

"Going Beserk": "Black and Tans" in Palestine

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the British actions in Ireland several years earlier. The "Black and Tans," whose official name was the "Auxiliary Division of the Royal Irish Constabulary," were auxiliary police that the British brought to Ireland to try to squelch the Irish Rebellion in 1919 and 1920. The Irish had grown more and more critical of British rule and by 1919 many Irish were openly resisting British control. Some forms of resistance included armed struggle. In an effort to shore up their slipping police and military control, Britain enlisted men into quasi counter-insurgent squads. They consisted mostly of young British veterans from World War I who subsequently received little if any training about how to "police" a civilian population. They were called "Black and Tans" because

their uniforms consisted of black pants and

The role that former "Black and Tans" played in Palestine during the years prior to

1948 has not been adequately studied. Their

story does not begin there, but rather with

British troops advancing on Nazareth. *Source: author collection.*

tan shirts, apparently the result of making do from the remnants of various squads or brigades.¹

Not surprisingly, the "Black and Tans" used a wide variety of techniques and strategies in their attempts to squelch the Irish Rebellion. These included the following: the demolition of homes of suspected rebels or in some cases, entire villages; arrests and imprisonments without warrants, charges or trials; beatings; torture; and rape. The reports that were recieved from Ireland impacted public opinion in Britain and the United States, which in turn mounted pressure on London to withdraw from southern Ireland.² By 1922, the "Irish Free State" (today's Republic of Ireland) was established in the south and the British retreated. The "Black and Tans" were disbanded.

But where could a young former member of the "Black and Tans" hope to find work? Did some find their way to Jerusalem and other places in Palestine? If so, what roles did they play there? The first part of this essay will seek to answer these questions. In the second section, I develop these initial points in order to examine public political discourse and media in the United States and Britain concerning these former "Black and Tans." I will show how we might approach a question crucial to the representation of police actions and the Palestinian reaction to these events: namely, did public discourse and media coverage link police brutality in Palestine during the Mandate Period to the negative reputation of the "Black and Tans?"

A British Gendarmerie in Palestine

The first three years (1917-1920) of British control of Palestine were characterized by military rule. Then in 1920, the British set up a civilian government in anticipation of a Mandate for Palestine from the newly formed League of Nations. With the civilian British government came the establishment of the Palestine Police Force, consisting of 18 British officers supported by 55 Palestinian officers and 1,144 rank and file. With a total population of 639,228 in 1920 (consisting of 512,090 Muslims, 60,883 Christians, 66,102 Jews, and 153 Samaritans),³ the relatively small number of 18 British officers is striking.

Almost immediately, the role of the police force or lack thereof was called into question. During the riots of 1920, Jews accused the "lower police officials" of standing by and allowing violence to be done to them.⁴ When Herbert Samuel, the first High Commissioner for Palestine, met with his advisory council and discussed how the Palestine Police should be set up, he encountered tensions concerning the potential conflicts between the authority of District Governors and the head of the Mandatewide police. At this same meeting, it became clear that the British did not recognize the indigenous security system in villages and towns of Palestine (*ghafir* or *haras*), and that a new (British) police system was envisioned to supersede it.⁵

Although the number of British police officers grew from 18 in 1920, to 120 by 1931, this was still relatively small in comparison with the population. One might be tempted to interpret the Palestine Police of the 1920s as rather heroic for maintaining security with such a small number of officers.⁶ But the new Mandate Government was also moving toward bringing in some form of military or supernumerary units.

The idea of having a special unit of British supernumeraries worried the few Palestinian Arabs who were aware of the plan. The members of the local Palestinian Arab community who served in the early years of the Mandate period on the Advisory Council for the High Commissioner objected to the idea of British gendarmerie, questioning whether the British intended to rule Palestine as a colony or as a country under Mandate. They felt that any gendarmerie should be made up of locals, pointing out that even the language barrier would make it hard for a British gendarmerie. But their concerns went unheard.

The Mandate Government decided that the task of maintaining public security would best be accomplished by forming two gendarmerie units.⁸ Both were called Palestine Gendarmerie. One consisted of Arabs and Jews under British officers and was established in 1921. The second, established in 1922, consisted exclusively of British recruits.

