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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (AVIATION SUPPLY)
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**EXPLOSIVES RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT
 ESTABLISHMENT**

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Lt Col J Kenny
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 Ballingollig
 Co Cork
 Republic of Ireland

Your reference

Our reference WAA/105/04

Date

15 July 1971

Dear Colonel Kenny

I was most interested to see your letter to Mr A G Credland, Curator of the Epping Forest Museum, which was shown to me as custodian of this Establishment's historical collection.

As you may already know the present Establishment occupies the site of the earlier Royal Gunpowder Factory which was producing gunpowder up to about 1940. Amongst our early records I believe we have a plan showing the layout of the Ballincollig Powder Mills in about 1828. This I shall confirm and if possible I shall send you a copy.

The reason for my writing beforehand is to let you know that Dr K N Bascombe, Secretary of the Waltham Abbey Historical Society, who is well acquainted with the history of the RGPF, is leaving today to make a tour of the Republic of Ireland and if time permits he would be pleased to visit you at Ballincollig.

In the meantime I am enclosing on loan for two months one of our library copies of W H Simmons "Short History of the Royal Gunpowder Factory at Waltham Abbey". Brief references are made to Ballincollig on pages 15 and 36.

Yours sincerely

M McLaren

M McLaren
 Head of Library Services
 for Director
 Explosives Research and
 Development Establishment

*Also I enclose for your retention
 a copy of my lecture
 notes prepared for a local
 historical society meeting.*

Copies to Mr A G Credland
 Curator Epping Forest Museum
 Dr K N Bascombe
 Mr G D Kelleher
 Cork Historical Society

HEADQUARTERS,
1st. FD. ARTY. REGT.
BALLINCOLLIG,
CO. CORK.
29/6/71.

Dear Sir,

I had written this letter some months ago, but owing to the Postal strike in England I did not post it.

I am enclosing a short brief of Ballincollig which I hope will be of some interest to you. There is very little of the Powder Mills left nowadays except ruins, but there are a few items still to be seen and I am sure if we explored the place with some experienced person like yourself, we would see a lot more.

Some of the items remaining are as follows:-

- (1) Weighbridge with scales.
- (2) Many grinding stones of different dimensions.
- (3) Vertical water pump on the canal.
- (4) A timber block about two feet high, and two feet square. This block is put together in sections and bolted. It could possibly be used for crushing the gunpowder.
- (5) Many of the stores for the gunpowder which are built like beehives.

I would be delighted if you could pay a visit to the ~~xxxxx~~ Barracks. If necessary we could accommodate you during your visit.

I expect all the lands to be taken over for building and if possible I would like to salvage as much as possible of the historic items that are there. Hoping to hear from you soon.

YOURS FAITHFULLY,

Joseph Kenny

LT. COL.
(JOSEPH KENNY.)

O/C 1st. FD. ARTY. REGT.

Ballincollig OR Baile an Chullaigh which means " town of the boar " had in 1659 according to the census of Ireland twenty five people living in it. To the South-West of it was Ballincollig Castle, (Barrett's Castle) from where the village seems to have drawn it's name. The castle which is still in existence was the seat of the Barrett family, who were the principal people of the barony. It was built in 1365 through a patent issued by Edward III., of England to Richard of Barrett. It stands on a large limestone rock in the middle of the plain and commands a view of the whole area. In fact it is in an excellent Military Position as there is a Marsh to the South of it, and it's high walls would certainly repel any attack. Its 40ft. high tower can be seen from the main Cork -- Macroom road. As with all old castles there is a fair amount of legend attached to it. In the National Library there is a story named " The Petrified Trooper " and it gives a long account of how a Capt., and some fifty troopers were lured into an ambush by a peasant called..... " Shaun of the Torch " who had offered to show him the way. They were supposed to take the castle in the name of King William, but ended up by losing half their force. In 1642 Cromwell had a large garrison there as had James II, in 1689.

The village seemed to have grown from strength to strength, and in 1795 it became the site for the Royal Gunpowder Mills, which are situated to the North of the Barracks, on the bank of the Lee. We will dwell on the Mills, as they are the reason for the Barracks. The village then became internationally known and was linked with Woolwich and Edinburgh, as the three main manufacturing places of Gunpowder for the Empire. There were in fact sixteen Gunpowder Mills in the whole area. Their function was:-

- (a) Granulating and drying gunpowder.
- (b) Manufacturing Charcoal.
- (c) Refining Sulphur.
- (d) Refining Saltpetre.
- (e) Making casks & hooped barrels.

