# Fianna Fáil TD apologises after false claim on British Army civilian casualties in Ireland sparks controversy



A Fianna Fáil TD has recently issued an apology for his claim that the British Army has never bombed or shot civilians in Ireland, a declaration that has ignited considerable debate regarding the historical record of British military actions on the island. Cathal Crowe's assertion was described as “a genuine slip-up,” but historical evidence sharply contradicts this assertion.

The British Army's presence in Ireland has long been marked by numerous controversial operations resulting in civilian casualties. Most notably, during the Easter Rising of 1916, British troops employed artillery and machine-gun fire in urban environments, leading to significant loss of life. According to historical accounts, at least 260 of the total 485 deaths were civilians, demonstrating the tragic consequences of military engagement in populated areas.

In Northern Ireland, operations throughout the Troubles further underscore the complexity and often tragic human cost of military intervention. Operation Banner, which lasted from 1969 to 2007, oversaw the British military's role in the conflict. Estimates indicate that the military accounted for approximately 10% of all fatalities during this period. While one study claims the British Army killed 306 individuals, another suggests the number could be as high as 301, with civilians constituting up to 53% of those fatalities. This included a staggering number of children among the casualties.

Particular incidents have cemented the reputation of British military actions as heavy-handed. The Ballymurphy massacre, which occurred in August 1971, saw eleven civilians killed by soldiers from the 1st Battalion, Parachute Regiment, during an operation against suspected IRA members. These tragic events later echoed in the infamous Bloody Sunday of January 1972, where British soldiers shot 26 unarmed civilians, resulting in 13 immediate fatalities. These cases illustrate that the military's engagement often blurred the lines between combatants and non-combatants, leading to grave unintended consequences.

The heavy toll of civilian life did not end with the Troubles. The Springhill massacre in July 1972, where five Catholic residents, including a 13-year-old girl and a priest, were killed by British soldiers while assisting the wounded, exemplifies the ongoing debates over accountability and military ethics. Different narratives of these events persist, often shaped by the interpretations and memories of those who lived through them.

Crowe’s erroneous statement reveals a broader challenge in public discourse about Ireland’s tumultuous history with British rule, particularly in light of ongoing discussions surrounding reconciliation and truth-telling. While the TD clarified his position, the historical record remains unambiguous: the actions of the British Army during various operations have, indeed, culminated in the tragic loss of civilian life, a fact that cannot be overlooked in the narrative of British-Irish relations. Acknowledging this history is crucial for future discussions about accountability and the path toward healing and understanding.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/politics/a-genuine-slip-up-td-apologises-after-claiming-british-army-never-bombed-or-shot-civilians-in-ireland/a1605565925.html), [[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Banner)
* Paragraph 2 – [[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter_Rising), [[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Banner)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ballymurphy_massacre), [[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloody_Sunday_%281972%29)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Springhill_massacre), [[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ballymurphy_massacre)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/politics/a-genuine-slip-up-td-apologises-after-claiming-british-army-never-bombed-or-shot-civilians-in-ireland/a1605565925.html), [[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Banner)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/politics/a-genuine-slip-up-td-apologises-after-claiming-british-army-never-bombed-or-shot-civilians-in-ireland/a1605565925.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falls_Curfew> - The Falls Curfew was a British Army operation in Belfast, Northern Ireland, from 3 to 5 July 1970, aimed at arresting suspected IRA members. During the curfew, four civilians were killed: Charles O'Neill, William Burns, Patrick Elliman, and Joseph Murphy. O'Neill was run over by an APC, Burns was shot at his doorstep, and Elliman was shot in the head. Murphy died of a heart attack after being detained. The operation was controversial due to the civilian casualties and the heavy-handed tactics employed.
3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter_Rising> - The Easter Rising was an armed insurrection in Ireland during Easter Week, 1916, aimed at ending British rule and establishing an independent Irish Republic. The British Army's response involved shelling and machine-gun fire in urban areas, leading to at least 485 deaths, with 260 (54%) being civilians. The use of artillery and heavy machine guns in built-up areas resulted in significant civilian casualties, as the British forces often could not distinguish between rebels and non-combatants.
4. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Banner> - Operation Banner was the operational name for the British Army's deployment in Northern Ireland from 1969 to 2007, during the Troubles. The British military was responsible for about 10% of all deaths in the conflict. According to one study, the British military killed 306 people during Operation Banner, 156 (~51%) of whom were unarmed civilians. Another study says the British military killed 301 people, 160 (~53%) of whom were unarmed civilians. Of the civilians killed, 61 were children.
5. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ballymurphy_massacre> - The Ballymurphy massacre was a series of incidents between 9 and 11 August 1971, in which the 1st Battalion, Parachute Regiment of the British Army killed eleven civilians in Ballymurphy, Belfast, Northern Ireland, as part of Operation Demetrius (internment without trial). The shootings were later referred to as Belfast's Bloody Sunday, a reference to the killing of civilians by the same battalion in Derry a few months later, in which the name was first applied.
6. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Springhill_massacre> - The Springhill massacre was an incident in which five Catholic residents were killed by the British Army in the Springhill estate in West Belfast, Northern Ireland, on 9 July 1972, during the Troubles. Three of the victims were teenagers, including a 13-year-old girl, and another was a Catholic priest waving a white flag as he went to attend one of the injured. The incident remains controversial, with differing accounts from the British Army and local residents.
7. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloody\_Sunday\_(1972)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloody_Sunday_%281972%29) - Bloody Sunday, or the Bogside Massacre, was a massacre on 30 January 1972 when British soldiers shot 26 unarmed civilians during a protest march in the Bogside area of Derry, Northern Ireland. Thirteen men were killed outright and the death of another man four months later was attributed to gunshot injuries from the incident. Many of the victims were shot while fleeing from the soldiers, and some were shot while trying to help the wounded. Other protesters were injured by shrapnel, rubber bullets, or batons; two were run down by British Army vehicles; and some were beaten. All of those shot were Catholics.