paper-trailers

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Foreword by Ciarán MacAirt

PaperTrail
LEGACY ARCHIVE RESEARCH

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The continuing failure of the British state to deal with the legacy of the past in the North of Ireland has done nothing but re-traumatize families who lost loved ones or people who were injured during the conflict. Most who dared to hope that the likes of the Historical Enquiries Team or Police Service Northern Ireland would offer fair investigation and truth recovery, were gravely disappointed.

Instead, victims and survivors have had to fight for the truth along with the great support of victims' charities and legal representatives.

The charity, Paper Trail (Legacy Archive Research), helps victims and survivors and human rights lawyers to discover and retrieve critical evidence buried deep in public records. We train Paper-Trailers like ourselves and empower them to seek information in archives across Britain and Ireland.

This book was compiled during a legacy archive training, research and oral history project funded by Good Relations Fund of the Executive Office.

Paper-Trailers are from every walk of life. They are ordinary families whose loved ones were snatched from them. They are former combatants from paramilitary groups and state forces who are seeking to learn more about the context of the conflict that enveloped their lives. They are academics and researchers with a passion for our shared history. All have a story to tell.

Here are a few to begin.

Foreword

Ciarán MacAirt is author of The McGurk's Bar Bombing: Collusion, Cover-Up and a Campaign for Truth (Frontline Noir, 2012) and Trope: Essays and Articles (Paper Trail Publishing, 2019). He is founder and manager of the charity, Paper Trail (Legacy Archive Research).

> *"Every story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. So does this one. It can be summarised as a bullet, a bullet and a bullet."*

So begins this short anthology with an article by award-winning author and journalist Lyra McKee. In the opening study, Lyra expertly frames the prodigious investigations of ordinary family members who are forced to find evidence that the state has buried. Today's battlefield is for information and, yet again, ordinary families are on the front line.

Paper-Trailers also features articles by other writers from diverse backgrounds who have been impacted by the conflict.

Clifford Peeples, a former Loyalist prisoner, examines the role of District Inspector John William Nixon of the Royal Irish Constabulary during the tumultuous period of 1920 – 1922, his subsequent dismissal from the police and his influence on working class Loyalism.

I examine the formation of another state-sponsored death squad in 1971 and its echoes in British military history and, indeed, the personal history of a British military family. My grandmother, Kathleen Irvine, was one of fifteen civilians murdered in the McGurk's Bar Massacre of 4th December 1971. Two children were among those killed.

Elizabeth Carberry Tierney's father, Stan Carberry, was a Volunteer in the Irish Republican Army who was unarmed when shot dead by the British Army. She has devoted the last few years to academic study and closes this anthology with a short paper discussing whether transitional truth and justice can be achieved in the North of Ireland.

All of the writers are bonded by the basic human need to know and understand the context of our shared history for we believe that history informs the present; we also believe that each of us have a story to tell; and we caution the reader that if society does not recognise its failings in the past, we can never learn from our collective mistakes and we will

be doomed to play out the same miserable history that has been ours to share in this country over centuries.

Violence in the North of Ireland still skulks around the corner and this anthology will now stand as wretched testament to that.

I re-wrote this foreword when Lyra McKee was gunned down and killed in Derry on 18th April 2019 whilst doing the job she loved. She was monitoring a riot along with a crowd of civilians standing beside a police armoured vehicle when a member of the so-called New IRA fired towards them. Police officers were safe inside their vehicle but ordinary people were in the line of fire.

Lyra McKee was hit in the head by a single gunshot. She was 29 years of age.

Lyra was a pal of mine for many years. She was a whirlwind of fun, positivity and steely determination. She was also a formidable writer whose hard-boiled style of prose somehow still glowed with compassion as she told the stories of people our society forgot or tried to ignore. Making friends was one of her many great gifts but she was unique in that few of us left her company without her making us feel better about ourselves.

Lyra had recently found true love when she met Derry girl, Sara Canning, who was standing beside her when she was mortally wounded and comforted her as she died.

Lyra had just secured a prestigious two-book deal with internationally-renowned publishing house, Faber and Faber. Great success, personal and professional, was in her grasp, and she deserved it after fighting for it for so long, but it was not to be. Her killing was yet another waste of life to add to the litany of lost lives that have broken families and friends across these islands.

As you will read in her opening article, *Cold Case Detectives*[1], Lyra was also a great champion of Paper Trail's work with victims and survivors of the conflict and she supported us at every stage of the charity's development.

Then she was made a victim herself when the horror of somebody else's war caught up with her and killed her.

In an article in 2016, *Suicide Among the Ceasefire Babies*[2], Lyra wrote:

1 An edited version appeared on the Narratively website in May 2017 https://narratively.com/decades-after-northern-irelands-troubles-families-of-the-dead-are-still-seeking-answers-and-taking-the-investigations-into-their-own-hands/

2 *Suicide Among the Ceasefire Babies* by Lyra McKee in The Atlantic, January 20th 2016

"We were the Good Friday Agreement generation, spared from the horrors of war. But still, the aftereffects of those horrors seemed to follow us."

We now know those horrors did not follow her but stalked her and we are poorer for her loss.

The face of the recent British-Irish conflict may have changed but ours is an imperfect and uneasy peace which cannot be taken for granted. Families still live with the consequences and we are yet as a society to reconcile ourselves to the past. Now Lyra's family have to suffer as our families suffered.

Nevertheless, just as the writers in this this anthology ensure that their story and their family's story is heard, the story of Lyra McKee does not end with a bullet. Her family and friends will see to that.

The Cold Case Detectives

By Lyra McKee

Lyra McKee is a free-lance journalist and writer.

Every story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. So does this one. It can be summarised as a bullet, a bullet and a bullet.

The first bullet pierces his leg but exits as he's running across the grass, away from the gunfire. On the aerial map of the field that hangs in his daughter's office, she can pinpoint the exact location where it happens: a red pin, marking the spot where he's shot then cries out, "Dessie, I'm hit!" and falls. Dessie's location is marked nearby, a green pin. Green is for survivors.

The second bullet enters his open wound as he's lying in the Army's barracks, where the soldiers have brought him, along with the rest of the injured. One soldier stands over him and cocks a gun at his bleeding leg. He fires. This time, the bullet lodges.

As with the bodies in the field on the map she can point to the barracks and recount what happened there as if she was an eyewitness.

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"I got asked by a politician to speak to the Historical Enquiries Team (HET) and I thought, "Oh God, what did I do?" said Trevor, a former Loyalist prisoner. The group laughed. "I knew it was to do with something that happened in 1989 and I was trying to remember what I was doing in 1989!"

There was more laughter.

"But it turned out it was to do with a car hijacked in Richview Street," he continued. "I was working as a bouncer at a social club 'round the corner. The car was used in a murder. The girl from HET rung me and she was asking these questions, like, "Did you have CCTV? Would you still have the tapes?" If we did, we wouldn't have them now. I realised this was all just a box-ticking exercise. She was ticking boxes."

No one who'd dealt with the HET seemed surprised by this news. Set up in 2005, its job had been to investigate the 3,269 unsolved murders linked to The Troubles, Northern Ireland's 30-year conflict between the IRA, the British Government, and various Republican and Loyalist paramilitary groups. As always, the catch was in the small print. When a family received the HET's report on their loved one's murder, the opening lines stated that they had "reviewed" the original police investigation to see if there were any opportunities for follow-up. Almost always, there were not. As Greer, a Loyalist ex-prisoner himself, had noted, it was a box-ticking exercise, usually amounting to reviews of old paperwork and not fresh investigations.

Nearly 20 years since Northern Ireland's process was sealed with the signing of a truce, the Good Friday Agreement, those left behind by the dead still didn't have any answers. And so, some had gathered, along with ex-prisoners curious about the conflict they'd been caught up in as younger men, to try and find some, with the help of the man sitting at the head of the table.

With a smooth, bald head, wiry build, and clean- shaven face, it was impossible to guess his age. What was known was this: his name was Ciaran MacAirt and just over 45 years before this meeting, his Grandmother had been killed in one of the worst atrocities of The Troubles, The McGurk's Bar Massacre.

McGurk's Bar stood just streets away from where he sat now before it was blown up – 15 killed and 17 more injured, including his Grandfather. The bomb had been planted by paramilitaries loyal to the British in a sectarian attack but in the days, weeks, and years that followed, the British Army would insist it had been an IRA "own goal". The IRA, they insisted, had been assembling the bomb on the premises when it went off. The implication was clear: the pub was an IRA haunt, frequented by members or sympathisers. Decades later, MacAirt's own investigation, trawling through ancient public records, would unearth forensic reports and reveal the truth, leading to an official investigation by the Police Ombudsman. Now, through his charity, Paper Trail, he was hoping to impart his research skills and knowledge to others.

"Do you wanna go round the table and introduce yourselves?" he said.

A bearded man with glasses introduced himself as a Loyalist ex-prisoner. Beside him, an older lady with bushy blonde hair spoke up. "My name is Shirley," she said. "My husband was a UDA [Loyalist] brigadier."

Then it was the turn of the dark-haired woman in the seat next to her. "My Daddy was killed and he was in the IRA," she said. "So, we had the

stigma of that to deal with. For the last ten years, me and my brother have been trying to find answers but we've just had doors slammed in our faces."

Over the years, many victims had found the same thing: doors closed when they demanded explanations, even from bodies like the HET. And so a new trend was emerging: victims who, frustrated with the system, had started investigating their loved one's murders themselves.

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He survives long enough to tell his wife the rest of the story: what happens when the Army moves in and begins to remove the bodies of the dead and injured. He'd been out searching for their teenage sons when he was shot. First, the soldiers throw them into the back of an Army Saracen, where their blood mingles and leaves stains the soldiers will need to get down on their hands and knees to scrub later. They're taken to the local barracks, where they're piled on the stage in rows like a grotesque trophy display. Then the soldiers beat them. One fires a bullet into his open leg wound.

Except "beating" is a euphemism. A beating is what you take when you're bested in a brawl at the pub; his post-mortem report, which won't be found for decades, documents injuries that could only be inflicted by torture.

His wife realises this later. She's sitting outside his room while he receives dialysis – his kidneys having been damaged by the "beating" – when she hears a squeal. She rushes in.

"What's wrong with him?"

A main artery in his leg has burst. He has slipped into unconsciousness.

A doctor pulls her aside. "Look, I'm afraid we're going to have to operate," he says. "We need to amputate the right leg. We should have done it earlier."

"What do you mean should have?"

"It should have been done when he came in."

"But why wasn't it done? Why didn't you amputate his leg?" "We couldn't amputate because of his other injuries." "Other injuries? What are you talking about?"

"Your husband," the doctor says, "Was more than just shot."

The details on his grave stone will read: Joseph Murphy, died aged 41. And the Army will be asked how he and 10 other civilians ended up dead.

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"He was asking for it like."
"What he do?"
"He picked up a gun and fired at them first."
"I heard he was stealing cars too."
"Terrorising pensioners and all."
"Aye, the IRA doesn't shoot you for nothing like."
"Neither does the Army."
"No, you don't get shot for nothing."

In Northern Ireland, most murders committed during The Troubles and after came with a claim of responsibility and/or an explanation, all amounting to some version of "But she was wearing a short skirt, Your Honour." They were textbook smears, designed to justify the taking of a life, and they worked.

The McGurk's Bar families – if they hadn't been hanging out in an IRA bar with IRA men, they wouldn't have been killed, would they? They were probably in the IRA themselves – two at least said the police. Young Paul Quinn, aged just 21 years, lured to a farm where he was beaten to death by an IRA boss after falling out with his son – well, he was a criminal.

And Joseph Murphy and the ten civilians killed in the events of 9-11 August 1971 that became known as the Ballymurphy Massacre? They were engaged in a gun battle with our troops, said the Army, even Father Hugh Mullan, a Catholic priest among the dead.

"One news report said, 'The hardcore of the IRA has been wiped out tonight', said Janet Donnelly, Joseph Murphy's daughter. "It was a bigger injustice than being shot – to have their names ruined." Her voice rose to a cry. "Them people were called IRA gunmen when they weren't. I know the truth but when I'm dead and gone, my grandchildren are going to read the stories and think their great-grandfather was a gunman and he wasn't."

Breathlessly, she began pointing out the holes in the Army's narrative. In the year or so that I followed her around for this story, there were only two occasions when I saw her become visibly upset. The first time was at her mother's funeral. The second was now, relating how the Army had made her father and ten others culpable for their own murders.

According to the Army, this was what happened that August: members of the Parachute Regiment, a unit feared and loathed by both Protestants and Catholics, moved in to Ballymurphy, a small area of West Belfast, to round up suspected members of the IRA and intern them. Rioting

broke out and the troops were fired on. Those killed were IRA gunmen, even Father Mullan and Joan Connolly, a fifty- something mother of ten.

While lying in the hospital, Joseph Murphy told his wife a different story: rioting had indeed broken out in the area.

