

Seamus Mac Evilly and the West Mayo Flying Column

A Family Memoir

By Michael Mac Evilly



Staff-Captain Séamus Mac Evilly (1897–1921)

West Mayo Brigade IRA

A. Coy. Castlebar Battalion

Killed at Kilmeena, 19th May 1921

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and the West Mayo Flying Column
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Second Edition

Edited by Dr. Myles Mac Evilly, 2012

Front cover, portrait of Séamus Mac Evilly
from a watercolour by William Brett, Castlebar.
Rear cover, early West Mayo Brigade cap badge with Cross of Cong feature.

This monograph is dedicated to the memory of the deceased members of the West Mayo Brigade of the IRA and to the men and women of Mayo who supported them in their struggle to achieve a Republic.

Micheál Mac A Mhílidh
2008.



Séamus Mac Evilly was born on the 28th October 1897 at Peter Street, Westport. He was christened James Patrick on 31st October but in the family he was called Séamus. He was a twin whose brother died young. Reared in Castlebar, he attended National School there. It is not known if he went to secondary school. His father, Michael Mac Evilly came from Inishturk, an island off the Mayo coast. He married Mary Gibbons of Cloonlara, Louisburgh in 1886 and they had 11 children, not all of whom survived. The couple lived on Inishturk for 6 months and later moved to Westport and after a time to Thomas St. Castlebar.



**Family home,
1798 St. (Thomas St),
Castlebar.**

Seamus' father always referred to Thomas St. as "1798 St.", site of the famous "Races of Castlebar" where on August 27th 1798 the smaller French and Irish forces under Gen Humbert routed the English and their Irish Militias and Yeomen under Gen Lake. Here, as in many other Mayo households there was a folk memory of the Year of the French. A framed poster from the *Shamrock* (from the 1898 Centennial) commemorating an event in Ballina ascribed to the French General Sarrazin was kept in the family home.⁽¹⁾

Joins Irish Volunteers

Seamus joined A. Coy. Castlebar Battalion of the Irish Volunteers in 1914.^(1a) The impetus for joining may have come from his father, Michael Mac Evilly, a Castlebar

publican, who had been a member of the IRB [Irish Republican Brotherhood]. His son, Fr. Michael, states that his father was sworn into the Fenians (IRB) by An Seabhach (James Stevens), probably around 1884. Michael later enlisted three of his sons, Séamus, Tom and Jerry into the organisation.^(1b)

The Mayo Volunteers were formed on 9th January 1914 at a meeting in the Foresters Hall, Castlebar following a visit from Col. Maurice Moore. There was therefore one Brigade for the entire county, with an initial membership of about 100 men and they were then known as the Irish National Volunteers. Amongst the Castlebar leaders were John Hoban, W.P. Mongey and P. McHugh. Their activities were confined to marching and drilling, with the occasional route march. Training was in the Rooney Hall in Tucker Street and also in the Co. Council yard in Cavendish Lane. There were occasional organising visits from Volunteer HQ by Liam Mellows and The O'Rahilly, who adjudicated at a military display in the Asylum grounds later in the year. In keeping with the rest of the country, most of the Castlebar Volunteers followed John Redmond in the split that arose after his offer in September 1914 of their services to the British Government in the 1914–1918 war. Those who went with Redmond became known as the National Volunteers and they died out later. The few that remained included the local leaders who carried on as the Irish Volunteers. A new Mayo Brigade was then formed with the following officers: Brigadier: Joe McBride (Westport), a brother of Major John MacBride; Vice-Brigadier: Michael McHugh (Castlebar); Adjutant: Dick Walsh (Balla) and Quartermaster: Michael Kilroy, a coachbuilder from Newport. Early in 1915, the Castlebar Battalion was successful in purchasing fifty Howth rifles and ammunition from GHQ. These were Martini and Lee Enfield single shot rifles, which were used for drilling purposes and they were kept in the Rooney Hall.

On 1st August 1915, a *slua* (Unit) of the Castlebar Fianna, including Séamus' brother Tom, took part in the funeral of O'Donovan Rossa in Glasnevin. Prior to 1916, a branch of Cumann na mBan was formed in Castlebar, but it is not known if any of Séamus' sisters joined. In early 1916, the National Volunteers carried out a raid on the Rooney Hall, led by T. Moclair and absconded with 25 rifles, which they conveyed to the Kiltimagh area. In Easter week 1916, they were recovered by a group of Irish Volunteers from Balla under Dick Walsh, who was also Head Centre of the IRB in Connaught. The probable officers of the Castlebar Batt. then were OC, John Hoban; Vice OC, Michael Staunton and Adjutant, W. Mongey.

The 1916 Rising

Although the Castlebar Volunteers had been warned several times to be ready, when the Rising occurred they all mobilised in the Rooney Hall with whatever few arms they had, including pikes made by John Hoban. The Fianna Éireann *slua* also

reported for service on Easter Monday. However the fact that they had no orders of any kind, resulted in no incidents occurring in the area. This did not prevent the Castlebar Urban District Council from publicly condemning the Rising, apparently the only UDC in the country to do so. In the aftermath, some arrests were made by the RIC, including John Hoban and possibly P. McHugh. Major John MacBride of Westport was one of the sixteen leaders executed.

Michael McHugh took over as OC of the Castlebar Battalion then. In the spring of 1917, Dick Walsh called a meeting in Michael Staunton's house in Islandeady and reorganisation started again in the whole county. Later in the year, there was a review of the Volunteers in the Mall in Castlebar, attended by de Valera, at which Séamus' father, Michael Mac Evilly, presided. On 17th June 1917 his brother, Michael, was ordained in Maynooth. The Conscription crisis of 19th April 1918 led to a huge increase in Volunteer numbers. Preparations were made to 'take to the hills' if it was enforced. A census was made of food supplies in the area and their location. First aid supplies were made and gathered by Cumann na mBan. The Volunteers were instrumental in organising the anti-Conscription pledge on Sunday 21st April 1918. When the British backed down and the crisis ended, the greater part of the new recruits dwindled away.

Crumlin Road Jail, Belfast

Séamus was arrested in Westport on 6th April 1918 on a charge of illegal drilling and at Castlebar Court on 12th April, along with J. Finnerty of Westport was sentenced to three months imprisonment (and three additional months in default of bail). This was served in Crumlin Road Jail in Belfast. Art O'Donnell was the first political prisoner there, having been arrested at his home in Clare in early March. A fortnight later Frank Aiken appeared and was followed the day afterwards by Austin Stack. They were quickly moved to the female section of the prison which had just been prepared for political prisoners. With the arrival of those held in Dundalk jail, O'Donnell wrote 'life began to hum'. He continued:

"By May 1918 there were upwards of 150 prisoners. Classes were organised in various subjects including Irish, military tactics and a daily half hour practice of Swedish drill. An Seabhach conducted Irish classes daily, assisted by Eamonn O'Dwyer of Goold's Cross, Tipperary. Séamus Murray of Dublin, a most versatile individual, in conjunction with Séamus Mac Evilly of Mayo and others, produced a manuscript paper which they called *The Jail Birds' Journal*, which when completed, at regular intervals was read out to the boys in the prison laundry, usually by Séamus Mac Evilly. Another journal was promoted at a later date by

the more literary prisoners called *Glór na gCharcrach* and was usually read by Ernest Blythe who also acted as Editor. Its contributors included the most important men in the prison and consisted of articles on a wide variety of subjects. Boxing lessons were organised and boxing tournaments were organised; a most popular type of entertainment was the burlesque boxing match and there were frequent variety concerts.”⁽²⁾

At this time there were some 150 Sinn Féin prisoners there, with Joe MacDonagh as their leader. Throughout May and June conditions in the jail, in particular the prison diet, steadily deteriorated. By 17th June MacDonagh submitted a formal complaint about conditions in the prison to the authorities, to no avail. Towards the end of the month a number of prisoners were transferred to cells in the third story of the prison, which overlooked a predominantly Loyalist district. By this time MacDonagh had also been temporarily transferred and Austin Stack became the leader of the prisoners. They now began to wave handkerchiefs from the cell windows, sing loudly and create a great deal of noise and were clearly seen and heard in the street outside. It wasn't long until a hostile crowd started singing Orange songs and hurling insults at the Pope. This caused considerable embarrassment to the prison authorities and resulted in the warders forcibly removing them from the upper cells to the lower ones. Art O'Donnell reported later that this was resisted vigorously by the prisoners who were 'very roughly handled, hosed and handcuffed in the removal; and so were removed to new cells and left handcuffed all through that night and subsequent nights'.⁽²⁾ The rest of the Sinn Féin prisoners promptly reacted by breaking everything in their cells. On 28th June, some seventy of the prisoners were placed in new cells which they also proceeded to wreck. On 29th June the prisoners attended Mass in the prison chapel still handcuffed. The fact that Séamus was obliged to receive Holy Communion in handcuffs has come down in family lore and particularly shocked his mother. On the way to Mass, some handcuff keys were spotted hanging on a wall and were appropriated. When Mass was over they were used to remove the 'cuffs which were then smashed on the iron balconies of the prison. A large force of RIC were then brought in and the prisoners were again handcuffed and removed to another part of the prison.

