

This project was completed by Matthew Draper.

### My Nanny and my Hero May Deasy (Hayes) – the Early Years

May Hayes (1898-1983) was married to James Deasy (1896-1983), and they lived in Shannonvale, Clonakilty. James Deasy hailed from a Dairy Farm, adjoining Killnagross, on the lands of the Mill owners, the Bennetts. May was a very unassuming person, who quietly and diligently guided her family through what we refer to as the “Years of the Troubles” in Ireland. Indeed, May and James both refused the post-war IRA pension, as in their opinion they had not fought for monetary reward, but for Irish Freedom. May was an early active member of Cumann na mBan. James was a local quarter master (storing arms in a former church tunnel, in the field on the other side of Kilnagross bridge, on the site of a former church.



May's parents Patrick Hayes (1859-1931) and Mary Anne McCarthy (1869-1948) met in Massachusetts, May was born in Massachusetts. The family returned in the early 1900's to Ahiohill to

inherit the family farm. In the picture are Patrick Hayes and Mary Anne McCarthy seated, with May Hayes 2nd from right.

Mary Anne McCarthy had a sister Nora McCarthy (1871-1931), seated on right.

All of the McCarthy's including Mary Anne's parents, John McCarthy and Ellen Carey can be found in Desertserges Graveyard.



May Hayes lived with her brother John Francis, and sisters Margaret (Peg), Mary Ann and Norah in the Hayes house, which was located on the site of the Knowles Bungalow in Shannonvale. May went to Knockskeagh National School, which was also attended by John “Flyer” Nyhan.



In her early years, Nanny (May) Hayes was actively involved the local “Mill” Hockey Team, and is third from Left in the photo (1924)

Indeed, May’s husband James Deasy also played, and is 2<sup>nd</sup> from Right in the back row



In this photo are May Hayes 2<sup>nd</sup> from Left back row, her brother Jack Hayes (1902-1978) 1<sup>st</sup> on right front row, William Tobin (1871-1955) Jack Hayes’s father-in-law 1<sup>st</sup> on right back row, Hannah Healy (1872-1952) Jack Hayes’s mother-in law, 1<sup>st</sup> on left back row, Jack Hayes’s wife Johanna Francis Tobin (1910-1983)

Jack Hayes was also very active in the Shannonvale Battalion, and was indeed shot in the thigh in askirmish with the Black

and Tans. Nanny May Hayes and friends in Cumann na mBan, dressed up Jack as a nurse, and smuggled him to hospital in Cork in an Ambulance for treatment. Indeed they were stopped by a patrol at the Viaduct and took their way through.

Nanny May Hayes recalled a nerve shattering raid by the Black and Tans in the Deasy Dairy, while she was visiting, and she had the good sense, to hide a revolver in the base of their Singer Sewing Machine, these were indeed dark and terrible days.



May Hayes met Leslie (Price) Barry, pictured, through their involvement in the very early days of Cumann na mBan. Leslie was a Director of Cumann na mBan, and went on to be Chairman and President of the Irish Red Cross. Leslie was also a founding member of the VHI. I do know that Nanny May Hayes travelled from Cork, with Leslie in a “Charabang” an open bus to an early Cumann na mBan

convention in Dublin. May Hayes’s was Leslie (Price) Barry’s best friend who went on to marry Commander Tom Barry. May Hayes was at their wedding, in the company of famous 1916 dignitaries, Countess Markiewitz, Eamonn DeValera, Michael Collins, Sean Hales, Harry Boland.

May and James Deasy, like many of their era found themselves on the Anti-Treaty side during the Civil War and were staunch supporters of Dev and Fianna Fail. Indeed they are my inspiration for my continued support of the Fianna Fail cause.



Neilus Cottar.  
2nd from right,  
front row

from West Cork to fight during the 1916 Rising, while his brother, Con, an IRA officer, had served time in prison and was wanted by the British forces in the Dunmanway region.

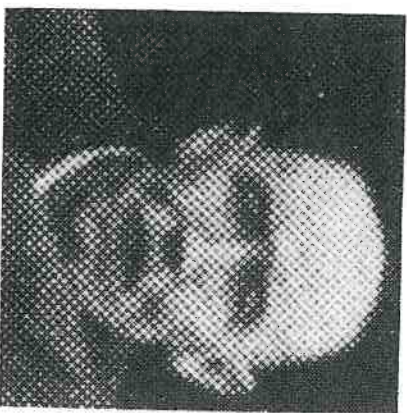
Sonny was an only child, christened Florence Patrick but given the nickname 'Sonny' to avoid confusion with his father. The Carey home in Main Street was often visited by Volunteers, who received a warm welcome. Sonny, an active sportsman, was particularly devoted to cycling and was on the Committee of the local Shamrock Cycling Club, as were his cousin, Con, and his friend, Ned Young. He was very serious about his duty as a Volunteer, and took time off from his job, as a labourer, for training. He was proud when he was chosen to bear arms at Kilmichael.

After the ambush, he, like his comrades, went on the run. He would take no part in the Civil War and, in later years, refused to even discuss it. He was unhappy about the treatment given to those who had risked their lives at Kilmichael and other West Cork actions.

He emigrated to America and worked in Brooklyn where he lived close to his Kilmichael brothers-in-arms, Tim Crowley and Sonny Dave Crowley. He came home occasionally, and finally moved back to the town, to the family house, in 1947. He died in Dunmanway in 1951.

