Why was Tipperary so active in the War of Independence?

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Inspired by the early publication of Dan Breen's memoirs,[1] there is a public perception abroad, particularly in Tipperary itself, that the local IRA formed the vanguard of the revolution during the War of Independence. Recent research into the number of casualties among the crown forces has shown that Tipperary was indeed among the more violent counties in this period, but did not contain the most active volunteers. The local IRA inflicted the fourth highest casualties on members of the security forces out of all counties in Ireland.

The forerunner in all respects, however, was Cork. In the early phase of the conflict between January 1917 and December 1919, nineteen policemen and soldiers fell victim of the IRA there, while in Tipperary just eight were wounded or killed. During the actual fighting from January 1920 till the Truce on 11 July 1921 Tipperary maintained the same relative position. In this period 114 casualties occurred among the crown forces in Tipperary while Cork witnessed four times as many with 458 men wounded or killed. If the number of these casualties is related to the size of the population, Tipperary drops to fifth place, but if casualties among the IRA and civilians are included Tipperary becomes the second most violent county in Ireland during the conflict.[2]

Tipperary therefore does not reach the extremes of Cork but is, as I indicated at the end of my 1996 article for the *Tipperary Historical Journal*, a good example of a county with an active IRA movement in this period.[3] In most other counties substantially fewer casualties occurred during the entire conflict, only ten of them exceeding twenty-five. These large discrepancies in the levels of conflict show that it is impossible to speak of a concerted centrally-led campaign of the IRA in the War of Independence. The levels of violence were clearly not determined by GHQ but depended on local initiative. In the 1996 article I also suggested certain elements which might aid in explaining this prominence of Tipperary and the southwest in general. In this article I want to take this issue a step further and will explore the causes for the relative activity of the IRA in Tipperary when compared to most other counties. In other words, what is it that made Munster, and Tipperary in particular such a violent place?

Explanations

Ever since the conflict started various reasons have been suggested by participants and historians for the variations in the levels of violence, all based on the premise that local circumstances were crucial. During the war IRA units frequently complained of a lack of rifles necessary for mounting ambushes, unsuitable terrain or too many opponents in their

area. Historians have put forward a number of other possible factors including the efficiency of the local police, a local tradition of agrarian violence, the presence of middle-class leadership, the strength of the cooperative movement, the numbers emigrating, the level of Sinn Féin support, the extent of Irish teaching, the strength of GAA and the Gaelic League, etc.[4]

Recently Peter Hart has tested all these and other factors statistically by assessing to what extent levels of violence correlated with each of them. His figures show that many suggestions put forward had some impact, but none that was conclusive. The strongest indicator for violence in the war was a local tradition of agrarian violence and emigration. The numbers speaking or being taught Irish were also significant, while an active and well-organised republican movement in the period immediately following the 1916 Rising and a corresponding weakness of the local police in dealing with this also correlated well.

Early activity apparently gave local units a head start that was often hard to make up. However, this did not apply to all areas. The counties Clare, Meath, Donegal and Roscommon showed a lot of early activity but did little later on, while Longford, Mayo and Galway were quiet after the Rising but became considerably active during the War of Independence.[5]

Apart from the difficult in explaining correlations with emigration and agrarian agitation in the nineteenth century, Hart's results mainly indicate that if activists were well-organised and started early, levels of violence tended to be high. This, of course, does not explain why some volunteers did start early or how the apparently non-determined process of radicalisation worked. Questions can also be raised about the validity of the search for correlations between socio-economic determinants and IRA violence, which can be briefly summarised as follows[6]: the factors correlated with the levels of violence apply to all people in a county and not just to those that became active. IRA activists were a-typical for the population as a whole and therefore the correlations with features that apply to the entire population are by definition suspect. This approach also assumes that there were no outside influences at play on the Volunteers in these counties and that all Volunteer activity was locally driven, which is manifestly untrue. GHQ fulfilled a directing policy. IRA activity was not confined to the county of origin of the volunteers (Tipperary men fought in Limerick, Kilkenny, Cork, Dublin, etc.), and their activities also influenced men elsewhere. The same can be said about the responses from the crown forces, be it police or especially the military. Government policy in particular was also rarely directed at particular activists or areas but often treated the country as a whole, regardless of local circumstances.

