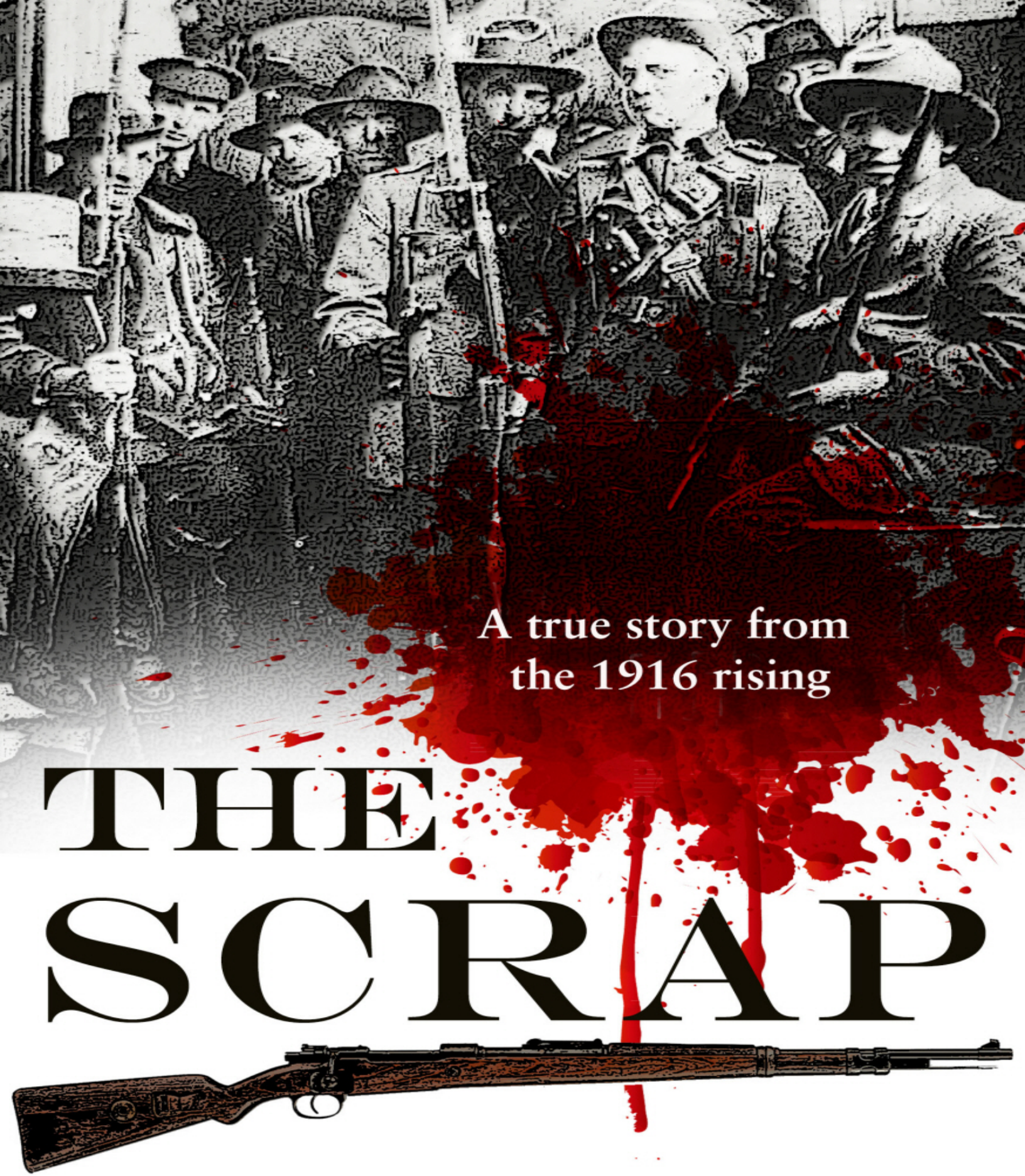


A true story from the 1916 rising

THE SCRAP

GENE KERRIGAN

ABOUT THE BOOK

In the last hours of the 1916 Easter Rising, twenty-year-old Charlie Saurin came face to face with his Commander-in-Chief, Patrick Pearse.

In a final gamble, Pearse had a desperate plan to save the collapsing rebellion.

It required the sacrifice of Saurin and his comrades.

The Scrap is the true story of the rising, from first-hand evidence, as seen by one rebel unit – F Company, 2nd Battalion – following them from the first skirmish in Fairview to the inferno of the GPO.

Told in the context of some of the major events of that week, the story of F Company brings alive the excitement, the humour, the horror and the contradictions of that decisive moment in the creation of the Irish state.

