

charged with detaining and guarding the men, and its soldiers who had the task of daily confrontation with the internees in their challenge to British military authority within the camp. Over time, the military covertly bowed to the resistance of the internees and to some extent capitulated to the demands and protests within the barbed-wire cages.

The story of the Ballykinlar internment camp is on the one hand an account of suffering, death, espionage, murder, maltreatment and torture. However, from the internees' perspective, it is also a chronicle of survival, comradeship, community, discipline, tuition, celebration and enterprise.

1

Internment – 1916 to 1920

1916

In the aftermath of the 1916 Rising, 3,226 men and seventy-seven women were arrested. A total of 1,862 men and five women were served with internment orders under Regulation 14(b) of the Defence of the Realm Act 1914. They were transferred to Britain and temporarily held in various detention centres in England and Scotland, including Knutsford, Stafford, Wakefield, Wandsworth, Woking, Lewes, Barlinnie prison in Glasgow and Perth.¹ Some of the internees served their terms of detention in English jails, but the vast majority of the male internees were transferred to the Frongoch internment camp, near Bala in North Wales.

Despite the alien environment, the prisoners used their time to plan for a resumption of war against the British establishment in Ireland. Frongoch later received the title 'University of Revolution' as it facilitated the reorganisation of the Irish Volunteers and provided training for men from all over Ireland,

who, on their release, were able to use their newly acquired skills in a new phase of the hostilities against Britain. The contacts made in Frongoch formed the blueprint of the intelligence network established during the War of Independence by men from various counties who played prominent roles in that campaign. The internment of such a large number of revolutionaries in one place was a serious mistake on the part of the British, one that would greatly increase the success of the IRA's operations in the years that followed.²

1918 – the ‘German Plot’

Throughout 1917 the Sinn Féin party reorganised and successfully contested by-elections in four Irish constituencies. At the same time the Irish Volunteers and IRB were also restructuring throughout the country. The success of Sinn Féin in the four by-elections in 1917 concerned the British authorities and they endeavoured to suppress the growing political opposition.

The possible internment of the Sinn Féin leaders was raised at a British cabinet meeting on Friday 19 April 1918. The proposal originated in a memorandum sent to the War Cabinet from the British Home Office and concerned the deportation of the Sinn Féin leaders to England under the Defence of the Realm Regulation No. 14. George N. Barnes, MP for the Gorbals Division, Glasgow, stated that to intern persons under Regulation 14(b) it would first have to be established that they were involved in ‘hostile associations’ with the enemy, i.e. Germany. Barnes advised that the regulation would have to

be amended, as he believed it was doubtful that a connection could be proved between the enemy and most of the Sinn Féin leaders.

The British prime minister, Lloyd George, then read from a letter sent by Lord French, British viceroy and lord lieutenant of Ireland, which concerned a plan to deal with a rebellious outbreak against the introduction of conscription to Ireland. He also read letters from Walter Long, secretary of state at the Colonial Office, and Lieutenant-General Bryan McMahon, British military commander-in-chief in Ireland, who stated that armed resistance was a possible outcome if the Military Service Act which allowed for conscription was introduced in Ireland.

Lloyd George was strongly of the opinion that an amendment should be adopted to counter any insurrection. The War Cabinet decided to amend Regulation 14(b) with the insertion of the following:

In any area in respect of which the operation of section one of the Defence of the Realm (Amendment) Act, 1915, is for the time being suspended, this regulation shall apply in relation to any person who is suspected of acting or having acted, or of being about to act in a manner prejudicial to the public safety or the defence of the realm, as it applies in relation to persons of hostile origin or association.

This amendment served as the cornerstone of the British government's internment policy in Ireland for the foreseeable

future.³ Barnes stated that he wished his dissension to be placed on record.

