**HISTORY IRELAND JANUARY 2013 WEBSITE LETTERS ON DUNMANWAY, PETER HART & KILMICHAEL**

**DUNMANWAY MASSACRE, APRIL 1922**

**From Jeffrey Dudgeon**

John Desmond of Bandon draws attention (letters, HI 20.5, Sept./Oct. 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. Bradfield, an elderly Protestant farmer from Bandon, 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

Belfast

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

**KILMICHAEL LETTERS**

**From Eve Morrison:**

Sir,—I write further to John Young’s letter (HI 20.6, Nov./Dec. 2012). In a statement dated 22 August 2012, Mr Young (one of the children of Kilmichael veteran Ned Young) takes ‘very strong exception’ to the account of our telephone conversation of 4 July 2012 that I gave in my response in Reviews in History to Niall Meehan’s long-winded review of Terror in Ireland.

I fully stand over my understanding of our 15-minute conversation (as recorded on my phone bill). As I already told Justine McCarthy of the Sunday Times, when I rang Mr Young I gave him my name and telephone number. I also told him I was an historian, and explained that I wanted to explore the veracity of a controversial claim that Peter Hart had lied about interviewing his father Ned. Mr Young does not recall confirming to me that Ned Young was mentally sound and could speak clearly on the dates Hart gave for his interview with him, whereas my notes indicate that Mr Young did do so. I asked Mr Young specifically if he was willing to go on record on this point, and he said yes. There was nothing confusing or ambiguous about our conversation, and further enquiries gave me no reason to doubt that Ned Young was well enough to be interviewed in the summer of 1988. John Young asserts that his father suffered a stroke in late 1986, but this evidently did not stop Ned Young participating in public events. In August 1987, for instance, the Southern Star published a photograph of Ned Young at Ballabuidhé (a local Dunmanway festival). In August 1988 the newspaper noted that he again attended the festival’s opening ceremony. Peter Hart had conducted his second interview with him several weeks earlier, in June.

Mr Young also maintains that the fact that the late Jim O’Driscoll SC, witnessed his signature on his 2007 affidavit imputes O’Driscoll’s support for the affidavit’s contention that Hart could not have interviewed Ned Young. Niall Meehan and others have styled O’Driscoll as one of the ‘signatories to the affidavit’. This is profoundly misleading. As solicitor Michael Malone, also a witness to the 2007 affidavit, explained to me, a ‘witness to signature’ merely verifies the identity and signature of the person making a statement, and does not imply any knowledge of or view on the contents of such a document. This was certainly so for Jim O’Driscoll. His widow Marion informed me that, contrary to what is being claimed, her late husband was clear that Hart did interview Ned Young, who was one of several IRA veterans O’Driscoll helped Hart to contact. She also confirmed that her husband had no reservations about Hart’s work, and in fact refused to join in attacks on Hart when approached to do so.—Yours etc.,

EVE MORRISON

A chara,—Eve Morrison in (HI 20.6, Nov./Dec. 2012) states that I am ‘misreading’ Jack Hennessy’s Bureau of Military History statement. I suggest it is she who is ‘misreading’ Hennessy. While Hennessy does not put the name ‘a false surrender’ on what he witnessed at Kilmichael on that day he actually describes one. Hennessy wrote: ‘Vice Comdt. McCarthy had got a bullet through the head and lay dead’. The breech of Hennessy’s rifle got fouled with ‘blood dripping’ from his forehead; he dropped his own rifle, took up McCarthy’s and continued to fight. He, like other Volunteers responded to Barry’s ‘three blasts’ whistle-indicator to cease firing following the surrender call. Hennessy says:

‘I heard the three blasts and got up from my position, shouting “hands up”. At the same time one of the Auxies about five yards from me drew his revolver. He had thrown down his rifle.’

It was during this period that two volunteers were fatally wounded. (I inadvertently wrote three in my previous letter.) At the opening of the ambush Barry blew the whistle—a signal for specific volunteers to commence; this whistle was again an indicator to cease firing—an acknowledgement that the surrender was accepted.

