

# IRISH WAR OF INDEPENDENCE 1920-2020

## Veteran's relatives on the 28 November 1920 Kilmichael Ambush

*History Ireland* discussion of Peter Hart's claims in *The IRA and its Enemies* on an Auxiliary 'false surrender' and about ambush commander Tom Barry

*Relatives of IRA veterans*

**Maureen Deasy** - daughter of Liam Deasy

**Seán Kelleher** - son of Tom Kelleher

**Maura O'Donovan** - daughter of Pat O'Donovan

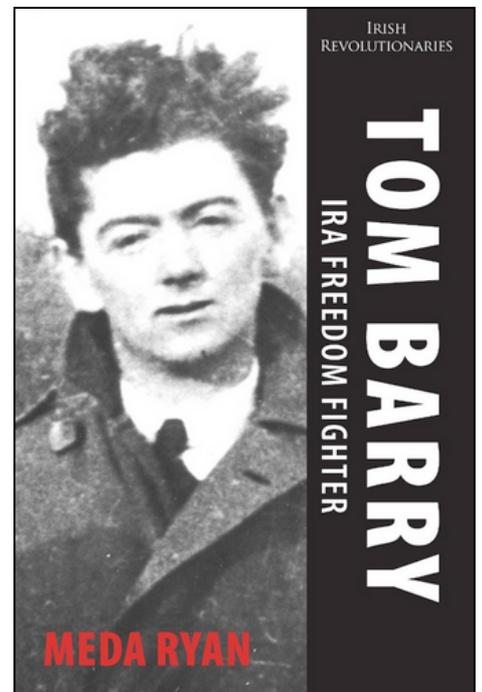
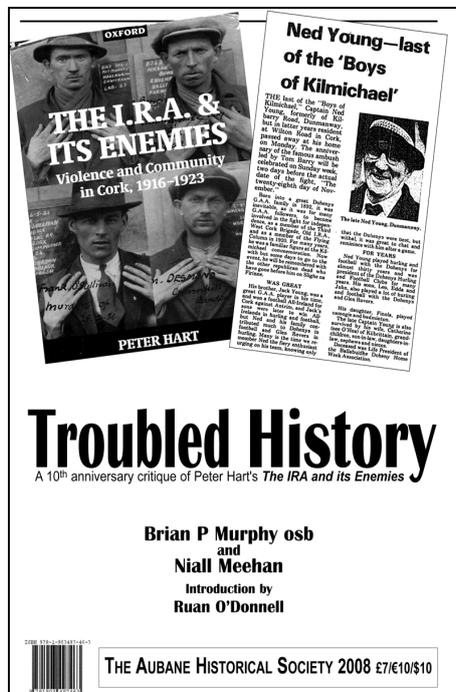
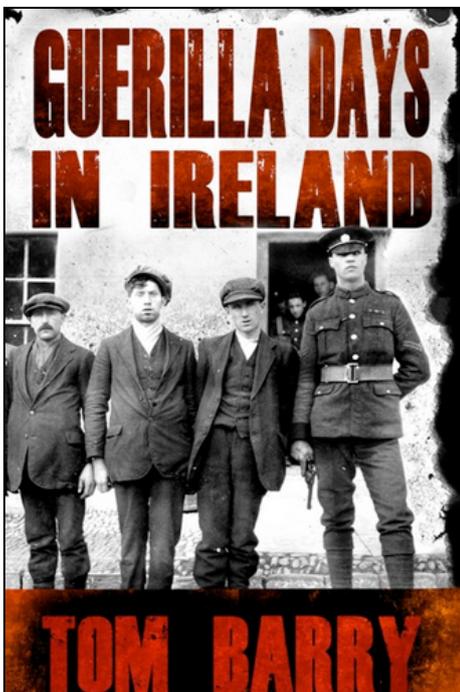
**John Young** - son of Ned Young

*plus historians*

**Níall Meehan**

**Eve Morrison**

**Pádraig Óg Ó Ruairc**



Compiled by

# THE AUBANE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# The Kilmichael Ambush of 28 November 1920

## A 2012 *History Ireland* discussion with historians, relatives of Kilmichael Ambush participants and of IRA veterans

Maureen Deasy (daughter of IRA veteran Liam Deasy, brother of Kilmichael Ambush casualty Pat Deasy); Sean Kelleher (son of IRA veteran Tom Kelleher); Maura O'Donovan (daughter of Kilmichael Ambush veteran Pat O'Donovan); Marion O'Driscoll (wife of solicitor Jim O'Driscoll); John Young (son of Kilmichael Ambush veteran Ned Young); plus historians Niall Meehan, Eve Morrison, Pádraig Óg Ó Ruairc

*Plus, two appendices, statement by John Young (son of Ned Young) and Sunday Times report of statement*

Review *History Ireland*, Issue 3 Volume 20 (May/June 2012)  
*Terror in Ireland 1916–1923*, David Fitzpatrick (ed.), (Lilliput Press/Trinity History Workshop, €15)

The provocative title of this book immediately challenges readers to think about what they consider terror to be, and what defines a terrorist. This volume, the fifth to be produced by the Trinity History Workshop, sets out to examine the role of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary terror in Ireland between the 1916 Rising and the Civil War. In his introduction to this collection of thirteen essays David Fitzpatrick argues that anyone who seeks to inflict terror on their opponents to achieve a political or military end is a terrorist. It can therefore be argued that all the forces involved in the Irish Revolution at some stage were guilty of committing acts of 'terrorism' or 'state terror'.

Brian Hanley's contribution, 'Terror in twentieth-century Ireland', acknowledges that the term 'terror' and its derivative 'terrorist' are usually problematic and pejorative. He succinctly and expertly analyses the use of these terms in modern Ireland, scrutinising recent interpretations of the period that have been put forward by historians and politicians. Fearghal McGarry covers similar ground in his excellent piece 'Violence and the Easter Rising'. But it is the nature of the guerrilla war that followed that has provoked some of the most heated historical debates of recent years.

The Bloody Sunday killings in Dublin are examined in 'English dogs or poor devils?' by Jane Leonard. Although Leonard also mentions the fatalities inflicted by the Crown forces, her main focus is on those killed by the IRA that morning. She argues that a number of the British army officers specifically targeted for assassination were not involved in intelligence work and uses a wealth of biographical detail to support her case. She shows that a number of those killed were officially employed in more mundane posts in the British army, including court martial, engineering and educational officers. This evidence is highly ambiguous, however, since intelligence officers frequently used these positions as cover for their own activities. It is interesting to compare Leonard's impressive research with the recently published work of J.B.E. Hittle, a US intelligence veteran and historian, which concluded that all but two of the officers shot on Bloody Sunday were connected with British intelligence.

Eunan O'Halpin also analyses the events of Bloody Sunday in 'Counting terror: Bloody Sunday and the dead of the Irish Revolution'. O'Halpin examines the deaths of civilians and members of the IRA who were killed the same day by Crown forces. Using information and statistics from his forthcoming *The dead of the Irish Revolution*, he puts all the deaths of Bloody Sunday into context, showing that the Dublin killings were a unique event in the War of Independence. O'Halpin provides some very interesting statistics on the nature of violence in Ireland between 1917 and 1921, including a

fascinating breakdown of the number of military and civilian deaths that occurred during the conflict.

The book is dedicated to the late Peter Hart and addresses some of the most controversial and important aspects of his work, including the Kilmichael ambush, the execution of alleged spies by the IRA's West Cork Brigade and IRA activity in England. Eve Morrison's chapter, 'Kilmichael revisited', re-examines the now famous (infamous?) Kilmichael ambush. Morrison introduces new material to the debate, quoting from privately held tape-recorded interviews of Kilmichael veterans conducted by Fr Chisholm in 1969. She also brings her extensive knowledge of the Bureau of Military History (BMH) to bear.

Morrison's chapter cannot, however, be said to have demolished Tom Barry's account of the ambush. Some of the eyewitness testimony quoted by her, including Ned Young's interview with Fr Chisholm (p. 168) and Tim Keohane's BMH statement (p. 167), indicates that Barry and some of his men did believe that members of the Auxiliary patrol killed at Kilmichael had used a false surrender tactic.

Given the conflicting testimony of Kilmichael veterans and the fighting conditions involved, a definitive account of the ambush will probably never be written. In recent years the Kilmichael controversy has grown to become a wider debate about historiography. Unfortunately, Morrison fails to address the serious questions regarding Hart's methodology, and in particular his claim to have interviewed an unnamed Kilmichael veteran at a time when all known participants in the ambush were dead.

The controversial topic of the execution of alleged spies and informers in West Cork is investigated by Thomas Earls Fitzgerald, who makes very good use of a wide range of sources, including BMH accounts, press and police reports, to examine each case in detail. Whilst he detects that some members of the IRA in Bandon were hostile towards Protestants, he concludes that those executed by the IRA were usually killed because they were under suspicion and not simply because of their religious profession. Gerard Noonan's impressive 'Republican terrorism in Britain 1920–1923' looks at a very important aspect of the Irish conflict that has been neglected for too long by historians.

Although academic in content, the essays are very clearly written and easily accessible. In summary, this book is a fine collection, comprising some excellent research, which will be enjoyed by both scholars and casual readers. *Terror in Ireland* certainly lives up to the claim made on its back cover that 'all those interested in the Irish Revolution will find both provocation and enlightenment in this work'.

