

1798 – an Account

Le Général Humbert – fighting to the last Man

Some visitors may come to Ireland, not knowing much of the Gaelic culture, which we all once had. It fostered a love of the land and of the community, a love of learning and a determination to defend our laws and values.



In Sligo, in the Northwest, signs point to: ‘Humbert’s Way’. **Humbert**, a gallant, able French General, came to these shores to combat the English. He partook in the 1798 rebellion. It tells but one chapter in the story of the loss of our Gaelic cultural heritage and identity. A hybrid identity had to be adopted, based on English and Gaelic influences. To survive, in those dark times, compromise was the price of life. Still, the policy of acculturation was effected by the force of arms over generations and, finally, by allowing the 1845-7 Famine to take the people down. Great Gaelic friendships with Europe ended. The philosophies and personal character, which had marked us out, are well documented in France and Germany.



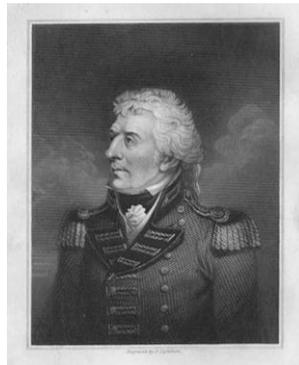
In 1791 an organization called the United Irishmen was formed by a new alliance between native Catholics and conscientious Protestants and Dissenters from the English ruling classes in Ireland. [Dissenters were Protestants not of the Anglican Church and so caught by the anti-Catholic Penal Laws in Ireland.] The aim of the movement was to ferment revolution and to gain independence from England. In 1796, England began a campaign to suppress the United Irishmen and their allies, another group called the Defenders. The United Irishmen took its inspiration from the American and French revolutions. If they had been well organized the United Irishmen, with timely military support from France, could have been successful.

The Irish ‘Croppies’, who cropped their hair short, in the French revolutionary style, were ready to rise by the Spring of 1798. However, a cohort of fully anglicized people was already long established, so that spies could operate easily for the English. One high informant took a lump sum of £5,000 and a pension of £1,000 to testify in the trial for treason of the Executive Committee of the United Irishman. The Town

Major Henry Sirr, Dublin's police chief, seized ten of the leaders, on 12th March, 1798, in the house of Oliver Bond, a woollen merchant. He and two others of the Leinster Directory were sentenced to death in a sham trial. A public housing flats complex in Dublin today carries the name of Oliver Bond. The charismatic Theobald Wolfe Tone was the leader of the new movement. He was a barrister and the son of a coach-maker. He and other leaders were still at large. The rebel commander-in-chief was Lord Edward Fitzgerald. He is remembered in Dublin by the name given to a public house.

The Unfortunate Wolfe Tone, in French uniform, to the left, from the pages of 'Walker's Hibernian Magazine', 1798. Wolfe Tone and Napper Tandy (the son of a Quaker ironmonger, and a man of conviction and principle), went to Paris to ask Napoleon Bonaparte for help. Napoleon mused: "What would these gentlemen have? France is revolutionised! Holland is revolutionised! Europe will soon be revolutionized! But this it seems is not enough to content them." He then said to Wolfe Tone: "Mais, vous êtes brave (but, you are courageous)". **Lord Edward decided to rebel without help.** The English pursued the volunteer members of the force. Executions by Militias, although they created martyrs like William Orr, were effective at undermining the movement. Orr's Terrace, in Harold's Cross, Dublin, bears his name.

Abercromby, the English Commander-in-Chief in Ireland, planned to use collective punishment of the populace. Troops were sent to live at 'Free Quarters' in disturbed areas, with orders to requisition food, cattle, fodder and to break the people by any means. Widespread house burnings, crop destruction, confiscation of food, torture and rape followed. Turning the island into a prison camp was not to be enough.



Abercromby was replaced by General Lake. He believed in selective punishments and recruited regiments for the Yeomanry (a part-time, local force) and the Fencibles (a foreign quasi-militia). The law and constitution were suspended. General Lake was to take action 'if necessary beyond that which can be sanctioned by the law'. Lake himself said: "I am convinced that the contest must lay between the army and the people".

In Athy, Co Kildare, on the 1st of May, 1798, Triangles first appeared. A victim was secured, whilst he was flogged to death. There were right-handed and left-handed floggers, who lashed in unison. Tiring floggers had replacements, to ensure no loss of momentum. The declared purpose was to elicit information.



