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'Nothing to learn' from Paras role in killings

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

An internal review of the British army's 37-year engagement in Northern Ireland suggests the only lesson to be learned from Bloody Sunday was that soldiers should not have been deployed in vehicles.

The analysis of 'Operation Banner', revealed today (Friday) in the first of two special reports by *The Irish News*, does not discuss in great detail the killing of the 14 marchers in Derry nor the decision to use the Parachute Regiment to police a civilian march.

While stressing the "defeat" of the Provisional IRA, the document makes only seven references to loyalist paramilitaries in its 98 pages and none to the controversial actions of the army's Force Research Unit or allegations of collusion or shoot-to-kill.

The authors mention the UDA as "perhaps the most respectable" of the loyalist groups.

Operation Banner, which at its height saw some 30,000 troops in the north, will officially conclude at the end of this month.

Last year three senior British army officers were seconded from normal duties to review the campaign and draw up lessons for future operations.

Obtained by Derry-based human rights group the Pat Finucane Centre, the report claims the only two examples of "poor military decision-making" to stand out over the 37 years were during the 'Falls curfew' and Bloody Sunday.

However, the reference to Bloody Sunday does not deal with the decisions to open fire on unarmed civilians in 1972.

The authors only highlight the "manner in which the arrest operation on Bloody Sunday was conducted, using vehicles to approach the crowd".

"The decision to do so was not hasty but, with hindsight, seems heavy handed," they say.

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John Kelly, a brother of Bloody Sunday victim Michael Kelly (17), described the comments as "despicable".

"They said the biggest lesson was the use of vehicles – they are not taking into account the loss of human life," he said.

"The deaths on Bloody Sunday were totally immaterial. It is clear the people of Derry do not count to the British army."

Paul O'Connor of the Pat Finucane Centre also described the report as "deeply flawed".

He claimed it offered a worrying insight into the thinking of senior officers and civil servants at the Ministry of Defence and called for it to be withdrawn immediately.

A British army spokesman said the analysis considered high-level general issues which may be applicable to future campaigns.

"It is critically important to consider what was learned by those who served in Northern Ireland," he said.

In his foreword, former British army head General Sir Mike Jackson said the lessons learned in the north have already been used in the Balkans, Sierra Leone, East Timor, Afghanistan and Iraq.

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