



THE ROYAL ULSTER CONSTABULARY CHIEF

"A worldwide expose of RUC Chief Ronnie Flanagan has infuriated the force's public relation officers, who are tasked with revamping the RUC's tarnished image abroad.

Compiled by Derry's Pat Finucane Centre, a human rights organization, and published on the internet, the profile traces the RUC Chief's rise through the ranks, identifying Flanagan's specific role within wider controversies such as shoot-to-kill orders, ill-treatment of detainees, recruitment of informers, cover-ups and most recently Garvaghy Road.

Allegations which link the RUC Chief with shoot-to-kill operations in the early 1980s have already been hotly refuted by a British newspaper but reports carried by the Sunday Times that Flanagan may sue for libel, have left the Pat Finucane Centre "unperturbed."

According to legal experts, an international libel action involving the internet would be extremely problematic and it is highly unlikely that the RUC Chief will pursue an action for libel.

A spokesperson for the Centre said the group would willingly change any proven factual inaccuracies within the profile but for the moment at least the document remains unchanged and on site. The Pat Finucane Centre pages can be accessed [here](#)"

The above was taken and abbreviated from an RM Distribution emailing. The actual website report appears below (with permission) should British authorities decide to remove it from the Pat Finucane Centre's website. We also have added a bonus. Ronnie himself! --webmaster

**NEW!!! NEW!!! The man himself!!! RONNIE FLANAGAN
Click on the camera!**

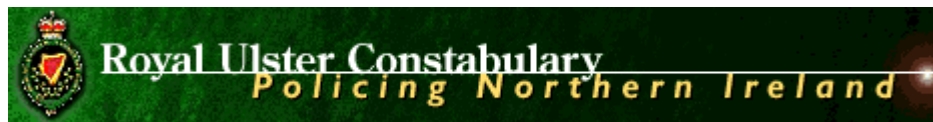


The avi comes from the website of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the military force in the six counties.

Fact File



Ronnie Flanagan: The RUC Chief Constable



On 4 November 1996 Ronnie Flanagan took up his post as Chief Constable (CC) of the RUC, one of the most powerful posts occupied by an unelected official in either Ireland or the United Kingdom. Events during his first year as Chief Constable could not be said to have brought Ronnie Flanagan any closer to his declared priority of building relationships with the nationalist community. However in an interview with the Belfast Telegraph shortly before taking up his appointment he asked that people "not judge the police on one event in one set of very traumatic circumstances, [Drumcree 1996] but... take a much longer, measured view of the service that the RUC provides on a daily basis." (31.10.1996) One year on the Pat Finucane Centre wishes to provide a "longer, measured view of the service" provided by the Chief Constable, Ronnie Flanagan.

Born: 25 March 1949 in the Oldpark area of North Belfast, then a predominantly Protestant working class area.

Religion: Protestant, attending Donegall St Congregational Church.

Education: Finiston Primary School, Belfast High School, Queens University and University of Ulster.

Martial Status: Married in 1970 and lives with his family in North Down. His personal security was compromised when Orangemen picketed his home during the 1996 Drumcree stand-off. One of his three sons is also in the RUC.

Employment: In 1970 Ronnie Flanagan joined the RUC while still at Queen's University where he was studying physics. On the advice of the RUC he switched his degree to psychology and was initially stationed at Queen St RUC barracks during university vacations.

Recommendations concerning recruitment in the Hunt Report encouraged recruits to continue third level education. As a teenager Flanagan had already expressed a wish to join the RUC after leaving Belfast High School but was encouraged by his parents to go to university. The new recruit spent his first night on duty guarding the Royal Navy recruiting office in Belfast which had been bombed earlier that day.

