**Dunmanway Massacre**

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*More on Dunmanway controversy*

**Dunmanway massacre, April 1922**

Dear Editor,

John Desmond of Bandon draws attention (*History Ireland,* September/October 2012) to the murder of the Coffey brothers on 14 February 1921 in Enniskeane by Essex Regiment soldiers, soon after that of Thomas Bradfield on 1 February 1921. An elderly Protestant farmer from Bandon, Bradfield had mistaken a Scottish-accented IRA man for a British soldier and unwisely advised him of a ‘dugout’ he had discovered on his land.

He declares the deaths of James and Timothy Coffey have not been linked to the later Dunmanway massacre in April 1922, adding “the seed of the now infamous Bandon Valley massacre was sewn” there and “matured several months later when those same forces vacated the military barracks in Dunmanway, leaving behind unfortunately for some people, a diary containing their names, and those of other informers.”

He explained how “two masked civilians, who were members of the ‘Anti-Sinn Fein Society’” led soldiers directly to the Coffey brothers’ bedroom, and that one of the two later escaped (from the Dunmanway massacre) and was awarded compensation for ‘dislocation’.

This was apparently Richard Helen from Clonakilty who was also said to have passed information to the police shortly after the murder of District Inspector Michael Kenny (or Keany) and the serious wounding of his sixteen-year-old son Edward on 11 February 1922 in Clonakilty where he had been Head Constable.

Mr Desmond concluded by asking that “historians delve into the unresearched facts, and then let all the dead rest in peace.” But history is never about letting the dead rest in peace; rather it subjects them to constant re-excavation. It wouldn’t be history otherwise.

I don’t doubt that many, perhaps most, of those thirteen Protestants (or their relatives) who were taken out and killed that April had assisted the security forces or the British administration during the War of Independence; few wouldn’t by commission or omission.

Those attacked included Revd. Ralph Harbord who was badly wounded at Murragh Rectory, the house of his father Canon Richard Harbord, and probably mistaken or substituted for an army brother; John Bradfield shot dead despite the killers asking for his brother William; and sixteen-year-old Robert Nagle shot dead in place of his father, Thomas, caretaker of the Masonic Hall in Clonakilty. It appeared anyone in the family would do those nights.

The killers were not being particular as this was sectarian terror fuelled by vengeance – ethnic cleansing if it had continued at that pace. And if the Protestants were not known to have collaborated they were perceived as having done so in suspicions that conflated spies, informers, boy scouts, Freemasons, YMCA members, and ‘anti-Sinn Fein Society’ loyalists, not unlike the toxic reasons of those murdering Catholics so often in the later Troubles.

But that is not the modern point. It was in this instance, as in Peter Hart’s chapter title, a matter of ‘Taking it out on the Protestants,’ and the consequences were extreme like other such mass killings – the thirteen Catholic civilians on Bloody Sunday in Derry in 1972 or the ten Protestants in Kingsmill, Armagh in 1976.

The trigger in April 1922 was the raid on the Hornibrook house at Ballincollig and the defensive killing of Vice-Commandant Michael O’Neill by Herbert Woods the nephew of the husband of Matilda Hornibrook.

Unless that was the first act in what was then made massacre. Why otherwise would the IRA in west Cork (with its top officers absent in Dublin) raid a prominent Protestant’s house in the middle of the night except to either kill the occupants or at least destroy the building? Woods, Thomas Hornibrook JP and his son Samuel were taken away and either hanged or shot. Their bodies were never located. They are amongst the disappeared.

Another seed is likely to have been the fact that on 15 December 1920 in Dunmanway, Cadet Harte of the Auxiliaries had killed a Catholic priest, the elderly Canon Magner and another man. Harte was later found guilty but insane, his mind said to have been affected by the Kilmichael killings a few days earlier.

That the Bandon area is significantly more Protestant than elsewhere in the south is of course relevant in terms of related motives such as economic jealousy, land grabbing and anti-masonic suspicion. The more better-off Protestants the more resentment.

The air of revenge in the city and county of Cork after the truce is also evidenced by the killing of a number of RIC officers such as DI Kenny who had apparently defended Rosscarbery barracks during the IRA attack in March 1921.

The attempts at a cover-up of the plainly sectarian motives in Dunmanway by so many writers, then and now, smack of collusion. We are told by John Desmond, the killings can be explained by that British intelligence document or diary naming informers, or ‘helpful citizens’ in the Bandon area. It remains inaccessible. Despite its continued invisibility it was used as evidence of legitimate motive by Meda Ryan and is quoted extensively in the Wikipedia article on Dunmanway.

The recently digitised Bureau of Military History statement by Michael O’Donoghue (Engineer, 2nd IRA Cork battalion) honestly explains, “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.”

However he prefaced his comments by saying that as all the dead were Protestants it may have given “the slaughter a sectarian appearance,” asserting instead, “Religious animosity had nothing whatever to do with it.” But what southerners and Republicans need to grasp is that Protestants in the south then and still so in the north, constitute an ethnic or national group, one wider and greater than its religion. Killing them for their ethnic loyalties is also sectarian.

The notion that the IRA, in particular the anti-Treaty IRA, could be undisciplined and sectarian is almost inconceivable to them. But all national or ethnic wars descend into murder. A case can be made for the War of Independence having been relatively restrained although that case can be argued as equally applying to the north, with neither conflict getting as far as ethnic cleansing.

However the epithet ‘sectarian’ is fiercely resisted in nationalist, and particularly, anti-revisionist quarters. Their case, if they only knew it, is consequently weakened, by defending or explaining away what is also, in Republican terms, indefensible.

Jeffrey Dudgeon

O’Donoghue statement: <http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/reels/bmh/BMH.WS1741%20PART%201.pdf#page=1>