Contemporary European History (2023), **32**, 587–603
doi:10.1017/S0960777322000790

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

ARTICLE

'I Have Lost a Lot by Fighting for My Country': Reckoning with the Irish Revolution

Anne Dolan

Department of History, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland
adolan@tcd.ie

Taking the lives of seven men with one act of violence in common, this article explores how the history of a whole life might reframe our sense of the 'soldiers' tale'. If violence stops being the only experience we seek, if, rather than isolated and sought out, it gets left in the muddle of getting older, of getting by, do we come closer to the marks that violence made, or begin to see them in the context of all the other things that shape a life? Do we find something of the perspective that those who lived with killing tried to put it in? Rather than see their lives through the prism of one episode of conflict, which is the position so many histories of killing begin from, this article proposes instead a history of seven individuals, who just happened to have been party to the killing of two men.

In 1924 the government of the new Irish Free State legislated for a military service pension scheme for those who could prove 'active service' in the recent fight for Irish independence from Britain (1916–21).[1] The scheme included those who took the pro-treaty side, the winners, in the subsequent civil war (1922–3).[2] When the losing side came to power in 1932, they extended the scheme to include their supporters, and the pension net continued to widen in the decades that followed as different forms of service, different consequences of conflict were acknowledged.[3] Based on the pension scheme devised in Britain for veterans of the First World War and little different in spirit and purpose to countless other post-conflict pension schemes that sought to compensate but also calm and control combatants in the wake of their wars, the Irish military service pension scheme received more than

[1] Although the Irish Free State government introduced an Army Pensions Act in 1923, the first Military Service Pension Act was enacted in 1924. Applicants had to prove they had done 'active service' during either the Easter Rising, the week commencing 23 Apr. 1916, the War of Independence from Jan. 1919 to July 1921, or through the Civil War from 1922–3. 'Active service' was defined as membership of specified organisations, carrying out orders in that organisation, or taking part in 'acts of war' as a member of that organisation. The War of Independence was a guerrilla war fought between Irish republicans and British crown forces. Conflict ended with a truce in July 1921, and after a period of negotiation in London a treaty was signed which effectively established the Irish Free State as a dominion within the British Commonwealth. The period is frequently referred to as the Irish revolution. There were 504 fatalities during the Easter Rising and 2,346 fatalities in the period from 1917 to 31 Dec. 1921. For further details see Charles Townshend, *The Republic: The Fight for Irish Independence* (London: Allen Lane, 2013); Eunan O'Halpin and Daithí Ó Corráin, *The Dead of the Irish Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020).

[2] A civil war was fought from June 1922 to May 1923 between those in favour of and those opposed to the treaty signed with Britain in Dec. 1921. The pro-treaty side won the civil war. The number of fatalities is still unknown. Estimates range from 1,500 to 5,000. See Michael Hopkinson, *Green Against Green: The Irish Civil War* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1988); Diarmaid Ferriter, *Between Two Hells: The Irish Civil War* (London: Profile Books, 2022).

[3] The majority of those who took the anti-treaty side re-formed politically as Fianna Fáil and came to power in 1932. The Fianna Fáil government extended the pension system to include those who fought on the anti-treaty side in the civil war with another pension act in 1934. A further act followed in 1949.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000790 Published online by Cambridge University Press

80,000 applications, 18,186 of which were successful.[4] The release of the military service pension archive, which began in 2014, remains an ongoing process.[5]

An administrative system created to adjudicate on claims and provide pensions to those deemed worthy has left behind a paper trail of unintended consequences. Maybe because they were more likely to need the money, this collection of applications has become one of the few places to find the foot-soldiers of the revolution, the anonymous ones who returned to obscurity, who made neither name nor fortune for themselves from what they had done. This interaction of the individual with the bureaucracy of the new state not only captures those unknown individuals, but it bequeaths, particularly in the case of the successful applicants, decades of paper documenting lives and families otherwise unfound. Across a lifetime of forms and receipts and correspondence administering small sums, veterans recorded their own evolving relationship with their past and did so all the while as their lives changed according to predicable patterns, as they went from son to husband to father, as they enjoyed prosperity and endured penury, as youth faded and settled for old age. These files stay the course of a whole life.

A close reading of such sources, in the Irish case, as in any other analogous case study of comparable sources in other post-conflict contexts, could easily pinpoint the toll violence took on those who perpetrated it. Because it was in the interest of applicants to pin their problems to their 'active service', to seek compensation for their hardships and their injuries, to demonstrate what they had done as much as what had been done to them, these sources lend themselves readily to a reading that foregrounds an act of violence and reads through the ruins of a life for its effects. This article suggests, because of what these pension applications capture, a slightly different approach, one that does not isolate the violence out but leaves it in the midst of all the other experiences that went towards shaping a life.

Because pension files of this nature come overwhelming in their thousands, this article examines one group of men with one act of violence in common in order to test this alternative approach. Bloody Sunday, 21 November 1920, was one of the most violent individual days in the Irish revolution, and it is also one of the examples of killing in an Irish context that has been analysed in terms of the nature of its violence and the effects it had on those who took part.[6] Because of this there is scope to see how these newly available sources might suggest alternative modes of approach that combine elements of the history of emotions, the history of gender, but most of all situates the experience of violence within the telling of a whole life. It is an Irish case study to test a wider approach.

Reading violence as the root cause of discernible effects has led to a concentration on those most damaged or perhaps more vocal or accessible in the sources, making it harder to heed the silent or the reticent, those who seemed to absorb their acts of violence privately, quietly into their later lives. Those who are often easiest to find in the records because of their suffering become a cohort onto themselves, set further apart than they should be from those who stood alongside them and took part in the same acts. By looking at a group of men who were party to the same killing, this article attempts to capture the variety of reactions to the same act, and to pose questions of whose testimony has tended to be heard and why. Certain sources affect the researcher and the reader more than others; the desperate, the broken, the angry move us in ways the taciturn do not. How the history of violence and its

[4] These numbers do not include applications for medals (68,896 were awarded), dependence allowances or disability pensions. If a pension recipient committed a crime and was sentenced to a period of imprisonment for any term longer than three months, the pension was deemed forfeit under the 1924 legislation. For further details on the pension system see Marie Coleman, 'Military Service Pensions and the Recognition and Reintegration of Guerrilla Fighters after the Irish Revolution', *Historical Research*, 91, 253 (Aug. 2018); Marie Coleman, 'Military Service Pensions for Veterans of the Irish Revolution, 1916–1923', *War in History*, 20, 2 (2013).

[5] See https://www.militaryarchives.ie/en/collections/online-collections/military-service-pensions-collection-1916-1923.

[6] See O'Halpin and Ó Corráin, *The Dead of the Irish Revolution*, 222–7, 252; Anne Dolan, 'Killing and Bloody Sunday, Nov. 1920', *The Historical Journal*, 49, 3 (Sept. 2006); Jane Leonard, '"English Dogs" or "Poor Devils"? The Dead of Bloody Sunday Morning', and Eunan O'Halpin, 'Counting Terror: Bloody Sunday and the Dead of the Irish Revolution', in David Fitzpatrick, ed., *Terror in Ireland 1916–1923* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2012).

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perpetration has been shaped by the effects of the sources on the historians of violence is something that is larger than the scope of this article, but by bringing a cohort of men who committed one act of violence back together, by hearing the words of the troubled alongside the greedy, the self-important and the aloof, this article might contribute to what should be a wider debate about why some voices from the past are always more likely to be heard.

Because their files capture the administration of their pensions over sometimes long lifetimes, the history of seven men with one act of violence in common can be written.[7] The point of such a history may not seem as obvious or as important as a history of the killings themselves. But this shift in perspective is suggested to see if there is more to be understood about the history of killing than the usual approaches seem to allow. Whether or not perpetrators of violence have been brutalised by their wars, victimised by what was asked of them, whether they took pleasure in killing, has prompted decades of rich analysis about the costs of war for those who fought.[8] How veterans told the 'soldiers' tale', their choice of words, their use of euphemisms, when they chose to be silent and when to speak, have raised critical questions about who has been listened to and how historians of violence have chosen to hear.[9] That so many have been so willing to find trauma in veterans' accounts also raises the question of what the historian brings to bear. Nigel Hunt argues that 'we have now almost reached the stage where we expect people to break down' in response to an act such as killing, 'and there is something wrong if they do not'.[10] That many historians have neither the clinical training nor access to the types of records needed to so liberally diagnose has not stopped trauma becoming 'common parlance, perhaps too common', and has led Graham Dawson and others to question the usefulness of trauma as a means of analysis, so ubiquitous and sweeping has the word become.[11] But in so many of these methodologies, whether in decoding the words used to describe it, measuring its capacity to cause pleasure,

[7] List of names based on information from James Bird, no date, Dublin Brigade (General Activities), Military Archives of Ireland (MAI), MA/MSPC/A/85/29. P. Brennan was the eighth man named by James Bird's list but a military service pension application for him has not been found. His application may become available in a future release of the collection.

