

The War of Independence and some of the role Furrigal village played as told to me by my Granduncle Henry Mortimer and also my Grandmother Mary O'Grady nee Mortimer.

The village of Furrigal is situated in the Kilsallagh area of Westport, County Mayo.

There was much involvement of the men from Furrigal in the War of Independence locally. Henry, his brother Thomas and Thomas O'Grady and Paddy Navin all played an active role during the war of Independence. They were all Furrigal men.

Their brothers Michael O'Grady and James Navin also played roles.

My Grandmother used to have a poem from that era that was a *battle cry* really.

'Up De Valera you are the champion of the fight
We will follow you to battle neath the Orange, Green and White'

My Grandmother Mary O'Grady, nee Mortimer, told me that the Black and Tans used to come on horseback to the village and of course all of the locality looking for people to take with them and to torture. She said nobody ever 'split' on the boys on the run. At the time the black and tans used to stay in as she put it 'an old bit of a houseen in Durless'. It was in Glan right beside Bouris school. When the Tans were staying there everyone had to be on double guard.

My Grandmother's house where she was born was situated at the bottom of Furrigal Bray, Mortimer's of Furrigal and was a refuge house and so was O'Grady's where she married into. So lads on the run were taken in and fed and often they stayed the night while someone stayed on watch in case the Tans would come on a raid as they often did. Sometimes it happened that the lads were only gone out the back door when the Tans landed in the front door.

All the houses were regularly searched but special attention was given to Mortimers, Navins and O'Grady's. Night raids were very common.

The Tans were coming up Furrigal bray one night when they were spotted and Austin Geraghty who was only a boy was sent to Navin's house as Paddy Navin was there. He had to choose between Navin's and O'Grady's where Thomas O'Grady was staying the night also. He managed to get to Navin's to warn Paddy and Paddy tore out the back way and over the topse across the boggy ground. He got away as the Tans landed in and wanted to know where Paddy was and they took his brother James Navin and kept him for two weeks in Louisburgh Barracks. My Grandmother somehow saved her brother in law Thomas from them. He was in the house the story was she put him up the chimney!

She met the Tans at the door and convinced them Thomas was not there.

There was one big cannon gun in the locality, it was carried by two of the lads. Andy Harney of Louisburgh used to come to the village sometimes and lead the men to battle from there. They would all gather at the top of the bray in a garden and say the rosary to protect them.

Two men got shot in my Granduncle Henry Mortimer's house *Paddy Kelly and Andy Harney*. The lads were all gathered in the house and cleaning their guns, the trigger was pressed by mistake and Paddy's hand got a bullet and Andy got a graze too. Henry had to go for the doctor who was Dr. O'Grady (a relation of O'Grady's of Furrigal) and Henry borrowed a policeman's bicycle to get to the Doctors house as fast as he could. Doctor O'Grady warned Henry to go home a different way than he came in case he had been seen by the Black and Tans who were staying local.

There were thirty guns stolen by the boys on the run of the Tans at Carrowkennedy Ambush and these were given to Henry who was Transport Commander at the time. He kept those guns under the bed in his house at the foot of the bray and he kept them there for six months while there was the hottest raids ever going on. I asked Henry what happened to these guns and he told me they were hidden in the caves as they were never used again as the Truce came. The Tans were looking for the lads on the run during this time.

One day Henry told me he and Paddy Kelly were within in the house handling the rifles. It was sheer luck that the Tans decided not to raid the house that day. They passed on through the village. Henry said that they were ready to unload as they would have had no choice.

There is a fairy fort in Keenan's land one in our land in Cartoor and one in Lavelle's land in Cartoor and one in Durless also. There were caves under each of these forts which led underground to each other. Henry said they used these caves to hide down there during these times. However they would have to stoop down very low as whoever built them must have been very small.

My Grandmother told me the Black and Tans didn't care what they done to a person. Some lads on the run had the legs cut off them, others their tongues and noses and more had a bucket of tar or cement poured over them and let dry. The Black and Tans would come on horses and they would halt you up and ask where are you going if they met you on the road. They met Myles Lavelle (Cartoor) one time and asked a few things about a boy on the run but he told them nothing. Then they would threaten to bring you with them in the hope of gaining information.

Then of course came the Truce and the lads on the run were now divided, no longer were they fighting the common enemy, but their own neighbours. *It was not long till Furrigal was again being raided, this time by a different group, the Free Staters, and this was worse for not only was neighbour fighting neighbour but also the free staters knew the locality as well as the Republicans. The Free Staters came to my Grandfathers house one day and asked him where was Thomas O'Grady, his brother he told them they knew more about Tom that he did himself and that he hadn't seen Tom for six months. Tom was on the run at the time. However the house was searched and then they wanted to look in the barns round the place but they didn't get Tom. They made my Grandfather open up every barn for them in their search. Thomas died of pneumonia in the 1930's and his coffin was draped with the Tricolour and he was carried all the way to Kilgeever from Furrigal which was an extraordinarily long way to carry a coffin. This was as a mark of respect for his part in the War of Independence.*

After the Truce the Furrigal people aligned themselves to the Republican side.