Conditions in Tipperary

As long as we cannot relate the actual features of individual IRA activists to violence, no statistical answer can be conclusive. Nevertheless, the suggested correlations can provide some insight into the extent to which Tipperary and the IRA were different when compared with areas outside the active southwest of Ireland. Tipperary was indeed a county with a strong tradition of emigration and agrarian violence in the late nineteenth century, which seems to have established a greater willingness to oppose the authorities with force.

The relative high numbers of local police indicates the continued expectation of such unrest among the authorities. There was one policeman for every 441 inhabitants of Tipperary in 1911, which compared for instance to 1 to every 534 persons in Mayo, and to 598 in Wexford.[7] Apparently, however, the relatively numerous Tipperary police force was

not very successful in countering the early activity of volunteers. Certain preconditions for a successful campaign by the IRA were thus met. The big questions, however, remain; how did these elements predetermine Tipperary to violence why was there early activity in Tipperary and how did this early activity lead to the outbreak of high levels of conflict in 1920-21? For a better understanding of this we will have to look at the experiences of the activists themselves. On a more theoretical level I have explored this issue in another article, but here we will try and trace the involvement of activists particularly in South Tipperary.[8]

Tipperary had been active in rural agitation and had high levels of emigration in the nineteenth century, but neither of these phenomena was particularly prevalent in the War of Independence. The potential influence of agrarian radicalism can possibly be read from the presence of some agrarian conflict in the IRA stronghold of Ballagh before 1916;[9] but there was no necessary connection between such tensions and IRA violence.

The correlation with agrarian agitation and emigration in the nineteenth century tells us little about those in Tipperary who became active in the War of Independence. It may have established some sort of radical tradition in which the use of force was an accepted form of political expression, one in which at least a part of the population was willing to acquiesce. However, this alone would not be sufficient, and seems not to have been very influential in the west of Ireland, where the Land League originated.

The census of 1911 also shows that although the recent spread of the teaching of Irish had an impact on the number of young people speaking the language, Tipperary had relatively few Irish speakers. About 25% of those aged between ten and twenty in Tipperary claimed an ability to speak Irish, which is up from 10% among those between twenty and thirty, but is considerably less than the population of relatively inactive eastern and northern counties like Wexford, which had 57% in this age group claiming an ability to speak Irish, or heavily Protestant Derry with 24%.[10]

The other important factor determining IRA activity in the War of Independence was early activism. In Tipperary there were indeed a relatively large number of activists before 1916, most of them connected with the IRB, such as Éamon O'Dwyer (Ballagh), Frank Drohan (Clonmel), Pierce McCan (Dualla), Patrick C. O'Mahony (Cashel), R.M. Hanrahan (Fethard), P.J. Moloney and Wm. Benn (Tipperary Town).

Most of these men were based in urban centres which may be explained by the fact that the original IRB of the nineteenth century had been primarily an urban organisation that was strong in Munster, and particularly in South Tipperary.[11] When it came to developing a strong base of early activists, the strong presence of the IRB (which was probably a remnant of conflict from the late nineteenth century) provided heavily urbanised places like Tipperary with a radical tradition and with an advantage over less urban areas with a weaker tradition of radicalism.

The prominence of town dwellers in radical nationalist activity continued both before and directly after the Rising. Before the Rising, the Irish Volunteers were started in towns by these IRB men. According to RIC records the first Volunteer Company in South Tipperary was set up in Cashel under direction of Patrick O'Mahony in March 1914, followed by Fethard in the same month and Tipperary Town in April. Patrick O'Mahony was singled out by the RIC as the prime mover in spreading the organisation outwards from the towns.[12] Following the split of September 1914, little activity was recorded among radicals except in the anti-recruiting campaign.[13]

Tipperary saw no involvement in the Rising. Although some attempts to mobilise the Volunteers were reported by the police, nevertheless twenty-three volunteers were arrested (including McCan, O'Dwyer, Drohan, Benn and Moloney). Of all these, fifteen came from large cities and five from small towns in the South Riding of Tipperary, and only a couple from the North Riding.[14] This dominance of townsmen among those arrested was mirrored elsewhere. About three-quarters of those detained in areas where people had not fought came from urban areas. It is also clear that the prisoners came disproportionately from Munster. Of all the twenty-nine counties whose volunteers had not participated in the Rising, Tipperary had the sixth highest number of people interned. Corkmen were most prominent among the internees, foreshadowing the county's later levels of activity.[15]