[8] For example, Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); George L. Mosse, 'Two World Wars and the Myth of the War Experience', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 21, 4 (Oct. 1986); Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: Bodley Head, 1990); Paul Addison and Angus Calder, eds., *Time to Kill: The Soldier's Experience of War in the West, 1939–1945* (London: Pimlico, 1997); Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (London: Granta Books, 1999); Ben Shepard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 2001); Howard G. Brown, *Mass Violence and the Self: From the French Wars of Religion to the Paris Commune* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018).

[9] For example, Samuel Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (London: Pimlico, 1998); Antoine Prost, *In the Wake of War: 'Les Anciens Combattants' and French Society, 1914–1939*, trans. Helen McPhail (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1992); Efrat Ben-Ze'ev and Edna Lomsky-Feder, 'The Canonical Generation: Trapped Between Personal and Narrative Memories', *Sociology*, 43, 6 (Dec. 2009).

[10] Nigel Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 123.

[11] Brown, *Mass Violence and the Self*, 14; C.F. Alford describes trauma as the 'diagnosis du jour' in C. Fred. Alford, *Trauma, Culture, PTSD* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1; Graham Dawson, 'The Meaning of "Moving On": From Trauma to the History and Memory of Emotions in "Post-Conflict" Northern Ireland', *Irish University Review*, 47, 1 (May 2017); Svenja Goltermann refers to the 'trauma industry' in 'On Silence, Madness, and Lassitude: Negotiating the Past in Post-War West Germany', in Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, Ruth Ginio and Jay Winter, eds., *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 112. Questions are asked of the transhistorical nature of trauma in Garthine Walker, 'Rereading Rape and Sexual Violence in Early Modern England', *Gender and History*, 10, 1 (Apr. 1998); Richard J. McNally, 'Is PTSD a Transhistorical Phenomenon?', in Deron E. Hinton and Byron J. Good, eds., *Culture and PTSD: Trauma in Global and Historical Perspective* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). For trauma in an Irish revolutionary context see Brendan Kelly, *Hearing Voices: The History of Psychiatry in Ireland* (Newbridge: Irish Academic Press, 2016); Ian Miller, 'Pain, Trauma, and Memory in the Irish War of Independence: Remembering and Contextualising Irish Suffering', in Fionnuala Dillane, Naomi McAreavey and Emilie Pine, eds., *The Body in Pain in Irish Literature and Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Síobhra Aiken, '"The Women Who Had Been Straining Every Nerve": Gender-Specific Medical Management of Trauma in the Irish Revolution (1916–1923)' and Eunan O'Halpin, 'Personal Loss and the "Trauma of Internal War": The Cases of W.T. Cosgrave and Seán Lemass', in Melania

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indifference or distress, the act of killing, the effects of killing, remain the angles of approach. In these models, lives are shaped somehow by violence; violence is the cause of a variety of discernible effects. But does the history of a whole life allow us to see violence from a different perspective? If violence stops being the only experience we seek – if, rather than isolated and sought out, it gets left in the muddle of getting older, of getting by – do we come closer to the marks that violence may have made, or at least see them in the context of all the other things that shape a life? Do we find something of the perspective that those who lived with killing tried to put it in?

Rather than see their lives through the prism of that one episode of conflict, which is the position so many histories of killing begin from, this article proposes instead a history of seven individuals, who just happened to have been party to the killing of two men. This might be defined as a microhistory, and while it will draw on influences from the history of emotions and the history of gender, it is perhaps harkening to something older, maybe vaguer, than that. Richard Cobb's call in 1972 for the 'urgent necessity of rediscovering the individual', his 'excursion into biographical method' to understand the French Revolution as experienced by 'four very different individual lives', is perhaps closer to the approach.[12] He sought the 'interaction of public catastrophe and private fortune', shifted 'the angle of vision' to 'narrow, unremarkable lives', but for all he found of the Revolution 'in their violent and bloody enterprises', there were always limits to the Revolution's reach.[13] Marguerite Barrois, a 'country girl' just arrived in Paris 'would remember the night of 9–10 Thermidor' because it was the night she became pregnant, 'not for the reason it is commemorated in history books'.[14] Cobb argued for an acknowledgement that 'there are many levels at which people can, and do, live and at which they can be depicted', and that best describes perhaps the purpose here.[15]

In the whole of the Irish revolution, why these seven men? At 9.00 am on 21 November 1920 one of them knocked at the door of a house in Morehampton Road in south Dublin's Donnybrook. Maybe because it was Sunday, a child answered, and John O'Donnell had to stay behind now with the boy. James Bird, Daniel Finlayson, John Young, Michael White, Edward Devitt and James Norton went in and shot three men.[16] Thomas Smith, the owner of the house and the father of the child, and his lodger, Captain MacLean, were both killed.[17] John Caldow, though shot several times, survived.[18] These were two of fifteen killings that were carried out by the IRA, all at 9.00 am that Sunday morning, killings that marked the beginning of the Irish revolution's Bloody Sunday, one of the most violent and dramatic days to date in what, since January 1919, was a relatively short revolutionary calendar still. Believed to be spies, intelligence agents, courts-marital officers, these fifteen were shot in similar circumstances, in their flats, boarding houses, and hotels; they died in bedrooms, in halls, or hanging, in one case, from a window frame.[19] Some were shot in front of women; Thomas Smith's son, his three children, heard the shots. Nine of the men shot were found still in pyjamas when they died. More were meant to die that morning, but some had moved on, had slept their Saturday night elsewhere and managed to thwart the IRA that day.[20] But that Sunday's violence was not done yet. Crown forces retaliated in the afternoon, firing on a crowd of supporters at a football match in Croke Park, killing

Terrazas Gallego, ed., *Trauma and Identity in Contemporary Irish Culture* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2020); Síobhra Aiken, *Spiritual Wounds: Trauma, Testimony and the Irish Civil War* (Newbridge: Irish Academic Press, 2022).

12 Richard Cobb, *Reactions to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 124, 126. There are echoes too of Zeldin's 'concern for the role of the individual in the past'; Theodore Zeldin, 'Personal History and the History of the Emotions', *Journal of Social History*, 15, 3 (Spring, 1982), 340.

13 Cobb, *Reactions*, 125, 131.

14 Ibid., 143.

15 Ibid., 131.

16 P. Brennan, named on Bird's list, may have been with them.

17 Proceedings of a Court of Inquiry in Lieu of Inquest on Thomas Herbert Smith, 22 Nov. 1920, TNA, WO35/159B.

18 Ibid.

19 Two of the fifteen killed were Auxiliaries called on by a maid in one of the houses to help, and the fifteenth casualty of the morning died of his wounds on 9 Dec. 1920. See O'Halpin and Ó Corráin, *The Dead of the Irish Revolution*, 222–7, 252.

20 For accounts of other attempts see *The Times*, 22 Nov. 1920; Statement by Joe McGuinness, Bureau of Military History (BMH), WS607; Interview with Seán Smith, Ernie O'Malley Notebooks, UCD Archives, p17b/122(17); Statement by

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fourteen and injuring dozens more.[21] Three prisoners were killed in Dublin Castle that night, a British auxiliary policeman took his own life, and this day, this 'Irish St Bartholomew', took on its bloody moniker as much because of the nature of the violence as the numbers killed.[22] The brutality of the day perhaps explains why old IRA men continued to insist when asked that 'that morning was one of the most critical ones in the history of our movement', why pension assessors took being 'inside' on a 'job' on Bloody Sunday morning to count for such a lot.[23]

Bloody Sunday has been written about before; the nature of the morning's killings, the effects they had on some of those who took part have been considered, but what happened in that house in Morehampton Road remains the most obscure.[24] There has been no perpetrator's voice. Until the release of the Military Service Pension collection, there was little trace of who was involved; the only descriptions of what happened came from the wife of Thomas Smith, who gave evidence at his inquest hours after her husband's death, and from a reference to the killings in a House of Lords debate.[25] None of the seven men wrote memoirs, none gave a statement to the Bureau of Military History;[26] none spoke to Ernie O'Malley when he interviewed over 450 veterans between the 1930s and the 1950s.[27] They were not prominent, notorious, or well-known, made neither career nor fortune from their exploits, and returned after revolution, as one Cork IRA man put it, 'to the poorhouse' again.[28] That ordinariness about them is part of what makes pursuing them worthwhile. But there is more to it than that. Although their pension files leave traces of entire lifetimes, they pose the same methodological questions as court records, petitions, begging letters, all those sources of different periods and places that have been used by Natalie Zemon Davis, by Mark Greengrass and others to open up the worlds of otherwise unseen individuals to analysis.[29] Because there was money, a pension, at stake, because the forms, the interviews, brought their own types of narrow scrutiny that some bore better than others, because those with fluent handwriting, fewer misspellings, may have found it easier to impress the assessors with either the bravado of their past accomplishments or the misery of

Patrick Lawson, BMH, WS667; Statement by Laurence Nugent, BMH, WS907; C. S. Andrews, *Dublin Made Me* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1979), 153.