Contents

THE SCRAP

A true story from the 1916 rising

Gene Kerrigan

From witness statements at the Bureau of Military History

The Countess told me about a fortnight before the rising that the scrap was definitely fixed for Easter.
Marie Perolz, WS246

One of them told me the scrap was starting and that they were going to the GPO.
Catherine Rooney, WS648

When passing through Upper Fitzwilliam Street we heard the sound of rifle firing. Tannam turned to me and said, 'The scrap is on'.
Seamus Murray, WS308

There was a bit of a scrap there with some British troops and a number of them were killed.
Thomas Harris, WS320

MacBride turned and bade each of us goodbye … 'All we can do is have a scrap and send it on to the next generation'.
Christopher M. Byrne, WS1014

This is for Derek Speirs

Introduction

This is the true story of members of F Company, 2nd Battalion, Dublin Brigade of the Irish Volunteers, and their experience of the rising at Easter 1916. It's based on first-hand evidence.

In the 1940s, the Bureau of Military History took statements from hundreds of witnesses to the 1913–23 struggle for Irish independence. The remarkable detail they left allows us to construct a close-up view of a major turning point in British and Irish history.

The idea behind the book was to choose a small unit of ordinary rebels, pretty much at random, and follow them through the rising – along with the people they encountered and alongside whom they fought. We see the rebellion as they saw it, in the context of some of the major events of that week.

Members of F Company were active in the GPO, in Jacob's factory and in the frightening and heartbreaking last phase of the rising, in Moore Street. People such as Patrick Pearse, James Connolly, Tom Clarke and Michael Collins became the stuff of legends and monuments – here we see them through the eyes of the rank and file, junior officers, nurses and others.

This is a writer's work, not an historian's – so there are no footnotes. But if in this story there are tears in a man's eyes it's not made up. If sparks fly from horses' hooves when Lancers gallop on cobblestones, it's not poetic licence. It's there in the remarkable military archives.

The story of F Company reflects the larger one: a small band of mostly young men and women challenged an

empire that comprised a fifth of the world’s population – and lost. And then won.

A note on sources

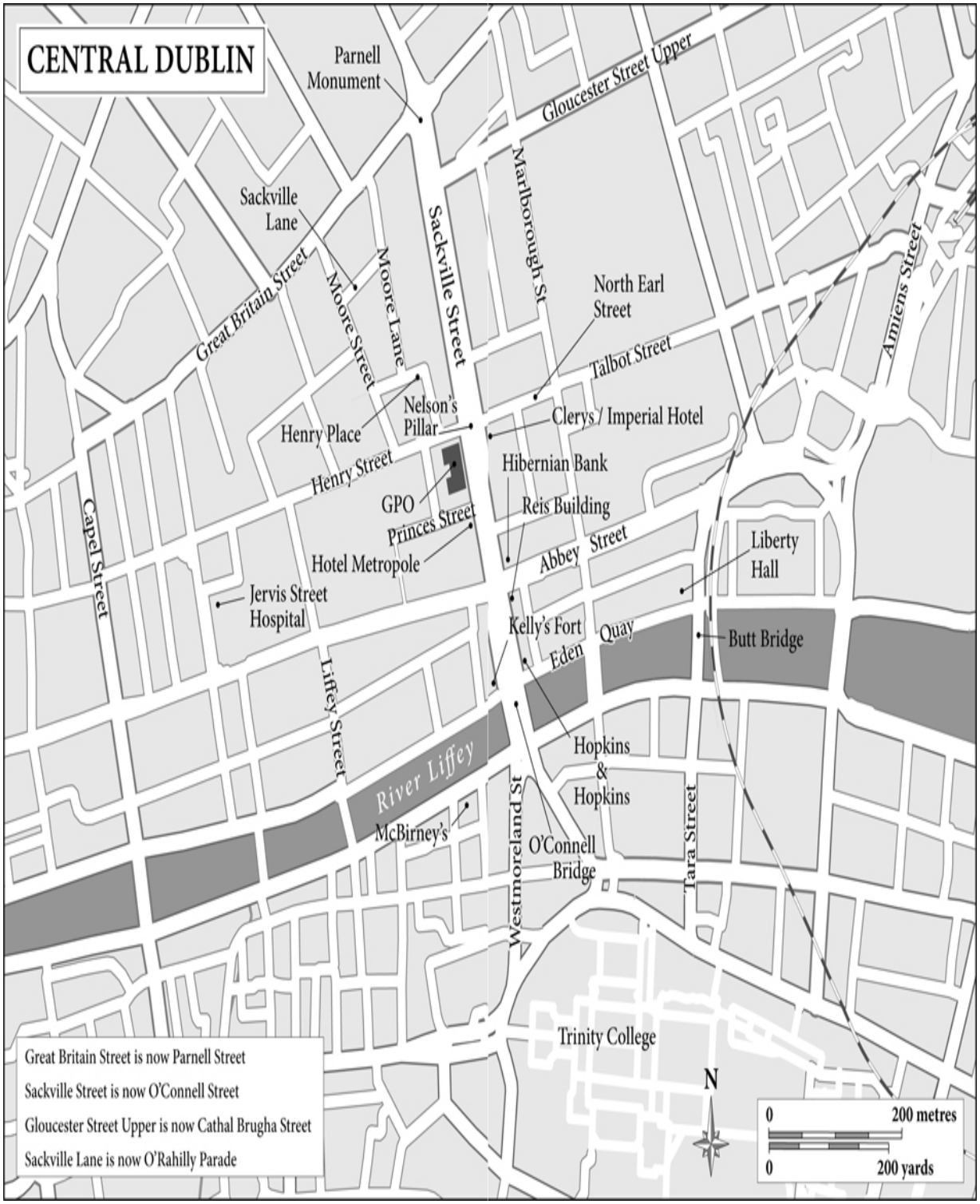
Scenes in the narrative are built sometimes from one or two statements, often from several viewpoints, with additional detail from secondary sources. Where the memories of witnesses differed I cross-checked accounts and made judgements about the sequence of events most likely to be accurate.

