

JAMES BERNARD ‘BARNEY’ O’DRISCOLL

(UCDA P17b/95, pp. 16–21)

Barney O’Driscoll (1891–1961) was born in Castletownsend, raised in Skibbereen, and educated at St Coleman’s College in Fermoy. In 1908 he emigrated to the United States, and during his five-year stay he immersed himself in Republican activities. Upon his return to West Cork, he entered the quarry business, and also helped establish Sinn Féin and the Irish Volunteers in his district. He endured several prison terms for Republican activities, and was finally released from jail in 1922. He stayed largely neutral in the Civil War, opening Killaloe Slate Quarry Company in 1923. From the slate quarrying business, he moved into plastic and metal manufacturing, becoming one of the country’s leading industrialists. He developed a number of metal and plastic factories in Clare and Tipperary, partnering with major international firms. O’Driscoll settled with his wife and children in Nenagh, County Tipperary. Dying in 1961, his large funeral attendance included President Éamon de Valera.



*Courtesy of Barbara
O’Driscoll*

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[16R] 1910. Paddy Ford¹ of the *Irish World* was a very strong supporter of the AOH.² They were trying to capture the 69th Regiment for the AOH.³ The Clan na Gael,⁴ the non-military side, controlled the Irish Volunteers [USA] who were trying to control the 69th 1st Regiment of the Irish Volunteer Society in New York and the second [regiment] in Brooklyn, the 14th National Guard then in Brooklyn.⁵ We tried to control it for I was a member of the Irish Volunteers, and we had H Company, [with] a good few Irish in it, the captain, a German friendly to the Irish. The carrying of arms was then permitted in the USA provided you carried them openly. We went for route marches. We bought our own rifles and ammunition. We went out to ranges in the country for rifle practice. Up to 1914 the AOH

- 1 Irish-American Patrick Ford published the nationalist *Irish World* newspaper in New York.
- 2 The Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH) is a Catholic political association founded in America in 1836. The group's aims are to support Irish independence and promote the Catholic faith. It has often been described as a 'Green' version of the Orange Order. In the early 1900s the AOH in Ireland was allied to John Redmond's Irish Parliamentary Party and used violence to silence political opponents and criticism of the party. There were frequent violent clashes between Irish Republicans and Hibernians during the Irish War of Independence, particularly in Ulster.
- 3 The 69th Regiment was a National Guard (military reserve) unit in New York city. The 'Fighting 69th' was closely associated with the city's Irish-American population and became a celebrated American formation during the First World War.
- 4 Clan na Gael was a Republican organisation in the United States established by the Fenians. It acted as a sister organisation to the IRB in Ireland.
- 5 The 14th Regiment was also a National Guard (military reserve) unit in New York. O'Driscoll is describing his experiences in the United States before the outbreak of the First World War.

controlled the 69th. You had to be a member of the Clan before you could become a member of the Irish Volunteers. Our leader was Martin L. Biggale.

I was in Frongoch in 1916 as Q[uar]ter Master.⁶ We checked out the rations every day at the railway station about 300 yards away, three times a day. I got a letter from home which had been sent there from a cousin of mine – Armour & Co. of Chicago – who was manager in Liverpool. His name was Cruickshank. He had a lot of corned beef, and he, being an imperialist and not knowing my sympathies, had written me a letter offering to give me some barrels cheap. My mother had sent on the letter. I asked Mick Staines, our Camp Commandant, if I could send out [17L] a business letter.⁷ He gave me permission but the Camp authorities refused it. I wrote a letter [and] gave it to one of the RDC's, Royal Defence Corps, men of above military age who helped to guard us. He posted it. Next we had a wholesale line out for letters. In public, to take away suspicion, I was particularly nasty to this man. I used to abuse him, for the British were then looking out for our sources. There was a large store where we received provisions. I had the letters in my pocket addressed to an English address with Irish letters inside. He came up behind

6 Frongoch was an internment camp in north Wales situated in a disused whiskey distillery. The British government initially opened the camp to hold German soldiers taken prisoner in the First World War, but after the 1916 Rising it was used to intern nearly 2,000 Irish Republicans. The camp was closed in December 1916 and the internees were released.

7 Michael Staines was a senior member of the Irish Volunteers and a TD in the First Dáil.

me, took out the letters, dropped them into a half-full tea chest. Always there was a little money for himself. The British put a detective, who, in the local post office, opened our letters for Ireland, but he never found our letters.

Brennan-Whitmore knew of one method of getting information out, through cigarette cartoons.⁸ He drew a sketch of this in his book on Frongoch and I must say if [he] had known anything about our way of sending, he would also have mentioned it.