21 Eleven died on 21 Nov. Two more died from their wounds on 23 Nov. and a third on 26 Nov. 1920. See O'Halpin and Ó Corráin, *The Dead*, 227–30, 236, 238.

22 Ibid., 231–4; Proceedings of a Court of Inquiry in Lieu of Inquest on Henry E. Spenle, TNA, WO35/159B; Sir Nevil Macready, *Annals of an Active Life*, II (London: Hutchinson, 1924), 509.

23 'Account of IRA Intelligence During the Anglo-Irish War Given by Captain Frank Thornton to Army Units', 1940[?], MAI, A/0800/IV. He also makes the same claim in his Bureau of Military History Statement, WS 615. This echoes David Neligan's view in Kenneth Griffith and Timothy O'Grady, eds., *Ireland's Unfinished Revolution: An Oral History* (Boulder, CO: Roberts Rinehart, 1999), 176 and Frank Gallagher in David Hogan [Frank Gallagher's pseudonym], *The Four Glorious Years* (Dublin: Irish Press, 1954), 243. See also, Statement by John O'Donnell before the Advisory Committee, 5 Dec. 1935, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2396, WMSP34REF2396, 23–5.

24 Dolan, 'Killing and Bloody Sunday, Nov. 1920'; Leonard, '"English Dogs" or "Poor Devils"?'; O'Halpin, 'Counting Terror'.

25 Proceedings of a Court of Inquiry in Lieu of Inquest on Thomas Herbert Smith, Evidence by Mrs Smith and R.F. Bridges, Captain, Royal Army Medical Corps, 22 Nov. 1920, TNA, WO35/159B; House of Lords Debates, 5th Series, vol. 42, 22 Nov. 1920, col. 416.

26 Between 1947 and 1957, under the auspices of the Department of Defence, the Bureau of Military History collected 1,773 statements from participants in the Irish Revolution. There is a statement by Paddy Brennan, but it is not clear from this statement if he is the same P. Brennan named in Bird's list.

27 Ernie O'Malley interviewed over 450 of his former comrades about their experiences during the period 1912–23. He did not interview the seven men who applied for pensions. He did interview a man named Patrick Brennan, but again it is unclear from his interviews if this is the same man listed by Bird.

28 Letter from Florence O'Donoghue to 'G', 8 May 1921, National Library of Ireland, Ms31,176, quoted in Michael Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Féin Party 1916–1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 299.

29 For example, Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987); Mark Greengrass, 'Hidden Transcripts: Secret Histories and Personal Testimonies of Religious Violence in the French Wars of Religion', in Mark Levene and Penny Roberts, eds., *The Massacre in History* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999). In an Irish context see for example, Lindsay Earner Byrne, *Letters of the Catholic Poor: Poverty in Independent Ireland, 1920–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

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their present need, because a pension brought a lifetime of chits and receipts and adherence, these seven lives can only ever be the sum of that 'unequal dialogue' between applicants and assessors.[30] Although everything they wrote may have been what they assumed the pension board wanted to hear, the process of the pension system, from the boxes to fill in on the application form to the way the pension and allowances were granted, administered or appealed, do force a shift of approach.

The files of these seven men do not lend themselves to the type of history of Bloody Sunday that has been written before. Of course, they could be mined for the sort of evidence that speaks to the nature of violence on that day, that shows the connection those applying made between that morning and the troubles of their later lives, but to do those same things with these files would be something of a waste. I want to try an approach suggested by Svenja Goltermann: 'Instead of starting with a concept like "trauma" and reading the evidence of the time through it', she would rather we 'study the evidence on its own terms'.[31] (For 'trauma' in this sentence one might add or substitute many other words.) While taking 'the evidence on its own terms' is often more aspired to than achieved, at least attempting it makes sense given the material at hand. Going to these pension files to pinpoint a particular reaction or emotion, trying to pull one thread from all the rest rather misses the richer pickings to be had. And there are resonances for other reasons in Goltermann's approach. She looked for the 'present pasts' of former German soldiers in 450 psychiatric files; in other words, how they constructed the Second World War in the decades after 1945.[32] And while that idea of 'present pasts' does emerge in these pension files – these men did have to circle back in the privacy of their applications to what they thought of their revolutions and their younger selves – the interaction of their present lives with their 'present pasts' also works against isolating any one concept or approach from the rest. Men in their thirties, in their forties, know well what life has and has not gone on to become, and no one emotion would ever capture the complexity of what youth recalled in the coming weariness of middle age might evoke. The best of days can be the worst of them just as well.

There are only traces of their lives before the IRA, but those traces make them quite typical according to Peter Hart's classification of Dublin's volunteers. Six were born across the years 1897 to 1902, making them 23, 22, 21, 20, and 18 on Bloody Sunday, close to but slightly younger than Hart's median age of 25.[33] The seventh, John O'Donnell, was a decade older, born in 1889, 31 on Bloody Sunday and a married man since 1915.[34] The other six were 'young and single', as Hart found most of the IRA to be.[35] Similar to a preponderance of Dublin IRA men, when they joined they were unskilled, semi-skilled, aspiring to better jobs than their fathers had.[36] Three of those fathers were labourers, two of whom could neither read nor write.[37] James Bird was born in south Dublin's inner city. As an infant he was one of six people living in three rooms; by the age of eleven he was one of seven living in two. By 1911 his mother had borne nine children, only five of whom

30 Le Roy Ladurie quoted in Malcolm Gaskill, 'Reporting Murder: Fiction in the Archives in Early Modern England', *Social History*, 23, 1 (1998), 2.

31 Svenja Goltermann, 'On Silence, Madness, and Lassitude: Negotiating the Past in Post-War West Germany', in Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, Ruth Ginio and Jay Winter, eds., *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 94.

32 Ibid.

33 Birth Certificate for Edward Devitt, 29 Jan. 1897; Birth Certificate for Daniel Finlayson, 28 Dec. 1899; Birth Certificate for James Bird, 4 July 1899; Birth Certificate for Michael White, 25 Aug. 1898; Birth Certificate for James Norton, 25 Sept. 1900; Birth Certificate for John Young, 29 Mar. 1902, General Register Office (GRO). There is no birth certificate for John O'Donnell. Peter Hart, *The IRA at War 1916–1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 121.

34 Application by Margaret O'Donnell for widow's allowance, 25 May 1972, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2396, W34E790, 38.

35 Hart, *The IRA at War*, 121.

36 Ibid., 119.

37 Census Entry for Edward Devitt, 1901 (7.5 Boyne Street) and 1911 (36.5 Denzille Street); Census Entry for Michael White, 1901 (10 Cross Avenue, Kingstown) and 1911 (17.1 Mulgrave Street, Kingstown); Census Entry for James Bird, 1901 (8.1 Rostrevor Terrace) and 1911 (3 Erne Terrace), National Archives of Ireland (NAI). There is no census entry for John O'Donnell.

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survived.[38] Michael White's family experienced the same decline in the suburb of Kingstown. By the age of twelve he was one of nine living in two rooms, and by twelve he was old enough to know his family had the highest occupancy on the street.[39] Edward Devitt's childhood was harsher still. At the age of four his family of eight people were among the twenty-six who lived in the five rooms of one house. By fourteen Devitt already earned his keep as a telegraph messenger and brought the little he earned home to the one room his family occupied in a tenement of ten families. He lived out his teenage life one of fifty cheek by jowl in that house.[40] Bird, White and Devitt had grown up in a poverty that was getting worse, and each of them had stayed long enough in school, thanks to the earnings of their older siblings, to want, as their pension applications show, something better and something more.

For the others it was different, better. James Norton's father was a life assurance agent. As his family grew the houses improved. They moved from homes of two rooms to three; they kept their own cow and pigs outside.[41] Daniel Finlayson was the son of a 'master painter' in Wicklow town. He lived over shops, but in comfortable places, and his father's business was healthy enough to employ his sons.[42] John Young grew up in one of a row of decent homes. His father was a policeman, a respectable man in a respectable place, maybe giving his teenage son another impetus to rebel.[43] Although he leaves no clear census trail, John O'Donnell was already in a skilled job by 1913; an engine driver for a timber merchant, he knew enough about machines by the time he joined to make him an armourer for the IRA.[44] How any of this shaped their revolutions, determined their reasons to fight can only be surmised, and there may well be little point. But this is the stuff that marked out their places in their social and economic worlds; it shaped their opportunities and limited their prospects, and it lets us see something of the streets and lanes their revolutions reached into, the streets and lanes most of them returned to when their revolutions were done. The ways they presented their own actions to the pension board, what they expected in return for what they had done, all of the costs they counted were summed up in an arithmetic of going under or getting by. Each of them, in their own ways, had learned those calculations young, and success or failure would always be measured by how many heads stirred in their sleep in the same room.