1970 was a significant year to join the RUC. The 21 year old was keen to join an organisation which had been completely discredited in the view of nationalists and damned by the Scarman Tribunal and the Hunt Report. Events in Derry and the Belfast pogroms of the summer of 1969 were contemporary issues not distant memory. A Scotland Yard detective charged with investigating the death of Samuel Devenney in April 1969 in Derry had met a 'conspiracy of silence' within the RUC. Easter 1970 had seen serious rioting between the British Army and nationalist youths in Belfast following an Orange parade on the Springfield Rd. In July the Lower Falls area was put under curfew. Relationships between the nationalist community and the British Army/RUC were in rapid decline.

Some would argue that 1970 was the year when the Hunt Report encouraged many to believe, wrongly as it turned out, that the RUC could be reformed. In addition the RUC represents a natural career option for young Protestant males. According to the journalist and former Police Authority member Chris Ryder Ronnie Flanagan said that the "police seemed to me a very attractive vehicle to be of some service, to make a contribution to the well-being of the community." (1) However Flanagan is not prepared to publicly criticise the RUC of those times. An insight was offered into his view of the early history of the troubles when, in an 1995 RTE interview, he denied the interviewer's suggestion that there had been 'collusion' between the RUC and loyalist attackers at Burntollet Bridge during the January 1969 People's Democracy march.(2)

1971: Following the introduction of internment in August he was transferred to CID as a relief detective. The psychology degree was shelved though he was later to graduate from the University of Ulster with an HNC in Police Studies and a BA and Masters in Public Sector Studies.

1973: Following promotion to Station Sergeant he was moved to Castlereagh RUC Barracks. Chris Ryder describes Castlereagh as 'busy' during this period. In 1972 Castlereagh was one of two centres given the specific responsibility for interrogating suspects. Reports soon emerged of systematic abuse of those held at the East Belfast 'holding centre'. A former member of the RUC Special Patrol Group commented on a typical reaction to Castlereagh: "It had a grim reputation. Suspects would be held there in windowless cubes for up to a week. They might be denied sleep, stripped, beaten or humiliated. No one wanted to be taken to Castlereagh." (3) Eventually this led to responsibility for interrogations being transferred from Special Branch to the CID in the mid 1970s. However with the end of internment the RUC came to rely heavily on confessions in order to secure convictions. The interrogation centres were to take on an even more important role.

1976: Promotion to Inspector was followed by transfer to the RUC barracks in the Waterside area of Derry and from there to the Personnel Department at RUC HQ in Belfast.

1978: With the policy of 'Ulsterisation', the transfer of responsibility from the British Army to the RUC, now in full swing, Ronnie Flanagan returned to Castlereagh as Duty Inspector in charge of the interrogation centre. That same year Amnesty International published a serious indictment of Castlereagh and other interrogation centres where "ill-treatment, by plain clothes detectives, of suspects had occurred with sufficient frequency to warrant a public inquiry."(4)

Amnesty's findings related to cases prior to 1978, that is before Ronnie Flanagan took over as Duty Inspector. Soon after publication of the report the British Government set up the Bennett Committee of Inquiry into Police Interrogation Procedures in Northern Ireland. (5) The limits imposed on the Inquiry were severely criticised by Amnesty. Individual cases could not be investigated for example. Nevertheless the report found that there was clear evidence of injuries sustained during interrogation which could not have been 'self-inflicted' and recommended the introduction of strict internal controls. Just before publication of the Bennett Report in the spring of 1979 Dr. Robert Irwin, a RUC Surgeon with responsibility for interrogation centres, gave an interview to London Weekend Television. In it he revealed that he had seen roughly 150/160 prisoners with various injuries which could not have been self-inflicted. These revelations were supported by another RUC surgeon, Dr Dennis Elliot, and the Association of Police Surgeons.