Like Peter Hart, Ms Morrison believes that the ‘Rebel Commandant’s report’ was not a forgery but was written by Tom Barry. I note that Meda Ryan in her biography of Tom Barry (2003) analyzed this report in detail, and it is obvious Barry would not have written it. But the clincher is the final sentence in the PS: ‘...P. Deasy was killed by a revolver bullet from one of the enemy whom he thought dead’. Barry would not have written that. Pat Deasy was seriously wounded following the false surrender and died some hours later.

Since that November day it has been known in West Cork that volunteers were fatally wounded following a false surrender. A controversy arose because Peter Hart located a document in the ‘Rebel Commandant’s report’, alleged to have been written by Tom Barry. It did not mention a false surrender. Hart endeavoured, in his book (1998), to prove there was none.  Meda Ryan (2003) pointed out that Hart had interviewed an anonymous scout on 19 November 1989, and that the last known Kilmichael ambush survivor Ned Young died on 13 November 1989. During a Q & A session at a UCC conference I asked Peter Hart to disclose the name of this Kilmichael ambush interviewee. Before a large audience he hedged, did what he could to bluff. I put it plainly to him that he was lying, and that he did not locate any participant who would deny the false surrender story. Despite being asked on numerous occasions by historians over the years, he did not answer that question. In a TG4 documentary Scéal Tom Barry (Dir. Gerry O’Callaghan, 2011) Hart said:

‘…it’s possible that this was some sort of a hoax and he was a fantasist, but that seems extremely unlikely.

Eve Morrison is now defending Peter Hart’s flawed narrative of the Kilmichael ambush, which includes disputing Tom Barry’s and the 3rd Brigade flying column’s actions on that day. Ms Morrison wrote that I am not ‘prepared [like others]...to accept the reality of war and...acknowledge the true extent of the sacrifice made by the men’. Let me assure Ms Morrison that I accept the reality of war and fully understand the sacrifices made by the men of the flying column. Is she not aware of the involvement of my father, Tom Kelleher, in many of the engagements carried out by members of the 3rd West Cork Brigade?—Is mise,

SEAN KELLEHER

Chontae Chorcaí

**From Niall Meehan**

Sir,—In paragraph two of Eve Morrison’s letter on the November 1920 Kilmichael ambush (HI 20.6, Nov./Dec. 2012) IRA volunteer Michael McCarthy died during the fight. Yet, in paragraph three he was alive afterwards.

Replying to Seán Kelleher (HI 20.4, July/Aug. 2012), Morrison cited Kilmichael veteran Jack Hennessy’s Bureau of Military History statement that McCarthy ‘lay dead’ prior to a British false surrender (that Morrison says never happened). Ambush testimony from veteran Jack O’Sullivan and commander Tom Barry supports this sequencing of McCarthy’s death.

Most veterans reported that McCarthy and Jim O’Sullivan were killed during the engagement and that a wounded Pat Deasy died some hours later. The veterans include Tom Barry, Jack Hennessy, James Murphy, Michael O’Driscoll, Ned Young and Stephen O’Neill. Here, Morrison is on sure ground.

Peter Hart in The IRA and its Enemies mistakenly presented as Tom Barry’s view that all three IRA fatalities resulted from the British Auxiliaries’ false surrender. He and Morrison use this misreading to undermine Barry’s account of the fight, thus weakening Barry’s false surrender narrative in Guerilla Days in Ireland. In fact, Barry consistently identified two resulting fatalities, Jim O’Sullivan and Pat Deasy.

Despite its clear contradiction with the veteran evidence cited above, Morrison simultaneously supports the view of veteran Patrick O’Brien, echoed in a recent commentary, that McCarthy was wounded and died soon after the ambush. This second version of McCarthy’s demise also strengthens Hart’s misinterpretation of Barry, and it reinforces Hart’s championing of a disputed ‘Rebel Commandant’s report’ in British archives. That document reported, ‘P. Deasy was killed by a revolver bullet from one of the enemy he thought dead’ and that two volunteers ‘subsequently died of wounds’. It does not mention a false surrender.