The motive for targeting the leaders of Sinn Féin and many others for arrest and internment originated with the large-scale opposition to the threat of conscription being introduced to Ireland in early 1918. The opposition to the Conscription Bill was an embarrassment to the British government and their reaction comprised of a vicious propaganda campaign in Ireland, Britain and America, supporting the bill. The most significant act came on Wednesday 8 May 1918, when *The Times* newspaper published a statement from the Dublin-born unionist politician, Edward Carson, stating that the British government had in their possession the clearest evidence of an alliance between Sinn Féin and Germany. The following week, on Friday 17 May 1918, the British government ordered the arrest and internment of all known and prominent members of Sinn Féin on the premise that they were involved with the German government in a plan to smuggle arms into Ireland. That night, in what became known as the ‘German Plot’, seventy-three Sinn Féin members were arrested, including Éamon de Valera, Arthur Griffith, William Cosgrave, Countess Markievicz and other prominent figures throughout the country. No charges were preferred and many received their internment orders only while being transported from Dún Laoghaire to Holyhead in Wales on the mail boat. Those arrested were sent to various jails throughout Britain.

The following day the British government issued a press statement giving reasons for the arrests:

In consequence of the knowledge that certain persons in Ireland have entered into treasonable communication with the German enemy, it is the duty of all loyal subjects to assist his Majesty’s Government in the suppression of this treasonable conspiracy.⁴

The Sinn Féin leaders had received prior warning of the arrests through Éamon Broy, one of Michael Collins’ spies at Dublin Castle, but decided to use the situation to their advantage, allowing the British government to walk into another misguided manoeuvre.⁵ Many of the men and women arrested were later selected as candidates for the general election of December 1918, and Sinn Féin effectively used the propaganda of their unjust incarceration to ensure that a number of them would be elected while they were still in British jails.⁶

The issue of releasing the internees was raised at a cabinet meeting in Downing Street on Wednesday 5 February 1919. The British viceroy and lord lieutenant of Ireland, Lord French, thought it advisable to release those interned following the ‘German Plot’ arrests. The then chief secretary for Ireland, Ian MacPherson, presented the suggestion to the meeting, but some cabinet members felt releasing the prisoners at that point would be perceived as pandering to pressure from Dáil Éireann and Sinn Féin. Winston Churchill, secretary of state for war stated, ‘It would be a disastrous sign of weakness to let out the Sinn Féin prisoners.’ In contrast, MacPherson voiced the opinion that everybody in Ireland was denouncing the British government for keeping the internees locked up in Britain.⁷

Éamon de Valera, Seán McGarry and Seán Milroy escaped

from Lincoln prison in February 1919, and in March the other men and women interned following the 'German Plot' arrests were released when the British government ordered a general release of all the prisoners.⁸

The War of Independence and the new internment policy

The Irish War of Independence began in January 1919 and gradually developed into an intense campaign, with the IRA adopting guerrilla war tactics against the superior military machine of the British Army. The arrest and internment of those suspected of involvement in the Irish Volunteers and Sinn Féin continued into 1919 and 1920 with men being transported to various jails throughout England, including Wormwood Scrubs.⁹

From February 1920, the British prison authorities were expressing concerns about the indifference of these Irish internees to the prisons' rules and regulations. In that month seventy internees were being held at Wormwood Scrubs prison. The prison governor, Major Briscoe, had considered the internees to be 'on the whole a respectable body of men ... content to live quietly under the regulations which were approved with much care and thought ...' until the arrival of Joseph McGrath from Dublin, who had been appointed the officer representing the body of internees. Significantly, Briscoe went on to say that 'few if any complaints were received by the commissioners until the arrival of McGrath'.¹⁰

The chairman of the prison commissioners, Sir Evelyn Ruggles-Brise, raised the issue of indiscipline among the Irish internees with the British home secretary. He suggested that the use of military camps as centres of internment would be more suitable for the growing number of internees. His proposal was based on the British government's intention of continuing the internment policy as a means of countering the growing threat from the IRA and civilians associated with Sinn Féin. Ruggles-Brise believed the use of military camps in England was the solution, and requested the transfer of internees to the authority of the British military and the War Office.¹¹