Where speech is within quote marks it's taken directly from witness statements. Where speech is without quote marks it's from indirect speech as recalled by participants.

Where one person might be variously called James, Jim, Jimmy or Seamus, I've used the least confusing version of names, depending on circumstances. I've adopted in most cases the casual form of names, as used by friends and comrades – i.e. Tom, Joe and Katie, not Thomas, Joseph and Catherine, etc.

Main characters

Charlie Saurin – student, F Company, aged 20
Frank Henderson – clerk, captain, F Company, aged 30
Oscar Traynor – professional footballer, lieutenant, F Company, aged 30
Arthur ‘Boss’ Shields – Abbey Theatre actor, F Company, aged 20
Harry Colley – rate collector, F Company, aged 25
Seamus Daly – fitter, F Company, aged 32
Harry Boland – merchant and tailor, F Company, aged 29
Vincent Poole – sewer worker, captain, Irish Citizen Army, aged 36
Nora O’Daly – nurse, Cumann na mBan, aged 33
Joe Good – electrician, London Volunteer, aged 21
Helena Molony – union organizer, Citizen Army, aged 31
Kathleen Lynn – doctor, Citizen Army, aged 42
Mattie Connolly – Citizen Army, aged 16
Matt Stafford – Fenian, aged 64


CENTRAL DUBLIN
Parnell Monument
Gloucester Street Upper
Sackville Lane
Great Britain Street
Moore Street
Moore Lane
Sackville Street
Marlborough St
North Earl Street
Amiens Street
Talbot Street
Nelson's Pillar
Clerys / Imperial Hotel
Henry Place
Henry Street
Hibernian Bank
GPO
Reis Building
Princes Street
Abbey Street
Liberty Hall
Capel Street
Hotel Metropole
Jervis Street Hospital
Kelly's Fort
Quay
Butt Bridge
Eden
Liffey Street
Hopkins & Hopkins
River Liffey
McBirney's
Westmoreland St
O'Connell Bridge
Tara Street
Trinity College
Great Britain Street is now Parnell Street
Sackville Street is now O'Connell Street
Gloucester Street Upper is now Cathal Brugha Street
Sackville Lane is now O'Rahilly Parade
N
0
200 metres
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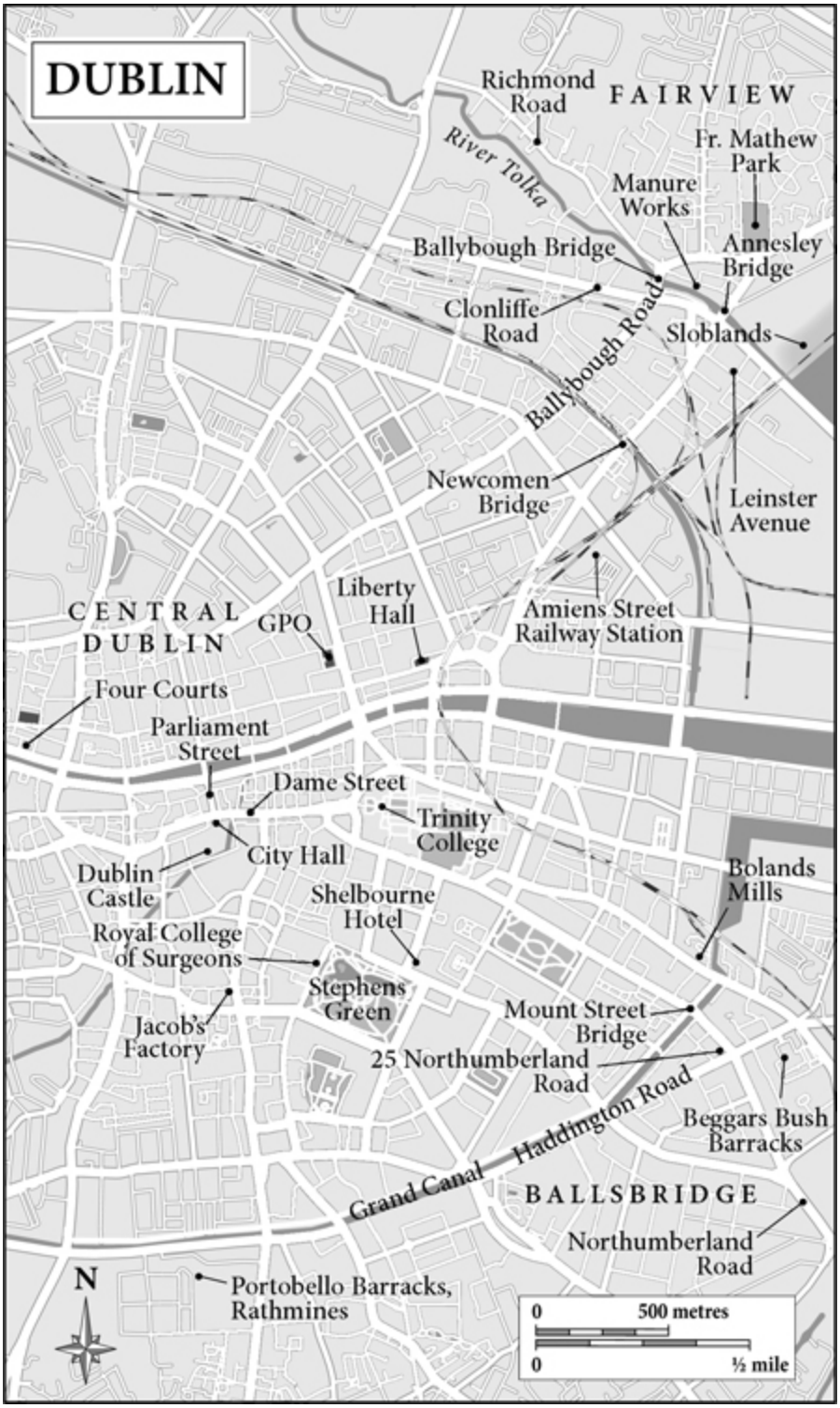
DUBLIN
Richmond Road
FAIRVIEW
River Tolka
Fr. Mathew Park
Manure Works
Ballybough Bridge
Annesley Bridge
Clonliffe Road
Ballybough Road
Sloblands
Newcomen Bridge
Leinster Avenue
Liberty Hall
CENTRAL DUBLIN
GPO
Amiens Street Railway Station
Four Courts
Parliament Street
Dame Street
Trinity College
City Hall
Dublin Castle
Shelbourne Hotel
Bolands Mills
Royal College of Surgeons
Stephens Green
Jacob's Factory
Mount Street Bridge
25 Northumberland Road
Haddington Road
Beggars Bush Barracks
Grand Canal
BALLSBRIDGE
Northumberland Road
N
Portobello Barracks, Rathmines
0
500 metres
0
½ mile

