

Ned Quinlan

This is the story of Ned Quinlan who in 1917 was the leader of the 7th Tipperary Brigade of the I.R.A which covered the Roscrea Area.

Ned was born in 1892 and at the age of 9 years his parents moved back to Ireland and settled in Coolanure in Killavilla in 1901. Still in his teens, Ned became an active member of the I.R.A. At the time he and his colleagues would have provided protection for Sinn Féin members during the Kilkenny by-election and would have kept law and order at rallies. Ernie O'Malley interviewed scores of I.R.A veterans in the 40s including Ned, here are some extracts of his interview.



Roscrea Through the Ages
Jimmy Leahy (left) & Ned Quinlan at the takeover of
Thurles Police Barracks

In 1919 Sergeant Brady's father was an ex-soldier from Roscrea (and) the order came down that he was to be shot. They waited in hiding for him on the Birr Road and when he came they shot him. They shot him with a bulldog revolver and when they emptied the revolver's six bullets but he was still alive and that was all the bullets they had. So they decided to get a large stone and finish him off. While they were looking for a suitable stone they heard a car coming and hid. In the car was Dr Heenan who was on his way from Birr and he put him in his car and took him in to Roscrea and treated him. He survived his ordeal and when he recovered he fled the area and didn't return until about 1935. There was another man about this time who was suspected of being a spy. The orders came down that he was to be frightened but not killed. They approached this man and put 5 or 6 bullets in his legs. When he recovered he

also left the area but was not heard from again. The local priest Father Ryan was taken at the time by some British army supporters and he was taken away, he was tarred and feathered and left tied to a gate. Ned and his men knew that three of them were local but could not prove who they were.

Part of this interview pertains to a suspicious character that arrived in town:

"Paddy Kennedy who was commanding officer of the 2nd Tipperary Brigade sent word for me to meet him one day. I knew Paddy was very trustworthy and I met him in Kinirons (now the Full House) pub when I did meet him he had a man on the run and asked me would I be able to put him up for a few days. He said that this lad was on his way to Dublin to take part in an attack on the Lord Lieutenant who had escaped a previous attack and was to meet Seán Tracy and Dan Breen along the way. On the way home he had been insistent that he was from the Cork/Kerry border. Then I said

that your accent is not from Kerry that I knew that accent and it was from Waterford. He became so enraged that he pulled out his gun before I persuaded him to calm down again."

Ned was suspicious of him after he came back from Currans bar in Ballybritt (now Breretons) drunk and told Ned that he had met a dozen R.I.C men on the road and got on so well with them that he went to the pub and stood them a drink. Despite his suspicions he took him on a raid of the house of Major Buster Jackson where Ned himself escaped with arms despite there being a dozen intoxicated R.I.C men across the road. After a week he was taken to Mountrath to meet a leading I.R.A man who took him to Portlaoise. Ned takes up the story.

"He was only 4 days in Maryborough when he came back in a panic. I met him with my brother John Joe and Mick Maher with a sidecar. I met them at midnight and he wanted to be in Ballylanders by morning, he said that he had been betrayed by someone in Maryborough. He gave me no reason for his haste. I drove him on to Jack Collison in Moneygall and got him out of bed then Jack tethered his horse and took him on to the Silvermines. When Jack came back I asked him what did he think of the lad and he said he thought his nerves were at him from the drink. I said I don't like him and it will do no harm to report him so I sent on a report to H.Q and heard no more about it."

A number of weeks later Jack Collison received a report that he was a prominent spy from Cappaquin in Waterford. He was taken to Newcastlewest, interrogated and with a rosary beads in his hands he was shot. Ned reckoned that the spy's infiltration had halted operations in Laois, Offaly and Tipperary for 3 weeks.

After the fighting was over Ned joined the new Garda force and went on to become a Garda detective in Tullamore until he retired. He was a great middle distance runner and became involved in the Offaly athletics board. He was held in such high esteem that Tullamore Harriers named their premier cup after him and was won by such names as Eamon Coughlan. He eventually moved to Waterford where he remained until his death.

Ned would be classed as being up there with names like Sean Tracey and Dan Breen when it came to some of the great freedom fighters of our country.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a hAnam.

Thanks to Ger Dooley for providing his lecture notes on this item.