IRB in Frongoch: Michael Collins started it. Gearóid O'Sullivan was weak and thin at the time.⁹ We put him between us in bed to keep him warm. Then in the Camp was Colm O'Murchada.¹⁰ He also was a member.

[17R] Seán Ó Muirthile wasn't there.¹¹ He started life as an auxiliary postman in Leap, County Cork. Some letters were missing and he was responsible. He was dismissed. His father and mother were native Irish speakers. He became a native Irish organiser. For years Michael Collins loathed him. Gearóid

8 W.J. Brennan-Whitmore was an officer of the Irish Volunteers during the Easter Rising and author of *With the Irish in Frongoch* (Cork 2013).

9 Gearóid O'Sullivan was adjutant-general of the IRA during the War of Independence, a position he also served in the National Army during the Civil War.

10 Colm O'Murchada (not O'Murathu as in the original text), a loyal supporter of Michael Collins, was acting secretary to the cabinet in 1921. At the crucial late night meeting of 3 December 1921, he made cryptic and inadequate notes about the details of the impending Anglo-Irish Treaty.

11 Seán Ó Muirthile was a top figure in the IRB. In the Civil War he served as quartermaster general in the National Army with the rank of lieutenant general.

[O'Sullivan] had no mind of his own. He copied Mick Collins.

Diarmuid O'Hegarty was arrested in 1916.¹² A question was asked about a John Hegarty in the House of Commons. He had been wrongfully arrested. The prison warder came to Diarmuid in prison. 'Are you John Hegarty?' he asked.

'No, I'm not,' replied Diarmuid O'Hegarty.

'Well, what does Diarmuid mean in English?'

'It's not John, anyhow.'

The warder went away. He returned. 'Are you sure your name is not John?'

'Yes, I'm sure.'

He came back. 'Well John or no John, pack up and get to hell out of this.'

When Diarmuid came back to the Department of Agriculture, T. P. Gill sent for him.¹³ He had known that Diarmuid had been out in the Rising. 'Take your holidays first, Hegarty,' he said, 'and report back. I hope you enjoyed the time you were fighting.'

Frongoch: [One] November day we decided to burn our camp. We had sent out so many complaints about the Brewery where we had been stationed that in the end the British were

12 Diarmuid O'Hegarty was a senior leader of both the military and political wings of the independence movement, and was closely associated with Michael Collins and the pro-Treaty military elite.

13 Thomas Patrick Gill was a journalist and Home Rule and Land War politician. He was the first manager of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction from 1900 to 1923.

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ordered to put us in one camp.¹⁴ That was our loss for the camp was bitterly cold, full of mud and dirt. We were kept out [18L] in the open that snowy day. The British put out the fires we had lighted in the huts. The sergeant major, 'Jackknives', picked out 7 of us including myself for punishment. We were made [to] stand outside, a soldier in charge of each of us, who never let us get out of his sight. Two more soldiers were added and an NCO. We were taken off by train. No food for us or the soldiers all that day: eventually we reached Reading Gaol.

I was given a fine bed, a beautiful clean cell and good food. We were kept in the women's prison. There were 35 of our men all told there. Reading Gaol had been used by the British for spies or for Irish, foreigners, whoever they weren't sure of: Chinese, Dutch, etc. amongst them. The food cooked in the male prison was brought over by some of these foreigners. Amongst them was a Dutchman who was always complaining about being in gaol as his country was neutral. He talked to Arthur Griffith about his trouble.¹⁵ He was accustomed to go to and fro on Dutch boats. 'But had you no passport?' said Griffith.

'Oh indeed I had a passport,' he said, 'why I had seven of them.'

Amongst the men there were Seán T. O'Kelly, Tommy MacCurtain, Ernest Blythe, Walter Cole, Terry MacSwiney,

14 Part of Frongoch Camp was built over a disused distillery (not a brewery), where the prisoners initially slept.

15 Arthur Griffith was a journalist and a founding member of Sinn Féin. He would later be the senior figure in the pro-Treaty political movement.

Henry Dixon, [18R] ?Harry Cotton, George Nichols of Galway, Darrell Figgis, Éamon Dwyer of Goulds Cross [Tipperary].¹⁶ There was no mention of IRB then in this prison.

1921: Henry Dixon and I, both of us had been in the US.¹⁷ We both thought the trouble between Devoy and Cohalan had been most probably due to Dev.¹⁸ The AOH had been very strong. There were at least 9 AOH men for every Clan man. Ford had been AOH, of course, but in 1916 he changed over, becoming more extreme even than Devoy.¹⁹ John Devoy, deep in his own bitterness, didn't want Dev to link up with Ford or his group. Dev said he couldn't afford not to use, to neglect, any Irishman who could be of use to the country.

