# *Jack Mike Brosnan 15-07-1899 – 18-07-1979*

# These notes are largely from his accounts to his nephews and brothers. Other sources are referenced where possible.

### Historical Background

The Irish War of Independence 1916 – 1921 came to an end with the signing of the Treaty between the Irish Free State government and the British government signed on 11th July,1921. The free state would consist of 26 of the 32 counties of Ireland – 6 north eastern counties would remain as Northern Ireland and as part of the British Empire. There was strong opposition to this clause in the Treaty, which resulted in the Civil War 1922 – 1923. Much of the opposition was in the South-West – counties Kerry, Cork, Limerick, Tipperary and elsewhere. A force of four hundred and fifty Dublin Guards of the Irish Free State army (“’Staters) on board the “Lady Wicklow” landed in Fenit on 2nd. August,1922 under the command of Brigadier Paddy O’Daly. Tralee town was captured the following day. They also recruited locally and systematically fought the Irish Republican Army. Many prisoners were taken and as reprisals for attacks against the Free State army, some prisoners were executed in military jails following sentence by military courts. In all 77 such prisoners were executed. [Kerry Landing, August 1922, an episode of the Civil War pp. 42-46, by Niall C. Harrington, Published in 1992 by Anvil Books Limited, Dublin 6.]

### Local Background

It was the custom in rural Ireland, when Christmas was approaching, that a family would make one major shopping expedition for food and drink supplies. On the Saturday before Christmas Day, 1922, Mr. And Mrs. McCarthy from Killbaun, Ballymacelligott, made the seven mile trip to Tralee to buy their “Christmas”. They left their three children at home – May, Din Joe, and Tom Paul. The McCarthys travelled by horse and common cart. They forded the Clogher River and travelled up Boreen Abutemeen up to the main road and on to Tralee. It rained heavily all day. By evening time the water level of the Clogher River was dangerously high. When the MacCarthys attempted to cross the ford the horse, the cart and the McCarthy parents were swept away and drowned, leaving three orphaned children. The children were looked after by the Rourke family in Kilbaun and by the Brosnan family in Ballinfeedora.

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### Arrest

At this time, Michael Brosnan and his brother Jack were both on the run.

Jack was dug in in Glenagenty and Michael in a hide on Thomas Casey’s farm in Cahir. Michael was convinced by a spy in a pub in Tralee that he was a member of the IRA from South Kerry and he offered him shelter leading to his arrest in January.

Early on Christmas morning, 1922 Mike Ger. Brosnan crossed the Clogher River from Ballinfeedora to Kilbaun to ensure that the McCarthy children were alright for Christmas Day. A unit of the Irish Free State Army was waiting for him and when he entered the McCarthy home, he was arrested at gunpoint. (Tom Paul McCarthy, later to become Rev. Ephraim McCarthy O.P., recounted in 1990’s, the sense of fear and intimidation he experienced as a five year old child, at the power of a gun.) Two soldiers dressed in civilian clothes walked with Mike Ger. down the hill from Kilbaun, giving an appearance of normality, as they were visible from the house in Ballinfeedora. The other soldiers took a circuitous route, surrounded the house and arrested Mike Ger’s two sons, Jack and Tom as they were at their Christmas dinner. The two sons were taken to Ballymullen Military Barracks in Tralee for interrogation and torture. For instance, when Jack was beaten unconscious, his body on the floor was covered with a sheet. Then his youngest brother, Tom, was brought in and shown his “dead” brother because he had refused to give information. They were later transferred to Ballymullan Jail. Tom was later released as he was underage.

### Internment

Many prisoners from Tralee Gaol, including Jack Mike Brosnan, were marched to Fenit harbour and were put on board the “Lady Wicklow”. It landed in Dublin and the prisoners were marched from there to the Curragh of Kildare where they were interned at the military camp. On May 24th, 1923 the Truce was declared and the prisoneres were released. A reception for the prisoners was held in the Mansion House, Dublin, and the guest of honour was Maud Gonne McBride.