The Mills were joined together by means of small canals, which were used for conveying Materials from one to the other. All this is still to be seen down there, and is indeed a fascinating place. There were, in 1837, Two hundred people employed, and 16,000 barrels of gunpowder were produced annually. The workers lived as the history says " some distance from the Mills in two ranges of neat little cottages. " The barrels of gunpowder were taken into Cork by horse-drawn cars under a heavy escort. From there they were shipped to all parts of the British Empire. Shot used during the Crimea War and Boer War, came from Ballincollig. However everything does not seem to have been rosy at the Powder Mills, and according to one of the twelve letters written to Lord Mayo, (a member of the cabinet in London.) there was a deputation from the workers who do not seem to have been happy with the safety arrangements at the Mills. They were assured that if an explosion occurred in one it would not endanger the others. Because of this regular inspections were carried out at the Mills. There is also a reference in one of these letters to..... Fenianism and says that it could be hurtful to the workers jobs, if an attack was made on the Mills. A great explosion occurred in Washington St., in Cork, where there was a storage office for the Gunpowder barrels. A barrel which had broken open while being carried to the docks, sprayed a line of gunpowder along the street from the store. The sparks from the horses shoes ignited the powder, which ran back along the line, blowing up the Warehouse. Then about the year 1910 a great explosion occurred at the Mills. One Mill was blown up completely killing fifty people. This was the beginning of the end for the Mills. Gunpowder manufacturing then moved to Gateshead in England.

The Gunpowder Mills to us are very important as with their establishment, a regular Guard was dispatched from Cork Bks, for security duties. In 1806 a survey was carried out in the area, and it was decided to establish this barracks which was completed by 1810.

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Its first unit was the 7th Bty. R.A. with a CO. Capt. A. Wall.

In the National Library there is a handwritten statement of a bomb. Brown " Story about the Riot " see attached. Major Evilly who was commanding Officer was praised in the Edinburgh Annual Register for his control of the situation. None of the units stationed here seemed to have distinguished themselves greatly and the only record we have of them is the inscriptions on the tombstones in the Military Graveyard (which is in excellent condition, being looked after by a Regular Caretaker.) One of the inscriptions reads:-

" Edward, bastard son of Surgeon James G. Elkington, 17th Lancers 1831. " On most of the tombstones is the Royal Artillery Badge with its inscription " Quo fas et gloria ducunt ". The Military Graveyard at Ballincollig was not however the only place the Military were buried. In Inniscarra graveyard (on left hand side where Protestants are buried) we find a tombstone to the Mother of Captain Blakely. The inscription on this reads:-

" Mary William, Mother of Captain Blakely, R.A. original inventor of improvements in cannon and the greatest Artillerist of the age ". In 1837 a history of Ireland was written, and it is in the first comprehensive report we have of the Barracks- it reads:- " The Arty. Bks. form an extensive quadrangular pile of buildings, having in the Eastern range the Officers appartments, and on the Western side a hospital, and a neat church built in 1814 in which Divine Service is regularly performed by a resident Chaplain.

The buildings contain accomodation for 18 Officers, 242 NCOs & Ptes., and are adapted to receive 8 Fd. Btys., though at present only one is stationed here to which are attached 95 Men & 44 horses. In the centre of the the quadrangle 8 gunsheds are placed in two parallel lines, and near them are the stables and Offices. Within the walls is a large and commodious schoolroom. The Barracks was in those days self-contained. Along with what we have mentioned, we had a granary, a grocers shop, a recreational establishment and a canteen. A little removed from the Barracks was a Sandes Home, the ruin of which is still to be seen. Inher book " Enlisted; or My Story " Elise Sandes who founded these Homes talks about Ballincollig as follows (page 186). The only Sandes Home now in operation is in the Curragh.

As with every Barracks there is a certain amount of stories associated with it. In 1884 the 11th Hussars were stationed here and were known as the " Bodysnatchers " Story. Lady Coldhurst - Slur on Regiment - Officers Resigned - Regiment transferred to India. We now move into the 20th C. and I have my first contact with a living person, Mr. Reid (Curraheen) who in fact was stationed here and married out of here in 1914 to the great War. In 1910 he was getting 15/10 a week, and this included 5/10 Ration Money. Wages as can be seen were small, but necessaries were cheap. His stout was 1d a pint, but in the canteen they drank it in basins. The Barracks was supplied with food by the local area. Cabbage was brought in, in horse-drawn carts, and signed for at the canteen by the Manager. But as soon as he turned his back, half the load was put back in the cart, and our honest Irishmen proceeded to the NCO's Mess, where the same process was repeated. Loads of hay were brought in the West Gate, signed for and left again by the Main Gate. What of the Gunners themselves who were stationed here? They were quite popular in the village, as of course they brought trade to the locals. Indeed some of the locals were rather Anti-Nationalistic, IRA feeling as they did not want the nice British soldiers to go.

