



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Summary

With the traditional 'marching season' now behind us, some general conclusions about the RUC's handling of this year's parades may be drawn.

In overall terms, the RUC performed reasonably well this year. With the single and glaring exception of the leadership's decision in relation to the Twelfth parade in Portadown, the police showed an impressive determination to stand up to trouble makers on both sides ^{and} to prevent hijacking of the parades by extremist elements. Their policing of the parades was generally fair and even-handed and there was a reasonable degree of sensitivity to local conditions. In Ballynahinch, Rasharkin, Keady, West Belfast, Derry and elsewhere, potentially explosive situations were kept firmly under control and, in the eyes of most nationalists, the RUC acquitted itself quite well.

The following is a brief account of the major parades/events in July and August, with a comment on the RUC's handling of each.

1. The first major event was the traditional 'church parade' through Portadown on the Sunday before the Twelfth (6 July). This was preceded by an RUC statement on 4 July which indicated that, subject to certain conditions, the parade would be allowed to pass along its traditional route, i.e., through Woodhouse Street and Obins Street to Drumcree Church and back via Garvaghy Road. The decision, it was made clear, had been based on "the requirement that it will be a dignified, peaceful church parade" and also on the tradition of respect accorded to church parades by Catholics. The conditions which the RUC imposed on the parade organisers were described in the statement as

relating to "conduct, bands and persons permitted to participate and proper stewarding". One of these conditions was that the parade should remain local in character.

On the day itself, Jim Wells and George Seawright tried to gain entrance to the Tunnel. Wells managed to get through but Seawright was kept back. In the course of the altercation to which this gave rise, stones and a petrol bomb were thrown at the police. 27 RUC men and 3 civilians were injured. One policeman was hit in the neck by a dart (fired from a nationalist housing estate). Two plastic bullets were fired and four people were arrested.

Comment: The police did their best to ensure that, as agreed with the organisers, only the local Portadown Lodges would pass through the Tunnel. While they were not entirely successful, they managed nevertheless to contain a potentially dangerous situation.

2. At 1 a.m. on the morning of 11 July, upwards of 2,000 Loyalists, including Ian Paisley and Peter Robinson, paraded silently through Hillsborough. Many wore paramilitary-style dress and some carried cudgels or sticks. The police did not try to intervene. The demonstration broke up without incident after about an hour.

Comment: We were told confidentially by the British side of the Secretariat that, in anticipation of a Paisleyite attempt to march through Obins Street, 1,500 police and 1,000 Army soldiers were deployed in Portadown that night and police were also on duty in Lurgan. Deprived of an opportunity to march in Portadown and Lurgan, the Paisleyites headed for Hillsborough. The RUC decided to remain on duty in Portadown and Lurgan rather than deploy forces to Hillsborough as (a) they feared the Paisleyites might double back to Portadown; and (b) the local population in Hillsborough (a Protestant town) would not

object to the Paisleyites in the same manner as nationalists in Portadown and Lurgan. The RUC would appear to have chosen the right course under the circumstances.

3. On the eve of the Twelfth (11 July), serious violence and disturbances occurred in many parts of the North in connection with the traditional bonfires.

In Portadown, trouble broke out around midnight when Loyalists from the Edgarstown area threw petrol bombs at nationalist homes in the Obins Street area. Police in riot gear arrived with some delay and took up position on the high wall which separates the two areas. They fired 150 plastic bullets at the Loyalist crowds. 14 policemen were injured in the disturbances and 4 people were taken to hospital with plastic bullet wounds.

Around 10 p.m. news came of the RUC's decision on the route for the Twelfth march. Soldiers placed barbed wire fencing along the Garvaghy Road and sealed off Obins Street. Later on, the RUC fired plastic bullets in the Garvaghy Road area when confronted by nationalists angry with the decision.

Comment: The RUC's suppression of the Loyalist disturbances with plastic bullets went down well in the nationalist community, though this positive impression was attenuated by news of the decision on Garvaghy Road.

In Belfast, about a dozen petrol bombs were thrown at the RUC from the nationalist end of Manor Street. A small number of plastic bullets were fired. In the Oldpark area, the RUC came under attack from both Loyalists and Nationalists.

Comment: The RUC were commended by Brian Feeney of the SDLP for their firm stance over a number of days in the face of Loyalist aggression in the Manor Street area.

In Ballynahinch, a group of 400-500 Loyalist marchers tried to enter Hillview Crescent (a cul-de-sac with Catholic homes only) but were prevented by the RUC from doing so.

Comment: This action appears to have been taken by the RUC in direct response to views expressed by the Irish side of the Secretariat (following representations to us by Eddie McGrady and other SDLP figures). It provided a good illustration of the efficiency of the Secretariat as a medium for expressing concern about possible "flashpoints" during the marching season.

4. The Twelfth (12 July) was marked by Orange marches in over twenty different towns, including Portadown, Belfast, Armagh, Ballynahinch, Newtownards and Dungannon.

In Portadown, the Orange march was kept out of Obins Street but was routed instead along the Garvaghy Road, an overwhelmingly nationalist area. Although it was confined to eight local lodges (about 150 elders in all) and passed off without any violent incidents, there was considerable tension and anger in the nationalist community over the decision and the massive security presence (with consequent inconvenience for local residents) which it necessitated in the area.