Three of them married when their revolutions were done; three of them couldn't or didn't want to or never got the chance. John Young was dead by twenty. Fighting in the National Army in Kerry, he didn't even make it to 1923 and the worst of that county's civil war.[45] Daniel Finlayson was single when he died in 1931. By then a house painter in New York, he drowned swimming at Long Island after midnight on 12 July. He had not worked since December 1930; there were not many houses to paint since the Wall Street Crash. His brother James had him buried out in Brooklyn in a graveyard he could visit, close enough to where he lived.[46] James Norton remained a single man all his life.[47] Devitt married just months after the civil war; White a year later in 1924. Labourers' sons, they married labourers' daughters from the same types of houses from similar nearby streets.[48] Bird waited that bit longer. A labourer's son, he married a bricklayer's daughter, but only when he was

38 Census Entry for James Bird, 1901 (8.1 Rostrevor Terrace) and 1911 (3 Erne Terrace), NAI. Three more of the seven had lost siblings: Census Entry for Michael White, 1911 (17.1 Mulgrave Street, Kingstown), Census Entry for John Young, 1911 (12 Mabel Street) and Census Entry for Daniel Finlayson, 1911 (1 Fitzwilliam Square, Wicklow), NAI.

39 Census Entry for Michael White, 1901 (10 Cross Avenue, Kingstown) and 1911 (17.1 Mulgrave Street, Kingstown), NAI.

40 Census Entry for Edward Devitt, 1901 (7.5 Boyne Street) and 1911 (36.5 Denzille Street), NAI.

41 Census Entry for James Norton, 1901 (13 Ballyedmonduff, Glencullen) and 1911 (2 Ballyedmonduff, Glencullen), NAI.

42 Census Entry for Daniel Finlayson, 1901 (4 Fitzwilliam Square, Wicklow) and 1911 (1 Fitzwilliam Square, Wicklow), NAI.

43 Census Entry for John Young, 1901 (9 Warrenmount Place) and 1911 (12 Mabel Street), NAI.

44 Statement by John O'Donnell before the Advisory Committee, 5 Dec. 1935, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2396, WMSP34REF2396, 23–5.

45 Application for a Dependent's Allowance, 29 Apr. 1925, MAI, MSP, 2D270, W2D270, 2–4.

46 Death Certificate, 13 July 1932, MAI, MSP, 24SP2125, W24B268, 58.

47 Application Form, James Norton, 11 Mar. 1935, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF4136, WMSP34REF4136, 2–20.

48 Marriage Certificate for Edward Devitt and Mary Howard, 26 Oct. 1923, GRO; Marriage Certificate for Michael White and Alice Barry, 2 Feb. 1924, GRO.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000790 Published online by Cambridge University Press

thirty-two, only when he had made his way up in the Department of Posts and Telegraphs to a 'skilled workman' in the engineering branch.[49] He moved from one better house to another, each time to a better address, and the term 'skilled worker' appeared often enough across the decades of his pension file to show just how far from two rooms in Erne Terrace he had come.[50]

But Bird was the only IRA officer of the seven. He had risen to lieutenant even though he was among the last to join. Three of the seven were older than him on Bloody Sunday morning, but, when asked, he was emphatic that 'I was in charge'.[51] Maybe this was why he filled his forms in more fulsomely than the rest, handed in a 'note of appreciation from the Chief of Staff' of the IRA when he appeared before the pension assessors for interview.[52] From the earliest sections of his application, he was 'training & equipping & obeying all orders', and while he had taken part in raids for arms, done police duties, there was little to suggest that he, like any of the seven, was prepared for what he was to do in Morehampton Road.[53] Bird's responses when he was interviewed about his service are the only ones to reveal a type of bravado. On disarming a British soldier before the truce, he claimed, 'I . . . ran my fingers up his nose and burst his eye with a clout'. To 'where were you detailed to go?' on Bloody Sunday, he replied: 'Morehampton Road. I put three men up against the wall and "plugged" them'.[54] It was 'I' alone, and it was the 'plugged' of a western, of a cheap gangster novelette. Whether Bird was playing up to what he imagined was his part in front of the assessors, whether such a euphemism as 'plugged' was still easier to utter than some of the other possible words, or whether he was conscious to play down that 'I was never in the army as a whole-time soldier', 'it was only at night, and on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays' that he fought, it is not possible to know.[55] He was more reticent about prison, about his hunger strike as an anti-treatyite during the civil war, perhaps because he lost that 'skilled' job and was only reinstated two years later in 1925. He expressed his sense of being hard-done-by, not because of his own actions, but rather his employer's response: 'I was deprived of arrears of wages when I was reinstated in my position', and admitted something of the consequences of taking the anti-treaty side with 'my chances in subsequent examinations for Govt. posts was greatly jeopardised'.[56] But he made sure never to lose that civil service job again. He queried the £27-14-2 pension he was given, checked each abatement, asked to appeal because he 'deserved a increase' [sic] or a higher rank.[57] Bird just wanted more. Years of testy letters followed with 'I could not accept', 'I don't understand why', 'I wish to state', but by the 1960s he had accepted his lot; he wrote in thanks 'for the kindness and attention' over so many years.[58] He mentioned no wounds, no injuries, and outlived the other six, dying at the age of eighty-four, with a death notice proudly referring to his

[49] Marriage Certificate for James Bird and Ellen Dixon, 5 Sept. 1931, GRO; Application Form, James Bird, 5 Mar. 1935, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2445, WMSP34REF2445, 17.

[50] See, for example, Statement of James Bird Made Before Advisory Committee, 5 Dec. 1935, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2445, WMSP34REF2445, 29; Declaration of Receipts of Public Money, 26 Mar. 1936, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2445, W34E618, 27.

[51] Statement of James Bird Made Before Advisory Committee, 5 Dec. 1935, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2445, WMSP34REF2445, 26.

[52] Ibid., 28.

[53] Application Form, James Bird, 5 Mar. 1935, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2445, WMSP34REF2445, 5.

[54] Statement of James Bird Made Before Advisory Committee, 5 Dec. 1935, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2445, WMSP34REF2445, 26 & 28.

[55] On euphemisms see Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 10–12; Jay Winter, 'War Memoirs, Witnessing and Silence', in Philip Dwyer, ed., *War Stories: The War Memoir in History and Literature* (New York: Berghahn Books: 2017), 38–9; Statement of James Bird Made Before Advisory Committee, 5 Dec. 1935, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2445, WMSP34REF2445, 28.

[56] Application Form, James Bird, 5 Mar. 1935, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2445, WMSP34REF2445, 18.

[57] Letter from James Bird to the Minister of Defence, 30 Apr. 1936, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2445, W34E618, 30.

[58] Letter from James Bird to the Department of Defence, received 2 May 1936, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2445, W34E618, 33; Letter from James Bird to the Department of Defence, 1 July 1939, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2445, W34E618, 34; Letter from James Bird to the Department of Defence, 18 July 1964, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2445, W34E618, 46; Letter from James Bird to the Department of Defence, 15 Sept. 1964, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2445, W34E618, 50.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000790 Published online by Cambridge University Press

membership of the old IRA.[59] That he killed two men one Sunday morning leaves no more or less trace here than the soldier whose eye he burst 'with a clout', than the marching and patrolling and raiding for arms. What he thought about each 21 November morning for the rest of his days we will never know. His file leaves only a sense of what he felt he was owed, and of years of carefully counting up the pounds, the shillings and the pence.

Daniel Finlayson's application in the 1920s was similarly functional in its approach. He had been on some of the same patrols, the same ambushes as Bird, had the same limited experience before 21 November 1920, but he may have seen more violence than Bird in the following months and years. He had been part of an ambush on Clare Street, part of the attack on the lodgings of Auxiliaries at the London North Western Railway Hotel, and he finished his war of independence at the burning of the Custom House, when he was arrested in May 1921.[60] On his release from prison, he took the pro-treaty side, did tough criminal investigation work, and went to Kerry as an intelligence officer with the new army's notorious Dublin Guards. After time in the Special Infantry Corps, he stayed on as a policeman, as a plain-clothes detective, but resigned in 1929 to go to America, back to painting houses as he had trained to with his father as a boy.[61] Beyond a polite frustration with how long it took the pension board to decide on his case, beyond a courteous enquiry as to when his first pension payment might arrive, he left no record of what any of this meant.[62] Maybe after writing up so many police reports, it was just another form, more paperwork to fill in. What he thought of what he saw and did as IRA man, as intelligence officer or policeman, he did not say. Why he left it all behind for America, he never said.

