

Stories Gathered From 1913 – 1923

By John and James Hurley

Lisheen National School



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Introduction

Our names are John and James Hurley and we attend Lisheen National School. Our project is on the War of Independence which happened after the failure of the 1916 Rising. The War of Independence was ignited mainly in County Cork with the notable victories of the Boys of Kilmichael and Crossbarry, a minority of the citizens in West Cork formed a brigade called 'The West Cork Flying Column', which was headed by Commandant Tom Barry.

The Civil War came about after the signing of the Treaty with England. One of the major consequences of the Treaty signing was the assassination of General Michael Collins at Béal na Blath.

We have gathered some stories from our grandaunt Mrs. Mary Whooley and two local residents Mrs. Peggy Hayes and Mr. Kevin O'Regan, all of who were born in and continue to live in the parish of Aughadown.

Interview with Mrs. Mary Whooley

Mary lives in Laherathanavally, Aughadown and tells us the following:

The Lisheen Company, Schull Battalion, Cork No 1 Brigade was formed during September 1917. Many of the members were from the Lisheen area. From that time until 1923, these men were actively involved in the struggle for Independence.

They had put their own lives at risk because they believed so strongly in what they were fighting for. Some of their duties would have been cutting the roads to curtail the movement of The Black and Tans. The Black and Tans were formed in 1919, and were ex British soldiers from World War One, recruited to assist the R.I.C. (Royal Irish Constabulary) in Ireland. They were also known as the Auxiliaries and were instrumental in the burning of Cork City. The Brigade also carried out raids on houses to confiscate guns and ammunition which resulted in feuds and fallouts among families and neighbours.

During the whole period, the Lisheen area was very important from a military viewpoint as it was very large and contained the main roads from Skibbereen to Schull and Ballydehob, all of which were centres of British Garrisons, as well as the railway from Skibbereen to Schull.

In late 1923, some of the men were arrested and taken to Cork jail where they went on hunger strike. Other members made their escape by emigrating to America.

One of the members of the Lisheen Company made a ring from a Florin coin (an old 2 shilling piece) while in custody. This ring is now today in the possession of a family member.

Picture of Ring made from a Florin coin



Mary tells us of how our great grandaunt celebrated her 100th birthday on the day that John was born. Her name was Mary Ellen McCarthy (nee Hegarty). She tells us how Mary Ellen recalled many incidents of the times during the War of Independence and as a young girl she remembered running scared from the Black and Tans on her way home from Lisheen School. She had been to the school to help out with preparing bandages for the local Lisheen Brigade.

During these times, our great grand uncle Timmy Hegarty was on the run with his comrades from the Black and Tans. The Black and Tans would come into their family yard searching for them. Out of frustration at not finding them, they would turn the milk churns upside down and spill out the milk all over the yard or they would go into the orchard and shake all the apples off of the apple trees trying to get information from the family.

When Timmy and his comrades would return the family would have to share their meals with them as they would be very hungry. Mary Ellen would have to wash the Brigades clothes and she helped her mother to scrub them as Timmy's shirt would have been soaking with perspiration.

As mentioned earlier, many of the men from the Lisheen Brigade had to immigrate to America after the war and Timmy was one of them. Mary Ellen referred to this as being such a sad time in her life. It was very late in her life before she could talk about the war and these times.

Picture of Volunteers who fought in the War of Independence and the Civil War



Detailed Statement of
Timothy Hegarty Lisheen Coy.
Schull Batt. Cork 5th Brig.
Sept 1919 attended Coy. parades twice weekly
Oct 1919 do. " " " " " "

The Ballydeobola R.I.C. Barracks
May 1920 took part in the burning of Ballydeobola
R.I.C. Barracks whilst under arms
June 1920 raided for arms + captured same
July 1920 was in charge of a dump in my father's
farm where firearms were stored
Aug 1920 cleaned guns + revolvers + dumped same
Sept 1920 carried despatches + delivered same
Oct 1920 Commanded Transport

1st Lieutenant to Barry's Column
 June 1921 Seized bicycles, commandeered transport
 Carried dispatches, made dumps. Cleared
 and secured guns, cut roads cut
 railway line. Felled trees, when proceeding
 to cut road at Newcourt which had been
 refilled by military, the Coy. O.C. was informed
 by a lady that the military were in
 ambush on an adjoining hill & on both
 sides of road which was densely wooded
 & where cutting was to take place
 According to information received by Coy. O.C.
 the military numbered between 60 + 70 carried
 two machine guns.