Following the reorganisation of the Volunteers in 1917 a new breed of activists came to the fore in South Tipperary like Seán Treacy, Michael O'Callaghan, Dan Breen, Thomas Donovan, Con Deere and people like the Quirkes, Barlows, Ryans, etc. Some of the older activists like Benn, O'Mahoney, Moloney and Hanrahan moved into Sinn Féin or left altogether. All of the original activists had difficulties with the switch to the use of physical force in the years ahead. Even those who remained in the Volunteers, like O'Dwyer and Drohan, were eventually sidelined due to their ambivalent attitude towards guerrilla tactics.[16] Although some of the new members were highly motivated ideologically (like the original activists), most of them were primarily attracted by the prospect of action. In this the post-1916 activists did not differ from most of the ordinary post-1916 members. Such a development is also common among revolutionary movements elsewhere and is described by theorists as the difference between the first and the second generation of violent activists.[17]

However, although activists were clearly more numerous in southwestern counties like Tipperary, there were people in all counties who became involved in the Volunteers inspired by the Rising, but only in places like Tipperary did a large proportion of these men become engaged in the use of large-scale violence later on. To explain this we have to identify the activists and trace their experiences in the period leading up to the conflict of 1920-21. It is clear from analyses of the social backgrounds of IRA activists that these were people from all classes, if somewhat less from the very rich and very poor. What does stand out is the fact that many of those among the newly-recruited volunteers who became involved in the use of force came from urban areas. This was in contrast to the overall membership, which was much more rural-based.[18] Thus, early activity in the towns was an important factor in the switch to the use of force, and the fact that South Tipperary was highly-urbanised and had a relative high number of pre-1916 activists meant that there was a relatively high number of potentially active volunteers after the Rising.

Signs of a reorganisation of republicans by the pre-1916 and some new activists were observed by the South Tipperary police in early 1917. Frank Drohan from Clonmel in particular was mentioned in this regard. These efforts to reorganise, first under the guise of the Gaelic League, then by setting up Sinn Féin and Liberty clubs, and at the end of 1917 also by reorganising Irish Volunteers companies inevitably led to some confrontations with the police. In July, P.J. Moloney and four young men were prosecuted for making a collection in aid of the East Clare election without a permit, and in September Éamon O'Dwyer and Seán Treacy were arrested and sentenced.[19] In October four men from various towns were sent to gaol for wearing uniforms.[20] O'Dwyer was arrested again in November this time for illegal drilling and wearing a uniform after giving a seditious speech in Toem. In this speech

he emphasised that 'no one was afraid of the police now', and that the men should follow the example of 1916 and 'fight for a free Ireland'.[21] After this, drilling and route marches, often led by men in uniform, became commonplace in South Tipperary particularly in and around the larger towns. Confrontation with the police (and other opponents of republicanism) that accompanied Volunteer activities were of course by their very nature more likely in urban areas where volunteers, their political opponents and the police were most numerous, and in these confrontations some volunteers became radicalised.

Early activities among volunteers following the 1916 Rising such as rioting, illegal drilling, arms raiding and the actual use of firearms were prevalent in Munster. In 1917, 59% of all political riots in Ireland took place there. In November 1917 the RIC recorded 334 cases of illegal drilling throughout the country, 272 of which took place in Munster. The same applied to another important expression of activism; raiding for arms, 275 of which took place in Munster but only 227 in the rest of the country put together. Although numbering only four, Tipperary saw the third highest incidents of seizure of arms from members of the crown forces between 1917 and 1919. The same prominence of Munster we find in firing incidents in the early period, 43 out of 76 taking place there.[22] As a result of this activity, many of the early arrests, 43% in 1917 and 42% in 1918, were recorded in Munster, and often involved people from urban areas.[23]

Slowly, those involved in confrontations with the security forces became less willing to accept being arrested and more willing to resist the authorities with all means available. The events surrounding the conscription crisis made this particularly clear. In September 1917, following the death of Thomas Ashe, leading republicans were, according to the local priest in Thurles, avoiding confrontation: 'It was remarkable that all the leaders of Sinn Féin both clerical and lay were not seen anywhere after the town had been occupied; they retired to their strongholds or to the country and left the people to the mercy of the military.' However, during the conscription crisis he observed the largest line for confession ever: 'Many of them made general confession evidently being prepared to die at home rather than be conscripted.' This was a sentiment apparently shared by their parents: 'parents say they would prefer to see their sons shot at home then to see them forced to join the English Army.'[24] The police reports confirm this image: '[The Riding] is not in a peaceable state when it is full of parties drilling and gathering in bands and showing a united front in opposing the law.' The police saw the actions of the clergy as having calmed tempers and to 'dissuade from forcible resistance and active violence'. After the furore surrounding conscription died down, the RIC clamped down on drilling and marching by the Volunteers. As a result, no open drilling took place towards the end of 1918, although the RIC noted that 'there is some reason to suspect night drilling', and more incidents of arms raiding were recorded, sometimes leading to direct confrontations with the police who stated that the Volunteers appeared particularly active in Tipperary Town and Clonmel.[25]