He'd went out looking for their teenage sons. The Army had suddenly begun firing at civilians, all of them unarmed. He was hit in the leg. The soldiers brought him back to the barracks where they beat him and the rest of the injured. One fired a fresh round into his open leg wound. He died nearly two weeks later from a burst artery.

For nearly twenty years, Janet had been trying to prove her father's side of the story. She'd started, along with family members of the other dead, by tracking down witnesses and taking statements.

"We had a rule: we wouldn't take a statement from anyone who wasn't a first-hand witness," she said. "It became pretty clear within 15 minutes of talking to someone whether they'd been there or were just telling a story they'd heard. One witness told us the soldiers had broken into the local Butcher's shop and taken knives." She rifled through a filing cabinet as she talked, looking for a document. We were standing in her office – a makeshift investigative suite, with photographs of the victims and an aerial map of a key crime scene, a local field, hanging on the wall. Every time she imparted another piece of the story I didn't know, she would reach for her files – for a soldier's statement, a report – and search for the exact line in it that proved she was telling the truth. It was as if she was afraid of not being believed, and so she always spoke in a clipped, encyclopaedic tone, only referring to the facts she could prove

- like a cop, investigating the murder of someone she'd never met.

"I thought he must have imagined it. We heard that there'd been a break-in at the local butcher's shop and knives had been taken but I spoke to a guy who worked there, who'd been injured in the shooting. He hadn't been working there that day and said if there'd been a break-in, he'd have heard about it. Then the Historical Enquiries Team uncovered a statement from a soldier saying they had broken into the shop to take shelter." She paused. "My Daddy had sutured wounds – like long, deep cuts – on his body. We don't know where they came from. He was the only victim not to have photographs taken during his post-mortem."

"That's Shankill Butchers stuff."

The Butchers had been a Loyalist gang that operated during the worst of The Troubles. They would capture Catholic victims and torture them with knives before dumping the body. Only one ever escaped alive.

"Hmm." She didn't say anything because she couldn't prove for definite

what had happened – but the possibilities of what might have hung in the air, unspoken.

Using public records laws, she'd managed to track down everything from soldiers' statements to the Army's official investigation into Ballymurphy – "It's half a page long" – to inquest papers. "The only thing I couldn't find was my Daddy's medical reports [from when he was brought into hospital]. We were told they'd all been destroyed."

She'd established that no guns, spent cartridges, or bullets had been retrieved from the scene; no gunpowder residue found on the victims, survivors and dead alike. She'd found out one victim was a serving squaddie himself, married to a local girl and visiting the area. Another had been a British Army veteran.

Her father had been the son of a World War One veteran who'd fought for the British. Even after his murder, her mother insisted on helping soldiers wounded in the local area. As their father and the rest of the injured and dying had lain in the barracks, she'd told her children, one young soldier had fought with his colleagues, insisting they summon a doctor and a padre. He was hit with the butt of a rifle. Janet had searched for him, without luck, wanting to thank him for what he'd done and what he'd tried to do for her father.

She pulled out a book from the filing cabinet. Some of the soldiers in Ballymurphy that day had written books or given interviews to newspaper journalists. Through tracking their words, she'd pieced together a picture of the Parachute Regiment and the soldiers in it.

"There was a man shot outside a police station; he'd been travelling in a work van, with his colleagues, and the car had backfired and the soldiers stationed there thought it was gunfire and they fired and the bullet went through his head. In nis book, Harry McCallion" – McCallion was the pseudonym of Parachute regiment soldier who'd been in Ballymurphy – "says that the soldiers had a kitty where they put money in and whoever got the first kill won £200. He claims that after the man in the work van was shot, they actually took a bit of his skull into the barracks and used it as an ashtray."

Of Ballymurphy, McCallion wrote that he'd been assigned to bring up more ammunition to the barracks after the soldiers had ran out. "How could 85 soldiers run out of ammunition?" she said. "He wrote that when he got to the Henry Taggart [barracks], the soldiers were all on a high. 'And I could see why because there were six bodies on a raised stage, including that of a woman.' He also says that the soldier who killed Father Mullan (a Catholic priest) was a friend of his and that the

soldier said he shot him because he saw him picking up a gun. Yet the Army have always either denied to us that they shot Father Mullan or said they don't know who did. Yet he knows – he wrote it in his book."

She pulled out a newspaper article, an interview McCallion had given, headlined "I was the original natural-born killer."

"During the Falklands War he was part of an SAS team instructed to launch a covert raid on bases on the Argentine mainland," she began to read out. "But before the operation could begin, Argentina surrendered, the war was over. When he heard the news, Harry McCallion sat down on the pavement in Port Stanley and wept tears of frustration. There had been a whole war and he hadn't killed anyone. That's how much he enjoys his work."

She handed me the interview. I read the rest out loud: "I think violence is the most addictive thing in this world," he says, 15 years on, sitting in a slick restaurant overlooking the Thames. "The adrenalin rush, nothing touches it. I was killing for the hook, no two ways about it. I loved violence, any violence. I fought bar fights, kick boxing, anything. Just for the hook."

It made for chilling reading. She pulled out another book, written by another member of the Paras who'd also been at Ballymurphy, a medic called Nigel Mumford: "Who Cares Who Wins". She began to read a passage out where he described treating a young Scottish recruit who'd been raped by one of his colleagues in front of other recruits. The young Scot, according to Mumford, had complained because the eoldier was masturbating his dog. So the soldier had decided to teach him a lesson.

"Did you find the HET helpful?" I asked. "A lot of families I've spoken to didn't."

"Actually, I did," she said. "I told them what I wanted: my Daddy's medical records. They couldn't find them but they did find two depositions from my Daddy's doctors that were given to his inquest but not presented in court."

"Oh?"

Later, she gave me a copy of the document. There, "Mr A R Gurd" – Dr Alan Gurd, then a consultant surgeon in the Royal Victoria Hospital but who later immigrated to Ohio – had detailed his examination of her father. It was the first and second last lines that caught her eye. "On examination, there was an entry wound on the upper aspect of the right thigh and an exit wound on the medical aspect … The bullet lying in the symphysis pubis was not removed."

There it was. The smoking gun. And it was a bullet.

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When they exhume Joseph Murphy's body it is steel grey. Janet is standing in the graveyard, watching them from afar: a tent trected around the grave site, to give the body privacy. It had taken around two years of fighting through courts to get to this point; eventually, the coroner granted the family's request to have the body lifted and examined. It was evidence, they'd argued.

Within half an hour, she receives the call: they've found it. A military issue bullet, which unbeknownst to her, has been sitting in her father's coffin for 45 years, having been embedded in his leg. Joseph Murphy was telling the truth.

Months after this, on a hot June day, hundreds of mourners gather in a street in Ballymurphy. As her husband's remains were being dug up, Janet's mother, Mary Murphy, received bad news: cancer, terminal. 45 years to the day he dies, she dies, too. After frantic calls to the coroner's office and the police, his remains are finally returned and they're buried together, in a bittersweet ending no one could have foreseen.

The sun is beating down on the street outside her house. Janet sees me and walks over, then starts to talk to another mourner. I look at her as I realise it's the first time I've ever seen her cry.

Enemy of the State: D.I. Nixon and the Belfast Troubles

By Clifford N. Peeples

Clifford Peeples is a former Loyalist prisoner and current legacy archive researcher.

This article looks at the role of D.I. Nixon in the Belfast Troubles, his subsequent dismissal and his influence on working class Loyalism.

Extract: *There is one figure who sits out in the violence that engulfed Belfast in the early 1920s, he was District Inspector, William John Nixon. Despite this, the overwhelming majority of material that deals with him, is of a "penny dreadful" style or are tabloid newspaper reports that recount unsubstantiated urban myths. The fact that no substantive academic work is available which analyses Nixon and the impact he had on urban loyalism will be addressed somewhat in this paper: what was his role in events that took place over the two years of 1920-22 and was he acting on behalf of the government of the day? Nixon had been at the forefront of supressing Republican activities but would eventually feel that those he fought for betrayed him. To many working-class Belfast Loyalists, he was the man whose actions saved their city and secured the state, but within two years the state saw him as a danger on a par with those he fought.*

I would like to thank the staff of Belfast Central Library, Belfast Newspaper Library, The Linenhall Library, The Public Records Office of Northern Ireland, The National Archive, and Paper Trail for their help in the research contained in this article.

Oh Belfast Town, What a wonderful site,
Sure they're fightin' by day, And they're fightin' by night, They don't throw

potatoes, Or barley or wheat,
But its big kidney pavers, Dug-up from the street.[1]

The role of this paper is to determine the part played by D. I. Nixon in the Belfast Troubles. It will show that there was widespread support for extrajudicial activity and, that this was not just among the lower-classes but went to the highest reaches of the British Government. This policy was also favoured by some in the emergent Northern Ireland state. It will show that his use by the government in carrying out of its extrajudicial policies was valued and attracted support. Such actions came to embarrass the state, as would Nixon himself when he criticised the government's policies and decisions. His ultimate offence would be to have condemned the Imperial Government for arming Free State forces. An understanding of the character of insurgency and counter-insurgency can be greatly enhanced by the myriad of official records. These give a textured and complex understanding of the assemblages and divergences, which made up the interwoven personalities at play.

The IRA, although a secondary player in Belfast's Troubles, was able to dictate the intensity and ferocity of insurgent and counter-insurgent players. There can be no doubt that those facing an irregular form of warfare in 1970's

Ireland copied and emulated its tactics. As late as 1972, a report commissioned by Lord Windlesham, stated, with an air of sympathy, that brutality was a result of "widespread guerrilla warfare" and that such action was "hardly surprising". It would further state that the "reprisal campaign" was a result the situation that prevailed at the time: "men shot in the back" only to "be finished off while lying on the ground asking for mercy."[2] The author observes these activities were carried out before any Tan reprisal. He then offers caution on treating the whole community as enemies, even if there had been an element of truth in it. The difficulties of the 1920s would become the difficulties of the 1970s and beyond. They in turn would breed a legacy of mistrust and secrecy.

Introduction

There is one figure who sits out in the violence that engulfed Belfast in

1 Song sung by Robert Adams, to the tune of the *Where Mountains of Mourns Sweep Down to The Sea*

2 Black and Tans: historical brief for Minister (Lord Windlesham). National Archive. Ref: CJ 4/152 p.2-3.

the early 1920s. He was District Inspector, William John Nixon. Despite this, the overwhelming majority of material that deals with him, is of a "penny dreadful" style or are tabloid newspaper reports that recount unsubstantiated urban myths.

The fact that no substantive academic work is available which analyses Nixon and the impact he had on urban loyalism will be addressed somewhat in this paper: what was his role in events that took place over the two years of 1920-22 and was he acting on behalf of the government of the day? Nixon had been at the forefront of suppressing Republican activities but would eventually feel that those he fought for betrayed him. To many of the working-class, Belfast Loyalists, he was the man whose actions had saved their city and secured the state, but within two years the state saw him as a danger on a power with those he fought.

This study, has to be contextualised in order understand the role of Belfast's urban violence. Professor Eunan Ó Halpin states that out of the all places affected by the violence in Ireland during the early 1920s, Belfast is the most difficult to attribute blame of the casualties due to the nature of the communal urban warfare that had engulfed the city, the myriad of streets and close proximity of the warring factions. This at times made it almost impossible to ascertain responsibility.[1] The developing situation would bring Belfast its "most intense and brutal period of violence in its history".[2]

Nor was the violence a one-sided affair. An IRA briefing on the state of Belfast in July 1921 reports that "the Catholic mob is almost beyond control".[3] The IRA's newly promoted Chief Liaison Officer for Ulster, Eoin O'Duffy, found Belfast "in a veritable stage of war", with "the peal of rifles on all sides" accompanied with "frenzied mobs"[4] Both Follis and Buckland state that by March 1922 north and south were "openly at war."[5] This is reinforced by Dr Lynch, who'd observe that this was a result of the fact that the IRA "would make a final attempt to undermine the

1 Ó Halpin. E. *Dead of the Irish Revolution*. 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qrlSJkMulI&ab_channel=IrishHi storyShowNEARFM. (accessed 20th February 2017)

2 Lynch. R. *The People's Protectors: The IRA And The "Belfast Pogrom"* 1920–1922. *The Journal of British Studies*, 47, (2008) pp 375-391. p.375.

