

Book review: *Death in the Fields* examines a vicious corner of an embattled North

Jonathan Trigg, historian and former British soldier, focuses on Tyrone's role in the conflict in this painstakingly even-handed and insightful study

ANDREW LYNCH MAY 27, 2023

As with most books about the North, it's important to know the author's perspective. Trigg writes from personal experience, being a former British infantry officer who completed tours there as well as in Bosnia and the Gulf. Today he is a respected military historian, however, and this coolly factual account strives hard to represent everyone fairly.

Death in the Fields begins by detailing the lie of the land, explaining how rural Tyrone's tribal divisions went back to the Plantation of Ulster. "To stand with an old [Catholic] farmer on a hillside in Pomeroy while he pointed out Protestant farms 'stolen from us by them black bastards [derogatory slang for Protestants]'," the IRA informer Sean O'Callaghan observed, "is to understand the emotive power of blood and earth."



"It was a dirty war," the IRA hunger striker Brendan Hughes later acknowledged. "We thought we could finish it, but we were only skirmishing around the abyss before we fell in." *Death in the Fields* is a chilling and timely reminder of what could happen if Northern Ireland's fragile peace ever breaks down again.