.
30 Ibid.
committed by ‘young hooligans who have seized the opportunity which the existing state of the county gives’.\textsuperscript{31}

As the new year of 1921 began, policemen serving in Tipperary who hoped that their situation might improve were to be disappointed. They continued to live a wretched existence in fortified barracks, risking death each time they ventured outside. The parallel campaign of intimidation and boycotting also continued. The inspector general remarked that ‘those in the know are afraid to say anything for fear that they will be suspected and murdered by the rebels’.\textsuperscript{32} During January 1921 in response to IRA guerrilla tactics, military transport appeared in public for the first time covered with steel plates and protected with wire netting to repel hand grenades.\textsuperscript{33} In reaction to the imposition of martial law the IRA reorganised and formed new divisions with Ernie O’Mulley now becoming divisional commandant for north Tipperary.

The first RIC death of 1921 in Tipperary took place on 17 January at Cappawhite. Constable Robert Boyd was drinking in the public bar of Mrs. Moran in Cappawhite when IRA volunteers English, Fitzpatrick, Ahearne and Ryan entered and shot him four times; he died instantly. A niece of Mrs. Moran also received a leg wound from a ricochet. A former soldier from Banbridge, county Down, Boyd had been in the RIC for only ten months, a force in which his father and two brothers also served. Following the death of Boyd two business premises in Cappawhite were burned down and all fairs, markets and public assemblies forbidden.\textsuperscript{34} The cyclical pattern of ambush followed by reprisal continued unabated.

Tipperary in 1921 was a very dangerous county for serving or retired members of the RIC, applicants for the force and those with any connection with the police. On 10 February 1921 Constable John Carroll went to visit his parents at their home in

\textsuperscript{31} RIC county Inspectors report, Tipperary North Riding, December 1920, NALCO 904/112.
\textsuperscript{32} RIC Inspector General’s monthly report, January 1921, NALCO 904/114.
\textsuperscript{33} Statement of James Leahy, BMH/WS 1454, p. 60.
\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Nenagh Guardian}, 22 January 1921.
Ballywilliam near Nenagh. Carroll was stationed in county Cork but had found himself unexpectedly in Nenagh as part of a police convoy traveling from the Phoenix Park Depot to Cork City. When the convoy stopped for the night at Nenagh Carroll made a spur of the moment decision to visit his home. He borrowed a bicycle and under cover of darkness made the five-mile journey to his parent’s farm. Unfortunately for Carroll, his parents had neighbours visiting at that time, one of whom was an active member of the Ballywilliam company of IRA volunteers.

Carroll was of particular concern to the IRA as he had been involved in the investigation of the Knocklong rescue in May 1919. He had recovered what was believed by the IRA to be ‘incriminating evidence’ during the search of the train from which Hogan had been freed by Breen and Treacy. Several IRA volunteers were in custody awaiting trial on charges connected with the Knocklong incident, and volunteer Martin Grace later recalled his belief that ‘Carroll would be giving evidence at the trial’.

Word was swiftly passed to Commandant Paddy McDonnell and Captain Jim Burke that Carroll had returned home, and the following morning as he cycled back towards Nenagh, he was taken prisoner. GHQ officer Captain Michael McCormack, who happened to be in the area at the time, was asked for instructions as to what should be done with Carroll. McCormack ordered his execution, and Carroll was shot dead at Ballycommon by a firing party of five men under the command of McDonnell.

Several days after his abduction and execution Carroll’s body was found at Ballyartella, some distance outside Nenagh. He had been blindfolded, his hands bound and he had been shot four times. Numerous notices were posted in the locality warning people not to attend the funeral of the dead constable. His father also received a letter warning him that if the police carried out reprisals in response to the killing, he and his remaining sons would

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35 Nenagh Guardian, 22 January 1921.
36 Statement of Martin Grace, BMH/WS 1463, p. 7.
be killed.\textsuperscript{37} It was subsequently reported that no person from the Ballywilliam area attended the funeral, and the county inspector uncompromisingly referred to the death as ‘a murder of this constable by his own acquaintances’\textsuperscript{38} While there were no reprisals associated with the death of Carroll, the county inspector believed that official reprisals undoubtedly had a good effect as they ‘demonstrate the authority and power of a government … but the action taken by way of reprisal has not been nearly drastic enough’.\textsuperscript{39} The death of Carroll had a tragic postscript over twelve months later when his brother was shot dead near his home on 13 June 1922, just before the Civil War began. The Carroll farmhouse was burnt to the ground on the same night.\textsuperscript{40}

In late February 1921 two former British soldiers from Templemore, James Maher and Patrick O’Meara were abducted and executed. As was customary in such cases throughout Ireland, their bodies were left on the road with signs affixed reading, ‘executed by IRA, spies and informers beware’.\textsuperscript{41} It was reported by the RIC that they had been executed on suspicion of being friendly with, and giving information to the police. The county inspector stated this to be untrue, adding that ‘these two men never gave any information … and were absolutely useless to us’.\textsuperscript{42} In reprisal for these deaths, on the same evening in Thurles two men, Larry Hickey and William Loughnane, were shot dead in their homes and a Denis Regan badly wounded. The RIC categorised the three men as Sinn Féiners, and that it was believed that they had been shot by ‘friends of Maher and O’Meara’.\textsuperscript{43}

In March 1921 Séamus Robinson, officer commanding the third Tipperary brigade, sent word to local commanders that each unit would have to become substantially more

\textsuperscript{37} RIC county Inspectors report, Tipperary North Riding, January 1921, NALCO 904/114.
\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Irish Independent}, 16 February 1921.
\textsuperscript{39} RIC county Inspectors report, Tipperary North Riding, January 1921, NALCO 904/114.
\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Freemans Journal}, 13 June 1922.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} RIC county Inspectors report, Tipperary North Riding, February 1921, NALCO 904/114.
\textsuperscript{43} Statement of James Leahy, BMH/WS 1454, p. 68.
The IRA in Cork city and county was under pressure from crown forces and to help alleviate the situation, it was ordered that a policeman or Black and Tan was to be shot in each town or village in Tipperary. The intention was to draw reinforcements into Tipperary and away from Cork. During March and April 1921 the RIC stations at Dovea, Drombane, Holycross, Roskeen and Shevry were the subject of continuous attacks by IRA to such an extent that they had to be evacuated. As soon as the police had withdrawn the barracks were burnt to the ground to prevent them being reoccupied.

Plate 4.1: Shevry RIC barracks following its’ destruction by the IRA in April 1921

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On 4 March 1921 Commandant Paddy Hogan of the second battalion arranged for a flying column to enter Cashel with the intention of carrying out Robinson’s order. Information had been received that Constable James Beasant was a frequent visitor to Cantwell’s bar. Hogan entered the pub while Tom Nagle stood guard outside as an RIC patrol had stopped only fifty yards down the street. Hogan fired several shots at Beasant, but to no avail as his ammunition was damp from being stored outdoors. Beasant and

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44 Statement of Patrick Keane, BMH/WS 1300, p. 5.
Hogan scuffled violently and Nagle entered the bar when he heard the commotion inside. He shot the policeman once in the head, killing him instantly. Miss Cantwell, daughter of the publican was also badly wounded. Aged twenty-six, Constable Beasant was a former soldier from Wiltshire who had six months service in the RIC and was employed as a driver in the transport section.

The death of Beasant had dramatic consequences when the volunteers involved left Cashel and dispersed to various safe houses several miles away. Hogan and Patrick Keane spent the night with the Dagg family at Derryclooney, and awoke the next morning to find the house surrounded by the military. Hogan told Keane that they were trapped and that they would have to fight for their lives, so both opened fire. During the exchange of shots which followed, Hogan was killed and Keane surrendered following pleading from the Dagg family who implored with him to surrender ‘in God’s name or we will all be killed’. A military officer who had been wounded in the encounter ordered a sergeant to shoot the prisoner if the convoy was fired upon while returning to Cahir military barracks. On the journey the convoy was stopped by a party of Black and Tans who wanted to take custody of the prisoner, but the officer in charge refused to hand him over, stating that Keane was in military custody and they were responsible for him. Keane later recalled that he had been fortunate to escape from the clutches of the Black and Tans as he might have suffered the fate of other captured IRA volunteers who had been killed while in custody. On arrival in Cahir he was placed in the custody of the military police. He feared that auxiliaries who frequented the barrack square ‘in all stages of drunkenness and at all hours of the night’ could cause him harm, but he managed to escape from the barracks and subsequently rejoin his flying column, returning to what he later described as a ‘hero’s welcome’.

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47 Statement of Patrick Keane, BMH/WS 1300, p. 6.
48 Ibid.
49 Statement of Patrick Keane, BMH/WS 1300, p. 9.
50 Ibid.
in response, the county inspector suggested adopting some of the tactics of the IRA by establishing ‘several flying columns of military and police … taking to the hills in pursuit’ with the support of aircraft from the Royal Air Force.\textsuperscript{51} He attributed the surge in violence to ‘bands of armed men roaming the country’ and repeated his erroneous belief that they were under the command of the ‘notorious’ Daniel Breen.\textsuperscript{52} By this stage of the conflict Breen was being linked with most killings and ambushes in both ridings of Tipperary regardless of whether he was actually involved or not.

On 20 March 1921 Constable William Campbell was shot dead in the rear yard of Mullinahone RIC barracks after he had gone outside of the station to get coal from an outbuilding. Although Campbell was on sick leave at the time he was residing in the barracks. A single man from Longford, Campbell had eight years police service, having been a farmer prior to joining. Newspapers reported that he was shot from behind the wall of the barracks by unknown men and County Inspector Gates stated his belief that the ambush was carried out by a party of rebels lying in wait for the military.\textsuperscript{53} Campbell’s body was removed to Tipperary military barracks for an inquest, but it was not possible to form a jury because of intimidation. Gates went on to give his opinion that the community was ‘sick of the situation … as they see the ruin and misery it entails’. But, he also asserted that the populace lacked moral courage and until the flying columns were broken and ‘the reign of terror is broken we cannot hope for a sane and moderate public opinion’.\textsuperscript{54} Further reference was made by Gates to ongoing disciplinary problems with the Black and Tans and Auxiliary Division, but he stated that the morale of the men was splendid and discipline ‘rapidly improving as undesirable recruits were weeded out’.\textsuperscript{55} When the RIC barracks at Dovea, Drombane, Holycross, Roskeen and Shevry During had been evacuated during March and April 1921, the station parties were transferred to the

\textsuperscript{51} RIC Inspector General’s monthly report, March 1921, NAI.CO 904/114.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} Irish Independent, 22 March 1921.
\textsuperscript{54} RIC county Inspectors report, Tipperary South Riding, March 1921, NAI.CO 904/114.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
heavily fortified garrison at Castlefogarty near Thurles. The IRA were reluctant to attack this garrison and Constable Harold Redvers Danton Browne, a Black and Tan stationed at Castlefogarty wrote to his parents in England telling them that his station was reputed to be ‘the most comfortable, but one of the most dangerous in Ireland’.56

Plate 4.2: Constable Harold Redvers Danton Browne, RIC Castlefogarty

Source: Reproduced with the permission of Inspector Chris Bilham, Hong Kong Police.

One of the most significant police deaths of the conflict occurred in April 1921 when District Inspector Gilbert Potter from Cahir was captured and subsequently executed by the IRA. The capture of Potter arose when volunteer intelligence officers reported that a military convoy passed twice a week between Cahir and Clogheen. IRA brigade headquarters ordered a combined attack with flying columns from both the first and second brigades under the command of Dan Breen. They lay in wait on 23 April for several hours at Hyland’s Cross, but the convoy did not arrive. An order was given to withdraw from the area due to a large military presence. As the IRA volunteers departed a smaller column of soldiers carrying rations arrived unexpectedly, and an exchange of shots took

56 Letter from Constable Harold Redvers Danton Browne, RIC Castlefogarty, 17 January 1921 (Original MS in possession of Mr. Chris Billham, Hong Kong).
place, which resulted in the death of one soldier and the wounding of several others. The remaining soldiers surrendered and were disarmed.

As the ambush was taking place IRA scouts a short distance away stopped a car driving towards the scene and interrogated the male occupant, who was dressed in civilian clothing. He told the volunteers that he was a doctor visiting patients, but when his car was searched a revolver was found, and unfortunately for him, volunteer Séan Downey recognized him as the local RIC district inspector, Gilbert Norman Potter.\footnote{Statement of Maurice McGrath, BMH/WS 1701, p. 34.} He was taken prisoner and brought with the flying column overnight over via the Knockmealdown Mountains into Waterford, stopping at Mount Mellary Abbey. They received a ‘hearty welcome and meal from the monks’.\footnote{Statement of Paul Merrigan, BMH/WS 1669, p. 13.} The monks knew that one of their guests was an IRA prisoner, but made no attempt to intervene. Knowing that there would be intense military activity when it was realized that Potter had been captured, the volunteers took shelter in the Comeragh Mountains. Potter was held captive for several days while the IRA offered to exchange his life for that of Thomas Traynor, an IRA volunteer who was awaiting execution in Mountjoy Prison for his involvement in an ambush on members of the Auxiliary Division at Brunswick Street, Dublin on 14 March 1921 during which one volunteer and two policemen were killed. During his incarceration Potter established a rapport with his captors which brought a rare element of humanity to an otherwise brutal conflict, and reminded both sides of the mortality of the often faceless casualties of war. The IRA captors grew to like Potter, and some later recalled that he developed a respect and understanding for their aspiration of independence, while disagreeing strongly with the method they had chosen in pursuit of that objective.\footnote{This phenomenon has been categorised as ‘terror-bonding’ or ‘traumatic bonding’, but was defined in 1973 as ‘Stockholm syndrome’, whereby victims display compassion on occasion even loyalty towards their captors.} One volunteer guarding Potter later described him ‘as undoubtedly a gentlemanly sort of fellow’.\footnote{Statement of Peter Tobin, BMH/WS 1223, p. 11.} Another recalled that he was
'a very nice kind of man and although fanatically attached to doing his duty … he admired the adherence we showed to our duty as we saw it'. His captors believed that Potter had come to respect his captors for their ‘sincere and honest purpose’ in trying to achieve independence. It was quickly realised by the police that Potter was missing when his abandoned car was discovered near the scene of the ambush. The county inspector reported to Dublin Castle that Potter had been kidnapped, no trace of him had been discovered, and there was every reason to believe that he had been ‘foully murdered’.

