**RESPONSE TO BARRY KEANE’S ARTICLE IN THE IRISH POLITICAL REVIEW OF SEPTEMBER 2012**

**Jeff Dudgeon letter published in Irish Political Review of November 2012 with a response by Barry Keane in the December 2012 issue**

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***MICHAEL O’DONOGHUE’S BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY WITNESS STATEMENT REGARDING THE DUNMANWAY MASSACRE***

**By Jeffrey Dudgeon**

The *Irish Political Review* (IPR September 2012) carried a press statement by Cork historian and web writer, Barry Keane, under the headline ‘*Dunmanway – Some New Information*.’ Keane asserts in his own heading “former GAA President’s statement to the Bureau of Military History (BMH) ends 1922 West Cork Protestant killings controversy.”

He added “both sides will be able to claim victory as the real story is revealed” and that while Peter Hart “got the sequence of events right,” Michael O’Donoghue’s information “directly contradicts his thesis that the murders were sectarian.” He concluded, “The Dunmanway killings “were a unique stain on the reputation of the IRA” as per “de Valera’s official biography” but they were not evidence of “systematic ethnic cleaning similar to that which happened to Catholics in the north.”

The BMH archive of over 2,000 items, mostly witness statements, was “collected by the State between 1947 and 1957, in order to gather primary source material for the revolutionary period in Ireland from 1913 to 1921.” It is separately described as ending on 11th July 1921. The Truce was seen as a suitable cut-off date as it avoided the Civil War and its preliminaries which were obviously highly sensitive in the south in the 1950s as so many of the participants were still alive.

That period was then only some 35 years earlier, the equivalent timeframe today for events in the late 1970s. However many of the statements, like Michael O’Donoghue’s, drift over into the 1922-23 period, and in his case extensively. References in the BMH files to the years 1922 and 1923 are numbered in hundreds. Of note is the fact that O’Donoghue’s statement is the only one to mention the Dunmanway murders and similarly the only one to mention the supposed Anti-Sinn Fein Society or League in Cork.

One other witness statement, that of Patrick Collins (Capt. 'G' Company, 2nd Battn., Cork No. 1 Bgde.) does mention something similar: “It was known by our Intelligence Service that, during the latter half of 1920, there was formed in Cork an Anti-Sinn Fein organisation, comprising members of the Freemason and Protestant Young Men's Christian Association in Cork City.” This unlikely combination however belongs to a somewhat earlier time and the city.

Barry Keane is far too sanguine about this controversy ending although he would very much like it to be so, believing it “a pointless debate.” His added overstatement above about “systematic ethnic cleaning” of Catholics in the north is largely for another day but it is worth reminding him that Peter Hart said such cleansing occurred in neither part of Ireland while the general fate of the northern Catholics does not suggest what did happen to them was systematic cleansing. It was certainly not entirely defensive as ninety-two police officers – RIC and RUC – were killed from 1920 to 1922 in the six counties.

I think Mr Keane would prefer that historians concentrated on the main aspects of the War of Independence in Cork and the less problematic, but Dunmanway was too great a crime to be a mere “stain” on the reputation of the IRA. It may have been exceptional but in a war in which Protestants feared they would suffer drastically it was inevitable, and probably more so in the post-truce chaos. Like Bloody Sunday, it was remarkable for the number of dead and the loss of control by the military.

In truth, Michael O’Donoghue’s witness statement to the BMH adds very little by way of information where Dunmanway is concerned. Indeed it is hardly a witness statement at all as he is only reporting on what he has heard and surmising in consequence.

The statement’s worth comes from who is saying it, more than what is said. On the basic facts and taking it at face value, O’Donoghue is likely to be correct as to the sequencing and origin of the killings, as such comments did not endanger comrades’ reputations. On the sectarian aspects, he has to be much less convincing since that is essentially a matter of opinion, something politically subjective.

The statement must therefore be assessed, in its context, with caution and due scepticism. Overall it is a well-written, literary, stirring narrative of military campaigning, 377 typed pages in length. Although it is unsigned and undated a year in the 1950s can be inferred from a note of 19 August 1958 regarding the abstraction of several pages of his Civil War service description.