Now that open defiance of the authorities had become difficult, it became clear that the next step for the Volunteers was to engage the authorities directly or become irrelevant, particularly in light of the growing prominence of political tactics by Sinn Féin. However, the actual use of physical force for a political objective is difficult for almost any person to begin to engage in. Moral and social constraints work upon most individuals preventing them from such activities. In all counties including Tipperary there were strong forces opposing such a move. Even most activists from before the Rising were unwilling to take such a step.

The cases of leading activists of the pre-1916 era, Frank Drohan and Éamon O'Dwyer have been noted before.

Despite these qualms the move towards more direct engagement of the police as epitomised in the Soloheadbeg ambush was not confined to Tipperary. Nine months earlier, on 13 April 1918, volunteers in Gortatlea, Co. Kerry already attacked a RIC barracks in which two volunteers were killed.[26] Soloheadbeg was, nevertheless, unique in the fact that it was the first time since 1916 that RIC men had been killed.

Those involved in this ambush were mostly from among the earliest post-1916 activists. Men, like the big four; Seamus Robinson,[27] Seán Treacy, Dan Breen and Seán Hogan, who had dedicated much of their time to the movement, were radicalised early on in their confrontation with the authorities. Some of them had been arrested and imprisoned more than once following the Rising and had a clearly different outlook from those who had not had these experiences. Their action in Solohead now caused a clear distinction between those willing to contemplate or support violent action and those who were not. There are reports that older volunteers were shocked by the events and dropped out of the movement.[28] Before this, violent action by these men had been prevented by the first generation of political activists. After Seán Treacy's arrest in 1918 a number of volunteers had planned to capture some RIC men to force his release but this had been forbidden by IRB officers, causing many volunteers to severe their ties with the IRB.[29] The growing disagreement over the means to be employed by the movement was obvious even from outside. Fr. Maher noted in 1918 that a cleavage seemed to have developed between volunteers and more politically-minded Sinn Féiners.[30]

In the initial phases of the conflict, opposition to the use of force was fairly widespread among volunteers, their family members and neighbours. Active opposition (particularly in towns) came from the so-called 'separation women', which referred to those women who had a husband in the British Army and received a separation allowance.[31] Other members of the community refused to cooperate because of their opposition to or fear of the consequences. When on the run, activists were frequently forced to move on if locals noticed they were armed, and confined themselves to certain areas where support was known to be strong.[32] As a result of this opposition, the number of volunteers gradually declined as many left the movement: 'at one time there were 135 men but they drifted away.' This company ended up with thirty-two to thirty-five volunteers at the time of the Truce. Other companies saw a similar development in a sort of survival-of-the-fittest process.[33] The remaining members however became increasingly willing to contemplate the use of extreme measures.

The clearest example of a non-cooperative attitude among some parents, an attitude that would have caused many to cease their connection with the movement was cited by Volunteer Bryan Ryan who was called upon by his friend Pat to help in a nightly IRA operation:

> My mother locked the door. I didn't know what to do but my father opened it. (...) Pat said, 'We have to call Martin Dwyer.' Your man stayed at Dwyer's gate and sent me in. I hadn't my wits about me. I knocked at his window. For I knew where I was, his mother started giving out – such a lacerating. 'Wait till I meet your mother, calling people out of their beds to commit murder, and get killed yourselves. Well if you have nothing else to do Martin has. Clear off.'[34]

Leading volunteers were also responsive to the demands of parents and the community. Brigade Quartermaster Éamon O'Dwyer, who himself opposed the use of ambushes, was frequently asked by family members to get their sons, brothers or fathers 'out of harm's way'. He was not deaf to their requests: 'sometimes I had to intervene and bring fellows home against their will.'[35] The restraining influence of parents may well explain the large percentage of active volunteers who did not have a father alive. Treacy and Breen had no father, as was the case for at least 45% of traceable Volunteers in rural Tipperary. The fathers of these men were already absent during the 1911 census. In less violent and largely agricultural Mayo, this applied only to 23% of volunteers.[36]