For the IRA volunteers guarding Potter the mutual respect and liking which had grown between captor and captive made ‘it very embarrassing’ to have to consider executing him if ordered to do so by GHQ. While waiting for news about the fate of Thomas Traynor, in a notable gesture of humanity, his captors put a proposal to Potter that they would allow him to escape if he gave his word of honour that he would take no further action against them. Potter expressed his appreciation for the gesture, but stated that he could not give his word, as he ‘must do his duty as he saw it’. The battalion intelligence officer Thomas Carew came to where Potter was being held captive and stated that he would wait with them until the Evening Herald newspaper arrived, as it was expected to carry news about Traynor. Sometime after 9 p.m. on 27 April the paper arrived and the headline read ‘Thomas Traynor hanged this morning’. Carew remarked ‘I am sorry for you Potter’ before leaving. A firing squad was assembled under the command of Commandant Dinny Lacey, who chose volunteers Allen and Crowe to carry out the actual execution, as both wanted revenge for the deaths of their brothers at the hands of crown forces. A grave had been dug beforehand, and Potter was forced to stand in the grave as the volunteers took aim and fired at him, causing non-fatal injuries. Potter cried out ‘I am not dead’, so Lacey stepped forward and administered a fatal shot to the head.

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On 8 May 1921 Mrs. Lily Potter received a package with a Cahir postmark containing her husband’s diary, will, signet ring, watch and poignant final letter to her and their four children. In his final letter Potter wrote ‘I request those in authority with IRA to send to my wife my note book which contains messages for her … there are, I am sure, humane leaders who will pity a wife who is Irish, as I am also’. The package was accompanied by a letter signed ‘Officer Commanding IRA’ stating that ‘DI Potter, having been legally arrested and tried, was sentenced to death, which was carried out on Wednesday, 27th April’.

Mrs. Potter collapsed on receiving the news. Newspapers reported that Potter, who had served for twenty-one years in the RIC was stationed in Cahir for a number of years and was ‘very popular, having done much to keep the town quiet’. Several months after the truce, and at the request of Mrs. Potter, the IRA disinterred the body of her husband as her claim for compensation and insurance could not proceed without proof of his death, and the Potter family wanted to give him a Christian burial. His funeral took place at Clonmel on 30 August 1921. In the last entry in his diary Potter wrote that he was to be ‘executed this evening at 7 p.m. … my guardians are not at all anxious to kill me, but have received orders from GHQ which they cannot disobey’. Following his death, ten farms in the locality were badly damaged in reprisal attacks, including Tincurry House near Cahir, where the Soloheadbeg ambusher had hidden following the ambush of 21 January 1919. A notice stating that the reprisals were officially sanctioned appeared in local newspapers at the time;

Official reprisals in south Tipperary – 14 homes destroyed … ordered by the colonel commanding the 16th Infantry Brigade on the grounds that the persons concerned are active supporters of armed rebels and that they reside in the area.

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64 *Nenagh Guardian*, 30 April 1921.
65 *Irish Independent*, 29 April 1921.
68 *The Nationalist*, 18 May 1921.
The breakdown in volunteer discipline that had taken place during the detention and subsequent execution of Potter did not go unnoticed by IRA commanders and subsequently became an issue of concern. A short time after Potter’s death a volunteer party set up an ambush in the same area for a joint military and RIC convoy that was expected to pass. Dinny Lacey, commander of the flying column made the comment that he expected an RIC district inspector to be amongst the convoy. On hearing this, volunteer Andrew Kennedy remarked ‘if there is a district inspector we had better shoot him when we get him and not be crying about it afterwards’. Lacey apparently took exception to this frivolous remark, and Kennedy later recalled that was subsequently punished by being selected for some ‘tough assignments’.  

In April 1921 IRA brigade headquarters issued an instruction that bridges in each battalion area were to be demolished. The previous practice of trenching or digging roads had largely been countered when military patrols began to carry wooden planks on their Crossley or Lancia tenders, which were then used as improvised bridging. On 27 April volunteers from Cappawhite in south Tipperary destroyed a bridge at Ballymore which was used by military and police convoys travelling between Tipperary town and Dundrum. Two IRA members, Lieutenant Martin Purcell and Volunteer Patrick Maher were captured during follow-up raids and taken into military custody at Tipperary barracks. Maher was transferred to the Curragh military hospital in Kildare where he subsequently died, and Purcell died while in custody in Tipperary. Believing that Purcell had been murdered, the IRA set out to exact retribution. They had valuable sources of accurate intelligence as two local RIC sergeants, O’Sullivan in Annacarty and Ryan in Dundrum were sympathetic to the volunteer cause and provided cipher codes and other important information. On 6 May 1921 a police patrol was approaching the Anglican Church at Annacarty along a rural road when they observed several men, one of whom was equipped with field glasses in the

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69 Statement of Andrew Kennedy, BMH/WS 963, p. 22.
70 Statement of Michael Davern, BMH/WS 1348, p. 54.
vicinity of a nearby farmhouse. Shots were fired at the patrol which hastily retreated back towards their barracks. As they withdrew from the area the policemen encountered a civilian who was taken prisoner as they suspected him to be a member of the ambush party. As the patrol reached the main road they came under heavy and sustained fire, resulting in the death of Sergeant James Kingston and his prisoner. The remaining members of the party escaped injury and the ambushers swiftly left the area. A native of Clonakilty in county Cork, Sergeant Kingston had twenty-six years’ service in the RIC and was married with six children. Following his death, fairs and markets in the Cappawhite area were prohibited, and the farmhouse near the scene of the ambush set ablaze. In his report the county inspector described the dead civilian as an ‘unknown ambusher’.\textsuperscript{71} In an effort to identify the man the RIC took the unusual step of photographing the body and displaying it in various shops in the locality, but nobody came forward to claim the remains.\textsuperscript{72}

In late April 1921 Commandant Sean Gaynor was summoned to a meeting at IRA GHQ in Dublin along with officers from every other county in Ireland. One of the issues addressed by IRA chief of staff Richard Mulcahy was the allegation that some brigades that were not pulling their weight.\textsuperscript{73} On his return to north Tipperary Gaynor selected the IRA in Newport for reorganization as he believed them to be ‘very poor’. He targeted the local district Inspector, Harold Biggs, an exceptionally unpopular man even by the standards of the time as a priority. Biggs had arrived in Tipperary in August 1920 as a member of the Auxiliary Division but had later transferred into the regular RIC as the district inspector for Newport. The barracks in Newport had been evacuated but a heavily fortified garrison was established at Rosehill House just outside the town. Biggs had quickly established a reputation for aggression, with one IRA volunteer remembering him as ‘truculent and

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\textsuperscript{71} Outrages against the police reports, April 1921, NALCO904/150.
\textsuperscript{72} Freemans Journal, 10 May 1921.
\textsuperscript{73} Statement of Sean Gaynor, BMH/WS 1389, p. 38.
active’ … a bitter opponent of the IRA with few equals in that regard. On one occasion it was alleged that Biggs went to the village of Silvermines after Sunday mass, and forced mass goers to sing ‘God save the King’ at gunpoint. For local IRA commanders the death of Biggs, described by Gaynor as ‘a vicious Black and Tan officer’ became a priority. If they could succeed in killing him, it would send a clear and unambiguous signal to other policemen about the dangers of active aggression. It would also remove the perception that the IRA in the Newport district had been less than enthusiastic about conducting military operations.

On 15 May 1921 brigade officers met at a house in Newport to plan how they might assassinate Biggs. As the meeting took place a scout who had been watching outside entered and said that Biggs had just passed by in a motor car with three other persons, all in civilian attire. It was believed that the party was going to visit the house of a local landowner Major Gabbitt, who regularly entertained Biggs along with other RIC and military officers. Plans were hastily made to ambush the car when it left Gabbitt’s house for the return journey to Newport. Twelve volunteers assembled and the two possible routes that the party could take from the house were covered. After several hours the car was seen leaving the house and as it approached the townland of Coolboreen, the volunteers opened fire. The car travelled on for about twenty yards before stopping and three of the occupants got out and ran away. A volunteer recognised Biggs and shouted ‘that’s the DI’, causing fire to be reopened. Biggs was shot dead, another person badly wounded and the third managed to return fire before escaping. Gabbitt, who was driving the car, emerged with his hands raised shouting ‘stop, stop, there is a lady in the car’. He told the volunteers that a Miss Barrington had been shot, and that another female, Miss Ryan was also in the car. While she was physically unscathed, Miss Ryan gave Gaynor and the other IRA members ‘dog’s abuse’ for having shot Miss Barrington. Another member of the

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75 Irish Independent, 19 May 1921.
ambush party, Paddy Ryan Lacken silenced her saying ‘that it served them right, and only for the bitch being in bad company, she would not be shot!’

The IRA party swiftly left the area as they expected an influx of reinforcements and reprisals following the shootings. The death of Winifred Barrington attracted significant attention given that she was not only a female civilian, but also the daughter of Sir Charles Barrington of Glenstal Castle, Limerick, a prominent property owner. Several similar incidents had taken place since the outbreak of hostilities including one at Gort in Galway when a car containing military officers in civilian attire and their female companions was ambushed, resulting in the death of Mrs. Blake, wife of the local county inspector. Such incidents provoked great controversy, with the press calling the death of female civilians ‘deplorable events’. Blame was attributed to individual soldiers and policemen for putting female civilians in harm’s way in the first place. *The Times* editorialised that if officers permitted ladies to accompany them they are ‘directly responsible for any harm that may unhappily befall them in the event of an attack. That is the rule of all wars’. Shortly afterwards at a military court of enquiry in Limerick into the deaths of District Inspector Biggs and Miss Barrington, Miss Ryan, who had escaped injury during the ambush deposed that the IRA volunteers fired several shots into the body of Biggs as he lay on the road, with one of them remarking that Biggs was ‘the man we wanted’.

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76 Statement of Sean Gaynor, BMH/WS 1389, p. 42.
77 *The Times*, 12 January 1921.
78 *Irish Independent*, 19 May 1921.
Plate 4.3: Graphic from the *Illustrated London News*, 1921 - ‘Death of an officer in Ireland’

This illustration depicts the execution of Lieutenant Breeze of the Worcester Regiment by the IRA near Dublin in 1921. A similar incident to the one during which DI Biggs and Ms. Barrington were killed, it was one of many such occurrences during which off duty members of the RIC and military were ambushed. Such ambushes often resulted in death or injury to civilians accompanying the intended target. Source: Reproduced with the permission of *Illustrated London News* magazine archives, London. © Illustrated London News Ltd/Mary Evans. Image Ref: ILN04
On 15 May 1921 a party of policemen was attacked in the village of Bansha as they left the Roman Catholic Church after attending mass. Having travelled approximately thirty yards from the church, a group of IRA volunteers opened fire from behind cover, hitting three of the policemen. Constable John Nutley was killed instantaneously while Sergeant Sullivan was seriously wounded and Constable McLaughlin received slight injuries. Nutley, a single man aged twenty-two from Galway had been in the RIC for only twelve months, having previously served in the army and also worked as a labourer. Several houses including that of a local publican Mrs. O'Dwyer were subsequently destroyed in reprisal.

On the following Sunday, local parish priest Father Byrne referred in his sermon to recent events. He asked parishioners to pray for the dead and wounded, and also for those who had lost their property or homes. He ended by saying that ‘no words can describe the appalling condition of the parish’, and expressed his hope that future Sabbaths would not be so desecrated by similar events. The county inspector subsequently reported that reprisals carried out in respect of the death of Nutley were ‘official reprisals’.

The Auxiliary Division were regarded by the IRA as their greatest threat but in common with the Black and Tans, indiscipline and drunkenness amongst their ranks played into the hands of the volunteers and of well-placed critics of British government policy in Ireland. The Labour Party Commission of Enquiry for example, concluded that the Auxiliaries did not seem to recognise the authority of Dublin Castle and wondered whom they served? One notorious incident occurred on 17 April 1921 at Castleconnell, close to the Limerick/Tipperary border. Three off duty temporary cadets in plain clothes were drinking in a hotel when it was raided by other auxiliaries, also in plain clothes. Each group mistook the other for IRA volunteers and opened fire. When the exchange of shots had

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80 Irish Independent, 17 May 1921
82 Irish Independent, 17 May 1921
83 Irish Independent, 23 May 1921
84 RIC county Inspectors report, Tipperary South Riding, May 1921, NAI CO 904/115.
85 Labour Party report on the commission of inquiry into the present conditions in Ireland, NALCO904/180, p. 7.
finished one RIC sergeant, one temporary cadet and the hotel manager, Denis O'Donovan had been killed. At the subsequent military enquiry the deputy adjutant general commented that the auxiliaries ‘had the wind up, blood up, and did what they used to do in the trenches in France’. He pleaded that in such circumstances they should not be held criminally responsible, but asserted that they were ‘not fit to be policemen, nor were any Auxiliaries’.