Later that day they were brought before the visiting Justice and found guilty of causing damage to the prison. They were given 14 days bread and water and, of course, close confinement. This did not have the desired effect and the boys got up to their windows and continued their concerts, speeches and applause into the night, again to the discomfort of the local loyalist citizens. In spite of numerous attempts to discipline them the prisoners kept the prison in a state of intermittent uproar for about a week. On 7th July the prisoners were again herded into the

Square [the centre of the prison] and were addressed by Sir James Kennedy, chairman of the visiting Justices, with the result that their "rights were restored unconditionally". In a letter to his brother Nick dated 7th July 1918, Stack described the final scene as follows:

"I lined the men up in military formation. Enter one of the Orangemen in his capacity as visiting justice . . . The justice makes a speech . . . he speaks of our outrageous conduct . . . of the kindness, mercy and leniency of the authorities towards us. He was moving off when I asked him to hold his place to listen to a word on behalf of the men. I was choking with anger but said something to this effect, that we did not expect or want to believe we were getting either leniency or mercy or kindness from Dublin Castle, that we never got anything from them save by fighting for it and that we expected to have to fight them again. I added that I believed his assertion as to leniency etc. to be quite on a par with England's claim that she was fighting in the present war on behalf of small nations. At this our fellows broke into a terrific cheer and you could hardly see the visiting justice and his companion they ran away so fast.”⁽³⁾

Séamus kept an autograph book of the period he was in Crumlin Road Prison, containing the names of prisoners, some of whom were subsequently to become prominent in Irish history. The first entry is dated 1st June 1918 and the last 8th July 1918. A poem, by Padraig O hÉigcheartaigh, dated 11th June 1918, is distinctive in that the first letter of each line spells out Mac Evilly.

"My land you are still unconquered
A day soon will come for the Gaedhal
Courage mo bhuachail, we're winning
Erin's sons never will fail
Victory or death is our motto
Ireland, mavourneen, a grá
Live on, keep your flag floating proudly
Let your watchword be Erin go breadh
Youth, courage and perseverance
is what Ireland requires in this struggle.”⁽⁴⁾

Due to the disturbances, Séamus would not have received any remission in his sentence and was probably released on 11th July 1918. On 20th July, Austin Stack was formally elected OC of the prisoners, who began, a few weeks later, a hunger strike for political status. This was achieved after a few days.

1918 Election

Later Ned Moane and Tom Ketterick were arrested in Westport and tried at Castlebar Court. As they were being escorted from the Courthouse, the crowd attacked the escort but were beaten back. When the Resident Magistrate was leaving by train the Volunteers attacked and almost wrecked it. As a result six were arrested and charged and were remanded to Sligo jail. On being tried in Castlebar in May 1918, some received a sentence of two months and others got six weeks. As manpower was needed, on instructions from Michael Collins, they appealed and were allowed out on bail. Later, as the Magistrate had resigned, the affair ended.

The general election of December 1918 found both the Sinn Féin and Volunteer organisations in Castlebar in a stronger position. They got through an enormous amount of work—acting as canvassers, tally clerks and dealing with transport. The whole election went off without incident. Fr. Meehan, a local C.C., was Director of Elections for the area. The First Dáil met on 21st January 1919. During that year the Volunteers continued their reorganising and drilling and later on—raiding for arms. Companies were organised in the surrounding districts and a new Battalion organisation came into existence. From now on the Volunteers became known as the Irish Republican Army.

It is not clear where Séamus worked at this time. His sister Máire states that he had been a clerk in a drapers shop in Westport and this is confirmed by Eugene Campbell.⁽⁵⁾ While he was always attached to the Castlebar Battalion the fact is that he spent most of his time on the run with the Westport unit. Following Séamus' release from jail, the family home in Thomas Street became the object of persistent raids by RIC and military. His sister Máire wrote later: "They [RIC] raided our house a short time after his release and pulled everything asunder looking for papers and arms. Séamus was there at the time and they attacked him. They got nothing and went away."⁽⁶⁾

Some time at the end of 1919 the oath of allegiance to Dáil Éireann and to an Irish Republic was administered to all Volunteer officers in Balla. About 100 officers were present at a meeting of officers of the Mayo Brigade in a shed in the Convent grounds, where they were addressed by Michael Staines TD⁽⁷⁾ a native of Newport.

Resistance begins

Early in 1920, the RIC evacuated Ballyheane and Islandeady barracks. These were burned on Easter Saturday night. The following Monday, as part of the policy against British Government administration in Ireland, a group of Volunteers under Castlebar Co. Capt. Peter Hynes and seven others, including James Chambers, destroyed the records in the Castlebar Income Tax Office, despite the hostility of the collector Mr Moran. A police force was also organised

amongst the Volunteers, but independent of them and under its own officers. It is not possible to say the extent of their influence.

Séamus was promoted to Staff Captain in 1920, according to an official IRA report. His responsibility on the Battalion Staff was Officer i/c Communications.⁽⁸⁾ He undoubtedly played a role in the Sinn Féin successes in the Local Government elections in June 1920, which did so much to undermine British rule. The recently arrived Black and Tans were now let loose on Mayo.

In August 1920 Ballyvary RIC barracks was attacked and captured by the Castlebar Battalion. The Sinn Féin Courts however were a much greater success, being availed of by most of the people. For this reason there was a concerted effort to wipe them out. Séamus was appointed Registrar of the District Court on its establishment in Castlebar on 28th May 1920 and in an attempt to capture him his parents house in Thomas Street was raided often. In one period of a fortnight it was raided three times by British military and police.^(8a) While a Dutch academic has suggested that "the concentration on Volunteers who had been arrested previously and on their families was evidenced in all areas",⁽⁹⁾ in this case the search was more specific, because of the number of times the house was raided. It is obvious that as IRA activity increased in the area, the house got more attention and Séamus took the precaution of sleeping in friends houses. Máire states: "They burst the door open again. They kept asking for him, with the intention of taking him away but he evaded them." She goes on to describe their fears. "At that time the Black and Tans had been burning peoples houses in other parts of the county, so each night they burst in our door in the middle of the night we thought this was it. Only my parents and I being at home, we were terrified at each raid. We were afraid they were going to burn down the house. They were searching every place and tumbling everything upside down as usual. Seeing us so distressed one kindly policeman told us quietly that the house wouldn't be burnt and that it was just another raid."⁽¹⁰⁾

Formation of West Mayo Brigade

In late August 1920 a GHQ organiser, believed to be one of the Price brothers arrived in Castlebar to carry out the reorganisation of the Mayo Volunteers. This followed upon a visit earlier in the month by Chief of Staff Dick Mulcahy to the West Connemara area in a similar role vis-a-vis the Galway Brigade.

Up until now Mayo was organised as one large brigade area. On Sunday 29th August 1920 under the guise of a Cycling and Sports meeting in the grounds of the Mayo Asylum in Castlebar organised by Seamus Mac Evilly from the Castlebar Battalion and Michael McHugh OC of the Mayo Brigade (Hon Sec and President of the meeting respectively), the Mayo Brigade was reorganised into four separate brigade areas, North, South, East, and West.



West Mayo Brigade Flying Column, IRA, "The Men of the West", 20 June, 1921, a month after Seamus was killed (19 May, 1921). Picture was taken by J Leonard at Derrymartin on the slopes of Nephin mountain at 11.45pm.

