

## Peter Hart and Tom Barry

Sir,—Peter Hart in his interview (*HI* 13.2, March/April 2005) dismisses my work in *Tom Barry: IRA freedom fighter*, saying that it ‘contains almost no new evidence’ despite my in-depth analysis of the Kilmichael ambush, the sectarian issue (1920–22) that Peter Hart places such emphasis on in his book (but not in the interview) and other aspects of Tom Barry’s life. The acquisition of Tom Barry’s papers plus interviews with Tom Barry and participants in events, together with other primary source material, is surely an addition to historiography. In relation to Peter Hart’s use of interviews to describe the ambush, he says that I am not ‘interested in dealing with the substance of this evidence in a rational way’. I’ll leave that for readers of my work to decide.

Regarding the Kilmichael ambush, Peter Hart talks about the different versions Barry gave of the event. In fact Barry consistently gave one version, which included the false surrender. Hart must be aware (if he has read those chapters of my book) that Barry’s 1932 *Irish Press* account was edited, resulting in the exclusion of the false surrender, much to Barry’s annoyance.

I have dealt logically in my book with ‘the substance’ of the Imperial War Museum (IWM) report allegedly written in 1920 by Barry, and cannot find anything to indicate that Barry wrote it. Most of the sentences are either at variance with the facts or do not conform to Barry’s stance as commander. Furthermore, A.J.S. Brady, an assistant in T.P. Grainger’s solicitor’s office (the firm that represented and processed claims for the relatives of the Auxiliaries killed at Kilmichael), gives an account of the co-operation between Cope, assistant under-secretary, and the Auxiliaries. Brady witnessed the composition of a report required for compensation. Those in control working for the Macroom-based Auxiliaries were observed forging a report. A typed report of this nature in the IWM is included with captured documents, though not specifically labelled ‘a captured document’. It states: ‘The following is

the Rebel Commandant’s report on the affair’. (Curiously, a feature of the typewritten report is that of the 133 numbered pages of text there are two pages numbered 64. If the ‘Rebel Commandant’s report’ was omitted there would be no page duplication. It could be a typographical error. However, it is also likely that the extra page was later inserted—sometime after its final composition.)

It should also be noted that in 1969, in a lecture to UCG students, Barry, when mentioning the late arrival to the ambush site of the horse and side-car, said, ‘there was a mistake in transmission. No orders or anything else were written at that time—in our brigade anyway’. Regarding written data that speaks for itself.

Peter Hart admits that there was a surrender but says, ‘The main question is whether or not the ambushed Auxiliary policemen pretended to surrender, thereby leading three IRA volunteers to their deaths’. If the Auxiliaries in a military conflict shouted a surrender call and this was accepted by the Volunteers, and Auxiliaries again used a firearm or firearms, then the surrender call was falsified, thereby resuming an open fight. Whether one or more ‘pretended to surrender’ or just surrendered makes no difference, as it was not open for some to resume the fight after a lull while their colleagues beside them surrendered or ‘pretended’ to surrender. It is at that time that Volunteers were killed. Barry took up the challenge and it was a fight to its conclusion. Once the Auxiliaries falsified their surrender call, as military men they had to accept the consequences. Prisoners may be taken after surrender; a false surrender (particularly one that results in fatalities) nullifies that possibility.

Apart from interviews, documentary evidence demonstrates the veracity of the false surrender claim. Brigadier Gen. Crozier, Auxiliary forces commander 1920–21, acknowledged the false surrender. Lionel Curtis, imperial activist and advisor to Lloyd George, accepted the false surrender (1921). Stephen O’Neill, Kilmichael section commander, wrote (1938) of the false surrender, as did contemporary

writers such as Piaras Beaslai (1926), Ernie O’Malley (1936) and John McCann (1946).

The British cabinet acknowledged this ambush as ‘a military operation’. Lloyd George sent over Sir Hamar Greenwood, chief secretary for Ireland. It ‘seemed to him’, to Bonar Law and to Tom Jones that this ambush was ‘of a different character from the preceding operations. The others were assassinations. This last was a military operation’, Tom Jones records. In this military operation the Auxiliaries were commissioned officers with war experience and most had been decorated, so they knew the rules of war. Any military man who called a surrender should have honoured that war code and not broken his word. Each knew when to fire and when not to; each one knew when he shouted ‘we surrender’ that it meant exactly *that*—a surrender—a cease-fire.

Peter Hart questions why I queried the use of ‘the witnesses’ that he quotes, ‘most of whom were interviewed by someone else’, he says. Hart has used the interviews (as well as the IWM report) to aid his claim that there was no false surrender at Kilmichael. In his book he stated that he used six interviews for his ‘reconstruction’ of the ambush. One by the Ballineen/Enniskeane Area Heritage Group is a general recording (with which I am familiar) and only mentions Kilmichael briefly—no details and no mention of a surrender or a false one. None of the three interviews that Fr Chisholm conducted mention a surrender—false or otherwise. (From experience, unless participants were queried specifically on a particular aspect they just didn’t mention it.)

Hart personally interviewed two people whom he says participated in the ambush—rifleman AA, 3 April, 25 June 1988, and scout AF, 19 November 1989, one of whom gave him a tour of the ambush site. This creates a logistical problem that only Peter Hart can solve. According to autobiographical details, all scouts and dispatch scouts were dead by 1971, and all after-ambush helpers and riflemen were dead by 19 November 1989. Rifleman Jack O’Sullivan, the second-last survivor, died in December 1986. Rifleman Ned Young, the last known survivor, was