


“This Brave And Resolute Stand”

Serving in the Royal Ulster Constabulary

Quotation taken from HM The Queen's speech at the presentation of the George Cross to the Royal Ulster Constabulary, April 12th 2000.





It has been the RUC who I have held the fabric of this society together over the past 30 years.

14 Marjorie Mowlam, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland,
(May 1997 - October 1999), 9 September 1999

Founded on June 1st 1922, the Royal Ulster Constabulary was responsible for policing in Northern Ireland until 2001, when it was incorporated into the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

At its peak, the Force was made up of around 8,500 officers and 4,500 reservists. Between 1922 and 2001, over 32,000 men and women from all backgrounds served in the ranks of the RUC.

The place of the RUC in the history of Northern Ireland has for some been a controversial one. This short booklet aims to set out some facts, to explain the realities of being a police officer, the impact of the job and the dangers associated with it for individuals, their families and friends.

Throughout the RUC's history, officers were always expected to help detect, contain and

prevent acts of terrorism organised by republican and loyalist groups, in addition to their regular duties. Thousands were physically and mentally injured, and hundreds died as a direct result of terrorist activity, some after their retirement, and many while off duty.

The RUC was often accused of bias in favour of the Unionist community, and sometimes of direct collusion with loyalist terrorists. Yet, between 1972 and 2001, over 8,000 loyalists were charged with terrorist/serious public order type offences as a result of police investigations, and the RUC solved 50% of murders committed by loyalists, compared with 30% of those committed by republicans.

The RUC and its families were awarded the George Cross in 1999, in recognition of collective and sustained bravery in the face of great danger throughout 'The Troubles'.

References

If you would like to find out more about the RUC and policing in Northern Ireland, try these websites and books:

www.rucgcfoundation.org

www.policefed-ni.org.uk

www.rucbenevolentfund.org

www.psnipolice.uk

Inside the RUC by Brewer & McGee (Oxford University Press)

Lost Lives by McKitterick, Kelters, Feeney, Thornton & McVea (Mainstream Publishing)

Policing and Conflict in Northern Ireland by Wright & Bryett (Macmillan Press)

The Thin Green Line by Doherty (Leo Cooper Ltd)

Deadly Beat by Latham (Mainstream Publishing)

The RUC – a Force Under Fire by Ryder (Mandarin)

Policing Northern Ireland by McGarry & O'Leary (Blackstaff Press)

Holding the Line by Hermon (Gill & Macmillan)

The Women in Green by Cameron (RUC Historical Society)

Arresting Memories by Sinclair and Scully (RUC Historical Society)



We now look forward to a new and exciting future...we seek to build on the...wonderful foundations laid by officers in the past...and by officers currently serving

Sir Ronnie Flanagan, Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary 1996-2001, in a speech at the presentation of the George Cross to the Royal Ulster Constabulary, 12 April 2000

Progressive Policing

The unique circumstances in which the RUC was required to operate often overshadows other aspects of policing in Northern Ireland.

Partly because of the heightened danger and complexity of policing in Northern Ireland, the RUC was often an innovator, and has frequently been asked to help implement best practice elsewhere in the UK and internationally. Key practices it pioneered included:

- The use of breathalysers (1960s)
- The use of community based committees on policing (1970s)
- Adoption of a strong human rights based approach to policing (1980s)

Linked to its early adoption of a human rights-based approach to policing, the RUC also had strong measures in place to ensure its officers were held accountable for their actions. For example, the opening chapter of the RUC Manual of 1987 is devoted to professional policing ethics and sets out very clearly the personal responsibility of each officer for good policing.

There was also external scrutiny (from 1970) of complaints against the police, with any allegations of criminal conduct having to be reported to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

The RUC carried out extensive community work throughout its history. Initiatives included outward bound activities for young people that were supported by Local Authorities and a Youth Diversion from Crime programme, all operated by specially trained officers.

The RUC also designed and ran a Police Education Programme that focused on issues like drugs and strangers and was implemented in over 90% of all schools.



Officers from the RUC and the Garda working together (1990s).



Young people taking part in an RUC organised ramble (1970s).



R.P.G. 7 short range anti-tank weapons used by republican and loyalist terrorists since the 1970s.

