

1922

A MOMENTOUS AND TURBULENT YEAR

*In the early months of 1922, the formation of the Civic Guard (later renamed An Garda Síochána) brought a sense of hope for peace and prosperity throughout the newly minted Irish Free State. However, no sooner had the long struggle for independence ended, Civil War erupted throughout the land, writes **Christopher Warner**.*



This discord reflected similar tumultuous events throughout the world with developments that would play a pivotal role in shaping the 20th century that continues to reverberate 100 years later.

On 9 February 1922, the Garda foundation committee secretly met in Room 85 at the Gresham Hotel in Dublin. Those attending included Chairman of the Provisional Government, Michael Collins and Michael Staines TD, who later served as the first Civic Guard Commissioner.

The men were tasked with the daunting challenge of establishing a new law enforcement branch from scratch – quickly. After all, history has continually shown the success of any new State relies heavily on its ability to establish law and order. Ireland would be no different.

The force consisted of fresh recruits as well as former members of and Irish Republican Police (IRP) and the disbanded Royal Irish Constabulary. Men from Dublin Metropolitan Police (DMP) were also encouraged to join up, adding to the alphabet soup. Less than two weeks after the inaugural meeting, Staines received the first candidates at a temporary depot on the show grounds of the Royal Dublin Society at Ballsbridge.

The physical requirements required a Civic Guard to be unmarried, be between the ages of 19 and 27 years, a minimum 5'9" tall and able to pass



General Michael Collins



Garda Henry Phelan

examinations in arithmetic, reading and spelling. Salary started at three pounds ten shillings per week – £3 10s 0p – an attractive wage equivalent at that time.

PJ Kerrigan of Westport (Fairview), Co. Mayo claimed the distinction of being Garda No 1. Eight months later, Henry Phelan [Reg. No. 1347] would become the first Civic Guard killed in the line of duty.

WORLDWIDE HEADLINES

February 1922 saw two other significant global events unfold – both involving Irishmen. First, James Joyce published his novel 'Ulysses'. Constructed as a modern parallel to Homer's epic poem, 'Odyssey', the book is known for its realistic character portrayal and experimental prose, including the stream-of-consciousness technique – a form which the Dublin-born author elevated to new heights.

The publication also became the subject of heated controversy, banned in both the United States and Britain due to content deemed obscene and heretical. Nonetheless, Joyce's masterpiece, a tale about the lives of Dubliners over a single day, is widely considered one of the greatest literary works ever written.

Another celebrated son made headlines 5,000 miles away in the sun-kissed hills of Hollywood. But

unfortunately, the story would not have a happy ending. On the morning of 1 February 1922, the acclaimed movie director William Desmond Taylor was found dead in his posh, two-story bungalow apartment. He had been shot at close range with a .38 calibre hollow point bullet. The crime had all the makings for a box office blockbuster, featuring no shortage of mystery, glamour and greed.

Born William Cunningham Deane-Tanner to a prominent Anglo-Irish family in Carlow, he later changed his name while re-inventing himself in America. His wanderlust eventually led to a career in show business, initially performing as an actor before emerging as the top director at Paramount Pictures. 'Taylor' directed more than 50 films, working with A-listers such as 'America's Sweetheart' Mary Pickford and also served three terms as President of the Motion Picture Directors Association.

His suspicious death sparked a massive investigation and media circus. The burgeoning film industry, already in damage control from the Fatty Arbuckle scandal, came under attack by religious groups and conservative leaders, demanding reform for allegedly promoting immoral values.

Newspapers spilled barrels of ink on speculation of wild parties in Tinseltown rife with sex, drugs and bootleg booze. The lengthy investigation spawned a long list of possible killers, ranging from leading starlets of the day to the IRA. The Carlow man's murder remains an official cold case.

KILDARE BARRACKS MUTINY

Although a few stumbles out of the gate were expected for the maiden police force, it nearly suffered a catastrophic fall shortly after the bell sounded. On 15 May 1922, over 1,000 members broke ranks during Commissioner Staines' morning parade address at Kildare Barracks.



James Joyce



William Desmond Taylor



General Eoin O'Duffy

Mistrust had reached a boiling point following the promotion of several former RIC men to senior ranks - a decision viewed as insulting to many of the ex-IRA recruits, who refused to take orders from officers they still regarded as the enemy.

