

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



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DE MORTUIS

A Study of 2400 fatalities arising  
from political disturbances in  
Northern Ireland between July 1969  
and July 1984.

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## PROCEDURES

It is impossible to say with certitude how many people have died in Northern Ireland as a consequence of the violence in that area or to determine exactly who has been responsible for those deaths. While, however, there is a high measure of agreement about the approximate numbers killed, there has been considerable disagreement about the agencies responsible and, since the early days of the disturbances, conflicting partizan interpretations have been offered about the sources of the violence.

It is one of the purposes of this study to attempt to identify and classify the 2,400 fatalities directly attributable to political disturbances which have occurred in Northern Ireland between July 1969 and July 1984. A necessary preliminary is to delimit the scope of the enquiry and to indicate the nature of the evidence employed in classifying the available data.

### GEOGRAPHICAL LIMITS

The study is confined to events within Northern Ireland. It does not take account of the several hundred people killed in Britain as a consequence of Republican military operations. A similarly large number have been killed in the Republic in circumstances related to the Northern conflict. Some of these deaths have been occasioned by Loyalist bombing and assassination sorties: others have been caused by premature explosions: still more have been caused by Republican elements in the course of bank raids, punishment shootings and assassinations. Those are not the subject of this enquiry. All of the incidents investigated in this account either occurred wholly in Northern Ireland or had an initiation or culmination within Northern

Ireland.

There have been a number of assassinations where a body was retrieved in Northern Ireland but where evidence suggested the killing had been perpetrated in the Republic. There have been deaths which occurred in the Republic but where the fatal injuries were inflicted in Northern Ireland. Several people have died in Southern hospitals from injuries received in Northern Ireland. All such are recorded here.

#### POLITICAL LIMITS

There is considerable evidence to support the claim that along with the growth of political violence in Northern Ireland there has also been an increase in general criminal activities. Physical assaults, armed robberies and domestic murders have become more common and consequently in certain cases it is difficult to distinguish between deaths which have a political dimension and those which do not. There is a continuum between absolute certainty as in the case of the I.R.A. acknowledging responsibility for the death of a security force member to total ambiguity as in cases of killings inflicted in the course of robberies. Instances of soldiers firing upon and killing joyriders can be clearly included as having a political dimension since this is a level of response which would not be acceptable in a community free from strife.

Instances of Protestant gunmen or Catholic gunmen killing Protestant or Catholic shopkeepers in the course of armed robbery are less clear. Such cases have been included only where there is evidence to support the view that they were committed by people with paramilitary associations.

The list of 2,400 fatalities investigated here has been compiled on the basis of strict adherence to the two conditions laid down. The death was territorially linked to Northern Ireland and was the outcome

of circumstances which had a defined political dimension.

#### NUMERICAL DISCREPANCIES

The application of these two criteria might account for the variations in totals between the cases recorded here and the totals maintained by the R.U.C. The disparity between the two sets of figures are revealed in the annual totals set out in Table 1:

TABLE 1

|        | 1969 | '70 | '71 | '72 | '73 | '74 | '75 | '76 | '77 | '78 | '79 | '80 | '81 | '82 | '83 | '84  |
|--------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|
| R.U.C. | 13   | 25  | 174 | 467 | 250 | 216 | 247 | 297 | 112 | 81  | 113 | 76  | 101 | 97  | 76  | 39*  |
| I.I.P. | 15   | 25  | 173 | 475 | 252 | 221 | 245 | 296 | 111 | 75  | 107 | 78  | 110 | 96  | 78  | 42** |

In so far as it has been possible to identify the discrepant cases, these could be attributable to different classification procedures. These figures commence in July '69 but do not include the death of Samuel Devanney in Derry whom many believe to be the first victim of the violence. The R.U.C. figures do not commence until August '69. Included here are cases of security forces killed in accidental exchanges with other security units such as the case of Pte. Ron Fowe, shot dead (28/8/72) in an exchange of fire between his unit and a Marine unit. The R.U.C. appears to exclude these. As stated, deaths in the course of robberies which do not have a political connection are excluded from this record. The R.U.C. appears to include some of these e.g. the case of Edward Gormley, shot dead near Castleberg (29/4/72) which, according to a police witness at a subsequent trial, had no political significance. The R.U.C. appears to record all deliberately caused deaths of Security personnel even when they occur in the Republic, such as the

\* to 30/6/84

\*\* to 26/7/84

killing of Const. John Docherty, near Lifford (27/10/73). Such deaths are not included in this account. Allowing for these variations, the margin of discrepancy between the two sets of totals represents a percentage figure of less than 1% and there would be no difference between the profiles of violence afforded by either set of figures.

#### EXCLUDED GROUPS

There are two substantial groups of fatalities which have not been included in this study because, while having a specific political dimension, they are not sufficiently causally attributable to the violence to merit inclusion. They do, however, merit reference.

The first such group relates to the high number of road death victims caused by Security Force vehicles during the past fifteen years. Speaking in Westminster on January 29th. 1973, Peter Baker announced that up to that point there had been 55 road deaths involving British Army vehicles. Over the intervening years the number must have risen sharply. A second category of fatalities not listed here but which would appear from newspaper reports to be fairly substantial in numbers would include those members of the Security Forces and particularly those in the Northern Ireland armed forces who have died from self-inflicted wounds caused by service weapons. Both groups of fatalities are victims of the strife, and although not catalogued here, cannot be left out of any final reckoning in human terms.

#### SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

A purpose in compiling this record was to register all the relevant circumstances of death which might help in forming a global perspective of the violence. Some of the information was objective, such as the

location of the body or the age of the victim: some entailed a subjective assessment of various pieces of evidence. The scope of the details recorded in each case is made plain in the data sheet employed (see Appendix I). The criteria employed for each category and the rationale of those criteria are set out in detail in the appropriate section of the text.

The factual data relating to each individual was drawn from the media reports and from death notices inserted by relatives. The inferential data was accumulated from a variety of sources. In judging the reliability of evidence the highest weighting was afforded to judicial proceedings. These included criminal trials which culminated in convictions, criminal trials which did not result in convictions but in which undisputed relevant evidence was offered, and civil proceedings which resulted in awards for damages to the next of kin of the dead person. Coroners' inquests offered considerable reliable evidence. Less reliable were the judgments afforded by the official and unofficial tribunals which examined various incidents during the period.

Circumstantial evidence based upon knowledge of the victim's religion and the location of the killing was not acceptable unless supported by other corroborative evidence. Official statements from the Security Forces or from paramilitary organizations were disregarded unless sustained by strong external evidence. Anecdotal evidence offered on a personal basis was disregarded.

There were two groups of fatalities for whom it was hard to attribute responsibility. The first of these included those individuals killed in street skirmishing between rival sectarian groups or between paramilitary groups and Security Forces. Such situations tended to be so

incoherent and so ill defined that it was often impossible to say who had been responsible for the fatality. The second group includes those cases of assassination where it is not possible to establish whether the motive was sectarian or associated with internal factionalism or communal disciplining. There were 152 such deaths where the available evidence was too flimsy to permit any realistic judgment about the source of death.