The small-scale arrest and internment of IRA and Sinn Féin personnel continued in March 1920. Raids targeted prominent members of Sinn Féin and those suspected of membership of the IRA from different parts of the country. The men arrested in the Ulster counties were transferred to Crumlin Road jail in Belfast, where they were held for one week. While there, a large number of the political prisoners went on hunger strike in solidarity with men making a similar protest in Mountjoy jail in Dublin. After a week at Crumlin Road jail the men were removed in lorries to the Belfast docks, where they were subjected to a vicious assault by a unionist mob who threw, amongst other things, nuts, bolts and lumps of coal at them. Many sustained serious injury and were taken to South Wales on a British naval destroyer without receiving medical treatment. They then went by train to London, where they were transferred to Wormwood Scrubs.

Since the British were not prepared for a large number of

men at Wormwood Scrubs continuing hunger strikes to the death, they released them to the care of hospitals in London under the Prisons Temporary Release for Ill Health Act 1913, where they subsequently ended their action. After a few weeks recovering in hospital, they were informed that the British intended to re-arrest them, so they decided to stage a walkout. They made contact with the Irish Self-Determination League in London and arrangements were made to accommodate them with Irish people living in the capital. Their hosts then arrived at the hospital, posing as visitors, and the men walked out with them. All eventually returned to Ireland.¹²

However, the British internment policy continued throughout Ireland and the number of internees was soon to increase dramatically, forcing the British to look for new, larger places to incarcerate their prisoners – the first of these was Ballykinlar.

2

Bloody Sunday

In the latter part of 1920, the British introduced night-time curfews in the Dublin area, which greatly hampered the activities of the Dublin-based IRA and increased the risk of capture. Events escalated on both sides until Sunday 21 November 1920, Bloody Sunday.

In the early hours of Wednesday 10 November 1920, the IRA chief of staff, Richard Mulcahy, had a narrow escape. He was in the house on South Circular Road, Dublin, of Dr Michael Hayes, who lectured in French in Dublin University, when the British military raided it. Mulcahy escaped through a skylight, but in his haste forgot to take with him a briefcase containing the names and addresses of over 200 IRA personnel from various parts of the country.¹ Michael Hayes was arrested and would be one of the first group of a few hundred men to be interned at Ballykinlar internment camp in early December 1920.

The discovery of the briefcase and the information it contained was a significant victory for the British intelligence machine and put considerable pressure on the IRA organisation.

The discovery was communicated to all IRA divisions throughout the country and those whose names were included in the list were warned to vary their routines and stay away from their homes as mass arrests were expected to follow.

About that time, the IRA intelligence department under Michael Collins had been considering an attack on British intelligence by assassinating British secret service agents and court-martial officers living in various addresses around Dublin. Collins summoned his agents in the Dublin Metropolitan Police (DMP), including Éamon Broy, to a meeting at a house in Rathgar. Gearóid O'Sullivan, IRA adjutant general, was also present. The DMP members were asked to monitor the movements of men from certain addresses, particularly during curfew hours.²

The man assigned to undertake the overall planning for the assassinations was Dick McKee, OC Dublin Brigade. The operation was to be carried out by the Squad.³ This special IRA unit, formed by Michael Collins in 1919, was tasked with carrying out the execution of enemy agents, spies and informers. Members of the Squad were always accompanied by one of the intelligence staff during their various assassination operations. They were later supported by an active service unit which was formed to assist in assassination operations and was made up of Volunteers from the four battalions of the Dublin Brigade.⁴

A list of enemy agents and spies was compiled by IRA agents Broy, David Neligan and Jim McNamara, who were all working in the Detective Branch ('G' Division) of the DMP at Dublin

