

Black and Tans: A Historical Brief for Minister, Lord Windlesham

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Lord Windlesham would be grateful for a short note on the origins of (a) The Black and Tans; and
(b) The B Specials.

(A reference to any existing authoritative and brief historical assessment would also suffice, I think, if available.)

At a time when the Royal Ulster Constabulary is under strength and there is talk of a need for a sizeable increase in police manpower in Northern Ireland, some of the arguments which must have been used when the two forces referred to above were formed are likely to recur. In particular, Lord Windlesham would be interested to know more about the circumstances which led to the formation of these special forces; what history has to tell us about them with hindsight; and whether there are any lessons to keep in mind at the present time. Lord Windlesham does not wish for more than a relatively brief paper on this, but would find such a paper very useful.

G. K. Sandiford

G. K. SANDIFORD
Private Secretary

Lord Windlesham's Office
London

3rd May, 1972

BLACK AND TANS

The Black and Tans have become part of Irish mythology. The term was applied to two separate bodies of men; English (and Northern Irish) recruits to the former Royal Irish Constabulary; and members of the Auxiliary Division of the RIC. Both bodies were formed in 1920 (i.e. shortly before the partition of Ireland,) in response to a major campaign against the RIC which was organised by Michael Collins and which began with the murder of an Inspector Hunt on 24 June 1919.

2. The campaign was carried out by the Irish Volunteers, an organisation which had existed before the First World War under the command of John Redmond, and which was recreated at the end of the war. The campaign began slowly; only 13 policemen and one soldier were killed by the Volunteers in the first year, but these relatively modest figures rose in 1920 to 182 police and 50 soldiers killed and 387 men of both forces wounded.
3. Although it took some time for the morale of the RIC to break, it was hardly surprising that a campaign of murder on this scale would lead to police reprisals, particularly against known leaders of Sinn Fein which at that time was the de facto Government of Ireland as well as having links with the Irish Volunteers. Another natural consequence was an increase in the number of resignations from the force, and it was this which was the immediate cause of the introduction of volunteers from elsewhere in the United Kingdom. As it happened, there was a shortage of the traditional dark green uniforms of the RIC and the new members of the force were permitted to wear British Army khaki trousers. The Auxiliaries were permitted to wear Army uniforms without badges of rank. The term "Black and Tans" is in fact not entirely appropriate to the uniforms worn, but appears to have been taken from the name of a pack of fox hounds in County Tipperary.
4. In Ireland the usual catch phrase in referring to the Black and Tans is "The sweepings of the British jails." There is no justification for this.

The recruits to the RIC were supposed to be men who had been demobilized from the British Army and who had received a "good character" on discharge. They were to be paid £3.10/- per week, rising to £4.15/-. The Auxiliary Division of the RIC had to be ex-officers and also were required to produce particulars of their service. They were paid £1 a day. It is nevertheless beyond dispute that the activities of the Black and Tans did a great deal to harden Irish opinion in favour of Sinn Fein and what it stood for. In the circumstances of widespread guerrilla warfare, and bearing in mind that the new recruits were plunged into a situation which they could hardly understand and had furthermore just spent up to five years in the trenches, it is hardly surprising that they behaved with some measure of brutality. However, as a recent commentator has said, "The increasingly brutal behaviour of the police, and the very rough Black and Tan reprisal campaign which was soon to develop, grew out of a situation in which an Irishman could have a shotgun discharged into his knee simply for joining the RIC or be killed while sitting drinking in uniform in a bar, or, having been shot in the back while on routine patrol, be finished off while lying on the ground asking for mercy. These things all happened before any Black and Tan campaign had started in Ireland and at a time when all attacks on the police were abhorred and vigorously denounced both by local priests and also by bishops of the Church that represented the vast majority of the people of Ireland." (Robert Kee. The Green Flag, Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1972 page 672).

I have added
to lower
this. G 4/5

5. Perhaps the main lesson which can be drawn from these events is that any body of men from Great Britain ^{who} should find themselves in the difficult position of having to interfere in Irish affairs, are all too likely to be accused of behaving like Black and Tans. It is to the credit of the Army that despite the almost routine Irish procedure of charges of brutality, they have so far managed on the whole to avoid being credibly presented as the reincarnation of their predecessors of 52 years ago. Perhaps one could

add that the events of the last few years before the partition of Ireland show that the biggest mistake in British policy of that time was the assumption that all Irishmen were on the side of the separatists. Mr Robert Kee's recent book to which reference is made above demonstrates that Irish Republican sentiments were held at first only by a very small minority of the population, but that they were spread throughout the county by the repressive actions of the British authorities, especially in 1916 and in 1920. Perhaps a remark by an Irishman who lived through this period, quoted by Mr Kee, is relevant: "What probably drove a peacefully-inclined man like myself into rebellion was the British attitude towards us; the assumption that the whole lot of us were a pack of murdering corner boys." That there may have been an element of truth in the British assumption does not alter the fact that it was to some extent a self-fulfilling one.