Even active volunteers were often difficult to motivate: 'I was sent around to get men to come with the column and ... none of them wanted to come and they had no intention of coming and wouldn't volunteer to come and said they wouldn't come until they had to.'[37] Fear of the consequences also led to the failure of many operations: local volunteers were noted for discharging shots in ambushes to prevent serious engagement from developing, with consequent reprisals on the locals. Usually no disciplinary action was taken against them, although GHQ officers such as Ernie O'Malley sometimes forced such men out of the Volunteers.[38] Some local officers were 'deposed' because they were: 'considered to have been too moderate and cowardly in attack'.[39] Fear and an unwillingness to kill also affected operations: 'We were a bit nervous in the beginning. In fact I had to threaten some of the lads with my gun to force them to take the first bottles [filled with petrol to burn the roof of a barracks].'[40] Other activists refused to shoot spies.

Despite this resistance, there was a relatively large number of volunteers in Tipperary who gradually became willing to engage in the use of force for political purposes. An important element in the development of this willingness among political activists in general is an existence in mental and physical isolation. In such isolation, with no restraints exerted from the outside, more and more extreme measure become acceptable to the members of such groups.[41] In Tipperary such a separation did indeed take place early on. The big four lived largely in isolation. Éamon O'Dwyer's farm, where 1916 veteran, Seamus Robinson from Glasgow came to live as commander of the brigade, was a place where likeminded activists came together and discussed further action without encountering much opposition against their violent plans. Seán Treacy had been forced on the run by his high-profile activity and numerous arrests early on, and had taken Dan Breen and Seán Hogan with him. The Soloheadbeg ambush only emphasised their position at the periphery of society – where the use of force was acceptable and unchallenged.

When the conflict became more serious, particularly after GHQ sanctioned attacks on the crown forces in January 1920, active volunteers came under increasing pressure from the authorities. It became increasingly difficult for them to function freely, particularly in towns with a higher concentration of policemen and political opponents. Thomas Donovan was a prominent example of this. He became involved in the Volunteers early on and soon became prominent. As a result, he was arrested frequently, became increasingly violent and finally got killed (like Seán Treacy) in a shoot out.

The countryside, and particularly places like O'Dwyer's farm and other supportive localities, provided safe havens for these men on the run, places where they could discuss and prepare their next move in relative safety. Although Treacy and Breen were not from urban areas, we have seen that most activists lived in towns and Seán Treacy's visits to Tipperary town in particular had the effect of activating people there.

A number of developments enhanced the relative danger for active volunteers of living in towns. Once the struggle had started, outlying barracks of the RIC were abandoned in large numbers from the autumn of 1919 onwards, and the police were concentrated in the larger barracks in urbanised centres. The local election results of 1920 also showed a stark difference between rural and urban areas in the support for Sinn Féin. In Munster as a whole 87% of people in rural districts voted Sinn Féin but only 43% did so in urban areas.[42]

A number of experiences could activate volunteers. The example of Solohead inspired those like Bryan Ryan who were motivated by the lure of action. He and others were further radicalised in consequence of the engagement of the crown forces. After the arrest of some locals following a round up, 'Jack Seán Óg, waved back to us. One of the Tans struck him in the mouth with a rifle. Incidents of a day like that stick in one's mind. I remember Jack Cain who was standing at my side, said, "Bryan, they can kill us, that's all they can do".'[43] The most obvious example of the motivating force of personal experience is supplied by the example of the brothers Plant, two protestant farmer sons from Moyglass, who joined the IRA after being beaten by the RIC when mistaken for republicans.[44]

Patrick Ryan from Fethard provides a classic example of the radicalisation process many young men went through in places like Tipperary. He joined the Volunteers in the summer of 1917 with about twenty other locals who were considered trustworthy and willing. He was involved in some drilling and a confrontation with Parliamentary Party supporters in the early phase of conflict. He was first arrested in March 1918 for drilling with three others and immediately went on hunger strike. After his release, he was determined to take up arms against the authorities. He became involved in arms trafficking and – more or less accidentally – in the use of physical force when he and some other volunteers ran into four armed RIC men in a car and disarmed them. After that, he was asked by the leading activist in the east of the Riding, Thomas Donovan from Killenaule 'to go on a stunt'. As a result he felt forced to go on the run and then became engaged full-time in IRA operations, leading to his involvement in still further engagements.[45]

Becoming involved in operations against the crown forces was not always something each individual volunteer could make happen. Many volunteers were dissuaded, rejected or overlooked when the question of who was to participate in an operation came up. When a column was formed in the Cahir Battalion each company was asked to send two men, making involvement in the use of force a selective process.[46] Later on, leading men such as Tom Donovan, Seán Treacy and the Flying Column commanders Dinny Lacey and Seán Hogan picked men from among the local Volunteers to aid in operations. This assistance in a military engagement was considered a test to see how people did under fire, a test which certainly not all passed: 'God they'd run away, some'.[47] Those who showed themselves to be suitable could graduate into the full-time use of physical force.