Castle.⁵ A network of people was used in the surveillance of the targeted persons and anything suspicious was reported. Maids, house boarders, messengers, waiters and footmen, for example, kept a close eye on anything out of the ordinary. Joseph Dolan, a member of the intelligence staff, visited many of the hotels and boarding houses where the targeted men were living to collect the information gathered by the network, which was then fed back to Collins and the IRA General Headquarters (GHQ) intelligence staff.⁶ Intelligence was also gathered on a group of British Secret Service agents known as the 'Cairo Gang' because they frequented the Cairo Café on Grafton Street, Dublin.⁷ Charles Dalton, a member of the Squad, was instructed by the intelligence staff to contact a young maid, Maudie, who worked at one of two boarding houses at 28–29 Upper Pembroke Street, where some of these men resided. She provided details of the residents' movements and retrieved torn-up documents and photographs from the waste-paper baskets. When pieced together, the fragments revealed information on Volunteers wanted by the British.⁸

Approximately one week before the planned assassinations, meetings were held by the various battalions around Dublin and they were instructed regarding 'important operations' to take place the following week.⁹ They were detailed to cover the units tasked with shooting the selected targets in different parts of the city. Two-man patrols were to cover roads approaching and exiting streets where the British targets were staying. Gerald (Garry) Byrne and Denny O'Brien were instructed to patrol the area from Leonard's Corner to Rialto and to fire shots at

any British military or police travelling in the direction of the city centre before 9 a.m. on the morning of the operation. There were other patrols posted at various locations around the city.¹⁰

On Saturday evening, 20 November, approximately 100 Volunteers from the intelligence staff, the Squad and members of the Dublin battalions assembled in a house on Lower Gardiner Street. The meeting was addressed by Dick McKee, who told them that a major operation had been planned for the following morning, beginning at 9 a.m., with the objective of eliminating a number of British intelligence agents and spies. McKee warned of the dangers involved and emphasised the importance of assassinating the British officers who were residing in hotels and boarding houses around the city centre and were a menace to the IRA. McKee said that he was conscious of the dangers the men would encounter on the day and the repercussions in the days that followed.¹¹

The operation hit a slight snag that evening when Dick McKee and Peadar Clancy were arrested at about 10.30 p.m. at a house owned by Seán Fitzpatrick in 36 Lower Gloucester Street.¹² In addition, Conor Clune, an IRA Volunteer from County Clare who was not involved in the operation and had only arrived in Dublin that night, was apprehended. He arrived at Vaughan's Hotel about 1.30 a.m. on 21 November, unaware that the place was likely to be raided: Michael Collins and several others had been there but had been advised to leave as the hotel porter's suspicions had been aroused.¹³ McKee, Clancy and Clune were taken to Exchange Court, inside the grounds of Dublin Castle. Michael Collins instructed David

Neligan to search the Bridewell Barracks, but he found no sign of them. A twelve-strong rescue party was waiting in a nearby church.¹⁴

Despite the setback, the plan to wipe out the Dublin-based British intelligence network began on the Sunday morning.¹⁵ The first target for assassination was Captain Baggally, a British court-martial officer. He was believed to have been one of those involved in the torture of Kevin Barry. Members of the Squad, including Seán Lemass, arrived at Baggally's lodgings, 119 Lower Baggot Street, and parked their car behind a house on the opposite side of the street. Three or four men entered the building while two stood guard outside. The assassination team knew the room in which Baggally was staying and kicked in the door. He attempted to escape through a window, but was shot several times. All the IRA men successfully escaped.¹⁶

The next to be killed was Colonel Fitzpatrick at 28 Earlsfort Terrace, who was from Tipperary and had a short time earlier been kidnapped by the IRA while stationed in County Clare. He had escaped, suffering a dislocated shoulder in the process, and had been released from hospital in Dublin only a few days before.¹⁷

