

# **"B" COMPANY (BROCKAGH), 2ND. BATTALION, WEST MAYO BRIGADE IRISH REPUBLICAN ARMY, 1919-1924**

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The Bureau of Military History has made available to the public lists of all the people that were involved in the republican movement during the revolutionary years 1913-1924. Of special interest are the individual company rolls of the IRA that historians, both amateur and professional, have awaited for so long. These lists can be taken as definitive and may supersede earlier attempts at local history.<sup>1</sup>

In 1935 the Department of Defence decided to extend the old IRA pension scheme to those who were in the IRA during the Civil War. These people had been denied entry to the pension scheme as they had opposed the Free State in 1922/23.<sup>2</sup> The government decided on a plan that would gather in all the information on the IRA between 1913 and 1924. In all the old brigade areas committees were set up and called the, 'Old IRA'. These committees then set to work and contacted everyone available that was associated with the movement in the relevant years.<sup>3</sup> Many had died, and others had emigrated in the intervening years, but finally definitive lists were submitted to the department. The lists were then examined by independent referees who decided who should get pensions. In the long run it was those that had seen active service who got any type of annual remuneration, the remainder were issued with service medals. We are indebted to those Old IRA committees that have left us such a trove of information, and from which we can build up a picture of the various companies of the republican movement that existed across the country. This article focuses on just one of those IRA companies, Brockagh, in the Newport Battalion of the West Mayo Brigade.<sup>4</sup>

When the West Mayo Brigade of the Irish Republican Army was formed from the old Mayo Brigade in 1920, company areas had to be delineated. Newport was the centre of the 2nd Battalion and the following surrounding areas were assigned to this battalion.<sup>5</sup>

## **Companies of the 2nd. (Newport) Battalion**

'A' Coy, Kilmeena

'B' Coy, Brockagh

'C' Coy, Newport

'D' Coy, Glenhest

'E' Coy, Shramore

'F' Coy, Tiernaur

## **Townlands in 'B' Company area**

Brockagh, Fahymore, Fahybeg, Aughagowla Mor, Aughagowla Beg, Drumgar, Knockmoyleen, Derryribbeen, Ballintleva, Derrartan, Clooncanavan, Gortna classer, Gorteen, Knockmuinard, Clogher, Slinaun, Ballyglass, Cartron, Derrinnumera, Rushbrook, Ballinacorriga, Lugnafahy, Ballinlough, Kiltyroe, Druminabo, Drumilra, Slinnanroe, Toorgarve.

The company area was bordered on the north side by the Newport and Glenhest companies. Kilmeena company was to the western side, whilst Derrygorm company was to the south side and

Islandeady to the eastern end. For some time in 1921, Brigade HQ was situated at Kellys of Brockagh. At the time of the Truce, 11 July 1921, Brockagh company had 85 men enrolled.

### **Officers**

The original O/C of the Brockagh company was Michael, "Sonny" Gallagher. The Brigade O/C, Michael Kilroy, soon recognised Gallagher's exceptional organisational skills and appointed him to the Newport battalion staff as adjutant to the Battalion O/C, Ned Lyons.<sup>6</sup> The company now elected Willie O'Malley as O/C, but Kilroy came again and got O'Malley to accept the position of Police Officer on the Newport battalion staff. The third O/C of the Brockagh company was Willie Rice, Aughagowla,<sup>7</sup> who had Jim Kelly as a First Lieutenant.<sup>8</sup>

### **Volunteers**

The following men were volunteers in Brockagh company prior to the Anglo / Irish Truce that came into operation on 11 July 1921.

Willie Rice, Aughagowla, Captain.

James Kelly, First Lieut.

William Kelly, Acting First Lieut. for James Kelly whilst on Active Service Unit.

Michael O'Malley, Second Lieut.

Thomas O'Boyle, Intelligence Officer.

R. Corcoran, Gortnaclasser.

Thomas M. Cusack, Ballinlough.

J.J. O'Haire, Brockagh.

### **Brockagh**

Michael Gallagher (Battalion Adjutant). Anthony Gallagher, Thomas Gallagher, Patrick Gallagher.

### **Aughagowla**

Patrick Mulchrone, Edward Joyce, Dominick Mulchrone.

