

The Kilmichael Ambush - A Review of Background, Controversies and Effects

(Seamus Fox – September 2005)

On the cold wintry evening of Sunday 28th November 1920, two Crossley tenders, each with nine cadets of the Auxiliary Division of the RIC on board, were travelling from their base in Macroom towards Dunmanway when they were ambushed about 1.5 miles south of the village of Kilmichael, Co Cork by the Flying Column of the 3rd (West) Cork Brigade of the IRA, led by Column Commander Tom Barry. While a number of details remain unclear and many others are disputed, what is clear and undisputed is that by the end of the ambush, nineteen men lay dead. Sixteen of the dead were Auxiliaries and three were IRA men. (For the casualties and details of the personnel – both Auxiliary and IRA involved, see [Appendix](#). Also given in the Appendix is the disposition of the ambushers – the disposition assumes importance when the controversies that arose from the Kilmichael ambush are discussed below.)

This essay will look at (1) [The background to the ambush](#) (2) [The controversies that arose from the ambush](#) and (3) [The effects of the ambush](#).

1.0 Background

The Auxiliaries¹ arrived in the town of Macroom in early September 1920 (Twohig 1994, pg 126). According to Hart, they arrived in a "district whose police chief declared it to be 'practically in a state of war'. ... Almost all the outlying police barracks had been evacuated and burned down ... The [British] army had stepped in in May [1920] to try to restore order and found itself embroiled in a vicious little war in the Muskerry hill country west of the town with the Ballyvourney I.R.A. ... The [British army] has lost three dead (including two officers) and six wounded, the I.R.A. lost one. The Macroom detachment simply stopped patrolling the western portion of the battalion area. ... When the new force of cadets arrived, the R.I.C. garrison had 'ceased to function' and control of the countryside had been ceded to the rebels" (Hart 1998, pgs 27-28).

In his account of the lead up to the Kilmichael ambush, Tom Barry paints a very dark picture of the actions of the Auxiliaries after their arrival in Macroom: "it seems to me that they were working on a plan to eliminate I.R.A. resistance by terrorism. ... They had a special technique. Fast lorries of them would come roaring into a village, the occupants would jump out, firing shots and ordering all the inhabitants out of doors. No exceptions were allowed. Men and women, old and young, the sick and the decrepit were lined up against the walls with their hands up, questioned and searched. ... For hours they would hold the little community prisoners, and on more than one occasion, in different villages, they stripped all the men naked in the presence of the assembled people of both sexes, and beat them mercilessly with belts and rifles." (Barry 1999, pg 37). Barry goes on to

¹ The Auxiliary Division of the RIC had been formed in July 1920. It was comprised almost exclusively of ex-officers of the British Armed Services. They were employed as Temporary Cadets on six month contracts with the option of another six. They were graded as RIC Sergeants and were meant to be a *corps d'elite* in the fight against the IRA (Townshend 1975, pg 110-111 and Abbott 2000, pgs 106-110).

describe the Auxiliaries killing local men as if for sport and concludes that "The Auxiliary force had been allowed to bluster through the country for four or five months killing, beating, terrorising, and burning factories and homes." (Barry 1999, pg 37).

A different picture is painted by Hart who says that the commanders of Auxiliaries based at Macroom were "responsible men who kept their cadets under control and prevented serious mischief or drinking" (Hart 1998, pg 28). Hart goes on to say that Liam Deasy (then Adjutant of the West Cork Brigade of the IRA) "remembered Lieutenant Colonel Crake - who died in the ambush - for his 'soldierly humanity'. Other I.R.A. men recalled their decency and restraint." (Hart 1998, pg 29).

Which account is more accurate? There are a number of problems with Barry's account. He gives no dates for the villages 'terrorised' by the Auxiliaries². In addition, the only person he names as being killed by the Auxiliaries was the Very Rev Canon Magner of Dunmanway. Canon Magner was killed by an Auxiliary but not until mid-December 1920 i.e. over two weeks after the Kilmichael ambush (See Deasy 1973, pg 192; Hart 1998, pg 286 and Hopkinson 2002, pg 83³).

In addition, Hart's account gets support from Bill Munro, who was an Auxiliary stationed in Macroom at this time. Munro's account is given in Gleeson's book (Gleeson 1963, pgs 61-80). According to Gleeson, Munro was "as nice and gentle a man as you would ever want to meet" (Gleeson 1963, pg 60). Munro says that the commanding officer of the Auxiliaries stationed in Macroom "turned out to be a wise and considerate officer, who got little credit for the good work he did" (Gleeson 1963, pg 63). Munro also credits this commanding officer with ensuring that the Auxiliaries did not go on a rampage of retaliation after the Kilmichael ambush (see Section 3 below). More relevant to the current issue of the actions of the Auxiliaries before the Kilmichael ambush is that rather than describing a rampage of terror after their arrival in Macroom in August 1920, Munro describes the first two months as follows: "We had been in Macroom for two months and despite all our endeavours we had not been in action or even seen anyone armed or looking aggressive. Really the life was getting a bit dull." (Gleeson 1963, pg 69).

However, while Hart does get support from Munro, there are problems with Hart's account as well. The source he references for his claim that the Auxiliaries in Macroom did not engage in serious mischief or drinking was Crozier. Brigadier-General F P Crozier had been appointed commandant of the Auxiliary Division of the RIC after it was established in July 1920 but he resigned his command in the Spring of 1921 after a number of Auxiliaries whom he had dismissed for alleged robbing and looting in Trim, Co Meath were re-instated (see Townshend 1975, pg 163 for further details). In the reference given by Hart, Crozier does state that company of the Auxiliaries based at Macroom ('C' Company) was one of the few companies who "drank moderately" (Crozier

² It could be argued that Barry was writing a memoir and therefore not subject to the same rigorous requirements to define a chronology and elucidate his sources as would a professional historian like Hart. However, where there is a clash in the accounts (as there are between Hart and Barry) then the absence of careful chronology and/or reference to back-up sources weakens the account without them.

³ Barry spells the priest's name as Magnier while Deasy, Hart and Hopkinson spell his name as Magner. A young man called Timothy Crowley was killed by the same Auxiliary in this incident.

1932, pg 198) but Crozier goes on to give examples of Auxiliaries elsewhere engaging in torture, looting and killing. Similarly, while it is true that Deasy does commend Colonel Crake for the "soldierly humanity" that Crake had shown him⁴, he goes on to say that this "was so different from the mercenary depravity of the majority of the Auxiliaries" (Deasy 1973, pg 167). In addition, one of the references that Hart gives to back up his contention that some IRA men "recalled their decency and restraint" is O'Suilleabhain in his book *Where Mountaineer Men have Sown*. However, O'Suilleabhain does not mention anything about the 'decency and restraint' of the Auxiliaries⁵.

Can the two accounts be reconciled? Perhaps they can be reconciled to some extent by removing the hyperbole (especially in Barry's account) and by looking at the arrival of the Auxiliaries in Macroom from both sides. Hart noted that when the Auxiliaries arrived they transformed the situation and "raided constantly and aggressively. Where previously rural Volunteers might not have seen a policeman for weeks or months at a time, now there were no safe havens. An Auxiliary patrol might appear at any time, day or night. They were fast, well armed and strong in numbers." (Hart 1998, pg 28). Not only the Volunteers of the IRA would have been affected by this constant raiding because, as Munro noted, when they arrived in Macroom they had "little idea of what to look for. In other words, we were raw." (Gleeson 1963, pg 67). Munro goes on to say that their lack of intelligence sent them "careering round Cork and Kerry on many a wild goose chase." (Gleeson 1963, pg 67).

It is highly likely that the people whose houses were raided (both members of the IRA and not) were in considerable fear of the Auxiliaries, particularly in the light of the stories in circulation of their activities elsewhere in the country. Ryan quotes from an interview with an inhabitant of Ballingearry who said the following about the Auxiliaries from Macroom: "Every neighbour in the district had been raided. They broke furniture, pulled men, women and children from their beds at all hours of the night, made wrecks of houses and brought misery ... a bad lot." (Ryan 2003, pg 35). Ryan also mentions that the Macroom Auxiliaries would take 'pot shots' at men working in the fields while they drove along the roads. She gives three sources for men being disabled from these 'pot shots' (Ryan 2003, pg 35 & 313⁶). However, Ryan does not give dates and locations for

⁴ Deasy says he was twice stopped by Crake and his men but let go both times - see Deasy 1973, pgs 165 & 167. Barry, in his retort to Deasy's book, calls these incidents into question (Barry 1974, pg 18).

⁵ The actual page reference given by Hart to O'Suilleabhain's book relates a story of what happened one day in the autumn of 1920 when O'Suilleabhain was working in the fields with some relatives and a number of the Macroom-based Auxiliaries came towards them in two lorries. O'Suilleabhain tells how his relatives expected him to run but instead he went and got his two revolvers, put them in his belt and put on his coat to conceal them. He then went to the gate of the field and waited for the two lorries to arrive. One of the Auxiliaries saluted him and he saluted both lorry-loads of Auxiliaries in turn. The Auxiliaries passed on without incident. At the end of this odd little story, O'Suilleabhain is more concerned with commenting on the lack of nationalist feeling among his relatives than with the "decency and restraint" of the Auxiliaries (O'Suilleabhain 1965, pgs 91-92). It may be appropriate to note, however, that O'Suilleabhain does comment on the courage and physical fitness of the Auxiliaries (O'Suilleabhain 1965, pgs 90). Perhaps it should also be noted that O'Suilleabhain's book is, in places, absolutely charming and almost Heaneyesque in its evocation of place but it also, in places, stretches credibility.

⁶ Unfortunately, it is not clear from the sources if these three sources refer to different or overlapping people who were disabled.

these raids and 'pot shots' taking place. Therefore, it is not clear whether they took place before or after the Kilmichael ambush⁷.

What can be taken from the above discussion of the background to the Kilmichael ambush? I think it can be safely concluded that, while Barry's and Ryan's hyperbole can be rejected so can Hart's and Munro's rather benign view of the activities of the Macroom-based Auxiliaries in the period leading up to Kilmichael ambush. However, while some reconciliation is possible, we are still left with people on both sides of the conflict viewing the same activities in very different ways.

To get a sense of how differently the same incidents can be viewed, I will review in some detail one particular incident - the killing by a Macroom-based Auxiliary of James Lehane in the village of Ballymakeera about a month before the Kilmichael ambush. Hart says that Lehane was the first and only victim of the Macroom Auxiliaries before Kilmichael and that he was not a Volunteer⁸. The accounts of his killing given by different sources are poles apart.

Munro's account goes as follows: "It was during a raid on some cottages up toward the Kerry border that we apparently surprised a meeting of some sort. It was just young fellows who took fright on seeing us and ran for it. They were some little way off before we spotted them and they were called on to halt, but they kept going and a few shots were fired after them. ... one was hit and fell. On reaching him we found him to be badly wounded so, taking him into one of the cottages, we did what we could for him and sent one car to get a doctor and a priest, both of whom arrived in time to do what they had to do before the young man died." (Gleeson 1963, pg 72). Munro goes on to say that "This incident depressed us, especially as it was a stupid and unnecessary death" (Gleeson 1963, pg 72).

Twohig's version of the killing of James Lehane is very different. He places Lehane's killing, not in the context of a 'raid on some cottages' but in the context of a major raid on

⁷ In the section discussing the background to the ambush, Ryan says the following: "Col Buxton Smith, commander 'C' Company Auxiliaries in Macroom Castle found it had to control his men. 'Within the first few months 25 men left this company,' he told Katherine Everett. 'They had no room for exercise. They can't walk a yard or go into a shop without danger, and they are savage for revenge.'" (Ryan 2003, pg 36). The source Ryan gives for the quote from Col Buxton Smith to Katherine Everett is the latter's book called *Bricks and Flowers*. However, it is clear from Everett's book that she went to Macroom Castle **after** the Kilmichael ambush - see Everett 1949, pg 153. Everett reports that the commander of the Black and Tans in Macroom Castle saying to her: "When I first came here I little knew what I was in for. I can trust no one. Already I have lost twenty-five of my men, and they are getting hard to hold. I can't give them any exercise - can't even allow them to knock a ball about in the park, lest they are sniped at from over the wall. They can't walk a yard or go into a shop without danger, and they are savage for revenge." (Everett 1949, pg 154).