The mutineers raided the armoury and quickly took control of the compound. Staines and his senior officers were forced to withdraw under armed guard. For the next seven weeks, Collins and other members of the fledgling government negotiated with the mutineers in hopes of restoring order.

The recruits formed a protest committee, issuing demands that included removing the ex-RIC officers from positions of authority. In the end, an accord was reached despite dogged efforts by a small group of Anti-Treaty Civic Guards eager to disrupt any further progress.

The revolt would lead to the idealised concept of an unarmed Gardaí. Having learned from their mistakes (and not wanting another heavily armed insurrection), the government sought to police the country without "force of arms or by numbers, but on their moral authority as servants of the people". Nevertheless, an armed element was maintained in the Force.

A NATION MOURNS

As renewed hostilities mercilessly tore families apart and divided the country, the most damaging blow occurred on 22 August 1922 in West Cork. Near the small village of Beal na Blath, Michael Collins was gunned down in an ambush by Anti-Treaty forces. He was 31 years old.

Collins had been in fine fettle the previous week, overseeing the official transfer of Dublin Castle to the Provisional Government. The 13th century fortress, erected on the same elevated grounds that once served as a Viking settlement, stood as the centre of power in Ireland. Although the British Army vacated in January 1922, evicting the former occupants' administrative branch took months to finalise. The long-awaited celebration would be short lived.

The revered "Big Fella" lay in state for three days, followed by a funeral mass took place at Dublin's Pro Cathedral attended by a massive congregation. Collins' good friend Richard Mulcahy TD delivered the graveside oration at Glasnevin Cemetery.

August/September ushered in a major structural shift within the Civic Guards. Eoin O'Duffy replaced Staines as Commissioner and immediately sought to impose stricter discipline while expanding the deployment of guards across the country.

The brash and temperamental Army General had little time for pleasantries and didn't mince words when addressing his men: "You are going out unarmed into a hostile area. You are the first to be sent out. You may be murdered, your barracks burned, your uniform taken off you, but you must carry on and bring peace to the people."

Under his leadership, he helped transform a fledgling department into a modern place force. His legacy, however, is complicated. O'Duffy's foray into politics and pro-fascist leanings made him one

of the most controversial public figures during the first half of the 20th century.

ROOTS OF TYRANNY

In the aftermath of the 'The Great War', a tidal wave of nationalism swept Europe – actions that eventually triggered unprecedented worldwide conflict and bloodshed.

Leading the charge, Benito Mussolini established the first world's fascist State in his native Italy. His ascent to power in October 1922 had been fuelled by a steady barrage of bombastic speeches and propaganda. Other despots and wannabe dictators later followed suit.

Germany's Weimar Republic, beset with hyperinflation and political extremism, became fertile ground for a failed Austrian painter named Adolf Hitler. As head of the National Socialist German Worker's Party – better known as the Nazi Party – this firebrand rapidly gained support for his deranged ideology based on fearmongering, hate and antisemitism. Despite spending part of the year in prison for assaulting his political rivals, Hitler still managed to garner attention outside of Germany.

On 21 November 1922, the *'New York Times'* published its first report on the tyrant-in-waiting: *"He exerts an uncanny control over audiences, possessing the remarkable ability to not only rouse his hearers to a fighting pitch of fury, but at will turn*



Adolf Hitler



Vladimir Putin

right around and reduce the same audience to docile coolness."

Incredibly, the article also had this to say: *"Hitler's anti-Semitism was not so violent or genuine as it sounded."* The Times would not be the last newspaper to misinterpret and underestimate the evil intentions of the diabolical leader.

Finally, as the year ended, the signing of a treaty in Russia created the Soviet Union on 30 December 1922. The new nation, destined to become a nuclear superpower, lasted 69 years before its iron curtain came crashing down.

However, the ignominious fall would have dire consequences for humanity at large. From the ashes of the communist regime, an opportunistic ex-KGB officer – Vladimir Putin – firmly grabbed power and will never let go, hellbent on restoring the USSR to its former glory at all costs.

About the Author: Christopher Warner is an Irish American actor and freelance writer. He's a frequent contributor to *Síocháin* and has written for several magazines and websites across multiple genres, including *Military History Matters*, *WWII Quarterly*, *Aviation History*, *Ireland's Own*, and *Irish America*. He currently resides in Co. Kerry with his wife, Maureen and their brood of cats.