**Pádraig Óg Ó Ruairc**

*Letters in response follow*

### From Eve Morrison

*History Ireland*, Issue 5 Volume 20 (Sept/Oct 2012)

In his review of *Terror in Ireland* (HI 20.3, May/June 2012) Pádraig Óg Ó Ruairc maintains that my chapter about the Kilmichael ambush failed to address the ‘wider debate about historiography’ and the ‘serious questions regarding Hart’s methodology, and in particular his claim to have interviewed an unnamed Kilmichael veteran at a time when all known participants in the ambush were dead’.

This is not true. I named all of Hart’s interviewees except one, an unidentified scout. Hart’s critics have insinuated that, as all ‘known participants’ in the ambush were dead by the dates he gave for one of his interviews, he must have fabricated the evidence. The real problem, however, was not Hart’s methodology but the assumption that all the Kilmichael participants had been identified. My chapter identified three previously unknown participants (Michael O’Dwyer, Tim Keohane and Cornelius Kelleher) whose names have come to light since this accusation was made. Michael O’Dwyer was named as a Kilmichael participant by Barry himself. Keohane’s presence at the ambush was verified by his company captain, and he was recommended to the Bureau of Military History (BMH) as a credible interviewee by Liam Deasy and Dan Holland, two former Cork III Brigade officers. Holland and Deasy were also members of the local Old IRA committee in West Cork who verified military service pension applications. Kelleher was a dispatch carrier who made an unsuccessful attempt to reach the ambush. The obvious significance of Kelleher’s testimony is not that he might have taken part in the ambush but simply that, if one previously unknown dispatch carrier was sent to the ambush site, it is perfectly possible that others could have been there as well. There is no definitive list of Kilmichael veterans, and no way of establishing when the last one died. There could be others yet.

Ó Ruairc also suggests that the testimonies of Ned Young and Tim Keohane support Barry’s version of events. This is not so. None of the interviews used by Hart or myself—apart from one article by Stephen O’Neill—do. It was only after considerable coaxing by Father Chisholm that Young would even discuss the circumstances surrounding the decision to execute all the Auxiliaries rather than take prisoners. Eventually Young would only confirm that he was told the ‘false surrender’ story after the ambush but made clear that he had not witnessed it nor heard any cries of surrender himself. Keohane’s BMH account says nothing about a false surrender. He states that ‘some’ of the Auxiliaries threw down their rifles. This is confirmed by Jack Hennessey’s statement. Keohane says this was in response to Barry’s call for them to surrender, but that Volunteers from no. 2 section were again fired on as they moved onto the road (Hennessey and John Lordan were wounded by this fire). This might have been an attempt by some—not all—of the Auxiliaries to surrender. Alternatively, one or more of the Auxiliaries might simply have thrown down their rifles because they were out of ammunition. Neither Keohane nor Hennessey suggest that there was anything ‘false’ or devious about it.

Keohane also states that the three Volunteer fatalities—Michael McCarthy, Jim O’Sullivan and Pat Deasy—had been killed or fatally wounded before this incident happened. This explicitly contradicts Barry’s false surrender story, because Barry maintained that some or all of these Volunteers lost their lives because they stood up.

Finally, there is James ‘Spud’ Murphy, who fought right beside Barry. Of all the Kilmichael accounts, his is the one that should confirm Barry’s. Yet Murphy says only that they got down on their knees and fired on the Auxiliaries at the second lorry until all were dead, apart from one who escaped. This, in a nutshell, is what the evidence collectively suggests occurred. As I said in my article, evidence also suggests that—throughout the ambush—some Auxiliaries attempted to, or did, surrender. None of those surrenders were accepted.

Ó Ruairc is right to say that we will probably never know exactly what happened at Kilmichael, nor the exact circumstances informing

Barry’s decision not to take prisoners. However, we can now say with assurance that virtually every other Volunteer who went on record about Kilmichael did not accept various elements of Barry’s story. Their accounts are supported by the available documentary evidence.

Regardless of whether or not one agrees with the moral and ethical conclusions Hart drew about Barry, his research into the Kilmichael ambush has been broadly vindicated.

EVE MORRISON

### From Sean Kelleher (son of Tom Kelleher)

*History Ireland*, Issue 5 Volume 20 (Sept/Oct 2012)

Pádraig Óg Ó Ruairc in his review of *Terror in Ireland 1916-1923* (HI 20.3, May/June 2012) states that Eve Morrison in her chapter ‘Kilmichael revisited’, ‘fails to address the serious questions regarding Peter Hart’s methodology’. His methodology and conclusions are fraught with problems and so two are those of Eve Morrison. I was disturbed by her statement in the concluding part of her chapter when she recorded that Meda Ryan and others ‘have taken sides in a long-standing disagreement between veterans of the West Cork flying column’.

There was no disagreement among Kilmichael ambush veterans concerning the fact that the Auxiliaries falsified their surrender call, and as a result forfeited their right to be accepted as prisoners. Though the men had differing view-points and described the horridness of the fighting in diverse ways, their conclusion was always similar to Jack Hennessey’s description (BMH) when he responded to Barry’s cease-fire whistle, following the surrender call:

I heard the three blasts and got up from my position, shouting “hands up”. At the same time one of the Auxies about five yards from me drew his revolver. He had thrown down his rifle.

Here Hennessey (in no. 2 section beside Volunteers who were killed) is describing the false surrender as he saw it happen, not the misinterpretation that Eve Morrison gives it. Her incredible speculative excuse is that ‘the Auxiliary might have thrown down his rifle because it was out of ammunition’.

Morrison strives to back up Peter Hart’s flawed arguments when she produces the text of participants’ interviews conducted by Fr Chisholm, which Hart used. The transcripts show a few participants describing some traumatic fighting events. However, it is the words that Fr Chisholm puts into the mouths of the men that are most striking. Peter Hart has used part of Chisholm’s sentences to reinforce his statements. Of particular note is Hart’s insistence over the years that he interviewed scout AF (anonymous) on 19 November 1989. Yet all participants were dead by this date—the last was Ned Young (unwell for some years due to a stroke) who died on 13 November 1989. Eve Morrison merely notes that Hart just ‘muddled a handful of citations’. Morrison mentions, but ignores section commander Stephen O’Neill’s ambush account (Kerryman, 1937). O’Neill confirms the false surrender. Ignored also is Auxiliary commander Brig. Crozier’s account of a false surrender, plus the many contemporary writers such as Piaras Beaslai and Ernie O’Malley who wrote of the false surrender.

An important point for people in West Cork is confirmed by Morrison, when she states that Fr Chisholm ‘never credited the false surrender story’. In addition, she states that he ‘provided Hart with much of his evidence’. It is well known in this region that Fr Chisholm activated some animosity between Kilmichael ambush survivors when working on Liam Deasy’s book, *Towards Ireland Free*. Peter Hart endeavoured to build on this. However, any temporary ill-feeling dissipated as the bond the men had for one another was too strong.

My father was Tom Kelleher of the 3rd West Cork Brigade flying column. Great comradeship existed among the men of the column who were like brothers, and had high regard for Tom Barry as their commander. I knew several of these men over the years and if alive

today they would soon put an end to this fictitious speculation, which should end now. Many of the survivors of the West Cork Brigade met over the years at annual commemoration ceremonies, funerals and historical outings. When a discussion arose on the Kilmichael ambush, it often centred on the Auxiliaries' bogus surrender call, which resulted in the fatal wounding of three Volunteers. No one should besmirch the memory of such a great leader as Tom Barry and his comrades who sacrificed and endured so much in the pursuit of justice and freedom for the Irish people.

SEAN KELLEHER

#### From Eve Morrison

*History Ireland*, Issue 6 Volume 20 (Nov/Dec 2012)

I refer to Seán Kelleher's letter (HI, Sept./Oct. 2012) about my chapter on Kilmichael in David Fitzpatrick's (ed.) *Terror in Ireland*. Mr Kelleher argues that Jack Hennessy's Bureau of Military History (BMH) statement contains an account of a false surrender by the Auxiliaries, while simultaneously asserting that such surrender caused the 'fatal wounding of three Volunteers'. Mr Kelleher is simply misreading the evidence he cites. Readers can now access Hennessy's statement for themselves on-line here: <http://www.Bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/reels/bmh/BMH.WS1234.pdf>.

Hennessy says that 'Vice Comdt McCarthy had got a bullet through his head and lay dead' before the incident which Mr Kelleher wrongly insists was the 'false surrender'. Furthermore, nowhere does Hennessy attribute the flying column's fatalities to foul play by the Auxiliaries. Nor did Father Chisholm put 'words into the mouths of the men'. It was Jack O'Sullivan who brought up the subject of Michael McCarthy's bravery as a soldier in his interview with Father Chisholm, and who insisted that it was wrong to say that McCarthy stood up during the ambush.