⁸ O'Suilleabhain disputes this. He says that, in addition to James Lehane, an IRA man called Christy Lucey was killed by the Auxiliaries on the 9th November at Túirín Dubh, Ballingearry (O'Suilleabhain 1965, pgs 159-160). According to O'Suilleabhain, he was unarmed. However, Hart says that "In the first two weeks of November Christy Lucey, an active I.R.A. officer, was gunned down in the street". From the context, it would seem that the street was in Cork City (Hart 1998, pg 10). There could have been two IRA men of the same name killed at roughly at the same time but this is unlikely. (O'Suilleabhain mentions that Lucey was from Cork City but staying with "friends and comrades" at Túirín Dubh.)

the village of Ballymakeera by the Auxiliaries where practically every house and business in the village is raided. Twohig gives details of who were in various houses and pubs and of the attempts by various IRA men in the village to evade capture (Twohig 1994, pgs 136-141). Twohig describes Lehane as "a middle-aged, easy going man, big and harmless. All this, and one thing and another, kept him from taking an active part in the events of the time."⁹ (Twohig 1994, pg 140). On the evening of the raid¹⁰, Twohig says that Lehane "happened to be in a house in the village - his own home was in the East End - when an Auxie walked in. When questioned he gave his name as James Lehane. The name must have meant something to the soldier who was obviously the worse for drink. ... He was ordered out of the house and directed down the by-road where, about fifty yards from the village cross, the Auxie emptied his revolver into him. Other Auxies ran to the spot but immediately the usual whistle blew for 'All Aboard' and they made for the lorries at the double. Some of the villagers went down and found Jim Lehane slumped against the fence with his feet towards the road." (Twohig 1994, pgs 140-141).

The detail of these two accounts are so at variance as to deny any attempt at reconciliation without further evidence but they illustrate very well how the same incident can come to be reported totally differently by the two sides to the conflict. What is clear, however, from the accounts of both sides is that, at the end, a man lay dead and he was killed by the hand of an Auxiliary. Munro does not mention any official inquiry into this killing or relate if any Auxiliary was held to account for it.

This section on background has hopefully provided some context in which the Kilmichael ambush occurred. The controversies that arose from the ambush will be considered next.

⁹ O'Suilleabhain describes him as "a man who would not hurt a fly" (O'Suilleabhain 1965, pg 159)

¹⁰ There is even disagreement as to the date - Hart says it was the 17th October and Twohig says it was the 20th October. O'Suilleabhain also gives an account of the killing of James Lehane (O'Suilleabhain 1965, pg 142 & pg 159) but he gives the date as 1st November 1920. (O'Suilleabhain account is much shorter than Twohig's and, except for minor details, agrees with Twohig's) Ryan also says it 1st November (Ryan 2003, pg 36). She also names the killer as Cadet Cecil Guthrie who was to die in the aftermath of the Kilmichael ambush - see Appendix 1.

2.0 The Kilmichael Controversies

As mentioned above, much of what happened at the Kilmichael ambush is either unclear or disputed. Abbott (2000, pg 160) enumerates five points of conflict as follows¹¹:

- (1) [Was the Auxiliary patrol tricked onto a minor road by a civilian or a person in Military uniform by telling them that a British army patrol had broken down on the minor road?](#)
- (2) [When the Auxiliary patrol reached the ambush position, was it induced to slow down or stop by a man in British Army uniform or a group of men in uniform gathered around one or two lorries?](#)
- (3) [Did some of the Auxiliaries in the second lorry make a bogus surrender call resulting in the deaths of some of the IRA men?](#)
- (4) [After the ambush, did the IRA kill Auxiliaries who had surrendered or who were wounded?](#)
- (5) [Did the IRA mutilate the bodies of dead Auxiliaries with axes?](#)

The following will attempt to answer these questions, with particular emphasis on the third and fourth questions.

(1) Was the Auxiliary patrol tricked onto a sideroad?

That the Auxiliary patrol was tricked onto a side road is mentioned by Munro (Gleeson 1963, pg 73) and by Macready (Macready 1924, pg 512). Munro says it was a civilian and Macready says that it was a man in the uniform of a British soldier. This ruse is not mentioned by Barry or another member of the ambush party, Paddy O'Brien in his account of the ambush (Deasy 1973, pgs 170-174). Perhaps more unusually, it is not mentioned in the official report prepared by a senior police officer in Cork and published in early December 1920 (Hart 1998, pg 23). Also, this latter report states that the patrol had been searching for a man in the Dunmanway direction. As the ambush site was on the main Macroom- Dunmanway road, there would have been no need to trick the patrol onto a side road. This seems likely as Munro also says that "each section officer got into the habit of doing the same patrol each time he was on duty" (Gleeson 1963, pg 73). Therefore the need for a ruse to get the patrol into the ambush site probably did not arise.

(2) How was the Auxiliary patrol induced to slow down?

The only real point of conflict in the next point is whether one man in military uniform got the first Auxiliary lorry to slow down or was it a bunch of men in uniform (pretending to be British soldiers) standing around one or two lorries. Munro says there were two stationary lorries at the ambush site with men in khaki uniforms clustered around them (Gleeson 1963, pg 74) and when the patrol lorries stopped fire was opened on them from all sides. Munro's account is basically the same, in this regard, as the first official report (Hart 1998, pg 23).

¹¹ Abbott does enumerate a sixth point of conflict concerning Barry's claim that there was no Auxiliary survivors - this claim was clearly wrong - see Appendix 1.

On the other hand, Barry says that they had one man in the uniform of an Irish Volunteer stand on the road and this caused the first lorry to slow down and approach slowly and a Mills bomb was thrown into the driver's seat to start the ambush (Barry 1999, pg 43). On reviewing the evidence (which included interviews with two veterans of the ambush and access to other interviews with veterans), Hart agreed with Barry that there was only one man in uniform standing on the road to slow down the Auxiliaries' trucks (Hart 1998, pg 30¹²).

(3) Was there a bogus surrender call from the Auxiliaries?

It is this point of conflict (Did the Auxiliaries make a false surrender call?) which is the issue that has given rise to the most controversy. For this reason, it will be considered in detail.

Barry claims in *Guerilla Days in Ireland* that the Auxiliaries in the second lorry gave a surrender call and then began shooting again as the IRA men stood up to take their surrender and this resulted in the deaths of three IRA men¹³. For this reason, he says he did not accept a further surrender call and had his men keep firing until all firing stopped from the Auxiliaries (Barry 1999, pgs 44-45).

Hart makes an in-depth trawl of the evidence concerning the false surrender claim (Hart 1998, pg 25-27 and 33-37) and rejects Barry's claim of a false surrender. "Barry's 'history' of Kilmichael ... is riddled with lies and evasions. There was no false surrender as he described it" (Hart 1998, pg 36). Hart based this conclusion mainly on four main pieces of evidence: (a) [Barry's first report to his superiors](#); (b) [Barry's first published account of the ambush in 1932](#); (c) [the account of the ambush by participant Paddy O'Brien](#) and (d) most critically, [interviews with ambush veterans](#). Each of these pieces of evidence will now be examined.

(a) The Kilmichael after ambush report

Hart notes that Barry made no mention of the false surrender in his report to his superiors immediately after the ambush. The document giving Barry's first report to his superiors was found in the Strickland Papers¹⁴ and Hart claims it is an authentic captured document. However, in a series of letters in *The Irish Times* and *The Examiner* in 1998, the authenticity of the document was questioned by Brian Murphy

¹² Hart claims that the man in uniform, standing on the road, was Barry himself. This is implied rather than stated in Barry's account. Also, Hart says that Barry threw the Mills bomb into the driver's seat - again this is not stated explicitly in Barry's account. (The passive tense is used: "the Mills bomb was thrown" (Barry 1999, pg 43)). In O'Brien's account, no mention is made of a man in uniform slowing down the trucks but he does say that it was Barry who threw the Mills bomb (Deasy 1973, pg 171).

¹³ "we heard the Auxiliaries shout "We surrender". We kept running along the grass edge of the road as they repeated the surrender cry, and actually saw some Auxiliaries throw away their rifles. Firing stopped, ... Then we saw three of our comrades on No. 2 section stand up, one crouched and two upright. Suddenly the Auxiliaries were firing again with revolvers. One of our three men spun around before he fell, and Pat Deasy staggered before he, too, went down." (Barry 1999, pg 44)

¹⁴ General Sir Peter Strickland was commanding officer of the 6th Division of the British Army in Ireland with its HQ in Cork. The 6th Division had responsibility for most of Munster. See Appendix VII of Townshend (1975) for the operational strength of the three brigades of the 6th Division in June 1920 along with their deployments at various military barracks.

and Meda Ryan and their points were replied to by Hart¹⁵. Good arguments are made by both sides. For example, Murphy points out that "Firstly, the report as it appears in the General Strickland Papers is not the original hand-written account by Barry. It is typed into the official record on the Irish Rebellion (1916-1921) in the 6th Divisional Area of the British Army. Secondly, the report is not dated." (Murphy in Hart et al 1999, pg 15). Murphy goes on to say that while this report does not mention the false surrender, neither does it mention other salient facts like Barry standing in the road in military uniform to confront the first lorry. Murphy also questions when Barry would have made such a report and the need to do so as he met with his commanding officer (Charlie Hurley, O/C Cork No. 3 Brigade) in the early hours of the 29th November just hours after the ambush and made a verbal report to him. (He also points out that a few days later - December 3rd - Barry was struck down with illness which had him out-of-action and hospitalised until December 28th.)

Hart accepts that the report is not the original but points out it was not used as propaganda and was at variance with the official report. Hart also points out that the report does have details that could have been known only to participants and explains the omissions by the brevity of the report (which also explains how Barry could have written it so fast¹⁶). With regard to the need to write the report, Hart points to the many similar reports Barry wrote about later actions. Murphy comes back and says that some of the details in the report are inaccurate e.g. the report says that the Flying Column was retiring from its position when the two Auxiliary lorries were sighted and the timing of the ambush was different from other accounts. He asks "why Peter Hart should reject part of the account as inaccurate, and then accept the failure to mention the a false surrender as accurate." (Murphy in Hart et al 1999, pg 18). Hart replies with a plausible conjecture as to why Barry wrote what (he thinks) he did in the report¹⁷. Hart believes that the "omissions and lies" (Hart in Hart et al 1998, pg 19) in the report are due to issues such as Barry not having "authority to launch a risky ambush outside brigade boundaries, and he hadn't told his superiors." (Hart in Hart et al 1998, pg 19). In addition, Hart claims he was still on probation¹⁸. Around these reasons, Hart builds a plausible conjecture for why Barry would have written the report as it is.

At this point, Meda Ryan enters the debate. She pointed out more inaccuracies in the report (like the number of men in the ambush party and the amount of ammunition that each man had) and also took issue with the language of the report, stating that it

¹⁵ The series of letters was published by the Aubane Historical Society in 1999 including one unpublished letter by Meda Ryan – see Hart et al (1999) in Bibliography below.

¹⁶ None of the other correspondents asked Hart if the non-mention of the false surrender could not also have been an omission due to brevity.

¹⁷ Hart also attempts to prove that Barry wrote the report in the Strickland papers by showing that nobody else would have had motivation for writing. However, as will be seen, his range of possible alternatives does not exhaust all the potential reasons for someone else writing the report.

¹⁸ Barry had being appointed Brigade Training Officer only in early September 1920 (Deasy 1973, pg 141) and there was suspicion of Barry among some of the brigade officers as his father had been an RIC man and he himself had been in the British Army for four years and upheld their policy on his return to Ireland. (Ryan 2003, pg 27).

was not Barry's language. Hart replies that IRA officers "often assumed as "official" a style as possible" (Hart in Hart et al 1999, pg 21) in their reports.