The local IRA had total control of this important "sports" meeting. Volunteers, ostensibly engaged in civilian police duty guarded the meeting while local Cumann Na mBan members were also in attendance. Two events occurred around this weekend which fortuitously diverted British attention from the sports meeting. The first was the funeral held on the same day as the sports meeting in Turlough of a local RIC man, Constable William J Potter, killed the previous Thursday near Knockroghery in Co. Roscommon. The other event was the death in a flying accident at Castlebar Aerodrome on Saturday 28th August of Major H F Chads, MC, of the 2nd Batt, The Border Regiment, and a native of Buckinghamshire. The pilot, a RAF Flight Lieutenant named Dimmock, was badly injured. The funeral to the Church of Ireland Cemetery in Castlebar on Tuesday 31st August was an enormous affair, the route being lined with soldiers in double file while two military bands took part. Business premises in Castlebar were compelled to close for the event (C.T., 4 September, 1920). Apart from the local organisers the identity of the other volunteers attending the sports meeting is not known, but it obviously included many of the senior IRA officers in Mayo.

The West Mayo Brigade now consisted of Castlebar (No. 1) Battalion, Newport (No. 2) Batt., Westport (No. 3) Batt. and Louisburgh (No. 4) Batt. The

Brigade officers were: OC, Tom Derrig (Westport), who was then teaching in Ballina Technical school; Michael Kilroy (Newport), Vice OC; Ned Moane (Westport), Adjutant and Michael McHugh (Castlebar), QM.

The probable officers of the Castlebar Battalion were OC, James (Brod) Chambers; Vice OC, Paddy Jordan; Adjutant, H. Merchant; QM, Mark Killilea; Communications, Seamus Mac Evilly. Other Castlebar volunteers included J Hughes, Paddy Horkan, Paddy Cannon, Jimmy Smith, J Swift, M Maloney, M O'Boyle. Subsequently Paddy Horkan took over as Captain of Castlebar Town Company, though the exact date is uncertain. Later on in the year, Michael McHugh was arrested and Tom Ketterick of Westport took his place as Brigade QM.

In an attempt to alleviate increasing British pressure on the IRA in the south of Ireland, in November 1920 a Brigade Council meeting was held in Kelly's of Brockagh (near Newport) and a decision was reached to press ahead with the formation of Active Service Units based on each Battalion area and to adopt a more active and aggressive policy against the British.⁽¹¹⁾

The continued raiding of his home, particularly after the introduction of the Restoration of Order in Ireland Act on 9th August, led to Séamus lying low for a while and he went to stay with his brother – Fr. Michael, who was then based in Tir an Fhia, Carraroe. His other sister Alice loved Connemara and spent a lot of time there. Again according to Máire: "They didn't escape being harassed there by raids from the police and military, but Séamus was lucky to have escaped each time." The family also feared for Fr. Michael's safety following the murder of his close friend Fr. Griffin by the British outside Galway in November 1920.^(11a)

After the decision had been made to form Battalion Active Service Units, "Séamus was sent for to Connemara and was escorted through the mountains by two guides who were familiar with the places they had to travel through."⁽¹²⁾ In the meantime Comdt. James Chambers – Castlebar Batt., called a meeting at The Rocks near the County Home and called for volunteers for the ASU's. Séamus is mentioned as being on full time active service from November 1920.

The Castlebar column was now reformed with Paddy Jordan—Islandeedy as OC, Dr J.A. Madden as Vice OC. After operating around Crimlin and that area it was decided to make a foray on Castlebar one Saturday night. This was interrupted when two British officers were captured at Ardvarney on the Ballina to Ballycastle road. Dr Madden gave orders for them to be shot at a certain time but a despatch from GHQ arrived later ordering the officers to be released. Sometime later, after the Castlebar column had arrived at Bayne's Hill, a second movement on the town was called off. Several other ambush attempts in the area came to nothing, largely because of the changed tactics of the British. On 31st December 1920, Tom Derrig, the Brigade OC was captured in his own home in

Westport, despite being under orders not to overnight there. A teacher in Ballina Technical School (in the North Mayo Brigade area) he had adopted a part time attitude to the running of the Brigade.⁽¹³⁾ Michael Kilroy from Newport took over as Brigade OC, Ned Moane became Vice OC, Johnny Gibbons, Adjutant and Tom Ketterick remained as Quartermaster.

Formation of Brigade Column

The Westport ASU met with similar lack of success and it was later decided to amalgamate all the different Battalion ASUs into one large Flying Column.⁽¹⁴⁾ There were always more volunteers for the Column than there were places available and those who were chosen were considered to be the best in the Brigade.⁽¹⁵⁾ In March 1921 Séamus, while coming in from Connemara to join the main column, was asked to join a Louisburgh unit in an operation in the town. The purpose of this was to eliminate rampaging Tans and RIC who had been shooting up Louisburgh after curfew. The unit consisted of Pat Kelly—the Louisburgh Batt. OC, Andy Harney, Vice OC, Jim Harney, Martin O'Reilly and two officers who were visiting the area—Joe Baker (Westport) and Séamus Mac Evilly (Castlebar). Baker stated later: "we were able to equip Mac Evilly with a service rifle and that meant we were a group of five people fully armed and capable of making an effective impact on the enemy. However nothing happened after various attempts due to the fact that the local RIC remained indoors in their barracks, which were well fortified with sandbags and barbed wire."⁽¹⁶⁾ (This was situated at the crossroads in the centre of the town.) Whether it was luck or they were tipped off, the enemy did not appear and the Volunteers could do little more than let off a few shots at the barracks.

There now occurred a curious incident told to me by Andy Harney only with extreme reluctance. It was confirmed later by Joe Baker who wrote: "a few days after this we were staying in a place called Furrigal and Séamus Mac Evilly was examining his revolver when it suddenly went off and wounded Pat Kelly and Andy Harney. The bullet—a .45—went through Andy Harney's abdomen and lodged in Pat Kelly's wrist. We sent into Louisburgh for Dr O'Grady who promptly came out and attended to the wounded. He cleaned and cauterised the wound in Andy's abdomen, which fortunately was superficial. The bullet had gone in one side at the front of the body and made its exit at the other side, before finishing in Pat's wrist". During the Truce it was removed in Dublin. (Interestingly, Andy Harney, who had a marvellous opinion of Séamus, never told me that the Battalion OC—Pat Kelly, whose mother was a Mac Evilly—was also wounded.) After leaving the wounded to be looked after in the district Jim Harney, Séamus Mac Evilly and Joe Baker were absorbed into the main body of the Westport Column.⁽¹⁷⁾

Active Service

Séamus' exact movements over the next two months are unclear but it would appear from available evidence that he spent his time on the run with the more active Westport section of the Brigade column. On 17th March 1921, the column took up an ambush position at Glospatrick, Murrisk on the road to Louisburgh—near the start of the Reek climb. It was a dreadful day with sleet and snow. The intention was to ambush an enemy convoy which occasionally plied between Louisburgh and Westport. After waiting all day they withdrew after dark, moving over the shoulder of the Reek, to Duffy's of Prospect. A few days later, on 22nd March, while scouting ambush positions at Derrykillew on the Leenane to Westport road, the Brigade OC Michael Kilroy along with Joe Ring (Batt. OC Westport) and Brodie Malone (Co. Captain, Westport) came upon an armed four-man RIC patrol. In the resulting exchange of fire Sergeant Coughlan RIC was killed and the other three wounded. After relieving them of their weapons Kilroy and the others rejoined the column which fell back on the mountain for safety. The enemy reaction was to burn several houses in the area as a reprisal. Two days later the Tans entered Westport and burnt several homes and Hughes' shop.

For about a month (April 1921) the column did nothing except wait in ambush positions by day and lived with the local people at night. As Tom Heavey has stated: "They were splendid. Most of them had scarcely enough for themselves and their children."⁽¹⁸⁾ About 21st April, Tom Heavey along with two others, went into Westport with the intention of ambushing enemy patrols. This was an unauthorised venture. However, when Joe Ring heard that they had gone he surmised that British reinforcements would arrive from Castlebar and he force-marched the column to intercept them. They spent a miserable night waiting in the wet but the reinforcements did not arrive. Ring severely reprimanded Heavey and the others.