### **Kiltyroe**

Peter Corcoran, Joseph Corcoran.

### **Fahy**

John Gallagher, Patrick Gallagher, John Goggins, James Goggins, Michael Goggins.

### **Gurteen**

Michael Murphy, John Murphy, Michael McGuire, Thomas McGuire, Willie O'Malley (Battalion Police Officer), John O'Malley. D.Mulchrone.

### **Drimplura**

Peter Cawley, Patrick Cawley, Thomas Geraty.

### **Derryribeen**

Thomas Cawley, Patrick Corcoran, Thomas O'Boyle, John O'Boyle, Matt O'Boyle, Thomas Duggan, Patrick Duggan, Michael Duggan, John Walsh, Anthony Walsh, John Callaghan.

### **Gortnaclasser**

Patrick Kelly (Battalion QM), John Kelly, Patrick Cawley, Patrick Corcoran, Patrick Graven.

### **Cultrain**

Patrick Lawless, Tom McHugh, John Cusack, James Cawley, John McHugh, John Cawley, P. McDonnell, James Cusack, John Fahey, Patrick Corcoran, Gortna classer. Patrick Graven.

### **Ballintleva**

Owen O'Malley, Thomas Walsh, Patrick Ryan, Patrick Ryan (Pat), John Ryan, Patrick Cawley, Patrick Kelly, James Lawless, Thomas Cawley, John Hopkins, Peter Hopkins, John Hopkins (Snr.)

### **Derrantin**

Patrick Fahey, M. Corcoran, B. Corcoran, Jack Ruane, Thomas Collins, Peter Corcoran.

### **Ballyglass**

John J. Murray, Thomas M. Murray, Pat Moore, Tom Fadden, Jerry Fadden, John Hastings, Tom Murray.

### **Ballinacorriga**

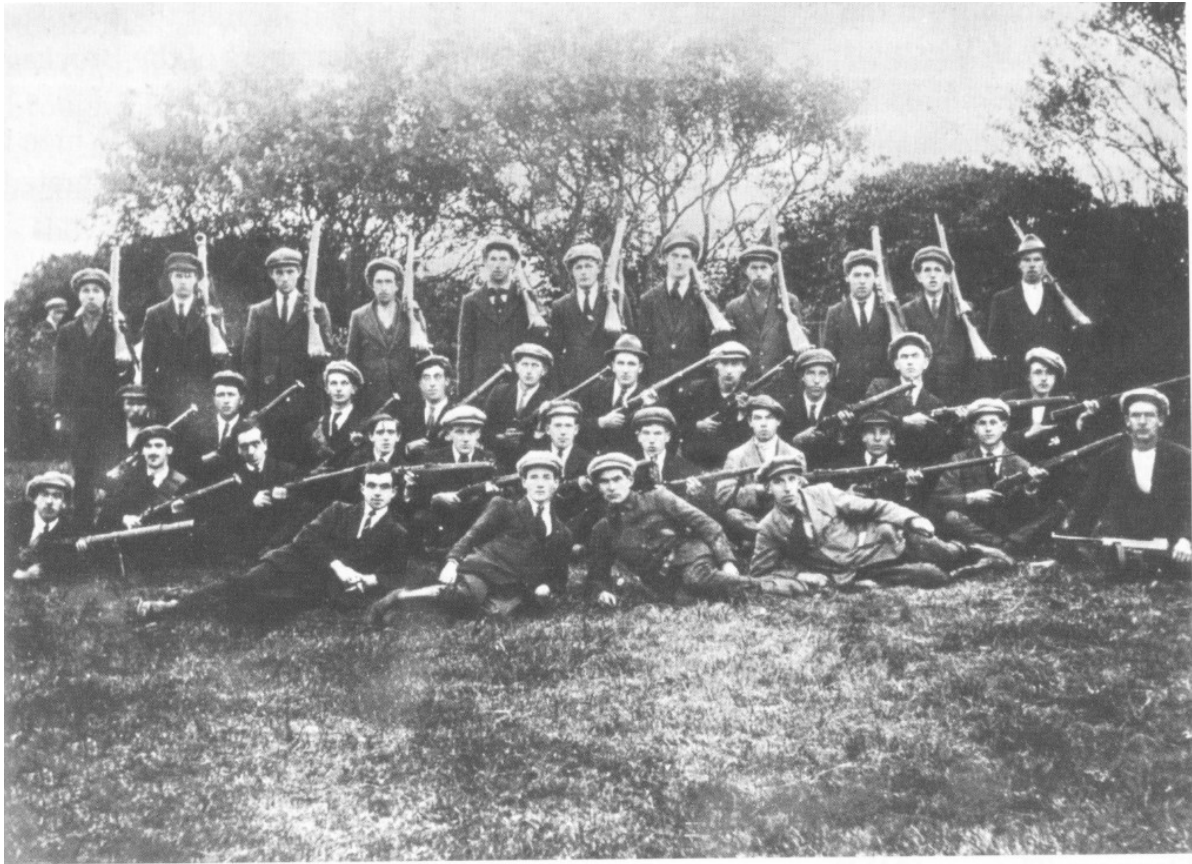
Martin Murray, Tom Murray, Patrick Browne. A total of 85 volunteers