It is equally absurd to blame Father Chisholm for creating discord among West Cork veterans. There is documentary evidence that from the mid-1930s onwards there was dissension among veterans of the West Cork Brigade. Mr Kelleher's own father, for example, was a member of an Old IRA veterans' organisation founded by Tom Barry as a rival to the existing West Cork body headed by Liam Deasy and Flor Begley. Deasy's papers also show that there was dissatisfaction with Tom Barry's memoir *Guerilla days in Ireland* (published in 1949) long before the rows that followed the publication of Liam Deasy's *Towards Ireland free* in 1974. This alternative version of the Kilmichael ambush, which I discussed in my chapter, was given by Kilmichael veterans to the BMH and has always existed locally. As I noted, Liam Deasy's nephew, Liam Deasy (whose uncle Pat Deasy was killed in the ambush), never accepted the 'false surrender' story.

In recent years local historians, history groups and relatives of Kilmichael veterans have become more active in promoting an alternative version of events. In 2010 the Kilmichael Historical Society Journal published an account of the Kilmichael ambush—similar to the one from Paddy O'Brien reproduced in *Towards Ireland free*—that did not include the false surrender. This article also gives a different sequence of the IRA deaths as a result of the ambush, as does a monument erected by the society in 2007 at Buttimer's farmhouse, where the IRA casualties were taken after the ambush: 'Jim O'Sullivan died during the ambush. Michael McCarthy died on the journey here. Pat Deasy passed away at Buttimer's at 10pm.'

At the monument's unveiling, local historian Seán Crowley remarked that the society's research into the sequence of their deaths was in line with the 'very first report on the ambush, written by Tom Barry himself'. This was a reference to the 'Rebel Commandant's Report' reproduced in the British Army history *Record of the rebellion in Ireland*, which critics of Peter Hart argue (wrongly) is a forgery. In his speech, Mr Crowley paid tribute to McCarthy, O'Sullivan and Deasy: 'Let us dwell briefly and thoughtfully on the three victims of this engagement, mindful too of the victims on the other side'. Mr

Crowley's reflections are no less patriotic than Mr Kelleher's, but they are more humane:

'There is an old saying that the brave and courageous soldier hates war, in that it causes great trauma, loss and hurt to the innocent as well as the combatants. The Irish War of Independence was no exception and the Kilmichael ambush, which was one of the most important engagements in the struggle, is a prime example of this.'

Obviously, there are people in West Cork who are more prepared than Mr Kelleher to accept the reality of war and, in so doing, acknowledge the true extent of the sacrifice made by the men he admires.

EVE MORRISON

#### From John Young (son of Ned Young)

*History Ireland*, Issue 6 Volume 20 (Nov/Dec 2012)

I am the son of Ned Young, the last surviving veteran of the 28 November 1920 Kilmichael ambush. Eve Morrison's chapter on the ambush in David Fitzpatrick's *Terror in Ireland 1916–1923* gives rise to serious questions concerning Peter Hart's *The IRA and its enemies* (1998). Morrison's response to Niall Meehan's review of the book (at <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1303>) concerns me directly, as does her false claim that Hart interviewed my father.

Further serious issues arise for Fr John Chisholm. He allowed Hart (and for thirteen years afterwards no other historian) access to taped interviews with War of Independence veterans. These were obtained by Fr Chisholm as research for Liam Deasy's 1973 memoir, *Toward Ireland free*, which Fr Chisholm edited. Hart reported the veterans anonymously. Hart also claimed to have personally interviewed two additional anonymous veterans of the ambush in 1988–9, when only one, my father Ned, was alive. My father, however, suffered a debilitating stroke late in 1986 and was incapable of giving an interview at the time Hart claimed to have been conducting them.

There is more to discuss concerning my father. Hart reported three anonymous ambush veterans discussing Kilmichael on Fr Chisholm's tapes. We now know that there were only two and that one of them was Ned Young, my father. Meehan pointed out these two new anomalies in his review. Morrison ignored them. Morrison in addition misreported a telephone conversation with me in her response to Meehan. I refute emphatically Morrison's assertions, in a statement available on [spinwatch.org](http://spinwatch.org).

Finally, I would like to address Fr Chisholm's role. I wrote to him in 2008 and asked whether he possessed a recording of my father. He replied that he did not, though he remembered my father 'with affection as a man of real character'. Fr Chisholm's statement was not accurate because he gave such a taped interview with my father to Eve Morrison in 2011. I join Liam Deasy's eldest daughter, Maureen Deasy (who typed her father's manuscript), in calling for all of the tapes (without exception) to be placed in a public archive so that all researchers, not a select few, may listen to them. I demand a copy of my father's taped interview, in full.

Peter Hart has done more damage to the profession of history than almost any other revisionist historian. Historians such as Morrison and Fitzpatrick are free to continue to defend him as they see fit. The ensuing controversy when they do so will expose to students of Irish history a pathway they should not take. Hart's attempt to instil retrospective dissension between veterans has failed, as has his attempt to portray the War of Independence as sectarian in intent and practice.

JOHN YOUNG

#### From Peter Connolly

*History Ireland*, Issue 6 Volume 20 (Nov/Dec 2012)

I see that the last issue of HI had two more letters on the subject of the Kilmichael ambush [... and two more in this issue!]. I wonder whether any other subject has occupied more space in the letters pages over the years? Surely the issue of the 'false surrender' can be laid to rest? I appreciate that it is not the facts of the event but rather the ideological

differences between adherents of the differing interpretations that lie behind the bitter arguments.

Nonetheless, is it necessary to make so much of this particular point? Frankly, it is quite conceivable that in the chaos and din of battle some Auxiliaries tried to surrender whilst others fought on unaware. Can anyone doubt that Barry was ruthless enough to execute surrendered men or that there were Auxiliaries who would have taken advantage of any opportunity that arose from a perceived surrender? So either is plausible but personally I consider the false surrender the less likely. By the time this is alleged to have happened the first lorry-load of Auxiliaries were dead or immobilised, so the remaining nine men (probably rather fewer by that stage) would have been surrounded on all sides by 30 to 40 IRA men. What possible advantage would have been gained by using a false surrender? Their lorry was unusable and they were hardly likely to be able to break through and get away. Their only alternatives were to fight on until they could do so no longer or to surrender. As experienced soldiers they would instinctively have known that, whatever chance of survival they might have in surrendering, they would have none if they abused that option.

Whatever the truth of the matter, it is a rather unimportant side issue. The main issue is that Barry planned and led a brilliant guerilla attack that achieved all its objectives. It was a significant psychological and propaganda victory even if its purely military consequences were limited. That there was another way to handle the matter was shown by the Ballinalee ambush on 2 February 1921, when Seán MacEoin successfully attacked two lorries with seventeen Auxiliaries aboard. The latter surrendered when they ran out of ammunition. MacEoin treated them well and, having disarmed them, allowed the survivors and their dead to leave in one lorry. Both ambushes were successful but the latter clearly looks better in hindsight. I have no idea whether Barry, at a much later date, in attempting to mitigate the savagery of Kilmichael, embellished some incident to justify the slaughter. Surely the truth can never be known for sure and this will remain open to interpretation.

PETER CONNOLLY

#### From Sean Kelleher (son of Tom Kelleher)

Letters Extra: <https://www.historyireland.com/letters-extra/peter-hart-etc/>

Eve Morrison in (HI 20.6, Nov./Dec. 2012) states that I am ‘misreading’ Jack Hennessy’s Bureau of Military History statement. I suggest it is she who is ‘misreading’ Hennessy. While Hennessy does not put the name ‘a false surrender’ on what he witnessed at Kilmichael on that day he actually describes one. Hennessy wrote: ‘Vice Comdt. McCarthy had got a bullet through the head and lay dead’. The breach of Hennessy’s rifle got fouled with ‘blood dripping’ from his forehead; he dropped his own rifle, took up McCarthy’s and continued to fight. He, like other Volunteers responded to Barry’s ‘three blasts’ whistle-indicator to cease firing following the surrender call. Hennessy says:

I heard the three blasts and got up from my position, shouting “hands up”. At the same time one of the Auxies about five yards from me drew his revolver. He had thrown down his rifle.

It was during this period that two volunteers were fatally wounded. (I inadvertently wrote three in my previous letter.) At the opening of the ambush Barry blew the whistle—a signal for specific volunteers to commence; this whistle was again an indicator to cease firing—an acknowledgement that the surrender was accepted.

Like Peter Hart, Ms Morrison believes that the ‘Rebel Commandant’s report’ was not a forgery but was written by Tom Barry. I note that Meda Ryan in her biography of Tom Barry (2003) analyzed this report in detail, and it is obvious Barry would not have written it. But the clincher is the final sentence in the PS: ‘...P. Deasy was killed by a revolver bullet from one of the enemy whom he thought dead’. Barry would not have written that. Pat Deasy was seriously wounded following the false surrender and died some hours later.

Since that November day it has been known in West Cork that volunteers were fatally wounded following a false surrender. A

controversy arose because Peter Hart located a document in the ‘Rebel Commandant’s report’, alleged to have been written by Tom Barry. It did not mention a false surrender. Hart endeavoured, in his book (1998), to prove there was none. Meda Ryan (2003) pointed out that Hart had interviewed an anonymous scout on 19 November 1989, and that the last known Kilmichael ambush survivor Ned Young died on 13 November 1989. During a Q & A session at a UCC conference I asked Peter Hart to disclose the name of this Kilmichael ambush interviewee. Before a large audience he hedged, did what he could to bluff. I put it plainly to him that he was lying, and that he did not locate any participant who would deny the false surrender story. Despite being asked on numerous occasions by historians over the years, he did not answer that question. In a TG4 documentary Scéal Tom Barry (Dir. Gerry O’Callaghan, 2011) Hart said:

...it’s possible that this was some sort of a hoax and he was a fantasist, but that seems extremely unlikely.

