



Guerilla Days in Ireland: A Personal Account of the Anglo-Irish War

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Guerilla Days in Ireland is the extraordinary story of the fight between two unequal forces, which ended in the withdrawal of the British from twenty-six counties. In particular, it is the story of the West Cork Flying column under Tom Barry, commander of genius and national hero.

Guerilla Days in Ireland: A Personal Account of the Anglo-Irish War Details

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From Reader Review *Guerilla Days in Ireland: A Personal Account of the Anglo-Irish War* for online ebook

Ian says

I think I was looking for an insight into the story behind the war. The motivations, the politics and what drove people to such extremes, although this is all touched upon, this book is more a military and tactical record. And for this, it's quite a success.

BOB says

The overwhelming impression here, at first, is that Tom Barry is not a man given to great self-reflection. Only in particularly fraught recollections does he describe the fears and doubts he faced in incredible circumstances. His men, apparently, respected and followed his orders without question or complaint. This is particularly important, Barry is not a man with any patience for complaints. The greatest mark of decency to him is to bear great suffering without complaint. A man is good if he is competent and does his duty above all else. For an experienced soldier with what seems like a good military mind such as himself, the task at hand was clear and there were few probing questions to be asked. This is seemingly true almost from the moment he learned of the 1916 rising, thousands of miles away fighting for the British army in Mesopotamia. How did Barry feel about fighting for the British in a bloody war of imperialism for years? Who knows!

He often seems easily impressed. "X was the greatest Quartermaster in Ireland". "If there was a finer battalion leader than Z I'd never met him". Eventually this extends to all the more famous Irish republican figures as well. DeValera, Collins, Mellows, Mulcahy and so on all are subject to glowing reviews. The one figure that comes in for any sort of criticism is Cathal Brugha, who is described as less than a genius and terse in person. But even here Barry makes it clear that he was a man of undoubtable conviction and courage who died a hero. This last applies to many figures he encounters. It becomes almost impossible to recall the differences between many of the people Barry meets and fights alongside, so frequently are they described as fine dashing men. By contrast, out of a sense of honour and to spare the victims families, those Irish who are the subject of open contempt (a man who panics and almost wrecks a mission, informants and traitors) aren't so much as named.

It's only by the time we get a chapter towards in which our hero meets both DeValera AND Collins and bestows upon them the expected effusive praise, that the political intent behind the book comes out most clearly. Pointedly, he argues against the image of Dev as a scheming cold man, and provides his only real memory of the civil war to follow when he recounts how the IRA prisoners in Mountjoy said the rosary for Collins upon his death. It emerges Barry's goal here is to try to heal the wounds of the civil war by harking back to a simpler and more noble time. By heaping praise on all of those involved in the struggle, and withholding scorn for or ignoring those he clearly disdained by avoiding names and details in those cases, he makes the case for Ireland as a united and noble country whose noble warriors were merely momentarily led astray. And that may be a fine sentiment, but it makes this frustrating as a historical document. Did he truly think all of these men were the finest Ireland had to offer? Did he at no point suffer real doubts about their capabilities and leadership? I suppose it's admirable that his recollections aren't clouded by the bitterness of what follows. And of course, he manages to dodge that bitterness rather neatly by not including any of the guerrilla days he spent fighting the Free State government. This just compounded my own disappointment

that Barry avoids the more difficult questions of the time by nostalgically appealing to the old days, when they all fought together against the true enemy.

Where the book truly excels is in describing the military terms. Barry is a military man above all else, and perfectly outlines the tactics used in specific engagements, the failures and successes of particular decisions, the constant fears of encirclement. Over and over he emphasises the importance of working with and for and being supported by the people, swimming in the sea as does a fish as Mao would say. This is the bulk of the book, and the primary reason to read it. All by itself it makes Guerrilla Days a fine book. But those looking for serious depth should look elsewhere.

Jay Callahan says

A great leader, I imagine, but not a great writer. Ernie O'Malley's books are much much better.

Wayne says

Just finished this great read. Tom Barry seems like he was a great bloke, loved his people & fought for them. This book is no stuffy read but a great account of how the Irish who were willing to fight finally got free after 750 years. Well at least in the South. Highly recommended.

Maggies Daisy says

This was very interesting and informative book concerning the obstacles that the Irish people faced during the years of occupation by the British Military during the time period of around 1918 to 1921. It centered around the author's experiences during the war in which he was a major contributor. His straightforward approach to the telling of his brave comrades who gave their lives to be free from the oppressive rule of Britain. One of the facts I learned was that Britain has gone to war 77 times in the last 450 years in which they 90% of those victories were the slaughter of unarmed tribesman from Africa to China.