Significantly Dr Irwin's testimony related to a three year period including 1978 when Ronnie Flanagan was Duty Inspector in charge of Castlereagh. The findings of the Bennett Report into 'present conditions' at the interrogation centres also relate to the period when Ronnie

Flanagan was in charge. The key role of the Duty Inspector (DI) is underlined in the Report. The "actual business of supervising interviews falls largely to the inspector on duty." (para.112) Permission for interrogations to begin or be continued after midnight was the responsibility of the DI. The importance of the role is underlined by the requirement that the DI must return to the interrogation centre before overnight interrogations could even be permitted. (para. 97). Standing Orders for Castlereagh made clear that any "untoward incident", including allegations of ill treatment, were to be reported to the Duty Inspector. (para.120) Officers in charge had the clear responsibility to ensure that "breaches of the regulations are not committed." (para.121) The decision on whether or not a suspect may consult a solicitor rested also with the Duty Inspector. (para.122)

Many 'untoward incidents' occurred while Ronnie Flanagan was in charge of Castlereagh.(6) Following a public uproar a number of prosecutions of RUC officers were attempted but no RUC officer was ever found guilty. Shortly after publication of the Bennett Report, Flanagan was required to implement its recommendations. He was subsequently transferred.

1981: As the Hunger Strikes focused world attention on the North Ronnie Flanagan moved to North Belfast in his new position as Detective Inspector with Special Branch. He soon became Detective Chief Inspector in command of the Headquarters Mobile Support Units or HMSUs. (7) These units were involved in a number of controversial shoot-to-kill incidents in the early 1980s soon after he took over command.

According to Amnesty International: "although the circumstances of many killings were disputed before 1982, three consecutive incidents in November and December 1982 sparked off widespread public concern that the security forces had a policy of deliberately killing alleged members of Republican groups. Six unarmed people were killed in the three incidents. The undercover anti-terrorist units of the RUC involved in the three incidents late in 1982 were HMSUs. Established as special paramilitary units to provide a rapid, aggressive response to terrorist threats, the existence of the units was first publicly revealed in the trial of an RUC constable charged with the murder of Seamus Grew. Deputy Chief Constable Michael McAtamney informed the court that the units' members were trained to operate and fire in any conceivable situation, that they were trained in 'firepower, speed and aggression', and they were trained to put people 'permanently out of action' rather than to injure them. They were equipped with rapid-fire weapons which are not standard police issue.

"The units operated under the control of the Special Branch of the RUC. The Special Branch is responsible for obtaining, analysing and acting upon information about terrorist groups. With the military intelligence services and the United Kingdom Government's Security Service (MI5), it performs an intelligence-gathering role. The recruitment and handling of informers is central to its work. Within the Special Branch there are a number of specialist squads, uniformed and plain clothed, which act on information supplied by informers.

"The HMSUs, each consisting of about 24 men, are reportedly trained by the Special Air Services (SAS) regiment of the British Army. The chain of command of the HMSUs consists of a Special Branch Inspector, a Special Branch Superintendent, and the RUC Assistant Chief Constable, who is head of the Special Branch. Each unit contains smaller groups of three or four men who operate in unmarked cars."(8)

By the end of 1982 six men had been shot dead. While the British Government denied the existence of a 'shoot-to-kill' policy, unionist politicians welcomed the existence of just such a policy.

As had so often been the case in disputed killings one injustice led to the next. The cover-up began immediately at the highest level. John Stalker, a senior officer in the Greater

Manchester Police, was sent over to investigate the 'shoot-to-kill' incidents. When it became clear that his report would expose serious and criminal wrong-doing by members of the security forces, Stalker himself became the victim of what many believe was a 'dirty tricks' campaign and was taken off the case.⁽⁹⁾ He had concluded that Special Branch had played a central role in directing operations both before and after two of the three incidents he was investigating. ⁽¹⁰⁾

"A clear message emerged: that Special Branch officers planned, directed and effectively controlled the official accounts given. The Special Branch targeted the suspected terrorist, they briefed the officers, and after the shootings they removed the men, cars and guns for a private debriefing before CID officers were allowed any access to these crucial matters. They provided the cover stories, and they decided at what point the CID were allowed to commence the official investigation of what had occurred. Most CID officers we saw seemed resigned to the supremacy of the Special Branch." ⁽¹¹⁾