Part One

April 1916

1

The bullet wound in his arm was fresh. It was understood, without anyone having to say anything, that this was a special case, to be handled sensitively.

He didn't tell the nursing staff at Dublin's Mater Hospital how the wound happened. They guessed it had something to do with drilling and training. Anyone who knew Mr Clarke knew he was the kind of man who probably did a bit of drilling and training.

Tom Clarke was thin, with the frail appearance of an old man, although he was just fifty-eight. It was the fifteen years in jail did that to him. The beatings, the torture.

He was taken to St Vincent's ward. A senior surgeon, Denis Farnan, a man of strong nationalist sympathies, examined the patient's wound.

It was standard practice for a patient in a Catholic hospital undergoing a serious procedure to receive the sacraments of Confession and the Eucharist. Clarke refused the sacraments, causing unease among the nursing sisters, who were aware that any procedure could go wrong.

Dr Farnan took out the bullet and dressed the wound.

Ideally, such a procedure would be followed by a period of recuperation. Clarke left the hospital in a hurry, his arm in a sling. He had things to do. The arrangements for the rising were almost complete, the wording of the Proclamation of the Republic had yet to be agreed.

The hospital chart disappeared and no record of the visit was entered in the hospital register.

Tom MacDonagh was a romantic poet, but when he addressed his officers this evening he spoke of raincoats, leggings and marching boots.

Needles and thread, too.

Pins, bandages, rations for several days.

Arms and ammunition, of course.

Horlicks malted milk tablets, for quick nourishment.

Tinned beef, chocolate and cheese.

A box of matches.

The good soldier is equipped for every eventuality.

MacDonagh was a poet, novelist and teacher, Officer Commanding 2nd Battalion, Dublin Brigade of the Irish Volunteers. He had recently been appointed the seventh member of the secret Military Council that was planning the rising. His was the final appointment, joining Tom Clarke, Patrick Pearse, Eamonn Ceannt, Sean MacDermott, Joe Plunkett and James Connolly.

In front of him in the packed room sat the men who would carry through their plans – the junior officers of the Dublin Brigade.

MacDonagh, a cheery, emotional man of thirty-eight, was on personal terms with many of the officers here this evening. None more so than Frank Henderson and Oscar Traynor, the captain and lieutenant of F Company, 2nd Battalion. The company was informally known among some of the Volunteers as ‘MacDonagh’s Own’.