Morrison simultaneously presents conflicting versions of McCarthy’s death without comment because she subordinates evidence to vindication of Hart. The publisher claimed Morrison’s Kilmichael chapter in Terror in Ireland 1916-1923 accomplished such vindication. In my opinion her contribution clarified problems with Hart’s methods. I explain this in my review and in a response to criticism from Morrison ( gcd.academia.edu/NiallMeehan ).

Besides misreading Barry, Hart’s methods included claiming access to anonymous interview testimony from five Kilmichael veterans: his two and three from Fr John Chisholm. In fact, Hart appears to have accessed just two (Ned Young and Jack O’Sullivan on the ‘Chisholm tapes’). In response to my review Morrison reported being on the trail of a Kilmichael ‘scout’, allegedly interviewed by Hart six days after the last known ambush veteran died. Should Morrison discover him that will make three. However, his evidential value is doubtful. According to Morrison in Terror, Hart ‘muddled’ citations by attributing to the ‘scout’ tape-recorded words said by Jack O’Sullivan. Is this a muddled attribution or a muddled existence? In addition, in Hart’s 1993 PhD thesis this same historical actor was not the unarmed ‘scout’ he mysteriously became in Hart’s 1998 book.

A reason the Kilmichael false surrender is still discussed (see Peter Connolly’s letter in HI 20.6, Nov./Dec.) is therefore because Peter Hart used questionable means to undermine it. These means were first noted in Meda Ryan’s Tom Barry IRA Freedom Fighter (echoed in John Young’s letter in the last HI). Irish Independence forces appeared as ethnically inflamed caricatures in Hart’s research. The inaccurate portrayal of Tom Barry as a lying ‘political serial killer’ fleshed out the portrayal. It links this discussion with that of John Regan and David Fitzpatrick on Hart’s equally problematic IRA sectarianism allegations (HI 20.1, Jan./Feb. 2012 to HI 20.6, Nov./Dec. 2012).

This debate long ago moved beyond determining the precise conclusion of a bloody battle in the November twilight of 1920. I am sure it will revive again when future commentators ponder why the Irish historical profession chose to remain silent about Hart’s distortion of ethical standards, and whether a systemic bias in favour of Hart’s conclusions facilitated such indifference.—Yours sincerely,

NIALL MEEHAN

Griffith College

Dublin 8

 Sir,—I am saddened that a question has arisen again regarding the false surrender at the Kilmichael ambush on 28 November 1920. Eve Morrison in her letter (HI 20.6, Nov./Dec. 2012) has written that ‘relatives of Kilmichael veterans have become more active in promoting an alternative version of event’.

My father Pat O’Donovan was a volunteer in Tom Barry’s flying column and fought in section two, where volunteers were fatally wounded that day due to the deceitful actions of the Auxiliaries. He always said that following acceptance of surrender, the Auxiliaries took up and activated revolvers after they had thrown down their rifles. Tom Barry and the men who fought at Kilmichael have been wronged over recent years, and Peter Hart in his writing has created much annoyance for many family members of these men.

These men suffered much in their fight for independence. The agony that my father and ‘the boys’ in direct line of fire (section two) had to endure, on that freezing November day, and their account of the Auxiliaries’ false surrender, should be accepted. Otherwise future generations will continue to speculate. The result will be like Peter Hart’s story—distorted.

My mother died in December 2010. She was the last link to ‘The Boys of Kilmichael’. She was lucid to the end and whenever asked, would recall her husband’s (my father’s) account and that of the other volunteers and the trauma they had to endure, due to the Auxiliaries’ having accepted a surrender and then resuming action with revolvers.