Plate 4.4: Templemore Abbey, 1920

Source: Lawrence Collection photograph, National Library of Ireland.

Another significant event which took place during May 1921 was the complete withdrawal of the Auxiliary Division from north Tipperary to reinforce companies based elsewhere in Ireland. Commandant Séan Scott in Templemore received a message from Michael Collins stating that B company was about to vacate Templemore Abbey, the home of Sir John Carden, which had been commandeered in 1920. Collins directed that must be destroyed ‘at all costs … even at the loss of men’. Scott was surprised to learn that the

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88 Statement of Sean Scott, BMH/WS 1486, p. 10.
Abbey was to be vacated as he had no local intelligence to that effect. Because of the implicit confidence which he had in Collins however, preparations were made to burn the mansion as ordered. The Abbey had been turned into a formidable bastion by the auxiliaries and was also an important symbolic target for the local volunteers as it was the ancestral seat of the Carden family who had been notoriously unpopular landlords in Templemore area during the great famine.89

Plate 4.5 Mural from the mess wall of ‘B’ company Auxiliary Division, Templemore Abbey, 192190

Source: Photographed by W.E. Crewe, F Company, Auxiliary Division, RIC. Reproduced with permission of Peter McGoldrick © www.irishconstabulary.com

Scott’s faith in the information supplied by Collins was justified as shortly after he had received his orders, and much to the relief of the volunteers lying in wait, the

89 John Rutter Carden (1811-1866) earned the nickname ‘Woodcock’ because ‘those who shot at him always missed’. It was also said of him that: ‘having so many enemies is the reason for him not being shot, for everyone leaves it for the others to do, and so he escapes altogether; whereas if he had only a few, he would be shot at once’. See; Arthur Carden, ‘Templemore houses and castles, drawings by Robert Smith’ in, Tipperary Historical Journal (2002), p. 113.
90 This mural was painted on the wall of the Auxiliary Division B Company mess at Templemore Abbey. The Latin motto ‘nulli secundus’ translates as ‘second to none’. Above the harp and crown badge of the RIC, the epithet ‘Tudor’s Toughs’ refers to the nickname given to themselves by members of the Auxiliary Division. At the centre of this unofficial crest is a one pound note, the daily wage paid to members of the division. Playing cards and alcohol feature prominently, along with police equipment such as whistles, revolvers and hand grenades, known as ‘mills bombs’.
auxiliaries were observed loading their transports and leaving the Abbey. On the same
night a party of fifteen IRA volunteers seized thirty gallons of petrol from various
businesses in the town and broke into the Abbey. It was ineptly set ablaze however, and
some volunteers received burns and other injuries in the process. Within a few hours the
elaborate gothic revival mansion and outbuildings had been razed to the ground. The
destruction of the Abbey and the swift departure of the Auxiliaries may not have been a
military victory for the IRA, but the symbolism of these events was manifest to all.

In June 1921 the already fraught situation in Tipperary for members of the Royal
Irish Constabulary worsened. The county inspector for north reported that the number of
outrages including deaths, robbery of mails, intimidation and boycotting had risen from
fifty-four in May to eighty in June.91 In the south riding the county inspector reported that
the situation was so bad ‘that it could not get any worse’.92 Long periods confined to
barracks and the constant threat of bodily harm had a devastating effect on both the
physical and mental wellbeing of policemen. The situation was particularly difficult for
those who had the additional burden of worrying about friends and family suffering
intimidation and boycotting. It was noticeable that morale varied substantially between
different barracks, and this was remarked upon by the county inspector for the north
riding. He noted that in stations which were strong and from which good fighting patrols
could be sent out morale was good, but in smaller stations where men were doing nothing
but holding their post ‘it is only natural to find pessimism and a fed up attitude … the men
naturally want to hunt for the rebel, and they want to see the government give a free hand
to those charged with settling the country’.93

The most violent incident to take place in Tipperary during this period occurred on
2 June when four policemen were killed and another four seriously wounded in an ambush
at Modreeney, between Borrisokane and Cloughjordan. Commandant Séan Gaynor

91 RIC county Inspectors report, Tipperary North Riding, June 1921, NAI.CO 904/115.
92 Ibid.
93 RIC county Inspectors report, Tipperary North Riding, June 1921, NAI.CO 904/115.
planned the ambush after receiving information from a constable based in Borrisokane barracks. A group of up to thirteen policemen were scheduled to make their way by bicycle from Borrisokane to Cloughjordan on the morning of the following Friday to attend the petty sessions court.\textsuperscript{94} Gaynor planned an ambush at the midway point between the two towns. The location was chosen because it was remote, distant from possible reinforcements, and at a bend in the road surrounded by high ground. This gave attackers a significant tactical advantage. IRA reinforcements were brought into the area but Gaynor did not reveal the intended target until the last minute. As his information had come from a policeman, he could not be certain that it was accurate and he had to consider the possibility of a trap being set.

More than twenty volunteers took part in the ambush, including a flying column assisted by the Cloughjordan volunteer company. The group set out for the ambush site at 4 a.m. on Friday 3 June 1921. Just before leaving, the volunteers were briefed as to their intended target. Most were armed with shotguns; several had rifles, while some of the officers had revolvers. When they reached Modreeney the volunteers concealed themselves and waited. The brigade had been practicing semaphore in previous months, and this skill proved to be of significant benefit when at 9 a.m., a scout signaled that the policemen were approaching. The signal also caused surprise however when it revealed that instead of the thirteen policemen who had been anticipated, the convoy actually consisted of over forty policemen and soldiers. Despite the increased odds, the IRA commander decided to attack and blew a whistle as a signal to open fire. The leading military lorry was unscathed and hurriedly left the scene, thus ensuring that reinforcements would be sent for. A car containing five policemen was then attacked. Constable James Briggs died instantly and eight other policemen badly wounded. The ambush took a somewhat bizarre turn when IRA commander Paddy Kennedy was seen firing at the police with a shotgun at close range.

\textsuperscript{94} Statement of Sean Gaynor, BMH/WS 1389, p. 43.
with his rosary beads hung around his neck. After thirty minutes the IRA ceased firing and withdrew, knowing that reinforcements would soon arrive from Nenagh, seven miles distant. Before doing so several weapons and a substantial amount of ammunition was taken from the bodies of the dead and wounded policemen. Medical assistance was given by local general practitioner Dr. Quigley, and local priest Fr. Smith administered the last rites to the dead and injured. Three of the wounded policemen, Constables John Cantlon, Martin Feeney and William Walsh died the following day.

Plate 4.6: Constable James Briggs MM, DCM

Source: Reproduced with the permission of the Briggs family, via James Herlihy, author of *Royal Irish Constabulary Officers, a biographical dictionary and genealogical guide 1816-1922.* (Dublin 2005).

A single man from Scotland, Constable Briggs had joined the RIC in 1920, having been awarded both the Military Medal (MM) and Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) for his service during the Great War. His memoriam card contained some poignant verses penned by his mother including

Friends may forget him, his mother will never;  
He will live in my heart till life's journey is done.  
Lord, teach me to live that when my life is ended,  
I'll be met at the gates by my dear hero son.

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95 Statement of Liam Hoolan, BMH/WS 1553, p. 16.  
96 *Irish Independent*, 4 June 1921
The Modreeney ambush was considered a significant military victory by the IRA given the number of casualties inflicted on the police and the fact that no volunteers were wounded in the encounter. A letter of commendation was subsequently sent to Commandant Gaynor by IRA chief of staff Richard Mulcahy.

Plate 4.7: Plan of Borrisoleigh RIC barracks 5 October 1920, prepared by the Defence of Barracks Sergeant as part of the fortification process.

Source: Reproduced with the permission of the National Archives of Ireland, reference number OPW5HC/4/93

On 28 June 1921 the last large scale operation against crown forces in north Tipperary took place when the RIC barracks in Borrisoleigh was attacked. The barracks was of strategic importance as it was located on the main street of the village, on the main road between Nenagh and Thurles, and close to the large garrison town of Templemore. The barracks had been heavily fortified during the latter part of 1920, steel shutters had been placed on all on doors and windows, and sandbags and barbed wire surrounded the
perimeter. As with previous attacks on terraced barracks such as those at Kilcommon and Rearcross, the usual tactics were employed: After gaining access to the barrack roof via an adjacent premises, the roof slates were removed; petrol poured into the void and set ablaze, forcing the police to abandon it. In Borrisoleigh the IRA received intelligence that the upstairs portion of Maher’s public house, next to to the barracks had been sealed off by the police and booby traps laid. It was necessary therefore to adopt new tactics. Local IRA commander Jim Stapleton decided to use a rudimentary ‘allowee’ bomb commonly used by the IRA. These were manufactured by taking a stick of gelignite and wrapping it in a coating of sticky mud. A fuse was lit and if thrown with accuracy, the bomb would stick to the building before detonating. In the days leading up to the attack over thirty local volunteers were assigned to the manufacture of such bombs and up to 400 IRA men from all three Tipperary brigades took part in the attack itself.97

On the evening of the attack all roads leading into Borrisoleigh were barricaded; trenches were dug and telephone wires cut. Parties of volunteers lay in wait at disparate locations as it was expected that reinforcements would be summoned by the Borrisoleigh garrison when the attack commenced. Diversionary sniper attacks were also planned for police stations at Gurtaderrybeg, Templetohy and Barnane. The main attack began at 11.00 p.m. when rifle fire was directed at the barracks and the bombs thrown. The barracks soon caught fire but the flames quickly died out. More bombs were thrown with similar results and Stapleton realised that the barracks was not going to be easily set ablaze. The police inside the barracks sent up Verey flares to summon assistance from Templemore; but none were forthcoming as it was feared that such reinforcements would be lured into an ambush. As dawn approached IRA commanders decided to end the attack by a pre-arranged signal, the ringing of the bell in the Roman Catholic Church. The signal had been deliberately chosen by Jim Stapleton to cause maximum annoyance to the local parish.

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priest, a vocal opponent of the IRA. In the period leading up to the attack farm labourer and former soldier Patrick Meagher had been executed by the IRA as he had been seen socialising with policemen and ignored warnings to cease doing so. His body was found by early morning mass goers with the usual notice of ‘executed by the IRA, spies and informers beware’ affixed.

Two days later twenty-one year old Constable Joseph Bourke was shot dead while standing at the door of Templemore RIC barracks. A former soldier from Cork who had joined the police in 1920, the exact circumstances of his death were shrouded in mystery, and no details were released by official sources. One newspaper subsequently reported that RIC Constable William Sheehan had been arrested and was in custody at the military barracks in Templemore in connection with the death of Bourke. In August 1921 a court-martial took place at Victoria Barracks in Cork and Sheehan was charged with the ‘wilful murder’ of Burke. Medical evidence was given that Sheehan had a ‘delusion of persecution’ and that he had told doctors that he was being ‘tormented by everybody’.

The court-martial accepted that Sheehan was unable to stand trial due to insanity, and he was remanded in custody to be dealt with according to military regulations. He was subsequently committed to Broadmoor Asylum in England.

The last member of the RIC in Tipperary to be killed before the truce came into effect on 11 July 1921 was Joseph Shelsher from London, a former soldier who had been in the RIC for less than twelve months and was stationed at Bansha. On the evening of 1 July he left his barracks on recreation at about 9 p.m. Two hours later his body was found on a nearby country road by a passing labourer. He had been shot once in the head, and

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98 Statement of James Leahy, BMH/WS 1454, p. 78.
99 Nenagh Guardian, 2 July 1921
101 Irish Independent, 1 July 1921.
102 Irish Times, 18 August 1921.
103 Ibid.
104 Weekly Survey of the State of Ireland, November 1921, National Archives CAB/24/131.
105 Outrages against the police reports, July 1921, NALCO904/150.
his revolver and ammunition taken.\textsuperscript{106} Following his death a large number of police and military reinforcements came into the area from the garrison in Tipperary town. Most business premises in Tipperary town and all in Bansha were ordered by the military to close for periods ranging from several hours to several days as a mark of respect to the deceased.