IRA medals in the possession of the Hegarty family



Interview with Mr. Kevin O'Regan

We interviewed Mr. Kevin O'Regan who lives in Aughadown, Skibbereen who told us the following stories regarding his father Joe O'Regan. The O'Regan family owned the creamery at Aughadown.

In 1914, the Lisheen Battalion was formed by Fr. Jimmy O'Sullivan who was the parish priest at that time. It disbanded when the people of the parish turned against John Redmond's idea to recruit soldiers for the British Army.

In 1917, the formation of the Sinn Féin Club in the Lisheen Area became the Lisheen Company and was attached to the Schull Battalion. The strength of the unit was about 30 to 80 at its height. During this period bombs and slugs were made at the company headquarters which was located in the engine room of the Aughadown Creamery. Some of the staff there were very involved in the local organisation with some even involved with the Kilmichael Ambush. One of the workers brought back an overcoat worn by one of the Black and Tans, which had a bullet hole through it. The jacket was left hanging in the engine room. Shortly after the Black and Tans passed and they started to raid the creamery. This was done on regular occasions. The one room that they didn't raid was the engine room which was very lucky as they would have found the jacket.

If they had found this evidence, all the staff would have been shot. Afraid that they would find the jacket, Kevin's uncle ran from the creamery through the fields and away to safety. They didn't check the engine room and they never came across the jacket in the end. One of the workers who had brought the jacket continued working on his job which was making the butter boxes.

In the summer of 1918, the Lisheen Battalion decided to raid the Dreenamolane Mines, near Ballydehob. These mines contained barytes which is a mineral found in rock and was used as an explosive. These mines were raided because the explosives needed to be transported to Cork. The first raid was unsuccessful and on the second raid they got all the explosives in the Explosives Magazine. First they were brought to Skeaghanore and then taken on to a dump in Lisheen. A few days later they were collected and delivered to the creamery and packed into butter boxes and conveyed to Skibbereen Railway Station for transferring by train to Cork to the Brigade Headquarters in Cork City. These boxes could hold at least 100 sticks of explosives. The butter boxes were transported by horse and trap and the driver was Joe O'Regan. On his way to Skibbereen, Joe was stopped by the infamous Sergeant Mulhern, Royal Irish Constabulary, who was Senior Police Man in Skibbereen, and was in close harmony with the Black and Tans. He and another man asked for a lift in the horse and trap and they never suspected the butter boxes were containing bombs. Joe's companions on seeing Joe arriving into Skibbereen thought that he had been arrested when they saw the Sergeant alongside him on the horse and trap. The butter boxes were put on the train to Cork and were successfully transferred to Cork.

Kevin tells us of the most outstanding part played by his father Joe O'Regan and his comrade Barney O'Driscoll. The O'Regan family exported large quantities of butter from their creamery to Wales. Joe and Barney spotting an obvious opportunity, made contact with a man in Cardiff who was willing to supply arms for cash, so they chartered a 200 ton vessel under the guise of exporting 180 tons of butter. After much debate and planning they decided to ask Willie Wood Wolfe, a mutual acquaintance to accompany them on the trip as he would be a perfect cover for the operation, as he was a Unionist, a Freemason and a Protestant with all the right contacts to avoid suspicion.