In the latter part of April the column got its first baptism of fire at Clogher, just outside Westport. They were marching along the road in formation when two lorries came upon them. Everyone dived for cover. Both sides opened fire. After about 20 minutes, the British, thinking it was a trap moved off. Possibly some were wounded. The column had no casualties.

About this time Séamus got word to his parents and sister Máire to call to an aunt's house in a quiet part of Castlebar. Máire wrote later: "Naturally their conversation was mostly about the troubled times. He said as well that they were fighting for a just cause and had clear consciences and also that they got confession and holy communion often, and they said the rosary every night. Hearing that was a great consolation to us. Soon after he had to leave. Alas, it was the last time we saw him alive."⁽¹⁹⁾

On 3rd May 1921 the Westport section of the Column had waited all day in an ambush position at Brackloon Bridge on the Leenane road without success. Word was received that the South Mayo Column under Tom Maguire was engaged in a major fight in the Partry Mountains near Tourmakeady. It was decided to go to their aid and to relieve the pressure from the several hundred enemy forces attacking them. It was a lovely summer day and the Column raced across moor and bog towards the Partry mountains. Before they reached Glenmask they got word that the engagement was broken off and the Column returned to Islandeady.

Islandeady Ambush

On 6th May a full scale ambush was laid on the main Castlebar–Westport road at the Big Wall near Islandeady. Information had been received that a convoy used to journey from Castlebar to Westport and Newport with supplies. In the early morning, a single military lorry travelled from Castlebar towards Westport. Immediately it passed, the Islandeady section started to block the road so that it could not get back and also to prevent reinforcements from Castlebar coming on the ambush suddenly. The convoy never came as far as the planned ambush site, as it turned off the main road to arrest Michael Staunton, then a prominent figure in the Sinn Féin movement. He was not at home, so they returned without much delay towards Castlebar and came suddenly on the volunteers who were cutting a trench across the road. Two members of the Islandeady company—Tom Lally and Tom O'Malley—were killed, and a number captured, including Frank O'Boyle. Paddy Cannon, Castlebar, and others escaped. After this the Column retired to Aughagower.

Sometime after this, the entire Column made a few night swoops on the town of Westport and on one particular occasion had it completely surrounded. No enemy patrols were located. However a smaller unit consisting of Tom Ketterick, Joe Baker and Brodie Malone had more success. A patrol of about eighteen RIC and Tans were bombed from the Red Bridge in Altamount Street. Most of them were wounded and the three Volunteers returned to a céidhli in the house of Thomas Joyce of Owenwee from where they had left for the operation. Séamus was there and a Volunteer—Edward O'Malley—described the scene later. "Some of the dancers are in the field green uniform of the Volunteers, but most of them wear sports jackets and riding breeches, having trench-coats for outdoor wear. All had pistols or revolvers in holsters strapped to their waists. A pile of rifles and shot-guns leans against the 'out-shot' bed... Yet they dance in the shadow of death. Gentle, refined Jim Mac Evilley is soon to give his life for Ireland."⁽²⁰⁾

In general, the West Mayo Brigade column so far had relatively little success in engaging the enemy, who were continuously on the alert and were inclined to take few chances. The British had learned well from their experience in the South

and had changed tactics accordingly, moving only in heavily armed columns at speed. They had become better equipped and their transport, communications and intelligence had been reorganised.^(20a)

The Kilmeena Ambush⁽²¹⁾

By May 1921, the West Mayo Brigade IRA had not been successful in carrying out a large-scale attack on the British forces in the area. As a consequence Michael Kilroy was under some pressure to attempt an attack. At this time Castlebar was the British army HQ in the area under Col. Pakenham, OC of the King's Own Scottish Borderers, while all the major towns had strongly fortified barracks, containing RIC and Black and Tans. This did not deter Kilroy and his Brigade staff, Ned Moane (Vice OC), Johnny Gibbons (Adjutant) and Tom Ketterick (Quartermaster), who continued to press on.

On 18th May 1921, in an effort to get a movement of enemy forces between Westport and Newport, Michael Kilroy detailed two units to attack these towns. The first unit contained some of the more experienced men and was under the command of Brodie Malone, along with Johnny Duffy, Tom Heavey and four others. They were all armed with Lee Enfield rifles. They moved into Westport and commenced firing at any of the enemy they saw.

The second unit, under Josie Doherty, the Newport Batt. OC, along with Jim Moran, Michael Gallagher and Jim Browne, went into Newport. All, with the exception of Browne, who had a shotgun, were armed with rifles. About 8.00pm Sergeant Francis Butler came out of the RIC station and was killed by a single bullet from Jim Moran. It transpired later that Butler had in the past aided the IRA with information.



Location of Kilmeena, site of the ambush.

The Castlebar unit, under the command of Paddy Jordan assembled at The Rocks [behind the old County Home in Castlebar] and made their way cross country to Kilmeena. Séamus was not with them then as he is known to have visited the house of Eugene Campbell, in Mayour, Kilmeena on the night before the ambush.⁽²²⁾

The following morning (19th May), at 3.00am, the main column, consisting of units from Castlebar, Newport, Westport and Louisburgh Battalions, forty-one men in all, took up position at Clooneen Cross, Kilmeena, close to Knocknabola Bridge, on the main Westport-Newport road. At first the men were positioned on a site commanding the road bridge which ran over the railway. It was a good position for shotgun men to hold as any lorries which approached would have to slow down. But when it had been occupied it was decided against, as it was exposed on the flank. The main ambush position was then selected to the south below Cloneen crossroads. A rough blockade was placed a little distance down the Derryharow road, along which the men had come that morning, to prevent lorries from suddenly turning to the flank of the position. However, in a move that was to prove disastrous later, Kilroy made no arrangements to block the main Newport-Westport road.

Across the road, at another bank, Dr Madden, himself a Ballycastle man, and a comrade acted as flankers, while beyond the brow of the hill, to the north of the position towards Newport, an outpost was placed to watch the Newport road and to control, by their fire, any approach along it. It was decided to place an observer on a hill, a hundred yards away towards Westport. He was to signal the approach of the British.

The Wait

The column now settled down to wait. They were armed with twenty-two rifles, sixteen shotguns and three revolvers. Séamus had a rifle.⁽²³⁾ About 10.00am a car was signalled approaching from the Newport direction, but the Newport men recognised it as belonging to Canon McDonald, PP, Newport, who was attending an engagement Kilmeena. A short time later two cars were signalled coming from Newport. They were filled with people in black and slowly came into the ambush position. Fire was almost opened when it was recognised that the cars contained nuns from Newport and Mulranny. They were on their way to a nun's funeral in Westport. The men relaxed and settled down to wait again. By noon, Michael Kilroy was thinking of moving the column away. Inexplicably the 14 men away skirmishing in Westport and Newport had still not rejoined the Column, a factor that significantly influenced the fatal outcome of the ambush as these were the additional riflemen.

There were a number of dangers in staying in an ambush position for an extended length of time. The men's concentration might drop and also information might be passed to the British. There was also the problem of food.

Kilroy decided to arrange a meal for the men, after which they column would withdraw east towards the Half Parish. Shortly before 3.00pm Jim Kelly and some others were supervising the cooking of eight fowl in the kitchen of Cummins' house. Suddenly two shots rang out from the scout on the Westport side, signalling the approach of the British convoy, unexpectedly from the Westport direction.

Engagement

The convoy of one Ford car and two Crosley tenders [lorries] a quarter of a mile apart consisted of twenty heavily armed RIC and Black and Tans, and was under the command of District Inspector Donnelon, fresh from the 5th Division three day counter insurgency course in the Curragh.^(23a) Fire was opened on the leading armoured lorry, which was heading towards Newport. It quickly sped through the ambush position which did not contain a road block. It met further gunfire from the northern outpost and disappeared from view about 250 yards away.