The long memory and equally lengthy reach of the IRA was powerfully demonstrated on 7 July 1921 when the body of a retired RIC sergeant, Anthony Foody was found at Carralavin, Mayo by a local postman. He had been shot dead and around his neck was placed a notice reading ‘revenge for Dwyer and the Ragg’.\textsuperscript{107} Foody had retired from the RIC only three weeks before and had purchased a smallholding at Bonniconlon, near to where his body was found. It was established that Foody had been taken at gunpoint by two armed and masked men from the house of a cousin that he was visiting.\textsuperscript{108} It was later reported that two men, relatives of Foody had been taken into custody for questioning in connection with his death, but no charges were subsequently preferred.\textsuperscript{109} Foody had served in Thurles prior to retiring and was believed by Tipperary IRA members to have been partially responsible for the deaths of two volunteers James McCarthy and Tom Dwyer during the ‘Ragg incident’ of 4 March 1920. Foody became a marked man following this incident and had a previous escape on 31 May 1920 when three armed and masked men called to his house and quizzed his wife as to his whereabouts. Stating that they were ‘Irish police … and have to do our duty’, they searched the house but left when they realised that Foody was not at home.\textsuperscript{110}

On 4 April 1920 Foody went to Dovea church with eight other policemen to attend mass and found that the a pew which had been paid for and used by RIC members for many years had been destroyed and left outside the church. Many churches in Ireland had pews which had been funded by the local RIC or had been donated for their use by

\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Freeman's Journal}, 4 July 1921  
\textsuperscript{107} Abbott, \textit{Police casualties in Ireland}, p. 264.  
\textsuperscript{108} Outrages against the police reports, July 1921, NALCO904/150.  
\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Irish Independent}, 8 July 1921.  
\textsuperscript{110} Outrages against the police reports, May 1920, NALCO904/148.
benefactors. Some dated back to the famine era but as the conflict progressed it became common for such pews to be removed from churches, or even destroyed. Local IRA volunteers berated the police as they left church with one remarking ‘we won’t have your breath amongst us’.\footnote{Outrages against the police reports, April 1920, NAI.CO904/148.} Considerable pressure was placed upon the clergy along with the general population to uphold the policy of boycott and intimidation against the RIC, and while Foody complained to the local parish priest about the removal of the pew, it was to no avail. The saga of the ‘peelers pew’ was even incorporated into a ballad about the incident, including the words ‘it (the pew) burnt like the trees … t’was nice timber for the fire’.\footnote{Padraig O’ Haicead, \textit{Keep their names ever green} (Nenagh, 2003), pp. 162-163.} Foody had been fortunate to escape death while serving in Tipperary, but even his retirement and relocation to a different part of Ireland were not enough to ensure his survival.

In 1921 the Tipperary IRA believed that a police ‘murder gang’ existed in Tipperary. They believed that it was under the command of Head Constable Eugene Igoe from Thurles, who was well known to volunteers in the county having previously served in Shevry and Littleton. Prior to the Ragg incident however, the IRA had regarded him to be ‘an inoffensive man … whose only interest was a buxom barmaid in a local pub’.\footnote{Statement of James Leahy, BMH/WS 1454, p. 42.} In October 1920 a ‘friendly policemen’ gave Commandant Jimmy Leahy a list containing twelve names of prominent local people that had allegedly been targeted for assassination by the RIC. Leahy was surprised to see that the list contained not only his own name but also that of the Archbishop of Cashel, Dr. Harty.\footnote{Ibid, p. 50.} In January 1921 Igoe was transferred to Dublin as part of a reorganisation of the intelligence service under the command of Colonel Ormode Winter, codename ‘O’. It was now realised that the key to success against the IRA was intelligence. Many IRA activists had relocated to Dublin to evade capture, and to counter this a detachment of specially selected policemen drawn from different parts of

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\footnote{Outrages against the police reports, April 1920, NAI.CO904/148.}
\footnote{Padraig O’ Haicead, \textit{Keep their names ever green} (Nenagh, 2003), pp. 162-163.}
\footnote{Statement of James Leahy, BMH/WS 1454, p. 42.}
\footnote{Ibid, p. 50.}
Ireland with extensive local knowledge was formed under the command of Igoe, who was promoted by Winter to the rank of temporary head constable.\textsuperscript{115} This ‘identification company’ patrolled the streets of Dublin in civilian attire looking for wanted men and were a direct threat to the squad assembled by Michael Collins to carry out assassinations at his behest.

Labelled the ‘Igoe gang’ by the IRA, this unit was intended to play the volunteers at their own game and redress the balance. Renowned for having an aggressive attitude, a superior of Igoe’s admitted that ‘he needed to be handier with his gun than the gunmen were with theirs’. He went on to say that while the police in Dublin were full of admiration for Igoe … he was regarded by the IRA as a murderer. Thus, his life would be in danger wherever he went.\textsuperscript{116} At the request of Michael Collins Jimmy Leahy sent two volunteers to Dublin with the intention of identifying Igoe for the squad. They were able to do so, but much to Leahy’s regret Igoe survived the conflict and subsequently went on to take part in secret service operations for the British government in other countries. He was unable to return to his farm in Mayo however, for fear of reprisal.\textsuperscript{117} After the conflict had ended in 1922 and the RIC was in the process of being disbanded, Winter interceded on Igoe’s behalf recommending that his pension should be increased for his ‘many services to the crown in Ireland and elsewhere’.\textsuperscript{118}

After two years marked by personal animosity and extreme bitterness on both sides the conflict was approaching a finality of sorts. During the first half of 1921, informal negotiations aimed at brokering a ceasefire took place between the British government and representatives of the IRA. Patrick Clune, archbishop of Perth in Western Australia acted as an intermediary. The on-going contact between Clune and Collins caused an exasperated

\textsuperscript{115} Michael T. Foy, \textit{Michael Collins’s intelligence war, the struggle between the British and the IRA, 1919-1921} (Glouster, 2006), p. 185.
\textsuperscript{116} RIC service file for Head Constable Eugene Igoe. TNA: PRO T164/25/20, quoted in; Foy, \textit{Michael Collins’s intelligence war}, p. 185.
\textsuperscript{117} Statement of James Leahy, BMH/WS 1454, p. 49.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.
Mark Sturgis, assistant under secretary at Dublin Castle to comment in his diary ‘I wonder how it is that the archbishop sees Collins apparently without difficulty in Dublin, yet our intelligence fails to find him after weeks of searching’. Another important negotiator in the peace process was General Jan Smuts, premier of South Africa. During the Boer War of 1899-1902 Smuts fought against the British and demonstrated a particular talent for guerrilla warfare, thus giving him credibility with Irish revolutionaries.

On 22 June 1921 King George V opened a session of parliament in Belfast and his speech on that occasion is regarded by historians such as Townshend and F.S.L. Lyons as having acted as a catalyst for the British government by publicly endorsing their attempts to make peace. The timing of the king’s speech was also critical as martial law was due to be extended to the remaining counties of Ireland on 14 July. Events moved swiftly and on 28 June Dublin Castle ordered the suspension of ‘raids on premises frequented by persons of political importance’.

A Dáil peace conference began at the Mansion House in Dublin on 5 July at which tentative agreement was reached to the overtures of the British government, and a truce came into effect on Monday 11 July 1921.

For thousands of policemen who had survived the conflict, their relief at a ceasefire was tempered with apprehension as they faced an uncertain future. In north Tipperary the county inspector reported that the men under his command did not receive the truce announcement with acclaim and that it was only natural that having suffered so much at the hands of ‘known murderers’, they felt it difficult to restrain themselves when orders to carry out the truce were received. Despite the personal animosity and strong feelings which existed between the participants in the conflict, the truce was reasonably well observed in practice, with liaison officers nominated on both sides to ensure that any breaches were swiftly dealt with. The inspector general of the RIC noted with some

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120 Townshend, *The British campaign in Ireland*, p. 197.
121 RIC county Inspectors report, Tipperary North Riding, July 1921, NAI.CO 904/116.
satisfaction that a ‘tremendous weight’ had been lifted from the civilian population, and
that they were beginning to enjoy the benefits of peace.\textsuperscript{122} Patrick Shea expressed the
feelings of many policemen and those close to them when he wrote that despite strong
reservations about the truce, the politics of the arrangement were soon forgotten:

\begin{quote}
The shooting was over and my father had come through unhurt. I would no longer
lie in bed praying for the sound of his footstep or watch the colour leave my
mother’s face when there was a knock on the door. Whatever the future might
hold, fear had been banished.\textsuperscript{123}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{122}\textit{RIC Inspector General’s monthly report, July 1921, NALCO 904/116.}
\textsuperscript{123}\textit{Shea, \textit{Voices and the sounds of drums, an Irish autobiography} (Belfast, 1981), p. 27.}
\end{flushright}
This illustration depicts a British soldier sympathizing with a member of the RIC, and making a comparison about their respective foes, the Imperial German army and the IRA. The epithet 'old contemptibles' was applied to British soldiers who had served in the regular army before 1914, and was adopted by the post-war veterans' association. Source: Reproduced with the permission of Punch magazine archives, London. © Punch magazine.
‘I never expected to see the day when ships would sail away to England with the Auxiliaries and the Black and Tans, the RIC and the British soldiery … Dublin Castle itself – that dread Bastille of Ireland – formally surrendered into my hands by the lord lieutenant - Michael Collins.’

When the truce commenced at 12 noon on Monday 11 July 1921 it initially brought a degree of peace to a country ravaged by conflict. It was an uneasy peace however, and both sides stood in readiness to recommence hostilities if the truce collapsed. The terms of the concord stated that the British government would not send additional reinforcements to Ireland and that the military, Royal Irish Constabulary or Auxiliary Division would not engage in what were termed ‘provocative’ displays of militarism. It was also agreed that volunteers would not be tracked nor their military supplies seized. For their part the IRA who were now referred to as the ‘Irish army’ in official correspondence for the first time undertook to cease all attacks on crown forces and disengage from what could be regarded as ‘reciprocal confrontational displays’. Breaches of the truce occurred on both sides, but the reality of the situation and political expediency ensured that most of them were overlooked. Many more policemen however, both serving and retired would die before the force was finally disbanded.

The campaign of boycotting and intimidation against the RIC and their families and those associated with them continued, albeit on a lesser scale. For policemen who had borne the brunt of the conflict since 1919, their relief at the lull in hostilities was tempered

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with frustration at the terms of the truce. For the first time the IRA was formally recognised and acknowledged, giving the militant movement the status and recognition it sought. RIC Deputy Inspector General Walsh warned the force men that extremists ‘may commit serious breaches of the truce … but responsible Sinn Féin leaders now have a direct and immediate common interest with the British government in maintaining law and order’.³ In Tipperary, the county inspector reported on apparent breaches of the ceasefire which saw ‘well known murderers of police parading at will in front of the comrades of those who have been murdered’.⁴ Officers of the IRA began to appear openly in public wearing military uniform and the movement took full advantage of the opportunity to recruit, drill and train. New arrivals that swelled the ranks of the volunteers during in the post-truce period were contemptuously referred to by some veteran members as ‘truciliers’. Piaras Béaslaí categorised them as ‘truce heroes’ and noted that many were more aggressive and militant than those who had been through the previous campaign.⁵ For truce liaison officers, when incidents did occur the apportioning of responsibility presented great difficulty, and carried profound implications for the peace negotiations.

One such incident occurred in Tipperary on 10 November 1921 when two constables cycling from their barracks in the village of Portroe towards Nenagh were fired at near Ballyrusheen. One of the policemen was badly wounded, and Chief Secretary Hamar Greenwood stated his belief that ‘the outrage was deliberately planned … but there was no reason to suppose that the miscreants were other than irresponsible mischief-makers acting on their own initiative’.⁶ Greenwood went on to say that the matter was

³ Memo from RIC Deputy Inspector General Walsh to all county and district inspectors, 9 December 1921, NALCO 904/178.
⁴ RIC county Inspectors report, Tipperary North Riding, August 1921, NALCO 904/116.
⁶ Weekly Survey of the State of Ireland, November 1921, National Archives CAB/24/131.
under investigation by the police in conjunction with the local Sinn Féin liaison officer.\(^7\)

On 1 October 1921 Sir Neville Macready, commander in chief of crown forces in Ireland cautioned the British government that advantage had been taken of the truce to convert the IRA, which was three months previously had been little more than ‘a disorganised rabble, into a well-disciplined, well-organized and well-armed force’.\(^8\) The IRA ensured that they were ready to resume the conflict in earnest should the ceasefire collapse, while policemen confined to barracks could only watch and wait for the next phase of the political process.

At 2.30 a.m. on 6 December 1921 after a prolonged period of negotiation a treaty was signed by representatives of the British government led by Prime Minister Lloyd George and Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill. The Irish provisional government delegation included Michael Collins, Arthur Griffith and Cathal Brugha. Urging the Irish people to support the treaty in the Dáil, Collins subsequently stated that ‘deputies have spoken about whether dead men would have approved … they have spoken whether children yet unborn will approve it, but few of them have spoken as to whether the living will approve it … there is no man here who has more regard for the dead than I have’.\(^9\)

The transition to a new entity known as the Irish Free State would inevitably have a profound effect on those serving in the current administration and their fate was referred to in article 10 of the treaty. It specified that compensation was to be paid to judges, officials, members of police forces, and other public servants who were discharged or forced to retire in consequence of the change of government. Expanding on this provision, article 10 went on to state that the agreement would not apply to members of the Auxiliary Division or Black and Tans recruited in Great Britain during the two years preceding … ‘the British government would assume responsibility for compensation or pensions as

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\(^7\)Weekly Survey of the State of Ireland, November 1921, National Archives CAB/24/131.
\(^8\)Townshend, The British campaign in Ireland 1919-1921, p. 199.
\(^9\)Tom Garvin, Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland 1858-1928 (Dublin 1986.), p. 277.
might be payable to such exempted persons.\textsuperscript{10} Article 10 of the treaty therefore distinguished between members of the RIC who had been serving prior to 1919, and those who had been recruited since the conflict began. For long serving policemen who had been linked by association with the nefarious activities of the Black and Tans and Auxiliaries, it was an important distinction. Article 10 of the treaty also clearly demonstrated the intention of the signatories to leave the nucleus of the pre 1919 RIC intact. These policemen would then form the core of new police forces to be established in both northern and southern Ireland. This stipulation also adhered to the terms of the Government of Ireland Act, 1920 which intended to establish new parliaments in both jurisdictions.