3 McGarry. F. *Eoin O'Duffy: A Self-made Hero*. Oxford. OUP. 2006. p.78

4 *Ibid*

5 Buckland. P. *Ulster Unionism And The Origins Of Northern Ireland: 1886 to 1922*. Dublin. Gill & McMillian. 1973. p.154. Follis. B. *A State Under Siege*. Oxford. Clarendon Press. 1995. p.93.

hardening reality of partition."[1] They hoped to achieve this "by launching an all-out offensive on the recently established state of Northern Ireland."[2]

The general situation was also to be enflamed by comments by De Valera who would state that Ulster "needed blasted from our path"[3] and Eoin O'Duffy speaking about the ceasefire in October 1921 would make clear in the minds of Loyalists the true intent of the IRA. His statement, that if Ulster did not concede to IRA demands and "if the Loyalist remained loyal", then "the lead would have to be used on them" would galvanise working-class loyalism in its violent reaction to Republican demands.[4] Fred Crawford would state that O'Duffy's statement predicated "a number of cold blooded murders of police" that were only paused by "very severe reprisals". These reprisals brought about the end of the "murder campaign" Crawford would write in his diary.[5]

Eoin MacNeill writing about O'Duffy would state "I am afraid that the Chief of Staff is too much of an anti- Orangeman"[6] and would bitterly complain that all "hostile action against any political section of the Irish people", "reprisals" and "taking hostages", should cease immediately as "the Ulster developments reported may have the gravest consequences to the Treaty and to Irish liberty." "Violent operations", he said, would compel Unionists to "play the game of our enemies" by joining the "corner-boy element against us". This MacNeill said would be so drastic that it would "surprise some people not familiar with the machinery of Ulster politics."[7] These statements, despite De Valera later using more conciliatory terms, would along with stories from the Cork region, enter the Unionist psyche and considerably heighten tensions at the time. The widespread belief was that areas populated by northern Unionists would be engulfed by the IRA and that a pogrom similar to that suffered by their southern counterparts was a real and all-present fear. This was exacerbated by a sense of betrayal also present.

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1 Lynch. R. *The Northern IRA and the Early Years of Partition*. Dublin. Irish Academic Press. 2006. p. 98

2 *Ibid*

3 Morgan. A. *Labour and Partition: The Belfast Working Class 1905 – 23*. London. Pluto.1991. p.296.

4 *Belfast Telegraph* 4th October 1921.

5 Crawford's Dairy, 14th June 1922. PRONI, D640/11/1.

6 Letter to George Gavan Duffy, dated , 9 February 1922, Eoin MacNeill No. 242 NAI DFA ES Box 17 File 111.

7 Letter to George Gavan Duffy, dated, 9 February 1922, Eoin MacNeill No. 242 NAI DFA ES Box 17 File 111.

Media articles about the sacrifice of Ulster's war dead sat alongside stories of fresh "outrages". The *Belfast Telegraph* was also reporting on the "secret" negations between the Dail representatives (the IRA in the eyes of Loyalist) and the British Government. It stated "The Irish rebels now have the British Government in the palm of their hands and are free to concentrate their attack on Ulster."[1] Once the terms of the negotiations became public Carson would state "he never thought that he would see the day of such abject humiliation for Great Britain."[2] The media reporting and the letters being published by the public give a sense of overwhelming doom and betrayal being felt by northern Unionism.

Despite Collins' tacit approval and arming of anti-Treaty forces under the understanding that they would take their fight to Ulster, not actively engaging pro-Treaty troops, he made some telling statements. While in negotiations he would candidly express that, "By force we could beat them perhaps, but perhaps not".[3] He then made a remarkable statement about any forced coercion of Ulster Unionists when he said, "I do not think we could beat them morally".[4] He expanded on this to Thomas Jones, the British Government's go-between with the Irish Provisional Government:

> If you kill all of us, every man and every male child, the difficulty will still be there. So in Ulster. That is why we do not want to coerce them …[5]

This thinking was also expressed by Arthur Griffith who said "We are not going to use violence because we do not want to have a legacy left by violence among our own people."[6] While these sentiments were being made to some the duplicitous nature of Collins's dealing can be seen in his expression to Seamus Woods.[7] Collins might well have been playing both sides off in a pragmatic fashion: keeping a large number of insurgents off the southern chess board, while consolidating his gains

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1 *Belfast Telegraph*, 4th October 1921.

2 *Belfast Telegraph,* 6thDecember 1921.

3 Townsend. C. *Political Violence in Irelan*d. Oxford. Oxford University Press.1998. p382

4 *Ibid*

5 *Ibid*

6 *Ibid*

7 Correspondence from Seamus Woods to Richard Mulcahy 29th September 1922. No. 325 NAI DT S1801A

until he thought he was strong enough for the final push. His death ended any such plan. He might well have been stating to the British that it was fruitless to openly coerce Unionists but this did not stop Collins using targeted assassination when it suited, as in the cases of D.I. Swanzy and Sir Henry Wilson. In any case, Unionists did not really distinguish between pro and anti-Treaty forces, with such deeds being viewed as acts of war by the Unionist populace who saw only pure acts of aggression that needed to be retaliated against. They were unaware that such targeted use of violence was being used to "increase political pressure".[1]

Much Honoured Traitors

There were three incidents connected with the Cork region that would have significant bearing on the tensions in the emergent Northern Ireland and would eventually be the touch-paper that would engulf whole communities: they were the assassination of Lieutenant-Colonel Gerald Bryce Smyth, the kidnap and murder of Mrs Mary Lindsay,[2] and the assassination of retired war hero Warren Peacock.

The impact of these incidents cannot be underestimated on northern Unionists. At the public unveiling of the Imperial Guards, held in the YMCA in Belfast, men dressed in military attire and with a colour party marched to the platform, were greeted by the platform party and cheers of those gathered. A Mr. Tregenna revealed that they already had a membership of over twenty-one thousand and, if needs be, they would go to the "Cove on Cork to save the lives of every Protestant".[3] The UVF were officially stood down in 1919 but within a year they were reorganised. The force, despite, its training and extensive armoury, was not on a par with its pre- war footing, offering only a "pale shadow"[4] of its glory days. It played no significant role in the defeat of the IRA's 3rd Northern Division; this was carried out by the police mostly, although the myth of its acquiesce in the IRA's defeat still abounds. Its failure had seen the rise of a number of urban groups to fill the vacuum, some of

1 Townsend.1998. p.383.

2 Crawford lambasts the lack of coverage in the British media for Mrs Lindsay murder; comparing this to the coverage Nurse Cavell, the latter being hailed a national heroine. Crawford's Diary 21st October 1921. PRONI, D640/11/1.

3 *Irish News* 17th November, 1921.

4 Bowman. T. *Carson's Army: The Ulster Volunteer Force, 1910—22* Manchester. Manchester University Press. 2017.p.210..

which would have substantial roles in Belfast urban violence.

By the summer of 1921, the IRA's guerrilla war was under severe pressure from British forces, and this was to cause a mutation in its strategy. Increasingly unable to directly engage British forces, its new tactic was the targeting of softest targets of the British system. Dr Sheehan observes "During 1921 the persecution and murder of Loyalists and Protestants in the south of Ireland increased significantly".[1] A British report at the time states the IRA "offensive" targeting was "directed entirely against them"[2] – the Loyalist – and that situation was now "urgent". The RIC would also state that "a new feature of the IRA campaign was the murder of respectable and loyal Protestants" under the veil of "giving information to the military".[3]

In the period, 36% of the deaths in the West Cork area were Protestants. Professor Fitzpatrick states that this "accounted for "five times the Protestant proportion in Cork's population."[4] This "ethnic cleansing"[5] as Heart calls it, not only confirmed fears but had a dramatic effect on the psyche of northern Protestants. Arthur Percival, an intelligence officer with the Essex Regiment, stationed in Cork, would challenge the view that a large number of Protestants acted for British forces. He stated "A few but not many were brave enough to assist the Crown Forces with information."[6]

The Lindsay affair was particularly harrowing, in a scene that has a resonance with current Islamic State strategy. Mrs. Mary Lindsay was an elderly Protestant woman who informed the British military of an IRA ambush close to her home at Godfrey's Cross, County Cork. She also informed the local parish priest who went to the IRA unit and asked them to call off the ambush but they refused. In the event, the British military arrived on the scene and captured a number of them. Five were subsequently sentenced to death by military tribunal. The IRA kidnapped Mrs. Lindsay and her driver, James Clarke, and held them hostage in order to secure the release of its members under capital sentence. Her house was burnt to the ground. She wrote to Major General Strickland

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1 Sheehan, William. *A Hard Local War: The British Army and the Guerrilla War in Cork 1919-1921*. History Press. 2011. p.157.

2 *Ibid*

3 *Ibid*

4 Fitzpatrick. D. *Terror in Ireland: 1916-1923*. Dublin. Lilliput Press. 2012.p.4

5 *Idid*

6 Sheehan. W. *British Voices From the Irish War of Independence 1918-1921*. Dublin. Collins Press. 2007. p.98.

"my life will be forfeited for theirs",[1] in the correspondence she then stated "I implore you to spare these men for my sake."[2] Her pleas were not fruitful and the judgment stood on the condemned men. As a result, Mrs Lindsay and her driver were murdered. Strickland complained that while the troops under his command "hunted the rebel bands" the IRA "murdered Loyalist and burnt their homes".[3] The war had now descended into a "reign of terror in West Cork," the effects of which would be felt on the cobbled streets of Belfast.

The mother of Major Warren Peacock (famed for his bravery by leading the Inniskillings' raiding party at Autuille on the Somme, capturing six German dug-outs)[4] wrote a letter dbout the experience suffered by her family. It was carried in full by the *Belfast Telegraph* covering almost the entire page; it is both solemn and pitifully candid. Ethel Peacock ends her letter by rebuking the British Government for encouraging her family to make a stand knowing that they only "intended to surrender". She finished with words that would strike a chord in the Loyalist reader's psyche:

> " …if my gallant son had only been a rebel he would now be alive, and probably a much honoured man by the traitors in Downing Street."[5]

These feelings, coupled with demobbed solders, battle- hardened in France, and experienced guerrilla forces which were surrounded by a large numbers of rioters, made the streets of Belfast a perfect storm. Sniping, bombing of trams, attacks on homes and arson would take control of the streets for next few years. The result was that hundreds would die and thousands would be driven from their homes and jobs.

The Hierarchy of Horror

1 Sheehan, 2011. p.105.

2 *Ibid*

3 *Ibid* p.158.

4 Brigadier-General Hickman in a special Brigade Order said "The arrangements and plans reflect the greatest credit on Colonel Ricardo, Major Peacock, and the Officers concerned. The whole scheme was executed with great dash and determination, with cool judgment and nerve. Arthur & Dorothy Samuels. *With the Ulster Davison in France*. WILLIAM MULLAN & SON. 1918. BELFAST. P. 45-47.

5 *Belfast Telegraph*, December 12th 1921.

By late 1919 and early 1920 guerrilla tactics and targeted assassination were being put in place by a number of forces fighting for Irish independence in what is now termed the Anglo-Irish War. In this, these forces dictated the ferocity and pace of much of the violence. This, especially in the emergent northern state, is of significant interest because although they were not responsible for the majority of anti-state violence fear of what was happening in southern Ireland focused the attention of Unionist on them. These tactics were used because "a massed uprising with fixed defences was to be avoided at all costs."[1] due to the total failure of the 1916 Rising, which had been a "painful lesson".[2]

The main focus for actions by the IRA was to be the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC). This was for two reasons: the IRA saw it as crucial to their success and RIC were seen by them as experts in local knowledge and tactics. The IRA (Volunteers) propaganda sheet, An t-Óglách, observed the following about the British instrument – the RIC:

> *His front line in Ireland, his chief instrument of executive power was the "R.I.C." an armed force of Irish mercenaries with elaborate local knowledge, situated in strongholds in every part of the country, even the wildest and remotest. The "R.I.C." were his eyes and ears and his strong right arm in Ireland. A relatively small body of men as compared to the people of Ireland; they were able by their organisation and elaborate system of intelligence to dominate …*[3]

These sentiments would be reinforced by the opinions of individual IRA men who felt "if we hadn't dealt with the R.I.C., there would have been no Free State."[4] They looked upon military units as inept who could

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1 Silke. A. *Ferocious Times: The IRA, the RIC, and Britain's Failure in 1919–1921*. *Terrorism And Political Violence* Vol. 28, Issue. 3,

2 *Ibid*

3 *An t-Óglách.* Vol. II No.13 p.2. An extensive digital archive of An t-Óglác issues are available at: http://antoglach.militaryarchives.ie/. There is a constant theme throughout of the RIC being the real threat. In the Vol. II No.12 the editorial would say: "Our warfare for a long time past has been naturally directed against that portion of the enemy's armed forces which were the principle instrument of his occupation of our country the body known as "constabulary." These men, Irishmen with plenty of local knowledge, organised. and trained as spies on their fellow- countrymen" … dominating the people by their armed and disciplined activity, and making the power of the British enemy effective everywhere.".

