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Killing Children: From Ireland to Palestine



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The most tragic casualty in a conflict is that of a child, the most disturbing casualty in a conflict is that of a child killed purposely. In Palestine there is a disturbingly tragic high rate of children killed by those sporting the uniform of Israeli armed forces.

On April 20th 2018 15-year-old Mohammed Ayouh was killed by Israeli forces on the Gaza Strip during protests there. The protesters armed with stones were met with live ammunition and among those who were shot at was 15 year old Mohammed. He died

when a bullet struck his head. Mohammed joins an ever lengthening list of child casualties in Palestine, children killed by brute force, stones verses bullets, kids verses soldiers.

The modern day murder of children in Palestine by Israeli forces brings to mind the history of child casualties in Ireland during the War of Independence, most notably in my own home County of Cork which bore the brunt of terror conducted by the Black and Tans, a ruthless arm of the British forces. The British authorities set up this force to suppress the Irish fight for freedom and their reign of terror included sackings of towns, raidings of homes and murder of children.

In January 1921 the Irish Republican Army carried out a successful ambush in a valley on the Cork and Kerry border in a place called Turengarriv Glen. After the ambush the Black and Tans took out their revenge by burning several homes and businesses in the nearby villages of Ballydesmond and Knocknagree. During this rampage the most despicable of their action occurred in Knocknagree when a group of children playing in a field outside the village were machine gunned by the Black and Tans.

The official report of the Knocknagree tragedy issued from British military headquarters stated that troops entering the village called on a group of “suspicious armed civilians in a field” to halt and when they refused, the troops opened fire on them. The official line from the authorities was that one young man was killed and two others injured. The young man was in fact a 14 year old boy called Michael John Kelleher while the wounded were his 9 and 11 year old friends. The only arms they carried were hurleys and the suspicious activity they were engaged in was a game of hurling.

On April 21st 1921 Patrick Goggin aged 7 was with his father in the family farmyard in Ballineen West Cork. Patrick informed his father he was going to a nearby field to count the cows and within minutes of his departure shots rang out and a blood curdling scream filled the West Cork countryside. The 7 year old boy had been shot by Black and Tans who were in a lorry which was bogged down in a nearby dirt track overlooking the field. He died days later and the Goggin family were left without an apology or a reason for young Patrick’s death.

On February 11th 1920 Black and Tans went raiding houses in the village of Clondrohid. As they hurtled towards the sleepy village in their crossly tenders, frightened locals ran in all directions. 15 year old Daniel O’Mahony was sprinting across the road to find safety when he was brought down by a bullet to the back which killed him instantly.

On the night of January 3rd 1921 Black and Tans raided homes in Derryfineen near Ballingearry in the Irish speaking area of West Cork. The occupants of one of the remote

homesteads were woken in the dead of night when Black and Tans burst in the door and turned the dwelling upside down in search of IRA arms, of which they found none. 16 year Jeremiah Casey managed to escape out the back door and made a dash into the darkness but the Black and Tans pursued the terrified youngster and shot him dead.

In the early evening of January 6th 1921 a lorry load of Black and Tans approached Kanturk in Noth Cork to carry out raids. On route they spotted a group of youths by a bridge outside the town. The youths ran when they saw the approaching lorry, knowing all too well the behaviour of those it was carrying. 15 year old John MacSweeney was shot in the back as he fled. The authorities claimed it was right shoot at the youths because they ran. This excuse was used in most cases of civilians shot by British forces in Ireland during the War of Independence.

In Cork City a 5pm curfew had been imposed and on the night of January 23rd 1921 city dwellers defied military orders and gathered on Shandon Street outside curfew hours in a show of resistance to the oppressive regime. A lorry of Black and Tans arrived from the nearby military barracks and shot into the crowd in order to disperse them. As the crowd scattered they left one body lying lifeless in the street – 10 year old Richard Morey who was shot through the heart.

On June 30th 1921 a convoy of Black and Tans were cruising through the countryside near Millstreet in North Cork when, for sheer sadistic sport, they decided to take pot shots at those working in the fields on that Summers day. 18 year old Bernard Moynihan was shot dead as he was cutting hay with his neighbours.

In times of conflict the most vulnerable are the most youngest. Today, Palestine is one of the most dangerous places to be a child. Just like what happened in Ireland during the years 1920-1921, all people are considered the enemy, all are considered targets, including those aged 18 and under. Sanity is suspended by those wearing the uniform of an occupying force and ruthless actions such as the killing of children is allowed to take place.