Eve Morrison is now defending Peter Hart’s flawed narrative of the Kilmichael ambush, which includes disputing Tom Barry’s and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade flying column’s actions on that day. Ms Morrison wrote that I am not ‘prepared [like others]...to accept the reality of war and...acknowledge the true extent of the sacrifice made by the men’. Let me assure Ms Morrison that I accept the reality of war and fully understand the sacrifices made by the men of the flying column. Is she not aware of the involvement of my father, Tom Kelleher, in many of the engagements carried out by members of the 3<sup>rd</sup> West Cork Brigade?  
SEAN KELLEHER

#### From Niall Meehan

Letters Extra: <https://www.historyireland.com/letters-extra/peter-hart-etc/>

In paragraph two of Eve Morrison’s letter on the November 1920 Kilmichael ambush (HI 20.6, Nov./Dec. 2012) IRA volunteer Michael McCarthy died during the fight. Yet, in paragraph three he was alive afterwards.

Replying to Seán Kelleher (HI 20.4, July/Aug. 2012), Morrison cited Kilmichael veteran Jack Hennessy’s Bureau of Military History statement that McCarthy ‘lay dead’ prior to a British false surrender (that Morrison says never happened). Ambush testimony from veteran Jack O’Sullivan and commander Tom Barry supports this sequencing of McCarthy’s death.

Most veterans reported that McCarthy and Jim O’Sullivan were killed during the engagement and that a wounded Pat Deasy died some hours later. The veterans include Tom Barry, Jack Hennessy, James Murphy, Michael O’Driscoll, Ned Young and Stephen O’Neill. Here, Morrison is on sure ground.

Peter Hart in *The IRA and its Enemies* mistakenly presented as Tom Barry’s view that all three IRA fatalities resulted from the British Auxiliaries’ false surrender. He and Morrison use this misreading to undermine Barry’s account of the fight, thus weakening Barry’s false surrender narrative in *Guerilla Days in Ireland*. In fact, Barry consistently identified two resulting fatalities, Jim O’Sullivan and Pat Deasy.

Despite its clear contradiction with the veteran evidence cited above, Morrison simultaneously supports the view of veteran Patrick O’Brien, echoed in a recent commentary, that McCarthy was wounded and died soon after the ambush. This second version of McCarthy’s demise also strengthens Hart’s misinterpretation of Barry, and it reinforces Hart’s championing of a disputed ‘Rebel Commandant’s report’ in British archives. That document reported, ‘P. Deasy was killed by a revolver bullet from one of the enemy he thought dead’ and that two volunteers ‘subsequently died of wounds’. It does not mention a false surrender.

Morrison simultaneously presents conflicting versions of McCarthy’s death without comment because she subordinates evidence to vindication of Hart. The publisher claimed Morrison’s Kilmichael chapter in *Terror in Ireland 1916-1923* accomplished such vindication. In my opinion her contribution clarified problems with Hart’s methods. I explain this in my review and in a response to criticism from Morrison

([gcd.academia.edu/NiallMeehan](http://gcd.academia.edu/NiallMeehan)).

Besides misreading Barry, Hart's methods included claiming access to anonymous interview testimony from five Kilmichael veterans: his two and three from Fr John Chisholm. In fact, Hart appears to have accessed just two (Ned Young and Jack O'Sullivan on the 'Chisholm tapes'). In response to my review Morrison reported being on the trail of a Kilmichael 'scout', allegedly interviewed by Hart six days after the last known ambush veteran died. Should Morrison discover him that will make three. However, his evidential value is doubtful. According to Morrison in *Terror*, Hart 'muddled' citations by attributing to the 'scout' tape-recorded words said by Jack O'Sullivan. Is this a muddled attribution or a muddled existence? In addition, in Hart's 1993 PhD thesis this same historical actor was not the unarmed 'scout' he mysteriously became in Hart's 1998 book.

A reason the Kilmichael false surrender is still discussed (see Peter Connolly's letter in HI 20.6, Nov./Dec.) is therefore because Peter Hart used questionable means to undermine it. These means were first noted in Meda Ryan's *Tom Barry IRA Freedom Fighter* (echoed in John Young's letter in the last HI). Irish Independence forces appeared as ethnically inflamed caricatures in Hart's research. The inaccurate portrayal of Tom Barry as a lying 'political serial killer' fleshed out the portrayal. It links this discussion with that of John Regan and David Fitzpatrick on Hart's equally problematic IRA sectarianism allegations (HI 20.1, Jan./Feb. 2012 to HI 20.6, Nov./Dec. 2012).

This debate long ago moved beyond determining the precise conclusion of a bloody battle in the November twilight of 1920. I am sure it will revive again when future commentators ponder why the Irish historical profession chose to remain silent about Hart's distortion of ethical standards, and whether a systemic bias in favour of Hart's conclusions facilitated such indifference.

NIALL MEEHAN

#### From Eve Morrison

Letters Extra: <https://www.historyireland.com/letters-extra/peter-hart-etc/>

I write further to John Young's letter (HI 20.6, Nov./Dec. 2012). In a statement dated 22 August 2012, Mr Young (one of the children of Kilmichael veteran Ned Young) takes 'very strong exception' to the account of our telephone conversation of 4 July 2012 that I gave in my response in Reviews in History to Niall Meehan's long-winded review of *Terror* in Ireland.

I fully stand over my understanding of our 15-minute conversation (as recorded on my phone bill). As I already told Justine McCarthy of the *Sunday Times*, when I rang Mr Young I gave him my name and telephone number. I also told him I was an historian, and explained that I wanted to explore the veracity of a controversial claim that Peter Hart had lied about interviewing his father Ned. Mr Young does not recall confirming to me that Ned Young was mentally sound and could speak clearly on the dates Hart gave for his interview with him, whereas my notes indicate that Mr Young did do so. I asked Mr Young specifically if he was willing to go on record on this point, and he said yes. There was nothing confusing or ambiguous about our conversation, and further enquiries gave me no reason to doubt that Ned Young was well enough to be interviewed in the summer of 1988. John Young asserts that his father suffered a stroke in late 1986, but this evidently did not stop Ned Young participating in public events. In August 1987, for instance, the *Southern Star* published a photograph of Ned Young at Ballabuidhé (a local Dunmanway festival). In August 1988 [*see note below*] the newspaper noted that he again attended the festival's opening ceremony. Peter Hart had conducted his second interview with him several weeks earlier, in June.

Mr Young also maintains that the fact that the late Jim O'Driscoll SC, witnessed his signature on his 2007 affidavit imputes O'Driscoll's support for the affidavit's contention that Hart could not have interviewed Ned Young. Niall Meehan and others have styled O'Driscoll as one of the 'signatories to the affidavit'. This is profoundly misleading. As solicitor Michael Malone, also a witness to the 2007

affidavit, explained to me, a 'witness to signature' merely verifies the identity and signature of the person making a statement, and does not imply any knowledge of or view on the contents of such a document. This was certainly so for Jim O'Driscoll. His widow Marion informed me that, contrary to what is being claimed, her late husband was clear that Hart did interview Ned Young, who was one of several IRA veterans O'Driscoll helped Hart to contact. She also confirmed that her husband had no reservations about Hart's work, and in fact refused to join in attacks on Hart when approached to do so.

EVE MORRISON

\* [*Eve Morrison has asked HI to make the following correction. A Southern Star report she cited as being published in August 1988 was in fact dated August 1986. The article is misdated as '9 August 1988' by the Irish Newspaper Archives.*]

#### From Maura O'Donovan (daughter of Pat O'Donovan)

Letters Extra: <https://www.historyireland.com/letters-extra/peter-hart-etc/>

I am saddened that a question has arisen again regarding the false surrender at the Kilmichael ambush on 28 November 1920. Eve Morrison in her letter (HI 20.6, Nov./Dec. 2012) has written that 'relatives of Kilmichael veterans have become more active in promoting an alternative version of event'.

My father Pat O'Donovan was a volunteer in Tom Barry's flying column and fought in section two, where volunteers were fatally wounded that day due to the deceitful actions of the Auxiliaries. He always said that following acceptance of surrender, the Auxiliaries took up and activated revolvers after they had thrown down their rifles. Tom Barry and the men who fought at Kilmichael have been wronged over recent years, and Peter Hart in his writing has created much annoyance for many family members of these men.

These men suffered much in their fight for independence. The agony that my father and 'the boys' in direct line of fire (section two) had to endure, on that freezing November day, and their account of the Auxiliaries' false surrender, should be accepted. Otherwise future generations will continue to speculate. The result will be like Peter Hart's story—distorted.

My mother died in December 2010. She was the last link to 'The Boys of Kilmichael'. She was lucid to the end and whenever asked, would recall her husband's (my father's) account and that of the other volunteers and the trauma they had to endure, due to the Auxiliaries' having accepted a surrender and then resuming action with revolvers.