The Black and Tans Arrive in Palestine

Who were the members of this second gendarmerie? Were there any former "Black and Tans" among them? Indeed, in April 1922, approximately 650 former "Black and Tans" arrived in Haifa, Palestine and commenced their duties as the British Palestine Gendarmerie. How did so many former "Black and Tans" end up in Palestine? They were not transferred there as a unit. Rather, there seems to have been a personal connection. The Inspector-General of Police and Prisons, Major-General H. H. Tudor (who also served as the General Officer Commanding), was in charge of the British military, Palestine Police, and the Palestine Gendarmerie. Coincidently, Tudor had been the Chief of Police in Ireland during the Irish Rebellion. As the "Black and Tans" were being disbanded in Ireland, enrolment sheets were being circulated. One former "Blank and Tan" who served in Palestine later claimed that before they had left Ireland, he put his "name on a list calling for volunteers for a new Force, the Palestine Gendarmerie, which the gods at Whitehall [i.e. the British] proposed to raise." So it was the case that 75 to 95 percent of the new British Palestine Gendarmerie were former members of the "Black and Tans."

The group of former "Black and Tans" deployed in Palestine were a motley crew. Among them were excommunicated priests and other former clergy, lawyers who had been debarred, a man who was arrested for murder in Mexico but had escaped, and a former medical doctor who allegedly raped a female patient after performing an abortion. In addition to formerly serving in the "Black and Tans," most of these men were also veterans of WWI, some holding high ranks and many having received medals of distinction. They drank heavily. In Palestine, they wore a distinctive uniform that included a Stetson broad-brimmed hat, reminiscent of a cowboy hat.¹²

According to their own reports, these former "Black and Tans" were brash and anxious for action. They delighted in skirmishes with bandits in the hills. Four platoons of British Gendarmerie were assigned to Nazareth. After becoming frustrated with their own accommodations there, they took over a floor of the former Russian hospice, which was used as offices for the staff of the civil governor of the Galilee. When a local Palestinian clerk resisted their take over, the Gendarmerie tossed his desk, chair, filing cabinet and him out of the second storey window. On another occasion in Nablus, one Gendarme proudly displayed, "an old cigarette-tin containing the brains of a man whose skull he had splintered with his riffle-butt (the smashed weapon was also exhibited)."

The British Gendarmerie in Palestine was short lived. In 1926, it was dissolved due to financial constraints. But did all of the former "Black and Tans" then leave Palestine? T. W. Williams reported to the *New York Times* that he had spoken with A. S. Mavrogordato, the British Deputy Inspector General in charge of the Palestine Police, who had informed him that "two hundred members of the former British constabulary, the famous 'Black and Tans,' are to be retained for any sudden uprising." Indeed, about 200 of these former "Black and Tans" joined the "British Section" of the Palestine Police. One such person was Douglas V. Duff, a former "Black and Tan" who rose to the rank of the Police Inspector for Jerusalem.

"Going Beserk": Duff and the Black and Tans at the Wailing Wall

Duff carried an Irish blackthorn baton or club (called a *shillelagh*) which he occasionally used to whack Palestinians over the head, leaving them unconscious. He carried a Colt 045 pistol on his hip and a Turkish styled whip. He generally bullied his way about, enforcing immediately and spontaneously his ideas of justice or at least whatever measure it would take to maintain order and get a job done. In combination with the standard issue Stetson, the image this man cuts is an Indiana Jones who had turned from virtue to vice. When there was an earthquake that left two "important" female tourists buried in a collapsed hotel in Jericho, he used his whip to coerce local Bedouins to dig them out. When one of the Bedouins attempted to leave before they found the bodies, Duff "hit him with a beautiful left uppercut to his bearded face and sank a right-cross to his heart." The Bedouin collapsed. Duff ordered him to be wrapped in woven-wire and whipped; the other Bedouin kept digging.¹⁷



Douglas Duff. Source: author collection.