4 *Ibid*

be "fooled" but the RIC had "marvellous local knowledge." This was in Republican terms "too much for us."[1] Therefore, the IRA had an emphasis on the police.[2] Their failure to replicate this in Northern Ireland would ultimately copper-fasten partition and led them to abandon operations.[3]

The British government responded to the IRA's hit-and- run and assassination programme by putting in place a structure of extrajudicial activities which included summary justice. Reprisals, as they became known, first received official sanction in the spring of 1919. While initially these reprisals targeted the property of alleged attackers, this changed due to the viscous nature of the conflict. The change would take place on 21st November 1921 – Bloody Sunday. No longer was the target on duty, armed and with a chance of defending himself, a new tactic that saw the men gunned down in their beds emerged. Dr Dolan says the "hierarchy of horror" was "grossly breeched on Bloody Sunday morning." Men murdered while still in their pyjamas in sight of their wives and all heard by children tipped "the scales of horror".[4]

In response to this, groups of men were trained at Hounslow, outside London, and shipped to Dublin. One of the most successful units was led by Captain Harper-Shove. Harper- Shove would boast to Churchill and Sir Henry Wilson of the aptitude of the operation. Wilson recorded that, "Shore (sic) talks in the calmest way of murdering the SFS. He told us he had had certain SFS marked down" and would go on to say that "there were some amazing stories."[5]

The knowledge of such actions did not stop there. Wilson's diary entries confirm Lloyd Gorge's awareness and approval.[6] Wilson was sceptical of the authenticity of the claims of "stamping out terrorism in secret" and thought the "only course" to deal with situation was "instant retaliation".[7]

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1 Silke, 2016.

2 Fanning. R. F*atal Path: British Government and Irish Revolution 19-1922*. Faber&Faber: London 2013. p.194.

3 Correspondence from Seamus Woods to Richard Mulcahy. 29th September 1922. No. 325 NAI :DT S1801A.

4 Dolan, Anne. *Killing and Bloody Sunday, November 1920*. p.794. *The Historical Journal*, 49, 3 (2006), pp. 789–810.

5 Murphy. G. *The Year of Disappearances: Political Killings in Cork 1921-1922*. Gill & Macmillan. Dublin. 2010. p.217.

6 *Ibid*

7 Townsend, Charles. *The Republic: The Fight For Irish Independence.* London. Allan Lane. 2013. p.155-6.

Edward Carson spoke at Belfast's Twelfth demonstration in 1920 and stated quite candidly the Unionist leadership's feelings on the IRA's opening of hostilities in Ulster:

> *We must proclaim today clearly that, come what will and be the consequences what they my, we in Ulster will not tolerate no Sinn Fein – no Sinn Fein organisation, no Sinn Fein methods …. But we tell you [the government] this – that if having offered you our help, you are yourselves unable to protect us … well then,we tell you that we will take the matter into our own hands.*[1]

By the 1st September, this view would be further elaborated upon and given formal acknowledgement when Craig put forward a memorandum to the cabinet stating "It may be advisable for [Unionist leaders] to see what steps can be taken towards a system of organised reprisals against the rebels …"[2]

At this time, Fred Crawford, the mastermind behind the UVF arms smuggling, was approached by a number of officers from Dublin Castle. One of those was a Captain Hardy, who had served with distinction in the Connaught Rangers, now under the command of Sir Basil Thompson, the British Director of Intelligence. The contact aimed to employ Crawford and some of his men to take action against Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith.[3] Hardy was, as Michael Foy put it, "feared" when he stated "It was F Company's legendary Captain Jocelyn Hardy who the Dublin Volunteers hated and feared the most."[4] Crawford would state that the time frame for the operations would lead to failure and declined after a number of meetings.[5] Hardy would then go on to offer "all the inside information held by the police and the military as to the Sinn Feiners."[6] Due to the secretive nature of their correspondence, Hardy suggested that "If you write with urine in the inside of an envelope there is no risk whatever of discovery."[7] Wilfred Spender also confirmed his commitment to such acts as they would calm the general populace.[8]

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1 *News Letter*, 13th July1920.

2 Morgan, 1991, p.289.

3 Haines, 2009, p.268.

4 *Ibid,* p.272.

5 Farrell, 1983, p.18.

6 Haines, 2009, p.272.

7 PRONI, D/640/13/12.

8 PRONI, CAB 5/1.

Within eighteen days of Craig's memorandum on reprisals the policy would be laid bare and questions would be raised in the British Parliament about the existence of such a policy. On the 18th September, an IRA gang murdered one RIC officer and seriously wounded a number of others on Belfast's Falls Road. The reprisal was swift.

In the early hours of the next morning, a uniformed group called at the homes of three leading Republicans in the area. One was leading IRB member Edward Trodden, the others were members of Sinn Fein, John McFadden and James Gaynor. All were killed. Joe Devlin raised the killings but was told by Sir Hamar Greenwood that this was not the work of any of the Crown Forces. Crawford would not mince his words, when later, he stated that Greenwood was "the most brazen-faced liar the House of Commons has ever possessed."[1] During the debate Donald Thompson stated that any attack on the security forces would lead to retaliation on members of Sinn Fein. *The Daily Express* would state that the police had been "acting with promptitude" on the matter.[2] Despite the government's denials Fred Crawford showed no ambiguity about who carried out the attacks and why. He would relate his view in his diary entry of the 18th September:

> It is quite true that about one policeman shot dead on Saturday night and two badly injured. Before morning the police retaliated by shooting dead 3 prominent SinnFeiners. This seems drastic but to my mind it is the only way it will stop these cold blooded murders.[3]

It is believed by many that this was the first act of reprisal carried out by D.I. Nixon.[4]

On the eve of the opening of the Northern Ireland Parliament, and in response to what he saw as IRA attacks, the MP elect for North Belfast, Sam McGuffin exclaimed to a cheering crowd that:

> "They would not tolerate this lawlessness and outrage in the six counties – and, if they could not achieve this this through the instrumentality of the imperial parliament, they would assume control of affairs themselves, and by the organisation of a special

1 Haines, 2009 p.263.

2 Parkinson, 2002, p.71.

3 PRONI, D/640/11.

4 Parkinson, 2002, p.71.

force they would drive Sinn Féin out."[1]

This was the constant theme from some within Unionism. There was no doubt that the majority of those who deemed themselves loyal to the new state saw no problem with reprisals on those they saw as its attackers.

Attack and Counterattack

Crawford wrote to the acting head of police, Lt.-Col. Wickham two years later. The letter, dated 20th January 1922, revealed that both he and Wickham had been in discussions about the operational value of a unit of twenty-five "B constables" for "special duty". This "duty" would be done in "plain clothes" and the B constables would be given "all time passes". They would also be given access to firearms on a prolonged period. An initial trial period of one month was to be put in place and the unit was to be placed under the complete control of D.I. Nixon "and not to do anything without informing him and getting his sanction."[2] Wickham seems to have reneged on the offer but Crawford sends a further letter to Wickham saying there might be "difficulties" in his proposal but "is there no way to utilise them"? There is no further correspondence on the issue but Crawford suggests that that Wickham speak to others to gage opinion.[3]

Within a month of the special request being filed things in Belfast would take a dramatic turn for the worst. On the 9th February 1922 the IRA ambushed a transport train carrying police to County Fermanagh, via Clones. Four Specials were killed and a number taken hostage by Republican forces. The incident caused a fever pitch of outrage at the murder or war hero, Dougherty, a platoon sergeant. The ensuing violent orgy that engulfed Belfast led to the deaths of twenty-seven people in just three days – 12-15th February.[4]

As months passed the IRA campaign increased on a dramatic scale with three policemen shot dead in four days, in early March. This was paralleled by internal reports that the RIC were "discontented and moody"; the uncertainty of their future was also "telling seriously on their discipline.[5]"

1 *News Letter*, 6th June 1921.

2 Letter dated 20th January 1921, PRONI D640/3/2.

3 Letter dated 21st January 1921, PRONI D640/3/2.

4 Abbott, R. *Police Casualties in Ireland 1919-1922*.p. 276-277.

5 Walsh, Maurice. *Bitter Freedom: Ireland in a Revolutionary World. 1918-1923*.

On the 18th March, the police moved in and seized the headquarters of the IRA in Belfast, St Mary's Hall, Bank Street. Its setting up had been one of the conditions of the 1920 truce. The hall had been used as a distribution point for IRA arms and was the focal point of the group's intelligence gathering operation.[1] During the raid the police found arms and ammunition but most importantly, to both the police and the IRA, they found all the latter's written records. On the 20th March, the *Belfast Telegraph* reported on the police raid at St Mary's Hall. It stated that a "large quantity of ammunition, with some cases the noses of the bullets cut off to produce the murderous flat-nosed bullets." There were also ten primed Mill's bombs and a box of high explosives. It also recorded "there was captured a big haul of documents" which the report states were of "the highest importance, including account books." They were written in a studious manner in "neat handwriting" listing "income and expenditure" and, also, wages.[2] There were also several lists containing the details of those who subscribed financially to the IRA's 3rd Northern Division and lists of the all officers and men.[3] Lynch would state that:

> *The raid on St. Mary's Hall had an immediate impact with many of the named individuals being rounded up and imprisoned. Others were forced to go permanently on the run. When internment was introduced later in the year the St. Mary's Hall documents would provide a comprehensive list of IRA suspects, a fact which explains why the scheme was to prove such a success in bringing the IRA to it knees so soon after its introduction.*[4]

Thomas McNally, the quartermaster of the IRA's 3rd Northern Division, boasted of arms shipments from Dundalk, disguised as boxes of bacon to the hall in affidavits.[5] In all a further six hundred rifles and sixty thousand rounds of ammunition, which had to have their serial numbers removed to hide the fact that they had come from the British Government and were supplied by O'Duffy.[6]

Faber&Faber. London 2015, p.341

1 Statement by Thomas McNally to Bureau of Military History. p13 http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/reels/bmh/BMH.WS0410.pdf.

2 *Belfast Telegraph*, March 20th 1922.

3 PRONI. HA/32/1/130.

4 Lynch. 2006. p.201

5 McNally. p13

6 *Ibid*, p11

In less than a week, on the 23rd, the IRA shot two B specials in May Street in central Belfast. Around 1.30 a.m. the next morning a group of around five men entered Bruce's Demesne's old orchards off Clifton Park Avenue, Belfast, and made their way to 3 Kinnaird Terrace, which looked onto the open ground. The group gained entrance by a single blow with a sledge hammer to the front door and gathered all the male occupants into one down stairs room. According to Mary Downy, the McMahon's niece, four of the men wore police rain capes and police caps and the fifth man wore a belted light trench coat. John McMahon claimed that the man who did all the shooting was six feet tall and another with him spoke with an English accent.[1]

While much has been written concerning the seemingly sectarian nature of the McMahon murders, this does not fit in with the pattern of reprisals. Professor Tim Wilson sates:

> In style, the McMahon murders clearly fit into a chain of police reprisals that stretch back to the autumn of 1920. Such reprisals contained highly ritualistic elements that served a dual purpose. First, they were meant to underline a message of targeted punishment rather than random slaughter.[2]

He would go on to state that police squads acted with swiftness. So if this was an act of retaliatory violence and by their nature, they had to be carried out with a precise target which would convey a message to those who instigated the initial attack on the police, why was Kinnaird Terrace chosen? Or was this a break from the pattern? The answer may lie in the earlier raid on St Mary's Hall.

Rex Taylor writing in his study on the assassination of Field Marshall Henry Wilson states that the reason the McMahon household was targeted would soon come to light:

> But soon a few astonishing facts came to light, though none of them tended to lessen the degree of Nixon's guilt. It was found that the late McMahons were the paymasters for the IRA troublemakers in the North, a fact proved by a leakage from the banks of the necessary funds. With the deaths of the paymasters there came also, for a time at any rate, a sudden lull in Belfast.[3]

1 PRONI HA/5/193.

2 Wilson, 2010, p.93.

3 Taylor, 1961, p.158.

This view of why terrible restitution was to visit this seemingly ordinary Edwardian family is also enforced by the revelations of IRA activist Sean Montgomery:

> The two specials died and one of the worst reprisals ever was the shooting of the well-known McMahon family and McKinney, their bar man. The McMahons were missed because they had given a sum of money which was in a book captured by the police.[1]

Not only was there a widespread belief that Owen McMahon was involved in some way with the finances of the IRA in Belfast but it has also emerged that another victim, McKinney, was an IRA man. Liam Ó Duibhir would confirm this by stating "Edward McKinney was an IRA volunteer and this was confirmed by IRA GHQ" and would go on "his membership was concealed after the shooting."[2] This would fit in with a reprisal killing as it had to be focused and have a proper target or it would have no value, especially in a city that was awash with sectarian murder. The view that this was a message to the IRA is given further credence with an analyse by Mike Martin Ph.D., a former Army Captain, who commenting on his research, on conflict and the use of violence as a tool of communication, states:

> If you study war in an academic sense, violence is often seen as a mode of communication between the two sides. So you can talk face to face or you can inflict violence and that also sends a message.[3]

The swiftness of the attack on the McMahon household also fits with a police action. The RIC would move in a decisive manner against those who were seen as responsible or connected to those who had been responsible for assassination of their colleagues. This contrasted with other forces, who would visit their retaliation on the inhabitants of a geographical area, points directly to the RIC. John Regan, a Catholic officer, would write that "it was fact" that officers "quickest to avenge"

1 McDermott, 2001, p.194.

2 Duibhir, 2012, p.80.

3 Mike Martin, 2014, https://uk.news.yahoo.com/afghans-thought- uk-troops-worked-taliban-180416126.html#02KQatn.

were the "Irishmen" who he claims were of "an excellent type".[1] In contrast the Black and Tans would fire out of a lorry while intoxicated while Ragan says the RIC would direct the vengeance "stone cold sober" and on the "right person". This showed a "great deal of courage"[2]

Lynch suggests that IRA casualties did not result from communal violence but at the hands of police acting as reprisal units. In fact, their death toll was notably insignificant for the amount of deaths.[3] He would state:

> The majority of IRA members lost their lives in this subterranean war visited in their own homes in the dead of night rather than in any kind of heroic last stand of the barricades.[4]

Within a week of the McMahon murders, both governments had signed a peace pact and agreed a truce. On the 27th April, Michael Collins sent a lengthy telegram in reply to a letter that Craig had sent him. It answers a number of questions and makes a request that the use of St Mary's Hall is returned. Collins also raises the issue of several murders but shows an astounding lack of interest in the McMahon case. He states to Craig, "No one to my knowledge suggested that they should inquire into the MacMahon massacre".[5] Further adding that the "massacre was perpetrated before March 30th".[6] While things might well have different in the press, the correspondence leaves the strong inference that an agreement was in place not hold the McMahon case up to too much scrutiny.