Meanwhile, one armoured lorry and a motor car had halted near the parish priest's house on the Westport side, without entering the ambush position. Inside the house there were a number of priests about to have lunch and the lorry and car halted behind Canon McDonald's car. The British jumped from the lorry and first grouped on the road in the standard musketry position. Fire was opened by the IRA on the kneeling RIC who hurriedly took cover across the road. They mounted a Lewis gun and opened fire on the column. Meanwhile, the occupants of the first lorry, which had broken through the ambush position, pulled up just beyond the bridge at Rosssduane School and came back on foot. They did not meet any opposition as the men from the northern outpost had withdrawn, but the column men near the road were unaware of this. Unobserved, the British took up positions and mounted a Lewis gun on the bridge, which opened up on the now exposed column positions. This machine gun provided covering fire which helped the RIC advance up a laneway at the back of tailor Flynn's house and allowed them to fire on the bank held by the column. Against this crossfire the shotguns were useless. The shotgun men withdrew, while the rifle men covered their retreat. A Black and Tan, Constable Harry Beckett, was shot through the eye at the back of the tailor's house and another RIC man, Head Constable Potter, was seriously wounded nearby, having been shot in the chin and neck.

The fight continued for about two hours. Kilroy now gave the order for the column to retreat to the second bank and this the men had to do across the top of Clooneen Hill. There were gaps in this bank, sometimes fifty yards in length, which were exposed to the fire from the enemy positions near the tailor's house and the parish priest's house.

Casualties

Seán Collins, a Belfast man working as a tailor in Westport, was killed in the first few minutes of the engagement. Séamus Mac Evilly (Castlebar) was shot in the abdomen at the second bank. John (Dálaí) Chambers found him lying there and attempted to help him but there was little he could do.⁽²⁴⁾ He noticed that Séamus was trying to reach into his pocket for his Rosary beads and they were placed in his fingers.⁽²⁵⁾ Séamus probably bled to death there.⁽²⁶⁾

Fathers Killeen (CC, Mulranny) and Walsh (CC, Kilmeena) had left the priests' house, where earlier District Inspector Donnellan (RIC) had burst in and accused the priests of firing on his men. While the fight was still raging they went on to the hill and found two Volunteers dying. These were Thomas O'Donnell, a young carpenter from Rossinrubble, Newport who worked in Kilroy's Coachbuilding firm in Castlebar, and Patrick Staunton of Kilmeena. The priests were in time to anoint them and they died before their eyes. Fr. Killeen now came upon Séamus Mac Evilly and anointed him, although he believed he was dead.⁽²⁷⁾ They then went to the top of the hill where they came across Paddy Jordan from Islandeady, Vice-Commandant of the Castlebar Battalion, who was badly injured. He had a deep track of a bullet across his head and by this time had lost a lot of blood. Paddy Mulloy (Newport) and John Cannon (Westport) were wounded on the way back. At the third bank, Kilroy found Paddy O'Malley of Rossinrubble, whose shin had been shattered by a bullet. He was able to advise Kilroy on what part of the next bank the enemy were sighted, as he had observed the result of the fire on men who had crossed in front of him before he had been wounded. Nearby was Tom Nolan (Castlebar), who had been wounded in the leg, and with him was the Westport man named Pierce, who had insisted on staying behind with Nolan.

Kilroy, using O'Malley's rifle with its damaged foresight, remained as long as he could firing at any movement. Then with the rest of the column, including the wounded—James Swift (Castlebar), John Chambers (Castlebar) and Michael

Since so many were killed and injured during the Kilmeena Ambush speculation persisted long after the event that somehow the ambush had been compromised from the start. Dominic Price, in his recent comprehensive account "War in Mayo 1919 to 1924", Collins Press 2012, speculates that a Dubliner a John Piers (or Pierce) an apprentice tailor in Westport and a recent Volunteer in the Westport Battalion may have been either an undercover spy all along or an informer subsequently.

After the ambush Pierce was taken as a prisoner to the RIC Barracks in Castlebar; where on arrival he requested to speak to Divisional Commissioner Cruise privately. It is certain that he gave the RIC details on the Flying Column then which they immediately acted upon. Pierce was seen in the back of RIC lorries over the next few days as they went about on raids and then was never seen again afterwards.⁽²⁸⁾

Edit, November 2012.

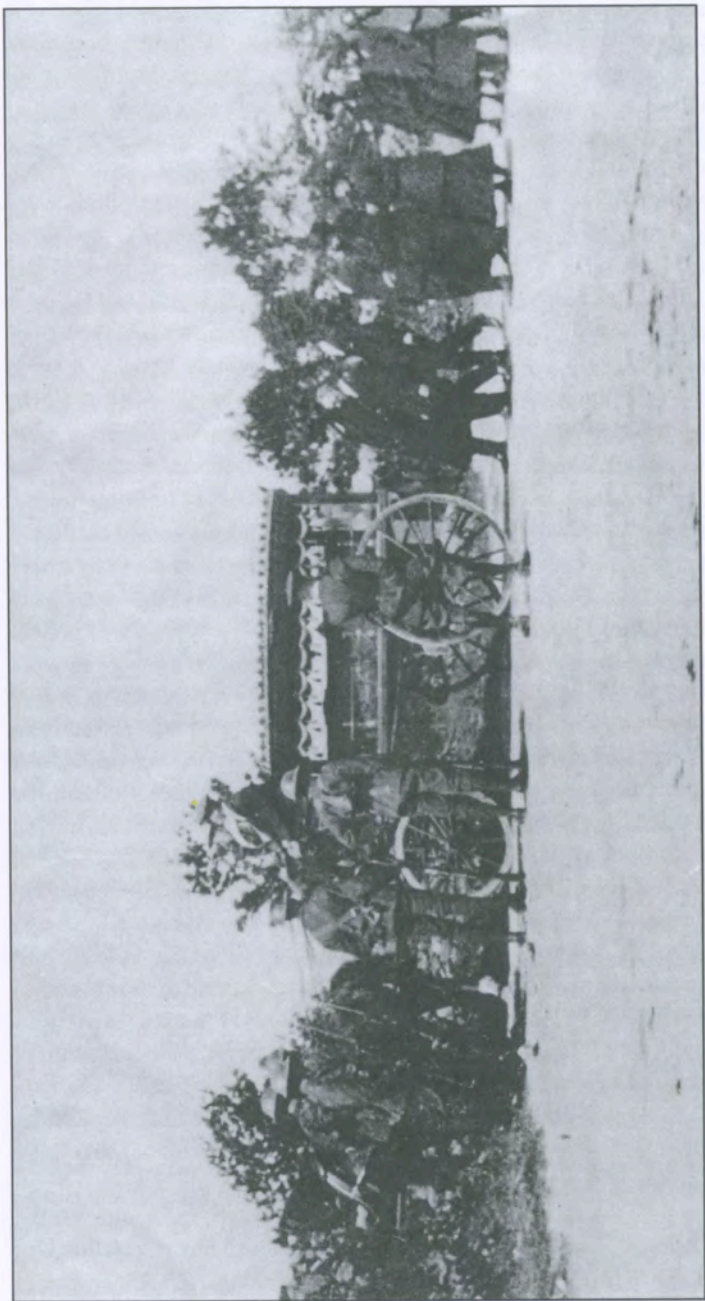
Hughes (Castlebar)—they withdrew under harassment to Aughagowla, where the wounded were tended to by Dr Madden and Nurse Joyce of Clogher. That night Michael Kilroy's home and workshop in Newport were burned. In a follow-up engagement in Skirdagh, Jim Browne, of the Newport unit, was killed.

In all, the British recovered four IRA dead at Kilmeena: Séamus Mac Evilly and Thomas O'Donnell, both members of the Castlebar ASU and Patrick Staunton and Seán Collins, members of the Westport ASU. Seven others were wounded and of these four were captured including Paddy Jordan who died later, Paddy Molloy, J. Cannon and Thomas Nolan. J. Pierce (Westport unit) who was uninjured was also captured.^(28a) Paddy Jordan and Captain Paddy O'Malley, a member of the Newport unit were dragged by the legs across fields and over banks, and thrown in on top of the dead and wounded already lying in a lorry. O'Malley's leg was amputated some years after the ambush. The column now retreated northwards, carrying some of the wounded.