The butter was loaded at Reenadoona pier and the trio set off for Wales. The butter was unloaded, but unfortunately the coal arrived before the arms, the reverse was the plan, so they had to wait. When the guns and ammunition arrived, the rifles were wrapped in canvas in bundles of 10 and the ammunition was in boxes, in all there were 160 rifles and 4,000 rounds of ammunition plus some small arms. A few sheets of half round steel plate was placed over the arsenal to prevent any damage and then the coal was loaded, and the intrepid sailors headed for home. The next hurdle was the Customs at Queenstown, but any fears they entertained were proved groundless, because just as they berthed at Queenstown for custom clearance, Willie Wood Wolfe gave the very clandestine Freemason sign to the Chief Customs Officer, the sign was reciprocated, in fact both men were members of the same lodge. Light refreshments were served, the papers were signed, and the Mariners headed for Dear Old Skibbereen. Joe and Barney were scarcely able to contain the good luck, so with full throttle they were soon at Baltimore and up the Ilen River to Reenadoona pier, to unload what must have been the first successful importation of illegal arms to Ireland. As soon as the coal was unloaded, the Lisheen Company alerted by Bernard O'Regan took the Arsenal into safe custody. Some of the rifles were used with devastation at Kilmichael and Crossbarry.

In early Nineteen Seventy, Fin O'Driscoll, son of the veteran, Barney, was in Hospital in Cork and was informed by a nurse that the famous general Tom Barry was in the next ward to him, and while Fin had known Tom in his youth through his father, he asked the nurse to inquire from Barry, if it would be in order for him to visit. The nurse came back immediately, saying it would be a personal insult if a son of Barney O'Driscoll had to seek an interview with him, on the contrary, Tom Barry would be honoured to speak with a son of Barney O'Driscoll. During the course of the conversation, the importation came up, and Tom told Fin, that he still had a few revolvers that were brought in through Reenadoona pier.

Documented piece from Mrs. Peggy Hayes

Mrs. Peggy Hayes who lives in Laherathanavally, Aughadown, Skibbereen gave us the following story regarding her father Jack Tom O'Driscoll.

Lisheen Company was formed during September 1917 by William Crowley. Jack Tom O'Driscoll was a member. The services of two officers from Skibbereen Company were obtained for training purposes. The company first paraded at the Manchester Martyrs Parade in November 1917 in Skibbereen. In December 1917 the company paraded in Skibbereen and was inspected by Eamonn De Valera. In 1918 a section of the company was detailed for the manufacture of bombs at company headquarters at O'Regan's creamery. On the night of March 30th 1918 an inspection was carried out by Charlie Hurley, Vice Commandant of Bandon Battalion with Liam Deasy and they came to the conclusion that Ballydehob barracks was vulnerable. A mine and canisters were made but when they arrived at the barracks they found that they were evacuated. By night Liam Deasy, Charlie Hurley, Maurice Donegan and Con Lehane stayed at the home of Jack Tom O'Driscoll. This is referred to in Liam Deasy's book "Towards Ireland Free". It was important that they would not be seen in the area so they had breakfast before 5.00 am and left.

One night Jack Tom and his parents were in bed when a loud knock came to the door. He arose to find the Black and Tans there with a gun. They had been informed that he was hiding a motorbike used for dispatch. A gun was held to his head while the out houses were searched, but luckily for him they did not go into an upstairs barn full of oats where the motor bike was hidden.

As a family, Peggy is proud of a frame containing his IRA medals and badges that they have hanging in their sitting room with a photograph of him taken at Sam's Cross Commemorations in 1970 by the late Joe O'Regan.

Kevin O'Regan recalled the following story about the motorbike:

On one occasion Joe O'Regan decided to go out for a ride on Jack Tom's motor bike. As he was on the road at Church Cross where the football pitch is now, he spotted the Black and Tans at New Court corner heading in his direction and knew that if he was spotted on the motorbike he would be shot. He slowed down and got off the motorbike and let the bike slip down into the bog. The motor bike was never recovered and now probably lies deep beneath the football pitch in Church Cross.

At the end of the Civil War we had the emergence of two main political parties, which were the foundation of today's political system.