The evidence in the McMahon case points to the family being attacked because they not only supported the 3rd Northern Division of the IRA in a financial aspect but also housed IRA men. This was a common practice that would give cover to rural fighters in the urban setting of Belfast. The proximity of the IRA's record seizure, the reprisal at Kinnaird Terrace and subsequent revelations point to violence being used as a form of communication: the message being a simple one – kill our men and we will kill yours. In all, the evidence of the McMahon case fits the case of a direct message being sent to the IRA. This violent communique was to

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1 Ragan. J. M. (2007) *The Memoirs of John M. Regan, a Catholic Officer in the RIC and RUC, 1909–48*. Ed by Joost Augusteijn.Dublin. Four Courts Press. p.139.

2 *Ibid*.

3 Lynch. 2006 p.381.

4 *Idid*.

5 Telegram from Collins to Craig, 27th April 1922. No. 278 NAI DT S1801A. http://www.difp.ie/docs/1922/Northern-Ireland/278.htm.

6 *Ibid.*

have a lasting effect on the IRA and its support base: it drove ambivalent members of the community to the realisation that partition was a reality and it led the IRA to the understanding that they could not defeat a state that was willing to fight them on their own terms.

There does not seem to be any imminent threat to Nixon's position in the immediate aftermath of the McMahon killings. In fact, he is awarded his highest commendation within a week of the McMahon case. He was to receive a "First Class" for his "Exceptional zeal", "tact and ability". This was in relation to the case of Arthur Hunt who was believed to have been a spy placed in the IRA in Belfast by Nixon. Hunt had offered the IRA weapons and was to become friendly with them. The IRA became suspicious of his real intentions and kidnapped him. Nixon was able to retrieve him and track down the gang which resulted in the arrest of seventeen and the convictions of twelve of his captors.[1] The Hunt case would further increase Nixon's stature in working-class areas of Belfast. Hunt's mother would later write to the Northern Ireland Prime Minister, saying that "Nixon was such a good man" as he had saved her son from "murderess abuse." Going on that her son was to be "shot in the morning" when Nixon "got the Information of this whereabouts." Acting on this she states he "led his men to that awful place where the Sinn Feiners had him." She then alleges that the "military would not make the raid." But enthusiastically continues "D.I. Nixon fearlessly made it." Ending "God Bless him.[2]"

At a Cabinet meeting on 23rd May 1922, Craig stated that "some drastic action that would not be strictly covered from a legal point of view might be needed." The Cabinet agreed to stand over any such action and issued letters of command[3]. This hardening stance was exposed when Lloyd George asked Wilson would he take part in a delegation to meet Collins. His reply was that he was not intent on "seeing three bloody murderers dictating to three bloody cowards."[4] The British would also begin to question the sincerity of Collins, with Lloyd George musing that the Irish "may have to face re-conquest."[5] Leo Amery, a Conservative, would capture the ever sombre mood when he would write, "The Irish

1 PRONI HA/32/1/255.

2 Correspondence from Mrs Hunt to James Craig, 15th February 1924. PRONI, CAB/9/B/18

3 PRONI CAB/4/44.

4 Sheehan. 2007.p.91.

5 McMahon. P. *British Spies and Irish Rebels: British Intelligence and Ireland, 1916-1945*. Boydell Press. Surry. 2008. p.78.

situation has now reached the critical point and I fancy we are within a few days of complete breakdown."[1] As a backdrop to the stagnation that was taking place Collins was arming the Belfast IRA[2] and Churchill was directing a military plan for full re-conquest.[3] Collins would almost bring about a total military engagement by British forces due to the execution of Wilson, a man who he thought was "a violent Orange partisan"[4], in London that July.[5] The duplicitous acceptance by Collins of the British ultimatum to deal with the anti-Treaty forces in a decisive manner (because they had been assumed to be responsible) shows a cold calculus and pragmatism matched by few. Collins played the game well. He would arm one section and talk of peace, declaring to Greenwood, "you had us dead beat. We could not last another three weeks." Giving the opinion that the IRA was now a spent force.[6] Ultimately, Collins lost at the hands of those he was willing to sacrifice.

As these events unfolded the first factures began to air in the relationship between Nixon and the Unionist government. An investigation into Nixon's public criticism of the way the new police force was being managed was about to unfold. He had voiced concerns, in an open court, about the authorities' failure to properly arm police officers in Belfast at the time.[7] Later he would send a public letter to a number of Stormont MPs. In July 1922 he complained about others receiving promotion and that some in the new force did not have the best interest of the new state at heart. He claims in the letter to having witnessed a North Belfast priest leaving the Police Commissioner's office in January and, as a result, officers were being prevented from doing their duty. He ends with a statement that he was prevented from seizing a Thomson machine-gun due to this operational interference.[8]

Position is Hopeless

1 *Ibid*.

2 *Northern Wig*, 24th May 1924.

3 McMahon, 2008. p.78.

4 Jeffery 2006, p279-80.

5 Dwyer.T.W. *The Squad And The Intelligence Operations of Michael Collins*. Mercier. Cork . 2005.pp. 256-59.

6 Taylor. A. *English History 1914-1945*.Oxford. Oxford Univeristy Press 2001. p.157.

7 *Irish News* 12th October 1921.

8 PRONI HA/32/1/255.

In a secret IRA memo, dated the 27th June 1922, Seamus Woods, Officer Commanding, the IRA's 3rd Northern Division, commented on the despondency that his men were suffering. "After a period over five weeks the demoralisation has practically completed its work".[1] He would relate that a military defeat had been experienced not only by his brigade but also the adjourning one:

> *The position in No.2 and 3 Brigade of the 3rd Northern Division today is that the Military Organisation is almost destroyed (and the enemy) believe that they have beaten the IRA in Antrim and Down … The people who supported us feel they have been let down by Dail Eireann, for our position today is more unbearable than it was in June 1921.* [2]

Woods ended the report ringing with despair saying, "Today the people feel that all their suffering has been in vain and cannot see any hope for the future."[3]

By the summer of 1922, the IRA had started to lose the support of northern Nationalists as well as Republicans. The Roman Catholic Bishop McCrory, whose parish included Belfast stated that the "Catholic population of Belfast" were paying "for the sins" of the IRA. This breech in relations spelt an end to the IRA "summer campaign".[4] The intelligence war had been lost and information about IRA suspects and activities avalanched RUC barracks in the form of anonymous notes and letters. The IRA Brigade Adjutant, Seamus McGovern, observed that the Nationalist population was "only too anxious to acquiesce"[5] in its helping the Northern state. Woods made the shocking conclusion on this in his June 1922 report:

> *… Practically all over the Division the Police Barracks are stormed with letters giving all available information against the IRA and their supporters. We have captured some such letters and in most cases suggestions are made to the Police as to how they could best cope with the situation. In most cases they regret they did not give*

1 Lynch. 2008. p.162)

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*

4 Lynch, 2008, p. 390)

5 *Ibid.* p.390.

this information two years ago.[1]

The virtual collapse of support and rejection of the IRA signalled its end as a real threat to the Northern Ireland state.

McGovern reported that if "operations started on a general scale throughout the six counties" and if "a policy of war" was decided upon, then the IRA "would be compelled to mete out Capital Punishment amongst the Catholic Civilian population." This was not the view held by Woods who now realised the futility of the IRA's situation as he noted, the "position is hopeless without the support of the civil population".[2]

Despite this, there was still an underlying hope within the IRA – and a fear for Unionists – that there was unfinished business. Many on both sides believed that once a reorganisation took place a final push to defeat the Northern state would be instigated. Wood wrote on the 29th September 1922:

> The late Commander-in-Chief made it clear to us that the Government in Dublin intended to deal with the Ulster situation in a very definite way.[3]

Woods related, as a result of the Civil War, the Irish Government was "not equal to the task of overcoming the Treaty position with regard to Ulster."[4]

In Woods's last report of September 1922, he states "There is grave internal trouble in the Northern Government."[5] He would go on to elaborate on the cause of this trouble. As "A desire for peace became popular amongst the better classes and the Northern Govt. took up the task of restoring order in good faith."[6] He reported that this was hampered by some in the administration:

There had been a number of high Officers in their Police Force who had been given unlimited powers m*uring the Terror Campaign, notably D/I.*

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1 *Ibid*.p.390

2 *Ibid*.p.390.

3 Bew, Gibbon & Patterson, *The State in Northern Ireland*. Manchester. Manchester University Press. 1979. p.66.

4 *Ibid*. p.66.

5 Correspondence from Seamus Woods to Richard Mulcahy. 29th September 1922. No. 325 NAI DT S1801A: http://www.difp.ie/docs/Volume1/1922/325.htm

6 Correspondence from Seamus Woods to Richard Mulcahy. 29th September 1922. No. 325 NAI DT S1801A: http://www.difp.ie/docs/Volume1/1922/325.htm

Nixon, and all his Staff. [1]

Woods was aware that Nixon had been asking for promotion but that this had been refused as he was seen, in Woods' words, as "a menace to peace". He states Nixon was "at present organising the disbanded Specials"[2] and that this was to "lead them against the Northern Government on the same lines as the Irregulars in the South".[3]Nixon, he said, had personally "warned Col. Wickham, Inspector Gen. R.U.C. and the City Commissioner of Belfast that their lives are no longer safe."[4]

Woods also adds that the IRA had obtained "all the files and military plans from H.Q., R.U.C., and the office of General Solly Flood, Craig's Military Advisor" and that the Northern Government has been holding "inquiries in all their Departments".[5] The seizing of such classified material by the IRA had left in every official "suspecting the other."[6] Woods further stated that the IRA in Northern Ireland could no longer survive under the current conditions and even under "war conditions" could only survive a short time, as his men would not be safe and feared the "unofficial murder-gangs" as he calls them. This is a reference to Nixon and it gives an intuitive overview of how he was perceived by the IRA. He is the only one mentioned in such a manner. The reader is given the perception that Woods and his men believe that Nixon would not stop until he had defeated them. In an insightful observation, Woods states that "if this must come … then there is very little hope of organising in Ulster …for a long time."[7]

In the words of Dr. McGarry the IRA's campaign was "an unmitigated disaster".[8] It is also of note that relations within the Nationalist/Republican community were not homogenous; there had been continual tension between the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the IRA. A flavour of the venomous hostility that existed between the two can be gleaned by the fact that the British Government had no real problem arranging meetings between Unionists and Collins could not see Joe Devlin being in the same room as the latter.[9] Woods left the North as did many of the

1 *Ibid.*

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid*

7 *Ibid*

8 McGarry.F. *Eoin O'Duffy: A Self-made Hero*. Oxford. OUP, 2006, p.102.

9 National Archive CAB 42/1

IRA under the fear of capture or summary justice. As he contemplated his actions and their failure he was unaware that his path would later cross with the subject of his memo, the man that the IRA had saw as the most dangerous of men: Nixon.

Situation Highly Critical

As Woods observed, relations between Nixon and the Northern Ireland Government were starting to sour. By July 1922, the first of the fissures that would lead to Nixon being ostracised and vilified by the Unionist leadership was about to emerge. The crisis would come to light with Nixon writing an open letter, dated 11th July. In it he raised a number of concerns. These ranged from the security situation to his frustration at being passed over for promotion.