My father participated in many engagements with the flying column. Between engagements he lived in a dugout in a field near his home. In later years he often returned to the ambush site, and with Fr O'Brien, he said the rosary for his comrades who were killed that day. He was the fourth last Kilmichael veteran. He died in 1981.

MAURA O'DONOVAN

#### From Maureen Deasy (daughter of Liam Deasy)

Letters Extra: <https://www.historyireland.com/letters-extra/kilmichael-2/>

I am the eldest daughter of Liam Deasy whose War of Independence memoir, *Toward Ireland Free*, was published in 1973. My father died in 1974. I willingly typed up the manuscript from start to finish as a labour of love.

Part of my father's research consisted of tape-recorded interviews with IRA veterans. These were undertaken with the help of Fr John Chisholm, who edited the manuscript under direction of my father, and with his introduction of Fr Chisholm to former veterans. After publication and after my father died, Fr Chisholm regarded the tapes as in effect his personal possessions. In 2007 I requested from him in a telephone conversation a copy of my father's tapes for submission to interested historians, a request he abruptly rejected on the grounds of 'priestly confidentiality'.

The tapes were subject to controversy due to Fr Chisholm allowing the late Peter Hart, author of *The IRA and its Enemies* (1998), to quote the recordings anonymously. Hart reported three veterans on the tapes speaking on the November 1920 Kilmichael ambush. Some years ago due to pressure from historians to make the tapes available for

inspection, Fr Chisholm gave the tapes to a member of the Deasy family, a nephew of my father. On the basis that she was sympathetic to Peter Hart's account Eve Morrison of Trinity College was given access to the tapes. She partially reported their contents in a chapter in *Terror in Ireland, 1916-1923* (2012). She wrote that the tapes contained veteran testimony from two Kilmichael veterans.

In Trinity College on 26 October 2011 at a talk on Kilmichael by Eve Morrison, Fr Chisholm was questioned by TV producer Jerry O'Callaghan. O'Callaghan listened to and was allowed to report on the recordings but not broadcast them. He reported in *Scéal Tom Barry* ('The Tom Barry Story') on TG4 in January 2012 that the tapes contained just one Kilmichael veteran speaking on the ambush. Fr Chisholm answered that he had mislaid a final tape O'Callaghan did not hear. He subsequently found that tape and gave it to Eve Morrison. It contained the testimony played at the TCD seminar and it was from Kilmichael veteran Ned Young. That is a very strange fact. In response to a request from John Young, son of Ned Young, for a copy of his father's tape, Fr Chisholm stated that he didn't have a tape recording of Ned Young.

In addition to the Deasy/Chisholm interviewees, Hart claimed to have personally interviewed two more veterans in 1988-89. As Ned Young was the last Kilmichael veteran alive since December 1986 he had to be one. However, Ned Young suffered a stroke in late 1986 and could not communicate effectively (as sworn on affidavit by Ned's son, John). Furthermore, Hart reportedly interviewed his second alleged additional veteran six days after Ned Young died. Therefore, as it stands currently there are now nine Deasy/Chisholm tapes containing two Kilmichael veterans speaking on the ambush, not three as Hart claimed. Hart's two separate additional interviews seem fictitious.

This situation clamours for the production of all the Chisholm/Deasy tapes for the scrutiny of all interested historians. On 3 June 2009 I wrote as follows to my father's nephew, the present custodian of convenience of the tapes, with a copy to Fr Chisholm:

It is my fervent wish that the tapes be placed in the public domain, where other scholars may have access to the contents. My father's research should not be sullied by becoming a political football. The only way in which this may be avoided is by openly and transparently placing the information in a historical archive. I suggest University College Cork as most appropriate.

Professor Dermot Keogh, then Head of History in UCC, was in contact and expressed great interest in receiving and safeguarding the material. My plea fell on deaf ears, as the tapes are still held privately and are still denied critical scrutiny.

I am not in good health. It is my fervent wish that Fr Chisholm make a thorough search for all material belonging to my father which he may also have mislaid, and that the material be given to UCC for use by researchers. This scandalous situation has to end and can only end with full disclosure of the tapes and their contents.

MAUREEN DEASY

**From John Young** (son of Ned Young) 4 February, 2013

Letters Extra: <https://www.historyireland.com/letters-extra/peter-hart-etc/>

Eve Morrison states (HI Jan-Feb 2013), "I fully stand over my understanding" of her disputed telephone conversation with me.

The problem is, after cold-calling me, she should have put her understanding to me in writing prior to publication. I would have corrected it. Had she done so, Eve Morrison would not now be in the embarrassing position of claiming to know better my father's state of health in 1988-89, than I do as his son who was responsible for his care.

In my response to the claims Eve Morrison published in reply to Niall Meehan's review of *Terror in Ireland*, I mentioned that my father Ned Young ventured out of doors rarely after his stroke in late 1986 (22 August 2012, Spinwatch.org.). I instanced attendance at Kilmichael commemorations because that was most relevant. I did not mention

another public event at which my father was photographed because it was irrelevant. Morrison thinks being photographed means my father was well. She is wrong.

To be clear (again), the views Eve Morrison attributes to me are not mine.

Morrison should also have noted that on Spinwatch.org I introduced into the discussion (for the first time) information that the late Senior Counsel, Jim O'Driscoll, dropped Peter Hart near my father Ned Young's house in 1988 and that my mother reported then that she refused entry to a non-Irish person (presumably Hart) due to my father's state of health.

Between 1987-89, Ned Young was the sole surviving veteran of the Kilmichael Ambush. He was incapable in 1988 of contributing the alleged interview material in Peter Hart's *The IRA and its Enemies* (1998). One indication that Hart did not speak to my father is that he reported Ned Young (anonymously) in his book as an '87-year-old man'. In 1988 my father was 96.

As is clear, originally from Niall Meehan in *Troubled History* (2008) and latterly from Morrison in *Terror in Ireland* (2012), Hart's alleged anonymous interview material came from other sources.

**Source one:**

*Troubled History* (2008) reported that Hart had possession of Ned Young's Bureau of Military History (BMH) Witness Statement, a number of copies of which I can confirm circulated in 1988.

**Source two:**

A 1969 taped interview with Ned Young in the possession of Fr. John Chisholm, but not available for inspection due to repeated denial of access to the tapes by Fr Chisholm (and Chisholm's false assertion to me in writing that he did not possess an interview recording with my father).

After denying to me that he had it, Fr. Chisholm gave my father's interview to Eve Morrison. On the tape Ned Young reports being informed by other veterans, immediately after the Kilmichael Ambush, of a British Auxiliary false surrender. Peter Hart failed to report this. My father did not personally witness the false surrender. As his Witness Statement reported, Ned Young was pursuing an escaping Auxiliary when it happened. Peter Hart and Eve Morrison failed to note this.

Significantly, as Meehan pointed out, Hart also did not report that in his book he presented Ned Young anonymously as two separate people: He appeared once as Hart's alleged interviewee and was listed separately again on Fr. Chisholm's tapes. Hart's anonymous sourcing made this subterfuge (presenting one person as two) possible. Morrison originally failed to acknowledge and continues to ignore this clearly established and extraordinary fact.

I also note in passing that Morrison is tracking a Kilmichael ambush 'scout', also allegedly interviewed by Hart anonymously six days after my father died on 13 November 1989. She might as well give up. My father, Ned Young, was indisputably (apart that is from Morrison) the only Kilmichael veteran alive from 1987-89.

Eve Morrison offers an insight in relation to my Affidavit, that was published in June 2008. Her consultation with solicitor Michael Malone yields, "a witness to a signature merely verifies the identity and signature of the person making a statement". This might have been self-evident to an academic product of Trinity College History Department, without wasting Mr. Malone's valuable time.

The late Jim O' Driscoll, another signatory, was an eminent Senior Counsel – Ar Dheis Dé go raibh sé – known for his pursuit of truth and justice. When recommended to do so he extended his goodwill and hospitality, in his normal spirit of generosity, to the newly-arrived personable young Canadian Historian, Peter Hart, in 1988. As I revealed on Spinwatch, as requested he deposited Hart near my father's address without any prior contact. Jim drove off about his business.

Hart never interviewed my father in the normal or any other sense of that term, as explained why not in my Affidavit. In his book Hart insisted he did (anonymously). Possibly (this based on a Morrison

report) Hart also informed Jim O'Driscoll of his 'success'.

By the time of my Affidavit in December 2007, Jim O'Driscoll had researched the Peter Hart dispute. He reviewed evidence from reputable researchers, including the historian Brian Murphy (in whom Jim expressed particular confidence), and my own intimate testimony of the Young family, of whom I was chosen representative in caring for my father. The multiple evidence presented by my sworn Affidavit had to be either truth on my part, or perjury. It is a monstrous offence to the unassailable reputation of Jim O'Driscoll SC, a man of the utmost integrity, to suggest that he would have had hand, act, or part – even as an identity-witness – in an affidavit based on perjury, particularly given Jim's previous association with Peter Hart.

Peter Hart never offered a word of response to my sworn Affidavit published in June 2008. It was possible at that time for Hart to reconnect with Jim O'Driscoll and to attempt a correction of the record. He chose not to do so. That and his silence on its contents speaks volumes.