Once men were on the run full-time – and had begun to associate solely with like-minded men – the conflict became increasingly violent. There is some incidental evidence that these men engaged less and less with non-members, even if they availed of their hospitality.[48] What were considered acceptable means by members of these groups then extended to include behaviour that was more and more violent. The increasing numbers of civilian casualties and hit-and-run murders towards the end of the war in 1921 also testify to this. The Soloheadbeg ambush was thus the culmination of a slow process of radicalisation of a number of highly-motivated and active men. The experience of early activity and the accompanying

confrontation radicalised some people, but did not necessarily make them willing to kill for political reasons. The low casualty figures in 1919 and early 1920 indicate this. There were eight casualties among the crown forces in Tipperary in the three years between the Rising and 1920, and nineteen in the first six months of 1920.

These rising numbers of confrontations forced more and more volunteers on the run who began to function in flying columns in isolation from the local community. In these conditions, the willingness to use force grew rapidly, as indicated by the rise in the number of police and military casualties to forty-five in the second half of 1920 and to fifty in the first half of 1921.

The growth in casualties once flying columns became common is even more apparent in Ireland as a whole. From the end of the Rising in 1916 to the beginning of 1920 there were sixty-seven casualties among the crown forces; in the first six months of 1920 alone this rose to 243, then to 481 in the second six months and 821 in the first six months of 1921.[49] The steep rise in civilian casualties in 1921 show IRA operations became increasingly brutal particularly after it became almost impossible to operate flying columns due to the counter measures of the authorities in the Spring of 1921. These developments can clearly be observed in the chronology of Tipperary activities drawn up by the Bureau of Military History.[50]

Ties with the Community

Radicalisation was thus a process that took place mostly as a result of confrontation. The large number of radicals in Tipperary before and immediately after the Rising and their active disposition provided a solid base for the development of violence. Republicans encountered opposition not only from the authorities but also from elements within their own community. The existence of a certain level of opposition from within the population in fact appears to have been crucial in the development of a willingness to use force. Virtual total support for republicans – as could be found in rural areas in the west of Ireland – went hand-in-hand with low levels of fighting. In Connacht 97% of votes in the local elections of 1920 for rural district boards went to Sinn Féin, against 87% in Munster.[51] Opposition to Sinn Féin in urban areas was similar in both provinces, but Munster was of course much more urbanised than Connacht, providing many more opportunities for activists to become radicalised in confrontations with their environment.

From the circumstances in Leinster and Ulster it could be concluded that too much opposition from within the community is not conducive either. In rural areas of Leinster, Sinn Féin received 67% of the vote in the local elections and in Ulster it received 42%. In the corresponding elections for the urban district boards a much smaller support base was revealed for Sinn Féin everywhere – 42% in Connacht, 43% in Munster, 35% in Leinster and just 15% in Ulster.[52] In line with the idea that guerrillas need to function as fish in a sea of popular support, it was of course important to have areas of solid support. In eastern and northern counties, the absence of activists and widespread regional support appear to have prevented the outbreak of fighting in those areas. It appears that a particular mix of support and opposition to republicanism was most favourable for the development of conflict.