It was a Saturday evening early in April 1916. The meeting was held in the headquarters of the Irish Volunteers, at 2 Dawson Street, Dublin. The rumours had multiplied in recent weeks. Everyone in the audience believed the scrap was coming soon, few knew exactly when.

When MacDonagh was finished, another member of the Military Council, Eamonn Ceannt, rose. You will receive your orders, he said. ‘I myself don’t know when that order may come, but I do know it can’t be far distant.’

Ceannt said he'd made his will.

'We've organised a fund in America to look after the wives and dependants of those who will go down. And each man is to hand in the names of his dependants to his Company Captain immediately. Prepare yourselves for the day and put your souls in order.'

The audience having been warmed up, the star turn made his appearance.

Patrick Pearse, wearing a greatcoat and a slouch hat, a green uniform with yellow tabs to indicate senior officer status, moved towards the top of the room. A teacher, a non-practising barrister, a poet in his mid-thirties, Pearse was a self-consciously romantic figure, his life totally consumed by the idea of Irish independence from the Empire. He ran a school, St Enda's, in Rathfarnham. Tom MacDonagh worked alongside him there.

When he reached the top of the room Pearse turned and faced the officers. He passed his slouch hat to his brother Willie. His brother helped him take off the heavy overcoat.

Pearse stood, amid complete silence, his head lowered.

He let the tension build. The seconds ticked by – ten, twenty, thirty – and he stood there, silent, poised, head down.

He raised his head quickly and said, 'Is every man here prepared to meet his God?'

He spoke not loudly but with great intensity.

In the audience, the words hit Oscar Traynor like an electric jolt. He was aware that the men around him were similarly moved.

'I know that you've been preparing your bodies for this great struggle that lies before us, but have you also been preparing your souls?'

Again, a long pause.

Then came the core message of Pearse's appearance here – the warning, without specifics or times or places, that the drilling and training were almost over.

For any man not in earnest, Pearse said, this is the time to get out.

The rest of his speech merely repeated earlier suggestions about practical preparations for the battle. It was the opening lines, the drama of that moment, which stuck in the minds of his audience.

Raincoats and leggings, needles and thread, make your will and cleanse your soul. The movement had always been a mixture of the secular and the divine, the mundane and the romantic. It would continue so into its climax, and long beyond.

2

The authorities at Dublin Castle knew rebellion was a possibility. There were two schools of thought about how to deal with the paramilitary pretensions of the Irish nationalists. Crack down on them, or let them march and drill like toy soldiers.

The Irish Volunteers were one small part of the nationalist movement, which in turn was just one element in a country securely held for the Empire. One point of view said such dissidence could be easily overwhelmed by the force of the British Army, shot, locked up and intimidated out of existence.

The other point of view was that cracking down might provoke the insurrection the authorities were hoping to avoid. It would inflame other nationalists, who weren't members of the Volunteers, who might be radicalized by the suppression. Leave the Volunteers alone, let them burn up their anger and ambition in playing at being soldiers. The extremists among them were, after all, a bunch of amateurs with little support among the people.

The day after the officer meeting addressed by Pearse, police raided the Volunteer training ground at Fr. Mathew Park, off Philipsburg Avenue, in Fairview. They wanted to search for a consignment of guns received from Volunteers in Wexford.

F Company's lieutenant, Oscar Traynor, quickly organized a defence and the police were held off at gunpoint: 'Not one step further or I order fire.'

Word spread. Captain Frank Henderson was among the F Company men who rushed to the park and forced the police

to back down.

One thing the authorities could do, they decided, was stop the printing and sale of seditious literature. A range of small newspapers openly championed everything from intellectual rejection of the Empire to detailed analysis of the tactics of insurrection. The police raided printworks in Capel Street and Liffey Street, then hurried down Eden Quay and raided the shop in Liberty Hall, offices of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union, where the papers were sold.

On the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 the Irish Citizen Army had decorated the front of Liberty Hall with a large banner: ‘We serve neither King nor Kaiser, but Ireland’.

Two policemen entered the union’s Co-op shop. They told Rosie Hackett they were taking the newspapers. Already a veteran trade unionist at the age of twenty-three, Hackett was also a member of the Irish Citizen Army. ‘Wait ’til I get the head,’ she told them and sent a printer to find James Connolly.

By the time Connolly came down, Helena Molony, secretary of the Irish Women Workers’ Union, had entered the shop. She was a separatist, a socialist, a feminist and a member of the Citizen Army. She also on occasion acted at the Abbey Theatre.

When Connolly arrived he was armed, and accompanied by the shop manager, Jenny Shanahan.

The police had already begun confiscating the seditious newspapers. The *Workers’ Republic* was currently carrying educational articles by Connolly, describing how a small army might engage an occupying force in street fighting.

One policeman told Connolly, ‘We’ve come to seize the paper.’