Morrison asserts that O'Driscoll "Refused to join in attacks on Hart when approached to do so". Subsequent to the publication in June 2008 of my Affidavit of 14 December 2007, I became aware that one letter had been sent to Jim O'Driscoll exhorting him, in polite terms, to confront Peter Hart publicly. Ms. Morrison's reference to Jim O'Driscoll's reasonable refusal to engage in such "attacks" is further evidence of her penchant for exaggeration for effect, which can be reduced, in this example, to one letter. The letter writer was unconnected in any way with my Affidavit. I sent assurance to Jim O'Driscoll to that effect. I conveyed my displeasure to the letter-writer, predicting that the letter could be used negatively in future. And – voilà! – enter Eve Morrison.

Eve Morrison puts Peter Hart's case passionately. However, Peter Hart failed, despite repeated challenge, to detail his methods adequately before he died tragically in 2010 – Ar Dheis Dé go raibh sé. As the evidence unravels, Morrison might begin to understand why Hart was reticent in his response to criticism.

JOHN YOUNG

**From Eve Morrison and Marion O'Driscoll** (wife of solicitor Jim O'Driscoll) 9 April 2013

Letters Extra: <https://www.historyireland.com/letters-extra/peter-hart-etc/>

I write to clarify a few issues raised in John Young's and Maureen Deasy's recent letters.

1) Marion O'Driscoll, widow of the late Jim O'Driscoll, read over and approved my earlier response to History Ireland, and co-signs this one. Mrs. O'Driscoll asks, in the strongest possible terms, that Mr Young (and anyone else) refrain from associating her late husband with his accusations against Peter Hart. Jim O'Driscoll simply witnessed John Young's signature, nothing else. Witnesses to signature usually do not even read the document being signed. Mrs. O'Driscoll states that her late husband greatly admired Hart's scholarship, had no objections to his book, and had no doubt whatsoever that Hart had interviewed Ned Young. She further confirms that Jim O'Driscoll personally introduced him to Ned Young.

2) John Young contends that his father had 'virtually lost the faculty of speech' after a stroke suffered in late 1986. A November 1987 Cork Examiner report on the annual Kilmichael Ambush Commemoration directly quotes Ned Young's words as he laid a wreath in honour of his comrades. This suggests that Ned Young was able to communicate effectively just a few months before Peter Hart's first interview with him.

3) Ned Young, in his Chisholm interview, does NOT say he was told about a false surrender 'immediately' after the ambush.

4) Any concerns Maureen Deasy has about the Chisholm tapes are a matter for herself and her family. Father John Chisholm's interviews were his own initiative, although carried out with Liam Deasy's blessing. Despite the interviews being entirely his property, Chisholm nonetheless consulted the Deasy family about what to do with the tapes.

The decision to give the recordings to Liam Deasy's nephew and namesake (now sadly deceased) was agreed by Maureen Deasy's two sisters, at a meeting with Father Chisholm in November 2007. Maureen, in a letter to Chisholm dated 31 October 2007, declined to attend: 'I shall not attend your proposed meeting'. Decisions relating to the tapes since then were either taken by Chisholm and Liam Deasy's nephew jointly (with Deasy having the final say), or by Liam Deasy's nephew alone.

EVE MORRISON, MARION O'DRISCOLL

**From John Young** (son of Ned Young) 17 May 2013

Letters Extra: <https://www.historyireland.com/letters-extra/peter-hart-etc/>

It was wrong of Dr Morrison to imply (*History Ireland* letter, April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013) that the late Jim O'Driscoll did not read my Affidavit before witnessing my signature. He did just that when we met in Ballydehob in August 2007, as any sensible person would. At the time, as I pointed out earlier to Dr Morrison, Jim told me he had dropped Peter Hart near my parent's home in 1988 but was too busy to go with him.

Before his untimely death, Jim O'Driscoll's name appeared twice publicly in relation to Peter Hart. First, in Hart's 1998 book that acknowledged Jim's kind assistance. Second, in *Troubled History* (2008) as a witness to my signature on my Affidavit, that refuted Peter Hart's claim: (a) to have interviewed my father; (b) to have interviewed a Kilmichael Ambush participant six days after my father, the last survivor, died. If Jim had felt so strongly about Hart's "scholarship", why did he associate himself, in any way, with a document critical of it? Why did he go out of his way freely to do so, having personally researched the issue? Readers may draw their own conclusions.

Dr Morrison also states in her letter:

'Ned Young, in his Chisholm [tapes] interview, does NOT say he was told about a false surrender 'immediately' after the ambush'. Dr Morrison repudiates herself. She contributed the following to her *Terror in Ireland* 'Kilmichael Revisited' essay (p168):

Young told Chisholm he had seen [John] Lordon bayonet an Auxiliary, and that after the ambush members of the column had informed him that this auxiliary had surrendered falsely.

A transcript would authenticate the point. However, aside from Dr Morrison and a chosen few, no one else has been given the opportunity to listen in full to the 'Chisholm tapes'. Again, I would ask that, whatever convoluted way the tapes are being held, that they be released into the public domain. This is also the last published wish (in *History Ireland*) of the late Maureen Deasy, eldest daughter of Liam on whose behalf the tapes were made.

I do not remember my father speaking at the 1987 Kilmichael commemoration. The guest speaker that year was Fr Des Wilson from Belfast. The sole sentence "emotionally recalled" for the *Cork Examiner* reporter, attributed to my father, could have been given later (November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1987, p4). Dominating page one of that *Examiner* edition is a large photograph of my father sitting by the Kilmichael Ambush monument. Above that is a caption, "The Last Boy of Kilmichael". If my father was openly recognised as the last surviving participant of the Kilmichael Ambush, how did Hart manage to 'interview' an "unarmed scout" six days after my father's death? Significant silence so far on this point from Dr Morrison.

In her earlier essay Dr Morrison admitted (p161) that Hart "wrongly attributed" to the "unidentified scout" words on the Chisholm tapes said by Jack O'Sullivan (acknowledged as the second last Kilmichael veteran to die in 1986). Dr Morrison suggests (p173) that Hart's "muddled... citations... do not undermine the authenticity of" his research. I beg to differ.

Based on newspaper articles, Dr Morrison assumes that my father was hale, hearty and quite happy to talk openly in 1988 to a Canadian student, a complete stranger, about the Kilmichael ambush. Even in good health, my father was wary of who he spoke to on the ambush. He only agreed to be recorded by Fr. Chisholm in 1970 because of the Liam Deasy connection and, possibly, because, as Chisholm put it, he "trusted

me as a priest". I again give Eve Morrison my word that after his stroke late in 1986 my father was not well enough, "having virtually lost the faculty of speech" (my Affidavit), to be interviewed in 1988 by Peter Hart.

In an earlier letter to Maureen Deasy, Fr. Chisholm protested that Hart referred to the Chisholm tapes "without my permission". He obviously did not protest enough – for he allowed Hart just to do that. Hart had to refer to the tapes, as he had nothing of his own to fall back on as evidence for his "interviews".

Ultimately, the reason Dr. Morrison attempts to discredit my Affidavit is that she has no actual evidence that Hart interviewed my father, other than hearsay. Why else did she contact me in the first

See also:

## Mini-defence of Hart's theory on Kilmichael Ambush

The just published *Dead of the Irish Revolution* (DIR), a 1916-21 fatalities database, continues fighting the 28 November 1920 Kilmichael Ambush. Eunan O'Halpin devotes three pages to a mini-defence of controversial historian the late Peter Hart.

36 IRA fighters defeated an 18-man British Auxiliary patrol, 16 of whom were killed. One escaped but was later captured and executed. Another Auxiliary, severely wounded, was left for dead.

In 1998 Hart reported that ambush commander Tom Barry was a vainglorious lying 'serial killer' and that the War of Independence was an ethno-sectarian squabble. Other revisionist historians predicted difficulties for those defending the Cork IRA. Quite the reverse has happened.

Controversy centres on Hart attempting to undermine Barry reporting an Auxiliary false surrender, resulting in IRA casualties, followed by a fight to the finish with no acceptance of further surrender attempts. O'Halpin's defence begins with a simple mistake, asserting that Barry claimed all three IRA casualties as false surrender victims, Pat Deasy, Jim O'Sullivan and Michael McCarthy. Barry indisputably stated two, Deasy and O'Sullivan.

O'Halpin defends Peter Hart's anonymous late-1980s 'interviews' with two elderly ambush participants. One occurred six days after Ned Young, the last surviving participant, died. O'Halpin resolves the problem with historian Eve Morrison's claim that a Willie Chambers is the missing man. But, in the *Southern Star* in 2017, Morrison reported Chambers during the ambush guarding a bridge 15km away.

In August, Morrison reported that Ned Young, the other alleged Hart interviewee, did not discuss the ambush (or Tom Barry) at all. That should not surprise us. His son John pointed out in 2008 that his then 96-year father suffered a debilitating stroke two years earlier.

Hart therefore interviewed an ambush veteran who did not speak about it and someone not there, who did.