- 16 Seán T. O'Kelly was a founding member of Sinn Féin and later president of Ireland; Tomás MacCurtain was a co-founder of the Irish Volunteers in Cork and later Lord Mayor of Cork; Ernest Blythe was an Ulster-born separatist involved in the IRB and the Irish Volunteers; Liverpool-born Walter Cole was one of Sinn Féin's first elected officials (alderman on Dublin Corporation); Terence MacSwiney was a key leader in Cork who later died on hunger strike; George Nichols was a veteran IRB leader in Galway; Darrell Figgis was a writer and Sinn Féin activist; Éamon Dwyer was a leader of the Irish Volunteers in Tipperary. No information was available for Harry Cotton.
- 17 Henry Dixon was a veteran separatist who co-founded Sinn Féin in 1905.
- 18 John Devoy and Judge Daniel Cohalan were leaders of the Irish-American Republican organisation, Clan na Gael. Devoy and Cohalan ran the Friends of Irish Freedom organisation, and clashed with Éamon de Valera during his efforts to secure US government recognition of the Irish Republic. In 1920, frustrated with his lack of control over the Friends of Irish Freedom, de Valera established a rival organisation, the American Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic, which was closely associated with Dáil Éireann.
- 19 Patrick Ford, publisher of the *Irish World* in New York.

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Daniel Cohalan was a believer first of all in Cohalan, and then his interest was Irish-American politics. (EOM: *Liam Mellows, according to Andy Doyle, had had a row with Devoy when he went to the US in 1917*).²⁰ Devoy was very bitter. He had been more bitter to O'Donovan Rossa than he had been to Dev. Rossa was a dynamiter. He didn't believe in going into the field, but he wanted to blow up buildings in England to carry the war into their country. My cousin was married to Rossa. His mind was going when he died. Rossa was able to keep his mind alive in gaol by never accepting anything [19L] from his enemies. He made them fight back not that they wanted any excuse, but they were made to suit his quarrels. He always rubbed the warders the wrong way.

Frongoch: 'Jackknives', the sergeant major, had a terrible tongue, but he had a heart of gold. At one time there were a couple of calls each day, roll calls, and then they called out the men's numbers, not their name. One day the officer was calling the numbers: WO 1246, 'anseo'.²¹ WO 1924, 'anseo'. WO 2132, 'anseo', WO 146, no reply. 146, no reply. Jackknives began to roar, 'No. 146!' Again, 'No. 146!' Slowly, through the crowd pushed his way Jack Hughes, a huge man who could throw any 4 military police around him. Jackknives was a big powerful man.

20 Following the Easter Rising, Liam Mellows took refuge in the United States. Andy Doyle, incorrectly spelled Andie in the original, was an officer in the Dublin Brigade.

21 Anseo, not annseo as in the original text, is the Irish for here.

'What do you want?' asked Jack Hughes.

Jackknives bent forward and said in a polite whisper, '... why didn't you answer your name?'

There was a Lieutenant Douglas there. Perhaps he was a Lord Alfred Douglas and a relation of Oscar Wilde.²² He was always kind and sympathetic to us. The adjutant was Lieutenant Byrnes, a regular of between 40–45 years of age. A very intelligent man, indeed. Henry Dixon said 7 or 8 years ago, there was a Lipton Canteen Scandal and [19R] there was a Major Byrnes there.²³ I bet he is the man. We had some meat one morning. The meat was rancid. Collins and Staines advised me to put it in a warm place so that it would be thoroughly rotten in a few hours time when the major would inspect it. And so it was. Byrnes said to me, 'You can wash it in vinegar. It'll do.'

'I won't,' I said, 'this is not Lipton now.'

He raised his stick as if to hit me, but he controlled himself and ever afterwards he was polite and agreeable to me.

When we reached Frongoch the place had been previously occupied by German prisoners of war, some of whom must have been tubercular. The British had cleared out the camps but they left untouched a large stack of envelopes marked Prisoner of War on the outside. We used these for a time before it was discovered.

22 The officer was not Lord Alfred Douglas, who was at the centre of Oscar Wilde's libel action against Douglas' father, the Marquess of Queensberry.

23 This was a corruption case concerning food contractor Lipton paying bribes to numerous British Army officers managing military canteens. One of the defendants was Lieutenant James Burns of the 8th Hussars.

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Questions were asked about it in the House of Commons, and as a result we claimed prisoner of war rights and treatment.

When released I went to West Cork. There was a vessel wrecked on the island off my coast. I found a revolver in the captain's cabin. I showed it to Mick Collins who was then on a visit to West Cork. He took the revolver.