America must have looked like a fine prospect when Finlayson left in February 1929; he was not to know what was coming at that point. That it was for a relatively well-paid policeman certainly speaks to the wider economic challenges so many faced throughout the 1920s and 1930s, whether veterans or not of this or any other war.[63] Although the old age pensioners who had their pensions cut by a shilling a week in the same year that the first pension legislation for IRA veterans came into effect may not have appreciated the urgency felt by the Irish, as so many other governments, to placate with pensions these mainly fit, capable of working, able-bodied young men, many of those same men could not cope even with the little financial help they got.[64] Of the seven, Michael White's application in the 1920s and Edward Devitt's in the 1930s capture the frustration, the desperation of poverty, but also how both blamed their revolutions for their misfortunes, though both had grown up in different types of penury. Michael White wrote to the Minister for Defence in July 1924 on the understanding that his letter would secure him a pension 'By Return of Post'.[65] He admitted that he was 'in Badly Need of Same at Present' and then listed what he had done. 'Took Part in Several Classes of Operations. Took Part in Several Ambushes. Took part in Bloody Sunday (21 November) Never to Be Forgotten'.[66] He mentioned other ambushes, the Custom House burning, that he had gone on to join the National Army only to be discharged as medically unfit by September 1923. His civil war merited no mention: Bloody Sunday was the only day that warranted a 'never to be forgotten' afterthought.[67] Getting no reply from the Minister, White wrote to the President of the Executive Council, W.T. Cosgrave, instead:

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59 Copy of a Newspaper Death Notice for James Bird, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2445, W34E618, 53.

60 Reference by John Keenan, 18 Dec. 1924, MAI, MSP, 24SP2125, W24SP2125, 10–15; Reference by James Cahill, 23 Dec. 1924, MAI, MSP, 24SP2125, W24SP2125, 28–33.

61 Reference by Inspector O'Driscoll, 30 Dec. 1924, MAI, MSP, 24SP2125, W24SP2125, 44; Letter from Daniel Finlayson to the Department of Defence, received 19 Feb. 1929, MAI, MSP, 24SP2125, W24B268, 52.

62 Letter from Daniel Finlayson to the Minister for Defence, 19 Nov. 1925, MAI, MSP, 24SP2125, W24B268, 5.

63 Padraic Colum, *The Road Round Ireland* (New York: Macmillan, 1927); Cormac Ó Gráda, *Rocky Road: The Irish Economy Since the 1920s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).

64 The full old age pension rate was cut by 10 per cent, from 10/- to 9/- per week, but not for those over 80 years. See Cormac Ó Gráda, '"The Greatest Blessing of All": The Old Age Pension in Ireland', *Past and Present*, 175, 1 (May 2002).

65 Letter from Michael White to the Minister of Defence, 21 July 1924, MSP, 24SP202, W24SP202, 4. Capitalisation as in original.

66 Letter from Michael White to the Minister of Defence, 6 July 1924, MAI, MSP, 24SP202, W24SP202, 2–3.

67 Ibid.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000790 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> My wife is in bad health at present and I am not very well myself. I am hardly able to keep in my employment as it is too heavy. I lost my British Army Pension during the trouble and as I did not follow up same till I left the National Army my appeal was turned down. I was also reduced 8/- in my wages when I came back to my employment.

He finished bluntly: 'So my Dear President you can plainly see I have lost a lot by fighting for my country'.[68] With no reply he wrote again to remind him that 'I am an Old I.R.A. and entitled to claim'.[69] The loss of his job prompted another letter to Cosgrave:

> I respectfully beg to make an appeal to you for employment in any of the Government Departments at anything. I am an old volunteer who stood by G.H.Q. at the time of the split . . . I have been living in hopes of having my money (re Service Pension) to carry me over my troubles till some work starts. But my dear Sir there is none and I am writing this appeal to you trusting in God you may be able to do something for me in regard to employment. I could make myself generally useful in any employment you could offer me and I trust you will see your way to give me something to do. I have a wife and child to support and times are very hard for me.[70]

By February 1925 things had got considerably worse and his letters took on a quite different tone:

> Sir in The Name of God when are we going to get our Money. I am in a Terrible Fix for what I owe and if I don't get an advance for which I Have Wrote I will Be in The Workhouse or Elsewhere. Surely we can get an advance on what we have Earned.[71]

Shortly after being granted a pension of £34-13-5 later that year, he appealed for what he called a 'gratuity', an advance on his pension to get his family to Canada, where his relatives 'have a good job for me out there'.[72] Although 'My Future Depends on same', the pension board said no.[73] He asked again in 1926, that as well as good employment waiting for him in 'Montreal Cannada' [sic], 'my Wife is Not getting Her Health Here and Wishes to Be out There as the Dr off Hollis St Marterniery Hospital says she Needs a change of Climet' [sic]. Though he pleaded 'How am I in the Name of God to give Her it unless you Sir, Can Do What I ask', the answer again was no.[74] If the nos were to stop him emigrating they did not work. Rather than Montreal he ended up living a lifetime in Liverpool instead.[75]

Edward Devitt told a different version of the same story almost a decade after White: 'the need has now come, in fact it came eleven years ago, and what happened. Owing to my disability I cannot obtain proper employment at a proper remuneration, not even from the State. I am to rot in the gutter with those for whom I am responsible'.[76] Devitt had joined the Volunteers in 1918, had patrolled, raided for arms, sold Dáil bonds. He was arrested the week after Bloody Sunday and claimed the time in prison, his anti-treaty service broke his health, leaving him with a heart condition that meant he failed every medical he took in the Department of Posts and Telegraphs, where he had

68 Letter from Michael White to W.T. Cosgrave, 25 Aug. 1924, MAI, MSP, 24SP202, W24SP202, 7.
69 Letter from Michael White to the Minister of Defence, 15 Sept. 1924, MAI, MSP, 24SP202, W24SP202, 9.
70 Letter from Michael White to W.T. Cosgrave, 21 Oct. 1924, MAI, MSP, 24SP202, W24SP202, 11.
71 Letter from Michael White to the Army Pensions Department, 10 Feb. 1925, MAI, MSP, 24SP202, W24A9, 8–9.
72 Pension grant, Michael White, 28 Feb. 1925, MAI, MSP, 24SP202, W24A9, 13; Letter from Michael White to Alfred Byrne, received 18 July 1925, MAI, MSP, 24SP202, W24A9, 19.
73 Letter from Michael White to Alfred Byrne, received 18 July 1925, MAI, MSP, 24SP202, W24A9, 19; Letter from the Army Finance Office to Michael White, 28 July 1925, MAI, MSP, 24SP202, W24A9, 22.
74 Letter from Michael White to the Army Finance Office, 21 Feb. 1926, MAI, MSP, 24SP202, W24A9, 29–30.
75 It is not clear from his application when he moves to Liverpool, but he spent the rest of his life there.
76 Letter from Edward Devitt to Frank Aiken, 28 May 1935, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2211, WDP2055, 77.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000790 Published online by Cambridge University Press

worked his way up from boy messenger to the engineering department.[77] Because of his heart he was never made permanent: 'I have lost £120 per annum, approximately, in my salary, as well as all pensionable and establishment rights. These I can never hope to attain'.[78] He had totted it all up: 'I understood the pension bill was to compensate men for the gap the war made in their lives. 4/- per week pension is little use to me when I remember that I would have £2 a week more had I kept out of the war'.[79] And he kept coming back to this regret: 'No doubt if in 1918 I followed the dictates of my pocket instead of my heart I would be in a far better financial position today . . . Had I studied my job and not my country I would have gotten more thanks'.[80] Maybe because so much more time had passed, maybe because his pension was smaller than White's at £13-1-1 per year, and maybe because he was rejected after several years of trying for a disability allowance, Devitt's correspondence was often blunt.[81] He wrote again and again to Frank Aiken, then Minister for Defence, to both his office and his home:

> I cannot see you so I write to you, you pass it on to Mr Irwin who in turn gives it to the Pension Board. They put it in the waste paper basket. A few weeks ago Mr Irwin attended a funeral of an old member of my company. He died in poverty. The state sends a representative of the Minister of Defence, and the man's old comrades have to pay for his internment. [sic] What a farce. I don [']t want the same thing to happen to me. If I cannot get the sympathy of the State when it is actually needed, I won't require it when I am dead.[82]

While Devitt was given to admit his jealousy for those who were 'in receipt of service pensions three times the amount allotted to me', he was also given to including the odd political barb to make his point: 'There were two armies in 1922 and apparently I chose the wrong one'.[83] While Devitt put it in a civil war context, Michael White was just as pointed in his own way. That reminder that Bloody Sunday was 'never to be forgotten' came in starker terms in his application form:

> Was one of the 4 men Who Carried out the Shootings on the 21 November 1921 at Morehampton Road. We were sent . . . to Carry out The Execution of Capt McClean, Mr Smith and Cadlow. Capt McClean and Smith Was Killed instantly But Cadlow Lived With 9 Bullets in Him But is Disfigured for Life. I Believe He Received £5000 Compensation.[84] [sic]

Something was clearly being weighed up in the balance; 'I have lost a lot by fighting for my country' he had reminded W.T. Cosgrave, and that figure of £5,000 was clearly on his mind.[85]

Though it would serve to put all of this down to the anger and frustration of poverty, there is the history of something else perhaps here at work, the history of the used up and the disappointed, the history of something, perhaps a feeling, that the best of chances were behind you, and that you deeply want it to be someone else's fault. In May 1935, at the age of thirty-eight, Edward Devitt put it thus:

[77] Application Form, Edward Devitt, 20 Feb. 1935, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2211, WMSP34REF2211, 2–20; Application by Edward Devitt for a Wound or Disease Pension, 1 Feb. 1933, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2211, WDP2055, 2–9.