‘You can’t,’ Connolly said.

‘I have my orders.’

Connolly raised his gun. ‘Drop them,’ he said, ‘or I’ll drop you.’

Behind the police, Helena Molony had drawn her revolver. Caught between the two, the police officers backed down and left the shop.

Connolly knew they’d be back. And this time they’d likely be out to suppress more than the newspapers. Already, plainclothes policemen routinely watched the building.

He hurried upstairs to his office. Minutes later, he came out on to the landing and spotted Jimmy O’Shea, a member of the Citizen Army. ‘Come up at once to No. 7.’

The Irish Citizen Army had originated as a group formed to protect strikers from the beatings they regularly received from police batons. Over the previous two years, under James Connolly, it had become an armed force of about three hundred that drilled regularly and intensely. Jimmy O’Shea, who worked in a foundry that built Guinness barges, was one of the Citizen Army’s most committed members.

When O’Shea entered room No. 7 he saw Constance Markievicz, nationalist, suffragette and member of the Citizen Army. Markievicz had become a countess when she married a Polish aristocrat. Now, she was writing quickly on a series of small pieces of paper. Nearby, Nora Connolly – the union leader’s daughter – was doing the same. There was a .45 revolver on the table in front of James Connolly. Markievicz too had a gun beside her.

Connolly asked O’Shea if he could evade the detectives watching the building and deliver these mobilization papers.

O’Shea said he’d try.

There was a standing order in the Citizen Army: if any member received a mobilization paper signed by Connolly they had to leave wherever they were – work, bed, home – and get to the place specified on the paper.

After the raid on the Co-op shop, and the resistance to the confiscation of the newspapers, Connolly feared that the police would return in force to close down the building and carry out arrests.

Three months earlier, Connolly had secretly become a member of the Military Council planning the rising – a socialist along with six nationalists. While Patrick Pearse had assumed the position of commander-in-chief, it was agreed that Connolly would direct military operations in Dublin. Knowing how close the rising was, he feared that a successful police assault on Liberty Hall would put the Citizen Army out of business – disrupting the plans, perhaps fatally. To prevent that, he now decided that Liberty Hall, up to the day of the insurrection, would become a fortress.

Within a few minutes the mobilization papers were ready. Connolly told Jimmy O'Shea to get them to the Citizen Army mobilizing officer, Tom Kain, who had a shop on Arran Quay.

Constance Markievicz put the papers down the back of O'Shea's shirt.

At the office downstairs, knowing the detectives watching from outside could see him, O'Shea made a show of paying his union subs. He'd been working at the foundry that morning and was streaked with grime, so he looked the part. Resisting the urge to hurry, he strolled past the detectives, lighting a cigarette. He crossed over to the quayside and walked up towards Marlborough Street. Only when he was out of sight of the detectives did he break into a run. He didn't stop until he had run a mile alongside the Liffey, to Capel Street Bridge.

At a premises there, O'Shea passed the mobilization papers to Tom Kain, who began circulating them to Citizen Army members, who in turn alerted others.

Jimmy O'Shea continued on to Emmet Hall, in Inchicore, where Mike Mallin, James Connolly's second in command,

lived. O’Shea and Mallin armed themselves with rifles and bandoliers and set out for Liberty Hall.

They came to the union offices, scores of armed men, from foundries, fitting shops, forges and construction sites. These weren’t casual members of the Citizen Army, in the way that many nationalists were casual members of the Irish Volunteers. They were committed, often hardened, soldiers.

Some carters had time to stable their horses, others brought them to Liberty Hall. Men arrived at the union hall in their greasy smocks, some with whips hanging from their belts, many flecked with coal, mud or cement.

Sean Connolly was there, captain in the Citizen Army, dressed in accordance with his job as a clerk in the rates department of City Hall.

Whatever their working clothes, they came with bandoliers and weapons. Each window and entrance was allocated an armed guard.

Everyone else went to a large room inside Liberty Hall, where James Connolly addressed them. The police had attempted to raid the building today, he said. They may come again, and we have to be prepared for anything. From here on, guards will be posted day and night. Each man will do two nights a week, plus Saturday and Sunday. Those who are unemployed will take the day shifts.

In the days that followed, there were armed members on landings and in corridors, women preparing knapsacks, young boys collecting bread from bakeries, large hams being cooked for when they’d be needed.

You walk into a room and there’s someone with a blowtorch heating a French bayonet, to bend it to fit a rifle for which it was never meant. Someone else is brewing tea on one side of a glowing fireplace; on the other side of the fireplace there’s a pot of melted lead, to make bullets. The building was now not so much a union hall as a military barracks in the days before a battle.

In the early hours of Wednesday, 19 April, Tom Clarke arrived at his home in Richmond Road. He told his wife Kathleen about tonight's meeting of the Military Council, at which the wording for the Proclamation of the Republic had finally been agreed.