Aftermath

The British convoy now returned to Westport. The dead and wounded were thrown down on the street outside the RIC barracks in James' Street and left there for a considerable time. Even sections friendly to the British in the town were shocked, including the Marquis of Sligo. They went into the barracks to protest against the disregard for the wounded prisoners. Eventually the bodies were dragged inside and the wounded tended to. On Thursday evening, the wounded Patrick Jordan was removed from the Westport RIC to the Mayo Infirmary in Castlebar, and from there to King George V Hospital (now St Bricin's) in Dublin, where he died on 15th June 1921. On Friday morning, at about 6.00am, the prisoners were taken by train from Westport to Castlebar. The authorities, having difficulty in getting one of the bodies identified, made elaborate enquiries in Castlebar and on Friday evening had the four bodies removed to Castlebar Jail, site of present Mayo General Hospital, where they were thrown on a dung heap. A plan was later considered for capturing the Marquis of Sligo and holding him as a hostage in case any of those who were captured were maltreated but permission was refused by GHQ.⁽²⁹⁾

Somehow, word had been got to Mrs Carney, Castlebar—a member of Cumann na mBan—about the bodies in the jail. She contacted Paddy Horkan, who, pretending to be from the undertakers, managed to get in and identify the bodies.⁽³⁰⁾ The first intimation for the Mac Evilly family in Castlebar that there was something amiss, was when Máire noticed groups of people talking to each other on the street near the family home and looking up towards it. No one wanted to be the first to bring the bad news. At the time of the ambush Séamus' father was tending cattle on the Newport road and had heard the shooting 15 miles away, but



Funeral cortege of Seamus Mac Evilly entering the Old Cemetery, Castlebar, 22 May 1921.
Mourners include: brother, Fr. Michael; father, Michael Mac Evilly; brothers, Jerry Mac Evilly, Tom Mac Evilly; mother Mary Mac Evilly; sisters, Maura and Alice.

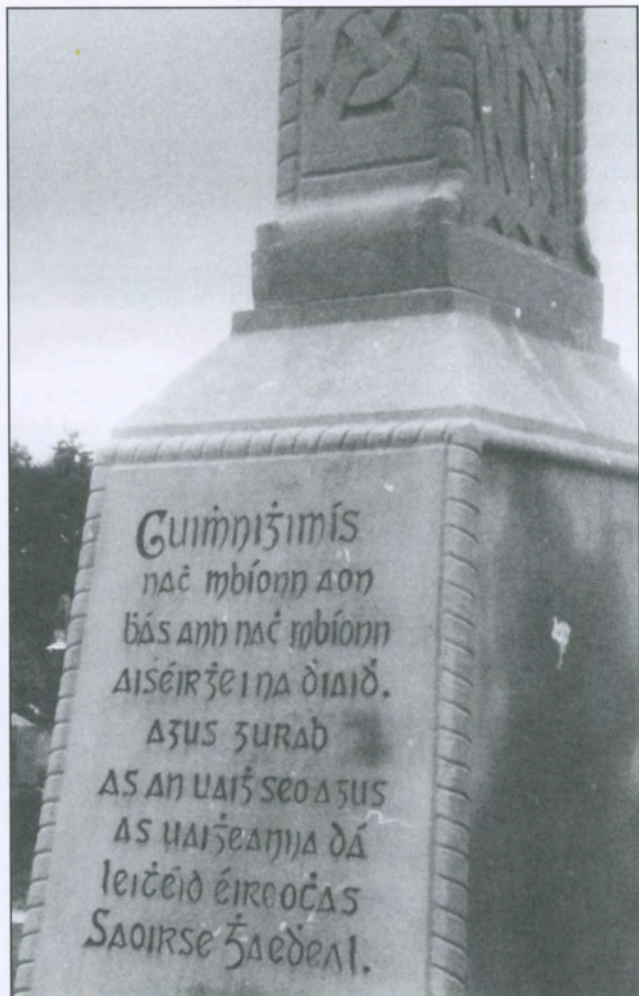
thought no more of it. When, eventually, a telegram arrived from relatives in Westport the family was devastated.

It is not known why his mother (and not her husband, Michael) went to identify Séamus in Castlebar jail after the bodies were brought there. Probably, her son Fr. Michael accompanied her. She was greeted with the words from a British soldier: “did you come to claim your pup?”. She didn’t reply and was told ‘one of those pigs is here’. Her reply was ‘there are many more to replace him’.⁽³¹⁾ The story in the family is that she resolved that whatever happened, they [the British] would not make her cry and she didn’t at the time. She demanded the body of her son and found Séamus lying on the dung heap with his glasses still on him. Later, when her cousin Bessie O’Donnell (née Lyons) and her husband Martin Hugh went to Castlebar to sympathise with her, she told them how she was full of courage when she went and demanded her son from the British, but that later, at home, she sat down and cried and said, ‘Wasn’t he a foolish boy’.⁽³²⁾ She was still a mother who had lost her son.

On Saturday a military enquiry, in lieu of an inquest, was held in Castlebar. Identity was established for three of the dead but it was not until Sunday that the body of Thomas O’Donnell, which was stated in official reports to be “Smith” or “Chambers”, was identified. On Saturday also the remains of a Black and Tan—Constable Harry Beckett—were removed from Westport police barracks to the railway station, en route to England. An official report stated that he was an



Castlebar gaol. Circa 1900.



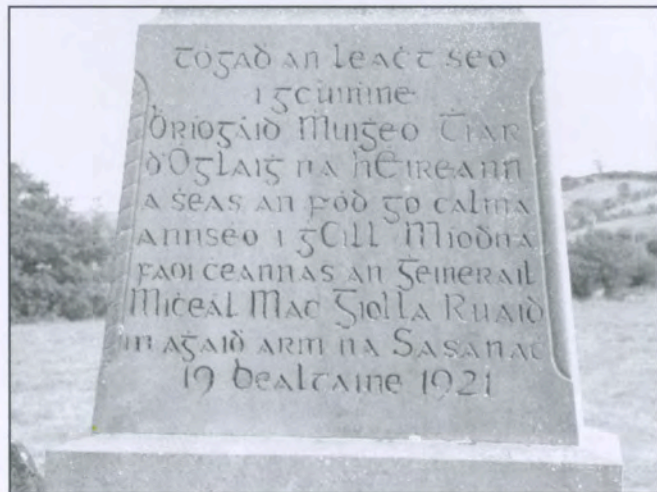
Inscription on Memorial Cross Republican Plot Castlebar Cemetery.



Commemoration at Republican Plot, Castlebar, Old Cemetery, ca 1955. (Half profile of Michael Mac Evilly on extreme right).



A later commemoration ca 1970. Seamus' sister Maura can be seen in the middle background. Surviving West Mayo Brigade IRA veterans Chambers and Horkan (wearing medals) also in picture.



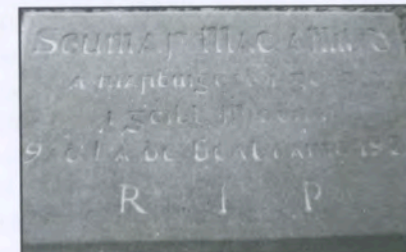
War of Independence Memorial at Kilmeena to West Mayo Brigade IRA, unveiled by Frank Aiken TD on 23 May 1971.

Australian who had only six weeks service in the RIC. On Friday, Saturday and Sunday, Crown forces searched many houses in Castlebar and Westport but no arrests were made.⁽³³⁾

Funerals

The British OC, Col. Packenham, now sent a letter to the Castlebar parish priest, Canon Fallon that only 12 persons would be allowed to attend each funeral, on Sunday and that no banners or colours were to be displayed. This was read at all masses on Sunday. When the remains of Séamus Mac Evilly emerged from the Castlebar jail on Saturday evening, the townspeople refused to have the coffin placed on the waiting hearse and insisted on carrying it on their shoulders to the Church of the Holy Rosary in Castlebar.

On Sunday morning, 22nd May, Fr. Michael celebrated last mass that morning for the repose of his brother's soul. The funeral of Séamus Mac Evilly was scheduled for 3.00pm. The British had ordered the streets to be cleared but still the people assembled. Shortly before this time the British attempted to move the people off the streets. Despite this, a large crowd had gathered at the church. At 3.00pm a body of military, with fixed bayonets, were drawn up outside. The coffin, draped in the tricolour, was carried from the church by some of his IRA comrades, including Captain Paddy Horkan, J. McCormack and Ned Philbin. Immediately, there was a major confrontation with the military. A British officer, a Lieutenant, ordered the flag to be removed and when this was refused, it was seized. A further difficulty arose with a wreath of "National" flowers in the shape of a Cross and this was ordered to be seized as well. The British officer in charge now ordered the people to disperse, which they refused. It was not until the military brought their rifles into the "working position" and on the advice of Fr. Geoffrey Prendergast, an ex-British army Captain and chaplain, that the crowd moved into the precincts of the church.⁽³⁴⁾ The Lieutenant subsequently called to the Presbytery in Castlebar to apologise to Fr. Prendergast, his senior officer.