[78] Letter from Edward Devitt to the Department of Defence, 8 May 1936, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2211, WMSP34REF2211, 33.

[79] Letter from Edward Devitt to the Department of Defence, 22 May 1936, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2211, WDP2055, 35.

[80] Letter from Edward Devitt to J.J. Irwin, 19 June 1935, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2211, WDP2055, 80.

[81] Note of Edward Devitt's Pension Award, 19 Feb. 1936, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2211, W34E628, 9.

[82] Letter from Edward Devitt to Frank Aiken, 28 May 1935, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2211, WDP2055, 77.

[83] Letter from Edward Devitt to the Department of Defence, 8 May 1936, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2211, WMSP34REF2211, 33.

[84] Application Form, Michael White, 6 Nov. 1924, MAI, MSP, 24SP202, W24SP202, 23. Caldow received £1,500 compensation, *Irish Independent,* 28 Jan. 1921.

[85] Letter from Michael White to W.T. Cosgrave, 25 Aug. 1924, MAI, MSP, 24SP202, W24SP202, 7.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000790 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> During the years 1918–1923 I gave all my attention and time to the cause of the Republic. The most important years of a man's life, between the age of 21 & 26, I let slip without thinking of my future, depending on my country to look after me in case of need.[86]

'Had I ignored the IRA I would have been . . .', suggests a history of resignation, a history of regret, but regret not so much for what had been done or with what Devitt had been asked to do, but rather with what life after had not gone on to become.[87] While one of his referees dismissed him with 'his whole growl is that he has never been made permanent in the Civil Service', the same referee admitted Devitt 'finds it very hard to rear family in one room'.[88] 'I little thought my country would still keep me living in a single room in a tenement twelve years afterwards'.[89] He had started life in a tenement. Nearly forty years old, he still lived in one, only now he had a wife and five children, only now he had his revolution, and he had the iniquities of the pension board to blame.[90]

Amidst all the details of his 'necessitous circumstances', his sense of grievance that 'I am still unestablished' after so many years served in his job, Devitt mentioned that he had had a 'nervous breakdown'.[91] He attributed it to 'identification parades' in prison, that his treatment in various jails in 1921 had 'destroyed his nerves', but for his application for a disability pension to be successful everything had to have its root cause in 1916–23.[92] He wrote nothing of when it happened or the form it took. The only thing clear in the confusion of his application is that his revolution, his experiences in prison, cannot be disaggregated from all the relentless worry about money, from all the years spent with never any quiet in one solitary room. He went to his war, he fought, and he lost, but none of that can be separated from getting older and more frustrated, from the responsibility of providing for a wife and five children, from that feeling 'I let slip without thinking' the most important years of his life.[93] His evidence is at once too limited and too complex to make assumptions about direct cause and discernible effect on his behalf.

In the case of the last two men, John O'Donnell and James Norton, they drew, or had drawn for them, a direct line from what happened on Bloody Sunday to the mental illness both men went on to suffer from. John O'Donnell, described by one of his referees as having 'cracked up as a consequence of 21/11/20', was first treated for 'neurasthenia' in January 1921.[94] In the British naval reserve in 1914, he had become an Irish Volunteer by 1916, and though the longest serving of the seven, his pension was the one awarded at the lowest rate of £8-2-6 per year.[95] The officer in command of his old company,

[86] Letter from Edward Devitt to Frank Aiken, 28 May 1935, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2211, WDP2055, 77.

[87] Ibid., 76.

[88] Evidence by Joseph O'Connor on Appeal of Edward Devitt, 20 July 1936, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2211, WMSP34REF2211, 38; Letter from Joseph O'Connor to M.S. Sheppard, 24 Apr. 1933, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2211, WDP2055, 15.

[89] It was the 1940s before his family was rehoused in a corporation house in the suburbs. Letter from Edward Devitt to the Department of Defence, 21 Sept. 1933, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2211, WDP2055, 16.

[90] 'By joining the IRA I killed any hope of promotion…', Letter from Edward Devitt to the Department of Defence, 29 Jan. 1935, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2211, WDP2055, 66; 'Through your fault I am placed in the unenviable position of…', Letter from Edward Devitt to the Department of Defence, 17 Mar. 1935, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2211, WDP2055, 70.

[91] Letter from Edward Devitt to Frank Aiken, 18 Oct. 1934, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2211, WDP2055, 38; Letter from Edward Devitt to the Department of Defence, 12 July 1944, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2211, WDP2055, 85; Application by Edward Devitt for a Wound or Disease Pension, 1 Feb. 1933, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2211, WDP2055, 4.

[92] Application by Edward Devitt for a Wound or Disease Pension, 1 Feb. 1933, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2211, WDP2055, 4; Letter from Joseph O'Connor to M.S. Sheppard, 24 Apr. 1933, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2211, WDP2055, 15.

[93] Letter from Edward Devitt to Frank Aiken, 28 May 1935, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2211, WDP2055, 77.

[94] The handwriting is unclear: 'cracked' could also be 'crocked'. Questionnaire on John O'Donnell by Joseph O'Connor, 8 June 1936, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2396, W1RBA78, 7; Note by John O'Donnell to the Department of Defence, 3 June 1938, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2396, W1RBA78, 30.

[95] Statement by John O'Donnell before the Advisory Committee, 5 Dec. 1935, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2396, WMSP34REF2396, 23–4; Letter from the Department of Defence to the Department of Finance confirming the rate of O'Donnell's pension, 6 May 1936, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2396, W34E790, 4.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000790 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Henry O'Farrell, made it clear that Bloody Sunday was to blame for his truncated war. He wrote that O'Donnell was:

> Door guard at Morehampton Rd, Bloody Sunday, an incident occurred with one of the children in the House, which later played so much on his mind as to cause the trouble from which he suffered. His condition became very noticeable frequently referring to this incident later he became very sullen & silent in fact an all round peculiarity in his manner, which compelled me to withdraw the work I had up to this entrusted to him. The incident referred to was that of the child who begged of him 'Not to shoot Daddy'.[96]

O'Donnell, the oldest of the seven, the only married one of the seven, had not shot anyone on Bloody Sunday; he had been left with the child, to keep him away from what was about to happen, to keep him back when the shots went off. O'Donnell was thirty-one that morning; at forty-two he was admitted to Grangegorman Hospital where he was treated for 'epileptic mania' from 1931 to 1932.[97]

His application is brief and incomplete, and others sometimes fill in the gaps, describing his condition, noting the periods when he went without work. He was willing to recount certain things, fixing springs in guns, making grenades for the IRA, but he was prompted to give more detail, find more referees who could speak to what he had done.[98] He seemed to change his mind about his claim for a disability pension in 1938 because 'I am now in Employment and feel physically fit'.[99] But he changed it back again in 1939: 'I see no reason why I should withdraw my claim as I would not have attempted to make a claim unless it was within my right in so doing'.[100] When he was called before the assessors he 'appeared nervous & reluctant to speak of his service', and only replied with considerable difficulty about Morehampton Road.[101] When O'Donnell died in 1947, he was a part-time worker, employed by the week.[102] He still lived at the same north inner-city address, and he left behind a wife and at least one child when he died at just fifty-eight.

In 1937 James Norton submitted an assessment of his health. Describing himself in the third person, or transcribing a doctor's appraisal, he wrote:

> As a result of his experiences on active service, culminating in the events of Bloody Sunday 21 November 1920, in which applicant was personally responsible as one of the firing party for the shooting of three British Intelligence Officers, two of which were killed, & one seriously wounded in the presence of their screaming wifes & children. [sic] The applicant[']s mental condition showed gradual deterioration during the months following, until complete mental breakdown was reached in July 1921, when applicant single handed, and without orders, got on the middle of the roadway at the Custom House armed with a Revolver attempted to capture a tender of British troops.[103]

96 Questionnaire on John O'Donnell by Henry O'Farrell, 12 Jan. 1937, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2396, W1RBA78, 13.

97 Letter from the Resident Medical Superintendent, Grangegorman Hospital to the Department of Defence, 1 Feb. 1937, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2396, W1RBA78, 15. Grangegorman Hospital began as Richmond Asylum in 1810 and continued as St Brendan's Hospital until 2013. See Brendan Kelly, *Grangegorman Histories: Inside the Asylum* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2020).