Clarke had been a nationalist activist since his teens, a nineteenth-century Fenian – believing the Empire wouldn't release its grip on Ireland without an armed fight. At age twenty-six he had been sentenced to jail, convicted of planning to blow up London Bridge. On release, after fifteen years, he went to the United States. He lived there for ten years and he and Kathleen married there. In 1907 he returned to Ireland, where he opened a tobacco shop in the centre of Dublin. Now, his record as an activist, and his selfless dedication to the cause, had won him a solid reputation among nationalists.

Pearse had this evening produced a draft version of the Proclamation. The Military Council discussed and amended it. Clarke was the first of the men to sign. He initially refused that honour, but Tom MacDonagh praised the Fenian's courage and example to the younger men. 'No man will precede you with my consent.'

The Proclamation addressed 'Irishmen and Irishwomen'. It took a stand with the suffragettes, endorsing 'the suffrages of all her men and women'. That was Connolly, a supporter of feminism. One of the seven signatories opposed the inclusion of equal opportunities and votes for women. Six of them supported it. Clarke told his wife which of the men had rejected the idea, but she would never reveal the name – other than to say it wasn't Tom.

On Holy Thursday, F Company paraded at Fr. Mathew Park and was addressed by Tom MacDonagh. He tried to prepare the rank-and-file Volunteers without telling them outright that they were within days of the rising. He spoke for longer than usual. The training manoeuvres that were

to be held on Sunday were very important, he said. Any man who wasn't up for a fight should drop out now, and no one would think less of them. If you choose to fight, don't worry about your families. Our friends in America have provided sufficient funds to ensure they'll be looked after.

Tomorrow, he said, was Good Friday; Sunday was Easter, a time of resurgence.

When the parade finished, MacDonagh said he wanted to have a chat with Frank Henderson. The captain put him off – he had a couple of hours of company work to do. Would it be all right if …

Of course, said MacDonagh. Sure, we'll talk again.

They never did.

Even now there would be obstacles and setbacks, but nothing could stop the rising. The Citizen Army would throw two or three hundred people into the fight; there were perhaps three thousand Irish Volunteers around the country.

In the event, two-thirds of those Volunteers would not come out, due to conflict among their leaders and to lack of arms. Those who did come out would have few modern weapons. Some would carry old guns more dangerous to themselves than to the enemy.

Somewhere in Dublin, preparing to take on the Empire within the next few days, a Volunteer from Dublin's 4th Battalion was patiently improvising a bayonet. He drilled a single blade from a pair of garden shears, then banded and bolted it to his shotgun.

They were taking on tens of thousands of troops, many of them battle-hardened in an army experienced in suppressing opposition throughout the Empire. An army with unlimited access to modern rifles, machine guns and artillery.

Part Two

The politics that created F Company

3

Sean O'Casey was singing 'Herself and Myself', a gentle romantic song about an old couple dancing at the wedding of a young friend and recalling their own youth.

It was 1912, O'Casey was aged thirty-two. It would be another five years before he would begin writing plays, and eleven years before the Abbey Theatre would first accept one of his works – leading to his emergence as an internationally acclaimed writer. For now, he was Sean, the Dublin labourer with the perpetually sore eyes, enjoying himself at another social evening at the St Laurence O'Toole hurling club.

The club was named after a twelfth-century archbishop of Dublin, the songs sung there were of lost heroes and lost loves – 'Jackets Green' or 'The Old Rustic Bridge by the Mill'.

This apparently placid cultural moment was a tiny part of a political shift taking place within Ireland, and between Ireland and its imperial owner. The governance of Ireland had become an issue, after a century in which Ireland was administered arrogantly and disastrously. In 1841 there were six and a half million people on the island. Then came famine and its consequences. By 1911, starvation and flight had cut the population to just over three million.

The imperial government felt strongly about not interfering with the free market. And Irish farmers and merchants felt equally strongly about their right to sell to the highest bidder, regardless of the consequences. In the words of the Earl of Clarendon, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland: 'No-one could now venture to dispute the fact that Ireland

had been sacrificed to the London corn-dealers … and that no distress would have occurred if the exportation of Irish grain had been prohibited.'

Every day, as people starved to death, shiploads of food left Irish ports.

For an age, Ireland had been held firmly within the Empire. The imperial power – despite its ideological hang-up about intervening in the free market – imposed oppressive controls on land; put limits on industrial and commercial development; suppressed political and administrative control; and responded with rigid and disastrous policies to the famines. In every aspect of government, what always counted was what best suited the interests and beliefs of those who ran the Empire.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the result was a battered, deferential country, annually paying extortionate amounts of tax to the Empire. According to Sir Robert Giffen, chief statistical adviser to the UK government, 'Ireland ought to pay about £3,500,000 and it pays nearly £7,000,000.'

Ireland was also submissive culturally – speaking the language of the Empire, playing its games, singing its songs, performing and listening to its music. The history taught in schools was history as seen by the Empire. The Irish had adopted the mindset of the colonized, in which subservience to a foreign monarch was the natural order of things.