For most of their extra mural activities the Gunners went into the big city on the train (Old Cork-Macroom line.) " Map. " Once a month they travelled en-masse to the Opera House where they enjoyed a free house. No regular public transport came to Ballincollig by road. If the soldier missed the last train, he had to get the tram which took him to Carrigrohane, where it went out to Blarney. Because of this they knew Carrigrohane as " Carry me Home. "

They enjoyed the same kind of games as we do to-day, Association foot-ball being the most popular. As soon as a gunner showed promise as an athlete, he was struck off the duty list, and separated from his colleagues. Their quarters were in "B" and "C" blocks, seventeen living to the room. They ate their meals in the rooms. In those days they marched much more than we do to-day. Annual firing practices were marched to. The Artillery were very impressive when they moved. They went to the Glen of Imaal, as we do to-day, the only difference being we travel in trucks, they rode on horse-back. The 18pdrs., go on for ever. There were six horses to the gun carriage, with three mounted drivers. "The Artillery" quoted Mr. Reid, "were immaculate. They were so glibly that they cleaned their knee length boots with a bone to acquire a shine." Their uniform was blue, and the Artillery wore spurs.

What of their Officers.? They were of course the days when the British Officer was at his pinnacle of fame. Backed by a powerful-Empire, and a long standing tradition he was a symbol of wealth and manner a carrier of British Culture to the ends of the earth. He had his own Mess, Room & batman, own horse stable and groom, and shared a carriage, and when he moved he did it in splendour. Then there was an Officers Ball in the Barracks it was indeed an occasion of pageantry. For recreational activity he played cricket and tennis and a spot of Polo. For practicing his Polo, he had his own special shed. (Wooden horse etc.) When the War broke out in 1914 there were 3,000 troops living under canvas in the Brigading Field, (Landing Field.) They spent their days on trench digging, which they later got plenty of in France.

Before we move into the modern era of the Barracks, I think we should once more move outside, and meet some of the more well known persons and places associated with it. Travelling out from Cork we first meet Carrigrohane, where perched on the top of the cliff is a very old castle built by the McCarthys, which later became the sanctuary of a very notorious raparee named Captain Cape. A little further up the road is a very unusual house, where Sir Patrick Hennessy (Fords.) was born. Coming back into the village again, and to Oriel House, which was the seat of the Tobin Family. The most famous member of the Clan was Sir Thomas Tobin. Tracing his lineage I find he goes back to William the Conqueror, and Malcolm Connor King of Scotland, in the 11th. C. His son was killed in India (21 years of age.) in 1857, and Sir Thomas erected a tablet to him in the garrison church in the Barracks. He died himself in 1881 and is buried in Inniscarra Graveyard where his tomb can still be seen. The Coldhurst family were also very powerful in the area. They owned large tracts of land as well as Blarney Castle. Captain Bowen-Coldhurst of 1916 fame is one of the descendants.

Major - General Patrick Ronayne Cliburne of American War of Independence fame was born at Grange Hill, two miles out of the main Cork - Macroom road. Further out the road we come to Ovens where there are historic caves. Britain and her allies won the Great War, but in the meantime she had lost one battle, in Ireland. The Irish Independence movement after 1916 was growing from strength to strength, and Ballincollig became a recruiting area for the 1st. Batt. 1st. Bgd. IRA. Its leading light was a young man called Leo Murphy. Leo born in 1901, lived in the outskirts of the village, where his father was a mason, who owned a public house which is still there. In 1917 at the age of seventeen, he was tried in his absence for being a member of an illegal organisation. He was sentenced to one month imprisonment, but he never served it. In 1918 he was appointed Captain and began to organise the IRA in the area.

For his work he was promoted Comdt., and in 1920 he prepared and commanded the ambush on the Model Farm Road, in which Capt. Thompson (Chief C.O. for Munster.) was captured. He was associated with other incidents and ambushes, one in which Sgt. Blomom was shot dead. (1921.) Leo Murphy was finally captured at Waterfall--- CORK EXAMINER 27th. June 1921. " see attached.

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There is a monument to him at Waterfall and of course our own Barracks ensures a fitting Military memory to him. His brother Frank worked in the Barracks, up to his death one year ago. During this period there are several references to the Barracks being called on to supply Reinforcements for British Regular and Black & Tan elements, ambushed by General Tom Barry and his Guerillas. During the ambush at Crossbarry a fire order came to the Barracks for help which was dispatched with haste. It was people like Leo Murphy and Tom Barry who finally brought about the downfall of the British in Ireland. The last British Unit to leave the Barracks were the 2nd. Bn. Green Howards in 1922.

The same year the Civil War broke out and a republican element realising they could not hold the Barracks, against the Free State, burned it.

In 1958 the Barracks was named Dun Ui Mhurchadha.

CONCLUSION.