The tone and style of the short section (280 words) on the Dunmanway murders differs from the rest of his testimony. It is hard edged, defensive and plainly propagandist although his humanity seeps through. It was written as a tribute to a fallen comrade just after a mention of him. No names or ranks of those who carried out the massacre are given nor were they likely to have been.

He wrote, “Poor Mick O'Neill A grand chivalrous warrior of the I.R.A. less than two months later, he called at the house of a British loyalist, named Hornibrook, to get help for a broken-down motor. As he knocked on the door, he was treacherously shot dead without the slightest warning by a hidden hand from inside the house. The I.R.A in Bandon were alerted. The house was surrounded. Under threat of bombing and burning, the inmates surrendered. Three men, Hornibrook, his son and son-in-law, a Captain Woods. The latter, a British Secret Service agent, confessed to firing the fatal shot, Why? God alone knows. None of the three knew O'Neill or he them. Probably Woods got scared at seeing the strange young man in I.R.A. attire knocking, thought he was cornered and fired at him in a panic. The sequel was tragic.”

By the time of the killings, which started in the early morning of 26 April 1922, O’Donoghue had moved to Donegal. He talks of attending meetings in Cork at the end of March 1922 and then of his decision to go to Donegal as the 1st Northern Division’s military engineer, swapping with one Mick Crowley. By late April 1922 he was out of Cork.

O’Donoghue concluded, “Several prominent loyalists - all active members of the anti-Sinn Féin Society in West Cork, and blacklisted as such in I.R.A. Intelligence Records - in Bandon, Clonakilty, Ballineen and Dunmanway, were seized at night by armed men, taken out and killed. Some were hung, most were shot. All were Protestants. This gave the slaughter a sectarian appearance. Religious animosity had nothing whatever to do with it. These people were done to death as a savage, wholesale, murderous reprisal for the murder of Mick O'Neill. They were doomed to die because they were listed as aiders and abettors of the British Secret Service, one of whom, Captain Woods, had confessed to shooting dead treacherously and in cold blood Vice-Commandant Michael O'Neill that day near Crookstown in May 1922 Fifteen or sixteen loyalists in all went to gory graves in brutal reprisal for O'Neill's murder.”

The use of the term “anti-Sinn Féin Society” seems to be exculpatory as O’Donoghue’s assertion that religion was not the issue does not pass muster when he accepts the ten later deaths – all Protestant – were reprisals. Nobody has produced evidence of such an entity in 1922 although Peter Hart says a number of those killed had pro-British reputations not least the Hornibrooks. That coheres with Gerard Murphy who wrote of an “‘anti-Sinn Féin Society’ consisting of renegade British officers carrying out assassinations in Cork during 1920/21. But IRA men then used this as a blanket term to cover their own shootings of Protestants in the post-Truce period.”

O’Donoghue’s phrasing reads remarkably like Hart’s memorable chapter heading ‘Taking it out on the Protestants.’ (*The IRA and its Enemies*, 1998) With so many killings, often based on little more than perception, local gossip and grudges, it was inevitable that collateral damage would also occur with the wrong victims being picked out or relatives substituting, as may have happened in the case of the shot Church of Ireland clergyman, the Rev. Ralph Harbord. It is probably true that if Captain Woods had not resisted, fourteen people would not have died.

The section is notable for being both justificatory and condemnatory yet the phrasing reveals his horror at the excesses of the days of rage. Minor points include him getting the month wrong (April not May) while later saying some of the Protestants were hanged which chimes with the statement by Matilda Woods, daughter of Thomas Hornibrook. Her husband was the uncle of Captain Woods who fired the fatal shot. (See Keane’s valuable website <https://sites.google.com/site/protestantcork191136/> for such accurate details in his section ‘*Protestant Cork decline 1911-1926 Murders, Mistakes, Myths, and Misinformation*.’)

Perhaps Thomas Hornibrook, his son Samuel and Captain Woods were indeed hanged if their crime was thought to be murder, the word used here. Most accounts accept that the IRA was raiding their house in darkness. O’Donoghue unobtrusively understands their predicament. One welcome result of the developing controversy might be the discovery and reburial of the bodies of those three disappeared men which have never been located.

