



The Black and Tans



By Gráinne Connolly / told by Eileen Coughlan.

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In Ireland for a number of years, the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) had been a target for the IRB and then the IRA. RIC barracks were frequently attacked and members of the RIC were murdered. Therefore, recruitment to the RIC started to be hit and miss and the RIC found it difficult to carry out its duties effectively, especially in the remote rural areas of southern Ireland. Never knowing if you were going to be the next target did a great deal to undermine morale in the RIC.

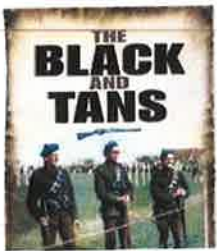
In 1919, the British government advertised for men who were willing to "face a rough and dangerous task". Many former British army soldiers had come back from Western Europe and did not find land fit for heroes. They came back to unemployment and few firms needed men whose primary skill was fighting in war. Therefore, there was plenty of ex-servicemen who were willing to reply to the government's advert. For many the sole attraction was not political or national pride - it was simply money. The men got paid ten shillings a day. They got three months training before being sent to Ireland in March 1920.



Once in Ireland, it quickly became apparent that there were not enough uniforms for all those who had joined up.

Therefore they wore a mixture of uniforms - some military, some RIC. This mixture gave them the appearance of being khaki and dark police uniform. As a result, these men got the nickname "Black and Tans", and it stuck. Some say that the nickname came from a pack of hunting hounds in Co. Limerick known as the "Black and Tans".

They raided homes and offices searching for volunteer suspects and weapons. Lorries crammed with Black and Tans drove into towns and villages shooting at random and terrorising the inhabitants. They were supported by another force known as the Auxiliaries, made up of ex-officers of the British army.



[www.historylearningsite.co.uk/Black and Tans.](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/Black%20and%20Tans)

Story 1 - Dispatches:

My nana (Eileen Coughlan) told me this story. Her mother Kate Ann O'Brien was walking to her local shop. The Black and Tans stopped her on the road and asked if she had a dispatch. (This was a note for IRA members who were hiding in safe houses. It was usually women who carried these secret messages called dispatches). She answered 'No'. The Black and Tans searched her and found nothing so they let her go.



Story 2 - Black and Tans

Eileen Coughlan also told me this story about her father Jim O'Brien. He was a small farmer and had hay in cocks in a field close to the road. He was turning the hay when he heard the Black and Tans coming down the road, walking. He decided to hide from them so that they would not ask him to help them. They did not see him. He was so frightened he thought the Black and Tans would hear his heart pounding. They didn't notice him and luckily moved on.

These two stories show the fear that ordinary country people had of the Black and Tans in Ireland.