As the War of Independence developed, Brockagh became an important place in the battalion structure. The various ASUs operating out of Newport, Westport and Castlebar, frequently visited the general area for rest and recreation. Men felt safe here, the people were friendly, and the terrain was elevated. The Brigade Vice O/C, Ned Moane of Westport, had an office in a farmhouse here, where he worked on the many reports required from GHQ in Dublin. The Brigade O/C, Michael Kilroy, often called and slept at Murrays of Ballinacorriga.

There is only one recorded armed action in the Brockagh company area in 1920/ 21. On 23 April 1921 a small ASU, under the command of Joe Ring, had an encounter with an RIC/Tan group travelling in a truck at Clogher Cross. Shots were exchanged, but no casualties were reported on either side.

### **Truce period**

The Truce came into operation On 11 July 1921 and hostilities ceased. The Brigade O/ C, Michael Kilroy, and his staff, now issued orders that each IRA volunteer would now have to attend at training camps. These camps were set up at various locations and the men attended for one-week intensive training at musketry, first aid, signalling, map reading and intelligence gathering. The Newport Battalion camp was situated at Shean Lodge, Ballycroy.



Shean Lodge training camp 1922. (Clew Bay Heritage Centre). Man on extreme left with Lewis gun is Jimmy Flaherty, Brigade Training Officer. Man on extreme left with Thompson gun is Tom Ainsworth. Four men to the front; 1. Unknown. 2. Josie Doherty, Battalion O/C. 3. Michael Kilroy, Brigade O/C. 4. Edward Moane, Brigade Adjutant.

As the months progressed in 1921 the political talks intensified in London between the two sides. Already people were talking in terms of the leadership styles of Collins and DeValera, and hardline positions were being taken. When the Treaty was signed in December 1921 the split came in the Republican movement. The Army (the IRA) split into Pro and Anti-Treaty sides. Similarly, Sinn Fein split. Cumann na mBan and Fianna Eireann stayed intact and held on to the republican position.

The Civil War broke out in Dublin on 28 June 1922 and slowly spread across the country. The newly established Free State Army attacked the stronger Republican positions from the sea. On 26 July a half battalion (500 approx) of the Free State Army landed at Westport Quay and took the town without a shot being fired. Those who had decided to leave the IRA and to join the Free State Army were free to do so and were inducted at the Town Hall in Westport. Fourteen men from the Brockagh area joined the 44th. Battalion of the new Free State Army in Westport. Nine of these had been former members of the Brockagh IRA company.

The roll call for the company for the civil war period shows that there were 56 men in the company. Some had joined the FSA, others stayed neutral and more had emigrated.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Joined the Free State Army at Westport**

Corcoran, Peter (24) Kiltyroe, Brockagh. He became brigade QM for the FSA at Westport

Corcoran, Joseph (18) Kiltiroe

McHugh, Pat (18) Cultrain

McHugh, John (18) Cultrain

Murray, Tom (18) Ballinacorrige

Cawley, John P. (20) Cultrain

Cawley, Stephen (17) Cultrain

Murphy, John (21) Gurteen

Rice, William (20) Aughagowla

This group were ex members of Brockagh Company.