- A) Picketing - the victim was left hanging, whilst standing on sharp pointed stakes. (Death was comparable with that caused by crucifixion.) When close to death, the victim would be let down, revived and then hanged again. This would be repeated until it was as well to leave the victim hanging.
- B) Portable ‘traveling gallows’ were used for Half-hangings. A conical cap, of strong paper or cloth, was used for Pitch Capping. A cone, filled with boiling pitch (tar) was fitted to victim’s head. The liquid ran down the face, into the eyes and mouth. When the pitch had cooled, the cap was pulled off, with most of the scalp. Shears were used to remove long hair – often with the ears too. The method of punishment varied: sometimes gun-powder was added to the tar, which was set alight. In Ulster and Leinster risings did, in any event, take place. Rebels, armed with farm implements, and pikes charged against firing cannons. Many of them were women.
- C) The Rebels aimed to free the people. However, many of these were being tortured and killed, at the same time, to defuse the Rebellion. Some successes were still recorded. 3 In Wexford, Father John Murphy of Boolavogue, went into folklore. His soldiers, ever known as Croppies, were mainly armed with pikes.
- D) At Enniscorthy, General Lake killed all survivors of the engagement – whether found in fields, roadways or ditches. In mopping up operations, his troops killed everyone in front of them. The courthouse was burned to the ground - with eighty wounded insurgents inside. It is recorded that their corpses still hissed, in the embers, the following day.
- E) By July of 1798, General Lake, his Militia and Yeomen (these latter protected the landed gentry, of English settler stock) had quelled the rising. Many rebels had taken to the field, poorly armed and with no hope of success. Occupation had so distressed them that they would embrace death. The only way to stop them was to show that their death would be horrifying. The method of crushing the rebellion was doubtlessly one of those things about which, on the 18 of May, 2011, HM Queen Elizabeth II, said “things which we would wish had been done differently or not at all”.
- F) In her short visit here, HM won all our hearts and put salve to many wounds. In 1998, we commemorated the vain revolution when, on New Year's Eve in Enniscorthy, a ceremony was held to open a year of commemoration. Torches were carried to the top of Vinegar Hill1, just outside Enniscorthy, to commemorate the final battle of the rising in Co Wexford. From January on, the National Library in Dublin offered an interactive exhibit on the Rising. The Downpatrick Museum (Co Down) and The

Belfast Ulster Museum also held exhibits, from April on. On April 13, in Boolavogue, the Fr. John Murphy Centre was officially opened.

G) General Humbert and the United Irishmen

Connacht had escaped from the pillage of General Lake. On the 22nd of August 1798, General Humbert arrived from France, at Killala, Co Mayo. Flying an English flag, he easily took the town. Many volunteers joined him, including men from Dún Chaocháin, Co Mayo (whose descendents visitors will have met). The impoverishment of the people struck the French. Captain Jobit wrote: “We were astonished by the extreme poverty ... the women and children are practically naked ... they share a primitive habitation with everything from the farmyard. Their daily food is potatoes and sour milk...”. He contrasts this poverty with the easy life lived by Protestant (English) landlords.

Captain Jobit did not identify with the religious disposition of the Irish. In France, from 1792 to 1794, some 40,000 people were executed for being Catholic. These French soldiers, now in Ireland, would have known what had happened. At the time, harsh anti-Catholic Penal laws were part of English efforts to kill off Irish national identity. If the French they had succeeded in Ireland, it has been asked, would one attempt at obliteration have been replaced by another? Perhaps, more likely, the French would have seen that the Faith in Ireland was very much more a matter of personal belief and conduct, rather than a sign of political allegiance or social status.

After a 15-mile march at night, Humbert arrived in Castlebar on August the 27th, 1798. A combined force of 2,000 French and Irish routed a force of 6,000 English soldiers. The defeat became known as the ‘Castlebar Races’, for the headlong flight of the English. Huge quantities of guns and equipment were abandoned, including General Lake's personal luggage. His army however, whilst still in retreat, engaged in atrocities. The English ran until they reached Tuam, with some units fleeing as far as Athlone. Following the French victory, thousands of volunteers flocked to join Humbert, who sent a request to France for reinforcements. On August the 31st, 1798, Humbert set up the Republic of Connaught and appointed one John Moore as its President. On September the 4th, the English generals Cornwallis and Lake, with 25,000 troops, came to Hollymount, 12 miles from Castlebar.

Lake wanted revenge for his earlier, humiliating defeat. Humbert moved his troops and left Castlebar, under the cover of darkness. Moving quickly, he gained a day's march ahead of Government forces. On the 5th, Humbert reached Collooney, having traveled 45 miles without rest. Colonel Charles Vereker, in charge of the Sligo garrison, advanced to meet the French at Collooney. They were taken by surprise. The brave action of Bartholomew Teeling, who maneuvered to kill a well-positioned gunner, turned the fray in favour of Humbert.