Without the courage and integrity of the men and women of the RUC, Northern Ireland would have suffered a bloodbath

Edward Fitt of Bells Hill, Founder of the SDLP, writing in the Daily Mail following the publication of the Patten Report in 1999

Policing The Trouble:

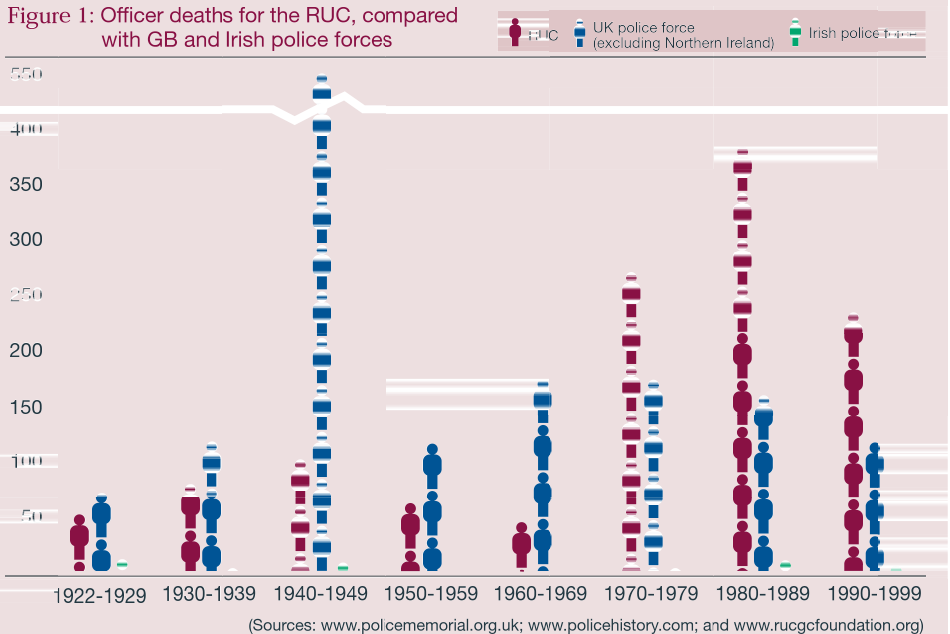
Serving as a police officer in Northern Ireland, particularly after 1968, meant living day to day as a prime target for violence and intimidation.

One former RUC officer recalls that ‘you could always tell if someone was police. They’d be the ones who’d drop their keys every morning to give them an excuse for looking under the car for explosives’. Another remembers being

issued with two flak jackets – one for use at work, the other to wear when going out socially.

In 1983, Interpol found that Northern Ireland was at that time the most dangerous place in the world to be a police officer – more than twice as risky as serving in El Salvador, the next most hazardous location.

Figure 1: Officer deaths for the RUC, compared with GB and Irish police forces



The accounts I have heard of personal tragedy, pain and loss in the RUC family are profoundly moving and humbling.

Peter Mandelson, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, (October 1999 - January 2001), in a speech to the House of Commons, 19 January 2000



RUC officers wearing body armour on patrol in Belfast city centre (1990s).

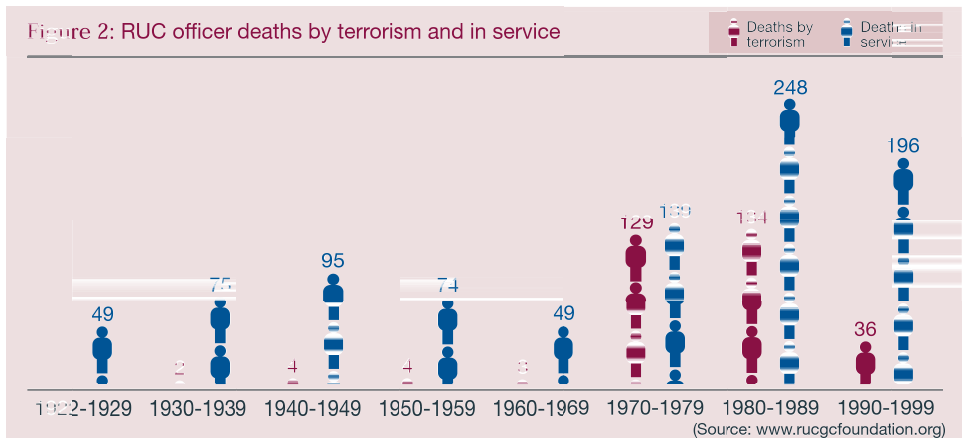
Between 1922 and 2001, 1,272 men and women died in service or as a direct result of terrorism (see figure 1 opposite). Throughout its history and from the 1970s onwards in particular, the mortality rate among RUC officers was extremely high compared with the rest of the UK and Ireland.