When details of the treaty became known, they were received with dissatisfaction by many members of the RIC. In a memo to cabinet on 10 December 1921 Greenwood revealed that the peace agreement with Sinn Féin had ‘aroused the liveliest feeling of apprehension in all ranks of the Royal Irish Constabulary’. He went on to say that it was the unanimous wish of all ranks of the RIC that the whole force should be disbanded rather than being subdivided and handed over to the governments of Northern and Southern Ireland. Greenwood stated that the RIC had been ‘an imperial force at the time they joined it, and its former members had no desire to serve in any part of it if ceased to be so’.\textsuperscript{11}

For policemen such as County Inspector John Regan in Limerick, the distinction between Irishmen that were members of the pre-1919 RIC and those recruited in Great Britain as the conflict escalated was also of crucial importance. In a later memoir he made the salient point that the Black and Tans ‘could return to their native land after the conflict

\textsuperscript{10} C.J.C Street, \textit{Ireland in 1921} (London, 1922), p. 258.
\textsuperscript{11} Memo from Chief Secretary to the Cabinet on the future of the Royal Irish Constabulary, 10 December 1921, National Archives, CAB/24/131.
ended, but many former members of the RIC could not remain in theirs”. An intensive campaign of lobbying by representative bodies for all ranks within the RIC began which included the sending of telegrams to both the prime minister and the king. A deputation from the representative bodies also travelled to London to personally lobby Churchill and other members of parliament. The delegation was led by County Inspector Gregory, chairman of the officer’s representative body. He was accompanied by District Inspectors Williamson and Loundes, Head Constable Kinsella, Sergeant Connolly, and Constables Wade and Fitzgibbon. Twenty-two other members of the rank and file also made the journey and the joint representative bodies engaged the leading Dublin barrister and former M.P Timothy Healy K.C as their senior counsel. The weekly magazine of the force, the Constabulary Gazette editorialised that ‘the force is unsettled and discontent rife … because of the uncertainly of the future’.

Greenwood had several meetings with the representatives and their legal advisors who expressed ‘utmost disfavour’ at the possibility of being handed over to the new government of the Irish Free State. The main objection stated was that the new government would be ‘composed entirely of members of Sinn Féin, against whom all their efforts had been directed during the recent struggle’. Representatives also emphasised their belief that it would not be possible for many policemen to return to their homes. Even if former policemen were not in any physical danger, it was asserted that ‘their lives

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13 Irish Independent, 16 March 1922.
14 Timothy Healy (1885–1931), a Kings Counsel and member of parliament between 1880 and 1918 represented six different constituencies and four different political allegiances. An opponent of Parnell, his opposition to the Irish parliamentary party endeared him to Sinn Féin following the 1916 Rising, although he never joined that party. His links to the British establishment and his ties to Sinn Féin made him a mutually acceptable choice as the first governor-general of the Irish Free State, 1922-28. See: Oxford companion to Irish history (New York, 2011), p. 237.
16 Ibid.
could be made intolerable by the hostility of their neighbours'.  

Greenwood offered no assurances to the representative bodies that their demands for complete disbandment could be met, but undertook to consider the proposal and submit it to the cabinet.

Aside from the sensitive political considerations involved, Greenwood was also conscious of the serious financial implications of completely disbanding the RIC, which had not been budgeted for. Article 10 of the treaty stated that the cost of disbanding the post 1919 force, which numbered some 5,796 men of constable and sergeant ranks would be borne by the British government. If the 6,571 men who had joined prior to 1919 were also to be disbanded on the same terms, substantial additional costs would be incurred. Greenwood circulated a memo to all police barracks on 17 December 1921 reassuring RIC members that the British government was fully conscious of their obligation towards those who had been and would shortly cease to be servants of the state. He went on to say that the unique position of the force required special treatment but that justice would be done 'to members of that gallant force … His Majesty’s Government will be the ultimate guarantor of their payments and pensions'.

At a cabinet meeting on 12 December 1921 the issue of complete disbandment of the RIC was again discussed and it was agreed that the government ‘must assure just treatment to members of the Royal Irish Constabulary’, but full disbandment was not conceded to at that stage. Greenwood was instructed to submit a memorandum to all cabinet members on the subject. By January 1922 the matter had been finally determined and the Provisional Government of Ireland Committee under the chairmanship of Winston Churchill submitted their recommendations to the cabinet. Dealing with the logistics of British withdrawal from Ireland, Churchill described the issue of policing as ‘the

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18 Circular from the Chief Secretary’s Office to all RIC stations, 17 December, 1921, NALCO 904/178.
19 Cabinet meeting minutes, agenda item 5, 12 December 1921. National Archives CAB/23/27.
most difficult question of all”.\textsuperscript{20} Article 10 of the treaty had contemplated the transfer of the nucleus of the old RIC to the new Irish provisional government, but the attitude adopted by the membership made it clear that such a transfer, even if it could be affected, would not be in the interests of the new Irish provisional government.

Churchill recommended that the RIC should be completely disbanded as soon as practicable because some former members might want to enlist in the new police forces which would be established in both jurisdictions. Such recruitment would provide technical experience and lessen the compensation burden on the British government.\textsuperscript{21} That burden was substantial and a sub-committee established to examine the issue estimated that the annual cost of pensioning all eligible permanent RIC members would be £1,312,448. An additional cost of £230,000 per annum would be required to also compensate members recruited in England since 1919. The committee recommended that the government of the Irish Free State should not be ‘saddled with this liability’ in the interests of adhering to the spirit of article 10 of the treaty. An assumption was also made in their report that the Irish Free State would in due course assume financial responsibility for RIC pensions. The representative bodies strongly objected to this proposal as ‘the whereabouts of former RIC members would then be fully known to the Irish Free State’.\textsuperscript{22}

A policing vacuum had existed throughout Ireland since the RIC had effectively ceased to function as a civil police force as violence escalated following the Soloheadbeg ambush of January 1919. The constabulary abandoned their barracks, petty sessions courts stopped operating and in June 1921 an alternative system of justice was established by the IRA which consisted of Sinn Féin courts and the Republican Police. As outlined by Fearghal McGarry the appropriation of the policing functions of the RIC allowed the volunteer movement to ‘assert its authority over the community while at the same time

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\textsuperscript{20} Memo from Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill to the Cabinet on the transfer of powers to the Irish provisional government, 11 January 1922. National Archives CAB/24/132.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{22} Cabinet meeting minutes, 15 March 1922. National Archives CAB/23/29.
challenging the power of the state’.\footnote{Fearghal McGarry, \textit{Eoin O’Duffy: A self-made hero} (Oxford, 2005), p. 52.} Collins did not believe however that the Republican Police as an organisation were suitable for retention as a replacement for the RIC in the Irish Free State. Writing to W.T Cosgrave minister for local government, Collins stated that he did not want a ‘casual police force without proper training … it is not necessary for me to illustrate this by pointing to the wretched Republican Police system and to the awful personnel’.\footnote{Gregory Allen, \textit{The Garda Síochána, policing independent Ireland 1922-82} (Dublin, 1999), p. 10.}

The task of founding, recruiting, training and deploying the Civic Guard was an onerous one. Following the truce of July 1921 and subsequent Anglo-Irish treaty of December 1921, bitter and divisive debates took place in the Dáil before deputies voted on 7 January 1922. The treaty was ratified by a small margin of sixty-four votes to fifty-seven. The refusal to accept this vote by a significant section of Sinn Féin and the IRA did much to ensure that Ireland moved inexorably towards Civil War. On 9 February 1922 the inaugural meeting of a committee tasked by the provisional government with establishing a new police force took place at the Gresham Hotel in Dublin. Michael Collins was present as was Michael Staines, who would subsequently become the first commissioner of the new force, Éamonn Duggan, IRA director of intelligence, and IRA chief of staff Eoin O’Duffy, who would become the second commissioner. Despite the contempt displayed for the RIC by militant nationalists during the previous three years, which included a policy of boycotting and intimidation, of the nine men invited by Collins to manage the new police force seven had previously served in the Royal Irish Constabulary. Thirteen of the twenty committee members were either serving or former members of the force, with a further three coming from the Dublin Metropolitan Police.\footnote{Elizabeth Malcolm, \textit{The Irish Policeman 1822-1922: a life} (Dublin, 2006), p. 215.} The new force was initially named the Civic Guard, and Collins requested of Churchill that demobilisation of the RIC be delayed
to give sufficient time for the Civic Guard to be established.\textsuperscript{26} The task of formally disbanding the RIC began in earnest however, and operated in parallel with the efforts of the new Irish government to find men to replace them.\textsuperscript{27}

On 5 March 1922 Collins made the first public reference to the new Civic Guard during a speech at College Green in Dublin. He stated that he wanted ‘the support of the people for the new police we are forming … it will be a people’s guard for the protection of all classes and parties’.\textsuperscript{28} The organising committee for the Civic Guard recommended that the force should have a strength of 4,300 men, and be administered by a commissioner answerable to the government. Significantly, the Civic Guard was to be unarmed, but differed little from the Royal Irish Constabulary in structure, training or deployment. An estimated ninety-seven per cent of men recruited in the early months of the foundation of the force were former IRA members and of those, thirty per cent were veterans of front line operations, including flying columns.\textsuperscript{29} For the provisional government, time was now of the essence as the membership of the RIC insisted through their representative bodies that before new police forces could be established in both northern and southern Ireland, their ‘contract be honoured and completed … and the force must be completely disbanded’.\textsuperscript{30} Despite the relative peace brought about by the truce and subsequent treaty tensions remained high as the RIC began to physically depart from their barracks. There were many incidents as old antipathies came to the fore and some IRA volunteers availed of a final opportunity to engage in violence against the representatives of a police force which they reviled.

\textsuperscript{26} On 31 July 1923 the Dáil approved an amendment submitted by Cathal O’Shannon of the Labour party that the name of the Civic Guard be changed to the ‘Garda Síochána na hÉireann’, or ‘Guardians of the peace of Ireland’. See; Liam McNiffe, \textit{A History of the Garda Síochána} (Dublin, 1997), p. 31.
\textsuperscript{27} Cabinet meeting minutes, 15 March 1922. National Archives CAB/23/29.
\textsuperscript{28} Conor Brady, \textit{Guardians of the Peace} (Dublin, 1974), p.43.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid, p. 47.
Gormanstown in county Meath was chosen as the depot where all members of the force would gather to formally be dispersed. The Auxiliary Division was the first to be disbanded, and the last of its 1,243 members left Ireland on 25 January 1922. Black and Tans, who were members of the regular RIC but had been recruited in England since 1919 were the next group to be dealt with, followed by policemen who had already been serving in the force prior to 1919. In Tipperary, the entire county force was ordered to proceed to Gormanstown for disbandment. On 3 March 1922 as the last police convoy left Tipperary town en route for Gormanstown, local IRA volunteers who were against the terms of the treaty place a roadblock and called on the convoy to halt. An exchange of fire followed during which Head Constable Christopher Davis and Constable William Cummings were killed and several others wounded. The remaining policemen were taken prisoner and subsequently released, but their vehicles, arms and ammunition were seized. The British government was subsequently informed that three surviving policemen had been arrested by the military as there were ‘strong reasons for suspecting that this outrage was organised with the treacherous connivance of some members of the police party’.

The chaos of the period just prior to the outbreak of the civil war was encapsulated by Kevin O'Higgins, minister for economic affairs in the provisional government. He wrote that the government was ‘simply eight young men in the city hall standing amidst the ruins of one administration … with the foundations of another not yet laid, and with wild men screaming through the keyhole’. No police force was functioning … no system of justice operating; the wheels of administration hung idle, barred out of recognition by the clash of rival jurisdictions. The deteriorating situation in Ireland and the imminent threat of civil war made it imperative that new police forces were quickly established and deployed both in northern and southern Ireland. In this disordered transitional period

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31 Freemans Journal, 4 March 1922.
32 Weekly Survey of the State of Ireland, week ended 10 March 1922, National Archives CAB/24/134.
33 Kevin O'Higgins, address to the Irish Society at Oxford University, 1924, cited in White, Terence De Vere, Kevin O'Higgins (Dublin, 1966), p. 84.
leading up to full disbandment of the RIC, concern was expressed by the British government about the potential for discontented policemen to offer confidential information or equipment in exchange for money or guarantees for their safety. It was of the utmost importance therefore to minimise the delay in disbandment. Mark Sturgis, assistant under-secretary at Dublin Castle cautioned the government that it could be a ‘costly business if the value of the material surrendered is measured against whatever savings may be affected on the disbandment terms’.  

Following this, an audacious raid took place at Clonmel RIC barracks on 26 March 1922 during which the IRA seized three Lewis guns, 293 rifles and bayonets, forty-five shotguns, 230 revolvers, 206,500 rounds of ammunition, eleven motor cars and a large quantity of other military equipment. A dubious Greenwood reported to the cabinet his belief that the raid could not have been carried out without ‘culpable negligence, if not connivance on the part of some members of the garrison’. He also warned of the difficulty such incidents would cause to the new Irish administration. This concern was mirrored by Churchill who was queried during a parliamentary debate if the provisional government was in a position to do anything about the disturbed situation in Tipperary. Referring to weaponry and personnel including former Black and Tans which had been supplied to Collins, Churchill informed parliament that he was ‘supplying the provisional government with the means of asserting their authority and that is their intention’.