98 For example, Statement by John O'Donnell before the Advisory Committee, 5 Dec. 1935, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2396, WMSP34REF2396, 25–6.

99 Note by John O'Donnell to the Department of Defence, 3 June 1938, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2396, W1RBA78, 30.

100 Letter from John O'Donnell to the Military Service Registration Board, 8 Mar. 1939, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2396, W1RBA78, 33.

101 Memo on John O'Donnell's appearance before the Military Service Registration Board, 7 Feb. 1940, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2396, W1RBA78, 47. It is not clear from his file if an allowance was paid.

102 Memo by Army Finance Branch, 22 Apr. 1947, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2396, W34E790, 28; Note on John O'Donnell's employment status, 9 July 1938, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2396, W34E790, 23.

103 Application for a Wound or Disease Pension, James Norton, 5 Aug. 1937, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF4136, WDP9489, 4.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000790 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Two years later he wrote more: 'I have been in and out of Grangegorman very often since', that 'I was advised to go to England for a complete change', where he suffered what he termed 'a breakdown', spending several months in two hospitals there.[104] He ended his statement: 'I was 20 years of age in November, 1920'.[105] His commanding officer called him 'one of my "special" men'.[106] The phrase 'in and out of Grangegorman' did poor justice to his claim. Grangegorman confirmed that he was there for a month in 1922, from January to April 1923, again from August 1923 to January 1924, all of May 1924, all of September and most of October of the same year, and February to October of 1925. And this same pattern continued through the 1930s as well. Back from Britain he was hospitalised in 1939, in 1940 and across most of 1941, 1945 and 1946.[107] Made a ward of court in 1954, he spent the rest of his life in the hospital, where he died aged seventy-four.[108] Grangegorman described his condition as 'manic depressive psychosis', and while the hospital noted his problems with drink, it was described as only 'a sequel to his unstable mental condition and not a cause'.[109] A police report from May 1939 gives another glimpse of his life. It described a family home on the north side of the city, a father, a carpenter, a sister, a shop assistant, 'the mother who keeps house'. Sergeant Scully, diligent in his task, asked about the family along the street, and found that they were 'looked upon locally as a struggling working-class family'. He also found that Norton had one friend, a 'constant companion', who let Norton use his address for correspondence about his pension application, because, as Scully wrote, Norton was 'anxious that his parents, or friends . . . should not learn that his mental condition is so serious as to have him granted a pension'.[110] On top of all the rest it seems he tried to hide what could not be hidden.

Norton had a similar record in the IRA as all the rest: similar raids, similar patrols, the same type of ambushes, prison, and six days of hunger strike.[111] On his release, he took no part in the civil war; by then his superior officer termed him 'a complete mental wreck'.[112] But what is to be done with this? I am not sure I know. A straight and stark line can be traced from Morehampton Road to Grangegorman Hospital, but I have neither the expertise nor the right to do that. While it might be argued that it was in every applicant's interest to pin their wounds and hurts on their active service alone, that with money, a pension for life, at stake, Bloody Sunday, because it impressed the pension board, would be the cause of all their woes. Other Bloody Sunday veterans certainly made that case. Albert Rutherford, who had been party to a killing in Mount Street on Bloody Sunday, was clear about what that morning should have meant: 'As that certain job alone has been a great strain on men's nerves . . . a job of that disagreeable nature was something more than Active Service'; it 'should entitle' all involved 'to at least the entire period'.[113] In other words, Rutherford thought it should guarantee a pension and a pension at the highest rate. Rutherford was described by one of his referees as someone

[104] Statement by James Norton, 15 Mar. 1939, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF4136, WDP9489, 21.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Questionnaire on James Norton by Henry O'Farrell, May 1938, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF4136, W1RB4154, 24.

[107] Letter from J. Fitzgerald, Assistant Resident Medical Superintendent, Grangegorman Hospital to the Military Service Registration Board, 7 Mar. 1935, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF4136, WDP9489, 18; Letter from the Chief Resident Medical Superintendent, Grangegorman Hospital to the Military Service Registration Board, 22 Mar. 1941, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF4136, WDP9489, 63; Letter from the Chief Resident Medical Superintendent, Grangegorman Hospital to the Military Service Registration Board, 23 Sept. 1944, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF4136, WDP9489, 74; Letter from the Chief Resident Medical Superintendent, Grangegorman Hospital to the Military Service Registration Board, 16 Mar. 1945, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF4136, WDP9489, 79; Letter from the Chief Resident Medical Superintendent, Grangegorman Hospital to the Military Service Registration Board, 18 June 1946, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF4136, WDP9489, 85.

[108] Cert confirming James Norton's status as a ward of court, 18 Nov. 1954, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF4136, WDP9489, 92; Letter from John Fitzgerald to the Department of Defence, 17 Jan. 1975, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF4136, W34E1843, 108.

[109] Letter from the Chief Resident Medical Superintendent, Grangegorman Hospital to the Military Service Registration Board, 22 Mar. 1939, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF4136, WDP9489, 23.

[110] Report by Sergt John Scully, 29 May 1939, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF4136, WDP9489, 44.

[111] Application Form, James Norton, 11 Mar. 1935, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF4136, WMSP34REF4136, 2–20.

[112] Letter from James Brogan to T. Markham, 11 Dec. 1938, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF4136, W1RB4154, 33.

[113] Letter from Albert Rutherford to Mr Robinson, 15 July 1937, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF22365, WMSP34REF22365, 78.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000790 Published online by Cambridge University Press

who 'seemed to enjoy the "Terror"'.[114] Rutherford was as complicated as the rest. Norton and O'Donnell, even Devitt, get to speak for no one but themselves.[115] Based on three cases, even three cases out of seven, there can be no rush to diagnose some form of post-traumatic stress disorder in every veteran of Bloody Sunday or the Irish revolution as a result. If trauma is to be a lens of interpretation it has to be broad enough to take the whole life of an individual within its gaze. Economic conditions, family circumstances, the context and accumulation of other combat experiences, all of the pressures these sources hint at or show us nothing of, these and more disrupt the ease with which cause and effect can be directly linked, and should question how ready to diagnose historians have been beyond their ken.[116] If trauma is to be used then it also has to accommodate Elizabeth Norton. The mother 'who keeps house' appeared once in her own right on her son's file, a short letter in 1940 to tell the pension board that her son had been certified.[117] It has to reckon with the cost of his treatment for 'a struggling working-class family', with how changed Elizabeth Norton found the son who came back to her from prison in January 1922.[118] Although Margaret O'Donnell must have worried about the loss of her husband's income when he spent those twelve months in Grangegorman, he did come home, he worked again, they lived out the rest of his days together, maybe with all sorts of traumas buried and well hidden, but maybe also with no trauma there at all.[119] We cannot presume to know. The pension applications, if they show anything, show decades of routine and struggle and ordinariness, and the marks of those things on a life also have to be taken into account.

As with so many other applicants, these seven men had to reckon with their revolutions, but more so with what they had become, with disappointment and old age, with illness and frustration, with the sense that they may have failed in their responsibilities as fathers and husbands, and now had to beg for a pension from a pen-pusher who could in a single stroke make things worse or put things right. The revolution has prompted some of the most innovative research on the history of masculinity in Ireland, but rather than discourses about masculinity idealised, about youth and violence, about militarism and hyper-masculinity, these men embody a much more fragile masculinity instead.[120] These are men worrying and getting older, coming to realise their best of times were behind them, that the power they once had with a gun in their hand amounted to nothing now, that their applications went

[114] Letter of Reference by S. Ó Conchubhair, 14 Dec. 1936, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF22365, WMSP34REF22365, 40; Letter from Albert Rutherford to Mr Robinson, 15 July 1937, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF22365, WMSP34REF22365, 78; Sworn Statement Made Before Advisory Committee by Albert Rutherford, 18 Dec. 1936, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF22365, WMSP34REF22365, 64.

[115] On veterans with 'nothing to regret or feel remorseful about', see Eve Morrison, 'Hauntings of the Irish Revolution: Veterans and Memory of the Independence Struggle and Civil War', in Marguérite Corporaal, Christopher Cusack and Ruud van den Beuken, eds., *Irish Studies and the Dynamics of Memory* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2017), 105.

[116] For the problems inherent in the linear relationship between past and present see Dawson, 'The Meaning of "Moving On"', 86–7.

[117] Report by Sergt John Scully, 29 May 1939, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF4136, WDP9489, 44; Letter from Elizabeth Norton to the Department of Defence, 21 Sept. 1940, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF4136, WDP9489, 52.

[118] Report by Sergt John Scully, 29 May 1939, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF4136, WDP9489, 44.

[119] Letter from the Resident Medical Superintendent, Grangegorman Hospital to the Department of Defence, 1 Feb. 1937, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2396, W1RBA78, 15.