Inspector Duff seems to have played a dubious role at the outset of the Western Wall Incident of 1928. The Wailing Wall, or Western Wall of the Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem, is sacred to both Muslims and Jews. In the 1920s, tensions mounted between Palestinian Muslims and Zionists over ownership, control, and access to the Wall. The Western Wall incident of September 1928 sparked rivalry and violence that spread across Palestine. By the end of the following year, the violence left 133 Jews and 116 Arabs dead.¹⁸

In September of 1928, just prior to the Jewish holiday of Yon Kippur, the Jews erected a screen across the alley that ran along the Wall. Inspector Duff visited the Wall area with the District Commissioner of Jerusalem, Edward Keith-Roach and exchanged words with the leader of the

Ashkenazi community, "beadle Noah Gladstone" [Rabbi Noah Baruch Glasstein], there that same evening. The Jewish leader promised to have the screen removed by the next morning, but this did not happen.¹⁹ The following day, Inspector Duff, sent a few of his local police down to remove the screen. When they returned tattered and beaten, he called for ten British officers, in battle gear, from nearby Mount Scopus. Once they arrived, Duff was pleased to find that four of the ten were his old comrades, also former "Black and Tans." They hurried down to the Wall, pushing through the crowds, and removed the screen, as Jewish women hit them with their parasols. After tearing down the screen, a Jewish man clung to it as Duff and his men pushed through the angry crowd. Duff then threw the remains of the screen down into the Tyropean Valley, along with the man who was still clinging to it.²⁰

In the days that followed the "Black and Tans" removal of the screen at the Wailing Wall, Douglas Duff became a public enemy of the Zionist Jews in Jerusalem. Zionists quickly criticized the "brutal" tactics of the British Palestine Police. One incident occurred, which Duff recorded later in his account of events, which sheds light on his bearings and psychological outlook. He and other police went to disperse a Jewish demonstration in the new part of Jerusalem. The angry crowd attacked their two trucks and forced Duff and the other police to retreat to a police outpost. Soon afterward, when the District Superintendent and a dozen troopers arrived, he ordered Duff not to show himself to the crowd. Defying these orders, Duff flung open the door and

charged outside yelling, kicking and swirling his whip. As he describes it, "Once again I experienced that strange and utterly sublime ecstasy of 'going berserk,' as my barbarian forefathers had done. I had no consciousness of what I was doing as I sprang at that crowd." The crowd dispersed as the other officers and troopers came out of the outpost. But, reminiscent of the Irish Rebellion, in the weeks that followed, three attempts of assassination were directed at Duff.²¹

"Duffing Up": Brutal Tactics from Ireland to Palestine

Duff also used various types of torture in the prisons, including water boarding and "suspension." Indeed, the slang term for torture used by other colonial police, "duffing up" seems to have been a direct reference to Duff. 22 Later, Jewish members of the Palestine Police claimed that they learned a great deal about how to torture effectively from Duff during his years in Jerusalem, particularly how to torture without leaving physical marks. While later recollections may be historically questionable, other pieces of evidence remain. By June of 1929 a criminal charge was brought against Duff. 23 But it was not until two years later that action was taken. On 22 October 1931, the Executive Council with the High Commissioner reviewed the results of a criminal court case against Duff. He was found guilty of having "counselled [sic] and procured Sergeant Ishak Ahmed Nejib," a member of the Palestine Police, to "exercise ill-treatment and to do acts which occasioned bodily distress to Farid Muhammad Sheikh Ibrahim." The High Commissioner affirmed the court's ruling and decided to dismiss Duff from public service immediately and report it to the Secretary of State. 24

Another former "Black and Tan" who had a long career in Palestine was Raymond Cafferata. Like Douglas Duff and other former "Black and Tans," Cafferata slowly rose in the ranks of the Palestine Police. By 1929, he was the district commander for Hebron. When riots broke out there in August of 1929 (after news of the disturbances at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem), he attempted to disperse rioters by firing his pistol into the crowd. As the only British member of the Palestine Police in Hebron, he was attempting to prevent what turned into the Hebron Massacre in which 64 Jews were killed. He testified that he had personally shot two Arabs, one who was about to kill a child and another who was about to stab a Jewish woman. Some criticized Cafferata for not doing enough to prevent the massacre, while others praised his valour for preventing an even bloodier massacre. From the British he received the King's medal of courage. Enough to prevent the massacre in the British he received the King's medal of courage.