Handrick says

"There can be no doubt as to why the death roll of the West Cork I.R.A. dropped so amazingly. It was solely because British terror was met by a not less effective I.R.A. counter-terror. We were now hard and ruthless as our enemy had been since hostilities began. The British were met with their own weapons. They had gone down in the mire to destroy us and our nation, and down after them we had to go to stop them."

Freedom Road El Camino Para la Libertad says

the inside story of the Anglo-Irish war of 1920-21, from the man who led the most successful Irish flying column. The book is a quick and engaging read, balancing details of each battle and operation with the big-

picture view of the Irish struggle for freedom. But above all the value of this book is its political lessons; the final chapter in particular should be required reading for all revolutionary activists. In demonstrating his own journey to political consciousness and the consolidation of a national determination to see the battle to its finish, Barry shows the dialectical relationship between armed struggle and constitutional politics. When political remedies at the ballot box were denied, support for armed resistance climbed to new heights. When the military effort was in jeopardy, new political ratification for the cause reenforced their strength. In the end the outmanned, outgunned IRA became an unbeatable force because they were on the side of the Irish people, and the Irish people were on their side. Activists looking for a strategy for revolution in the twenty-first century would do very well to study the political insights of this military man.

Tom Barry says

If you are interested in the history of Irish nationalism or have a broader interest in the history of guerrilla warfare, then this book is a must read. It's an easy reading autobiography of Tom Barry's days as part of a "Flying Column" in West Cork, Ireland, and follows his exploits against the British forces supporting British rule in Ireland.

The basic strategy of the guerrilla is to hit and run, using surprise and avoiding at all costs set piece engagements when the superior firepower of a conventional army can be brought to bear. The guerilla wins by avoiding direct confrontation, and by outlasting the will of the enemy to bear losses and to pursue him. So we see that in Iraq and Afghanistan, for example, conventional forces fight a losing battle because they are unable to sustain the will to fight a more determined enemy. This was the strategy successfully followed by Tom Barry and his small band of lightly armed and untrained volunteers, who saw off the much larger and much better armed British army.

In case you are interested, as far as I know I have no direct bloodline connection with the author, though my family is from the same part of Ireland.

David Zierhart says

I picked up this book while in Ireland. I have relatives there whom we have managed to keep in touch with since my Great Grandfather immigrated to the US in 1893. I wanted to get a better understanding of the divide between the Irish Republic and the British. This certainly did it! A courageous stand against the occupying British, many great sacrifices made to keep the Irish independent and proudly so. Thomas Barry takes us inside the IRA. Its a situation that I don't believe will ever be truly over until we have a unified Ireland.

Jordan says

"Ten minutes later from the corridor outside the top tier of cells I looked down on the extraordinary spectacle of about a thousand kneeling Republican prisoners spontaneously reciting the Rosary aloud for the repose of the dead Michael Collins, President of the Free State Executive Council and Commander-in-Chief of the Free State Forces [...] Through all the hates and bitternesses of Civil War, those Republican prisoners, remembered that the dead leader, latterly their enemy, was once an inspiration and driving force in their struggle with the alien army of occupation."

Steve says

An outstanding first-hand account of the lives and times of the 3rd (West) Cork Brigade's "Flying Column" during the 1919-1921 Irish War of Independence (here and often referred to as the Anglo-Irish War), in which (most of) Ireland finally won full independence from English rule.

Tom Barry, the commander of the Flying Brigade -- a constantly on-the-move guerrilla strike force -- proves to be as good a writer as he was a rebel commander. Even though written a quarter of a century after the events, Barry's vivid descriptions bring his readers into the center of the action, and often convey the fear, anger, exhaustion and exhilaration that he and members of his unit felt at different points of their struggle.

In addition to being a compelling personal history, Barry's book also serves as a lesson in leadership. Barry -- who was only in his early 20's during these times -- is courageous in taking risks, generous in distributing credit, and motivational in focusing his forces on the larger objectives of the IRA during their fight for independence. Anyone seeking a position of leadership would do well to learn Barry's lessons.

A few of my favorite passages:

On Imperialism: "The British Imperialists down the ages owe in the main, their successful conquests of many peoples to the technique of "Divide and Conquer." They have consistently urged class against class, district against district, creed against creed, and in the resultant chaos of warring sects and factions, they established themselves and maintained their rule of exploitation. So in 1920 and 1921, they fanned the flame of religious intolerance between Catholics and Protestants." [Reviewer's addition: In so doing, the British exacerbated the tensions that led to the ongoing conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. And this technique is of course not theirs alone; conservatives in the U.S. practice it with great success today, tragically.]