O'Halpin, like Hart, ignores participant descriptions of a false surrender. Ned Young, who reported being away from the ambush proper pursuing an escaping Auxiliary, spoke of a false surrender relayed to him immediately afterwards. His comrades also said John Lordan killed an Auxiliary he accused of falsely surrendering. Stephen O'Neill, the first ambush fighter to publish on the subject, in 1937, is similarly ignored. Since Tom Barry's *Guerilla Days in Ireland* is dismissed, it is hardly surprising that its contribution is misreported.

A different approach is evident in DIR commentary on the April 1921 killing of Kate Carroll in Monaghan. She featured in revisionist accounts of the IRA's supposed war on Protestants and 'social deviants'. Here, DIR readers are spared knowledge that after 29 years historians discovered Carroll was Catholic. The saga is explained in my essay, 'She is a Protestant as well'.

The book is an objective database to the extent that, like Hart's Kilmichael research, its omissions and errors are identified. **Niall Meehan**, author of 'Examining Peter Hart', *Southern Star*, 14 November 2020

place? Hart should have been able to produce authenticated notes, or even tapes, of these claimed interviews with my father and others. The excuses Hart used for not doing so, such as confidentiality or concerns for the families, were just a means of avoiding the issue. Hart never, at any stage, had contact with myself or my family, so how could he decide what our reaction would be?

Tom Barry, Ned Young and the Boys of Kilmichael have all gone to their rest. So too, unfortunately, have Peter Hart, Jim O'Driscoll and Maureen Deasy. I intend now to give the Kilmichael Ambush a rest. Perhaps Dr Morrison should do the same.

**John Young**



**West Cork's War of Independence: Sectarianism, Tom Barry, Peter Hart and the Kilmichael Ambush - a 2017 Southern Star, Irish Times, discussion between Tom Cooper, Gerry Gregg, Eoghan Harris, Cal Hyland, Barry Keane, Simon Kingston, Niall Meehan, Eve Morrison, John Regan, Donald Wood, at <https://www.academia.edu/34399025>**



**Three letters on the Kilmichael Ambush Southern Star August 2020, <https://www.academia.edu/44049155/> In response to: 'Eve Morrison on the Kilmichael Ambush', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=buVryG55kqs>**

## APPENDIX 1

# Historian Caught in Ambush Row

Son of a witness to a notorious 1920 IRA bloodbath is disputing claims about the attack

Justine McCarthy, *Sunday Times*, 26 August 2012

**A SON of a war of independence veteran has accused a historian of publishing "untrue and unchecked claims" relating to a disputed IRA ambush in which his father participated 92 years ago.**

Edward "Ned" Young was the last known survivor of the Kilmichael ambush, when the IRA killed 17 police auxiliaries on November 28, 1920. His son John Young has described as "palpably untrue" assertions made by Dr Eve Morrison about a phone conversation he had with her last month. Morrison's claims appear to contradict an affidavit Young signed five years ago, in which he denied that his father co-operated with a controversial book about the ambush.

Young has requested that a statement by him disputing Morrison's version of the July 4 conversation be posted on the Reviews in History website, which is operated by the University of London's Institute of Historical Research.

On the site Morrison claims that John Young told her his father was healthy enough to be interviewed in 1988 when Peter Hart, an acclaimed revisionist historian, claimed to have done so. Hart's thesis in *The IRA and its Enemies* - a book he published in 1998 - was that Tom Barry, the ambush leader, concocted a story that the Auxiliaries faked a surrender in order to justify the IRA killing 17 of them.

Hart reported an interview with Young, who was not identified, which supported his theory that there had been no fake surrender. John Young signed an affidavit on December 14, 2007, describing Hart's claim to have interviewed his father as "totally untrue".

He swore his father was incapable of being interviewed in 1988, as he had suffered a stroke in 1986 and died aged 97 on November 13, 1989.

"At that stage [the time of Hart's claimed interview], Ned Young was wheelchair-bound, having suffered a stroke some time previously," John Young said in his affidavit.

"As a consequence, it made him incapable of giving an interview, having virtually lost the faculty of speech." Young said a man with "a foreign accent" called at his mother's house in the late 1980s and requested an interview with her husband. She refused, as he was sick in bed.

"If, as seems likely, the man in the question was Peter Hart, it makes his subsequent behaviour all the more inexcusable and inexplicable."

Morrison states on the website: "Mr Young confirmed [by phone] that his father's mental faculties were not impaired, and he could speak perfectly clearly. I asked him this twice, and he said he was willing to go on the record on this point."



## Historian caught in ambush row

The son of a witness to a notorious 1920 IRA bloodbath is disputing claims about the attack, says Justine McCarthy

A SON of a war of independence veteran has accused a historian of publishing "untrue and unchecked claims" relating to a disputed IRA ambush in which his father participated 92 years ago.

"palpably untrue" assertions made by Dr Eve Morrison about a phone conversation he had with her last month. Morrison's claims appear to contradict an affidavit Young signed five years ago, in which he denied that his father co-operated with a controversial book about the ambush.

Young has requested that a statement by him disputing Morrison's version of the July 4 conversation be posted on the Reviews in History website, which is operated by the University of London's Institute of Historical Research.

On the site Morrison claims that John Young told her his father was healthy enough to be interviewed in 1988 when Peter Hart, an acclaimed revisionist historian, claimed to have done so. Hart's thesis in *The IRA and its Enemies* - a book he published in 1998 - was that Tom Barry, the ambush leader, concocted a story that the Auxiliaries faked a surrender in order to justify the IRA killing 17 of them.

Hart reported an interview with Young, who was not identified, which supported his theory that there had been no fake surrender. John Young signed an affidavit on December 14, 2007, describing Hart's claim to have interviewed his father as "totally untrue".

He swore his father was incapable of being interviewed in 1988, as he had suffered a stroke in 1986 and died aged 97 on November 13, 1989.

"At that stage [the time of Hart's claimed interview], Ned Young was wheelchair-bound, having suffered a stroke some time previously," John Young said in his affidavit.

"As a consequence, it made him incapable of giving an interview, having virtually lost the faculty of speech." Young said a man with "a foreign accent" called at his mother's house in the late 1980s and requested an interview with her husband. She refused, as he was sick in bed.

Morrison's essay 'Kilmichael Revisited' was part of a collection entitled *Terror in Ireland 1916-1921*, edited by David Fitzpatrick, Hart's and Morrison's history professor at Trinity College in Dublin. In his replying statement, Young says: "I am surprised if Eve Morrison's behaviour is regarded as acceptable academic practice in Trinity College. Is a short, hurried and confused telephone call between strangers on a serious matter a proper basis for making historical claims? "Does Eve Morrison consider me so light-minded as to reverse a sworn statement about my own father in the course of a brief conversation on the telephone with someone I have never met?"

"Why did [she] not attempt to confirm with me in writing her mistaken interpretation of our conversation before publication? She had over 40 days prior to publication in which to do so."

Last week Morrison said she identified herself to Young when she phoned him last month, and put it to him that she did not believe Hart had lied about interviewing his father.

"I asked Mr Young how he could be so sure that Hart did not interview his father," Morrison said. "Mr Young stated that he had left instructions that no one was to be let into his parents' house without his permission and that no one had ever told him that Hart had visited the house."

In response to Young's request to publish his statement, *Reviews in History* said it "has a policy of simply allowing a review and a response from the authors and editors, so we wouldn't be able to publish any additional pieces".

A scene from *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*, based on the Kilmichael ambush; inset: Hart

*Sunday Times* 26 August 2012

## APPENDIX 2

Monday, 27 August 2012

<https://spinwatch.org/index.php/issues/northern-ireland/item/301-why-spinwatch-is-publishing-john-young%e2%80%99s-statement/>

# Why Spinwatch is publishing John Young's Statement



Niall Meehan

The statement below is from the son of an Irish War of Independence veteran who fought at the Kilmichael Ambush of 28 November 1920. It arises from claims in a controversial 1998 Oxford University Press book, *The IRA and its Enemies, Violence and Community in Cork, 1916-1923*, by Peter Hart (who died suddenly in 2010 aged 46). That book was based on Hart's 1993 Trinity College Dublin PhD thesis of the same name.

In the book Hart wrote that he spoke to 13 Irish Republican Army veterans of the conflict, anonymously. Hart said he did this because some of the veterans he spoke to requested anonymity.

This created particular problems in Hart's treatment of the 28 November 1920 West Cork Kilmichael Ambush. Seventeen of eighteen British soldiers were killed in action there (the last was left for dead). They were from the notorious counterinsurgency Auxiliary Division of the RIC.

In his *Guerrilla Days in Ireland* (1949), Ambush commander Tom Barry asserted that the Auxiliaries had engaged in a 'false surrender' trick, resulting in two of three IRA fatalities. According to Barry the false surrender justified his decision to order that all the Auxiliaries be killed outright. Hart disputed this, calling Barry and liar and a 'political serial killer'. Hart's claims received media publicity in Ireland and Britain, as well as numerous academic accolades.

As evidence for his view, Hart claimed to have spoken to two Kilmichael Ambush veterans in 1988-89 when just one veteran, Edward, 'Ned', Young, was alive. Indeed, Hart claimed to have spoken to one of his two anonymous interviewees on 19 November 1989, six days after Ned Young died on 13 November 1989, aged 97. Ned Young's death was reported in the widely read West Cork Southern Star newspaper on 18 November 1989, with the headline, *Ned Young - last of 'the Boys of Kilmichael'*.