Special Branch officers "planned, directed and effectively controlled" the operations. These remain serious accusations. Unarmed men were shot dead. Stories were concocted. A conspiracy to murder was compounded by a further conspiracy to pervert the course of justice. Special Branch within the HMSUs not only co-ordinated the shootings but also the subsequent cover up. According to Chris Ryder Ronnie Flanagan was the Special Branch "detective chief inspector in command of the Headquarters Mobile Support Units, the elite anti-terrorist units who carried out some of the most difficult and dangerous work against the killers and bombers." ⁽¹²⁾

1987: Promoted to Detective Superintendent. Took over Special Branch command of the Tasking and Co-ordinating Group (South Region) in Gough Barracks in Armagh which "directed police and soldiers in the undercover war along the border from south Down to west Fermanagh." ⁽¹³⁾ The first Tasking and Co-ordinating Group (TCG) was created in 1978 and operated from Castlereagh (coinciding with Ronnie Flanagan's time there as Duty Inspector). Following the shoot-to-kill controversies TCGs were essentially tasked with taking over where RUC units (HMSUs) had failed. The latter, according to the security services, had handled the cover-up badly. In the wake of the killings there was agreement that the Special Branch should co-ordinate intelligence and surveillance but that actual ambushes should be carried out by British Army units. Both were integrated into TCGs. According to Mark Urban: "TCGs attained a critical role in what security chiefs called 'executive action', locking together intelligence from informers with the surveillance and ambushing activities of undercover units. The Army's TCG Liaison Officer (TCGLO), a captain or major, is almost always a veteran of an SAS or 14 Intelligence Company tour in Ulster, whose duty is to act as a go between and advise senior (RUC) detectives on the Army's capabilities." ⁽¹⁴⁾

The TCGs essentially called the shots while the SAS fired them in an increasingly dirty war. South Region Tasking and Co-ordinating Group based at Gough Barracks for example was the hidden hand behind the Loughgall ambush of eight IRA men and a civilian in May 1987. While the actual military operation was carried out by the SAS the planning and co-ordination was the responsibility of the TCG. It is no exaggeration to state that no covert or undercover operation was possible in the area without the TCG playing a key role. At anyone time TCG (South Region) had upto eight covert operations underway.

1988: Ronnie Flanagan was awarded a diploma following a course at the FBI Academy. Later Ronnie Flanagan also lectured the FBI on intelligence and resource management and instructed the Philippines Government following the collapse of the Marcos dictatorship.

1989: Transferred back to Belfast HQ to run the Special Branch operations department which co-ordinated surveillance and intelligence throughout the North. The department was also

responsible for monitoring outside of the North which implies liaison with similar bodies and/or actual intelligence gathering by the RUC Special Branch in other jurisdictions. Flanagan also attended Bramshill Police Staff College for three months during the summer in order to qualify for promotion to Chief Superintendent.

1990: At 40 becomes one of the youngest Chief Superintendents in the RUC. He returned to Bramshill soon after to run the actual course that he had taken.

1991: Following a further six month Senior Command Course Flanagan was appointed Assistant Chief Constable in command of the Complaints and Discipline Branch. Complaints and Discipline has a significant record of 'non-achievement' within the RUC. Even where courts of law have paid out thousands of pounds in compensation claims against RUC officers, no successful prosecutions have been taken by Complaints and Discipline.

1992: Given command of the RUC in the Greater Belfast area and increasingly assumes the role of media spokesman for the RUC.

1994: Returned to take over command of the Special Branch following the Chinook helicopter crash on the Mull of Kintyre in which senior Special Branch, MI5 and British Military Intelligence men are killed. The man who Flanagan replaced, the head of Special Branch, Brian Fitzsimmons, is believed to have withheld knowledge of the planned loyalist murder of Belfast solicitor Pat Finucane. August 1994 saw the declaration of an IRA's ceasefire.

1995: Ronnie Flanagan headed the Fundamental Review of Policing whose brief was to define the nature and levels of 'future policing needs' and to quantify the organisation and structures needed to deliver it. The review took place against an increasing background of calls from nationalist representatives for root and branch changes in the nature of policing leading to a representative police service in the North.