In her book *Tom Barry - Irish Freedom Fighter* (published in 2003), Meda Ryan returns to the issue of the authenticity of the report. She goes over the arguments against the authenticity of the report covered by Brian Murphy and herself in the letters to *The Irish Times* and points to more inaccuracies in the report such as the number of guns captured and order in which the casualties happened. More importantly, she supplies her own conjecture as to why the British may have wished to write such a report. The report she claims may have arisen because of the need for some on the British side for such a report so as to expedite the compensation claims of the relatives of the Auxiliaries who died or were injured at Kilmichael. She adduces a certain amount of evidence for her conjecture. While Ryan's conjecture is also plausible, like Hart's conjecture, it is not proven. However, what is important about Ryan's conjecture is that it refutes one of Hart's key arguments. Hart had asked why the British would wish to forge such a report since they had not used it for propaganda purposes and it contradicted the official version. Ryan's conjecture shows that there could be alternative reasons why the elements on the British side would wish to forge the report for use other than propaganda.

What can be gleaned from the above on the authenticity of the Kilmichael report in the Strickland papers? Was it written by Barry? All that can be said is that there are good arguments on both sides and, therefore, the authenticity of the document is in question¹⁹. Probably more importantly, the omission of any mention of the false surrender in the document is not, in itself, any proof that it did not happen. Even if the document had been proven to be authentic, further proof would have been needed to show that a false surrender had not occurred. That the report cannot be taken as authentic means that even stronger proof is needed.

(b) The Irish Press Article in 1932

The next piece of evidence mentioned by Hart is the account of the ambush written by Barry for the *Irish Press* in 1932. Hart notes that Barry made no mention of a false surrender in his first published account of the ambush made in 1932²⁰. This account was published in the *Irish Press* newspaper on the 26th November 1932. Hart comments that not only was there no trick surrender in this account but it was a "a direct contradiction, in substance and in tone, of what he wrote in 1949" (Hart

¹⁹ The debate continues as to the authenticity of the document – see Hart (2005), pgs 17-18 and Ryan (2005), pg 16.

²⁰ Probably the first published account of the ambush is in the book by Béaslaí which was published in 1926. In this first comprehensive (if partisan) history of the War of Independence, a short account of the Kilmichael ambush is given and mention is made of the false surrender. "On 28th November occurred a historic ambush of Auxiliaries at Kilmichael, near Macroom, Co. Cork, which evoked deep wrath in England and heartfelt delight in Ireland. ... What really happened on that occasion was that, after the fight had continued for a time, some of the Auxiliaries offered to surrender. When Volunteers advanced to take the surrender they were fired on; thereupon the Auxiliaries were charged, a hand to hand fight ensued, and no quarter was given." (Béaslaí 1926, Vol II, pg 97). It is therefore clear that the claim that the Auxiliaries at Kilmichael gave a false surrender was in circulation for a considerable time before Barry's first published account.

1998, pg 26). However, Ryan produces an extract from a letter from Barry (dated 28th November 1932) to the *Irish Press* complaining that the reference to the false surrender had been edited out of the article and asking for this to be rectified²¹. She concludes "So the omission of the false surrender in the *Irish Press* article was not the work of Tom Barry." (Ryan 2003, pg 66).

(c) *Paddy O'Brien's Account of the Ambush*

Hart goes on to note that Paddy O'Brien, who was a participant in the ambush, makes no mention of a false surrender in his account. Paddy O'Brien's account was given in Liam Deasy's book *Towards Ireland Free* published in 1973. O'Brien account of what happened around the time that Barry says the false surrender goes as follows: "Meanwhile, the second tender was about one hundred and fifty yards behind, and had become stuck in the road where the driver had tried unsuccessfully to turn it. The Auxiliaries had jumped out, threw themselves on the road and firing from the cover of the tender. We then open fire from their rear and when they realised that they were caught between two fires, they knew they were doomed. It was then realised that three of our men had been killed in Michael McCarthy's section; he himself had been shot through the head, Jim O'Sullivan through the jaw, and Pat Deasy had two bullet wounds through the body. ... it had been a short but grim fight. Of the eighteen Auxiliaries involved, one escaped and fled across country only to be captured and shot later, and another who was taken for dead survived for a while but never recovered from his wounds. The remaining sixteen had been killed outright." (Deasy 1973, page 172).

Hart notes that this account by O'Brien led Barry to claim that he felt that O'Brien's account depicted him as a bloody-minded commander who exterminated the Auxiliaries without reason²². Hart finds this a very odd interpretation for Barry to have made as O'Brien's account makes no such claims. Rather "It is Barry who introduces the issue of 'extermination' and who clearly feels very defensive about it. Why? Because ... he says that, after the bogus surrender, several cadets shouted 'we surrender' a second time, but that the guerrillas kept on firing until all had been killed. So, if there was no trick, the Auxiliaries were gunned down 'for no reason'." (Hart 1998, pgs 26-27)²³.

Ryan interviewed Paddy O'Brien in 1975 and he told her that "He was unaware that there were errors in the account of Kilmichael 'in the book', as he hadn't analysed it" (Ryan 2003, pg 45). She goes on to say that "Paddy O'Brien was among the many participants in the Kilmichael ambush who mentioned the false surrender to me" (Ryan 2003, pg 45). From this it would seem that the fact that Paddy O'Brien did not mention a false surrender was a simple omission. However, Paddy O'Brien gave

²¹ Ryan states in an endnote that "A response to this [letter to the *Irish Press*] does not seem to be among his papers. This does not mean that he did not get one, as there are gaps in the correspondence." (Ryan 2003, pg 320)

²² Barry made these claims in a booklet he published in 1974 called *The Reality of the Anglo-Irish War, 1920-1921, in West Cork: Refutations, Corrections and Comment on Liam Deasy's 'Towards Ireland Free'*

²³ This issue of the possible 'extermination of prisoners' will be reviewed in the next section below i.e. Section (4).

another account of the ambush and this will be considered along with the other accounts of the Kilmichael ambush by veterans in the next section.

(d) Interviews with Ambush Veterans

Perhaps Hart's strongest evidence against Barry's claim of a false surrender is the evidence of interviews with six veterans of the ambush. He carried out two of the interviews himself (in 1988 and 1989); three were conducted by Dr John Chisholm in the late 1960s and one held by the Ballineen/Enniskeane Area Heritage Group (the latter also have a detailed statement written by one of the ambush party). Hart states "All of the men interviewed agree on this point: McCarthy and O'Sullivan did not stand up and did not die because of a fake surrender. Two of the veterans considered Barry's account to be an insult to the memory of these men." (Hart 1998, pg 34 footnote). Hart does not name the two veterans he interviewed or give the names of the other veterans whose interviews he was drawing information from "to protect confidentiality" (Hart 1998, pg 33 footnote).

On the other hand, Ryan names seven veterans of the ambush whom she interviewed. They were Dan Hourihane; Jack O'Sullivan; Pat O'Donovan; Paddy O'Brien; Tim O'Connell; James O'Mahoney; and Ned Young. Ryan conducted these interviews in the 1970s.

She states that Dan Hourihane, who was beside casualty Jim O'Sullivan in Section 2²⁴, told her that "I'll never forget it - same as yesterday. After they shouted that surrender, it was silence! Jim lifted himself. Thought it was over. God rest his soul." (Ryan 2003, pg 51).

Referring to Pat O'Donovan, Ryan states "He, like others interviewed, said that he heard 'the surrender' call." (Ryan 2003, pg 53).

With regards to Jack O'Sullivan, she says that "He was definite that there were shouts of surrender and the Auxiliaries began firing again." (Ryan 2003, pg 315).

As mentioned above, Ryan also says that Paddy O'Brien confirmed the false surrender to her (Ryan 2003, pg 45).

Discussing the death of Pat Deasy, she notes that he had two wounds - a side-stomach graze and one higher up believed to be the fatal wound. She says that "Pat O'Donovan and Tim O'Connell, at either side of him, both knew of the side graze before the surrender call. He got up during the surrender, as firing started again." (Ryan 2003, pg 43).

Along with the interviews with the veterans, Ryan also recalls a discussion between two veterans in the aftermath of a ceremony in Castletown-Kenneigh (where the three IRA men killed at Kilmichael are buried). "Two survivors, Jack O'Sullivan and Ned

²⁴ All three IRA casualties were in Section 2. See Appendix for the sections into which the ambush party were broken into and some information as to who made up the various sections.

Young, could recall exactly where they were and how they felt. Because of the occasion, 'the false surrender' and its consequences for their comrades were discussed." (Ryan 2003, pg 46)²⁵.

Along with interviews with veterans, Ryan also interviewed relatives of the veterans and local historians. One of the latter was Louis Whyte who was involved in the Kilmichael Commemoration Committee and in the writing of *The Wild Heather Glen* - see Bibliography below. She quotes him as saying "we listened to the men over the years as they talked about Kilmichael and they always talked about the false surrender." (Ryan 1993, pg 53).

Finally, Ryan points out that another veteran (Stephen O'Neill who commanded the third section) published an account of the ambush in 1937 - see Bibliography below - in which he refers to the false surrender call. Ryan concludes that "None of the participants publicly contradicted Tom Barry's, Stephen O'Neill's or other published accounts that recorded the false surrender story by saying 'there was no false surrender' " (Ryan 2003, pg 53).

What is very persuasive about Ryan arguments for a false surrender having taken place is that most of her veteran interviewees (noted above) were in or around Section 2, and therefore more likely to be close to any surrender call, if there was one. Dan Hourihane, Pat O'Donovan and Tim O'Connell are placed by Ryan in Section 2 and therefore close to the casualties²⁶. Jack O'Sullivan is placed by O'Brien in Section 3 but opposite Section 2 rather than opposite Section 1 (Deasy, pg 171). Even Paddy O'Brien, who was also in Section 3 but along with Stephen O'Neill opposite Section 1

²⁵ Ryan points out some potential problems with Hart's two anonymous veterans of the ambush whom he interviewed. Hart refers to them as AA and AF. He says he interviewed AA on 3rd April 1988 and 25th June 1988 and AF on 19th November 1989 (Hart 1998, pg 33 footnote). Hart says that interviewee AF was a scout. However, according to Ryan, the last veteran of the Kilmichael ambush (Ned Young) died on 13th November 1989 and the second last (Jack O'Sullivan) died in 1986 (Ryan 2003, pg 52). (These years of death are confirmed by Whyte - see Appendix.) This would seem to point at Hart's AA interviewee being Ned Young. But Ryan says his "faculties were impaired during his final years" (Ryan 2003, pg 52). There is a further problem pointed out by Ryan. She says that the last of the scouts died in 1971. She names five scouts (three 'posted' scouts and two dispatch scouts) and gives the years of their deaths (Ryan 2003, pg 52). Again the years of death of the five named scouts concur with Whyte - see Appendix. Ryan calls on Hart to reveal the names of his interviewees because "Their version of events to Peter Hart contradicts so many others, and while they remain anonymous, the story of the Kilmichael ambush will remain clouded in controversy" (Ryan 2003, pg 53).

Three points can be made about this issue as it currently stands. First, as noted in the Appendix, there are some problems in identifying all the IRA participants in the Kilmichael ambush. For example, with regard to the scouts, Ryan says there were 5 scouts (and names them) but Hart says there were 10 scouts (Hart 1998, pg 131) without naming them. Until the discrepancies in the names of those IRA men who took part in the Kilmichael ambush are sorted, it is possible (albeit unlikely) that Hart's interviewees are veterans not known to Ryan. Second, if, as seems to be the case, that Hart obtained his interviews with AA and AF on the basis of anonymity and confidentiality then it would be unprofessional for him to reveal their identities. Third, in a situation such as this, where there is a conflict between two historians and one historian (Hart) is not naming his sources and another historian (Ryan) is naming her sources, it undoubtedly strengthens the arguments of the historian who is naming sources as the latter's sources can be checked by third parties.

²⁶ It should be pointed out that Tim O'Connell is placed by O'Brien in Section 1 (Deasy, pg 171). He is also placed in Section 1 by Ned Young - see below.

and the Command Post (and therefore quite a distance from the second lorry) says, according to Ryan, that he heard the surrender call. "Paddy O'Brien did not see the [IRA] men fall as he was in the sub-section of No. 3 (across the road), but he did hear the surrender call, the lull and the resumption of Auxiliary firing." (Ryan 2003, pg 45). For the veterans interviewed by Ryan, the false surrender seems to have been an accepted and unquestioned fact.