302 RUC officers – around 9% of the total number of deaths in Northern Ireland – were killed as a direct result of the security situation between 1969 and 2001 (see figure 2 below). Over 10,000 were injured during the course of their duties, 300 of whom were disabled or seriously hurt, and in addition, almost 70 officers committed suicide during the years when the

threat of terrorist activity was at its peak.

The danger faced by police officers was ever present – on and off duty, and also frequently affected relatives and friends. One officer recalls that he, in common with many of his colleagues, took the basic security precaution of not telling his children what he did for a living.

Many police officers and their families were attacked in their homes. 1,183 families were forced to move house to safer locations, often several times. For example, 78 families of officers were relocated as a result of threats from loyalist groups arising from the Drumcree marches in 1996 and 1998 alone.



Undoubtedly mistakes were made...But the general case of a partisan force co-operating with Protestant mobs to attack Catholic people is devoid of substance.

— Aaron Scarman of Quatt, in Violence and Civil Disturbances in Northern Ireland in 1969, 1972

Equity in Policing

It is the case that the majority of RUC officers came from Protestant backgrounds. However, Community Attitudes Studies carried out in the 1990s found that around 70% of Catholics cited fear of attack from within the community as the main reason why they were deterred from joining the RUC.

Writing in the Irish News in 1986, Assistant Chief Constable Cahal Ramsay attempted to encourage other Catholics to become police officers: “I can assure the Catholic community that a career in the RUC is a decent and honourable calling without religion or politics being compromised in any way”.

The RUC laid out its position on policing for the whole community as early as 1976, with three guiding principles:

1. Equal protection under the law for all citizens and respect for their rights as persons
2. Fair and impartial law enforcement regardless of personal opinion, prejudices, or other relevant considerations
3. Enforcement of the law within the law

The Force also complied with all Equality legislation and welcomed external scrutiny.

Nevertheless, the RUC was often accused of biased policing, and many nationalist communities believed their access to justice was compromised as a result. Yet research undertaken as part of the Patten Report in 1999 found that 75% of people (77% of Protestants and 69% of Catholics) who had contact with the police in the previous two years had been satisfied with their experience.

Annual Community Attitudes Surveys carried out in the 1990s also found that 80% of people asked found the police to be polite, and that around 80% of Protestants and 76% of Catholics found them to be helpful.



RUC in the middle of opposing factions.

Policing under pressure

Between 1969 and 2001, RUC officers were responsible for recovering 115,939 kilos of explosives and 11,820 firearms.

Between 1972 and 2001, 10,957 republicans and 8,099 loyalists were charged with terrorist and serious public order offences.

Of the 3,327 deaths that took place in Northern Ireland as a result of the security situation between 1969 and 2001, the RUC was involved in 52, in the course of duty.

Awards for Gallantry

Between 1922 and 2001, RUC officers received 370 individual awards in recognition of their gallantry and bravery in service:

Empire Gallantry Award (subsequently exchanged for George Cross)	1
George Medal	1
Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) for Gallantry	1
British Empire Medal for Gallantry	4
Bar to British Empire Medal for Gallantry	1
Queen's Gallantry Medal	129
Bar to Queen's Gallantry Medal	5
King's Police Medal for Gallantry	3
King's Police and Fire Service Medal for Gallantry	4
Queen's Police Medal for Gallantry (posthumous)	7
Queen's/King's Commendation for Brave Conduct	114

In addition, 712 officers received Sovereign's Awards for Distinguished Service.



Sculpture to the RUC, RUC GC Garden (Ned Jackson Smyth).



The Area of Peace, RUC GC Garden (1999).



RUC vehicle (1990s).



Sculpture to the George Cross, RUC GC Garden (Eleanor Wheeler and Alan Cargo).



"The Royal Ulster Constabulary has been the bulwark against, and the main target of, a sustained and brutal terrorism campaign. The Force has suffered heavily in protecting both sides of the community from danger. Many officers have been ostracised by their own community and others have been forced to leave their homes in the face of threats to them and their families."

The London Gazette, November 23 1999

The Royal Ulster Constabulary's role in the recent history of Northern Ireland remains for some a controversial one. What is without doubt is that thousands of men and women bravely faced danger every day in the course of their duties as police officers.

This short booklet sets out the facts about what it was like to serve in the Royal Ulster Constabulary between 1922 and 2001.

The Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross Foundation (Patron: HRH The Prince of Wales) was established by the Police (Northern Ireland) Act of 2000 for the purpose of 'marking the sacrifices and honouring the achievements of the Royal Ulster Constabulary'. You can find out more, including information on the Foundation's Police Bursary Scheme and Memorial Garden, at www.rucgcfoundation.org.



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