General Sir Neville Macready, commander-in-chief of forces in Ireland shared this concern and had written to the cabinet in March 2011 criticising the delay in disbandment. He stated that many policemen were now housed in military barracks for their own safety, and aside from the fact that they were still drawing pay, as they had nothing to do ‘they spend their time discussing their grievances, which if it continued might lead to trouble,

34 Fedorowich, ‘The problems of disbandment’, p. 95.
35 Weekly Survey of the State of Ireland, week ended 27 March 1922, National Archives CAB/24/134.
36 Parliamentary question from Sir William Davison to Winston Churchill, 26 July 1922, Hansard’s parliamentary debates, fifth series, House of Commons (vol 51 cc 876-9, London 1909-42)
with troops having to restore order’. Writing to the chief of police in March 1922, Assistant Under-Secretary A.W Cope highlighted the exceptional conditions in Ireland, and that many members of the force would be in great danger if they remained at home after disbandment. Chief Secretary Sir Hamar Greenwood concurred stating that the bitterness of feeling in Ireland, and ‘almost impossibility of finding employment … places them in a radically worse position than any other public servants whose services have been dispensed with’.

The British government did not accept the claims of RIC representative bodies pressing for better terms of disbandment that members of the force would be unable to live in any part of Ireland, but nonetheless did agree to payment of a disturbance allowance for Irishmen who wanted to move to England after disbandment. In consequence of this decision, free railway warrants for policemen and their families to travel to any destination in Ireland or England were issued. Agreement was also reached that pensions would be adjusted to provide a living wage during what was termed the ‘unemployable period’ of several years that former policemen were expected to face upon disbandment. A clear distinction was again made in these negotiations between pre 1919 RIC members and those that had latterly been recruited in England. The British government estimated that about 8,000 men would be affected, with perhaps 5,600 of those expected to seek assistance with emigration or relocation. For policemen, their wives and children awaiting disbandment at camps such as Gormanstown camp or Baldonnel aerodrome, the irony that these facilities

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37 Memo from CIC Ireland to the cabinet 11 March 1922, National Archives CAB/24/134.
38 Alfred W. Cope was Assistant Under-Secretary for Ireland and was involved in peace negotiations with the IRA. He was instrumental in securing the release of Éamon De Valera in June 1922 to prevent the truce being jeopardized, and was subsequently a member of the cabinet subcommittee dealing with its’ observance. See: O’ Farrell, Who’s who in the Irish war of independence 1916-1921, p. 37.
39 Letter from Chief Secretary Greenwood to the Treasury 24 February 1922, National Archives CAB/24/134.
40 Irish Office memorandum on the disbandment of the RIC, 24 February 1922, National Archives CAB/24/134.
41 Memo from Cope to Tudor, 29 March 1922, NALCO 904/178.
42 Irish Office memorandum on the disbandment of the RIC, 24 February 1922, National Archives CAB/24/134.
had previously been used to detain Sinn Féin prisoners was not lost on them, and they became increasingly restless and agitated.\textsuperscript{43} On 14 March 1922 it was reported that circa 1,000 officers and other ranks awaiting disbandment marched from Ship Street barracks to the RIC Depot in the Phoenix Park, and onwards to Dublin Castle. Categorized by the press as ‘hundreds of angry RIC men’, their representatives issued a threat to officials that they would refuse to be disbanded ‘unless increased compensation was forthcoming’.\textsuperscript{44} This significant demonstration of discontent from a body renowned for rigid discipline echoed that of a previous generation of policemen in 1882 when the strain of performing agrarian related duties during the land wars led to an unprecedented situation where several hundred RIC members had briefly engaged in a public protest for improved pay and conditions.\textsuperscript{45}

During protracted negotiations with RIC representative bodies and their legal advisors, Greenwood emphasised that the terms of disbandment were the most generous ever granted by a government to public servants disbanded at their own request, but conceded that such terms were fully justified given the unique service rendered by the RIC.\textsuperscript{46} Prime Minister Lloyd George agreed, stating that the loyalty and gallantry shown by these men has been such that ‘it would be a dishonour for any government or party to neglect their interests’.\textsuperscript{47} For many policemen awaiting disbandment, policing was the only profession that they had ever known, but finding a police force in another country willing to recruit them proved to be virtually impossible. The London Metropolitan Police had some vacancies and while the commissioner expressed sympathy, he informed the Home Office that the Metropolitan Police could not ‘be made a place of refuge for RIC men’.\textsuperscript{48} A resettlement branch was established at Chester under the direction of Sir Ormond de

\textsuperscript{43} Fedorowich, ‘The problems of disbandment: The Royal Irish Constabulary and imperial migration 1919-29’, p. 96.
\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Irish Independent}, 15 March 1922.
\textsuperscript{46} Summary of proceedings at interviews of RIC Representative Bodies with the Chief Secretary, 6, 7 and 8 February 1922, 1922, National Archives CAB/24/134.
\textsuperscript{47} Cabinet meeting minutes, 15 March 1922. National Archives CAB/23/29.
\textsuperscript{48} Fedorowich, ‘The problems of disbandment’, p. 97.
L’Épée Winter, former director of intelligence at Dublin Castle. Many policemen travelled to England with their families in search of a new life. In 1962 former RIC constable Thomas Shirley recalled of the period after disbandment that he met numerous former policemen in London at ‘Piccadilly, the Strand and Hyde Park etc.’ waiting to begin new lives in other countries, or perhaps hoping to return to Ireland if and when it was safe to do so. Greenwood told parliament that in accordance with the unanimous wish of the officers and men of the RIC, the government had decided to disband the whole force. Policemen were informed that in addition to compensation and disturbance allowances payable to them on disbandment, the fares of themselves, their families and dependents would be paid by the Government to any part of the United Kingdom to which they may wish to go.

Disbanded policemen who expressed a willingness to emigrate were allowed to commute their RIC pensions into lump sums which could be used to establish businesses or purchase property in their new country of residence. Between 1922 and 1924 5,400 applications for commutation were made, with 3,600 of those applications being approved. Several countries including Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa were contacted directly by the British government enquiring as to whether they required experienced constables or soldiers in their colonial police forces or military, but the response was overwhelmingly negative. The chief reason given to the British government for rejecting such requests was a moratorium on police recruitment caused by economic hardship following the Great War. Another significant reason given was the fact that many cities in those countries already had substantial populations of Irish immigrants. Consequently, the negative reputation acquired by the RIC during the previous three years

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49 Irish Times, 2 May 1922.
51 House of Commons debate 05 April 1922, Hansard's parliamentary debates, fifth series, House of Commons (vol 152 cc 2235-9, London 1909-42)
weighed heavily against any consideration of employing former members. In March 1922 for example the police commissioner of south Australia warned the governor-general of the state that ‘grave trouble’ would be caused if former RIC men were recruited to his force. Even if disbanded policemen could join a police force elsewhere, there were profound financial implications in doing so as their pension and gratuity entitlements would be severely curtailed and withheld for the duration of their service in a new police force. Questioning Greenwood in the House of Commons during a debate on the disbandment of the RIC, Sir J. Butcher commented

> we say to these men, you may become prison warders or go into private employment or do anything in the world for which you have no training, but if you do the one thing for which you have been trained you will suffer in your pocket.\(^5^4\)

Several hundred former members of the Black and Tans and Auxiliary Division were recruited to join the Palestine Police which was undergoing rapid expansion to allow for the withdrawal of British troops from the country. Of the 483 former RIC members who joined the Palestine Police, 229 were Irish with the remaining 254 giving their place of birth as England.\(^5^5\) Their commanding officer was Hugh Tudor, who had performed a similar role as chief of police in Ireland in 1920. The deployment of this new force led to similar allegations of brutality and lawlessness as had been made in Ireland and they were scathingly referred to by Sir Henry Wilson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff. In a letter to the commander of military forces in Palestine he made reference to the discredited tactics previously used in Ireland which were now being applied in Palestine. He wrote acerbically that Winston Churchill intended to govern the country with ‘hot air, aeroplanes [and] Jews stiffened by 700 Black and Tans … no doubt we shall have profound peace!’\(^5^6\)

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\(^{56}\) Ibid, p. 98.
The Constabulary (Ireland) Act of 1922 came before parliament on 8 April and set a date of 31 August 1922 by which the complete disbandment of the RIC should be completed. It also enshrined in legislation the provisions made in terms of pensions and gratuities. Pending the passing of this legislation, a formal disbandment parade took place on 4 April 1922 at the Phoenix Park Depot, the spiritual home of the RIC and which had been built as a training depot for the constabulary in 1842. At the conclusion of this parade, the Royal Irish Constabulary effectively ceased to exist. Editorialising about the disbandment of the force the Irish Times opined that a force which had given ‘magnificent service to the Empire was not only being disbanded, but is being sent virtually into exile’.\textsuperscript{57}

Policemen based in Northern Ireland were allowed to remain serving until 1 June 1922 to allow transition arrangements to be made for the formation of the new Royal Ulster Constabulary. Recruitment advertisements for the new force specified that enrolment would be open to all members of the Royal Irish Constabulary, the Ulster

\textsuperscript{57} Irish Times, 13 April 1922.
Special Constabulary and a limited number of Dublin Metropolitan Policemen. It was also made clear that former members of the Black and Tans and Auxiliary Division would not be welcome as applicants with less than two years’ service would only be considered in exceptional cases. A total of 1,347 RIC veterans subsequently gained employment within the RUC of which 505 or 19.2% were Roman Catholic. Policing in Northern Ireland would prove to be as problematical and divisive as it had been the south during the previous several years. The target figure of having Roman Catholics comprise one third of the RUC would never to be achieved, as northern Unionists had been openly hostile towards Roman Catholic RIC members in many parts of the province.

In September 1920, the British government permitted the formation of a special constabulary in Northern Ireland to bolster the RIC rather than deploy Black and Tans or Auxiliaries within the province. The Ulster Special Constabulary (USC) eventually consisted of over 24,000 men and consisted of three cohorts, ‘A’ Specials–armed, full time policemen, ‘B’ Specials–armed, part-time policemen and ‘C’ Specials–an unarmed part-time reserve. Comprised almost entirely of Protestants, the Ulster Special Constabulary was a controversial and divisive body for several decades and came to symbolise the fractious nature of society in Northern Ireland after 1922 as many of its’ members were also members of the paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force.

Despite the truce, the treaty and impending disbandment, danger was ever-present for policemen throughout Ireland. In Tipperary on 8 April 1922 Sergeant Edward McConnell, who had been stationed at Castlefogarty and was awaiting disbandment attended a dance at Richmond military barracks in Templemore. When he failed to return to the RIC barracks in the town his colleagues initiated a search and his body was subsequently found in woodland at the Old Demesne in the town. He had been shot six

times. A former soldier from county Tyrone who was engaged to be married, McConnell had served in the RIC for less than twelve months. In common with the killing of many other policemen, soldiers and civilians which took place during this turbulent period, the circumstances of his death were never clarified, nor responsibility taken by any group.

Policemen who had already been disbanded were also in constant danger. At 10.30 p.m. on 23 May 1922 three men called to a house near Newport in county Tipperary where recently disbanded RIC Sergeant John Walshe was visiting his wife and three children. The men spoke to Mrs. Walshe and asked to see her husband, stating that he was required at the local police barracks. When Walshe came to the front door he was shot several times and died instantly. On the same night former soldier Patrick Galligan was also shot dead in Newport. It was later reported that no members of the public had attended the removals of either Walshe or Galligan, and that no inquest could be held as jurors had refused to attend. In the aftermath of these killings, all former RIC members living in the area were directed to leave Newport via a campaign of anonymous posters and letters, and several disbanded policemen who lived in the town hurriedly departed. Walshe, who had previously been stationed at Newport and Cloughjordan, was the last RIC member to be killed in Tipperary, bringing the total of men killed in the county since 1919 to forty six.

On 17 August 1922, 380 members of the new Civic Guard led by Commissioner Michael Staines marched into Dublin Castle to formally take over the bastion from the Royal Irish Constabulary. As the Civic Guard passed through the gate they were watched by a large crowd, including some disbanded members of the RIC, some of whom saluted as a gesture of respect to their successors as the column through the gates of Dublin Castle. During the formal ceremony the tricolour was raised over the castle, and the garrison troops of the second battalion of the King’s Shropshire Light Infantry marched out of Dublin Castle for the last time. General Sir Neville Macready, commander-in-chief of

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61 Southern Star, 27 May 1922.
British forces in Ireland observed the ceremony and acknowledged that the Civic Guard ‘are a fine body of men … and enlisted from the same class as the RIC, i.e. the sons of small farmers’. At Gormanstown, only 400 disbanded members of the RIC remained, but by the end of the month, they too had departed. As former RIC Constable Thomas Shirley recalled in 1962, ‘I locked the gates on the evening of 31 August 1922, handed the key to Commandant Brennan of the Free State army. I then took the train for the boat and landed in London at 6 a.m. the following morning’.

With that symbolic gesture, the Royal Irish Constabulary ceased to exist after 108 years of service. Describing the passing of the RIC into history Sir Hamar Greenwood stated in the House of Commons that disbandment had been inevitable in consequence of the treaty, stating that ‘as an imperial force they were born, and as an imperial force they wished to die’.