Cafferata weathered the years of the Arab Revolt and despite negative reports from his commanding officer, in 1940, the High Commissioner recommended to London that he be promoted to police superintendent.²⁷ By 1943, he was a district commander and served in Haifa from 1944 until his departure from Palestine. He was accused of excessive force during searches of Ramat Hashoron (6 November 1943) and Kibbutz

Givat Chaim (25 November 1945), as well as torturing Asher Trattner, a member of the Jewish underground group Irgun, after his arrest on 16 October 1944.²⁸ The Jewish underground groups attempted to assassinate Cafferata on 15 February 1946. He narrowly escaped the TNT and accompanying bullets.²⁹

Captain John M. Rymer-Jones was Inspector General of the Palestine Police from August 1943 until March 1946. He too had a connection to the Irish Rebellion as he had served in the British Army in Ireland as they sought to squelch the rebels at all cost. Shortly after assuming the top position in the Palestine Police, he was assigned to organize a new supernumerary force, like a gendarmerie, of new recruits. The force was called the Police Mobile Force or "PMF." His right-hand-man and deputy, Michael McConnell was also a former "Black and Tan" who had served in the British Palestine Gendarmerie. As Charles Smith has described, Rymer-Jones and McConnell set up the PMF as a type of "crack unit of the police force" drawing on their experiences in Ireland.³⁰ But the PMF, most of who were young, inexperienced recruits, were undisciplined. After allegedly carrying out attacks of revenge, the PMF was disbanded.³¹

Duff, Cafferata, Rymer-Jones and McConnell were not the only veterans of the Irish Rebellion whose expertise in controlling by force led them to rise in the ranks of the Palestine Police. Indeed, by 1943, the majority of district commander positions in Palestine were filled by former "Black and Tans." They included James Kyles, James Munro, Eric James and Alfred Tennyson Barker.³² Barker received the "King's Police Medal" for "distinguished service" in late 1940.³³

Public and Media Discourse on "Black and Tans" in Palestine

On March 30th, 1922, the Jewish Telegraph Agency reported to the *New York Times* that a "new militia" had arrived in Palestine. This "first detachment" of 250 men was "made up largely of men who were demobilized from the units of the police in Ireland known as the 'Black and Tans." The article states that the "entire contingent" would eventually consist of 700 men and "will supplement the native police force." Note that the tone of this short article was matter-of-fact. There was no expression of concern that these men were notorious for their brutality while in Ireland, where they subjected the local population to the various types of violence mentioned at the beginning of this essay. This article, as the vast majority of articles that appeared in newspapers in the United States concerning Palestine during the early Mandate period, originated from the Jewish Telegraphy Agency.

In the four years that the British Palestine Gendarmerie existed (1922-1926), only two articles appeared in the New York Times that mentioned the former "Black and Tans" in Palestine. The first is the article described in the previous paragraph, written

as the Gendarmerie was forming. The second was an article published in 1926 as the Gendarmerie was disbanding. The tone was similar to the first article, mater-of-fact, as it explained that the 200 members of the "famous 'Black and Tans,' are to be retained for any sudden uprising." Interestingly, this article was entitled "Palestine Arabs Give No Trouble."³⁵ In the four years when an entire unit of former "Black and Tans" actually served in Palestine *as a group* and carried out several brash and brutal activities, the American media did not take note.

Similar to the New York Times, the Times of London ran a story on 25th February 1926, describing the disbandment of the Palestine Gendarmerie. It mentioned that it had consisted of mostly former "Black and Tans" and that some of them would stay and serve in the British section of the Palestine Police. This article lauded the work of these men, giving no hint of criticism. Indeed it praised them as a "remarkable as well as picturesque force." The subtitle of the article was "End of an Efficient Force." "36"

After the riots of 1929, the "special correspondent" for the Times of London wrote, "It is impossible to speak without pride of the work done by these men, who in twos and threes, sometimes singly, moved boldly about the city and the districts…" He went on to praise Raymond Cafferata, "the British Police Officer in Hebron… who single-handed followed up the murderers into each house and drove them out of town."³⁷