Another target was a guest house at 22 Lower Mount Street where two British agents, Mahon and Peel, were staying. Two members of the Squad, James Slattery and Tom Keogh, with six Volunteers from E Company, 2nd Battalion of the Dublin Brigade, arrived at the address shortly before 9 a.m. When a maid admitted them, two men remained at the door to ensure no one entered or left. Another member of the household staff,

on realising what was happening, shouted to a group from the RIC Auxiliary Division who were passing. Two went for back-up, while the others approached the building. Billy McLean, one of the IRA men at the front door, opened fire, keeping them at bay for a while, but was injured when they returned fire. Meanwhile Slattery and Keogh shot Mahon. There was a second man in the room, but they had no instructions to shoot him, and only later discovered that he was an 'undesirable character' and should have been killed. On hearing the shots, the other target, Peel, locked his door and managed to escape through a window. The two members of the Auxiliary Division who went for back-up were ambushed and killed by an IRA cover party.¹⁸

When the IRA men failed to shoot Peel they abandoned the operation. On discovering that the British military were covering their escape route, they left through the rear of the property, engaging in a running battle with the military and Auxiliaries. One of the IRA party, Frank Teeling, was shot and injured. He was subsequently arrested, convicted and sentenced to be hanged, but later escaped from Kilmainham gaol along with Ernie O'Malley and Simon Donnelly. Although wounded, Bill McLean escaped with the help of Tom Keogh. Joseph Dolan and others, who were returning from Ranelagh, picked them up on the road. Dolan and the others had aborted their operation in Ranelagh after discovering that their intended target, Lieutenant Noble, had left his lodgings at 7 a.m.¹⁹

One British officer and two civilians were assassinated at 117 Morehampton Road: the landlord Thomas Henry Smith

and the two men staying with him, Captain McLean and an ex-soldier called J. Caldow, McLean's brother-in-law.

Another court-martial officer, Captain Newbury, was staying at 92 Lower Baggot Street with his wife. IRA men including Bill Stapleton, Jack Stafford, Joe Leonard and Hugo MacNeill, knocked at the front door asking for him. They were shown to the ground-floor rooms where Newbury and his wife were staying. The Volunteers knocked on the front parlour door, but receiving no reply, knocked at the back door, which was opened by Mrs Newbury who, on seeing the men with revolvers drawn, tried to close it. One of the Volunteers jammed his foot in the door and they forced their way in. Newbury and his wife ran into the adjoining room and attempted to barricade the door, but the IRA shot at the door and a bullet passed through hitting the target. The men forced their way in as Newbury was attempting to escape through a window. He was shot a further seven times from inside the room and by those standing guard on the street. He died half in and half out of the window. Newbury's wife was standing in the corner of the room screaming and in a terrified state.²⁰

The next address was a boarding house at 28–9 Upper Pembroke Street where six targets were staying. When Charles Dalton, with Paddy Flanagan and several other Volunteers arrived, the hall door was open as the porter was shaking mats on the front steps. Dalton, Flanagan and two other Volunteers went to a room on the top floor occupied by two officers, Major Dowling and Major Rice.²¹ The Volunteers pushed the door open and found them awake in bed – both were shot. Captain

Kenlyside was wounded in the arm and was saved by his wife who struggled with the IRA men. Colonel Woodcock was descending the stairs when he came upon the members of the Squad. Woodcock called out to Colonel Montgomery, who was shot in the stomach as he came out of his room. Woodcock was shot as he tried to return to his room to get his weapon. The sixth man, Murray, who was also an officer, was shot and wounded as he was descending the stairs.²²

A party of IRA men entered 38 Upper Mount Street having been admitted by a servant, Catherine Farrell. She pointed out the rooms of Lieutenant Bennett and Lieutenant Aimes. Bennett was dragged into Aimes' bedroom and both men were shot dead.