If the controversy between Hart and Ryan were to rest at this point, then one would have to conclude, on the balance of evidence, that a false surrender by some Auxiliaries did take place. However, some further evidence has been released that was unavailable to either Hart or Ryan when they were writing their books. This evidence comes from the Bureau of Military History (BMH). The BMH was formed in 1947 and over the next ten years, (among other activities) it collected 1773 witness statements from individuals who had been active in the period 1913 - 1921 (Doyle et al 2002). These statements were kept unavailable for a considerable period but were released in March 2003²⁷.

Five IRA veterans of the Kilmichael ambush gave witness statements to the BMH covering their involvement with the IRA. Each of the five gave an account of the Kilmichael ambush in their statements - the accounts of the ambush differ in length from one and half to almost four typed pages. The five veterans, who gave statements, were:

- Jack Hennessy
- James 'Spud' Murphy
- Patrick O'Brien
- Michael O'Driscoll
- Ned Young

What is remarkable about the accounts of the Kilmichael ambush given by these five veterans is that **not one** of them mentions a false surrender.

Murphy places himself in the Command Post along with Barry (as did Barry himself and O'Brien in their accounts). After they had dealt with the first lorry, his description goes as follows: "We were ordered out on the road - Tom Barry first -

²⁷ It should be noted that Barry had strong views on the methods employed by the BMH. He said that he was told they "record every single word from anyone who wishes to appear before the Bureau and who claimed service with the IRA. It did not matter whether the deponent was obviously mentally disturbed, intoxicated or a phoney, his statement had to be recorded. None of those statements was open for inspection by anyone else, not even by a maligned person. They were all to be locked away and not to be re-opened for fifty years, after which they were to be handed over to a group of historians who would, from that material, write a military history of the period. If this is correct, then God help Irish History. Perhaps some professional historians will investigate what we were told about the depositions and, if it is true, ask that a bonfire be made of the lot in the Garden of Remembrance." (Barry 1974, pg 9). At a minimum, this stance by Barry shows a lack of trust in 'professional historians'. He seems to fear that they would take one source and not try to check it against other sources. In addition, Barry would not seem to trust a number of his old comrades and, especially in his 1974 book, he adopts a combative and sometimes condescending attitude towards them. See also Ryan 2003, pgs 238-240 and pgs 274-278.

and we followed. We got down on our knees and we opened fire on the men that got out of the [second] lorry at the other end (west) of the position. After an exchange lasting about ten minutes, they were all killed ... At this stage, the engagement was over and, on a roll call of our men, it was found that we had two fatal casualties - Mick McCarthy and Jim Sullivan - and that one of our men, Pat Deasy, was seriously wounded." (Murphy, pgs 6-7). Again, no false surrender.

As in his account in Deasy's book *Towards Ireland Free*, Paddy O'Brien places himself in Section 3 with Stephen O'Neill opposite Section 1. His account to the BMH mirrors the one given by him in Deasy's book²⁸.

O'Driscoll places himself in Section 2 beside Jim O'Sullivan. His account of the time in the ambush in which the false surrender is said to have taken place goes as follows: "The second lorry was just approaching our position and had not quite reached it when the driver stopped and tried to reverse. We opened up. The Auxies jumped out and sought cover, replying to our fire. The fire was general along the road. Jim Sullivan, who was alongside me, was killed. As far as I could judge, a bullet struck his rifle and part of the bolt was driven into his face. Michael McCarthy, our section commander was also killed. Pat Deasy, another of our section, was seriously wounded. Tom Barry had dealt with the first lorry and he led a party along the grass verge of the road to come behind the Auxies fighting us. Soon the fighting was over. We were ordered out on the road." (O'Driscoll, pg 5).

Young places himself in Section 2 but on the opposite side of the road to the rest of Section 2²⁹. He describes the fire being opened on the second lorry and two Auxiliaries making a run for it. He followed one of them as he went across the bog and fired at him, thought he was 'finished' and went looking for the second. "In the meantime, the survivors from the second lorry had been continuing to fight, but in a few minutes all firing ceased. The section under the Column O/C (Tom Barry) which had dealt with the leading lorry, now advanced along the road towards the second lorry, shooting as they come. The surviving members of the Column were now ordered on to the roadway." (Young, pg 15).

²⁸ Ryan notes that the style of writing of O'Brien's account of the ambush in Deasy's book does not seem to be in his manner (Ryan 2003, pg 44) and suggests that the style of writing may be due more to Fr Chisholm (who edited Deasy's book). While there are differences in style, the substance of O'Brien's account to the BMH and O'Brien's account in Deasy's book is largely the same such as (a) column broken up into two sections - one under Barry and the other under McCarthy; (b) Sonny Dave Crowley with Barry in the Command Post; (c) the number of men in the ambush party and (d) placing himself opposite Barry's section with Stephen O'Neill and Jack Hegarty. He also names the four men he recruited from Ballinacarriga - this is referred to in Deasy's book but the men are not named. There are slight differences. The men arriving on the sidecar are not mentioned in the BMH account while it is in the account in Deasy's book. The opening of the firing on the first lorry is different in the two accounts. Also, he does not say he was engaged in the firing on the second lorry in the BMH account - this is implied in the account in Deasy's book. Most importantly, for the present purposes, neither account mentions a false surrender.

²⁹ In his account in Deasy's book, O'Brien places Jack O'Sullivan and Paddy McCarthy overlooking Section 2 from the other side of the road (Deasy 1973, pg 171) but Young does not mention either of these.

The only veteran to make even a slightly ambiguous statement is Hennessy. He places himself in Section 2 (in a "box" they constructed to give some cover) alongside Michael McCarthy, John Lordan and Tim Crowley. He describes how, after Section 2 had fired on the second lorry, the Auxiliaries had jumped off, took what cover they could and fired back. McCarthy was killed (by a bullet through the head) and he himself wounded. Blood dripped from his wound into the breach of rifle and fouled it. He took McCarthy's rifle and kept firing. Hennessy goes on to state the following: "Our orders were to fix bayonets and charge onto the road when we heard three blasts from the O/C's whistle. 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. I pulled on him and shot him dead. I got back to cover, where I remained for a few minutes firing at living and dead Auxies on the road. The Column O/C sounded his whistle again. Nearly all the Auxies had been wiped out."

In her 2005 article, Ryan gives this quote from Hennessy and goes on to say "This is a false surrender – after the ceasefire whistle was blown, an Auxie who had thrown down his rifle 'drew his revolver'." (Ryan 2005, pg 18) Two points can be made about this claim. One, the ceasefire whistle was blown by the Column commander i.e. it was not the Auxiliaries who called the ceasefire. Two, if this quote describes a false surrender then it is one that occurred **after** McCarthy was killed and is therefore not at all like the false surrender as described by Barry. (As noted above, Barry claimed that the false surrender by the Auxiliaries led to the deaths of the IRA men.)

What is one to make of these statements given to the BMH by the veterans juxtapositioned with the interviewees given by veterans to Ryan? We know the identity of Ryan's interviewees and the veterans who gave statements to the BMH. There is an overlap of two - Ned Young and Paddy O'Brien.

With regard to Ned Young, Ryan does not directly quote him as saying there was a false surrender but does relate how he discussed the false surrender with Jack O'Sullivan - see above. At any rate, in his account to the BMH, Young says that he followed two Auxiliaries who made a dash for it from the second lorry - he could, therefore, have been out of earshot if a false surrender was made³⁰.

With regard to Paddy O'Brien's account, there are almost directly contradictory statements i.e. between the two written statements (he gave in Deasy's book and to the BMH) and what he said to Ryan. In his statement to the BMH in 1953 and in his account of the Kilmichael ambush in Deasy's book (which was published in 1973), O'Brien makes no mention of the false surrender. However, as noted above, Ryan

³⁰ In addition, there is what seems like an internal contradiction in Young's account to the BMH. In his account, he says that two Auxiliaries jumped from the second lorry and made a dash up the road towards Macroom. He says he followed one and shot at him. He says that he saw him fall into a bog hole and thought he was 'finished' – see above. Afterwards, he said he went looking for the second Auxiliary and found him under the lorry. It seems highly unlikely that an Auxiliary would make a dash away from the lorry and danger and then afterwards double back towards the lorry.

says that O'Brien confirmed to her that there was a false surrender³¹. As she was interviewing O'Brien after the publication of Deasy's book, Ryan says the following of his account of the ambush in Deasy's book "He was ill when he signed the form"³², and told me afterwards that he was not aware of what he was signing. ... He was unaware that there were errors in the account of Kilmichael 'in the book', as he hadn't analysed it." (Ryan 2003, pg 45). O'Brien would have been about 77 years old when Deasy published his book but he was approximately 57 years old when he gave his statement to the BMH. He may have been ill when he gave his account of the ambush for Deasy's book but he gave an almost identical account almost 20 years earlier. In Whyte's book, O'Brien is described as follows: "Although only twenty-four, he had already been very active in the Volunteers in the years leading up to the engagement at Kilmichael. ... He had a great knowledge and understanding of how the British System worked in the locality. His advice was often sought on matters of intelligence." (Whyte 1995, pg 90). It would seem highly unlikely that a man such as O'Brien would leave the false surrender out of two accounts of the Kilmichael ambush unless he was doing so deliberately. However, one is left with the question as to why he would then confirm such a false surrender to Ryan³³? One possibility is that, on the one hand, in his statement to the BMH and in his account given for Deasy's book, he may have been giving an eyewitness account of what he seen and heard³⁴ (he was, after all, quite a distance – 100 to 150 yards - from the second lorry). On the other hand, while talking to Ryan, he may have been giving second-hand accounts gleaned from participants nearer the second lorry. However, this possible explanation is not totally satisfactory because, as noted above, Ryan says that "he did hear the surrender call, the lull and the resumption of Auxiliary firing". She follows this by immediately quoting O'Brien directly as saying "They were not far away from us." (Ryan 2003, pg 45).

If the accounts by the two overlapping veterans (Paddy O'Brien and Ned Young) are inconclusive, what can be said about the accounts of the remaining named veterans? As noted above, Ryan names three veterans - Dan Hourihane, Pat O'Donovan and Jack O'Sullivan - as confirming to her directly that there was a false surrender. Three

³¹ After stating that Paddy O'Brien was among the many participants who confirmed the false surrender to her, Ryan quotes O'Brien directly as saying "Well sure, it was that false surrender, that's how our boys were killed. The Auxies paid for their tricks." (Ryan 2003, pg 45).

³² Presumably the form confirming his statement including his account of the Kilmichael ambush given in Deasy's book.

³³ What makes this question even more intriguing is that, when making his statement to the BMH, O'Brien was aware of Barry's account of the ambush in *Guerilla Days in Ireland* and he even states that Barry's account was wrong on a relatively small point. When describing the allocation of men to positions after they reached the ambush site, O'Brien says "Every man was placed in his position then as described by Tom Barry in 'Guerilla Days', except that he does not mention Sonny Dave Crowley, Vice O.C. 3rd Battalion, who was alongside himself for the duration of the fight." (O'Brien, pg 15 in statement to BMH). More generally, as can be seen from the dates of the BMH statements, all the veteran accounts of the ambush were given at least four years after the publication of Barry's book, which was published in 1949 after being serialised in *The Irish Press* in 1948. As with the case with O'Brien, not one of the veterans directly contradicts Barry's account of the false surrender in their statements to the BMH. They simply leave any mention of a false surrender out of their accounts of the ambush.