On the 6th, Humbert lead his troops through Ballintogher and across the Sligo border and into Leitrim. If he had known that Sligo was undefended, he could have taken the town and fled North. [English versions of placenames, on the Humbert route, often appear odd to English-speakers and even odder to Irish-speakers.] Cornwallis reached Frenchpark in Roscommon, with over 25,000 men under his command. General Lake's army, resting in Collooney, sent an advance guard to pursue Humbert's rearguard. They harassed Humbert's men all the way to Ballinamuck. Some volunteers were caught asleep, exhausted by the long march. They were hanged.

Later, Humbert camped on the high ground in front of Drumkeerin village. The local people brought them milk meat and potatoes. The French were impressed with the hospitality of the people, all along the route to Ballinamuck. Humbert was requested to surrender at Drumkeerin but refused to do so. At night, Humbert left Drumkeerin and went through Tarmon. He knew that if he did not cross the River Shannon at Ballintra, near Drumshanbo, he might be hemmed in by the river and Lough Allen. In addition, Lake was pursuing him and Cornwallis was possibly already in Carrick-on-Shannon.

On Friday, September the 7th, Humbert's forces routed 100 troops guarding Ballintra Bridge. He tried to destroy the bridge, to slow down General Lake, but snipers from the other side of the river prevented this. Humbert's forces rested in Drumshanbo. Humbert moved his army up the hilly road (Bóthar a' Chnoic) leading from Drumshanbo – across Dristernan Hill – to Lough Scure. At Clodrumin, close to the crossroads at Derrinkip, British forces led by Crawford opened fire on Humbert's rearguard. His forces halted to face the pursuers. These retreated, at full gallop, suffering considerable losses.

Following this engagement Crawford did not engage with Humbert's forces, until Lake joined up with them much later, at Ballinamuck. Humbert considered proceeding to Granard, where he thought thousands of United Irishmen from the Midlands would join him. However, it came to light that over 2,000 United Irishmen had been defeated at the Battle of Granard. Armed with pikes, the Rebels had been no match for well armed Yeomanry and English forces. When the Battle of Granard was over, the English took surviving Croppies to the church at Granard, to hang them.

A hangman from Wicklow was called 'The Walking Gallows'. With a rope around the victim's neck, he threw him over his shoulder and jumped around until the victim was dead. When the English grew tired of hanging, any prisoners still alive were tied up and left lying on the street overnight. In the morning a herd of cattle was driven over them. Anyone still alive was shot. In the days which followed, an orgy of burnings, floggings and shootings of local people began, to deter anyone from joining Humbert.

Back at Clodrumin, Humbert split his forces. This was a ploy to keep Lake's forces confused regarding his intentions. Firstly, one Division from Clodrumin marched to Drumroosk, where they turned left towards Cornagher, to meet up with another Division. Secondly, a Division is thought to have traveled to Fenagh, through the townland of Fenagh Beg. Tradition says that Humbert was attacked by a section of the Ballinamore Yeomanry, as he entered Fenagh.



Lake's terror tactics, after Granard, carried a clear message. Any locals who now joined Humbert would have considered the likely outcomes they faced. Humbert continued from Fenagh, along what is locally

called the Old French Road, and met up with the rest of his forces. Late on the 7th of September, Humbert reached Cloone with a weary and tired group of soldiers. He ordered a rest for two hours. His instructions were disobeyed. Sentries allowed the men to rest for four hours.

A French General Sarrazin would later on hint that Humbert may have been bribed to stay at Cloone. This suggestion said more of Sarrazin than of the intrepid General Humbert. Another story comes from a French officer called General Fontaine. He said that they arrived in Cloone with great difficulty. Their canon had to be carried along a marshy and difficult road. The English had stopped harassing them because they were awaiting reinforcements.

Fontaine said that Humbert received a deputation from local United Irishmen: they promised him 10,000 recruits, if he could wait until the following day. 2 Several of the volunteers in the Living Communities have spent some time in Dristernan, in the house of this author, which was built right on the path once taken by the great Humbert and his followers. 6 Later again at 10pm, Cornwallis left Carrick, with his troops, for Mohill. He learned that Humbert was staying the night in Cloone. He sent word to Lake to proceed there. Lake was somewhere close to Keshcarrigan and must march through the night.

At Cloone, Humbert's men ate and rested. Tradition has it that they cooked meat using the graveyard's gates as a grill. It is also said that, during their stay in Cloone, the chains used to haul the artillery pieces and ammunition went missing. Humbert's march was delayed by his lack of horses and of harnesses for hauling his supplies over mountainous terrain. The loss of the chains at Cloone was a significant factor in the ultimate defeat at Ballinamuck. On the 8th of September, Humbert's forces left Cloone. The French and Irish went towards Ballinamuck, leaving Keeldra Lake and going into Catton and Fearglass, in the parish of Gortletteragh.

