

Presumably Peter Hart is aware of Murphy's criticism. His publishers printed a partial sentence from the review in later editions of *The IRA and its enemies*. (The words quoted did not refer to the criticism, but rather to the book being 'important' and 'controversial'.)

The absence of questions from interviewer Brian Hanley on the killing of Protestant men in Dunmanway in April 1922 was surprising. In response to a piece I wrote in *The Village* on this subject, Brian Hanley commented on the 'increasingly sterile' debate on Kilmichael, in comparison to the 'much more serious' issue of the April killings. A pity, therefore, that he did not pose the question when he had an opportunity to do so.

Brian Murphy and Meda Ryan have added to our understanding of the period. Murphy's analysis of the development of media manipulation in war is one that will be of interest to media and communications studies analysts, as will the observation that historians are being spun by historical 'spin'. As opposed to Peter Hart's reaction to criticism from a female historian, I found Meda Ryan's analysis (*Tom Barry: IRA freedom fighter* [2003]) 'rational'. I thought her empirical evidence on the false surrender at Kilmichael and on the April killings compelling.

Peter Hart has repeated his intention to publish a detailed answer to Ryan and to Murphy. He said as much on 21 October last, on *indymedia*, in response to my attempt to promote this important debate. As in the *HI* interview, Peter Hart felt unable to comment in detail at that time. I look forward to reading a detailed comment in the not too distant future.—Yours etc.,

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Sir,—Peter Hart is rather unfair on the British Army when he says that ex-soldiers who joined the IRA in Cork during the War of Independence were not 'militarily significant' (*HI* 13.2, March/April 2005). Surely Tom Barry's own British Army training was of advantage when he joined the IRA, first as brigade training officer, and later as flying column leader? This is

not the place for me to again review in detail either Peter Hart's *The IRA and its enemies* or Meda Ryan's *Tom Barry: IRA freedom fighter*. My review of the former can be found in the *Ballygeary Historical Society Journal* (2005), and of the latter in *Irish Literary Supplement*, Boston (Fall 2004). But I must express bewilderment that Peter Hart now describes Tom Barry as 'a very minor character', before going on to protest that 'the Kilmichael chapter is only six per cent of my book'. In that four-part book not only had the theme for Part One been set by its opening chapter 'The Kilmichael Ambush', but that for Part Two had also been set by its opening chapter 'The Boys of Kilmichael'. And I am not aware that he uttered any protest at the time when reviews of his book hailed him for apparently demonstrating quite conclusively that Barry's 1949 account of Kilmichael had been, in the author's own words, 'riddled with lies and evasions'.

I am, admittedly, expressing personal prejudices when I state that, for me, Tom Barry was not a particularly attractive personality. He had rather unsuccessfully red-baited my father, Michael O'Riordan, during the 1946 Cork by-election, only to be outvoted by him at the polls. When I myself last encountered Barry, in 1975, I refused to have anything to do with him, since I was outraged by the fact that he was supporting a war in Northern Ireland to which I was militantly and confrontationally in active opposition. But one does not have to particularly like the man in order to appreciate his military genius in winning the freedom of this state, and to abhor the attempted character assassination of Barry in respect of his leadership during the War of Independence.

It is difficult to see how Peter Hart can maintain that 'Meda Ryan's book contains almost no new evidence'. His own book set great store on his claim that Barry had not thought of presenting the 'false surrender' argument in his 1932 *Irish Press* article on Kilmichael. But now Meda Ryan's thoroughgoing research has come up trumps with a very angry letter from Barry to that editor, protesting

that the critically important 'false surrender' section of his submitted article had been omitted from publication. And then there is Peter Hart's prize exhibit, what he claims to be an authentic report written by Barry himself in 1920 but later captured by the British military authorities. He maintains that others 'can't deal with the contents' of that document. But was that not the case with Peter Hart himself, when he excised from it such material as he found inconvenient for his argument?

Meda Ryan's convincing response that Barry could not possibly have written that 1920 'report' surely has as its *coup de grâce* her restoration of a key sentence that Peter Hart had omitted. Peter Hart's own narrative agrees with all other accounts that two Irish Volunteers, Michael McCarthy and Jim O'Sullivan, had been killed outright during the Kilmichael ambush, while another, Pat Deasy, would die of his wounds sometime later. The key sentence omitted from an otherwise quite extensive reproduction of the 'captured document' had contradicted that finding by stating the exact opposite in its detailing of IRA casualties—'one killed, and two who have subsequently died of wounds'. The 'report' concluded with a PS in respect of that earlier reference to casualties, stating that 'it was not until the finish of the action that P. Deasy was killed', the only Volunteer so named. Meda Ryan's restoration of the sentence omitted by Peter Hart makes clear that the 'report' was in fact maintaining that Deasy had been killed outright during the ambush itself. But Pat Deasy did not in fact die until almost six hours later, and half a mile away from Kilmichael.

When asked to respond to quite specific criticisms raised by Meda Ryan and Brian Murphy, the reply offered by Peter Hart is that 'the question is so dependent on factual details that I don't have the space to really say much here'. If that is the case, is it not high time for him to engage in a public debate with these critics regarding all the evidence now available? Such a debate would itself be an event of considerable historical importance!—Yours etc.,

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