(EOM: *Collins, was he a bully?*)

I don't know, but if you were ever in trouble he was a good man to have near you.

[20] I was 2 months in jail with Arthur Griffith. He thought that there would be no further need for fighting, that the blood spilt in 1916 had played its part and that there was now no need for more. I thought he was callous about the execution of Casement.²⁴ He was hoping that they would execute Casement, for if they didn't hang him then Irish people would say that he had been a [British] spy.

Mick Collins: A fast man to read and he read a lot. He not only knew poetry, but he could quote it. We had a fierce argument once about 'Kelly and Burke and Shea', as to who wrote it, and I think I was right.²⁵ He knew some of R. W. Service by heart.²⁶

24 Roger Casement, a leading Irish separatist, was arrested in County Kerry after being landed at Banna Strand from a German submarine on 21 April 1916. He had been in Germany trying to form an Irish Brigade from Irish prisoners of war taken by the Germans during the First World War. He was hung for high treason at Pentonville Prison, London, on 3 August 1916.

25 'Kelly, Burke and Shea', a poem celebrating Irish nationalists' martial qualities, was written by Joseph Ignatius Constantine Clarke in 1898.

26 Robert William Service was a popular British-Canadian poet, best

Cork was controlled by Mick Collins. Bishop Cohalan in Cork was very pro-Treaty.²⁷ He went very hard on Dónal Óg to vote for the Treaty and it was said that he made him a promise to vote for it.²⁸ 'I don't believe that,' said Andy Doyle, for Dónal Óg wouldn't give his word lightly. Bishop Kelly [was] very anti-Sinn Féin in West Cork.²⁹ He kept a good grip on his priests. One of them, Fr Eugene Daly, a friend of mine, in favour of the IRA and of Sinn Féin. In 1919 there was some Blessed Oliver Plunkett celebration.³⁰ He referred to the venerable Oliver, then mentioned his descendants, talking of Plunkett, Count Plunkett. This Fr Daly was put on an [21] interdict, not to refer to anything in the nature of politics.

There is a big percentage of Protestants in West Cork and a very close association with the British Navy. These two big influences were at work. Get a woman who would have 2 sons in the British Navy who would be completely loyal to the Republic, or to the boys.

known for his poems set in the Canadian Yukon gold rush at the turn of the century, such as 'The Shooting of Dan McGrew' and 'The Cremation of Sam McGee'.

- 27 Bishop Daniel Cohalan, Catholic bishop of the Cork diocese, excommunicated IRA fighters in December 1920 and was strongly anti-Republican during the Civil War.
- 28 Donal Óg O'Callaghan was a Republican activist who succeeded Terence MacSwiney as lord mayor of Cork.
- 29 Denis Kelly, Catholic bishop of Ross (West Cork), was a strong Redmondite and persistent critic of the Republicans.
- 30 Irish Archbishop Oliver Plunkett was declared a martyr of the faith by the Catholic Church in 1918, beatified in 1920 and canonised as a saint in 1975.

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Influence of priests was then very strong. Much stronger than it is now.

Cork in 1909 had O'Brienites who to a man went over to Sinn Féin, and this was a seed, [an] anti-Redmondite seed, and this helped West Cork.³¹

West Cork: Ancient Order of Hibernians, Redmondite crowd. AOH American Alliance, which was backed by the O'Brien crowd.

Private meeting in Cork held by Mick Collins of his supporters at which Collins advocated the breaking of the Pact.³² O'Driscoll was against this action of Michael [Collins].³³ Church holiday in Cork on that occasion and a parade. Cathal Brugha not consulted as he was Minister of Defence.

(EOM: *Was Griffith jealous of Dev?*)

Darrell Figgis and the Constitution.³⁴ Darrell a friend of Griffith.

- 31 Followers of William O'Brien's All For Ireland League, a party which appealed to rural and urban labourers and militant nationalists. It also preached conciliation towards unionists.
- 32 The Collins/de Valera Pact for the June 1922 general election. The night before the election, while speaking in Cork city, Michael Collins told supporters to vote for whomever they wished rather than the Sinn Féin election panel, thereby breaking his agreement with de Valera.
- 33 Barney O'Driscoll – O'Malley seems to be summarising what O'Driscoll has said here.
- 34 Darrell Figgis, a Sinn Féin pioneer and co-founder of the Irish Volunteers, supported the Anglo-Irish Treaty and served as vice-chairman of the committee that wrote the Free State constitution. He opposed the Collins/de Valera Pact during the June 1922 general election, in which he successfully ran as a pro-Treaty independent.