On the origin of the massacre, John Regan’s supposition that the capture on 26 April in Macroom of the four British Intelligence officers and their later execution was related no longer stands up. Similarly the notion expressed in the IPR that there is a case for the killings having been the work of the British can be discarded. It has to be said however that O’Donoghue only implies IRA involvement, probably because it did not seem an issue at that time, and not one he wanted to emphasise.

Jack Lane wrote in the same IPR issue, “But the killings were repudiated at the time on the basis that they were sectarian and would fuel sectarianism.” This was indeed true – of both sides of the Dail – and it does not suggest the anti-Treatyites were “prepared to kill groups of Protestants to further their cause.” Most of the Cork IRA was anti-treaty for all sorts of reasons and its senior officers were at that moment in Dublin, as we know, but it has to be admitted then when blood is up sectarianism is never far from the surface. The killing of ten Protestants in county Cork after O’Neill’s killing is in no way dissimilar to the Kingsmill massacre in county Armagh fifty-four years later where ten Protestants were taken out of a minibus and shot dead in reprisal for earlier killings.

But why is the accusation of sectarianism so strenuously resisted by O’Donoghue, the IPR and most Irish nationalist writers in relation to these and other events? It would be remarkable if an ethnic or national war like that in Ireland over the last century did not involve a high degree of sectarianism. Rebel or paramilitary forces would hardly be an exception to the pattern.

The only reason, I believe, is that Republicanism grew out of, maintains and certainly trades effectively – especially internationally – on a policy and reputation of bringing Irish people of all persuasions together. This could be possible with Irish Protestants, rarely of Unionists and certainly never of the pro-British population and Loyalists – the majority in the north. The problem always was that only a very few could afford to be simply Protestants and those who could showed a remarkable propensity to convert to Roman Catholicism, for whatever reason, or had a minority radical and Anglophobic outlook like F.J. Bigger, Bulmer Hobson, Casement and Douglas Hyde.

This successful piece of disingenuity or sometimes self-deception is at its most resonant with Wolfe Tone’s statement of aims, worth quoting at length, “'To subvert the tyranny of our execrable government, to break the connection with England, the never failing source of all our political evils, and to assert the independence of my country - these were my objects. To unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of all past dissentions, and to substitute the common name of Irishman, in the place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic, and Dissenter - these were my means.”

Not only did he fail then but his words now have only the opposite effect, and have done since partition. If the Ulster Protestants are not part of the Irish nation, Republicanism for them has to be sectarian and is in fact Hibernianism, recognisable or not.

Michael O’Donoghue, having a twin brother James in the RIC exemplified the split line amongst Irish Catholics, one more evident today with Home Rule sentiment surfacing as Republican hegemony slides away.

He wrote in his witness statement of that twin: “His training completed, he was posted to Aughnacloy, Co. Tyrone, where he served until the R.I.C. were disbanded in 1922. I wrote back to mother and told her to warn her R.I.C. son never to write to me or never to mention that he had a brother in Cork at U.C.C. Furthermore, I wanted to hear no mention of him whatsoever in any of her letters, and I never referred to him at all. I was a bit alarmed about my own extraordinary position. Here was I now in Cork, an active member of the Irish Volunteers (now the I.R.A.), while my twin brother was in the R.I.C. Force in Ulster, and my father, an ex-sergeant, R.I.C.”

He then related the fate of that brother in the summer of 1922 after he left the RIC, “The local I.R.A. police had promptly arrested him and ordered him to leave Cappoquin within 24 hours under threat of death. He had gone back straight to Gormanston R.I.C. H.Q., where he was retained in the R.I.C. for a few months longer. My parents were irate with the local I.R.A. for this bit of tyranny, and I, too, shared their resentment, somewhat. It certainly was galling for me, an I.R.A. fighter in North and South, to dash home to see my parents and family and to find that my brother, a demobbed R.I.C. man, returned home, had been driven away as a dangerous criminal at the point of the gun by the local Republican police”.

An anti-Treatyite, O’Donoghue was no unseeing triumphalist, observing, “It was just one of the many acts of bullying end brutal tyranny indulged in at that time by petty local Republican "warriors" to show their arrogant authority and self-importance. These acts resulted in the name of I.R.A. police becoming obnoxious in many districts. In many places, the local Battalion Commandant claimed supreme authority in his area and ruled like a feudal baron.”