The level of mobilisation among Catholic males in the Volunteers can further illuminate the position of volunteers in various areas, and makes the importance of opposition more apparent. The Volunteers in rural parts of South Tipperary mobilised 13% of all males between fifteen and fifty-nine in their organisation, indicating solid but certainly not

wholesale support. In contrast, the Volunteers in west Mayo mobilised 34% of the male population in that age bracket, showing they had a very strong hold over an already sympathetic community, and had little cause to use force. The Tipperary volunteers were nevertheless significantly better integrated in society than in an eastern county like Wexford, where the Volunteers took in 7% of the eligible male population or a northern county like Derry with 4%. In the latter counties, where the IRA was clearly less active, there was also a higher incidence of involvement in the Volunteers by traditionally less rebellious groups such as merchants and big farmers.[53]

Strong support among the population of course provided safe conditions for those on the run and was also important in another aspect of the struggle with the police. From early on in the struggle, the Volunteers tried to drive a wedge between the authorities and the population. In a speech by Éamon O'Dwyer on 25 November 1917 he called upon the local volunteers and population:

> That they should take no notice of the laws i.e. the laws of a political character dealing with drilling and such like, and not mind the police as no one was afraid of the police now. [...] That they should ignore the law courts and set up their own arbitration tribunals. [...] That their present policy should be to make all laws impossible. [...] That the police if they were sensible men should now throw in their lot with their fellow countrymen in their struggle for freedom and not be on the side of the enemies of their country as heretofore.[54]

Following this the Tipperary police reported increasing hostility towards them particularly during the conscription crisis in April 1918: 'General feeling towards police is one of hostility if not hatred leading to much anxiety in police stations.' Some improvement in the attitude to the police was noted after the conscription crisis, but not in all areas, and occasional attacks on policemen were reported during the rest of that year. In January 1919 the complacency which had set in among the Tipperary police was lifted following the Soloheadbeg ambush and the county inspector noted that: 'It is however impossible to ignore the fact that even in Clonmel the same principles of hostility and enmity towards the police are rampant'.[55]

In reaction to the declaration of the South Riding of Tipperary as a special military area in February 1919 (following the events at Solohead) the Tipperary brigade staff stepped up its campaign against the RIC. In a counter-proclamation it described the police as 'hirelings, assassins and traitorous spies' responsible for the deportation and sentencing of thousands of Irishmen. It warned that every policeman in the area, every person on England's payroll (magistrates, jurors, etc.) 'who helps England to rule this county' and any civilian who gives information to the police or soldiery will be deemed to have forfeited his life.[56]

In some parts of South Tipperary this attempt to ostracise the police was successful. In May 1919 the county inspector reported that the Knocklong murders were accepted 'as usual ... more particularly in those parts of Tipperary and Cashel districts peculiarly given to this form of showing hatred to constituted authority.' In September he followed this with the remark that relations between the police and the population were 'generally not unfriendly except in Tipperary and Cashel district where people are afraid to speak to a policeman.' In December 1919 he again noted that: 'In many places there is a disposition to be on friendly terms with the police except in certain areas where the young men refuse to speak to them.' This included the refusal to report crime to the police.[57] The rejection of the RIC as the

representatives of a legitimate government was eroded more quickly and more thoroughly in Tipperary and Munster as a whole than elsewhere. This is indicated by the lower recruitment figure during World War One, the success of the alternative government of the Dáil, the larger numbers of politically-inspired riots, and in the election results.[58]

The mental separation between the population and the crown forces made the shooting of policemen also more readily acceptable to the community in which the Volunteers functioned. As soon as the police were turned into enemies and outsiders it became more acceptable to attack them. This separation had been enhanced by the evacuation of outlying barracks during late 1919 and early 1920 causing a much greater physical distance between the police and much of the population. The negative effect of these evacuations was noted by the County Inspector: '[This] leaves open a large stretch of country including the notorious Rosegreen over which the police will have no control. I do not believe in this policy of abandoning such barracks.'[59] Nevertheless the IRA did not randomly shoot members of the RIC, but continued to make a distinction between those actively opposing them and those simply performing their regular police duties. In the autumn of 1920 the IRA issued an order to shoot all Black-and-Tans on sight, adding that 'constant warfare must be carried out' against specially 'obnoxious police and military'.[60] Nevertheless, an inebriated member of the Auxiliaries found drunk in Clonmel in October 1920 was still simply relieved of his weapon, but otherwise not harmed.[61]

The loss of control by the authorities over the countryside also meant that the IRA could freely exert control over the population. Even hostile elements within the population became afraid to express their opposition to the movement, which made the ability of flying columns to function much greater. The circumstances under which the flying columns were formed, which included both of the elements discussed above, were judged fairly well by the police in October 1920:

> There is no doubt that organised bands of men are working in certain areas for the exclusive object of ambushing police and military. Those bands take up those who from one cause or another are on the run. They are not entirely popular but hold the countryside in such terror that no one dare speak. In some part the relations between police and the majority of people are friendly enough in others of course it is quite different. ... Many young fellows are leaving their homes. I fear some join the flying columns which are being organised.