[120] For example, Aidan Beatty, *Masculinity and Power in Irish Nationalism, 1884–1938* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Jane G. V. McGaughey, *Ulster's Men: Protestant Unionist Masculinities and Militarization in the North of Ireland, 1912–1923* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012); Jennifer Redmond, ed., 'Revolutionary Masculinities', Special Issue of *Irish Studies Review*, 29, 2 (2021); Rebecca Anne Barr, Sean Brady and Jane McGaughey, eds., *Ireland and Masculinities in History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); Marnie Hay, *Na Fianna Éireann and the Irish Revolution, 1909–23: Scouting for Rebels* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019); Sikata Banerjee, *Muscular Nationalism: Gender, Violence and Empire in India and Ireland, 1914–2004* (New York: NYU Press, 2012); Dale Montgomery, '"They Were the Men who Licked the IRA Until they Squealed": Blueshirt Masculine Identity 1932–36', in Caroline Magennis and Raymond Mullen, eds., *Irish Masculinities: Reflections on Literature and Culture* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2011).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000790 Published online by Cambridge University Press

for months and years unheeded, no better than anybody else.[121] They became men who wrote subservient, deferential begging letters, 'Granting My Dear Sir you will Give This application your Kind Consideration and attention', who had to admit to how desperate their circumstances were, knowing their destitution, their 'I am in Receipt of Know Money from anywhere' [sic] had to be rehearsed and paraded again and again in the hope of getting some reply.[122] These were once powerful men going back to being nobodies, some jealous of the wealth and success of others, some bitter, jaded, aware that they had been forgotten and overlooked. 'Perhaps it is Mr Aiken[']s idea for all old IRA to fade away', Devitt wrote.[123] 'Being a volunteer and obeying all orders' hadn't brought him any good.[124]

Some are examples of regret, of disillusionment, not with what the revolution had become or the conservatism of the state, but rather regret with what they had and had not become themselves, regret with the time they spent in the IRA, with what some believed their revolutions had amounted to.[125] But their regret was as fluid with age as any other feeling, and even Devitt, so constant in his regret, recounted all that he had done with pride. A history of these men has to be able to accommodate the capacity of any one individual to feel multiple and contradictory emotions at any one time, never mind over a lifetime of letters to a pension board.[126] And in turn it becomes problematic to conceive of these or other veterans as a coherent cohort.

While it can be put simply down to the way the pension process worked, that everything had to be tied inevitably back to 1916–23 for it to count, underlying the applications of many of the seven is a sense of their own victimhood. Whether victims of what they had been made to see and do during their revolutions, or of poverty, of missed opportunities, of age, of their own choices, they come from these applications as the wronged, the mistreated, the victimised. Even in their accounts of what they had done, of the lives in each of their cases that they had been party to taking, their purpose was to recount their own losses, their own sense of what it was they had given and what they assumed was merited in return.[127] They blur the line between victim and perpetrator even more than it has been already blurred.[128]

They are men also reckoning with how others see them; depending on referees to recommend them based on their records, hoping some would write with effusive praise 'of his exemplary and trustworthy character', knowing others would bluntly write 'Cannot remember this man'.[129] This is masculinity under an obligation to others, at the mercy of the good word of an officer all those years after revolution was done.[130] It is masculinity hoping some glimmer of camaraderie could still be counted

[121] See, for example, Letter from Daniel Finlayson to the Minister of Defence, 30 July 1925, MAI, MSP, 24SP2125, W24SP2125, 57; Letter from Edward Devitt to the Department of Defence, 21 Sept. 1933, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2211, WDP2055, 16.

[122] Letter from Michael White to the Department of Defence, received 9 Sept. 1924, MAI, MSP, 24SP202, W24SP202, 8; Life Certificate, Michael White, 7 Mar. 1925, MAI, MSP, 24SP202, W24A9, 15.

[123] Letter from Edward Devitt to J.J. Irwin, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2211, WDP2055, 80.

[124] Application Form, Edward Devitt, 20 Feb. 1935, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF2211, WMSP34REF2211, 5.

[125] See also R. F. Foster, *Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland, 1890–1923* (London: Penguin, 2014); Roy Foster, 'Revolutionary Disillusionment'; Frances Flanagan, *Remembering the Revolution: Dissent, Culture and Nationalism in the Irish Free State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[126] On telling and ageing see Jay Winter, 'Thinking About Silence', in Ben-Ze'ev, Ginio and Winter, eds., *Shadows of War*, 8.

[127] On a sense of veteran entitlement see Martin Crotty and Mark Edele, 'Total War and Entitlement: Towards a Global History of Veteran Privilege', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 59, 1 (Mar. 2013).

[128] Lynne Viola, 'The Question of the Perpetrator in Soviet History', *Slavic Review*, 72, 1 (2013), 22; John Carter Wood, 'Conceptualizing Cultures of Violence and Cultural Change', in Stuart Carroll, ed., *Cultures of Violence: Interpersonal Violence in Historical Perspective* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Lee Ann Fujii, 'Shades of Truth and Lies: Interpreting Testimonies of War and Violence', *Journal of Peace Research*, 47, 2 (Mar. 2010).

[129] Questionnaire on James Norton by Henry O'Farrell, May 1938, MAI, MSP, MSP34REF4136, W1RB4154, 24; Reference by Col. Seán Guilfoyle on Michael White, 21 Jan. 1925, MAI, MSP, 24SP202, W24SP202, 41.

[130] See Martina Salvante on masculinity destabilised by having to ask for help. Martina Salvante, 'Italian Disabled Veterans Between Experience and Representation', in Stephen McVeigh and Nicola Cooper, eds., *Men After War* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 122.

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on, that something of who a man once was could be recalled. At the same time, they leave traces of masculinity within the structure of a family – as sons, husbands, fathers, they show themselves burdened by their responsibilities to others, but they also hint at how fraught it might have been for their parents, their wives and children, who had to reckon with them in return.

These men are just a small sample, but they speak beyond their numbers to the wider potential of Goltermann's approach and to the need to pursue, where the sources make it possible, what violence may or may not have meant in the context of a whole life. The 'present pasts' of these men were shaped by changing necessity, by the poverty of their circumstances, by what could be got from a pension board on the strength of how they told their 'soldiers' tale'.[131] The mixture of emotions that came with age and responsibility, the tangle of pride and nostalgia, disappointment and resentment that constantly changed how their wars were framed make it hard to set the effects of violence apart from all the very many other factors that may have shaped a life. The soldier and then the veteran was always son, brother, husband, father; they were always the sum of much that a pension application could never show.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Michael White wrote short notes in increasingly spidery handwriting to the pension board. He asked why his pension had increased, he apologised for filling in the wrong date on his forms.[132] By then it was a settled, quieter file, far from the years of special arrangements for cashing cheques, of ceding power of attorney on his pension 'as I Have a Little Domistc Trouble at Home to be Seen to as I am out of work' [sic].[133] He comes from his file by turn burdened, restless, settled, at ease, and old, and what his revolution might have meant to him only reaches us through the mess of all of that. White, as the six others, goes some way to prove Cobb's earlier point: 'there are many levels at which people can, and do, live' and their wars cannot be separated out from the rest as wheat from chaff.[134] Equally, there are many ways for readers of such sources to respond to the distress and the despair, to the fortunes of those in front of us, and how those fortunes shape the impetus of what we write. As historians we are moved by the material, by the pain on the page, by the blunt eloquence of anger, and however mindful of that Michael White is more likely to be written of in the full fury and frustration of his youth, to be written of because of his poverty, and not for that more serene old age his pension file eventually settled into. James Bird's application may never prompt the same empathy that Edward Devitt's, John O'Donnell's or James Norton's would. Each file creates what Katie Barclay calls 'affective connections' or 'emotional engagements with the dead'; some will be deeper, more powerful than others, and that has consequences for how we might choose to tell these seven soldiers' tales.[135] By telling them together it is not simply a matter of balancing the broken Norton with the bravado of Bird; all seven took part in the same act of violence; all seven lived in the shadow of it and so many other things.

[131] Goltermann, 'On Silence, Madness, and Lassitude'; Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale*.

[132] Letter from Michael White to the Pension Board, no date, MAI, MSP, 24SP202, W24A9, 230; Letter from Michael White to the Pension Board, 30 Sept. 1967, MAI, MSP, 24SP202, W24A9, 207.

[133] Letter from Michael White to Mr Horgan, 23 Sept. 1929, MAI, MSP, 24SP202, W24A9, 60.

[134] Cobb, *Reactions*, 131.

[135] Katie Barclay, 'Falling in Love with the Dead', *Rethinking History*, 22, 4 (2018), 468 & 464.

Cite this article: Dolan A (2023). 'I Have Lost a Lot by Fighting for My Country': Reckoning with the Irish Revolution. *Contemporary European History* **32**, 587–603. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000790

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000790 Published online by Cambridge University Press