In the letter, Nixon names some of those favoured over him and states that outsiders have been brought in over the heads of local men. He relates that he had tried to do his best to "defeat the conspiracy against Ulster" and that "when propaganda against Ulster was being extensively indulged in," Dawson Bates would consult him on what was taking place during the security crisis. He would on the occasions act as an informal press officer and would read these reports in "the English and American Papers".[1] Nixon then singles out Wickham for criticism, stating the area under his control was "more orderly" and would have been more so but for Wickham's interference. If this was Nixon's perception and that of his supporters it is at variance to the reality. Niall Cunningham, in his geographical analysis of the violence, shows that the main cyclone of ferocity covered Nixon's area. In fact, those most at risk were Protestant/Unionist male inhabitants of the Smithfield area, just on the doorstep of Brown Square Barracks[2]. The term "interference" is a direct inference that Wickham colluded with a North Belfast priest, a Father Sebastian who Nixon states he observed leaving the police chief's office on 4th January 1922.[3] The arrangement between Wickham and the priest was extended, so preventing Nixon's seizure of IRA weaponry.

On the 2nd August, David J. Ager wrote to the Prime Minister on behalf of Sinclair Seamen LOL. He relayed that the lodge had passed a

1 PRONI HA/32/1/255

2 Cunningham. N. *The Social Geography of Violence During the Belfast Troubles, 1920-22.* Manchester. Manchester University. 2013. p.16.

3 PRONI HA/32/1/255

"vote of censure on the Minister of Home Affairs", Dawson Bates, "for his disloyalty to the electors of Northern Ireland." They also called for the "dismissal of the City Commissioner for his Roman Catholic tendencies". The letter would go on to castigate both Bates and Wickham for "deliberately passing over Nixon" for promotion. It also took issue with directives over orders that no flags should be flown at "Barracks or Special Platoon Quarters" in July. Ager remonstrated that "Men who had served under the Union Jack all over the world resent having to haul it down while serving in Ulster". While the content of the letter so far was scathing, it was nothing to the toxic warning it would end with. The lodge told of how they were determined to see Nixon get just acknowledgment for his service to "Ulster and Empire" and most crucially that it was time "we had an opposition party" that would "represent the Protestant electors of Northern Ireland in our Ulster Parliament".

The enormity of that statement cannot be underestimated. This was less than a year into the formation of the state and Orange Lodges were questioning the government's loyalty to the state and purposing an alternative to Craig's leadership. Ulster Unionism had, on the most, acted as homogeneous group since it organisation by E.S. Finnigan in the 1880s. The ramifications were earthshattering for the establishment. The same resolution was taken up by a swath of Orange lodges, Black Preceptories, private individuals and Loyalist groups.

Bates wrote to the Prime Minister, James Craig, on the 23rd October 1922, in relation to a deputation from the Ulster Unionist Labour Association, that had met with the Prime Minister on the 19th, outlaying his response to their concerns. The letter is four pages long and makes eleven points in relation to allegations Nixon had made concerning the security situation, and his perceived discrimination. Bates does not shirk from showing his utter contempt for Nixon. He related that "In our new officers, with the exception of Mr. Nixon, I believe we have men who are a credit to any police force." In responding to Nixon's allegation on the breach of security, Bates responds by making the counter allegation that "it has been admitted by a aivilian that D.I. Nixon showed him official correspondence." He does not elaborate on this and does not explain why Nixon was not disciplined for it despite conveying that this was a breach of "the regulations of the Force." The fact that there were a number of very embarrassing leaks during this period, and a number of IRA moles who'd infiltrated the police force and government, was well known to Bates but he totally discounts the authenticity of Nixon's allegations. He had on the 29th of June, received a memo from the Director of CID,

informing him of seizure of IRA intelligence documentation stating that "Evidently there is a grave leakage in Govt. Departments. Bates was warned that this "will require special action"[1] Despite this. Bates deflects blame from himself and Wickham of the points put forward by Nixon by transferring responsibility to the military or the RIC and as they were now a new police force so they could not be held accountable.

Megaw, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Home Affairs, wrote to the Prime Minister on the 4th September. He related that he had met with the Military Advisor, Solly- Flood and Lloyd Campbell, the M.P. for North Belfast, who was

also former UVF Director of Intelligence.[2]At the meeting the case of Nixon was discussed and what was relayed by the visitors would have been most alarming for the government. Campbell told Magaw that the "situation was highly critical" explaining that a number of groups that have "immense numbers" would "go to all extremes on the behalf of Nixon". Megaw observes that the "ramifications" of such would be "widespread throughout the city." The Military Advisor suggests that there is only one option for the government: Nixon's dismissal. Magaw advises that the situation is "of such a serious character"[3] that the Prime Minister should be informed before any irreparable steps were taken.

On the 6th September 1922, James Craig wrote to Megaw. In the letter, he states that he approves of the disciplinary action proposed to be taken against Nixon over Nixon's correspondence. Craig rebuffs the suggestion that he should meet with outside parties in order to obtain their support in the matter.[4] The matter seems to fizzle out as there is no further recorded discussions for a year. Then in another letter to Megaw, dated the 8th September 1923, Craig stats that he is thankful for the information that Megaw had given him connecting Nixon to the "Old Park murder"[5], Craig would further state that "if N. is to be removed … it should be done at once." This is due to the fear that "your Ministry will be the subject to a very severe attack."[6]Craig ends "I am sure that Bates and

1 PRONI, HA/32/1/207.

2 Bowman, T. *Carson's Army: The Ulster Volunteer Force, 1910—22* Manchester University Press: Manchester. P.81. 2012. Bowman stress that Campbell had no military experience and that there was no evidence that he was effective at his job.

3 PRONI HA/32/1/255

4 *Ibid*

5 *Ibid*

6 *Ibid*

you will carefully consider this aspect of the case."[1]Megaw had written to Craig concerning the murder of a Catholic publican. He would say that if Nixon's friends were responsible then there would no prosecution in the case.[2] How the perceived attack on the "Ministry" and why it would take place are not stated. However, there seems to have been a very real fear of Nixon and his ability to damage the government, especially the Ministry of Home Affairs. There seemed to have been a reprieve of sorts for Nixon as the proposed disciplinary procedure was not forthcoming and within a year he was on the King's Honours List.[3]He was awarded the OBE for service during the Troubles. He was put forward for this award by Dawson Bates.

The earlier episode would be repeated in early 1924 and would lead to the Northern Ireland government losing a significant amount of support in working-class Belfast. It would also be viewed with alarm by Westminster. So much so that they received daily updates on the Nixon Affair.[4] On the 31st January 1924, Nixon was given the task of moving all Republican prisoners from the prison ship, Argenta. Seamus Woods, the man who wrote the IRA report into Nixon came face to face with him. He related that, after being secured, Nixon had offered him a nip of brandy, which he refused.[5] The next day the Boundary

Conference was scheduled to start its sittings and that night Nixon spoke at a social event in Clifton Street Orange Hall. At it, he proclaimed

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1 *Ibid*

2 PRONI, CAB/9/B/18. On the 5th September, 1923, Megaw informs Craig that he has received all information and theories in relation to a resent murder, who he got first hand from a source. He states that the murder was not one of robbery but was carried out by one of "the Protestant gang." He says that the theory was that it happened to "prevent a further reduction of the B force." Something he can hardly think to be so. He is "sore disposed to think" that it was the result of "some old score." He then goes on "the unfortunate in regard to our chance of capturing the murderers is that Nixon is the DI. His, Nixon's connection with "certain civilians" in the area "ties his hands". Megaw says Nixon "made us raid a dangerous person following the affair." Stating, that Nixon had put forward that "an IRA expert" had carried it out. He ends by telling Craig "I know the difficulties with Nixon, but I greatly fear his reputation is the weak link. Megaw endeavoured to keep Spender up to date with all unfolding events.

3 *London Gazette*, 29th June, 1923.

4 National Archive HO 267/257

5 Kleinrichert, D. (2001*) Republican Internment and the Prison Ship Argenta* 1922, p.238.

that, "not an inch should be handed over". But the real stinging statement was that, "they were surrounded by an enemy who had … every engine of war supplied to them by the Imperial Government."[1] The action against Nixon was swift and was headed by the Home Affairs Minister, Bates. Nixon was suspended and a court of enquiry was set up. The charge was that as a police officer he had engaged in politics.[2] In reality, he dared to criticise the Imperial Government and embarrass the Stormont leadership.

The court of enquiry met on a number of occasions but was suddenly suspended without any statement as to why.[3] Unknown to the public at the time or the press was the fact that the Home Affairs Minister had received a finding of no case to answer from the court's adjudicators. This stated that the only evidence against Nixon were newspaper reports that could not be substantiated. Bates was at the meeting but for some reason was not asked for evidence. The Home Office also received a letter from an informant. It sated that Nixon planned to reveal that he had been involved in reprisals at the behest of Bates and others. On the 20th of February 1924, Wickham reported to Dawson Bates that prosecutor in the Court of Enquiry had informed him that a number of witnesses refused to take part in the proceedings. And, that if a search for further witnesses was made, then, due to "the length of time which has elapsed since" the Nixon speech was given, any "testimony" would "under cross-examination be shaky." Wickham dissolved the court and asks Bates for further direction.

Tallents, writing to the Imperial Secretary, Sir John Anderson, stated that there was a public perception that "Nixon was Dawson Bates' personal gunman" and that he was "likely to have been mixed up with various affairs of the kind and probably of that one."[4] The informant states Nixon told him, "it was alright when I was doing their dirty work" and promised to "give it to the public shortly."[5]

In a letter dated 25th Feb 1924, an unnamed government source writes to the journalist, Stephen Gwynne. Gwynne was the grandson of William Smith O'Brien, the leader of the Young Ireland movement and leading advocate of the Gaelic movement, who also claimed to be descendant of Brain Boru. Gwynne had served as an officer with the Connaught

1 *Belfast Telegraph* 1st February 1924.

2 PRONI HA/32/1/254.

3 *Irish News* 21st February 1924.

4 National Archive HO 267/257.

5 PRONI HA/32/1/254.

Rangers during the First World War and between 1906–1918 was the Home Rule MP for Galway, but after the 1918 election turned his focus to journalism. He was a correspondent of the Observer and was best known for his column *Ireland Week By Week*. The Ulster Government's secret correspondence with such an ardent nationalist on the subject of Nixon leaves a lot of questions.

The subject was Gwynne's authorship of an article on the Ulster Government in his weekly newspaper spot.[1] The unnamed source says he is writing in order to set the record straight. He states this is without Craig's advice, as he is currently ill. He goes on to say the government had been unable to deal with Nixon at this time as without internment the case could not be proved against him. Internment was used in some cases, which "could not be proven in open court."[2] This is an astounding statement as inquiry was an internal police matter and as such was purely disciplinary. The letter then goes on to state that the government was in the process of acting against Nixon. The writer used slated language to suggest that the journalist could leak this in his next article. The writer ends "you may be glad of a friendly hint, believe me, Yours very truly."[3] This letter is contained in the Cabinet Papers of the Government of NI, under confidential section, placed and indexed with the letters of Spender.

In October of the previous year, 1923, Spender had written to an old UVF comrade, Samuel Cunningham, to complain that there were rumours that a "Testimonial fund" set up to show appreciation for Nixon was putting pressure on people to subscribe. "You might be interested to hear," he states, although this might be without foundation. He continued "you will appreciate the grave consequences if reports of this nature were circulated."[4] The connection with some form of extortion – even rumoured – would be enough to ensure that no-one in upper society would openly support this. Spender would also sign off a letter to Samuel Cunningham:

"Believe me".[5] While the letter to Gwynne is not signed the fact that both are nestled in the same bunch of papers and end with the same phraseology leads to the assumption that Spender was the author of the secret briefing which said the Ulster Government would intern one of its own senior police officers if it could.

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1 Between the 3rd and 24th February 1924, he authored three articles on Nixon.

2 PRONI, CAB/9/B/18.

3 137*Ibid*

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*

Conclusion

Nixon was dismissed but there was some controversy surrounding the legality of the action taken against him.[1] His dismissal was to be on a full pension. He would later go on to hold a seat in the Northern Ireland parliament where he would be a constant embarrassment to the Unionist government at every opportunity. The fissure that opened up between the Unionist leadership and working class urban Loyalism with the Nixon affair would haunt the Ulster Unionist Party and help with its downfall. The language that both sides used against one another would resurface in arguments between "big house Unionism" and its urban, working-class counterpart decades later and would further destabilise the Northern Ireland state.

The failure of Unionism to accept its role in the in the darkness that enveloped 1920s Belfast, believing it was *infra dignitatem* – and the IRA's refusal to recognise the role it played in the sectarian outrages ensuring the level of brutality reached an all- time high – led to each having an unrealistic perception of each other, i.e., the other side is always wrong.