During the Arab Revolt in Palestine from 1936-1939, when the number of British police swelled and reinforcements from the Army and Royal Air Force were brought in large number, brutal tactics were employed, similar to the ones used to put down the Irish Rebellion in 1919 and 1920. These tactics included demolition of homes, or in some cases, entire villages of suspected rebels; arrests and imprisonments without warrants, charges or trials; beatings; and torture. Yet, unlike the media coverage of the Irish Rebellion with its sharp criticism of "Black and Tan" tactics, the media coverage of the situation in Palestine generally praised the British efforts and villainized the local Arab Palestinian rebels. This was the approach, not just during the riots of 1929 and the Arab Revolt (1936-1939), but throughout the Mandate Period until the early 1940s. A search through the issues of the *Times of London* and the *New York Times* from 1921 through the 1940s has revealed no public expressions of disapproval for the British Mandate Government of Palestine employing former "Blank and Tans" in the British section of the Palestine Police. Indeed, up until approximately 1939, the media generally complains that the Palestine Police were not doing enough to maintain order.

Not only did former "Black and Tans" serve in Palestine, they played a significant role in the police force, controlling most district commander positions by the early 1940s. They acted at times in brash and rough ways. They were prone to controlling the situation through force and taking decisive, often brutal action. But the media coverage of these former "Black and Tans" was mostly positive. In fact, the negative *image* of "Black and Tan tactics" or "Black and Tans" was not employed by the major

newspapers of the United States and Great Britain until the early 1940s. But starting in the early 1940s, the media began to use the *image* of the "Black and Tans" concerning events in Palestine. Why this was so will be explored by the author in his on-going work on the image of the "Black and Tans" in late Mandate Palestine.

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Endnotes

- 1 A. D. Harvey, "Who Were the Auxiliaries?" The Historical Journal 35:3 (1992), 665-669.
- 2 Many articles in major U.S. papers attest to this phenomenon. An example of both direct voice and media coverage is the front page article entitled "Lloyd George Will Hear Plea of Irish-American," that appeared in the New York Times on 22 April 1919.
- 3 "Report to the Courts concerning the Riots of 1920," WO 32/9614-0001, p. 2, British National Archive. Sections of the British National Archive will be cited as follows: WO = War Office; CO= Colonial Office; CAB=Cabinet Office; FO= Foreign Office; T = Treasury.
- 4 Report to the Courts concerning the Riots of 1920," WO 32/9614-0001, p. 20.
- Council Meeting Minutes, 7 December 1920, CO 814/6-0003, pp. 9-14.
- 6 The subject of the Palestine Police has generated a fair amount of scholarship recently. Oral histories of Jewish, Arab and British members of the force have been collected in an effort led by Eugene Rogan at St Anthony's College, Oxford. See: Eugene Rogan, "The Palestine Police Oral History Project," Council for British Research in the Levant Bulletin 2 (2007), 35-40. For a study of how the British experience in Ireland was used in Palestine, and then in turn, how British Palestine Police went on to other countries controlled by the British, see: Georgina Sinclair, "Get into a Crack Force and earn £20 a Month and all found. . . ': The Influence of the Palestine Police upon Colonial Policing 1922-1948," European Review of History-Revue europe'enne d'Histoire 13:1 (2006), 49–65. For a closer look at the Palestine Police in the 1930s as well as list of other recent scholarship, see Gad Kroizer, "From Dowbiggin to Tegart: Revolutionary Change in the Colonial

- Police in Palestine during the 1930s," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 32:2 (2004), 115–133.
- 7 Advisory Council Minutes, 18 April 1922, CO 814/6-0017, pp. 2-4.
- 8 An initial attempt to supplement police with a "Palestine Defense [sic] Forces" (made of one Jewish and one Arab battalion) was short lived. A riot broke out between Jews and Arabs between Jaffa and Tel Aviv on 1 May 1921 and Arab members of the Palestine Police reportedly openly joined in. Charles Smith, "Communal Conflict and Insurrection in Palestine, 1936-1948," in Policing and Decolonisation: Politics, Nationalism and the Police, 1917-1965, ed. David Anderson and David Killingray (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 63.
- 9 Public Notice issued by High Commissioner Samuel, 15 August 1922, CO 765-1-0048, p. 1-2.
- 10 Douglas V. Duff, *Bailing with a Teaspoon* (London: John Long, 1953), 24.
- 11 Charles Jeffries, *The Colonial Police* (London: Max Parrish, 1952), 153. Jeffries states that the British section of the gendarmerie consisted of 38 officers and 724 other ranks, "partly recruited from men who had been servicing in Ireland with the RIC and its Auxiliary Division..."
- 12 Several members of the British Section of the Palestine Police wrote personal memoirs concerning their time in Palestine. In addition to Duff (cited above), see: Colin Imray, *Policeman in Palestine* (Bideford: Edward Gaskell, 1995); Michael Lang, *One Man in his Time: the Diary of a Palestine Policeman 1946-1948* (Lewes: Book Guild: 1997); and Geoffrey Morton, *Just the Job: Some Experiences of a Colonial Policeman* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1957).