His mother was very upset at the fact that Séamus would be buried without the Irish flag. The cortege of 12 relatives then moved off. It included his two brothers who were serving in other Brigades—Tom, with the Sligo Brigade and Jerry with the Cork No. 2 Brigade in Fermoy.⁽³⁵⁾ Going down Linenhall Street she asked her son Jerry to go into Moran's General Store and obtain a flag. He returned and handed it to her and she immediately hid it on her person. The approaches to the cemetery were held by British military, RIC and Black and Tans, with rifles at the ready. Military were also placed in the cemetery itself and in the fields adjoining. As the cortege was entering the cemetery, one of them took a photograph, which is extant. This shows, from a distance, some of the twelve family members who were allowed to attend. While at the graveside a shot rang out from the far side of the cemetery and when the soldiers moved off Mary stood forward and threw the flag into the grave. An ordinary woman, she did not know that the flag is never buried. This gesture of defiance shows her sympathy with the cause for which her son fought.

After prayers by his brother, Fr. Michael Mac Evilly, Séamus was laid to rest in the Republican plot in the Old Cemetery, Castlebar. Amongst the wreaths placed on the grave was one from the family: 'In fond memory from father, mother, brothers and sisters—with pride'.

The remains of Thomas O'Donnell were removed from Castlebar Jail a few minutes after the funeral of Séamus Mac Evilly had passed. They were laid side by side in the Republican plot in Castlebar. [His body had not been claimed.] Again there were only 12 mourners. Fr. Michael also officiated at the graveside.

Earlier that morning, at 10.30am the funeral of Seán Collins was held with 12 mourners in attendance. The military had refused to hand over his body to his comrades for interment in Westport. (He was an orphan.) He was also buried in the Republican plot in the Old Cemetery, Castlebar. Canon Fallon officiated at the graveside.

The remains of Patrick Staunton were taken over on Saturday by his relations and he was interred on Sunday in the family grave in Kilmeena cemetery with a large crowd in attendance. The funeral was unrestricted. Rev. M. Conroy officiated at the graveside.

After the funeral, Séamus' mother went to stay with her family in Cloonlara, near Louisburgh for about seven weeks. It was evidently felt that her home in Castlebar would become a target for British reprisals and that she would be safer with her own people. She also needed time to grieve for her son. This was a correct decision as the house was subsequently raided but without incident.

Carrowkennedy

Some time afterwards, the famous photograph of the West Mayo Flying Column was taken by Jack Leonard at the foot of the Nephin mountains. On 3rd June 1921

the defeat at Kilmeena was avenged at Carrowkennedy, on the Westport–Leenane road, when the Brigade column ambushed a large convoy of RIC and Black and Tans and forced it to surrender. In all, seven British, including the local RIC District Inspector were killed, more captured and large amounts of arms and ammunition, including a Lewis machine gun, were recovered. The IRA had no casualties.

The British response was the largest roundup ever seen in the West, in an attempt to capture what they called 'this murder gang'. Armoured trains, with thousands of troops, were poured into West Mayo. Aeroplanes, two seater Bristol F2B 'fighters', from 2 and 105 RAF Squadrons out of Castlebar aerodrome joined in the search. In Clew Bay and Killary harbour, the British mounted a sea blockade, lighting up the mountains at night with their searchlights.⁽³⁶⁾ All to no avail. The fact that no member of the column was captured is in itself a telling tribute to the Mayo IRA and to those, especially the women (who have until recently been written out of the War of Independence history), who gave them aid. The capture of these weapons and the experience gained at Carrowkennedy, resulted in a huge increase in IRA morale.

Truce

The Truce on 11th July, 1921 came as a surprise to the Volunteers, who now came out into the open and were warmly greeted. Séamus' death was deeply felt by the family, whose only consolation was the fact that he had been killed in attempting to establish an Irish Republic. It had been the practice in their home to keep Séamus' room free in case he might return at night while on the run. His father, Michael, told Séamus Kavanagh later, that on the night of the Truce he heard Séamus' footsteps coming up the stairs in the house and go into his own room. When he checked, there was no one there.⁽³⁷⁾

The Truce led in December 1921 to the ill fated Treaty with England and the subsequent civil war, in which Seamus' brothers took the losing Republican side. Later as part of the newly formed 4th Western Division embracing West and North Mayo and Connemara under Cmdt Gen Michael Kilroy, the Mayo IRA, almost completely anti-treaty as a group, played a prominent role in defence of an all Ireland Republic, yet to be achieved (only two Mayo TDs voted for the Treaty after the Dáil Éireann debates).

1922 Election

In a subsequent poignant footnote in a reprise of the great Castlebar meeting of 1917 at which De Valera spoke, Seamus' father Michael Mac Evilly chaired a general election meeting in Castlebar on 30 April 1922 attended by Mary Mc Swiney TD and other republicans. In his address he invoked the sacrifice of the 1916 leaders and referred tellingly to the hardships incurred by ordinary Volunteers in the Flying Columns.⁽³⁹⁾

Aided by Catholic hierarchy interference, by the Press, and with widespread war-weariness of the people, the pro-Treaty parties won the General Election of June 1922. Here again, Mayo had overwhelmingly voted Republican and anti-Treaty, winning six of the nine Mayo constituencies. But for Michael Kilroy and his West Mayo Flying Column further bloodshed and imprisonment were to come as civil war loomed.

Epilogue

In 1924 a silver trophy for coursing, designed by Willie Brett of Castlebar was made in Séamus' honour. Later, on 21st May 1934, Dr John A. Madden, in the presence of thousands, unveiled a memorial at the Republican Plot in Castlebar. The evocative inscriptions in Irish on the memorial cross, one of which is taken



Castlebar Coursing Club Mac Evilly Memorial Cup.

from Patrick Pearse's panegyric at the grave of O'Donovan Rossa in Glasnevin Cemetery on August 1st 1915 were devised by Andy Mc Tighe, teacher, Irish language scholar and later Headmaster of Breaffy NS.⁽³⁸⁾ Séamus' name is also mentioned on the Republican plot in the old Cemetery in Kilmeena, where, up to recently the local people commemorate each year those killed in the Kilmeena ambush. Commemorations in Castlebar have become infrequent.

Other known mementoes

1. Head and shoulders portrait in oils by Willie Brett, a Castlebar artist, (in author's possession). **Front cover picture.**
2. Another portrait surrounded by flags, given to Willie Kavanagh and Máire by Fr. Michael on their wedding. (in possession of Dermot Kavanagh, Cork.)
3. Autograph book, with signatures from Crumlin Road Jail in Belfast.
4. Embroidery, listing Séamus' name amongst those West Mayo volunteers killed in action, now in Westport Heritage Centre.

Sources

1. As quoted by Michael Mac Evilly in *Remembering the Year of the French; Irish Folk History and Social Memory* by Guy Beiner, University of Wisconsin Press, 2007. p 405, ref 95.
- 1a. Maurice Twomey papers. UCDA p 69/162 (20).
- 1b. Joost Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerilla Warfare. The Experience of Ordinary Volunteers in the Irish War of Independence 1916–1921*. (1996). p 49.
2. Statement of Art O'Donnell, Bureau of Military History, from Eamonn Gaynor.
3. J. Anthony Gaughan, *Austin Stack. Portrait of a Separatist*, (Dublin 1977). p 87.
4. Diary in Dermot Kavanagh's possession.
5. Information from Mary Walsh [née Staunton], [cousin] 19.2.2005. Eugene Campbell informed her that Séamus worked in a drapers shop in Westport.
6. Personal account written by his sister, Máire Kavanagh. [In author's possession.]
7. Joe Good *Enchanted by Dreams. The Journal of a Revolutionary*. p 155.
8. Maurice Twomey papers, *op cit* p 69/162 (20), also p 69/162 (50).
- 8a. *Mayoman*, 5.6.1920, also 31.7.1920.
9. Joost Augusteijn, *op cit*. p 229.
10. Máire Kavanagh, *op cit*.
11. Joost Augusteijn, "The Importance of being Irish. Ideas and the Volunteers in Mayo and Tipperary", in *Revolution? Ireland 1917–1923*. David Fitzpatrick [Ed]. p 37.
- 11a. Fr. (later Canon) Michael Mac Evilly [1892–1985] and Fr. Griffin were classmates in Maynooth. This friendship is dealt with in P. O'Laoi,

Fr. Griffin 1892–1920. [1994]. Ordained in 1917, Fr. Michael at this time was on loan to the Galway diocese and was CC in Carraroe. Fr. O’Laoi wrote ‘They were kindred spirits and poured out their hearts to one another, in such a way that ‘Kev’ (as Fr. Michael was known amongst his friends) knew more about the real Fr. Griffin than anyone else, priest or layman’. Fr. Michael took the infamous photograph of Fr. Griffin in the uniform of an IRA officer. (It belonged to Comdt. Séamus Murphy). An Irish language enthusiast, Fr. Michael founded, in 1923, the Irish language periodical *An Chearnóg* and wrote in Irish under the pen name MacDara.