The last operation of that morning took place at the Gresham Hotel on Sackville Street (now O'Connell Street). The IRA party split into two groups with one going to room 14 occupied by Lieutenant L. E. Wilde, who was shot when he opened the door. The other party went to room 24 and shot ex-captain Patrick McCormack five times as he sat in bed reading a newspaper.²³

The British reaction to the Sunday morning events was both swift and brutal. Large numbers of military, Auxiliary cadets, Black and Tans and RIC converged on the streets of the city as part of a large-scale security operation. The city was already a hive of activity as crowds were arriving for the Gaelic football match due to take place at Croke Park that afternoon between Dublin and Tipperary. The match attracted up to 15,000 men, women and children, and was to become the target of a vicious British reprisal. The combined British forces entered Croke Park

at approximately 3 p.m. while the game was in progress and began indiscriminately shooting into the crowd, killing fourteen and injuring many others.²⁴ The victims were John Scott, aged fourteen, James Mathews, Jeremiah O'Leary aged ten, Patrick O'Dowd, Jane Boyle, William Robinson, Thomas Hogan, James Burke, Michael Feery, James Teehan, Joseph Traynor, Thomas Ryan, Michael Hogan and Daniel Carroll.²⁵

The three IRA men who had been arrested on the previous night, Dick McKee, Peadar Clancy and Conor Clune, were tortured and murdered in Dublin Castle by members of the Auxiliary Division that night. This caused a lot of anger among the Volunteers of the Dublin Brigade and the Squad. Michael Collins was in a bad way over their deaths and tried to identify the informer who had betrayed McKee and Clancy to the British. Every member of the Squad wanted to deal personally with the person responsible for their capture.²⁶

Michael Collins made it clear that the methods of the British military would be met with harsh retribution:

My one intention was the destruction of the undesirables who continued to make miserable the lives of ordinary citizens. I have proof enough to assure myself of the atrocities which this gang of spies and informers have committed. If I had a second motive it was no more than a feeling such as I would have for a dangerous reptile. By their destruction the very air is made sweeter. For myself, my conscience is clear. There is no crime in detecting in wartime the spy and the informer. They have destroyed without trial. I have paid them back in their own coin.²⁷

Widespread raids throughout the city resulted in over a hundred arrests that night. The events of the previous day sent shockwaves through the British establishment, in both Ireland and England. David Neligan was at breakfast in Dublin Castle that morning and later described the scene:

In the Castle, pandemonium reigned. An officer, whose pals had been wiped out, shot himself in his room. The tragedy was hushed up ... A long string of cars and baggage choked the Castle gate all day. Officers, Secret Service men and their wives were flying to protection and a room could not be found in the Castle for love nor money. A British officer wounded himself in the D.B.C. café in Dame Street and then put up a tale of being attacked and received compensation ...²⁸

In the days that followed, a hotel was commandeered for officers' quarters and was heavily guarded by the military, as was City Hall.²⁹

As well as the immediate, violent reaction by British forces on Bloody Sunday, the killings by the IRA on that day would force the British government into large-scale action that would lead to a massive surge in the numbers of interned men.

3

The Internment Round-Up

The long-term reaction to the events of Sunday 21 November 1920, which became known as Bloody Sunday, was not confined to Dublin. On Sunday evening, 21 November, a party of the Auxiliary forces attached to the RIC raided Bruree, County Limerick, arresting two men, John Driscoll and Patrick Murphy. Both were taken to Macroom Castle in County Cork and on the journey one of the Auxiliaries told them that they would be very lucky if they were alive in the morning. They were held at Macroom Castle for several days and on Monday 29 November they heard a lorry pull up in the castle yard and a soldier say that sixteen Auxiliary cadets had been killed in an ambush the previous day at Kilmichael, County Cork. A short time later two Auxiliary cadets entered the men's cell and asked for the adjutant of the Third Cork Brigade. The men replied that they were not aware who was in the IRA, let alone who the adjutant was. They were subjected to verbal abuse and told to have their prayers said by the time the Auxiliary forces returned as they were about to travel to Kilmichael to retrieve the bodies of their comrades. One of the cadets said, 'When we come back we will do you in.'