

Lethal Allies
British Collusion in Ireland

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The story should be familiar: in the 1970s Northern Ireland's state forces – the police (RUC), the military (UDR) and military reservists, almost exclusively Protestant – shared personnel, weapons and intelligence with the Loyalist (Protestant) paramilitaries. And so when those paramilitaries began killing Catholics – because they were Catholics, not because they were Republicans; sectarian not political killings – the police investigations were perfunctory when they weren't engaged in obstruction, cover-up and – occasionally – killing. The powers-that-be in Stormont and London chose not to do anything about this for fear of alienating what it perceived as the host (Protestant) population.

In the earliest mainstream account of these Loyalist killings, Martin Dillon and Denis Lehane's *Political Murder in Northern Ireland* (1973), the absence of prosecutions for these murders was attributed to the police force, the RUC, being overwhelmed by the number of deaths. On the ground, however, the fact that there was also collusion between the state and the Loyalist paramilitaries was known by British Army personnel: Fred Holroyd, for example, who was there in the mid 1970s, wrote about this in his memoir *War Without Honour* (1989); and it was discussed in Roger Faligot's *The Kitson Experiment* (1983) and Martin Dillon's *The Dirty War* (1988) and is the subject of Sean McPhilemy's *The Committee* (1998) and Bill Rolston's *Unfinished Business: State Killings and the Quest for Truth* (2000) – and these are just books I have on my shelves. There are many others.

This account differs from previous versions. First, it largely eschews the preceding literature on the subject and the three state whistle-blowers, Holroyd, Colin Wallace and John Weir, and uses as evidence official documents: some in the UK national archives, the Barron Report into the bombings in the Irish Republic,¹ and, in particular, the reports of the

1 See <<http://www.dublinmonaghanbombings.org/index2.html>>.

Historical Enquiries Team, a group of police who have been investigating or reinvestigating the many unsolved murders in Northern Ireland.² Second, it concentrates on the deaths – 120 in all, largely the work of one group, ‘the Glenanne gang’³ – in a particular area of Northern Ireland.

There are things I didn’t like and things I would have done differently. There are hundreds of pages which describe the murders. Each incident is accompanied by thumbnail sketches of the victims, all of the ‘He or she was a wonderful person/father/daughter/’ variety, which are mawkish, tedious and irrelevant. The book would have been better – tighter, brisker – without them. Omitting Wallace and Holroyd means that a dimension to this, the conflict between the various state agencies is largely absent; and there isn’t enough on the reasons for the political system’s seeming indifference to all these deaths. But these are perhaps minor points when placed against the detailed analyses of the murders which are an irrefutable account of the collusion between state forces and the Loyalist paramilitaries. And providing that, I’m sure, was the author’s aim.

Robin Ramsay

² See for example <<http://www.thedetail.tv/issues/239/hmic-report-into-het/series-of-critical-reports-leave-future-of-historical-enquiries-team-in-doubt>>. The HET investigations may be ending due to cuts in police budgets.

³ See, for example, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glenanne_gang>.