12. Máire Kavanagh, *op cit*.
13. Joost Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerilla Warfare. The Radicalisation of the Irish Republican Army—a comparative analysis, 1916–1921*. Ph.D. thesis University of Amsterdam, p 152.
14. Ernie O’Malley, *Raids and Rallies*. (1982). p 160.
15. Uinseann MacEoin, *Survivors*. 2nd edition. (1987). Tom Heavey account as related to Michael Mac Evilly. p 430.
16. Joe Baker, *My Stand for Freedom. Autobiography of an Irish Republican Soldier*. Westport Historical Society, (1988), p 20. Baker afterwards led an ASU in the civil war.
17. *Ibid*, p 22.
18. Tom Heavey interviews with author, various dates.
19. Máire Kavanagh, *op cit*.
20. Edward O’Malley, *Memories of a Mayoman*. (1981), p 28. FNT, 1981.
- 20a. *Ambushes and Armour. The Irish Rebellion 1919–1921*. (2011). Ch 8. W. H. Kautt.
21. See article by Michael Mac Evilly in *Mayo Association Year Book 1998*.
22. Information from Mary Walsh [née Staunton], [cousin], 19.2.2005. Eugene Campbell remembers Séamus being in his parents house that night.
23. Booklet, *West Mayo Brigade 1921–1971. Unveiling of Memorials at Kilmeena, Skirdagh, Carrowkennedy*. (May–June 1971) by W. Sammon, a local historian from Carrowmore, Newport, 1971.
- 23a. *The History of the 5th Division; Heart and Mines*. (2009), p 62, 116. Ed. W. Sheehan.
24. Information from his wife. John (Dálaí) Chambers was a brother of the Castlebar Batt. OC, James Chambers.
25. Information given to Séamus Kavanagh [nephew] by Mac Evilly’s mother, Mary.
26. *The Sunday Press* 22nd January 1956. This also contains a panoramic photograph of the ambush site. Also Ernie O’Malley’s *Raids and Rallies* (1982), p 166.

27. An Canóin Tomás Ó Cillín, ‘Luíochán Chill Míodhna’ in *Cathair na Mart*. Journal of the Westport Historical Society, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1982), p 29.
 28. “*The Flame and the Candle. War in Mayo 1919 to 1924*” The Collins Press. 2012. Ch. 5. p150 ref 68, 1920–1921 Statement of John Pierce to DC R.F Cruise. Tuam Diocese Archive.
 - 28a. Moane, Brigadier E. and Malone, Vice Comdt. B. ‘Transcript of tape recordings made in Dublin in January 1967’. [Transcribed by Michael Mac Evilly, Dublin 1983].
 29. Uinseann MacEoin, *Survivors*, 2nd edition, (1987). Tom Heavey account as related to Michael Mac Evilly. p 436.
 30. Paddy Horkan [tape recording].
 31. John Maye [nephew], 9.2.2003.
 32. Alice Quinn O’Donnell. Kilmeena, Westport, [cousin], 8.7.2001.
 33. *Connaught Telegraph*, 28.5.1921.
 34. *Mayoman*, 28.5.1921.
 35. Tom Mac Evilly [1899–1976] organised Na Fianna Éireann in Castlebar in September 1913. This was the second branch of Na Fianna to be formed outside of Dublin. Later, at O Donovan Rossa’s funeral in August 1915 this Castlebar *slua* (unit) led Na Fianna section of the parade (under Dublin officers, Garry, Houlihan, Martin, et al.) but due to the high attendance it had to halt outside the Cemetery. Tom became a member of the Irish Volunteers in 1919 and in May 1921 became Adjutant of Sligo Town Company. Took Republican side in CW and escaped on two occasions. He was finally captured in the Sligo area, after participating in the capture of Sligo Town Hall and the disarming of the guard. He was interned in Finner Camp and sentenced to death by military court in February 1923 for being in possession of a weapon. He was subsequently reprieved after Fr. Michael approached a senior officer, probably Gen. Mulcahy, reminding him of Seamus’ death in the Kilmeena ambush. Family lore tells that this senior officer said “Ye are a right family of Bolshies”, a pejorative anti-treatyite term that embraced another brother Jerry interned in Hare Park prison in the Curragh at that time. He was moved then to B Wing, Mountjoy—Prison number 1394. During the mass hunger strike there (March 1924) he was beaten into semi-consciousness in the basement with subsequent permanent loss of hearing in one ear. Michael Kilroy, former OC 4th Western division, was leader of the prisoners in Mountjoy at that time. Mentioned in Peadar O’Donnell’s *The Gates Flew Open* [p 140]. He was released on parole about February 1924, from Harepark Camp, The Curragh after a total of 16 months in prison, owing to the death of another brother (David) and one of the last to be released. Later he became CEO, Co. Sligo VEC.
- Jerry Mac Evilly [1900–1945] joined Cork No. 2 Brigade, Fermoy Batt. in

the spring of 1921. Took Republican side in CW. Part of Conn Leddy's unit which took over Moorpark from the British. Fought with ASU until captured on 4th October 1922 near Ariglen. He was one of the Cork Diocese volunteers directly affected by Bishop Cohan of Cork's decree of excommunication in December 1920. He took part in the 41 day hunger strike in Harepark Camp and was released unconditionally on 21st December 1923. Emigrated to New York shortly afterwards. While working in a bar there he was shown a photograph by a former British soldier of a "Rebel" funeral which turned out to be that of Seamus. This is the probable source of the family funeral photograph on page 20. He returned in the thirties and set up a bacon business in Castlebar.

Both Tom and Jerry Mac Evilly later declined to accept their IRA medals and military pensions. This caused some controversy at the time, leading to letters to newspapers.

36. Uinseann MacEoin, *Survivors*, 2nd edition, (1987). John Joe Philbin account as related to Michael Mac Evilly, p 465.
37. Séamus Kavanagh, nephew. 12.1.2000.
38. Personal communication from Andrea Mc Tighe, daughter.
39. *Mayo News*, 6 May 1922.

Photograph Sources

- p3. Top, West Mayo Brigade cap-badge, with Cross of Cong insert.
Bottom, Connaught Telegraph
- p10. J Leonard Collection.
- p20. Nancy Mac Evilly.
- p21. National Library, Lawrence Collection.
- p23. Top, Unknown.
Bottom, Liam Lyons, Westport.
- p24. www.castlebar.ie
<http://www.castlebar.ie/photos/the-west/kilmeena/glry/index/dscn2818.html>
<http://www.castlebar.ie/photos/the-west/kilmeena/glry/index/dscn2817.html>
- p28. Unknown.



About the author

Born in Castlebar in 1942, Michael Mac Evilly was educated at St. Jarlath's College, Tuam. He subsequently went to University College, Galway (now NUIG) where he was Reachtaire of An Chumainn Trachtála. Having taken a B.Comm degree he then joined Haughey Boland & Company, Accountants in Dublin. A life-long Republican, over many years he gathered a significant library relating to the War of Independence which he warmly shared with many researchers. He is the author of several articles on a Republican theme and of the book "A Splendid Resistance. The life of IRA Chief of Staff Dr. Andy Cooney", which was published posthumously in 2011. He died at Easter 2009, dílis dá thír agus dá mhuintir.