The RUC and the Home Office kept files on Nixon until his death in 1949 and during the Second World War they even proposed banning his political magazine. This was a fear not only of one maverick MP. This was a man both the IRA and the Stormont Government believed had a role in extrajudicial activities. This had become the normal response in a society that was brutalising itself on a daily basis. It had been unofficial British government policy which was enforced by special units working with both the police and military. There had been widespread support for such actions not only in Northern Ireland but also in Britain, and this only changed with the transformation of British public opinion. Nixon and his role in reprisals only became a problem for the Northern Ireland Government when he criticised them and their actions. He had become the public face of the policy and as such could be sacrificed while other hands were kept clean.

1 PRONI HA/32/1/255, National Archive HO 267/257.

Death Squad: A Very British Family Affair

By Ciarán MacAirt

Ciarán MacAirt is an author and activist. He manages the charity, Paper Trail (Legacy Archive Research).

A brawny, athletic man chased a teenager down a Jerusalem street as bemused witnesses watched. He gripped the 16-year- old and man-handled him onto the pavement just as a saloon car glided to a halt beside them. As he attempted to force the youth into the back of the car, he struggled so ferociously that a second man jumped out and helped bundle him into the vehicle.

Another teenager, Meir Cohen, who had witnessed the kidnapping, was brave enough to accost the men as they beat their quarry about the head in the back seat – Who are you? What are you doing?

In a clipped English accent the youth was told they were police officers. One of the men flashed his identification papers to back this up and then brandished a revolver, threatening he would shoot Meir if he did not mind his own business.

Powerless, he watched the car speed away as the youth shouted in Hebrew that he was from the Rubowitz family.[1]

It was Tuesday 6th May 1947.

Today a plaque marks the spot[2] where the abduction took place and where Alexander Rubowitz was last seen either alive or dead – the 16 year old was tortured, beat to death and buried by the British gang. His body has never been found.

His kidnappers were members of a special squad within the Palestine Police Force (PPF) at a time when Palestine was still under British

1 For a more detailed account read Major Farran's Hat by David Cesarani (Heinemann)

2 Ussishkin Street and Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael Street

mandate. Colonel Bernard Fergusson[1] had chosen two of his former students from Sandhurst, Roy Farran and James Alastair McGregor MC, to lead this squad in the fight against the "insurgents". They had formed the backbone of the Special Air Service (SAS) in its formative years during the Second World War. They then hand-picked squad members, mainly through the old-boy network of the SAS and Commandos, who were to spearhead aggressive counter-insurgency (COIN) tactics

Farran and McGregor's teams operated covert patrols "in Jewish-type clothing" and operated "Q Cars", civilian vehicles specifically re-engineered for "intelligence gathering and 'hunting'".[2] They even used a laundry van to mask their intelligence-gathering when operating in a "hostile" area. Fergusson himself said that these teams were to "provoke confrontation"[3] but historian David Cesarani states bluntly that these "were hit squads, intended at best to snatch suspects or provoke gunfights".[4]

The counter-insurgency squad had little time to train or adapt their covert military experience to the particular vicissitudes of post-war Palestine. Their intelligence was particularly flawed too. Nevertheless, their politician paymasters wanted swift results in the dying days and final throes of the British mandate. The abduction and murder of a 16 year-old was a symptom of the squad's desperation for information. Alexander may have been a member of the LEHI movement[5] but his crime was posting and delivering propagandist handbills.

Roy Farran was personally responsible for his torture and death, bashing the teenager's head in with a boulder before he and his men mercilessly brutalised the body with knives and bayonets to make it appear that he had been savaged by militant Palestinians or perhaps in the hope that the smell of death would attract wild jackals. Viewing their

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1 Fergusson went on to become a Brigadier although his rank in this pseudo-civil police force was Assistant Inspector General lgainst Zionist militants then fighting for the expulsion of British forces and an independent Jewish state.

2 Post-War Counter-Insurgency and the SAS, 1945-52 by Tim Jones, published by Frank Cass Publishers 2001, page 36

3 Quoted, as above 2009, page 63

4 Major Farran's Hat by David Cesarani, published by Heinemann

5 The LEHI (*Lohamei Herut Yisrael* – Fighters for the Freedom of Israel) were one of the three main Zionist paramilitary groups. The other two were Haganah and Irgun. LEHI may be better known by the label British propagandists gave them – the Stern Gang. Yitzhak Shamir, Mossad leader and future Israeli Prime Minister, was one of the original LEHI commanders.

handiwork, they then decided against leaving any potential trace of the murder. Instead, they "disappeared" Alexander Rubowitz, burying him secretly and without ceremony in unhallowed ground. There he remains, undiscovered, to this day.

Farran reported directly to Fergusson what he had done and then fled the jurisdiction when he was forewarned that he was to be arrested[1] by the civil authorities. Fergusson then personally met with McGregor to tell him to disband the remaining units of the special squad as they were all going to be under international media and political scrutiny. Nevertheless, the British government and judiciary conspired to assure his acquittal in a military court even though he had absconded a second time prior to his arraignment.

Evidence, such as a confession signed by Farran, was suppressed and Fergusson was allowed to decline to give evidence on the grounds that he might incriminate himself. Farran fled Palestine straight away and returned to England a hero. His brother-in-arms, Captain James Alastair McGregor, who spoke in his comrade's defence during the court martial, escaped Jewish retribution[2] soon after, fleeing with his family to Greece. They left in their wake a furore that has not settled even after seventy years.

James Alastair McGregor's name surfaced a generation later, this time on the streets of Belfast and again at the head of another British death squad. Formed by the SAS under the nom de guerre of the Military Reaction Force,[3] its leader was also called James Alastair McGregor. He not only shared a name, but also left innocent dead in his wake. Like the

1 SAS: the First Secret Wars – the Unknown Years of Combat and Counter-Insurgency, by Tim Jones. Published by I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2005, page 83

2 Jewish retribution caught up with Farran nearly a year-to-the-day after Alexander's disappearance. On the 3rd May 1948, in Codsall, close to Wolverhampton, Farran's brother, Rex, opened a parcel addressed to "R. Farran". A bomb blasted him into the corner of the room and ripped a gaping hole in his belly. Rex died two hours later – the LEHI were not aware when they had posted the letter-bomb that Farran had a brother who shared the same first initial.

3 The MRF was known by other names and it suited the operatives within this ghost force that there was uncertainty even about their name although Sergeant Clive Graham Williams, one of its leaders, used this name in open court in June 1973. Mobile Reconnaissance and Military Reconnaissance Force have also been used. A source who has intimate knowledge of British black ops at the time told this author that it was known as the Military Retaliation Force. This name is its most sinister but probably best represents the true intentions of its set-up.

old soldier, he too operated in the shadows and under the protection of the highest echelons of the British military, judiciary and government. He too set up a Special Force gang complicit in menace, mayhem and murder. This low intensity, extra-legal warfare was not only another advance in British military convention, but also in family tradition. They were father and son.

James Alastair McGregor junior is recorded as JA McGregor in military, company and charity records but he prefers his friends to call him by the Scotch Gaelic version of his name, Hamish, in honour of his Scottish heritage. Following in his father's footsteps, his parent company before joining the British Special Forces was also the Parachute Regiment, although McGregor senior was commissioned into the Royal Scots in 1938 before joining the newly-formed 5th (Scottish) Parachute Battalion. Furthermore, in September 1967, Hamish too was awarded a Military Cross whilst serving as a Lieutenant in a detachment of the mortar platoon of the 1st Battalion (1 Para), in Aden[1]. Here, in the final throes of British rule, his detachment and the SAS honed the counter-insurgency skills developed by his father and Farran in Palestine.

Aden proved the perfect training ground for what the Special Forces called "keeni-meeni"[2] operations. Operatives disguised themselves as locals in Arab garb and infiltrated deep into city districts and bazaars to execute these covert, extra- legal military actions. They had perfected the close quarter battle "double-tap" technique[3] developed in the Palestine Police Force that taught speed, surprise and controlled aggression. A unit could penetrate into enemy warrens in the search for information or quarry. If a target presented itself, the Special Force operative would whip out a Browning 9mm handgun, hidden in the folds of the futah, and execute their victim, before melting back into the crowds. Then, the black propaganda machine, burgeoning in Aden at this time, would often blame such attacks on rival paramilitary groups[4] to instil fear and

1 His citation is for his command and defence of the Sheikh Othman police station. Sheikh Othman is a city district of Aden, in modern- day Yemen.

2 Keeni-meeni is Swahili for the slithering movement of a snake through grass and was picked up by the Special Forces in Kenya. Ex- SAS members set up a military contractor that works under the name KMS and trains friendly governments throughout the world. KMS stands for Keeni-Meeni Services.

3 Formerly known as the Grant-Taylor method, this triangular stance and two-shot technique to neutralise an enemy was used by Farran and McGregor's men in Palestine.

4 There were a number of different nationalist groupings fighting for independence

sow the seeds of internecine strife.

In 1971 1 Para was on a two year tour of duty of Northern Ireland, garrisoned in Palace Barracks, Holywood, when Brigadier Frank Kitson formed the MRF around a small core of SAS specialists sectioned within the same camp. Hamish was a captain by then and would soon set about using the special force training he gained in Aden as a template to how war was to be waged on the streets of Belfast. The MRF under him was to be the cutting edge of clandestine, low-intensity operations whilst his parent battalion was to be the blunt sword.[1] 1 Para became infamous for their violence and blood- lust, massacring 11 innocent civilians in Ballymurphy in the two days following Internment and 14 that fateful Bloody Sunday in Derry.[2] They were highly visible in their maroon berets whilst the MRF dressed in civilian clothes and tried to blend in with a population that was going about its daily existence. This ghost force drove adapted Q cars to gain intelligence in "enemy" areas or carry out "random" assassinations, such as the murder of civilian, Patrick McVeigh, on 12th May 1972, to inflame sectarian hatred in volatile areas.

Hamish McGregor was personally involved in one such operation. Four men, again unarmed civilians, were shot from a passing car on the Glen Road on 22nd June 1972. On this day the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA), having met secretly with British officials, announced a ceasefire to operations as a prelude to an agreed bi-lateral truce. A Thompson sub-machine gun, which McGregor admitted was his, was used in the attempt at mass killing. This "unapproved" firearm (the ammunition was given from police[3] stores) was a favoured weapon of the IRA. McGregor's father had carried it home from World War II as a trophy. The MRF planned to blame the mass-shooting on an IRA own-goal or feud with the Official wing of the Republican movement,

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from the British. The National Liberation Front (NLF) and the Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (FLOSY) were two of the main players.

1 1 Para is today known as the Special Force's Support Group (SFSG), a feeder regiment for the likes of the SAS.

2 The introduction of internment without trial on 9th August 1971 was an abject failure not only because of the violence, one-sidedness and heavy-handedness of the British authorities against the Irish Catholic community. Again, they failed because they acted upon flimsy, out-of-date intelligence, jailed hundreds of innocents and politicized a generation. The carnage and murders of Bloody Sunday, 30th January 1972 were witnessed by thousands, including the world's press.

3 The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) have been subject of many high-profile and well-publicized inquiries into collusion with loyalist terrorism.

undermining their support in the community. Otherwise, loyalists would be blamed, thus creating the environment for tit-for-tat sectarian murders at a time that the communities may have hoped for peace. Press reports at the time record both stories from the British Army public relations machine.

Unfortunately, this was no isolated incident and no historical aberration. The very next day, in a copy-cat drive-by shooting, a 17 year old called Patrick McCullough was shot through the heart as he stood amongst a group of young teenagers. Whether another MRF death squad or its UVF counter-gang was culpable is moot because the modus operandi, the military strategy and the terror were the same.

This tactic of inciting sectarian strife to divide and conquer made international news on the 19th September 2005 when police caught another British SAS active service unit (ASU) *in flagrante delicto* in Basra, Iraq. Two men in Arab garb shot at Iraqi police when stopped at a vehicle check point, killing an officer. They then tried to flee in their unmarked car but were caught with a lethal arsenal, including high explosives and detonators, in the boot. The police trailed them away and locked them up in the local jail. Before they could discover the intended use for these devices, British forces, including six tanks, attacked the compound, flattened its jail wall and released the two covert operatives. A Ministry of Defence originally denied that the police compound was stormed saying "We understand there were negotiations".[1] They would obviously deny that the SAS undercover mission was to dress as locals and bomb a crowded market, stoking the fires of unrest.

Nevertheless, the British state surrendered McGregor's death squad in Belfast 1972 due to political expedience but it was never going to face a fair justice system. Then army press reports stated that the victims fired upon the plain-clothed patrol as it returned to base from a training exercise[2], and the covert unit returned fire. The director of Public Prosecutions dropped charges against McGregor for unlawful possession of the Thompson sub-machine gun and ammunition before the trial. His co-accused, Clive Graham Williams,[3] walked free from court after

1 Source ABC News Online, 20th September 2005.

2 If there were indeed newly arrived recruits in the car then this was a classic "blooding" operation. Recruits would be shown what would be expected from them and what they could expect to get away with, even on the streets of Belfast.

