

The Civil War in Galway

Part 11 of Nollaig O Gadhra's series to mark the 75th anniversary

WHILE the six executions in Tuam on April 11th, 1923 brought the total of the Civil War to 71, six more — though not on the same day — were to be added to the infamous total of "77" before it was all over.

On April 25th, 1923 three men — Edward Greaney, James McInerney and Reginald Hathaway — were shot in Tralee. Hathaway was a former British soldier who deserted to the Irish Republican cause because he was convinced of its righteousness. When the split came, he took the anti-Treaty I.R.A. side and fought with courage in West Cork and South Kerry. It was his tough luck that his number came up the day before Frank Aiken announced the cessation of hostilities that came into effect on April 30th, 1923. The same could probably be said for Patrick Mahoney who was shot in Ennis the following morning, April 26th, 1923.

But even the end of the fighting did not persuade the Free State authorities to desist from further "official executions." Conor Quinn and William Shaughnessy went before the final firing squad on May 2nd, 1923, thus pushing the grand total from 75 to 77 in a manner that seems to suggest, once again, that those at the top of the Military Council of the new state wanted to involve as many Free State Army Commands as possible in the blood-letting. Nor did it end there. Further "unofficial executions" followed, the most famous one perhaps being that of Captain Noel Lemass who was seized by Government forces in Dublin on July 3rd, 1923. It was understood that he had been snatched by the new Special Branch interrogators based in Oriel House, but nothing further was heard about him until his mutilated body was found in the Dublin Mountains on October 12th, 1923.

The capture and, it was accepted, the torture of Noel Lemass remains a cause of rumour and speculation to this very day. He is most remembered by a later generation for the simple fact that his younger brother, Seán Lemass, who was also out in 1916, with W.T. Cosgrave amongst other typical "Dubs," never mentioned the matter in public or sought to make political capital out of it as he made his way up the Fianna Fáil ladder to become Taoiseach. But there are rumours that "Lemass was one of those who knew too much". In other words, some Free State opponents in the Civil War intended to silence him, even if there was a cease-fire, and the war was over. It has also been suggested by some sources that Lemass may have been involved in the unofficial attack on Seán Hales and Pádraic O Máille on December 7th, 1923 which was used by the Cosgrave government as an excuse for the shooting without trial of Rory, Liam, Dick and Joe the following morning. Or at least that he knew too much about who was really involved in an incident which the I.R.A. never claimed and never sanctioned.

Whatever about all this, the point needs to be made clearly at the end of this series that Liam Lynch in his most militant internal moments never suggested that all elected T.D.s be attacked or shot. Hales and O Máille were on the I.R.A. "hit list," at the time because they voted for the Emergency Powers provisions of the Provisional Parliament which removed the power to inflict death from the courts and indeed from the Government and handed it over to a three-man Military Council (where Defence Minister Mulcahy doubled as Commander in Chief) — any two members of which could order an execution without appeal or sanction. It may be difficult for some of us to comprehend today how come it was possible to arrive at such manifestly unjust ways of doing things in the new Irish Free State whose supporters said they were fighting for democracy. The reality, of course, is that it is weak uncertain governments, not strong ones, that behave like this. For those who ask why no legal redress was taken for all the official misdeeds, including "official executions" of the Civil War, an Indemnity Bill was passed on August 3rd, 1923 to protect the forces of the Government from the consequences of actions taken by them against Republicans.

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LET us finally return to the last of the notes compiled by J.J. Waldron about the aftermath of the Tuam executions and indeed the entire sad saga of Civil War in the Galway area.

Under the heading *The Aftermath*, he writes: The day came when the Military vacated the Tuam Workhouse and returned to their headquarters, Athlone, taking with them the exhumed bodies of the executed men and later re-interring them in Athlone.

In the meantime, the policy of the then Government was to abolish the task of the Workhouses, which included the one in Glenamaddy which catered for the children.

These latter were eventually transferred to Tuam. They were under the care of the Bon Secours sisters and the sister in charge was one of the finest nuns I have ever met, named Mother Hortens. She did a marvellous job in renovating the Tuam Workhouse and in 12 months the children had a home from home. She did a very charitable act too in marking the site where the Republican boys were executed in 1923 and later had a glass protection erected around it, and a beautiful old Crucifix placed on the wall. She was also responsible for the founding of the present fine hospital in Vicar Street, which, down the years, has expanded beyond all expectations.

In the meantime, as the days passed, the relatives of the executed men were demanding the return of the bodies of the young men to be buried in their parish. They eventually succeeded in their demand, and one day, the relatives and friends had the satisfaction of bringing them back and having them interred in Downpatrick Graveyard in a communal grave. Today if you visit there you can't help noticing a tall granite pillar with a cross over their grave and their names inscribed on a plaque underneath. This was placed there by their comrades and friends to show to the world that they fought, they have departed to a better world and they will never be forgotten. The design of the monument was suggested by their Republican comrades, first by Mr. John Heneghan of Athenry Road, Tuam and later carried out by Mr. Mick Martin, B.E., Taylor's Hill, Galway.

Since these events previously narrated took place, it's 50 years ago. Unbelievable changes have taken place in the country, its face has been lifted, as it were, and signs of prosperity appear all around us. The old workhouse is gone with its jail-like surrounding walls. And in its place houses are appearing where people will dwell, and the happy cries of children will be heard in play, and so life carries on. At the request of the special organising Committee, the County Council has assented to leave the oratory standing to be turned into a community centre, and will carry out some necessary repairs on it.