Halloran, Michael (20) Slogger

Brennan, John (17) Ballyglass

Gannon, John (19) Ruagh, Kilmeena

Flannery, Thomas (24) Drumgar

Peter Callaghan

These five were unattached before joining the FSA.

### **The shooting of Pat Mulchrone**

During the civil war of 1922/ 23 only three republicans died violently in the West Mayo Brigade area. Now known as the 1st Brigade area after the reorganisation in November 1921.

Killed in action; Staff Captain Jim Moran at Glenhest, 7 March 1923

Killed whilst delivering dispatches by FSA; Willie Barrett, Fianna boy, Castlebar, March 1923.

Mortally wounded by a FSA officer; Lieut. Pat Mulchrone, Aughagowla, at Brockagh November 1922.

Patrick Mulchrone of Aughagowla was a volunteer attached to the Castlebar town company. He had recently been appointed as a Lieutenant and was at home in Aughagowla in his parents' home, on leave from his employment as a motor driver in Castlebar. On 1st November 1922 Pat Mulchrone made his way to Gallaghers house in Brockagh to meet with others for a game of cards and a chat.

Meanwhile, in Westport, the local Free State Army garrison was preparing for an incursion into the Newport Battalion area. Their plan was to sweep the area down through Clogher and on to Brockagh. This was being done in conjunction with the FSA garrison from Castlebar that would approach through Islandeady.

Captain Joseph Ruddy was the FSA O/C in Westport and he supervised his troops as they loaded up on trucks at the town hall.<sup>10</sup> Another contingent had already gone ahead on foot from the Drummindoo area where the FSA had a strong following. Commandant Galvin was in charge of the Castlebar troops and the plan was to meet at Clogher Cross for the sweep northwards towards Newport.<sup>11</sup>

Back at Brockagh the local IRA was on the alert. Several times the FSA had attempted to attack Newport, so an ASU was permanently based in the area. The main Westport/Newport road was blocked by a blown bridge at Rossow, so the obvious way then to attack was by Clogher. The newly appointed Battalion O/C, Jack Connolly,<sup>12</sup> had his men in the area on the day and were ready to defend their positions.

At the Gallagher household that afternoon the card game got underway and all appeared normal. At about 4pm, as dusk approached, the house was suddenly surrounded by FSA troops, many of whom were known to those within. Captain Ruddy now entered the house and immediately recognised Pat Mulchrone, saying- 'what are you f\*\*\*\*\* doing in this house'. He then approached Mulchrone, who was unarmed, and fired a shot from his Webley revolver, hitting Mulchrone in the side. He then fired point-blank at Jack Connolly and a man called Keane who were also in the kitchen of the house.

Mrs. Gallagher, who was minding some local children, now proceeded to move the children upstairs for safety. With that, Ruddy ordered his men to fire hand grenades through an upstairs window, claiming that there was a machine-gun based there. The explosion of the grenades brought down the ceiling in the upstairs room.

Connolly and Keane were taken prisoner and a priest and doctor were called for to attend Pat Mulchrone. He was removed to Castlebar Infirmary in the early hours of 2 November. His father had returned from the horse fair in Westport and had a conversation with his son and he ascertained that Ruddy had shot him intentionally whilst he was unarmed and with his hands in the air. Pat Mulchrone was attended to by Surgeon MacBride but died early on the morning of 3 November from shock and loss of blood.

An inquest was held in Castlebar on 17 November. The jury consisted of 12 Castlebar men and they reached the following verdict, "We find that the deceased, Pat Mulchrone, met his death as the result of a bullet wound received during a raid by National forces on the house of Patrick Gallagher at Brockagh on 1 November 1922. From the evidence before us we are unable to determine who fired the fatal shot."

This was not a properly conducted affair and crucial evidence relating to Mulchrone's death-bed statement to his father was ignored. So also was evidence ignored from Surgeon MacBride relating to the particular type of bullet that killed Mulchrone. A crucial witness, Thomas O'Boyle of Derryribbeen, was unable to attend the inquest for fear of arrest and the Free State authorities would not guarantee his freedom.