Once at war, there is little can be done to curb excesses at command level let alone at the periphery. This witness gave honourable examples of how he tried while always defending his comrades but it is not the last word on the matter of Dunmanway.

Jeffrey Dudgeon

14 September 2012

[Published in IPR November 2012 with ‘Some Comments’ and an attack/reply by Brendan Clifford ‘Prying out sectarianism.’ Part I. Part II and Barry Keane’s response came in December 2012.]

**Sunday Independent letter full version of 709 words:**

25 July 2011

Dear Editor,

Eoghan Harris draws attention (24 July) to the need for Republicans and their supporters, to face up to the reality of “the sufferings of Irish Protestants in the period 1919-22.” His words expose the great deceit of those who repeatedly quote Wolfe Tone’s words about the “unity of Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter” and yet desperately downplay the, perhaps inevitable, consequence of the War of Independence on the very same Protestants and Dissenters.

St Matthew’s remark “By their deeds, ye shall know them” is especially apposite, for it is the failings of those who go to war, and then do the opposite of what they supposedly believe in, which is most reprehensible. That so many Republicans are still trying to shrug off blame for their actions, most recently in Northern Ireland, and also a century ago, is no surprise. That they are increasingly backed by a raft of weasel-worded academics and commentators is a new and disturbing phenomenon.

The death toll of 73 Cork Protestants in those years, quoted in the article, is quite breath-taking given the brief period covered and the relatively small numbers. It certainly explains why the decline in Cork’s Protestant population between the censuses of 1911 and 1926 was nearly 50% in the City and 40% in the County. The massive fall indicates a near-complete loss of confidence by that community, especially on the part of the less well-off Protestants (i.e. Dissenters). Such rapid population declines are nearly unprecedented in Europe, short of ethnic cleansing.

Historians do face difficulties when it comes to making an assessment of the 1921-2 killings, in particular of the 13 Protestants in the Bandon Valley and Dunmanway (ironically the same number as were killed by the British Army in January 1972 on Bloody Sunday). That these events had a seismic effect on the southern Protestant community is not in doubt.

There are two views, at least, on whether they were sectarian killings, the worst in southern Ireland over the whole revolutionary period. Plainly there were earlier events in the town that inflamed passions.

That the Dunmanway Protestants deserved their fate, being ‘informers’ is however one interpretation which needs particular challenge. (Two were boys and one a Church of Ireland clergyman). Such a view is heartless and takes no account of the fact that the vast bulk of Protestants were still British in their outlook and loyalties, as indeed were a considerable proportion of the Catholic community. In different ways, they saw it as their duty to support the legal security forces.

In the dangerous interregnum between the War of Independence and the Civil War, most Protestants were beginning a painful reassessment. Of course, as always, a large proportion were not politically minded and just kept their heads down and hoped. People’s national loyalties don’t switch when frontiers move. That takes generations, if indeed they ever change.

Harris also draws attention to the failure by many academics “to challenge the disgraceful forgery called the Dunmanway dossier, still used by ultra-nationalists to blacken innocent Protestants as spies.” This document, apparently left behind by the departing British forces, and supposedly listing ‘informers’ is frequently quoted as the IRA’s justification for the Dunmanway killings - after the truce. However it remains inaccessible. No one knows its full contents or present whereabouts.

Most people nowadays get their preliminary information on a subject from Wikipedia and then a few, if interested, consult academic works. However the Wikipedia article on the Dunmanway Massacre has been captured by the dodgy dossier’s exponents, in tone and content.

Excuses for the killings come before their details and, until recently, the fact that the dead were all Protestants was buried down the page. The dead are now described in the summary as ‘Protestants accused of informing,’ not simply ‘civilians,’ as is the practice with similar Belfast articles. And the only evidence allowed for this crude smear and historic analysis is the invisible list.

I challenge the dossier’s present custodians to produce the document or cease using it as an excuse for murder, and also for academic historians to join with me in expressing their concerns publicly about its unavailability

Yours sincerely,

Jeffrey Dudgeon (author of *Roger Casement: The Black Diaries - With a Study of his Background, Sexuality, and Irish Political Life)*

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