On the Essex Regiment of the British Army: "Their brutalities when killing defenceless I.R.A. prisoners were incredible. They never showed mercy to the wounded, the sick or the unarmed. There was never a unit in any army in any campaign which had disgraced the profession of arms as did those vulgar monsters who were the dregs of the underworld of London." [Reviewer's note: this is not likely true, as there have been all too many disgraceful armies ... but I appreciate the passion nonetheless. ;)]

On the need for guerrilla tactics: "Excluding naval personnel, approximately twelve thousand, six hundred armed British troops, Auxiliaries and Black and Tans occupied the County of Cork seven weeks before the Truce between Ireland and Britain. Standing against this field force was that of the Irish Republican Army, never at any time exceeding three hundred and ten riflemen in the whole of the County of Cork, for the very excellent reason that this was the total of rifles held by the combined three Cork Brigades."

On the importance of taking up arms against oppressors: "Since the Treaty of Limerick in 1691 down to and including 1916 the British terms to the defeated Irish soldiers had always been unconditional surrender followed by a massacre of the Irish leaders. But now they had to deal with an Army that was capable, not alone of fighting back but of actually threatening to smash their military power in Ireland in the not far distant future. While the Army survived and fought on, nothing under God could have broken the Nation's will to victory. Patriotic and brave men might die on the scaffold, on hunger strike or endure in British jails; mass meetings might demand our freedom; electors vote for a Republic; writers and poets cry aloud of

British tyranny and of Ireland's sufferings, but none of those would have induced the lords of the Conquest to undo their grip or even discuss our liberation. The only language they listened to or could understand was that of the rifle, the revolver, the bomb and the crackling of flames which cost them so dearly in blood and treasure."

As these excerpts show, this book is not an unbiased account of these times ... but if an impartial history is what you're looking for, you ought not be looking in the Memoir section. If instead you want to read a true and stirring account of a ragtag band of rebels challenging the mighty British Empire, pick up this book!

D.L. Gardner says

Fascinating and passionate account of what was going on in Ireland after Easter Rising. Excellent book by someone who was there.

Jim says

It's not often that one finds a well-written book about guerrilla warfare written by one of the main participants. During the hostilities with England in the period 1919-1921, the most active IRA fighting group was the West Cork Flying Column headed by Tom Barry. In his *Guerilla Days in Ireland*, Barry discusses the movements of his IRA fighters against the British regulars, the mercenary Black & Tans, and the Auxiliaries who were pitted against him in a vain attempt to hold onto Ireland for the British.

One thing that distinguished Barry from other, more self-involved military leaders is the tribute he pays in the book to each and every one of his fighters who died at the hands of the enemy. He memorializes them in place, when discussing the individual battles, and reserves an appendix in the back summarizing their names and origins. Barry would have been a good man to fight for: He cared for his men.

Reading this book, I was surprised how little I knew about recent Irish history. There have been a couple of John Ford Films (most notably **The Informer** and **The Rising of the Moon** that popularized the conflict) and a biopic of Michael Collins. Other than that, this is all new material for me.

Tom Barry says

Someone got me this book for my last birthday; I first read this book twenty years ago when divisions in Ireland were still raw due to the violence in the north.

This is a very personal account of Tom Barry's role fighting the British army in the Irish rebellion. A leader of one of the 'flying columns', he recounts the guerilla campaign in the Cork and Kerry countryside, that eventually led to the withdrawal of British forces from the South of the country, and the creation of the Irish Free State, later the Irish Republic. It's a fascinating David v Goliath story, of how a small band of untrained and poorly equipped Irish volunteers, took on 'the might of the British Army.' In military terms, what Barry and his comrades achieved was a remarkable example of guerilla warfare at his most effective.

The book itself is well written and easy to read, but the only real reason to read it is if you have an interest in Irish nationalism. If you are looking for a St Patrick's day book present for someone who is interested in 20th

century Irish history, then this could be a good choice.

Finoola says

This read in part like an adventure book, it was so exciting. But at the core it's just a stepped down version of the events of the guerilla tactics being used against the British in West Cork in 1920-21. It is probably the author's personality that makes it so entertaining. He is a sometimes funny, unpolitical (I didn't say apolitical) ordinary soldier engaged in the only the tactics they could succeed in a fight between unevenly matched forces. I liked his generosity in describing his comrades, even the ones who ended up on the opposite side in the civil war; and indeed one of the best things about the book is his evenhandedness - there is no civil war bitterness at all to be found in this book. Not only that but he gives credit to the British soldiers who behaved in an honourable fashion and don't burn out civilians, torture prisoners etc. It goes without saying that in the days of the Auxies and Black and Tans that those were in the minority.

Anyway I'd recommend this to anyone with even a passing interest in Irish or general military history. It's a fast, easy read and you might learn something for if you ever need to hide in the bushes and snipe at imperialists.