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63 Memo to cabinet on the situation in Ireland for the week ended 19 August 1922. National Archives CAB/24/136.
65 Irish Independent, 11 May 1922.
Plate 5.2: Graphic from *Punch* magazine 10 May 1922 – ‘Exiled’.66

This illustration depicts the difficult situation in which former members of the RIC and their families found themselves following disbandment, facing reprisal attacks or unemployment if they remained in Ireland. For many, emigration was the preferred option. Source: Reproduced with the permission of *Punch* magazine archives, London, © *Punch* magazine.
Chapter Six – Aftermath

‘How is it that the great political parties are shaken to their foundations and shattered in almost every generation by contact with Irish affairs … whence does this mysterious power of Ireland come?’ - Winston Churchill.¹

On 28 October 1922 Garda Henry Phelan, accompanied by Gardaí Thomas Irwin and Thomas Flood, went to a shop at Mullinahone in south Tipperary to buy hurling equipment. They intended to start a hurling team in Callan where they were stationed. It was hoped that such involvement in rebuilding communities after three years of conflict would help to integrate the Civic Guard into society and establish it as the legitimate police force of the fledgling Irish Free State. A group of anti-truce IRA volunteers followed the Gardaí into the shop and shot Phelan dead, believing that he was in fact his brother, a disbanded RIC constable.² Phelan was the first member of the Civic Guard to be killed, and died in south Tipperary, where the first police casualties of the 1919-21 conflict had also been killed. Despite the truce, the subsequent treaty and the disbandment of the RIC, policing in Tipperary was still fraught with danger.

In county Tipperary during the period from 1913 to 1921, the Irish Volunteer movement developed to the point when in 1919, militant nationalists began a violent guerilla campaign to achieve independence from British rule. Policemen and IRA volunteers became intimately acquainted with each other and individual enmities fermented. When the conflict erupted in January 1919 with the Soloheadbeg ambush it presented the opportunity for old scores to be settled. This had profound and lasting consequences for the men of the Royal Irish Constabulary and their families. Those associated with the force on a peripheral basis also found themselves by association to be participants in the conflict. As the decade of commemoration from 1913 to 1923 takes

place there is inevitably, renewed and substantial interest in the events which led to Irish independence. The need exists therefore, to give a detached and balanced view of the significant events and institutions of this period. Amongst these, the Royal Irish Constabulary must be considered not least because of its role as a civic, peace-keeping force at a time of escalating violence and of the breakdown of trust in its capacity to hold the peace. It is the duty of historians to examine this period, notwithstanding the extent to which their work might be used to support the arguments and assertions of partisan political figures and commentators.

Thus, Hopkinson has noted how throughout Ireland an ambush which resulted in the deaths of policemen or soldiers has left a lasting impression on the public consciousness and ‘remains the stuff of legend’.\(^3\) In counties which were particularly violent, tourists and locals alike are encouraged to visit the sites of IRA ambushes. While the heroic figures of the IRA are well remembered, those that died at their hands are less so. In pure military terms a substantial majority of attacks planned by the IRA failed, but nationalist historiography has in many cases romanticised the brutal and complex truth of a violent confrontation that, in some respects, was analogous to an insurgency, or civil war.

This has ensured that the comparatively few military successes of the militant nationalist movement remain in the public consciousness. Hart observed that some of the policemen killed acquired a posthumous notoriety that arose from ‘Michael Collins having ordered their deaths’, but he also emphasised the importance of examining the lives of less well-known and some forgotten victims of the conflict.\(^4\) The reality of hostilities frequently differed from the romanticised and self-serving version of events presented by militant nationalists such as Dan Breen and Tom Barry in their memoirs. Dispassionate statistics cannot give an accurate portrayal of the devastation wrought on individual policemen, their families and innocent victims of the conflict. The tone of nationalist accounts of the RIC

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\(^3\) Hopkinson, *The Irish war of independence*, p. 74.

was set in 1926, some four years after it had been disbanded, when Piaras Béasláí contended that members of the force were never policemen in the sense in which the word was then understood in free countries, and that their primary and essential purpose was to ‘hold the country in subjection to England’.

Much of the subsequent historiography of the period from 1913 to 1922 concurred with his assertion, and the 493 members of the RIC killed during the period have generally remained as statistics or footnotes, anonymous casualties in a bitter conflict.

Thus, one of the objectives of this thesis was to consider the perception in nationalist historiography of the Royal Irish Constabulary as a militaristic, colonial police force. This perception finds its origins in the circumstances under which the force was conceived. As shown by Broeker and Donnelly, disaffection in some rural districts led to an outburst of ‘agrarian’ violence and efforts by the authorities to deal with it. The Peace Preservation Force, a rudimentary police service established by Sir Robert Peel which was first deployed in 1814 in the Tipperary barony of Middlethird evolved into the County Constabulary in 1822, and thence became the Royal Irish Constabulary in 1867. The policing of agrarian violence necessitated the Peace Preservation Force to be armed and militaristic in character.

With the passage of time however, the RIC became firmly established and gradually evolved into an indigenous civil police force which increasingly focused on the everyday routine of law enforcement in a rapidly modernising society. This role may have induced caution but also have brought acceptance as people and police eyed each other in a society where disturbance became increasingly less evident. A deliberate policy was adopted to minimise transfers, thus ensuring that policemen spent long periods in the same district, gaining not only valuable local knowledge but also ensuring a measure of acceptance by the

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same community from which the force was recruited. Policemen forged relationships and most found wives amongst the local population. They worshipped in neighbourhood churches, sent their children to national schools in the area and traded with local merchants and suppliers. Even Béaslaí would later acknowledge that a large number of the RIC notwithstanding their training, had ‘no hostility to their fellow countrymen, and shrank from a conflict with them’.

There is evidence therefore that the police force became hibernicised, and Fitzpatrick has shown how policemen were overwhelmingly Irish by birth and Roman Catholic by upbringing, the sons of farmers, labourers and shop assistants, who joined the force because it was regarded as a good job with reasonable pay, prospects of advancement and a pension upon retirement. By 1913 eighty-six per cent of the force was Roman Catholic, and ninety-eight per cent had been born in Ireland. Kevin O’Higgins, a minister in the Irish provisional government, may have accurately gauged the reality when he remarked of those aspiring to a career in the RIC, that it ‘was the height of ambition for most young fellows who happened to be five foot nine or thereabouts’. Policing was perceived as providing stable employment over the long term: in 1919 for example, there were over 400 men still serving in a force of approximately 9,000 who had joined over thirty years before.

It may be reasonable to suggest therefore, that when conflict erupted in 1919 policemen might have reflected the political views and the cultural assumptions of many of their compatriots. The sum of their party allegiances may never be precisely known but it is safe to assume that they ranged from conventionally loyalist and unionist to parliamentary

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9 Shea, *Voices and the sound of drums*, p. 29. Kevin O’Higgins was Sinn Féin TD for Laois-Offaly and played a prominent role in drafting the 1922 constitution. As Minister for Home Affairs, he was responsible for reinstituting law and order as well economic recovery in the new Free State. He was instrumental in creating the Garda Síochána as an unarmed police force to replace the RIC and became Justice Minister in 1924. O’Higgins was shot dead on 10 July 1927 by the IRA while walking to mass. See O’Farrell; *Who’s Who in the Irish War of Independence 1916-1921* (Dublin, 1980), p. 126.
and advanced nationalist. Geopolitical considerations may not have been a concern to many policemen as they faced not only the routine of their daily duties but also the possibility of displacement, injury or even death. The escalation of political violence fundamentally changed the nature of policing in Ireland and estranged the police from many of those whom they sought to serve. As shown by Augusteijn, the gradual distancing of the police from local nationalist communities in the period after 1916 provided the militant movement with what they perceived to be ‘legitimate’ targets.\(^\text{10}\)

Following the Soloheadbeg ambush and the subsequent campaign of barrack attacks, physical separation intensified as policemen were forced to abandon small barracks in isolated rural areas and retreat to larger urban barracks that were easier to defend. As shown in chart 6.1, hundreds of barracks were destroyed or damaged in the period between 1919 and 1922.

Chart 6.1: RIC barracks destroyed or damaged, 1919-22

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barracks Status</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vacated barracks</td>
<td>522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damaged</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupied barracks</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destroyed</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Statistical evidence demonstrates that the majority of barracks were destroyed after they had been abandoned, and also that IRA attacks on occupied barracks which were heavily fortified seldom resulted in their destruction. The lack of success in destroying

\(^\text{10}\) Joost Augusteijn, *From public defiance to guerrilla warfare, experiences of ordinary volunteers in the Irish War of Independence* (Dublin, 1996), p. 344.
occupied RIC barracks was a key factor in causing IRA headquarters to change tactics from carrying out large scale attacks on fortified barracks to ambushes by mobile columns under the leadership of officers appointed by GHQ.

As violence escalated during 1920 the inspector general of the RIC entreated the government to send military assistance to aid his beleaguered force. Reinforcements arrived however in the form of the Black and Tans and Auxiliary Division. The decision to engage in what has been categorised as ‘non-Irish recruitment’ had profound and lasting consequences and effectively nullified the organisation as a civil police force. Furthermore, as argued by Lowe, this had the consequence of effectively destroying the RIC without the necessity of the IRA militarily defeating it.\footnote{Lowe, ‘The war against the RIC’, p. 35.} The events of 1919 to 1922 did irreparable damage to the reputation and historical perception of the Royal Irish Constabulary in nationalist historiography.

Violence against the RIC between the outbreak of hostilities in January 1919 and the disbandment of the force in 1922 over the country as a whole resulted in a total death toll of 493 policemen. Of these a total of 242, or 59.75 per cent of the total occurred in Munster. The high degree of violence in Munster was even greater than that percentage suggests; in 1911 Munster’s inhabitants accounted for just 23 per cent of the national total. Violence in the six Munster counties during 1920 and 1921 contrasts with the relatively low level of documented violence during 1919 when neither Waterford nor Kerry recorded any RIC deaths. It could be suggested that if war had indeed been declared against the RIC, it did not start in earnest until 1920. Such outbreaks of violence as did occur in 1919 may have reflected the actions of violent individuals who were prepared to act independently of national IRA or Sinn Féin policy. Thus in Tipperary during 1919 two of the three fatalities occurred at Soloheadbeg, and may reflect the personal involvement of militants such as Dan Breen. Following the truce of July 1921, the level of violence dropped sharply and such further RIC deaths as occurred were isolated incidents reflecting lingering personal
animosities, rather than as a result of a definite policy or strategic decision on the part of the IRA.

High levels of violence were evident in county Cork and to a lesser extent in Kerry, Limerick and Tipperary, in contrast with relatively low levels in Waterford. The Soloheadbeg ambush of January 1919 skews the pattern somewhat, and in that year the four RIC deaths recorded in Tipperary were more than in any other Munster county, accounting for 40% of the total. Since counties vary in size and population however, it is important to consider any vital statistic relative to the overall size of population. By that measure also, Tipperary was the most violent county, having one RIC death per 38,000 people as recorded in the last available census data of 1911 (rounded to the nearest thousand); the next most violent county was Cork with one RIC death per every 39,000 in the population. In 1920, Cork with 49 RIC deaths had the most violent of any Munster county in absolute terms, more than twice the 24 recorded that year in Tipperary.

Chart 6.2: RIC deaths by county, Munster 1919-22

![Chart 6.2: RIC deaths by county, Munster 1919-22](image)


When these deaths are compared with the size of their respective populations however, Tipperary is the more violent county with one RIC death per 6,000 (rounded) in the
population while in Cork there is one death for every 8,000 of the population. In 1920 Waterford was the least violent county in Munster; its three RIC deaths were the lowest total of any county in absolute terms and with one death per 28,000 of population it was the least violent in proportionate terms. In 1921 Cork with 40 deaths was the most violent county in absolute terms, followed by Kerry and Limerick. Tipperary and Clare ranked joint fourth. With one death per 11,000 of population Tipperary was proportionately less violent than Kerry (one death per 6.6 thousand), Cork (one per 8.0 thousand) Clare (one per 8.6 thousand) and Limerick (one per 10.2 thousand). In 1922 in absolute terms Tipperary with four RIC deaths was more violent than any other county: the next violent Cork and Clare record two each, a position confirmed in relative terms.

Overall, for the period 1919 to 1922, with forty six deaths, Tipperary proved to be more violent in absolute terms than Waterford (8), Clare (30), Kerry and Limerick (38 each) but much less violent than Cork with 92 deaths. In relative terms Tipperary emerged as the most violent county however having recorded one death for every 3,313 in the population. It was followed by Clare with one death for every 3,474 in the population and then Limerick with one death for every 3,474 in the population. Thus Cork emerges as a relatively less violent county for the period as a whole, ranking fifth of the sixth Munster counties. The relative and disparate levels of violence between counties is revealed even more clearly when RIC deaths are expressed in statistical terms, relative to each one thousand inhabitants of the respective counties.
The counties of Clare, Cork, Kerry, Limerick and Tipperary rank closely together in terms of violence directed at members of the RIC. This suggests that in statistical terms at least, it would be difficult to conclude that a policeman would be any safer in any one of the five rather than in another. What is clear is that he would be safest in Waterford; in two of the four years it did not record a single police death and in the two remaining years fatalities remained in low, single figures. While there is not much to distinguish its violent neighbours to the west and south the salient historical question might be why Waterford stands out against the rest of the counties in the province of Munster.

The pattern of violence directed against the police in Tipperary shows that incidents may be divided evenly into those where a lone policeman was killed (eleven incidents), and those where a number were killed (eleven incidents). The former include the assassination of significant figures – those holding a critical leadership or strategic role in the RIC such as District Inspector Hunt in Thurles or Wilson in Templemore, or those singled out as being especially ruthless or assiduous in fulfilling their duties such as District Inspector Biggs in Newport. Others were the victims of carefully planned operations involving the deployment of large numbers of volunteers and which were relatively more likely to take place in 1921 in the months leading up to the truce. The introduction of flying
columns greatly increased the professionalism and military efficacy of the volunteer army. In consequence the number of policemen killed in individual ambushes such as those which took place at Modreeney, Inches Cross or Kilcommon increased exponentially. There are also many cases where volunteers exercised ‘discretion’ as to whether policemen captured by them during ambushes or while on patrol were interrogated and relieved of their weapons, or killed. District Inspector Potter for example, was offered the opportunity to escape from captivity, but he declined. In other cases such as that of Head Constable Igoe, volunteers from Tipperary were sent to Dublin specifically to target him for assassination. There are several possible reasons for such discrepancies, including the unwillingness of individual volunteers to execute somebody in cold blood, or individual enmities between policemen and IRA members.