### Press cuttings on Michael Brosnan and others

Timeline:

August 02, 1922 Dublin Guards aboard the Lady Wicklow landed at Fenit County Kerry

August 03, 1922 Troops from Western Division crossed the Shannon, landed in Tarbert

December, 1922 Jack and Tom Brosnan arrested at Ballineedora

Taken to Ballymullan Barracks and Tralee Jail

Tom (underage) was released; Jack was interned in the Curragh

January, 1923 Michael Brosnan arrested at Caher

Taken to Ballymullan Barracks and Tralee Jail

January 02, 1923 Major General Paddy O’Daly appointed GOC Dublin Guard in Tralee

January 19, 1923 Daly, Clifford, Brosnan and Hanlon court-martialled and sentenced

Paddy O’Daly’s request to Richard Mulcahy, Chief of Staff to confirm executions

January 20, 1923 Eleven Executions\*

March 6, 1923 Knocknagoshel trap-mine incident

March 7, 1923 Ballyseedy trap-mine incident

May 24, 1923 Truce

### Press Reports

**Saturday Evening Mail** Vol.32. No.18. Saturday, 20th January,1923

Eleven Executions

Death Sentences carried out in Tralee and Limerick

The Charge

Sequel to recent Trials by Irish Military Courts

Our Tralee correspondent wires:- Four executions were carried out in Tralee Jail this morning:- James Daly, Knockaduff, Killarney; John Clifford, Mountluke, Cahirciveen; Michael Brosnan, Ballineedora, Ballymacelligott, and James Hanlon, Causeway.

An official notice on the prison gate says:-

“These men were convicted by military courts in Tralee of having in their possession arms and ammunition, and sentenced to death.”

“The sentence,” it adds, “was duly confirmed by the confirming authority.” An official report issued from Army Headquarters this afternoon states that the executions were carried out at 8 a.m. to-day.

An official report from G.H.Q., Portobello, announces 7 further executions, 2 in Limerick and 5 in Athlone.

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### The Official Report

The following official report was issued by Army Headquarters to-day:-

“At a Military Court held in Tralee the following persons were tried for being in possession of arms and ammunition:-

“James Daly, Knockaduff, Killarney;

“John Clifford, Mountlate, Cahirciveen;

“Michael Brosnan, Ballineedora, Rathanny, Tralee;

“James Hanlon, Causeway, County Kerry.

“They were found guilty and sentenced to death. The findings and sentences were duly confirmed. The executions were carried out at Tralee to-day at 8 a.m.”

#### At Limerick

Cornelius McMahon and Patrick Hennessy, both of Clooney, Ennis, arrested on Tuesday, 16th inst. at Carrahan, were tried on charges of being in possession of ammunition without proper authority, being implicated in the destruction of the railway at Ardsolus on Sunday, 14th inst. And further with being in possession of articles taken from Ardsolus station on the same date.

“Both prisoners were found guilty and sentenced to death.

“The findings and sentences were duly confirmed. The executions were carried out at Limerick this morning at 8 a.m.”

#### At Athlone:

“Thomas Hughes, Bogginfin, Athlone;

“Michael Walsh, Deraymore, Caherlistrane, County Galway;

“Herbert Collins, Tickean, Headford, County Galway;

“Stephen Joyce, Caherlistrane, County Galway;

“Martin Burke, Caherlistrane, County Galway,

“were tried on the charge of being in possession, without proper authority, of arms and ammunition.

“The five accused were found guilty of the charge, and were sentenced to death. The findings of the sentences were duly confirmed. The executions took place at Athlone to-day at 8 a.m.”

### Postscript

The civil war came to an end when both sides agreed a Truce on 24th March, 1923.

Public Acts No. 31/1923 Indemnity Act, 1923, was enacted on 3rd August, 1923.

It specified, among other things, 'Restrictions on taking proceedings against certain persons' and 'Validation and review of sentences of military tribunals'. This retrospectively validated the trials, sentences, due confirmations of sentences, and executions. It indemnified Ministers in Government, Senior Army Officers and others, from prosecution for the execution of prisoners. (There had been 77 such executions in all.)

Two pieces of similar legislation were also enacted by the Oireachtas:

Public Acts No. 2/1923 Indemnity (British Military) Act, 1923

Public Acts No. 49/1923 Local Authorities (Indemnity) Act, 1923