Jack Connolly, the IRA Battalion O/C, was lucky to escape with his life that day. He was arrested and then imprisoned in Galway Jail. He made a detailed statement of the murder of Pat Mulchrone and it was smuggled out of prison. The December edition of Poblacht na hEireann, the republican newspaper, carried the statement. Capt. Ruddy was himself killed at nearby Kilbride later in November whilst attacking republican forces in the Newport area. Also killed that day was Capt. Joe Walsh of Westport who had also been at the scene of Pat Mulchrone's murder at Brockagh.

After the IRA cease-fire order of 24 May 1923 IRA activity came to a standstill in the Brockagh area. The volunteers obeyed their superior officers and put aside their weapons in prepared dumps as ordered. A perusal of the company roll shows that many emigrated to Britain and America, never to return. This was typical of practically every other IRA company across the country. In 1926 the movement again split with the foundation of the Fianna Fail party and this departure of so many prominent people from the movement left few orthodox republicans to continue activities.

The evocative words of the republican song, The Legion of the Rearguard, serves to remember the service rendered by the men of Brockagh Company in the dangerous years of 1919-1924. The republicans that opposed the Treaty became known as the Legion of the Rearguard during the Civil War.

## **The Legion of the Rearguard**

Chorus:

*Legion of the rearguard, answering to Ireland's call.*

*Hark the martial tramp is heard, from Cork to Donegal.*

*Tone and Emmet guide you, though your task be hard,*

*Cathal Brugha leads you, Soldiers of the Legion of the rearguard.*

(Jack O'Sheehan 1923)

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## **Notes:**

1. The Bureau of Military History was set up by the government in 1946. Its brief was to collect and collate all information regarding the revolutionary period in Ireland 1913-1924.
2. The government decided in 1934 to extend the Military Pensions scheme to the members of the IRA that had fought on the republican side in the Civil War of 1922/23. Only Free State supporters had been eligible to apply for pensions prior to this.
3. A monumental task faced the government in sorting out who was eligible to apply for the new pension scheme. All of the former IRA brigades set up committees and were known as the 'Old IRA'. These committees were composed mainly of the senior officers from the brigades. In the West Mayo Brigade area all of the former officers, such as Michael Kilroy, Ned Moane and Joe Baker spent an amount of time drawing up lists that incorporated everyone that had been involved with the IRA in the relevant years.
4. Brockagh is situated south and south-east of Newport.
5. The West Mayo Brigade was set up in July 1920. The old Mayo Brigade, that had existed since 1914, was proving to be too unwieldy and was divided into four separate units.
6. Michael Kilroy was the first O/C of the Newport Battalion. Ned Lyons was the second O/C until his arrest in 1920. He died in Dundrum Asylum, Dublin, in 1924, having never recovered from the brutal treatment received in Galway Jail from Crown forces. Josie Doherty replaced him until the start of the Civil War, when Jack Connolly took over.
7. Willie Rice of Aughagowla became the third O/C of the Brockagh Company. He joined the Free State Army in Westport when they arrived by sea in July 1922. He was present in Gallaghers house when Capt. Ruddy shot Pat Mulchrone.
8. Jim Kelly was on the Brigade ASU and took part in both the Kilmeena and Carrowkennedy ambushes. He stayed republican and eventually emigrated to Liverpool. It is believed that he died in an air raid during WWII.
9. Ireland witnessed its highest emigration in 1923/4 since the Famine. Most republicans, on release from the internment camps, emigrated to the US.
10. Joseph Ruddy was from Church Lane, Westport. He was implicated in the assassination of Magistrate Milling in Westport in March 1919 and left the area until the Truce of 1921. It is believed that he lived in Cavan during that period. He joined the FSA in 1922 with the rank of Captain and went on to command the Westport Garrison of the

4th Battalion based at the Town Hall and the Workhouse. He was killed at Kilbride on 24 November 1922 along with Capt. Joe Walsh of Mill St and three others.

11. Commandant Galvin of Castlebar FSA was also involved in the killing of Fianna boy, Jackie Barrett of Castlebar at Derrycoosh, Islandeady, in March 1923.
12. Jack Connolly took over the 2nd. Battalion from Josie Doherty in early 1922. When in Galway Jail he smuggled out a full account of the shooting of Pat Mulchrone and this was then published in the republican newspaper, Poblacht na hÉireann, in December 1922.

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