In the summer of 1995 a stand-off developed between Orangemen and residents of the nationalist Garvaghy Rd in Portadown over the route of an Orange march. This is sometimes referred to as "Drumcree 1". Flanagan became directly involved in the dispute. The Mediation Network for Northern Ireland was invited to help resolve the controversy. The mediators eventually brokered a compromise which involved residents allowing a token parade down the Garvaghy Road following a personal assurance from the then Deputy Chief Constable Ronnie Flanagan that no parade would be allowed the following year (1996) without the permission of residents.

1996: Ronnie Flanagan awarded an OBE in the new years honours list. In February the IRA ceasefire ended with a massive bomb in Canary Wharf in London.

Despite the assurance made the previous year to Garvaghy residents and the Mediation Network a parade was forced down the Garvaghy Rd in the summer of 1996 leading to serious street disturbances throughout the North (Drumcree 2). The parade had originally been stopped by the RUC but the decision was reversed in the face of loyalist violence and a de facto mutiny in the ranks of the RUC. Unionists blamed Ronnie Flanagan for the original decision to stop the parade while nationalists were incensed at the reversal of the decision. The Mediation Network took the unprecedented step of publishing a long statement in the newspapers testifying to the assurances which Ronnie Flanagan now claims had never been given.⁽¹⁵⁾ The dispute over parades led to three long summers of violence, alienation and even death. Also in the summer of 1996 Flanagan personally ordered a 24 hour curfew of the largely nationalist Lower Ormeau area of Belfast in order to force through an Orange parade. In an interview with the *Belfast Telegraph* Flanagan states, "The truth has to be acknowledged that our relationship with the community at large was damaged by the events of the

summer." (31/10/96)

On November 4 Ronnie Flanagan took over as Chief Constable. In two years he had moved from acting deputy Chief Constable to deputy and then Chief Constable. Within the RUC itself the appointment came as no surprise and was broadly welcomed. The previous incumbent, Hugh Annesley, was deeply unpopular and was seen as an outsider imposed on the force. Annesley was dismissed by the RUC rank and file as the "Chinese Chief" or "Hugh Who?". Flanagan on the other hand is seen as 'one of their own', having risen up through the ranks and, more importantly to an organisation bereft of media friendly spokesmen, has shown himself well capable of presenting the new image of the RUC which the Northern Ireland Office regards as important. (That new image involved frequent interviews in civilian clothes with the inevitable implication that an RUC uniform was a negative image.) When his appointment was first announced in August the *Irish News* editorialised that "it would be churlish not to congratulate" the incoming CC but added that "everyone in Northern Ireland carries a certain amount of baggage with them, and Mr Flanagan is no different. He cannot escape responsibility for his own part in recent controversial policing decisions," ie Drumcree 1 and 2 (31.8.1996). An *Irish News* profile quoted an earlier editorial on Flanagan which argued that "...the RUC needs more than a good spin-doctor, if it is to earn the trust and confidence of the whole community." (29.8.1996) The skills of the "good communication" were demonstrated in words of praise from Unionists and SDLP spokespersons alike, though the latter stressed that "Drumcree was a sharp traumatic turning point and most who had been prepared to give the RUC a chance now believe it cannot evolve into a professional police force."[\(16\)](#)

1997: With no resolution of the parades crisis in sight the RUC was determined to learn from mistakes made the previous summer. The new Secretary of State, Dr Mo Mowlam, though she met both local residents groups and the Orange Order, knew that no important decision about Drumcree and other contentious parades could be made independently of or contrary to the advice of the Chief Constable. Flanagan was determined to avoid another damaging confrontation with Orangemen, including those within the ranks of the RUC. (Research by the Pat Finucane Centre suggests that upto 13% of all RUC members belong to the Orange Order [\(17\)](#)). That had been the first mistake made the previous year. The second was to allow television pictures of the brutal removal of residents from the Garvaghy Rd in broad daylight. In the early hours of 6 July waiting journalists were diverted from the Garvaghy Rd to an area close to Drumcree church. With much of the media sold a dummy, the RUC were able to move into the Garvaghy Road in order to clear the road of its residents and to confine them in certain well-defined areas. The entire area was sealed off in a well planned military-style operation. RUC members in balaclavas (without numbers) proceeded to physically assault and to drag demonstrators from the road, with extensive use of batons, fists, boots as well as ongoing sexist and sectarian verbal abuse. The decision itself, and the implementation of that decision, was primarily the responsibility of the RUC Chief Constable.

