



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

The following article from "The Belfast telegraph" makes interesting reading for anyone seeking an understanding of the evil terrorist war waged by the IRA and the brave men, much maligned, who confronted the terrorists and provided our society with security in the midst of the years of murder and mayhem.

- The Editor.

It's now time to confront the lies told for years about RUC's intrepid Special Branch

Brilliant propagandists demonised the true heroes of the Troubles, writes Ruth Dudley Edwards



The van in which eight IRA men were shot dead by the SAS outside Loughgall RUC station in 1988, an incident which is covered in Dr Matchett's new book

I've just finished reading *Secret Victory: the Intelligence War that Beat the IRA*, a fascinating book that left me very angry. Not that I haven't frequently been angry about the appalling treatment of the RUC, but Dr William Matchett's account of the exceptional contribution of Special Branch throughout "an irregular war" to saving lives, defeating the IRA and making a political settlement possible brought so much back to the forefront of my memory.

I remember particularly the brutal murders of dedicated servants of the state, their demonisation by terrorists and their apologists, and the manner in which they became the scapegoats to be sacrificed in the interests of what became known as the peace process.

Dr Matchett knows what he's writing about, having been in the RUC from 1982 and in

Special Branch from 1989 until well after the Good Friday Agreement.

He later took career breaks to work on counter-terrorism policing projects in Afghanistan, Iraq, Indonesia, Jordan and the Lebanon, before leaving the RUC in 2014 and earning a PhD from Maynooth University, on which this book is based.

Apart from his mastery of the relevant official sources, he conducted invaluable interviews with ex-colleagues.

He deals dispassionately with such controversial subjects as the inside story of the Loughgall IRA operation that ended up with eight dead terrorists and an unlucky civilian, the Supergrass fiasco, the Stalker and Stevens inquiries and the often tense relationships between Special Branch and Military Intelligence, particularly the FRU.

Special Branch operated under more stringent legal constraints even than their equivalents in the rest of the United Kingdom, and were, as Dr Matchett put it, "the world's most human rights compliant counter-insurgency."

Of 58 insurgents killed in 40 separate covert operations between 1974 and 1992, 83% had weapons or explosives and all but one was confirmed as an active member of his terrorist organisation.



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During the period when they were accused of operating a shoot-to-kill-policy, Special Branch's covert operations, even when the SAS was involved, had an arrest rate of 96%.

Dr Matchett's calculation is that Special Branch saved in the region of 16,500 lives by disrupting 85% of the IRA's operations, so it was hardly surprising that they were loathed by republicans.

He gives a great deal of credit to agents, whom he said came mostly from the ranks of those who came to hate what the organisations they had joined for idealistic reasons had turned into.

Republicans tortured and murdered anyone they suspected of being agents or informers, yet somehow managed to present themselves as victims and the police as perpetrators.

"You have to hand it to the republican movement," said a former Deputy Head of Special Branch.

"Once they realised we had them beaten on the military front they put long-term objectives in place — influencing residents' groups, victims' groups, human rights groups and whoever they believed would represent their interests."

And their mighty and ruthless propaganda machine has undoubtedly done a brilliant job.

"A multi-million pound industry emerged in which law firms, NGOs, academics and the liberal elite have prospered", says Dr Matchett, and the state concentrates on investigating itself and the people who fought for it, rather than those who sought to destroy it.

The gullible liberal left and organisations like Amnesty, who have judged the RUC as if they were operating in Tunbridge Wells, have colluded.

Too few people remember that the "armed struggle was illegal, immoral, sectarian, unlawful, unethical, and wrong."

Sinn Fein's audacious heralding of the IRA as peacemakers set the tone and we now have the peace process being sold abroad as all about dialogue and nothing about security, so the wrong lessons are being given to those trying to deal with terrorists.

Shockingly, no publisher would take on the book, so Dr Matchett published it himself.

My anger is slightly assuaged by the excellent reviews from Professor Arthur Aughey of Ulster University and Professor Michael Rainsborough, Head of War Studies at King's College London, as well 37 five-star (which means ecstatic) reviews on Amazon, where it is selling very briskly.

I'd urge everyone with an open mind to read it now and reflect on how terrorists can run rings around a liberal state if they get the rhetoric right.

Belfast Telegraph, 09/01/2017.