³⁴ O'Brien signed both these statements.

other veterans - Jack Hennessy, James 'Spud' Murphy and Michael O'Driscoll - gave accounts to the BMH in which they do not mention a false surrender. As also noted above, Ryan three interviewees were all in a position to hear a false surrender. However, the same is true for the three who gave accounts to the BMH. Hennessy was beside Michael McCarthy in the 'box' in section 2 and, McCarthy (according to Barry) is supposed to have been shot after he went to take the false surrender call. Murphy came up the road from the position of the first lorry along with the Barry and the others in the Command Post. If Barry heard a false surrender, so presumably should Murphy. O'Driscoll was alongside Jim O'Sullivan in section 2. Again, O'Sullivan was supposed to have been shot after lifting himself up in the wake of the false surrender. In common with the other BMH accounts, O'Driscoll does not mention any false surrender but says that O'Sullivan was hit in the general firing.

Overall, can any conclusion be drawn from the veteran interviews as to whether there was or was not a false surrender? The simple answer is no. There is a straight conflict of evidence between interviewees quoted by Hart and those quoted by Ryan. Naming the veterans she interviewed adds weight to Ryan's argument. However, the absence of any reference to a false surrender by the veterans who gave accounts to the BMH cannot be gainsaid. At a very minimum, proponents of the false surrender theory would have to put forward a plausible hypothesis as to the absence of any mention of a false surrender in the BMH statements³⁵. Similarly, those who believe there was not a false surrender would have to explain why a number of veterans confirmed it to Ryan and others. Needless to say, such hypotheses from both sides would, of necessity, be conjecture unless further verifiable evidence becomes available.

If the issue of the false surrender cannot be settled with the current evidence, can we be any more definite about the question as to whether there was an 'extermination' of wounded Auxiliaries and/or prisoners in the aftermath of the ambush? This is the question that we turn to next.

³⁵ Referring to the absence of any mention of a false surrender by the veterans who gave statements to the BMH, Ryan has said that "Unless participants were pressed specifically on a particular point, they tended not to mention it." (Ryan 2005, pg 18). This may well be the case. However, it is, at least, peculiar that all of the five Kilmichael veterans who gave statements to the BMH did not mention such a significant factor as the false surrender which is a central part of Barry's account, particularly since (as noted above) Barry's best known account would have been placed in the public arena just a few years before the veterans gave their statements to the BMH.

(4) Were Auxiliary prisoners and/or wounded killed in the aftermath of the ambush?

The official British report in the aftermath of the ambush claimed that prisoners were killed. "After firing had continued for some time, and many men were wounded, overwhelming forces of the ambushers came out and forcibly disarmed the survivors. There followed a brutal massacre, ... The dead and wounded were hacked about the head with axes, shot guns fired into their bodies, and they were savagely mutilated. (Hart 1998, pg 23). Hart goes on to state that a number of Auxiliary prisoners - some wounded, some not - were killed after the ambush (Hart 1998, pgs 34-35). From his account of the killings, it is difficult to quantify how many prisoners/wounded he believes were killed but it would seem that he believes, at least, five were killed and possibly three of these were not wounded before surrendering.

Before considering these claims in detail, an attempt will be made to see if there is evidence of a pattern of the maltreatment and/or killing of British forces held captive by the IRA. This will be carried out by [a review of the engagements \(both before and after Kilmichael\) in whose aftermath the IRA held members of the British forces prisoner](#). After this review, various sources will be examined to see if what light they throw on Hart's claims. These sources will include:

- [The coroner's report](#)
- [Barry's own statements](#)
- [Crozier's comment](#)
- [And, most importantly, veteran statements](#)

(a) The Kilmichael Ambush in the Context of Other IRA Engagements

This is an attempt to see if there was a pattern of the killing or maltreatment of Crown forces held prisoner by the IRA (or even allegations of such killings and maltreatment) in the aftermath of engagements in which they took British prisoners. To attempt to answer this question, we will review the engagements (both before and after Kilmichael) in whose aftermath the IRA were left 'in charge of the field' i.e. engagements which the IRA 'won' and held members of the British forces prisoner, for however short a time.

In the period January 1920 to the Truce (July 1920), thirty engagements have been identified after which the IRA had Crown Forces in their custody³⁶. In the aftermath

³⁶ The thirty engagements were Carrigtwohill RIC barracks on 2nd January 1920; Ballytrain RIC barracks on 14th February 1920; Castlemartyr RIC barracks on 14th February 1920; Ballylanders RIC barracks on 23rd April 1920; Drangan RIC barracks on 3rd June 1920; Mile Bush (Middleton) ambush on 5th June 1920; Newmarket-on-Fergus RIC barracks on 13th June 1920; Ring coastguard station on 20th June 1920; Howes Strand coastguard station mid-June and mid-July 1920; Ballycrovane coastguard station in 22nd July 1920; Kildorry ambush on 7th August 1920; Ballyvarey RIC barracks on 22nd August 1920; Mallow Military barracks on 28th September 1920; Trim RIC barracks on 30th September 1920; Schull RIC barracks on 4th October 1920; Ruan RIC barracks on 18th October 1920; Toureen ambush on 24th October 1920; Glen of Aherlow ambush on 13th November 1920; Leary's Cross (Castlelyons) ambush on 10th December 1920; Glencurrane ambush on 19th December 1920; Glenwood ambush on 20th January 1920; Turengarriffe ambush on 28th January 1921; Clonfin ambush on 2nd February 1921; Kilfall ambush on 7th March 1921;

of all of these engagements, the British forces (whether RIC or British military) were disarmed and released. It could be argued that a substantial number of the accounts (on which this claim is based) were given by IRA veterans or those close to them³⁷ and they would have a vested interest in not revealing atrocities like the killing of prisoners. However, as there were RIC survivors to almost all of these engagements³⁸, it can be safely assumed that any killing of RIC prisoners seen by these survivors would have been also given in accounts³⁹.

Even in all the accounts of RIC casualties between the years 1919 to 1922 (Abbott 2000), there are no accusations of the killing of RIC prisoners by the IRA in the aftermath of engagements, with the exception of Kilmichael⁴⁰.

Fr. Murphy's Bridge (Banteer) ambush on 8th March 1921; Scramogue ambush on 23rd March 1921; Clogheen ambush on 22nd April 1921; Castlemaine ambush on 1st June 1921 and Carrowkennedy ambush on 3rd June 1921. It is not claimed that this list is exhaustive, rather it gives a number of engagements which veterans or historians (mostly veterans) have identified as engagements after which the IRA held the field in the aftermath of the engagement. See chronology of the 1919-1923 period available at <http://webpages.dcu.ie/~foxs/irhist> for some details of the above engagements and the sources that permit them to be designated as engagements which the IRA held members of the British forces captive.

³⁷ Most of the accounts of these engagements were written by veterans (such as Liam Deasy, Florence O'Donoghue, Dan Breen, Ernie O'Malley and Michael Brennan). They may not always have been present at the engagements but, if they were not, they received accounts from those who were.

³⁸ In three ambushes, not mentioned above, there was no one from the British side who could provide an eyewitness account. These were (1) The Rineen ambush on the 22nd September 1920 when all six ambushed RIC men were killed. (2) The ambush at Dromkeen, Pallas ambush on the 3rd February 1921 and (3) The Bog Rd., Rathmore ambush on the 4th May 1921. In the Dromkeen ambush, 11 RIC men were killed and two escaped and in the Rathmore ambush, 8 RIC men were killed and one escaped. In these three engagements, there would not have been RIC survivors who would have been able to give eyewitness accounts of what happened in the aftermath of the engagements.

³⁹ Kee does refer - in a footnote - to a report in the *Irish Times* where survivors of an ambush in County Clare claimed that wounded had been bayoneted by the IRA (Kee 1972, pg 695 footnote). Given the date of the report (25th January 1925), the ambush referred to by Kee was almost definitely the Glenwood ambush on the 20th January 1921 in which six RIC men were killed. Brennan who led the East Clare Flying Column in this engagement does not mention the killing of wounded in his account - he says that "four got away, but two of them were wounded" (Brennan 1980, pg 69). Abbott agrees that there were four survivors - two who escaped and two who were wounded. Interestingly, Abbott adds that "After the ambush the IRA removed the police weapons, except Sergeant Egan's rifle who, although seriously wounded, succeeded in retaining it" (Abbott 2000, pg 186). Therefore, if there were killing of wounded then, from Abbot's account, it would seem that, at the very least, all wounded were not killed.

⁴⁰ There are two other partial exceptions. One is the aftermath of the Scramogue ambush but the circumstances in this instance were complex as the two RIC men killed after the engagement had been in civilian clothes as they were being transported in custody by their own side - see Abbott 2000, pgs 214-215. The other was an ambush (not in the list above) near Dromore (Sligo) where the IRA took two RIC captive but, as they were being pursued by police and British military, they shot their two captives - see Abbott 2000, pg 261.

Perhaps it should be pointed out that, as opposed to the maltreatment of prisoners, Abbott refers to two occasions when the IRA commanders ensured that prisoners were not maltreated. In the aftermath of the Tureengarriffe ambush, Abbott says "As they searched the wounded RIC officers the IRA men threw their personal items into the ditches, however, this stopped and the items were retrieved when the IRA leader [Sean Moylan] appeared on the scene and threatened to shoot the individuals concerned." (Abbott 2000, pg 191). Perhaps more remarkably, Abbott notes that in the aftermath of the Clonfin ambush, the IRA commander (Sean MacEoin) gave permission for wounded RIC men to be attended to and, when MacEoin was later captured and courtmartialled, three Auxiliary officers paid tribute to him for his actions at the scene of the ambush. (Abbott 2000, pgs 194-195). For Moylan's own (very brief) description of the

What can be taken from this short review of engagements after which the IRA held prisoners? It should first be clarified that the IRA did not have any prisons in which to hold captives and holding even a few prisoners/hostages seemed to tax its resources⁴¹. Given this situation, it would seem that, in general, it was IRA policy to disarm and release members of the British forces it captured in military engagements⁴².

If this was the general situation, was it different for the IRA column led by Barry? Hart seems to think so. "It certainly seems significant that in previous attacks where Barry was not the only brigade officer - such as at Toureen - enemy prisoners were treated decently, but at Kilmichael and subsequent actions they were liable to be summarily executed." (Hart 1998, pg 37). The implication in this statement is that Barry instituted a policy of the killing of prisoners. To back up this assertion, Hart gives (in a footnote) the example of "two of three captured British were shot in Bandon on 22 Feb. 1921" (Hart 1998, pg 37 footnote⁴³). Barry's account of the killing of the two captured unarmed members of the British army in Bandon (Barry 1999, pgs 99-104) states that they were killed specifically because they were members of the Essex regiment and the Essex had killed eleven members of the West Cork IRA while the latter were "defenseless prisoners" (Barry 1999, pg 102). In fact, Barry places this raid on Bandon by the West Cork Flying Column in the context of wishing to avenge the killing in custody of their eleven comrades by the Essex regiment, the attempted murder of others, the torture of IRA prisoners, burning of their homes, etc.

Also, in Barry's account, two other members of the British Armed forces - Naval Warrant Officers were captured by the IRA the same night and released. According to Barry, they were released because "They were armed members of a foreign army of occupation, but were not guilty of the murder of unarmed Irishmen." (Barry 1999,

Tureengarriffe ambush - see Moylan 2003, pg 91. For further detail on the Clonfin ambush and its aftermath, see Coleman 2003, pgs 126-127.

⁴¹ See, for example, Brennan on the holding of General Lucas (Brennan 1980, pgs 54-56).

⁴² It would seem that the British forces followed a similar policy and I have been able to identify only three incidents where there were accusations of the killing of IRA prisoners by British forces in the immediate aftermath of engagements. These three incidents were Clonmult, Co. Cork (on 20th February 1921); Selton Hall, Co. Leitrim (on 11th March 1921) and Clogheen, Co. Cork (on 23rd March 1921). Normal practice by the British forces would seem to arrest the IRA men who they captured on raids or after an engagement and keep them in detention. However, the subsequent treatment of IRA prisoners by their captors was often very bad. There were frequent accusations of maltreatment and torture and a large number of IRA prisoners were killed - both judicially and extra-judicially - while in custody. However, an in-depth review of this issue - and the mirror issue of the treatment by the IRA of its (albeit much much fewer) longer term prisoners/hostages and suspected spies - is beyond the scope of this essay.