Ronnie Flanagan is undoubtedly an intelligent, talented and communicative individual. Many have found him to be genial and friendly. His rapid rise in the ranks of the RUC are testimony to certain skills. His admission that he had left the Free Masons, a semi-secret organisation which is widely perceived to have influence inside all UK police forces, because, as he put it, "there may be a perception people have that it might place me [in a compromising position]" was a shrewd move.[\(18\)](#) . Flanagan however avoids dealing with the much more significant issue of those members of the RUC who belong to sectarian and political organisations such as the Loyal Orders.

However, recently, two important groups who met with the Chief Constable have voiced criticism of him. In August 1997 Flanagan met with Congressman Chris Smith, chair of the Human Rights Sub-committee of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the US Congress.

Congressman Smith spoke of the meeting with the Chief Constable during hearings of the Subcommittee in October. He wondered aloud how the Chief Constable would treat an unemployed nationalist given the contempt with which he had treated a US congressman. He added that this was a Chief Constable "in denial". A July meeting with a high level Canadian delegation including MPs and the former Canadian Attorney General, Warren Allmond, ended with Flanagan accusing the former most senior law officer in Canada and the parliamentarians, of being less than honest with the truth. They had, in their view, witnessed human rights abuses by his men on the Garvaghy Rd. Not so according to the Chief Constable, who clearly inferred that they were the liars. Other international human rights observers have related how the former rugby hooker has a tendency to "badmouth" human rights groups with anecdotal comments designed to discredit them.

- (1) Chris Ryder (1997), *The RUC 1922-1997*, p.473
- (2) Transcript of RTE interview with Sean O'Meoloid, Policing in Northern Ireland, 9.3.1995, p.7
- (3) Mark Urban (1992), *Big Boy's Rules*, Faber
- (4) Amnesty International, *The Protection of Human Rights in Northern Ireland*, (AI index: Eur 45/01/85) para 4.5
- (5) Cmnd.7497, March 1979
- (6) IBID, para.163 (By 1978 complaints in general against the RUC had risen from 1388 in 1975 to 2331 by 1978 (Bennett, Appendix 2)
- (7) Chris Ryder (1997), *The RUC 1922-1997*, p.473
- (8) Amnesty International, *Northern Ireland Killings by Security Forces and "Supergrass Trials"* AI index: EUR 45/08/88, pp17-18
- (9) There is a long precedent for such dirty tricks. Dr Irwin, the RUC surgeon who exposed brutality in the interrogation centres also fell victim to a smear campaign run by the security services.
- (10) Incident 1 refers to the murders of Gervaise Mc Kerr, Sean Burns and Eugene Toman on 11.11.82. Incident 2 refers to the murders of Seamus Grew and Roddy Carroll near Armagh on 12.12.82
- (11) John Stalker, *Stalker*, (p.28)
- (12) Chris Ryder (1997), *The RUC 1922-1997*, p.473
- (13) Chris Ryder (1997), *The RUC 1922-1997*, p.473
- (14) Mark Urban (1992) *Big Boy's Rules*, Faber (p.95)
- (15) *Irish News*, 13.7.1996
- (16) *Sunday Business Post*, 10.11.1996
- (17) Pat Finucane Centre (1997), *For God and Ulster: an alternative guide to the Loyal Orders*, PFC (p41-12)
- (18) *Irish News*, 4.11.1996

[HOMEPAGE](#) || [SITE MAP](#)

This page hosted by  Get your own Free Home Page