This work also examined the geography and topography of Tipperary as factors in the history of militancy and rebellion in the county, which was adjacent to other active counties such as Limerick and Cork, and primarily rural, with many mountainous areas that made it suitable for ambushes and other insurgency activity. As Hopkinson has shown however, strong personalities within the militant nationalist movement were also important factors as to why Tipperary differed from its neighbouring counties.\footnote{Hopkinson, \textit{The Irish war of independence} (Dublin, 2002), p. 116.} The south Tipperary brigade had been estranged from the Irish Republican Brotherhood because permission had been refused for an attack on a policeman in 1917, and subsequent events demonstrated that volunteer headquarters in Dublin continued to exercise tenuous control over brigades in Tipperary.

In the case of the Soloheadbeg ambush for example, it was carried out in spite of orders to the contrary which had been issue by Richard Mulcahy, IRA chief of staff. With regard to the Lorrha ambush Breen told local volunteers that the ambush had been authorised by IRA headquarters, when in fact it had not been so authorised. Séamus Robinson, who had been officer commanding the third brigade when the Soloheadbeg
ambush took place would in later life strongly contest the version of accounts of the conflict given by Breen, pointing out that Breen had spent most of his time outside the county, took part in few engagements and never held officer rank in the IRA. In 1950 Robinson refused an invitation to attend the unveiling of a memorial at the site of the ambush, and he was heavily critical of the version of events contained in Breen’s autobiography citing his belief that, despite being the officer in command of the third Tipperary brigade and a veteran of the 1916 Rising, his part in the conflict had been minimised. Robinson also wrote a series of letters to the *Irish Press* and *Irish Times* newspapers on the subject using the pseudonym ‘Dalriada’.13

For a variety of reasons, some policemen took no active part in the conflict, while others actively assisted the IRA in a variety of ways, such as the provision of information about impending searches or arrests. Many indigenous members of the RIC were torn between doing their duty as policemen, and their inherent sympathies towards the aspiration of Irish independence. Constable Eugene Bratton for example, based in Meath was sympathetic to the IRA and offered to resign from the force, citing his disapproval of the behavior of Black and Tans in the county. The local IRA commander however advised Bratton to remain in situ because he ‘was much more useful’ as a serving member (see: appendix F).14 Other policemen, particularly those with long service shrank from confrontation or conflict, in the words of Tipperary IRA commander Liam Hoolan ‘hoping to live long enough to draw their pensions’.15

Referring to the long history of the RIC, one retired policemen wrote that the force ‘had the military efficiency when we did not really want it. When we required it, it was not forthcoming’.16 Describing the difficulties faced by members of the RIC in 1920 *The Times*

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14 Statement of Eugene Bratton, BMH/WS.467, p. 12.
editorialised that policemen whose training has been entirely that of a civilian police force were to a great extent ‘unfitted for the present conditions, which are those of a singularly difficult war. All their tradition, grown into an instinct, makes them slow to use firearms’.\footnote{\textit{The Times}, 20 August 1920.}
Conclusion

Following the Anglo-Irish treaty of December 1921 the Royal Irish Constabulary was disbanded, not because of a policy decision by the new government of the Irish Free State, but at the insistence of the membership of the force itself. For many younger men who had endured a two-year campaign of assassination, intimidation and boycotting, emigration with their families was a viable and perhaps, desirable alternative to remaining in Ireland. For disbanded policemen with families who wanted to remain in Ireland, living anonymously at home on relatively generous RIC pensions might have seemed the most prudent course of action. For some men such as Sergeant Anthony Foody however, who had served in Tipperary and moved to Mayo after disbandment, relocation to another county did not put him out of the reach of IRA volunteers with long memories and old scores to settle.

The departure of the police and the military also had significant economic consequences for villages, towns and cities throughout Ireland. On December 9 1921 the Irish Times predicted that the withdrawal of the military from the garrison towns of Ireland would be a source of profound regret and that ‘towns which owed the greater part of their trade to the military … would now be hard hit unless some compensating factor is supplied’.

Hundreds of RIC barracks, courthouses and other symbols of British governance had been destroyed, and those that remained standing had been evacuated. In common with other garrison towns the populace of Templemore for example, had maintained a close social and economic relationship with the occupants of Richmond barracks for over one hundred years, and there were serious economic and social consequences when the army departed. Describing the handover of Richmond to IRA volunteers on behalf of the Irish provisional government, the official history of the Northamptonshire Regiment acerbically described them as a ‘motley force calling itself the

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1 Irish Times, 9 December 1921.
Irish army. When marching from barracks to the train station however, it was noted by soldiers that ‘the enthusiasm of the civil population, after their previous attitude towards British troops, was extraordinary’. On 25 February 1922 the *Nenagh Guardian* reported that the withdrawal of British troops from the Curragh camp had led to serious unemployment in the town of Kildare and surrounding area, with over 400 men losing their jobs in one week following the final departure of soldiers from local garrisons.

For lengthy periods of its existence the men of the RIC were conventional civil policemen performing routine and frequently mundane duties. In the last two years of its existence however, it can be argued that most members found themselves in an extraordinarily violent situation which was not of their own making. Despite the move to primarily non-Irish recruitment for the Black and Tans and Auxiliary Division, seventy-eight per cent of the policemen killed in Tipperary during the conflict, that is thirty-six out of forty-six were Irishmen.

It this study the RIC were placed in an appropriate historical context as a force comprised primarily of indigenous Irishmen who found themselves in an almost impossible position when the conflict began. Given the critical importance of the RIC in Irish history and the significance of the campaign in Tipperary, it is hoped that this work will add something of value to the historiography of the period. The perception of the RIC was compared to the reality of the guerrilla campaign waged against them, and the role of the constabulary in Tipperary during the period critically assessed. The experiences of ordinary members of the constabulary were studied as a central focus of this thesis, and the reality of key events such as ambushes and barrack attacks, rather than the perception of these incidents portrayed in nationalist folklore analysed.

When hostilities eventually ceased, many IRA volunteers accepted that the RIC had indeed been courageous opponents. This recognition was encapsulated in an incident

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2 Northamptonshire regimental diary 1919-23.
which took place when Naas RIC barracks in county Kildare was formally handed over to local IRA commanders several months after the truce. During the ceremony an RIC officer queried if the IRA would have retained the force as the new police service of the Irish Free State. A senior volunteer commander remarked that if they had not dealt with the RIC, there would have been no free state, stating ‘your fellows had the most local knowledge, which was too much for us. Anyhow, we want to have our police modelled on your old lot’. Perhaps no greater compliment could be paid to the men of the ‘old’ RIC than the recognition by their former avowed enemies that the disbanded force might have served as a suitable model for a police service in the newly independent Ireland.

The year 1969 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Soloheadbeg ambush, the event which is generally accepted as having commenced the conflict of 1919-21. On 21 January of that year a notice appeared in the births, marriages and deaths section of the Irish Times commemorating Constables James McDonnell and Patrick O’Connell, the two policemen killed at Soloheadbeg. It was published ‘in proud memory of two fine Irishmen … and their gallant Irish comrades of the old RIC’. As Elizabeth Malcolm observed, by that time the epithet ‘old’ had come into common usage to distinguish the pre 1919 RIC as a civil force from its final incarnation. The same term was also used to distinguish the IRA as a force legitimized by its role in the foundation of an independent state, as opposed to an organisation that acted against the state. In the case of the RIC however the application of ‘old’ not only allowed a distinction to be made between Irish-born policemen and the British-born Black and Tans or Auxiliary division, but also allowed for a clear distinction to be made between two fundamentally different historical contexts. In both the case of the IRA and the RIC the distinction between ‘old’ and ‘new’ implied tradition and honour, legitimacy and acceptance as opposed to dishonour.

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In May 2010, some forty years after the anniversary of the Soloheadbeg ambush a new memorial garden was formally opened inside the grounds of Dublin Castle to commemorate over eighty members of An Garda Síochána killed in the line of duty since the foundation of the force in 1922. The garden also contains a plaque which commemorates deceased members of both the Royal Irish Constabulary and the Dublin Metropolitan Police. The only memorials which previously existed to the Royal Irish Constabulary are located at Saint Paul’s Cathedral and Westminster Abbey in London.\(^7\) The installation of a memorial plaque to the RIC at Dublin Castle, the former headquarters of the force is significant. It can be argued that such gestures, combined with a willingness to look afresh at Irish history are tacit acknowledgements that the 85,208 men who served in the Royal Irish Constabulary between 1814 and 1922, and almost 500 who died in the 1919-22 period alone, are worthy of remembrance in equal measure to other victims of the conflict.

In March 2012 the government of Ireland announced the nomination of an expert committee of historians and academics to advise them on the development and delivery of a programme for the ‘decade of commemoration from 2012 – 2022’. The Taoiseach stated that the committee would develop a comprehensive and inclusive programme of commemorations ‘appropriate for the centenary anniversary of the defining period of modern Irish history … in particular it will seek to set a tone that is inclusive and non-triumphalist, ensuring authenticity, proportionality and openness, while acknowledging the multiple identities and traditions which are part of the history of the island of Ireland’.\(^8\)

Historians who challenge the accepted historiographical version of events or otherwise demur have been categorised as revisionist, and their work deemed controversial. The American historian James McPherson however, wrote that revisionism is the lifeblood

\(^7\) Herlihy, *The Royal Irish Constabulary, a short history and genealogical guide* (Dublin, 1997), p. 18.
of historical scholarship, and that history is a continuing dialogue between the present and the past. He went on to say that ‘interpretations of the past are subject to change in response to new evidence, new questions asked of the evidence, new perspectives gained by the passage of time. There is no single, eternal, and immutable truth about past events and their meaning’.  

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Appendix A – RIC Barracks in North Tipperary, 1919

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<th>Nenagh District</th>
<th>Newport District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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10 *Thom’s directory of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, 1919* (Dublin, 1919)

11 H.Q indicates the barracks where the RIC district inspector was based. The county inspector was located in Nenagh.
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### Appendix C – RIC deaths in Tipperary, 1919-1922

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Appendix D – Design of the RIC station badge, 1910

Instructions from RIC Inspector General Neville Chamberlain on the design and display of RIC station badges which were affixed to the exterior of all barracks in Ireland. Source: Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland, reference number EPH D137
Appendix E – Sinn Fein circular on the RIC boycott, 1919

Open letter from Sinn Féin to all branches announcing a boycott of all police forces, 21 May 1919. Source: Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland, reference number ILB 300 p 5 [Item 106]
Appendix F – Sinn Fein circular re employment of ex-RIC members who have resigned, 1920

Circular from Sinn Féin to all local branches on the policy of assisting former RIC members who have resigned to gain employment in Ireland or in the United States if they emigrate. Source: Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland, reference number LB 300 p 5 [Item 65]
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Bureau of Military History IRA witness statements

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<td>BMH/WS. 1127</td>
<td>Timothy Tierney</td>
<td>3rd</td>
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</tr>
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<td>BMH/WS. 1259</td>
<td>Sean Fitzpatrick</td>
<td>3rd</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMH/WS. 1262</td>
<td>Phil Fitzgerald</td>
<td>3rd</td>
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<td>Edmond Grogan</td>
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<td>BMH/WS. 1348</td>
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<td>BMH/WS. 1352</td>
<td>Dan Breen</td>
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<td>Paul Mulcahy</td>
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<td>BMH/WS. 1372</td>
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<td>BMH/WS. 1388</td>
<td>John Hackett</td>
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<td>Séan Gaynor</td>
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<td>BMH/WS. 1391</td>
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<td>Edward Ryan</td>
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<td>BMH/WS. 1454</td>
<td>James Leahy</td>
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<td>Name:</td>
<td>Brigade:</td>
<td>Rank/Role</td>
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<td>BMH/WS. 1463</td>
<td>Martin Grace</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>BMH/WS. 1465</td>
<td>James Hewitt</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Quartermaster</td>
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<td>BMH/WS. 1474</td>
<td>Eamon O’Duibhir</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>BMH/WS. 1475</td>
<td>Patrick Kinnane</td>
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<td>BMH/WS. 1486</td>
<td>Séan Scott</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMH/WS. 1510</td>
<td>James Duggan</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Captain</td>
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<td>BMH/WS. 1522</td>
<td>Edward McGrath</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>BMH/WS. 1541</td>
<td>Thomas Meagher</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>BMH/WS. 1553</td>
<td>Liam Hoolan</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMH/WS. 1595</td>
<td>Séamus Babington</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Brigade engineer</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMH/WS. 1658</td>
<td>Tadgh Crowe</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>BMH/WS. 1669</td>
<td>Paul Merrigan</td>
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<td>Transport officer</td>
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<td>BMH/WS. 1701</td>
<td>Maurice McGrath</td>
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<td>Adjutant</td>
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Photograph of RIC Constable Daniel McCarthy, Reproduced with the permission of Mr.
Peter McGoldrick

Photograph of mural from the mess wall of ‘B’ company Auxiliary Division, Templemore
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Appendix G - County map of Tipperary the showing the locations of RIC fatalities, 1919-22

Inset map of Ireland showing the geographical location of county Tipperary