[Irish Times letter - unpublished]

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Sir, – Cal Hyland wrote (September 10th) of the fate of many RIC men after its disbandment in 1922. Those who did not go or stay in the north faced further danger. In the recently digitised witness statements of the Bureau of Military History I have just read one example, full of irony, that tells of a singularly divided family.

The witness, Michael V O'Donoghue, Engineer Cork 1 Brigade and 1st Northern Division, (and GAA President from 1952 to 1955) had a twin brother, James, in the RIC.

Michael attested, “His training completed, he was posted to Aughnacloy, Co. Tyrone, where he served until the R.I.C. were disbanded in 1922. I wrote back to mother and told her to warn her R.I.C. son never to write to me or never to mention that he had a brother in Cork at U.C.C. Furthermore, I wanted to hear no mention of him whatsoever in any of her letters, and I never referred to him at all. I was a bit alarmed about my own extraordinary position. Here was I now in Cork, an active member of the Irish Volunteers (now the I.R.A.), while my twin brother was in the R.I.C. Force in Ulster, and my father, an ex-sergeant, R.I.C.”

Back in the summer of 1922 with the tables turned, he relates the fate of that brother, “The local I.R.A. police had promptly arrested him and ordered him to leave Cappoquin within 24 hours under threat of death…It certainly was galling for me, an I.R.A. fighter in North and South, to dash home to see my parents and family and to find that my brother, a demobbed R.I.C. man, returned home, had been driven away as a dangerous criminal at the point of the gun by the local Republican police”.

An anti-Treatyite, O’Donoghue was no triumphalist, observing, “It was just one of the many acts of bullying end brutal tyranny indulged in at that time by petty local Republican "warriors" to show their arrogant authority and self-importance. These acts resulted in the name of I.R.A. police becoming obnoxious in many districts. In many places, the local Battalion Commandant claimed supreme authority in his area and ruled like a feudal baron.”

Once at war, there is little can be done to curb excesses at command level let alone at the periphery but this witness gives many examples of how he tried.

Jeffrey Dudgeon

The Irish Times - Monday, September 10, 2012

**Marking the end of the RIC**

Sir, – I was saddened to read Michael McArdle’s letter (September 5th). I am currently working on Document CO762 in the Kew Archives (The Irish Claims Commission files – 3,632 of them). I would guess that Mr McArdle’s grandfather fitted into one of the more common claims: ex-RIC men, returned to their homes after disbandment in 1922 to be woken-up – usually between midnight and 4 am – given 24 hours to leave the country and, in most cases, their wives and families being given an extra 48 hours to leave. A quick check on the first 300 files gives 30 ex-officers and six widows claiming. This does not include quite a number of parents, brothers and sisters who were boycotted because of their relatives’ membership. In that first 300, there was at least one pregnant wife who miscarried as a result of the treatment she got from these “heroes’. There was also the case of ex-Constable James Reilly of Tipperary (aged 64) who was exiled. His son was later warned that he had better not return as a senior member of Sinn Féin wanted his house.

Sadly for Mr McArdle, no one of that name claimed.

As to de Valera and McNeill’s statements of April 10th, 1919, surely this was the usual war-chiefs winding their soldiers up to deeds of gaiscidheacht – Brian Boru did it, famously, before Clontarf. The police in many European countries were armed at that time to protect them from Bolsheviks and other undesirable elements. – Yours, etc,

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