⁴³ In the same footnote, Hart also says that the "famous attack on Rosscarbery barracks on 23 March 1921 is another interesting example". This is odd as the two RIC men killed in this attack (Sergeant Shea and Constable Bowles) are reported to have died in the first stages of this long attack (see Abbott 2000, pgs 216-217 and Barry 1999, pgs 149-150). Also, the remaining RIC men (some wounded) escaped out a back window and the IRA did not hold any prisoner (Deasy 1973, pgs 161-162; Barry 1974, pgs 40-41, O'Donoghue [no date], pgs 165-166).

pg 103)⁴⁴. Another incident somewhat contradicts Hart's assertion. Barry relates that, in a raid on Skibbereen by his Column on 8th February 1921, three unarmed members of the King's Liverpool Regiment were captured and were subsequently released "because of their fair attitude to I.R.A. prisoners" (Barry 1999, pg 92⁴⁵). Therefore, even in Barry's case, all prisoners were not summarily executed. However, what is probably more significant for the present discussion, the two Essex soldiers captured in Bandon were killed⁴⁶. This shows that Barry, in certain circumstances, was willing to condone the killing of prisoners⁴⁷.

Before leaving this review of other engagements, it may be useful to point to a few areas in which the Kilmichael ambush was quite atypical. One, the high death toll at Kilmichael ambush made it the engagement with the highest number of casualties in any single engagement during the January 1920 to July 1921 period⁴⁸. Two, it was very unusual for there to be fatal casualties on both sides during an engagement. In none of the thirty engagements noted above where the IRA was left 'in charge of the field' were there fatal IRA casualties, only at Kilmichael did the IRA suffer fatal casualties. Three, the high number of Auxiliary casualties relative to the number in their party was unusual. While there was one other ambush where all members of the RIC ambushed party were killed (Rineen ambush - 22nd September 1920), in that ambush there were only six RIC men. In addition, there were a small number of ambushes where most of the British were killed and one or two escaped by running from the scene. However, in the vast majority of engagements, the number of fatal casualties (on both sides) was quite small. For example, taking the list of engagements given above where the IRA was left 'in charge of the field', the average

⁴⁴ According to Hart there were not two but one and in this he gets support from Deasy. In the account of the attack on Bandon in Deasy's book, he states the column "captured a British Wireless Naval Operator. This man was later released." (Deasy 1973, pg 228). In his retort to Deasy's book, Barry does not allude to this inconsistency in the two accounts (Barry 1974, pgs 27-28).

⁴⁵ Barry's account is supported by Deasy except that Deasy says that two privates of the King's Liverpool Regiment were arrested and later released (Deasy 1973, pg 213). Both Barry and Deasy praise the commanding officer of the Liverpools in Skibbereen, Colonel Hudson as "an upright and humane man" (Deasy 1973, pg 213) and "a good type of British officer (Barry 1999, pg 91). In fact, Barry says he was responsible for saving the lives of IRA prisoners (Barry 1999, pg 92).

⁴⁶ It is interesting to note that in the account of the raid on Bandon in Deasy's book, no reference is made to the killing of prisoners. Rather, the account refers to one of the Column's sections approaching the town from the Dunmanway direction where "They shot two British soldiers a short distance from their barracks" (Deasy 1973, pg 228). No mention is made, in this account, of them being either captured or unarmed. Deasy was not present on the raid and his account is based on the reports of two veterans who were present.

⁴⁷ Another source is interesting for the potential light it throws on Barry's attitude towards prisoners - this source is Mossie Harnett. He was an officer in the West Limerick Brigade of the IRA. In his memoir, he relates an incident from the summer of 1921 when he and an armed guard of other IRA men were conveying a Black and Tan prisoner from west Limerick to the HQ of the 1st Southern Division of the IRA at Lombardstown in Co. Cork. "On arrival there I met Brigadier Tom Barry and Tom Daly. ... They accepted responsibility for my prisoner but Tom Barry remarked 'Why did you not drop him into a bog hole on your way here?' " (Harnett 2002, pg 107). Perhaps not too much should be read into Barry's remark to Harnett as it could have been an example of black Cork humour. However, it does take on more sinister overtones when put beside the accusations of the killing of prisoners.

⁴⁸ The next highest number of casualties I could find was the 12 IRA men killed at Clonmult when an IRA Flying Column in an old farmhouse was surrounded by British forces. Interestingly, as noted above, there were accusations of the killing of prisoners after Clonmult.

number of fatal British casualties was 1.6⁴⁹ and in the vast majority of engagements there were wounded survivors.

Having placed the Kilmichael ambush in the context of other IRA engagements and discovered some of its more unusual features, let us now return to the Kilmichael ambush itself and see if there is any direct evidence for the killing of wounded Auxiliaries or prisoners in its aftermath.

(b) The Coroner's Report

Some evidence that prisoners and/or wounded were killed comes from the report of Dr Kelleher (the Macroom coroner⁵⁰). He found that three Auxiliaries had been shot in the head at point-blank range, probably by guns held to their head, that several had been shot after death and another had his head smashed open (Hart 1998, pg 24). This evidence on its own does not prove that prisoners or wounded were killed after the ambush as Barry's account talks of hand-to-hand fighting, revolvers used at point-blank range and use of rifle butts (Barry 1999, pgs 43-44). In addition, being somewhat inexperienced fighters, some of the column members could have shot Auxiliaries who were already dead as they may not have been able to tell at a distance⁵¹.

(c) Barry's Own Statements

Barry's own words are also not conclusive but they do give rise to some questions. Ryan quotes a veteran (Pat O'Donovan) saying that before the ambush Barry told them that "it would be a fight until the end; either we wiped them out or they wiped us out. But he said, "We'll wipe them out. We'll smash the bloody fellows." " (Ryan 2003, pg 38). This talk from Barry could have been the expected pre-fight 'pep talk' but it could also indicate that Barry intended, even before the ambush, to 'wipe out' the Auxiliaries.

In his classic account in *Guerilla Days in Ireland*, Barry says that after the shooting dead of the IRA men by the Auxiliaries following the false surrender call "I gave the order, "Rapid fire and do not stop until I tell you. The four rifles [of Barry and his three comrades from the command post] opened a rapid fire and several of the enemy were hit before they realised they were being attacked from the rear ... Some of the survivors of our No. 2 section had again joined in and the enemy, sandwiched between the two fires, were again shouting 'We surrender'. Having seen more than enough of their surrender tactics, I shouted the order 'Keep firing on them. Keep

⁴⁹ It should perhaps be noted that in the engagements after Kilmichael, the war got bloodier and more deadly on both sides. For example, if one includes the Rineen ambush (which took place before Kilmichael) and the Dromkeen and Rathmore ambushes (which took place after Kilmichael) to the thirty engagements mentioned above, the average number of fatal British casualties in the twenty engagements before Kilmichael was approximately one, while in the thirteen engagements after Kilmichael, the average number of fatal British casualties was four.

⁵⁰ Dr Kelleher's son (Philip), who was a District Inspector in the RIC, had been shot dead by the IRA in Granard, Co. Longford less than a month before the Kilmichael ambush.

⁵¹ Some evidence that dead Auxiliaries were shot at come from Hennessy's account of the ambush in his BMH statement - see below.

firing on them. Keep firing No. 2 section.' " (Barry 1999, pgs 44-45)⁵². Ryan quotes Barry saying the following in a 1966 RTE interview " I want here and now publicly to take full responsibility that we wouldn't take prisoners after their false surrender and after killing two of our men" (Ryan 2003, pg 49). After giving Jack O'Sullivan's recollection of a prisoner having been shot after he had dropped his gun and walked down the road (see below), Ryan writes "At this stage, Barry didn't want prisoners - especially men who had used deceptive tactics. ... Barry said he accepted full responsibility for shooting them outright. 'Soldiers who had cheated in war deserved to die.'" (Ryan 2003, pg 43). While the last two quotes can be reconciled with his classic account, they do allow for an interpretation that Barry was sanguine about wounded/prisoners being killed after the ambush. Probably, the most unequivocal quote from Barry was one he gave in an interview with RTE in 1969. Speaking about the false surrender, Barry said " I have a vivid collection of that ... if they hadn't done the false surrender ... No! I wouldn't have killed a prisoner. ' " (Ryan 2003, pg 46). Finally, while not directly quoting from Barry, Ryan also states that Barry's response to the false surrender was decisive "He commanded his men to return fire. Whether or not some of the 'Auxies' had dropped arms, they were shot - some at point blank range." (Ryan 2003, pg 43⁵³).

(d) Crozier's Account

Another source is Frank Crozier. As mentioned above, he had been made commander of the Auxiliaries after their formation in August 1920 but had resigned in February 1921 after Auxiliaries he had dismissed for burning and looting a public house outside Trim, Co. Meath had been re-instated. In his book *Ireland Forever*, Crozier stated the following about the Kilmichael ambush "It was perfectly true that the wounded had been put to death after the ambush, but the reason for this barbarous inhumanity became understandable although inexcusable. ... Arms were supposed to have been surrendered, but a wounded Auxiliary whipped out a revolver when lying on the ground and shot a 'Shinner' with the result that all his comrades were put to death with him, the rebels 'seeing red', a condition akin to 'going mad' - as often given in defense of the Black and Tans by Mr. Churchill and others." (Crozier 1932, pg 128⁵⁴).

⁵² In other words, he clearly states that there was a second surrender call which he did not accept.

⁵³ In her earlier book, Ryan was even more affirmative "Certainly in the final stages of the fight when Barry and the three men from the command post area advanced firing there were surrender cries and at that stage the 'Auxies' who had dropped their arms were shot" (Ryan 1982, pg 35).

⁵⁴ Hart claims that, after he had resigned, Crozier had become a *persona grata* with republican leaders and that he got much of his information on the Kilmichael ambush from that source (Hart 1989, pg 37 footnote).

(e) Veterans' Statements

Notwithstanding the coroner's report, quotes from Barry and Crozier, some compelling evidence for the killing of prisoners comes from veteran interviews. Hart gives quotes from the Chisholm interviewees (see above) which would indicate that at least two Auxiliaries were taken prisoner and these two were killed. What one veteran said to Chisholm (as given in Hart's book) was "Two were left - I don't believe they were ever wounded. They got up with their hands in the air and approached [Michael] McCarthy's section" (Hart 1998, pg 34). Hart goes on to say that "One of these men was shot in the head. The other was clubbed down and then shot several times." (Hart 1998, pg 34). Also, according to Hart, another was pulled from a lorry and shot. Hart's also quotes his scout informant as saying that he came upon a wounded Auxiliary and told Barry. "He said, 'finish him', placed his revolver to the man's head and pulled the trigger" (Hart 1998, pg 35). However, as noted above, Hart's interviewees, and Chisholm's interviewees (whom he quotes) were anonymous.

This is not the case with Ryan's interviewees. She states that "One Volunteer told me that he had come up behind a man and ordered him to drop his gun which he did. He was walking up the road as a prisoner when a shot dropped him to his feet." (Ryan 1982, pg 35⁵⁵). In her 2003 book, Ryan named this Volunteer as Jack O'Sullivan (Ryan 2003, pg 43).

Do the veterans who gave statements to the BMH make any mention of the killing of wounded/prisoners? The answer is no. Like in his account in Deasy's book, O'Brien makes no mention of wounded or prisoners in his statement to the BMH. As noted above, Young describes a fight and "in a few minutes all firing ceased". Again, as noted above, Murphy describes a short engagement, after which "they were all killed". After the account of the ambush given by O'Driscoll, all he adds is "Some of our men were pretty badly shaken. The fight had been short, sharp and very bloody." (O'Driscoll, pg 5 in statement to BMH).

As was case with the false surrender issue, the only veteran who gives an account in his BMH statement which can be interpreted as somewhat unusual is Hennessy. After describing the fight at the second lorry (given above), Hennessy go on to say "When I reached the road a wounded Auxie moved his hand towards his revolver. I put my bayonet through him under the ribs. Another Auxie tried to pull on John Lordan, who was too near to use his bayonet and he struck the Auxie with the butt of his rifle. The butt broke the Auxie's skull." (Hennessy, pg 6).