Comment: The Chief Constable's decision in favour of the Garvaghy Road route was widely condemned by nationalist representatives. The Minister for Foreign Affairs sharply criticised it in a statement on 15 July and, in addition to sustained exchanges about it in the Conference framework, the matter was discussed at a special meeting of the Conference held in London on 29 July. For present purposes it is sufficient to record the Irish view that this decision ran counter to assurances given privately beforehand that there would be no surrender to Loyalist intimidation and that its effect had been to raise questions about the effectiveness of the Agreement and to play into the hands of the IRA.

Later on 12 July, trouble erupted in Portadown as Orange marches returned to the town from Armagh. As they passed the entrance to the Tunnel, rioting broke out. A police Landrover was overturned and one policeman dragged out and beaten with his own riot-stick. The overturned Landrover was set on fire. 9 RUC men and a number of civilians, including Alan Wright, were injured.

5. On the following day (13 July), a crowd of up to 60 masked Loyalists attacked Catholic homes in the mainly nationalist village of Rasharkin, Co. Antrim, causing injuries to one youth and extensive damage to property. On the basis of RUC arrests, twenty individuals were subsequently charged with possession of offensive weapons and riotous behaviour.

In Portadown, as on the previous day, the police prevented a Loyalist march (Royal Black Preceptory) from passing through the Tunnel and Obins Street.

6. The first major event in August was an Apprentice Boys' march in Keady, Co. Armagh (8 August). The RUC confined the march to a route on the outskirts of the (heavily nationalist) town, thereby enraging Loyalists who wished to parade through the town centre. RUC members came under attack from a Loyalist crowd, who hurled bricks and stones and attacked several buildings. Plastic bullets were fired during the disturbances. After the march, Loyalists went on the rampage, breaking windows and setting fire to one house.

Comment: The RUC stood firm under intense pressure and were commended by Seamus Mallon (in a private comment to the undersigned) for having done so.

7. The anniversary of the introduction of internment (9 August) was the occasion, as usual, for nationalist parades in various centres.

The major parade was held in West Belfast on 10 August. It drew an attendance of roughly 2,500 (including NORAID and Troops Out delegations). Contrary to the fears of many beforehand, it passed off virtually without incident. The RUC warned participants, before it started, that the parade was illegal and they would make themselves liable to prosecution by participating in it. Having issued this warning, however, they stood back and allowed it to proceed.

Comment: The RUC took what seems to have been a wise decision under the circumstances - on the one hand, they formally warned marchers that the parade was illegal (thereby preempting possible Loyalist criticism that they were turning a blind eye to an illegal Republican march), yet on the other they did not intervene forcibly in a way which would have played into the hands of Provisional IRA activists and propagandists.

8. On 12 August, Apprentice Boys parades were held in numerous parts of the North. The only significant trouble occurred during the main parade in Derry. Police dealt firmly with attacks on them from both nationalists and loyalists. The worst trouble occurred in the Waterside area where they came under attack from a Loyalist crowd who threw stones and bottles at them and set fire to a pub. The security forces also came under attack from an IRA sniper. In all, 20 arrests were made and 20 RUC men and 11 civilians were injured during the disturbances.

Comment: In Derry, the RUC managed the difficult task of securing the parade route agreed with the organisers while at the same time fending off sustained attacks from both Loyalists and nationalists.

9. In the course of widespread rioting in various areas over the weekend of 15-16 August, 11 RUC men and a number of civilians were injured in clashes between the police and both nationalists and Loyalists.

In Toomebridge, following the AOH's annual August 15 parade there, a large group of nationalist youths attacked police and threw petrol bombs, bricks and bottles. 29 arrests were made.

In Kilkeel, the RUC made 16 arrests when Loyalists attacked a nationalist band returning from the AOH's 15 August parade in Warrenpoint. Four policemen were injured in the disturbances. During the subsequent weekend, fifty Loyalist youths were involved in an hour-long attack on police and property in Kilkeel and three arrests were made.

In Armoy, Co. Antrim, there were attacks on the RUC following a Loyalist band parade. Five RUC men were injured.

10. Late on 22 August, rioting took place in Rasharkin after a Loyalist band parade. Eight RUC men and two civilians were injured and a number of people arrested.
11. Finally, the Royal Black Preceptory marches last Saturday (30 August) passed off without notable incident.

A. Denoghue.

Anglo-Irish Division

2 September 1986

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STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS ON MARCHES,

15 JULY 1986

I have deliberately kept public silence about the events in Northern Ireland in order not to aggravate an already inflamed situation. It is necessary not to clear up misunderstandings which may have arisen about my position.

Nationalists have been dismayed by the events in the past ten days. They have suffered at the hands of thugs and bully boys. Their lives have been at risk, there has been one tragic death and many serious injuries. Nationalists' property has been vandalised, and their right to equal treatment under the law denied.

My concern has been to see that nationalists are protected, particularly those in enclaves which are vulnerable to attack by sectarian mobs. Throughout the last ten days I have remained in constant contact with the situation on the ground. I have received detailed information from responsible leaders of the nationalist community, for which I wish to thank them. I have taken full account of this information in the messages which I have sent directly to the Secretary of State through the channels established by the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

I share the deep resentment of nationalists in Northern Ireland about certain operational decisions made by the RUC on the routing of marches and I have made my views known in strong terms to Mr. King. It is intolerable that provocative demands by unionist marchers should be listened to. I want nationalists to know that I am determined to see to it that their interests are safeguarded and that their physical security is protected.

I want to say also that I am shocked by the Sinn Fein/IRA attacks on members of the majority community. I condemn all this violence.

I call for restraint from all sides at this dangerous time. I call especially on the leaders of unionist opinion to show their abhorrence of unionist violence and to do everything in their power to prevent it.