The shift that was occurring in political attitudes would continue throughout the next decade, culminating in the wrenching of Ireland from the grasp of the British Empire, and the partition of the island into Catholic nationalist and Protestant unionist enclaves.

One of the strands in that shift in attitudes was cultural. As a counter to the culture of the Empire, there had been an upsurge of interest in Ireland's Gaelic past. The Gaelic League promoted the Irish language, music and dance. The

Gaelic Athletic Association promoted native games. The Abbey Theatre promoted national drama, and would in time see the emergence of a generation of celebrated writers – including O'Casey, J. M. Synge, Lady Gregory and W. B. Yeats.

The St Laurence O'Toole club was run by the GAA. Like the great number of such clubs, it held social evenings to encourage interest in Irish culture, as well as concerts, dances and open-air festivals where a range of activities were staged.

Frank Henderson, the future captain of F Company, was master of ceremonies at the St Laurence O'Toole social club and a friend of Sean O'Casey's. He was aged twenty-six, a member of the GAA and the Gaelic League, an avid reader of the political newspapers that flowered in the atmosphere of Celtic revival.

Henderson shared with O'Casey a sympathy for the trade union efforts to reduce the squalor of working-class life. He flirted with socialist ideas: 'The common people were downtrodden at the time and under heavy oppression and there was no relief forthcoming but by uniting together and striking a blow against their bosses.'

But Henderson believed that breaking the imperial bond was more important than socialism: 'political freedom was a better objective and to break the connection with English rule in Ireland.' Besides, someone told him socialists would never tolerate his devotion to Catholicism, so he drew back.

Politically, the shift in nationalist attitudes was dominated by the Irish Parliamentary Party – led by John Redmond MP. After campaigning for thirty years, the Irish Party had finally in 1912 got a Home Rule Bill enacted by the British parliament. It was due to be brought into effect within two years. This would set up an Irish parliament, with limited powers, within the Empire.

There was another strand of nationalism, stemming from the old Fenian tradition, which said the British would

concede no real power without a fight. They would have to be kicked out.

Behind the scenes, the secretive Irish Republican Brotherhood was spreading the doctrine of physical force. The organization had been founded half a century earlier, among Irish emigrants in America, and had for several years been burrowing away covertly inside the nationalist cultural and political movement. By 1912 it had about 1,700 members in Ireland.

However, it wasn't the nationalists whose activities caused the Empire the most worry. Between 1912 and 1914 there was a real fear of conflict between the Empire and its loyal subjects in Ireland.

The violent events of 1912–16 would be driven largely by the unionists' preparations to resist Home Rule. Their resolute leader, Sir Edward Carson, a southern unionist, a widely respected lawyer with a successful practice in London, began organizing armed militias in 1912, with the explicit intent to resist the will of parliament. These eventually became the Ulster Volunteer Force. Having fought and lost their case politically, the unionists threatened civil war rather than allow the UK government to implement parliament's Home Rule legislation.

Like Patrick Pearse would later do, Carson presided over a Military Council. By the summer of 1914, he and his comrades had formally constituted a provisional government.

The British establishment didn't seek to put down this incipient rebellion. They were deeply respectful of the upper-class figures involved. Treasonous British Army officers at the Curragh camp warned that they would not obey any order to act against the unionists, and were treated respectfully by the authorities.

Imitating the example of the unionists, nationalists held a rally in Dublin and set up the Irish Volunteers. They armed themselves as best they could and engaged in intensive

training. The Empire's toleration of Carson's seditious forces now made it difficult for the British to act aggressively against the Irish Volunteers.

The titular head of the Volunteers was Professor Eoin MacNeill, from University College Dublin, an academic specializing in early and medieval Irish history. Behind the scenes, the IRB subtly nudged here and pushed there – a quiet word, a planted idea.

Like the unionists, the Volunteers bought guns in Germany. The Kaiser's people, anticipating war with the United Kingdom, hoped that by providing weapons to both sides they might create an Irish civil war that would distract the British.

Frank Henderson and his brother Leo were involved in organizing the rally that saw the creation of the Volunteers. They enlisted in B Company, 2nd Battalion, Dublin Brigade. The 2nd Battalion training ground at Fr. Mathew Park was just across the road from their home at Windsor Villas.

Sean O'Casey was a member of the IRB. He approached Frank Henderson and invited him to join. This was an honour, a sign of trust and high regard by the hidden inner circle of Irish nationalism.

Frank's brother Leo – seven years younger – was already a member of the IRB, but Frank was not. He thought about it for a week, then said no. On the one hand he believed that there would never be an effective rebellion against the Empire unless there was some secretive body working away in the background – an open organization would be prey to spies and informers. However, the Catholic bishops had issued a Pastoral letter in which they ruled that it was sinful for Catholics to join secret, oath-bound societies. Frank's nationalism clashed with his strong Catholic beliefs, and his deep religious commitment won out.

Charlie Saurin and his friend Arthur Shields had grown up together on Vernon Terrace, Clontarf, a few doors away