What is one to make of this account by Hennessy? While it may have happened exactly as Hennessy described, one factor makes it somewhat difficult to believe. This is the relative fighting experience of the Auxiliaries and the Volunteers. As noted above, the Auxiliaries were almost exclusively British Army officers, many with World War One experience. On the other hand, the majority of Volunteers had

⁵⁵ Hart mentions that Ryan's interviewee could be describing the same encounter as Chisholm's interviewee. (Hart 1998, pg 34 footnote).

relatively little fighting experience. Nevertheless, according to Hennessy's account, not one but two Volunteers showed superior close-combat fighting skill and ruthlessness than their more experienced enemy.

Having reviewed the above evidence, can any conclusion be reached on the question of whether there was an 'extermination' of wounded or captured Auxiliaries in the aftermath of the Kilmichael ambush?

Overall, the evidence - while not totally conclusive - would seem to point to some Auxiliary prisoners (probably some wounded) being killed after the ambush. The reasons for coming to this conclusion are threefold – two are circumstantial and one is direct. The two circumstantial reasons are (1) The highly unusual aspects of the ambush such as the very high number of fatal casualties and the fact that there were casualties on both sides; (2) Barry's own highly ambivalent statements and the fact, as the Bandon raid shows, he was prepared to defend the killing of prisoners (at least in certain circumstances). The direct reason comes from the veteran statements. Crucial to this latter evidence is the statement from Jack O'Sullivan given to Ryan saying that he saw a prisoner shot. To this can be added the evidence of Chisholm's interviewees (quoted by Hart). Even though they are anonymous, they cannot be ignored. Given this evidence, it would seem reasonable to conclude that some Auxiliary prisoners and/or wounded were killed by the IRA in the aftermath of the Kilmichael ambush.

(5) Were the bodies of dead Auxiliaries mutilated with axes after the ambush?

The claim that the IRA mutilated the bodies of dead Auxiliaries with axes was made by the British in the wake of the Kilmichael ambush. It is not stated why the ambush party would have been carrying axes and Barry claimed that there were only two bayonets in the whole column (Ryan 2003, pg 55). Also, the close hand-to-hand fighting, the shooting at close range and the use of rifle butts would have given rise to horrendous injuries⁵⁶. At any rate, put beside the much more important debate on whether the wounded Auxiliaries and/or those who were prisoners were killed after the ambush, it pales in significance and can safely put into the realm of war-time propaganda.

⁵⁶ A military source quoted by Ryan points out that the effect of the Mills bomb would have been to inflict horrific jagged wounds. (Ryan 2003, pg 64)

3.0 The effects of the ambush

As Townshend has noted, after the ambush "West Cork trembled in anticipation of Auxiliary reprisals" (Townshend 1975, pg 131). West Cork had every right to expect reprisals. As Hopkinson has noted "The list of reprisals [carried out by British forces] in the late summer and autumn of 1920 reads like a sombre catalogue of small towns throughout the length and breadth of the south and west: Thurles, Upperchurch and Limerick in late July, Templemore on the 16 August, Balbriggan on 21 September, Ennistymon, Lahinch and Miltown Malbay on 22 September, Trim on 27 September and Mallow a day later, Boyle on the 5 October, Listowel, Tralee and Tubbercurry also in October, Templemore again on 1 November and Ballymote and Granard on 4 November."⁵⁷ (Hopkinson 2002, pg 80).

However, according to Townshend, the expected reprisals after Kilmichael did not materialise (Townshend 1975, pg 131). Hart agrees "Only a few half-hearted reprisals against houses and haysheds were carried out around Macroom" (Hart 1998, pg 36). Bill Munro, who as noted above was an Auxiliary stationed in Macroom at the time, has stated "For us who were directly concerned the shock had been so great ... that we were like men dazed. Not so the army, who although not directly affected, immediately thought of taking reprisals on the local inhabitants. The houses of some known sympathisers were set alight before our CO [Commanding Officer⁵⁸] could stop it. He ordered us to help in putting out the fires." (Gleeson 1963, pg 76).

As can be expected, others disagree with this reported lack of reprisals. Twohig quotes from the book *Memories of Dromleigh, A Country School 1840-1990* which says that three houses were burnt by the British in the vicinity of Kilmichael and one man (Denny Sullivan) was taken out of Kilmichael Bar and shot on Tuesday 30th November (Twohig 1994, pgs 145-147). Hart says that no other source supports the report of this man being killed by British troops in the aftermath of Kilmichael (Hart 1998, pg 36 footnote). However, Ryan also reports the killing of Denny Sullivan by the Auxiliaries (Ryan 2003, pages 70-71)⁵⁹. She goes on to say that "On the Monday, when the Auxiliaries were on their way to Kilmichael to collect they bodies, they forced elderly postmaster Jim Coughlan to walk 'behind the lorries'. They shot at Jim O'Mahony and Jer Hogan 'who had a narrow escape' and later confined Jim Coughlan to jail for three months." (Ryan 2003, page 70). She goes onto say that "Shops, homes, hay barns, outhouses were destroyed at Kilmichael, Johnstown and Inchageela. Several farmhouses for miles around Kilmichael were burned." (Ryan 2003, pg 72)⁶⁰. It is likely that these different

⁵⁷ Not all of these reprisals were carried out by the Auxiliaries, most were carried out by the RIC (primarily the 'Black and Tans' who were non-Irish recruits to the RIC).

⁵⁸ The Commanding Officer of 'C' Company of the Auxiliary Division of the RIC which was stationed at Macroom Castle in November 1920 was ex-British Army Colonel Barton Smith. He resigned from the Auxiliaries on 21st February 1921 and committed suicide on Clapham Common, London on the 4th February 1922 (Abbott 2000, pg 163). Hart names him as Buxton Smith rather than Barton Smith (Hart 1999, pg 36) and Ryan names him as Buxton Smyth (Ryan 2003, pg 36).

⁵⁹ A website which details the activities of the Ballingearry IRA, states that a Denny Mahony from Kilmichael was killed by the "Black and Tans" from Macroom on the 30th November 1920 – see <http://homepage.eircom.net/~sosul/page53.html>

⁶⁰ Barry wrote "Shops and homes, hay barns, outhouses, were destroyed at Kilmichael, Johnstown and Inchageela." (Barry 1955, pg 127).

views on the reprisals could again arise from which perspective they are seen. It is clear that the inhabitants lived in great fear of British reprisals and many decided to live away from their homes. On the British side, men such as Munro perhaps expected, given the losses at Kilmichael, that the reprisals would be more widespread. For example, in the aftermath of the Rineen Ambush in Co. Clare in September 1920, in which six RIC men were killed, the RIC ran amok in Ennistymon, Lahinch and Miltown Malbay burning many prominent and not-so-prominent buildings and killing six unarmed people (O'Malley 2001, pgs 77-82; Hopkinson 2002, pg 130; Lynch in *The Kerryman* (1955), pgs 74-77).

The effect of the Kilmichael ambush was more pronounced on the level of British policy. According to Townshend, two days after Kilmichael (1st December 1920) the British decided that "because of 'the recent outrage near Cork, which partook of a more definitely military character than its predecessors', that the Chief Secretary [Hamar Greenwood] should apply martial law 'in such particular areas as he might consider necessary' " (Townshend 1975, pg 133⁶¹). Townshend places the declaration of martial and the other measures undertaken at this time by the Irish Executive (such as internment on suspicion) as a reaction to not only Kilmichael but also Bloody Sunday which had taken place the previous Sunday (21st November 1920) when Collins's Squad "and the Dublin Brigade of the I.R.A. entered eight houses in Dublin and shot dead 12 British officers" (Townshend 1975, pg 129). However, when Viscount French, Lord-Lieutenant, proclaimed martial law on the 10th December 1920 on the counties of Cork, Kerry, Limerick and Tipperary part of the reasons for declaring martial law given in its proclamation read "repeated murderous attacks have been made on His Majesty's Forces culminating in the ambush, massacre, and mutilation with axes, of sixteen Cadets of the Auxiliary Division". The latter part of this statement is obviously a reference to Kilmichael. (The proclamation is given as Appendix F in Hopkinson 2002, pg 211).

Conclusion

The Kilmichael ambush was a pivotal event in the War of Independence. It was not only literally a battleground. It also became a metaphorical battleground in the on-going propaganda war between the two sides to the conflict - a glorious victory on the IRA side and an horrendous atrocity on the side of the British armed forces. Probably, more importantly, it became woven into the moral milieu in which the war was fought. The morality of the actions of both sides during the ambush, particularly Barry and his men, has been a source of on-going debate. As shown above, the likelihood is that IRA men killed wounded/captive Auxiliaries after the ambush. While this conclusion does not reflect on the morality of the larger issues that started the war, it does add weight to the truism that, once wars start, the moral high-ground rarely stays completely on one side.

⁶¹ The quotes within this quote from Townshend come from British Cabinet papers.

Appendix - Casualties and participants of the Kilmichael Ambush

The names of the sixteen Auxiliaries who were killed at Kilmichael were William Barnes (Surrey); Cecil Bayley (Lancashire); Leonard Bradshaw (Lancashire); Francis Crake (Northumberland); James Cleave (Worcester); Philip Graham (Berkshire); Stanley Hugh-Jones (Hampshire); Fredrick Hugo (London); Albert Jones (Northamptonshire); Ernest Lucas (Sussex); William Pallester (Yorkshire); Horace Pearson (Co Armagh); Arthur Poole (London); Frank Taylor (Kent); Christopher Wainwright (Lancashire) and Benjamin Webster (Lanark). These names and their places of origin are taken from Abbott (2000), pgs 161-163⁶². Another Auxiliary (H F Forde) survived being shot in the head. He lay on the road until noon the following day when the British found that he was still alive. It is believed that he remained paralysed for the rest of his life (Whyte 1995, pg 152). Another Auxiliary (Cecil Guthrie from Fyfe) escaped from the ambush site but was subsequently captured and killed by the IRA (See Hart 1998, pg 35 and Twohig 1994, pgs 148-149⁶³).

The names of the three IRA men killed were Michael McCarthy (Dunmanway, Co Cork); Jim O'Sullivan (Rosmore, Co Cork) and Pat Deasy (Kilmacsimon Quay, Co Cork).

Who was in the West Cork Flying Column at Kilmichael? Barry says that "a Column of thirty-six riflemen⁶⁴ were mobilised" (Barry 1999, pg 28), along with three unarmed scouts. Barry says he allocated his riflemen into either belonging to his Command Post one of three sections. According to Barry, there were four in his Command Post (Barry himself; John 'Flyer' Nyhan (Clonakilty); Jim 'Spud' Murphy (Clonakilty) and Mick O'Herlihy (Union Hall). The rest of the column was divided into three sections. The first section of ten men was at the western end⁶⁵ of the ambushade positioned near the command post. He does not say who was in charge of the first section but the second section, also of ten men, was under the command of Michael McCarthy (V/C of the Dunmanway Battalion). This was positioned at the eastern end of the ambushade. The command post and the first and second sections were on the northern side of the road. There were thirteen men in the third section commanded by Stephen O'Neill. This was broken into two subsections - one between the first and second section (on the southern side of the road) and the other beyond the second section (around a bend in the road towards Macroom) to cover for the possibility of a third lorry. John Lordan (V/C of the

⁶² Ryan also gives the Auxiliary casualty list. They are the same as those given by Abbott with some minor spelling differences - see Ryan 2003, pg 290. Whyte also gives a list of the Auxiliary casualties and, again, except for some details they are the same as those given by Ryan and Abbott.

⁶³ Ryan claims that Guthrie is the killer of James Lehane (Ryan 2003, pg 47). See above in The Background to the Ambush section for details on the killing of James Lehane.

⁶⁴ From the numbers subsequently given for the sections into which he divided the column, Barry did not include himself in the thirty-six.

⁶⁵ The Macroom to Dunmanway road, on which the Auxiliaries were travelling, runs generally in a north to south direction. However, the site chosen for the ambush was a section of the Macroom to Dunmanway road about a mile and a half south of the village of Kilmichael where the road turns sharply westwards (to the left), continues in this direction for about 150 yards and then turns reasonably sharply again (to the right) and resumes its north to south direction. See sketch of ambush site in Whyte (1995), pg 37.

