



Rebel Hearts: Journeys Within the IRA's Soul

Kevin Toolis

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For ten years Kevin Toolis investigated the lives of the IRA soldiers who wage a secret battle against the British State. His journeys took him from the back kitchens of Belfast, where men joked while making two-thousand-pound bombs, to prisons for interviews with men serving life sentences, and to the graveyards where mourners weep. Each chapter explores a world where history, faith, and human savagery determine life and death. At once moving and harrowing, *Rebel Hearts* is the most authoritative and insightful book ever written on the IRA.

Rebel Hearts: Journeys Within the IRA's Soul Details

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Meykong Delta says

This is a book for anyone who strives to understand the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Being a rebellious, independent person, I've always instinctively understood the Catholic point of view more than the Protestant point of view in this centuries old conflict. As I cringed my way through Kevin Toolis' investigation of the IRA, I was finally able to open my heart and inner eye to see the Protestant point of view, as well. In addition, despite the many books I've read about the Troubles, this book really helped me understand the political complicating factors... not just the obvious issues between the IRA and the British government, but also between the Republic and the IRA. Toolis' provided so much insight on a personal level for me that I found myself [for the first time in my life] wanting to write a letter to the author thanking him for writing his book! As I read the last painful page, I ended the book more enlightened, and thus seeing the conflict in a much more balanced way. I just may actually write that letter, too. :)

Kiley says

A great book on the IRA, especially for readers who have no exposure firsthand of the Troubles. What the book truly did was humanize the struggle. Toolis does a great job of being fair in his assessments of both the Brits and the Irish. Regardless of where you stand, it is now easy to understand how and why the IRA exists and do what they do. You may not agree with their actions or condone the violence, but there is a struggle going on here....one for the basic rights of freedom. It is easy to see how this quest for freedom from the Crown has escalated into such violent means. I am certainly left with a desire to read more on the Troubles and gain even more insight into the plight of the Irish.

Janet Whalen says

Journalistic portrait of ordinary people involved in the IRA. Sympathetic portrayal of how individuals and families are swept into the Republican movement. Really makes you think about the definitions of Freedom Fighter, Patriot and Terrorist and how malleable those terms can be. Humans are arguably inherently tribal. We tend to seek meaning through belonging. In America today we tend to deplore "jihadists" and express bewilderment that anyone would be crazy enough to die for their beliefs. Yet as I read of the Irish people in Belfast and Derry, perhaps my own distant cousins as I am partially of Irish descent, crazy seemed to make much more sense. Many Irish in the North believe they are living in occupied territory, that the Forces of the British Crown are foreign oppressors. In this Weltanschauung It is crystal clear that kicking out the invaders to free your home from oppression, by any means necessary including by force of arms is a total no-brainer. Perspective is everything, innit?

Glen says

This is an easy read from the standpoint of the good journalistic prose, but of course painful to read because of the subject matter. Toolis has spent much time with his subjects, and does not shy away from his own ambivalence about the use of violence in the name of a cause he believes in and at some level supports. This book was written before the Good Friday Agreement and long before Martin McGuinness, to whom perhaps the most interesting chapter of the book ("Chieftains") is devoted, became Deputy First Minister for Northern Ireland, a reality that helps the reader see just how far Ulster has come since the Troubles, albeit with still a long way to go. Toolis ventures a comparison of Ireland to South Africa in the concluding chapter, but unless one is willing to cast McGuinness in the role of Mandela and Arlene Foster in the role of de Klerk (a hell of a stretch on both counts), a road to real political reconciliation and a unified Ireland is still a long ways off. Still, given the results of the recent Brexit referendum and the call for an all-Ireland forum, who knows?

Mike/ says

Interesting primer on the IRA and the issues in Northern Ireland.

Ann says

I did really want to like this book. However it felt very disjointed - a collection of stories and narratives without connections that would help me relate everyone and everything together - and so I ended up giving up about halfway through.

John says

Excellent book for understanding the IRA's political standpoint and their historical and present reasons for their actions. The use of interviews is quite interesting to hear from those at various positions in the IRA from Volunteer upwards.

This is one of the books recommended by the BBC journalist Peter Taylor for those interested in reading around this area.

I really wish I could have had the extra time to read the last chapter on Martyrs - but I will certainly seek this book again in the future to finish where I left off.

Deeann says

Describes cronyism and apartheid in Northern Ireland supported by British troops, and the IRA rebels.

Julie H. says

Okay, so I'm fascinated with Irish history, with the North of Ireland, and with what drives people to defend their land with guns and bombs. The compelling cover shot got me to pull this one off the shelf, and I'm so glad I did. Toolis provides some great insights, and I thoroughly enjoyed this book.

Michael Lovito says

Jeez this took me a long time. Rebel Hearts is an incredibly dense and detailed book about that takes singular incidents in the Troubles, and uses them as a jumping off point to discuss the broader trends and history surrounding the armed struggle of the IRA. Sometimes these stories can be revealing (especially the profile of Martin McGuinness, and the story about the failed assassination of a dog warden), but other times it becomes a slough, and very focused on the logistics and hierarchy of IRA life. At it's best, Rebel Hearts reveals the conflict between the IRA's romantic notions of itself and the allure of it's ideals with the ultimately pathetic and futile nature of some of their actions. At it's worst, it feels a lot like the Troubles must have at their height, which, is to say, never ending.

Christina says

One of the best books on the IRA that I've ever read. It is a great blend of anecdotes and personal interviews with Volunteers and family members with meticulously researched passages from the author. If you're interested in The Troubles in Northern Ireland, this book is a must-read.

Lauren says

This was a wonderfully fascinating look at the Troubles. It did a really great job of analyzing the psychology and motivation of both Nationalists and Republicans during the Troubles. It also really showed how difficult an issue it was to understand not just for outsiders but for those in Northern Ireland as well. It really put an emphasis on the fact that it was inescapable for people living in Northern Ireland from the 1960s-1990s. It was also a really great book, because it feels so applicable to so many political situations that are going on today. What is a terrorist? What is the difference between a group like the IRA and the actions of the 1916 Easter Rising Republicans or the French Republicans of the 1790s or the Continental Army of the 1770s. Is it the civilian toll? Are they legitimately people fighting for the right to exist like the Rebel Syrians or Ukrainians in today's news? Such a fascinating, thought provoking read. I would absolutely recommend it to anyone interested in the troubles or the politics of Northern Ireland.

Roy says

Toolis captures the feel of living as outsiders and an underclass in an oppressive state during the Troubles. He

shows the motivation behind the IRA.
Let's hope Brexit doesn't take us back to that.

NuNu says

.An insightful look into the various factions that exist within the IRA.

Kady Marteness says

A wonderful journey -- Toolis makes a great guide. Poignant, sad, funny and true: all the gears that make up the IRA and presented here.