My father participated in many engagements with the flying column. Between engagements he lived in a dugout in a field near his home. In later years he often returned to the ambush site, and with Fr O’Brien, he said the rosary for his comrades who were killed that day. He was the fourth last Kilmichael veteran. He died in 1981.—Yours etc.,

MAURA O’DONOVAN

Dunmanway

Co. Cork.

Sir,—I am the eldest daughter of Liam Deasy whose War of Independence memoir, Toward Ireland Free, was published in 1973. My father died in 1974. I willingly typed up the manuscript from start to finish as a labour of love.

Part of my father’s research consisted of tape-recorded interviews with IRA veterans. These were undertaken with the help of Fr John Chisholm, who edited the manuscript under direction of my father, and with his introduction of Fr Chisholm to former veterans. After publication and after my father died, Fr Chisholm regarded the tapes as in effect his personal possessions. In 2007 I requested from him in a telephone conversation a copy of my father’s tapes for submission to interested historians, a request he abruptly rejected on the grounds of ‘priestly confidentiality’.

The tapes were subject to controversy due to Fr Chisholm allowing the late Peter Hart, author of The IRA and its Enemies (1998), to quote the recordings anonymously. Hart reported three veterans on the tapes speaking on the November 1920 Kilmichael ambush. Some years ago due to pressure from historians to make the tapes available for inspection, Fr Chisholm gave the tapes to a member of the Deasy family, a nephew of my father. On the basis that she was sympathetic to Peter Hart’s account Eve Morrison of Trinity College was given access to the tapes. She partially reported their contents in a chapter in Terror in Ireland, 1916-1923 (2012). She wrote that the tapes contained veteran testimony from two Kilmichael veterans.

In Trinity College on 26 October 2011 at a talk on Kilmichael by Eve Morrison, Fr Chisholm was questioned by TV producer Jerry O’Callaghan. O’Callaghan listened to and was allowed to report on the recordings but not broadcast them. He reported in Scéal Tom Barry (‘The Tom Barry Story’) on TG4 in January 2012 that the tapes contained just one Kilmichael veteran speaking on the ambush. Fr Chisholm answered that he had mislaid a final tape O’Callaghan did not hear. He subsequently found that tape and gave it to Eve Morrison. It contained the testimony played at the TCD seminar and it was from Kilmichael veteran Ned Young. That is a very strange fact. In response to a request from John Young, son of Ned Young, for a copy of his father’s tape, Fr Chisholm stated that he didn’t have a tape recording of Ned Young.

In addition to the Deasy/Chisholm interviewees, Hart claimed to have personally interviewed two more veterans in 1988-89. As Ned Young was the last Kilmichael veteran alive since December 1986 he had to be one. However, Ned Young suffered a stroke in late 1986 and could not communicate effectively (as sworn on affidavit by Ned’s son, John). Furthermore, Hart reportedly interviewed his second alleged additional veteran six days after Ned Young died. Therefore, as it stands currently there are now nine Deasy/Chisholm tapes containing two Kilmichael veterans speaking on the ambush, not three as Hart claimed. Hart’s two separate additional interviews seem fictitious.

This situation clamours for the production of all the Chisholm/Deasy tapes for the scrutiny of all interested historians. On 3 June 2009 I wrote as follows to my father’s nephew, the present custodian of convenience of the tapes, with a copy to Fr Chisholm:

‘It is my fervent wish that the tapes be placed in the public domain, where other scholars may have access to the contents. My father’s research should not be sullied by becoming a political football. The only way in which this may be avoided is by openly and transparently placing the information in a historical archive.  I suggest University College Cork as most appropriate.’

Professor Dermot Keogh, then Head of History in UCC, was in contact and expressed great interest in receiving and safeguarding the material. My plea fell on deaf ears, as the tapes are still held privately and are still denied critical scrutiny.

I am not in good health.  It is my fervent wish that Fr Chisholm make a thorough search for all material belonging to my father which he may also have mislaid, and that the material be given to UCC for use by researchers. This scandalous situation has to end and can only end with full disclosure of the tapes and their contents. Yours etc.,

MAUREEN DEASY