Bandon Battalion) arrived late and was placed in Section 2⁶⁶. Along with the three members who were killed, other members of the column mentioned by Barry as being at Kilmichael were Paddy O'Brien (Ballinacarriga, Adjutant of the Dunmanway Battalion); Jack Hennessy (Ballineen); and Dan Hourihan (Barry 1999, pgs 38-48 and Barry 1955, pgs 120-128). He also mentioned that "five fully armed I.R.A. men" (Barry 1999, pg 43), who had not been given the mobilisation order in time, arrived just before the action commenced. They were ordered to gallop up a lane and they did not reappear until the fight was over.

Deasy relates an account of the Kilmichael ambush given to him by Paddy O'Brien - the Adjutant of the Dunmanway Battalion mentioned above - see Deasy 1973, pgs 170-172⁶⁷. O'Brien says there were 32 men in the column. However, unlike Barry, he says the column was divided in two sections - one under Barry himself and the other under Michael McCarthy⁶⁸. He names the three that Barry says were with him in the Command Post but also says that Sonny Dave Crowley was with them. Also in this section, according to O'Brien, were John Aherne, Battie Coughlan, Tim O'Connell, Jerh Cotter and Mick O'Donovan. He places himself across the road (on the southern side of the road) with Stephen O'Neill and Jack Hegarty, opposite Barry and his men. He says that further along (on his side i.e. the southern side of the road) were Paddy McCarthy and Jack O'Sullivan overlooking the second section. In the second section were Ned Young and Michael Con O'Driscoll. He names the two scouts as two local men Tim O'Sullivan and Jack Kelly. (He names the same three IRA men who were killed as did Barry.) He also mentions Dan Hourihane (Deasy 1973, pgs 170-172). Deasy mentions that Jeremiah O'Mahony was also present (Deasy 1973, pg 177 footnote).

Hart says that there were 37 men and 10 scouts present (Hart 1998, pg 131) and they were "West Cork men all" (Hart 1998, pg 130). He does not name the column men but says that there were five O'Donovans; five O'Sullivans and four McCarthys as well as Crowleys, Hourihans, O'Briens, O'Driscolls and O'Neills (Hart 1998, pg 130)⁶⁹.

Ryan says there were 36 men in the ambush party (Ryan 2003, pg 38) broken down into sections as listed by Barry. She gives the same four command post members as Barry but she puts Tim O'Connell in Section 2 (unlike O'Brien). The new names she gives are Pat

⁶⁶ Therefore, according to Barry, there were a total of thirty-eight "riflemen" at the ambush, including himself.

⁶⁷ At the time of the ambush, (Liam) Deasy was Adjutant of the Cork No. 3 (West) Brigade of the IRA. The brigade had been formed in January 1919, when the large Cork brigade was broken up into three brigades. When the West Cork Brigade was formed, it had six battalions - Bandon (1st); Clonakilty (2nd); Dunmanway (3rd); Skibbereen (4th); Bantry (5th) and Beara (6th). Later (in July 1920) a 7th Battalion was formed on the Schull peninsula from units of the Skibbereen and Bantry Battalions. Each of the battalions comprised a number of local companies (roughly six to ten). At the time of the Kilmichael ambush, the brigade commandant was Charlie Hurley; the vice-commandant was Ted O'Sullivan; as mentioned the Adjutant was Deasy; the brigade Quarter Master was Dick Barrett; the Intelligence Officer was Sean Buckley and the Training Officer (and Brigade Column commander) was Tom Barry (Deasy 1973, pgs 317-319). The only brigade officer present at Kilmichael was Barry.

⁶⁸ It should be noted that Barry strenuously disagreed with this aspect of O'Brien's account, and with many other aspects, in his 1974 retort to Deasy's book - see Barry 1974, pgs 13-20

⁶⁹ Hart goes on to say that their names "echo those of generations of local ancestors ... and evoke an almost tribal identity" (Hart 1998, pg 130).

O'Donovan and James O'Mahony (Ryan 2003, pg 43), both of whom she places in Section 2. On the same page she names Jack O'Sullivan but does not place him in a section. She also names Jack Hennessy and Dan Hourihane and places them in Section 2 (Ryan 2003, pg 51). Ryan names the three scouts as John Kelly, Tim O'Sullivan and Dan O'Driscoll. She also says there were two dispatch scouts called Nelius Cotter and Sean Falvey. (Ryan 2003, pg 52). It should be noted that Jack O'Sullivan is not the same person as Jim O'Sullivan (the former survived the ambush).

A more complete listing of the 'Boys of Kilmichael' is given by Whyte (1995). The names given by Whyte (1995) are listed in Table 1 along with their year of birth and death and which section Whyte says they were in at Kilmichael (if any mentioned). Whyte breaks the column into the same sections as Barry.

First Name	Surname	From	Birth	Death	Section
Jack	Aherne	Budrimeen, Ballineen	1901	1973	Section 1 - wounded at Kilmichael
Tom	Barry	Roscarbery	1898	1980	Command Post
Sonny	Carey	Main St., Dunmanway	1902	1951	
Neilus	Cotter	Curraghdrinagh	1891	1952	Scout
Batty	Coughlan	Railway St., Dunmanway	1895	1951	
Denis	Cronin	Bantry	1897	1966	
Sonny Dave	Crowley	Castletown-Kenneigh/Enniskeane	1894	1971	Command Post
Timothy	Crowley	Phale, Ballineen	1889	1955	
Pat	Deasy	Kilmacsimon Quay	1904	1920	Section 2 - Killed at Kilmichael
Sean	Falvey	Ballymurphy, Inishannon	1898	1971	Scout
Johnny	Hegarty	Keelinga, Leap	1895	1973	
Jack	Hennessy	Cahir, Ballineen	1899	1970	Section 2 - wounded at Kilmichael
Michael	Herlihy	Brade, Union Hall and Bandon	1897	1949	Command Post
Dan	Hourihan	Girlough, Ballineen	1900	1974	
Jack	Hourihan	Toureen, Skibereen and Ballineen	1899	1922	
John	Kelly	Johnstown, Kilmichael	1890	1959	Scout
John	Lordan	Coolnaugh, Newcestown	1892	1930	Section 2 - arrived late - wounded at Kilmichael
Jack	McCarthy	Lissane, Drimoleague	1892	1971	
Michael	McCarthy	East Green, Dunmanway	1895	1920	Section 2 (Leader); - Killed at Kilmichael
Paddy 'Kilmallock'	McCarthy	Kilcoe, Ballydehob	1900	1922	
Timothy 'Casey'	McCarthy	Durrus	1885	1965	
Jim 'Spud'	Murphy	Clonakilty	1900	1976	Command Post
John 'Flyer'	Nyhan	Sovereign St., (Pearse St.), Clonakilty & Hollyhill, Ballineen	1892	1934	Command Post
Denis	O'Brien	Castlelack, Bandon	1899	1953	
Paddy	O'Brien	Ballinacarriga	1896	1979	
Tim	O'Connell	Aultagh (Ahakeera, Dunmanway)	1898	1983	

John	O'Donovan	Behigullane, Dunmanway	1887	1973	
Michael (Ross)	O'Donovan	Bonagh, Roscarbery	1899	1965	
Michael (Leap)	O'Donovan	Cullane, Leap	1896	1958	
Patrick	O'Donovan	Drominidy, Drimoleague	1899	1981	
Patrick	O'Donovan	Inchafune House, Dunmanway	1895	1974	
Dan	O'Driscoll	Rossmore, Ballineen	1898	1967	Scout
Michael	O'Driscoll	Snave, Bantry	1899	1976	
Michael Con	O'Driscoll	Granure, Ballygurteen near Ballineen	1989	1969	
Jerome	O'Hea	Lissycrmin, Lislevane, Bandon	1892	1961	
James	O'Mahony	Corran Hill, Ballineen	1897	1979	
Jeremiah	O'Mahony	Paddock, Coppeen, Enniskeane	1891	1921	
Denis	O'Neill	Baltimore	1897	1978	
Stephen	O'Neill	Reenroe, Clonakilty	1889	1966	Section 3 (Leader)
Dan	O'Sullivan	Kilkern	1894	1969	
Jack	O'Sullivan	Cahirmounteen, Kealkin	1899	1986	
Jim	O'Sullivan	Knockawaddra, Rossmore	1894	1920	Section 2 - Killed at Kilmichael
John D	O'Sullivan	Bawngorm, Bantry	1897	1958	Section 2
Tim	O'Sullivan	Coopeen East	1880	1965	Scout
Jack	Roche	Kilbrittain	1902	1973	Wounded at Kilmichael
Ned	Young	West green, Dunmanway	1892	1989	

Table 1: Whyte's 'Boys of Kilmichael'

While Whyte's list is the most detailed, a small number of discrepancies emerge when comparison is made with the other writers. There are 46 names in Whyte's list. This compares with the 41 people that Barry said were there. Part of this discrepancy can be accounted by the fact that Barry says there was three scouts while Whyte says there were five scouts. (Ryan names the same five scouts – three 'posted' scouts and two dispatch scouts - see above.) Removing the scouts brings the number of 'riflemen' to 41 in Whyte's list with Barry saying there were 38 (i.e. he mentions originally 36 plus himself and John Lordan). This remaining discrepancy could be partly accounted for if Whyte's list included the five men who arrived late on the sidecar just as the ambush was about to start⁷⁰. However, if Whyte's list does include these five men then this would bring the number of 'riflemen' who took part in the ambush to 36, i.e. two below Barry's figure.

In addition, O'Brien mentions the name of one man as being in Section 1 - Jerh Cotter - see above. He is not on Whyte's list. O'Brien may have confused him with Neilus Cotter

⁷⁰ As noted above, Barry says the five men in the sidecar were ordered to gallop up a lane where they "disappeared from sight and were not to reappear until the fight was over" (Barry 1999, pg 43). However, O'Brien says there were four of them (Deasy 1973, pg 171) and Barry, who challenges a number of aspects of O'Brien's account in his 1974 publication, does not challenge him on this point. Barry's number is accepted by Ryan and Hart but O'Brien's number gets backing in the statements given by two of the veterans (Jim 'Spud' Murphy and Ned Young) to the Bureau of Military History - they both say there was four men on the sidecar. (The two other veterans who gave statements to the Bureau of Military History - Jack Hennessy and Michael O'Driscoll - did not mention the men on the sidecar.)

but this is unlikely as O'Brien places Jerh Cotter in Section 1 as a rifleman while Neilus Cotter was a scout (who Whyte places north of the ambush site)⁷¹. In addition, in his 1974 book, Barry mentioned another man - Mick Dwyer - who held the rank of section commander at Kilmichael and who is also not on Whyte's list (Barry 1974, pg 14)⁷².

These discrepancies take on a significance in the controversy that arose between Ryan and Hart as to the identity of interviewees - see section above on [The False Surrender Controversy in The Controversies that Arose from the Ambush](#).

⁷¹ Ned Young in his statement to the Bureau of Military History mentions a man named Cotter who was in Section 1 but he does not give his first name.

⁷² Other small discrepancies arise in the statements given by veterans to the Bureau of Military History. For example, Jim 'Spud' Murphy gives a list of 41 names as being members of the column at Kilmichael. These names, by and large, agree with Whyte's list (with obviously some missing from Murphy's list) but he does mention a Sonny Crowley from Dunmanway and a David Crowley from Ballineen. Whyte's list has a Sonny Dave Crowley from Castletown-Kenneigh and the only other Crowley on his list is Tim Crowley (who Murphy also mentions). Was this a mistake by Murphy or was there a third Crowley at Kilmichael? Ned Young in his statement also mentioned a Mick Crowley but this is most like to be Tim Crowley as Young places him in Section 2 and Jack Hennessy in his statement also places Tim Crowley near himself in Section 2.

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⁷³ This book states that "All the material for this book ... was researched and compiled by the Ballineen/Enniskeane Heritage Group". However, copyright lies with Louis Whyte and he is named as author by Cork County Library.