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Loughgall highlighted as a major 'success'

(Seamus McKinney, [Irish News](#))

Throughout its analysis of Operation Banner, the British army praises its actions and stresses its success against the IRA.

While the report's authors admit that the army was initially deployed to "interpose itself between Protestant and Catholic areas", they say that by 1971 the IRA and especially the Provisionals were the main threat.

They also claim that 'Operation Motorman' in 1972 to clear no-go areas in nationalist areas for security forces marked a major turning point in the Troubles.

The largest movement of British service personnel since the end of the Second World War, the authors believe that Motorman changed the army's role from a counter insurgency to a counter terrorist operation.

Loughgall on May 8 1987 is highlighted as a major success for the British army, when eight IRA members were killed as they attacked the Co Armagh village's police station. A passer-by was also shot dead.

The use of covert operations by the British army is also singled out as vital to its success in Northern Ireland.

"PIRA seems to have been brought to believe that there was no answer to army covert operations and that they would not win through violence. That was probably a key factor," the report says.

Much coverage is also devoted to the emergence of the IRA's "south Armagh sniper". From August 1992 until December 1993, six soldiers and three RUC constables were killed by single-shot attacks in the area.

While it was believed the sniper was one man code-named 'Goldfinger', the authors claim that two Provisional IRA units were involved.

They acknowledge: "The attacks affected security force operations and had an impact on morale among some troops and police officers serving in south Armagh."

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But quoting Israeli historian Martin van Creveld, the authors say the British army's success in the north was unique in that it was against an irregular force.

They say that while the British army did not win in "any recognisable way", it achieved its "end-state", making it clear to the Provisionals they would not win through violence.

In the report's forward, former army chief General Sir Mike Jackson states: "That campaign [Operation Banner] is...one of the very few every brought to a successful conclusion by the armed forces of a developed nation against an irregular force."

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