*Troubled History, a 10th Anniversary Critique of The IRA and its Enemies* (2008), by Niall Meehan and Brian Murphy, published a sworn affidavit by Ned Young's son, John Young, in which John Young stated that his father suffered a stroke in late 1986.<sup>1</sup> It '*made [Ned young] incapable of giving an interview, having virtually lost*

<sup>1</sup> *Troubled History* available at, <http://gcd.academia.edu/NiallMeehan/Books/75341/>.

*the faculty of speech*'. Peter Hart did not respond to *Troubled History*, apart from stating in *Times Higher Education* that he had not acted improperly.<sup>2</sup>

In 2012 Eve Morrison, also a TCD PhD graduate, defended Hart's Kilmichael analysis in her contribution to *Terror in Ireland 1916-23*, edited by Professor David Fitzpatrick. The book, a product of the TCD History Workshop, was dedicated to Peter Hart's memory. Niall Meehan critiqued the work for *Reviews in History*. Fitzpatrick and Morrison responded. Morrison claimed in her response that she had telephoned John Young on 4 July 2012 and that he told her, '*his father's mental faculties were not impaired and that he could speak perfectly clearly*'.<sup>3</sup>

John Young rejects this account of the telephone call and asked *Reviews in History* to carry his statement to that effect. *Reviews in History* replied that as an academic journal they are not, after publishing a review and response, a forum for publishing 'additional pieces'. Young's statement was partially reported by Justine McCarthy in the Irish edition of the *Sunday Times* (26 August 2012).<sup>4</sup>

For that reason, in the interests of transparency, Spinwatch reproduces John Young's statement here in full.

### Statement by John Young, son of Edward ('Ned') Young

*Edward, 'Ned', Young was the last surviving veteran of the 28 November 1920 Kilmichael Ambush. He died on 13 November 1989, aged 97.*

Dear *Reviews in History*,

I take very strong objection to Eve Morrison's claims published on your website, in which she reports entirely inaccurately a short, confused, 4 July 2012 telephone conversation with me. Her remarks were never checked with me for accuracy. I wish you to publish on your website after her remarks the following attached statement, dated 22 August 2012, which I am copying to Niall Meehan, to whom Eve Morrison took exception for accurately reporting the contents of an affidavit I swore in December 2007.

You may contact me to verify the contents of the statement if you wish, and for that purpose alone.

Yours sincerely,  
John Young (son of Edward 'Ned' Young)  
West Green and Killbarry Road, Dunmanway, Co. Cork

Statement by John Young, son of Edward ('Ned') Young  
22 August 2012

**A response to claims by Dr Eve Morrison (TCD Modern history Department) at the Institute for Historical Research, *Reviews in History* website, <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1303>.**

I am a son of Edward, 'Ned', Young, last surviving veteran of the 28 November 1920 Kilmichael Ambush. Ned Young died on 13 November 1989, aged 97.

In a response (16 August 2012) to a review by Niall Meehan of *Terror in Ireland 1916-1921* (edited by Professor David Fitzpatrick), the author of a chapter on the Kilmichael Ambush, Dr Eve Morrison, reports a 4 July 2012 telephone conversation with me. I have not spoken to Eve Morrison before or since. I have never

<sup>2</sup> John Gill, *Troubles and strife as IRA historian draws peers' fire*, available at, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=402611&sectioncode=26>.

<sup>3</sup> Meehan review and Fitzpatrick-Morrison response available at, <http://gcd.academia.edu/NiallMeehan/Papers/1877653>.

<sup>4</sup> Available at, <http://www.indymedia.ie/article/102322>.

received any other communication of any kind from Eve Morrison.

I refute Eve Morrison's report of that conversation in its entirety.

The telephone call lasted approximately five to ten minutes. I attempted at the outset to ascertain who or what Ms Morrison represented and the purpose of her call, without success. Members of my family witnessed my end of the conversation with Eve Morrison. After the somewhat puzzling telephone call I dismissed the subject from my mind.

That pales into insignificance in comparison to claims Eve Morrison makes in her recently published report of that conversation, brought to my attention by a family member.

Morrison defends the late Peter Hart's analysis of [the 28 November 1920] Kilmichael Ambush in *The IRA and its Enemies* (OUP, 1998). That analysis was based on alleged anonymous interviews with two Kilmichael veterans in 1988 and 1989, at a time when my father was, I repeat for emphasis, the sole surviving ambush participant. Meehan noted in his review that Hart's claim to have interviewed my father anonymously in April and June of 1988 was undermined by an affidavit signed by me on 21 August 2007, sworn with witnesses on 14 December 2007 (first published, in full, as an appendix to *Troubled History*, 2008, by Meehan and Brian Murphy). Peter Hart made no response to my affidavit that stated, inter alia,

If Peter Hart is referring to my father, Ned Young, with his made up reference (of "A.A."), his claim that he interviewed my father in April and June of 1988 is totally untrue as, at that stage, Ned Young was wheelchair bound having suffered a stroke sometime previously (circa late 1986). As a consequence, it made him incapable of giving an interview, having virtually lost the faculty of speech. He was constantly attended day and night by family members and full-time professional carers. On my instructions to my mother and the carers, the only people allowed into my parents home were family members, i.e., his nephews and nieces, grandchildren his doctor, Dr. Jim Young (his nephew), and the priests of the parish.

Despite this, Eve Morrison claims in her response to Meehan that on 4 July 2012,

[John] Young confirmed that his father's mental faculties were not impaired and that he could speak perfectly clearly. I asked him this twice, and he said he was willing to go on the record on this point.

This her statement is - I repeat emphatically - palpably untrue. I wish to go on record to refute Eve Morrison's claim. My August 2007 affidavit stands in its entirety because it is true and immutable.

I am surprised if Eve Morrison's behaviour is regarded as acceptable academic practice in Trinity College Dublin. Is a short, hurried, and confused telephone call between strangers on a serious matter a proper basis for making historical claims? Does Eve Morrison consider me so light minded as to reverse a sworn considered statement about my own father, in the course of a brief conversation on the telephone with someone I have never met? Why did Eve Morrison not attempt to confirm with me in writing her mistaken interpretation of our conversation before publication? She had over forty days prior to publication in which to do so.

Eve Morrison's other claims with regard to how my father was cared for are equally without foundation and equally upsetting to me and to my family. Two carers under my direction were required to nurse my father after he suffered his stroke in late 1986. Ned Young rarely ventured out in public during the period in question, an exception being attendance at the annual Kilmichael commemoration. I was the family member in overall charge of my father's care and well-being. I reiterate what is stated in my affidavit, that, apart from designated family members, his doctor and parish clergy, no one was permitted to speak to my father without my express permission. Eve Morrison's insulting remarks to the effect that because I was not present 24-7 Peter Hart could have slipped through this mutually agreed family net is specious and

unworthy of serious consideration.

I have a specific reason, not before revealed, why I am confident in making this assertion:

During the late 1980s a man with what my late mother described as a 'foreign accent' called to her door asking to interview Ned Young. She reported to me that she explained to him directly that Ned Young was a sick man in bed who would not be granting interviews, not least because he was incapable of doing so. I do not know if the man was Peter Hart. However, I am aware that the late Jim O'Driscoll, SC (Orwell Road, Dublin), drove the then PhD researcher Peter Hart and deposited him at my mother and father's address during that time frame. Jim O'Driscoll, who I knew well, was one of the witness signatories to my affidavit sworn on 14 December 2007, referred to above.<sup>5</sup> If, as seems likely, the man in question was Peter Hart, it makes his subsequent behaviour all the more inexcusable and inexplicable.

Eve Morrison's suggestion that my father was not the last surviving veteran of the Kilmichael ambush is nonsense. Morrison makes this claim because Peter Hart reported interviewing a second anonymous 'Kilmichael veteran' six days after Edward, 'Ned', Young, my father, died.

My upset at being presented with Eve Morrison's claims is only surpassed by my incredulity at the publication of untrue and unchecked claims by Morrison.

I am equally astonished by the revelation that Father John Chisholm possessed a forty-year-old tape-recorded interview with my father he released to Eve Morrison. I wrote to Fr Chisholm in 2008, asking if he had such a tape recording. He replied,

I greatly regret having to inform you I have no recording of an interview with your father, though I remember him with affection as a man of real character.

I agree with the suggestion that Fr Chisholm deposit tapes of interviews with War of Independence veterans (which he obtained on the basis of research for Liam Deasy's 1973 book, *Towards Ireland Free*) in a public archive. That is the expressed view also of Liam Deasy's eldest daughter, Maureen, who typed her father's manuscript. I demand that a copy of Fr Chisholm's interview with my father should be given to me without further delay.

**John Young 22 August 2012**

---

<sup>5</sup> An article critical of Hart in the *Southern Star* of 5 July 2008, of which Jim O'Driscoll was aware, makes reference to that fact, <http://www.southernstar.ie/News/Kilmichael-veterans-son-challenges-Hart-846.htm?id=846>. Jim O'Driscoll died suddenly in 2009. His Irish Times obituary, 21 March 2009, refers to the controversy, <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/obituaries/2009/0321/1224243193986.html>).