The potential for opposition against the Volunteers from within the population became manifest with the growth of conflict towards the end of 1920, when the county inspector reported that more information was coming freely to the police. However, following more direct action against alleged civilian spies by the IRA, which clearly showed up the inability of the RIC to protect the population, the county inspector reported that this willingness had decreased again: 'There is a marked falling off in the friendliness towards the police which was distinctly growing during last months. This is undoubtedly to be attributed to the brutal murders of civilians all over the country.'[62] In the last six months of 1920 the IRA in Tipperary killed the first two civilians, but in the first six months of 1921 they shot sixteen.[63] The growing conflict created a standoff between the IRA and RIC, in which the IRA successfully took control of the rural areas in Tipperary. In June 1921 the RIC reported that 'Our forces hold the towns and some of the villages, the IRA practically holds all the country districts.'[64]

Conclusion

The high levels of activity in Tipperary can thus be explained by the coming together of a number of developments. The existence of a strong local tradition of agitation meant that a relatively high number of potential early activists and supporters before the 1916 Rising were present, particularly in the numerous towns. A resulting willingness among the population to support opposition to the government was combined with the existence of a fairly well-established IRB organisation. The men involved in this organisation created a fairly strong and largely urban-based network of radical volunteers before 1916. A relatively large proportion of these activists were arrested and interned following the Rising, which again created a larger willingness to defy the authorities in the following years, particularly after the release of the prisoners. This strong defiance led to more confrontations with the police in Tipperary then in most other counties, which in turn led to a radicalisation among some of these activists and their associates. The presence of more policemen and concentrations of centres of opposition to republicanism in the numerous towns made this relatively likely in Tipperary.

This radicalisation and a clamp down on the Volunteers by the authorities after the conscription crisis meant that active volunteers became increasingly willing to use force to protect their personal freedom. The concurrent success of Sinn Féin and its political strategy led some activists to the conclusion that it was necessary for them to prepare for military action – with the use of force, if need be. The resulting violence is epitomised in the Soloheadbeg ambush and the Knocklong rescue. These confrontations then involved a small but growing number of other volunteers in the conflict, some of whom were forced to go on the run and join these early activists. Slowly those on the run began to come together and form groups of activists among whom the acceptability of increasingly violent action grew. This had already happened on a smaller scale to the original post-1916 activists around Seán Treacy. The presence of growing numbers of increasingly radical activists in turn led to more confrontations and a growing involvement of other volunteers, particularly after the introduction of barracks attacks in the beginning of 1920. The identity of these new activists was largely determined by their motivation, a supportive family environment, financial circumstances and probably by the extent to which leading activists became aware of their existence. The presence of a generally supportive population in the countryside was a necessity for the new flying columns to function. However, the fact that there was also a small but sizeable group of opponents in rural areas caused a further extension in the means that were deemed acceptable to employ. The shooting of alleged civilian spies and – increasingly – of individual policemen in Tipperary during 1921 was a direct result of this.

In less active areas a number of the developments described above did not take place or occurred to a much lesser extent. Areas in the east and north of the country did not have a tradition of agitation and contained much larger concentrations of political opponents of republicanism. As a result radical activists were rare before and immediately after the Rising, as witnessed by the small number of arrests in 1916 in most of these counties. Afterwards there were also fewer radicals and these encountered much more opposition and found it hard to mobilise public defiance of the police. The few that did radicalise found fewer areas of support and would be more liable for arrest. The conditions were therefore less conducive to the creation of activists and also to the functioning of flying columns. There were nevertheless activists and areas in most counties which did provide conditions in which active volunteers could function, sometimes also in flying columns.

In western areas there was also a smaller base of activists and fewer opportunities to radicalise due to the heavily agrarian nature of the area. Some activists certainly did go on the run; but they were rarely opposed by police or a hostile public, and as a result further radicalisation was slow to take place. Nevertheless, many western areas did form flying columns at a later stage under direct orders from GHQ and these were able to function fairly well due to the widespread support for republicanism. However, it is clear from the nature of their activities and the number of casualties that they were not yet so willing to shoot opponents among the crown forces and particularly among the civilian population as activists in Munster were when the Truce came.

A solid base of radical activists, a favourable mix of support and opposition among the population, a concentration of police forces in the relatively numerous towns which provided conditions which were conducive to growing confrontation and radicalisation were the elements which help explain the prominence of the Tipperary IRA in the Irish War of Independence.

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