Cornwallis' army had reached Mohill. He knew that Humbert was heading for Ballinamuck. He sent his troops ahead of Humbert, to cut him off. General Lake had followed the route of Humbert through Kesh, Fenagh and was now in Cloone, just as Cornwallis was in Mohill. The combined English force was about 35,000. It was now only a matter of time before Humbert was caught at Ballinamuck. Lake caught up with Humbert's forces, which numbered something short of 2,000. Battle of Ballinamuck The battle of Ballinamuck took place on a warm Saturday morning, the 8th of September.

Humbert's army was outnumbered and could only put up a token resistance. The French surrendered and were taken prisoners of war. No quarter was shown to the Irish. The English charged into them, killing all they could. One of Lake's Militia wrote: "We ran for four miles before we could get into action... We pursued the Rebels through the bog – the country was covered for miles round with their slain." On the 9th of September, many people went to the battlefield at Ballinamuck. Amongst them was a man from Killeshandra, who wrote: "There lay dead about five hundred. I went with many others to see them. How awful! To see that healthy mountain covered with dead bodies, resembling at a distance flocks of sheep – for numbers were naked and swelled with the weather".

In the days and weeks following the battle, the Yeomanry from Leitrim, Longford, and Cavan scoured the countryside, looking for rebels who had escaped. Tradition handed down tells us that a fleeing Rebel was caught at Fenagh and hung from a tree outside the late Jimmy Joe McKiernan's (local Sculptor) House. He could have been from Cavan as there were reports that many Rebels had come from Belturbet to join Humbert.

William Brady from Keshcarrigan was caught helping Rebels to flee across a bog, a few miles from Ballinamuck. He was tried and sentenced to be hanged by the neck, until dead. Afterwards his head was to be severed from his body and placed on the most conspicuous part of Cavan town. Prisoners brought to Carrick-on-Shannon were not court martialled. 7 “After the action at Ballinamuck, the regiment marched to Carrick-on-Shannon where, in the courthouse, there were a couple of hundred rebels.

An order arrived from Cornwallis directing a certain number of them to be hanged without further ceremony – and a number of bits of paper were rolled up with the word ‘Death’ being written on the number ordered to be killed; and, with those in a hat, the Adjutant Captain Kay entered the courthouse and the drawing of lots began. As fast as a wretch drew the fatal ticket, he was handed out and hanged at the door... It was a dreadful duty to devolve upon any regiment”. Another account says: “19 hanged, with remaining prisoners sent to another regiment to follow our example”.

Two places of execution were used in Carrick-on-Shannon. Prisoners not hanged at the first site were sent to the second. Yet other prisoners were exported, as slaves, to colonies like Australia and Tasmania. The French were treated as prisoners of war and all were returned to France. An exchange of British prisoners held in France ensured their safe return. In Ireland, executions, punishments and reprisals went on for weeks after the battle of Ballinamuck. During the first two weeks of September, 1798, more soldiers and bigger armies than local people had ever seen, marauded across the Leitrim and the Fenagh countryside. ‘Free Quarters’ was fully exploited.

Adelia M. West, an Anglo-Irish lady, wrote in her memoirs “My mother told me that the autumn of ‘98 was the finest she ever saw, it was like Summer through November and on to Christmas. She cut a large bunch of roses in the garden at Annadale [in Kiltubrid] but, though flowers were unusually plentiful, food was scarce. And the poor misguided, ignorant people were in many places starving.”

The disconnect between dying people and their masters is noteworthy. Our people were starving; their lives destroyed. And Famine was yet to come, in 1845. Éire, Banba and Fodhla, our three goddesses - of the Land and People, of their Defence and of Learning - had overseen another stage in their relegation into obscurity. Histories: A Flame Now Quenched Rebels and Frenchmen in Leitrim, By Father Liam Kelly Leitrim and the Croppies 1776 -1804, By Gerard McAtasney Leitrim and Longford 1798 “Undaunted by Gibbet and Yeos”, By Des Guckian The Year of Liberty The Great Irish Rebellion of 1798, By Thomas Pakenham The last Invasion of Ireland, By Richard Hayes Importantly, information supplied by local people, now deceased, to the Folklore Department in Ballinamore Library. i) <http://www.thewildgeese.com/pages/1798.html>
ii) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/ashorthistory/archive/intro151.shtml>
iii) <http://www.struggle.ws/andrew/1798.html>
iv) <http://www.fenagh.com/history/united-irishmen/>
v) <http://www.askaboutireland.ie/reading-room/history-heritage/history-of-ireland/1798-glossary-of-terms/> 8

Curtha in Eagar ag an nDr Liam SS Réamonn – 17/Márta/2012

My father, Seán Réamonn (RIP), told me that many of our kinsmen perished on Vinegar Hill. Our family is centered around the town of Ballygarret. The name, being Norman, derives from Old German. Norman families became ‘Hiberniores Hibernis ipsis (more Irish than the Irish themselves.)’