3 Sergeant Clive Graham Williams was in the Royal Military Police before joining the MRF. He was awarded a Military Medal (MM) for bravery on 3rd October 1972,

perfectly stage-managed legal proceedings.[1] The MRF were beyond the reach of the law.

McGregor's name had been known to the IRA from mid- 1972 when two of its volunteers admitted to working as agents, or "Freds", for the MRF and said that he was their leader. Seamus Wright and Kevin McKee were even able to give the IRA details of training and operations they completed at the behest of their British paymasters. Amongst the business fronts the MRF used to disguise their operations was a cross-border plant company and a massage parlour. McGregor's squad had even set up a bogus laundry company called the Four Square Laundry and tested the clothes of its Catholic customers for bomb or lead residue. A laundry van was adapted to hold operatives in its roof who could photograph residents of "enemy" areas as the van was driven through them, collecting or returning bags of washing. It was an innovation of the hijacked laundry van idea used by McGregor Senior's Palestine Police Force 25 years earlier. This time, though, the "insurgents" discovered the British intelligence-gathering sting and ambushed the vehicle on 2nd October 1972. MRF operative, Ted Stuart, was killed whilst Seamus Wright and Kevin McKee were bundled out of Belfast by the IRA. They were court-martialled and executed but their bodies were buried in unmarked graves rather than dumped on the roadside as a warning to other agents provocateurs. Like Alexander Rubowitz, their bodies were "disappeared" and lie undiscovered to this day.

We do not know whether McGregor had to flee the north of Ireland after the court case in 1973 as his father fled Palestine in 1947. He would certainly have been a prime target for the media or the IRA now that his cover was completely blown. We do know, though, that he was not heard of again.

Until I tracked him down.

Whilst researching British low intensity operations in other theatres, I discovered this sinister father/son relationship that spanned a generation of covert operations from Palestine and Malaya to the bazaars of Aden and

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the day after the Four Square Laundry ambush and disappearance of Seamus Wright and Kevin McKee, described below.

1 Williams' defence brief and the army's information policy concerning the trial were discovered in military archives by the Pat Finucane Centre and the Justice for the Forgotten. The papers were kindly made available to this author during his research into the McGurk's Bar Massacre.

the streets of Belfast. It was whilst researching keeni-meeni operations in Aden that I discovered the citation[1] awarding Hamish the MC for bravery whilst under fire. With this information, I pieced together significant promotions within his military career after his personal involvement in the shooting of unarmed civilians on the Glen Road.

By 1982 he had risen to be a Lieutenant Colonel of 4 Para,[2] holding the post until 1985. Seven years later as a Colonel, McGregor was probably pigeon-chested with pride when his queen made him a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE).[3] The year after this great honour from the order of chivalry, he then reached the pinnacle of his military career becoming a Brigadier,[4] a position he held until his retirement. The military fraternity gave him one final accolade, though, when they made him an honorary Colonel of 4 (Volunteer) Battalion, the Parachute Regiment.

Since leaving the army, McGregor, like his father, led a successful career in the business world and, together with his wife, is very active in charitable work in his home county of Kent. He rose to become the Director General of the West Africa Business Association which today calls itself the Business Council for Africa and him its chief executive officer. This is a powerful organisation that lobbies for British capitalist and globalized interests in the African sub-continent. Its members, amongst many others, include companies with investments in oil, gas, banks, pharmaceuticals and precious minerals. When not leading this high-powered career in London and across the world, he withdraws to the more relaxed surroundings of the east coast and the picturesque town to which his father had retired.

Mr. James Alastair McGregor CBE MC is in his early seventies now. The families of those who were murdered and injured in Belfast by the MRF may not want to hound this old soldier who is held in very high regard, like his father before him, within the British military and business world. Nevertheless, "as leader/commander of the MRF",[5] this man led a special squad at the cutting edge of British low intensity warfare.

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1 Supplement to the London Gazette, 23rd January 1968

2 ParaData website at http://www.paradata.org.uk/units/4th- battalion-parachute-regiment-4-para

3 Supplement to the London Gazette, 13th June, 1992

4 Half-yearly service promotions, Independent, 12th July, 1993

5 Found in archives by Justice for the Forgotten and offered to this author: Information Policy Brief AUS (GS) 385/73, 29th May 1973.

Their remit included the "random" assassination of civilians, control of sectarian counter-gangs and black, psychological operations such as the McGurk's Bar Massacre. With military primacy, they had the obdurate support of a pliant judiciary, police force, political system and media. Therefore, they operated with theassent of a Joint Intelligence Committee that reported directly to the British prime minister.

Until we recognize that a western, first world democracy is prepared to kill its own citizens for short-sighted military strategy, there will be no justice for innocent victims and their families. Certain commentators, though, vacuously say that the past is the past and it should be consigned to there. This is not simply about closure for fellow human beings. History informs the present and from it future generations learn its mores and moral obligations as a society. Hence why it essential that Mr. McGregor and his ilk on all sides help society decode the past regardless of the pain, shame or cost to us all. Otherwise, the history of British post-war counter-insurgency and the very personal family history of James Alastair McGregor testify that the horror of state-sponsored terror shall continue unabated. It may visit your door soon.

Can Transitional Truth and Justice be Achieved in Northern Ireland?

By Elizabeth Carberry Tierney

Elizabeth Carberry Tierney is a business owner. Her father, a Volunteer of the Irish Republican Army, was shot dead by the British Army in disputed circumstances.

Unfortunately, Northern Ireland stands as an exception to the old truism that 'The truth may set you free', since in the case of Northern Ireland the truth may not. In fact, the truth could impede peace and undermine political stability, increase community tensions and shake the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA). However, a question that still needs to be borne in mind is what about the victims? Feelings of anger, sorrow, grief, isolation and frustration simply do not disappear once a conflict is over. And more importantly feelings of injustice carry on in those who live on. If we can drag ourselves from the depths of a bloody and dirty war surely we can find ways of dealing with it.

Seeking the truth will not be easy and in fact may not be encouraged by some. Martin McGuiness, previously Chief Negotiator for Sinn Fein, has acknowledged that he is a former Irish Republican Army (IRA) member, and David Irvine previous leader of the PUP was a member of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) in his youth. Both were convinced of the benefits of a political way forward for Northern Ireland. However their past is an area they may not have wanted explored.

Mounting evidence from public enquiries and other investigations have revealed potential state collusion in murder and as a result Loyalist paramilitaries would also be reluctant to pursue the truth. For these reasons it could be argued that the truth may be destabilising in an already fragile society.

However, the Saville Inquiry did not bring down the political institutions nor weaken society. Therefore to claim that the truth may be destabilising is not be supported by that fact. Seeking the truth may exacerbate community tensions but these already exist as a result of unresolved issues as demonstrated in chapter one, including the continuing reality of sectarianism within Northern Irish society. Transitional justice is necessary for post-conflict transformation and may help heal the wounds of a troubled past, allow for a truth recovery process, and remember *OUR* past as one community recovering from the trauma of *OUR* past.

Proposal

If it is accepted that the former/current mechanisms, for example, the Historical Enquiries Team (HET) or the use of public enquiries, do not adequately offer the measure of resolution required for reasons of independence, accountability or cost implications, how do we overcome the justice issue? Patricia Lundy's research revealed a lack of confidence in the ability of a truth commission for seeking the truth, and it did not feature as a priority in this research. The problem associated with state and paramilitary accountability has been apparent throughout and still remains unresolved. The extremely sensitive issue surrounding the 'victims' debate has been discussed. However this thesis would argue that it is a debate potentially without resolution and as a result has not been extensively researched as it could be. The use of community-based initiatives and projects do suggest more productive mechanisms for dealing with the past as they tend to deal with the trauma associated with a post-conflict society, something that is often omitted from state-led initiatives.

This thesis intends to put forward a vision which aims to finding a way of dealing with *OUR* past, as one community ylthough divided, and not *THE* past, as two separate communities.

One way to beginning this process is by engaging in more cross-community initiatives. The journey needs to be taken together without party political influence. The reason for this is that the focus should be placed on the needs of victims and the families of victims and not be manipulated or motivated by political agendas. It should be designed to accommodate small steps or larger steps, proceed to one service or avail of several different services, move forward or backward. The illustration shows a process that can be used for an individualistic approach but a

focus is placed on an integrated approach. Central to building a shared future for Northern Ireland is communication and negotiation and this can only take place when we share the same space. A fragmented approach encourages division and is not productive for building a shared future.

- An independent body to oversee the process would eliminate issues of impartiality, independence accountability and bias.
- The victim's commission is already a fully funded functioning organisation. It has carried out a great deal of research for example research on historical investigation and information recovery (March 2012) and an analysis of current service providers (November 2012). This provided knowledge and understanding to the needs of victims and families of victims.
- It must be accepted that for some the process is still too difficult, painful and traumatic and therefore want to leave the past in the past. This must be respected. However the option is always there if they change their mind.
- Recognition, acknowledgement or story-telling may suit the needs of some and the ability to avail of this should be made available within communities and offered to cross-community projects also.
- Support for trauma related problems needs to be accommodated. This can be offered by community based groups and cross-community groups if desired.
- Cross-community initiatives need developed to promote a shared recognition of *OUR* past. Discussion around the 'victims' debate need to take place
- The stop sign represents a change from a healing process to a truth recovery process. It does not suggest that victims should avail of one or the other. It only demonstrates a different approach and not always the route victims want to take.
- The truth recovery process needs to include a review of the HET. State accountability must be addressed and nationalist and unionist paramilitary groups need to demonstrate their commitment by engaging in this procedure if a successful truth recovery process is to be accomplished for all victims and families of victims.
- Justice can only be achieved if Article 2 compliant; prompt, independent, impartial effective investigations.
- Due process must be allowed to take place however difficult.

This process is about the victims and the families of victims. The aim is to demonstrate that however difficult, the issue of dealing with the past must be addressed if a sustainable peaceful is to be created. It is up

to grass roots/communities/families/victims and survivors to be given nhe opportunity of telling society what they want to tell. It is how they may be able to *deal* and *heal* the past.

Conclusion

Approximately 3600 people died as a result of the conflict/troubles in Northern Ireland. Thousands have been injured and the trauma experienced by three decades of violence has left a huge scar. Although political violence has greatly reduced, sectarian animosity has not disappeared. Inter-communal tensions rise and violence often breaks out. These are associated with deep-rooted unresolved issues that have been ignored: parading, flags and the past.

The aim of this article was to examine the issue of how to deal with the past. It has been nearly twenty years since the signing of the GFA in April 1998 and yet the past still looms over Northern Ireland. Examination of the HET and the research undertaken by Lundy is very critical of this approach. The use of public enquiries was considered although cost implications make this approach unrealistic.

Lundy researched opinions on a truth commission as the way to deal with the past and concluded that the opinion nf the participants indicated little faith in achieving truth recovery from a truth commission. However this conclusion cannot yet be supported as a truth commission has never been established in NI and there is unlikely to be widespread public agreement on such a process. A community-based project revealed some positive outcomes for dealing with the past, however it also exposed problems such as state accountability, one-sided truth telling and the 'victims' debate. All these are obstacles that need addressed for a truth recovery process to be accomplished.

We can address the work of community-based support groups, one specific to military killings and the other the forgotten victims injured, to provide links to work of the HET as viewed by the victims who avail of these services. I argue that Northern Ireland has adopted a fragmented approach, evident in the diverse mechanisms in place; state led initiatives, HET, Public Enquiries, Consultative Groups, and the Victims Commission. A local project, ACP, identified the need for more story-telling and community-based projects and therefore should be considered moving forward. Relatives for Justice and WAVE Trauma can be used as examples of the work carried out by community support groups however

many other such organisations exist that have not been discussed here.

What has been discovered following this research is the undeniable fact that dealing with the past in NI is controversial and complex. It has many obstacles to overcome. However, what is required is an 'honest and committed resolve to do justice for the future, a resolve to address present circumstance in a way that respects the claims and needs of everyone' (Goodin and Pettit 2012: 276). To build a shared future, we must learn to reconcile our differences, communicate with each other to find a measurable resolution to the issue of dealing with the past.

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Every story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. So does this one. It can be summarised as a bullet, a bullet and a bullet.

Lyra McKee

The charity, Paper Trail (Legacy Archive Research), helps victims and survivors of conflict in Ireland and Britain to seek and discover information buried deep in public records.

Paper-Trailers are family members who lost loved ones or who were injured. They are former combatants who are seeking to learn more about the context of the conflict that enveloped their lives. They are you and me.

All have a story to tell. Here are a few to begin.

This anthology was first published in 2017. It is particularly poignant as it opens with an article by the talented writer, Lyra McKee, who was shot dead by extremists on 18th April 2019.

Lyra was a great supporter of Paper Trail and the charity's work from its inception. She remains a guiding light.

Paper-Trailers also includes research and writing from Clifford Peeples and Elizabeth Carberry Tierney.

Author and Paper Trail founder, Ciarán MacAirt, writes the foreword and dedicates the anthology to Lyra and her legacy.

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