- 13 Duff, Bailing, 33.
- 14 Duff, Bailing, 46.
- 15 "Palestine Arabs Give No Trouble," New York Times, 25 April 1926.
- 16 Gad Kroizer, "From Dowbiggin to Tegart: Revolutionary Changes in the Colonial Police in Palestine during the 1930s," *Journal of Imperial* and Commonwealth History 32:2 (2004), 117.
- 17 Duff, Bailing, 153-156
- 18 Studies on the Wailing Wall disturbances of 1928-1929 include: Philip Mattar, "The role of the Mufti of Jerusalem in the Political Struggle over the Western Wall, 1928-1929," *Middle Eastern Studies* 19:1 (1983), 104-118; and Martin Kolinsky, "Premeditation in the Palestine Disturbances of August 1929?" *Middle Eastern Studies* 26:1 (1990), 18-34; and Lawrence Davidson, "Competing Responses to the 1929 Arab Uprising in Palestine: The Zionist Press versus the State Department," *Middle East Policy* 5:2 (1997), 93-112.
- 19 Duff's account submitted to the District Superintendent of Police, W. F. Wainwright, CO 733-163-4, 0001, p. 126. A similar account was submitted by a certain American named Author Raus to the Zionist Executive of Palestine with copies provided to other Zionist organizations and to the British Mandate Government. In Raus' account, the beadle had not agreed to take down the screen, but rather Keith-Roach was informing him that Duff would take the screen down the following morning. Arthur Raus to Colonel Kisch, 3 January 1929, CO 733-163-4, 0001, p. 143-145.
- 20 Duff, Bailing, 169-177. See also Tom Segev's narrative of the events in his One Palestine, Complete (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), 296-297.
- 21 Duff, Bailing, 176-178.
- 22 Drius M. Rejali, *Torture and Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 300.

- 23 Executive Council Minutes, 4 June 1929, CO 814-15-0005, p. 2.
- 24 Executive Council Minutes, 22 October 1931, CO 814-27-0003, p. 2.
- 25 Although Raymond Cafferata was a colourful character, there seems to be no serious scholarly work devoted to him exclusively. Five boxes of materials await in Middle East Centre Archive
- St Antony's College, Oxford, reference number GB165-0044.
- 26 "Palestine Presses Trials for Rioters," *New York Times*, 24 September, 1929.
- 27 Smith, "Communal Conflict," 72, 78.
- 28 Nachman Ben-Yehuda, Political Assassinations by Jews: A Rhetorical Device for Justice (New York: SUNY Press, 1993), 217-218.
- 29 Ha'aretz, 17 February 1946.
- 30 Smith, "Communal Conflict," 73.
- 31 After terrorists had blown up a police vehicle on 18 November 1946, some PMF men allegedly went on a rampage in Tel Aviv. And in the summer of 1947, a police armoured car threw a grenade into a café, killing four Jews. This was seen as retaliation for the Irgun hanging two British officers shortly prior. Smith, "Communal Conflict," 75-76.
- 32 Smith, "Communal Conflict," 83.
- 33 "King's Police and Fire Services Medal" *Times of London*, 2 January 1941.
- 34 "New Militia in Palestine," New York Times, 31 March 1922.
- 35 "Palestine Arabs Give No Trouble," *New York Times*, 25 April 1926.
- 36 "The Palestine Gendarmerie; End of an Efficient Force," *Times of London*, 25 February 1926.
- 37 "Palestine-The Outbreak and its Causes," *Times of London*, 14 September 1929.