## NEILUS COTTER

1891-1952



The planning of Kilmichael Ambush took place in Neilus's mother's home - the Collins, of Kilmadur - with Tom Barry present. On the day of the ambush, Neilus was a scout positioned in Tim Murray's lane, behind where the monument stands today.

He had been missing from home for a fortnight previously, presumed training and preparing.

After the ambush, he was delegated the dangerous and responsible task of quickly removing his dead and dying comrades to Buttiner's, Gortroe, where young Pat Deasy was attended to immediately. John Kelly went for the doctor and priest, while Tim O'Connell organised makeshift coffins from Bill Good's, Shanlaragh, to bury the bodies in Gortroe Bog.

During the next two days the very heavy thunder showers caused the boxes to sink in the bog, so on the Tuesday night after the ambush, Neilus and Tim lifted the boxes and placed them in coffins brought from Casey's, Inchigeelagh.

They brought the coffins to the top of Curraghdrinagh, where they were hidden in the brushwood. Neilus Cotter's family could see all this activity from their home across the glen.

On the following Thursday night late, under cover of darkness, Neilus and Tim, having organised horses and carts, brought the three bodies for burial at Castletown Kenneigh. Tom Barry paid for the coffins later, the price being £10.00 each.

The Cotters were natives of Curraghdrinagh. De Valera was a regular visitor to their household. Neilus was the eldest of eleven children. At the age of 21, he joined the Volunteers. He and his friends did their training by night in the GAA field in Johnstown, called The Gallows Ground. He learned boxing in Pigeon Hill, Macroom. He was a good entertainer and played the accordion and violin, perhaps following in the tradition of his grandmother, who could play the fiddle while standing on a rolling barrel.

From the ambush, he brought home a horn and pick-axe, and a wheel from the Crossley Tender, the vehicle from which the Auxiliaries had terrorised West Cork. Another of his proud possessions was the bicycle which Leslie Price, then chief organiser of Cumann na mBan, and later to be wife of Tom Barry, had left at his house.

He cut turf during the Emergency and, later, worked in Griffins Quarry for the Co. Council. He never married, although his mother had a cottage built for him, on the land, in the hope that he would settle down.

When he passed the site of the ambush, he always saluted the cross. He attended the Ceremonies on a regular basis and liked to talk of

times gone by. He remembered them as being traumatic times for himself and his comrades.

Neilus died in 1952, and is buried in Inchigeela Graveyard.

## **BATTY COUGHLAN** 1895-1951

The entry relating to Batty Coughlan in the Black and Tans diary read:

Coughlan, Bartholomew, Railway St., Dunmanway, Captain IRA. Arrested and released after hunger strike. In Mount Pleasant attack.

Before the 'troubles', Batty was a carpenter. He joined the Volunteers from 1917 - 1922. He fought courageously in several engagements, as well as at the ambush at Kilmichael.

He was arrested and interned at Crumlin Road Jail, Belfast. Afterwards, he served a year at Worrnwood Scrubs Prison, in London. While at the Scrubs, he staged a twelve day hunger strike.

In 1923, he emigrated to America, settling in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he married a Mary O'Brien, had six daughters and a son.

An employee of a Boston sugar company for twenty five years, he always maintained contact with old Kilmichael comrades. Sonny Dave Crowley, Tim Crowley and Sonny Carey also emigrated to America at the time. He is remembered as a gentle, family man. In 1947, he returned to Dunmanway to visit his mother whom he hadn't seen for 25 years. Four years later, he died of pneumonia in Cambridge, where his body rests today.

## **DENIS CRONIN** 1897-1966

Denis Cronin was the youngest of eight children born at Gurteenroe, Bantry into a farming family.

A great lover of sport, he became involved in the Volunteers through the G.A.A and joined the Bantry Battalion with his neighbours, the O'Driscoll brothers of Snave.

He was just 23 years old at the time of the ambush, and afterwards went 'on the run' with his friend and comrade-in-arms, Michael O'Driscoll. Fearing reprisals against his family, he stayed away from his home for several months. During this time, his sisters, at great risk to themselves, took him food and clothing whenever possible.

After the Civil War, he joined the Gardai and was stationed in Wexford and, later, in Charleville, Co. Cork. Married to Bridle Manning, a girl from a neighbouring Bantry townland, he was an outgoing, chatty man, who took great interest in world affairs.

After retirement, he worked as a security officer in Charleville. He died in Sarsfield Court Hospital, Cork, and is buried at Kilmacomogue Graveyard, Bantry, not far from his home.

## **'SONNY DAVE' CROWLEY** 1894-1971

Sonny Dave Crowley was born into a family whose heritage was such that it made his commitment to Irish freedom a natural obligation.

Sonny Dave's father, Old Dave, a dapper man who always wore a hard hat and carried a cane, was a Fenian who had been evicted in the 1800's from his farm at The Paddock, Enniskane. David - known all his life as 'Sonny Dave' - was born in 1894, one of a family of six children, four boys and two girls.

Story of Neilus Cotte, Curradkinagh  
Told by Matthew's Maternal grandmother,  
"Teresa Cahalana," from Aahakeera,  
Dunmanway. Teresa is the niece of  
Neilus Cotte and is very proud of her → JPTO  
Uncle.

Story of May Hayes and James Deasy, told by  
Matthew's Gran Aunt, Bernie Deasy, (Hodnett)  
from Shannon Vale, Clonakilty

Teresa can remember her Mother, Ann Cahalane  
(nee Götter) telling her that when it was  
war time, they used to have to hide under  
the table ~~(as)~~ in fear.