

Bloody Sunday: an account of the day

'Bloody Sunday' refers to the shooting dead by the British Army of 13 civilians (and the wounding of another 14 people, one of whom later died) during a Civil Rights march in Derry.

Despite a ban on parades and marches in Northern Ireland in 1972, a demonstration by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association against internment was allowed to go ahead, after consultations with the police and army. The Association placed 'special emphasis on the necessity for a peaceful incident-free day'.

14:00	The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) march against internment was meant to start at 2.00pm from the Creggan.
14:50	The march left late (2.50pm approximately) from Central Drive in the Creggan Estate and took an indirect route towards the Bogside area of the city. People joined the march along its entire route. At approximately 3.25pm the march passed the 'Bogside Inn' and turned up Westland Street before going down William Street. Estimates of the number of marchers at this point vary. Some observers put the number as high as 20,000 whereas the Widgery Report estimated the number at between 3,000 and 5,000.
15:35	Around 3.45pm most of the marchers followed the organisers instructions and turned right into Rossville Street to hold a meeting at 'Free Derry Corner'. However a section of the crowd continued along William Street to the British Army barricade. A riot developed. (Confrontations between the Catholic youth of Derry and the British Army had become a common feature of life in the city and many observers reported that the rioting was not particularly intense.)
15:55	At approximately 3.55pm, away from the riot and also out of sight of the meeting, soldiers (believed to be a machine-gun platoon of Paratroopers) in a derelict building in William Street opened fire (shooting 5 rounds) and injured Damien Donaghy (15) and John Johnston (59). Both were treated for injuries and were taken to hospital (Johnston died on 16 June 1972). <i>[The most recent information (see, for example, Pringle, P. and Jacobson, P.; 2000) suggests that an Official IRA member then fired a single shot in response at the soldiers in the derelict building. This incident happened prior to the main shooting and also out of sight of Rossville Street.]</i> Also around this time (about 3.55pm) as the riot in William Street was breaking up, Paratroopers requested permission to begin an arrest operation.
16:05	By about 4.05pm most people had moved to 'Free Derry Corner' to attend the meeting.
16:07	4.07pm (approximately) An order was given for a 'sub unit' (Support Company) of the 1st Battalion Parachute Regiment to move into William Street to begin an arrest operation directed at any remaining rioters. The order authorising the arrest operation specifically stated that the soldiers were 'not to conduct running battle down Rossville Street' (Official Brigade Log). The soldiers of Support Company were under the command of Ted Loden, then a Major in the Parachute Regiment (and were the only soldiers to fire at the crowd from street level).
16:10	At approximately 4.10pm soldiers of the Support Company of the 1st Battalion Parachute Regiment began to open fire on people in the area of Rossville Street Flats. By about 4.40pm the shooting ended with 13 people dead and a further 14 injured from gunshots. The shooting took place in four main places: the car park (courtyard) of Rossville Flats; the forecourt of Rossville Flats (between the Flats and Joseph Place); at the rubble and wire barricade on Rossville Street (between Rossville Flats and Glenfada Park); and in the area around Glenfada Park (between Glenfada Park and Abbey Park). According to British Army evidence 21 soldiers fired their weapons on 'Bloody Sunday' and shot 108 rounds in total. <i>[Most of the basic facts are agreed, however what remains in dispute is whether or not the soldiers came under fire as they entered the area of Rossville Flats. The soldiers claimed to have come under sustained attack by gunfire and nail-bomb. None of the eyewitness accounts saw any gun or bomb being used by those who had been shot dead or wounded. No soldiers were injured in the operation, no guns or bombs were recovered at the scene of the killing.]</i>