Another item is, also, that the Archbishop of Tuam has given permission for an annual Mass to be said for the souls of the executed men and those that died there during the Famine.

Go ndéana Dia trócaire ar a n-anamacha.

There are a few other outstanding notes:

Week of May 10th, 1923

Troops searching the Headford district captured a well-known Republican Mr. Martin Kyne of Caherlistrane. In his house they discovered dispatches, field-glasses, trench coats and many other articles of use to the Republican forces.

In the home of another Republican Martin Rooney they collected a shot gun, cartridges, together with a quantity of cigarettes and tobacco and he was arrested also.

In the same district, three other Republicans from Barrack Street, Tuam were arrested, namely Edward Hayes, John Conry and Luke Reilly.

June 11th, 1923

It is rumoured that Mr. Tom Maguire, T.D., the leader of the Republicans has escaped from Athlone prison. ??? O'Grady and a man named Pender, an active Republican from Ballinasloe with 12 or 14 others.

The ruse adopted to effect their liberty was by getting possession of army uniforms.

Maguire was arrested in Headford about six months ago.

June 25th, 1923

It is stated that things are coming back to normal in the area of Headford and its surroundings after the disturbances from some time past. Business is rapidly improving in the town.

The traders suffered severely with the shootings and riots. The only bank in town, the National, had to close down when its premises was destroyed, but now they are carrying on from a temporary site.

It is of historic interest to look back and read the list of claims made by the landlords of the period for the burning of their mansions, etc. during the Civil War. It gives one some idea of the size of their property and the value they held 50 years ago. Most

of it now is divided up amongst the tenants.

These were the claim amounts at the Quarter Sessions in September, 1923. The value today (1972) would probably be three times the claim. The combined total amounts to £153,779-14-4.

Col. Lewen, Castlegrove House and Lodge, £65,839; Col. Bernard, Castlehacket, House and Lodge, £56,358; James Greated, Lydican Castle, Claregalway, £8,192; Bodkin & Hoade, Annagh House, Ballyglunin, £3,790; Weldon, Coolarne, Athenry, £1,647; Concannon & St. George, Tyrone House, £4,000; McDonnell, Ballykeeran Lodge, Glasson, £1,660; Gleeson, Dunmore, damage to Courthouse, £590; Gilmore, Glenamaddy, Sawmill at Patch, £1,400; O'Malley, Dunmore, car, petrol, etc., £540; Kirwan, Dalgin, Motor Car, £300; O'Driscoll, Tuam, damage to R.I.C. Barracks, Mountbellew, £2,000; Rooney, Tuam, damage to cars and bicycles, £723 and O'Rorke, Clonberne, motor car, £400.

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CLEARLY, with the conduct of Quarter Sessions and the filing of claims for financial gain, the mood of the country was settling down to one of resignation to the new order — "the Greengrocers Republic" as Frank O'Connor, himself an I.R.A. activist during the Civil War in Cork called it.

Others said it was a withdrawal from "anarchy" — the type of revolutionary "anarchy" they had all participated in themselves during the Black and Tan era from 1919 to 1921. Some, like Pádraic O Máille, quickly came to realise that it was not the "stepping stone" Collins had said it was, when he used his position as head of the secret I.R.B., to push through the Treaty vote on the basis that "what is good enough for Mick Collins, is good enough for us." O Máille had the courage to resign from Cumann na nGaedheal, with nine others, and paid a price for doing so. Not all of them got the deal Joe McGrath got, when he left the cabinet, but secured a franchise for the Irish Hospital Sweepstakes — the National Lotto of the era!

On the other hand, when DeValera, humiliated and defeated, picked himself up and changed his political track with the new Fianna Fáil party (which owed most of the organisation work to Seán Lemass and Gerry Boland) he admitted, in later life, that, in fact, he had greater freedom under the Treaty than he anticipated, and that much of this was due to the way the first Free State Government under W.T. Cosgrave and Kevin O'Higgins had laboured in the most appallingly difficult circumstances. Others, of course, like Tom Maguire never deviated. Not until he died aged over 100 years, in the 1990s. And in fairness to Dev, after he failed to get his way in Sinn Féin, to quote Lemass, he did state, on the record of the Dáil that "there are those outside his house who can claim the same continuity and commitment to the Republican idea that we did up to 1925."

The rights and wrongs of this terrible period in our history are of concern because, as is clear each passing day, we have failed to resolve not only the problem that caused it, but indeed the problems arising from its legacy. Those who claim that "the politics of the Civil War are gone" have not only pulled down the blinkers on the agony that continues North of the border. They ignore the stark reality of the extent to which that same "Northern" or "National" or "British" problem (take your choice!) damages all other activities in this country/island/state (take your choice again!). And the enormous cost and misery, never mind loss of lives, that it imposes even on those of us here in the south who have fairly successful isolated ourselves from the raw reality.

The one main point that needs to be made about the Civil War in Galway, or in anywhere else, is that we bear its tragedy and its lessons constantly in mind. Because such an appalling vista much never be allowed to happen again. The surest way to avoid that danger, and to tackle the contradictions it presents for all sides, is to make sure there is open and honest, fresh and original and ongoing discussion about it.

RTE please note: to those who say they are "bored" by such programming, I say it is, at least, as important as all those programmes on the 50th anniversary of British withdrawal from India, which, I suspect, have dominated our television screens, for a year, simply because the material was available.

(To be continued)