

List of Suspected Civilian Spies Killed by the IRA, 1920-21

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Note about the form of entries in this database: Each of the entries in the Cork Spy Files follows the same format: (1) the name of the suspected spy, including certain variations in the forename or surname that appear in the sources; (2) the victim's age (if known, and usually as derived from the 1911 census); (3) the victim's residence if known and given without parentheses; (4) the place of death, given within parentheses; (5) the exact date of the incident, i.e., the date on which the suspected spy was killed or mortally wounded, or the date on which the victim was abducted or otherwise disappeared, though death took place on a later date; (6) the full range of our sources for each death, with abbreviations as needed, and for which a full list will soon be supplied on the website as part of a comprehensive bibliography; and (7) a note providing all valuable information about the victim available to us and considered relevant.

2. Civilian James Herlihy (aged about 31) of [Kearny's Lane], Cork city (Pouladuff district)

Date of incident: [?] July 1920 (ex-soldier executed as spy by IRA)

Sources: *FJ*, 23, 24 Feb. 1921; *II*, 23, 24, 25, 28 Feb. 1921; British Army World War I Pension Records, 1914-20 (WO 364, TNA); Daniel Healy's WS 1656, 12-13 (BMH); Jeremiah Keating's WS 1657, 6 (BMH); Patrick Collins's WS 1707, 8 (BMH); Borgonovo (2006), 123, fn. 16; Borgonovo (2007), 81, 144; Murphy (2010), 41; O'Halpin (2013), 340.

Note: An ex-soldier, Herlihy was taken into custody as a spy by men of G Company of the Second Battalion of the Cork No. 1 Brigade. He was 'removed to the Pouladuff district south of the city, where he was executed by a firing squad from the company on instructions from the brigade'. James Herlihy 'and some other civilians were known to our Intelligence Service to be in touch with the British military and to have supplied to them the names of prominent I.R.A. men in our district. We also learned that these spies had been supplied with revolvers (by the British) for their protection in case of attack by the I.R.A.' Patrick Collins of G Company, who knew Herlihy well, had asked him on the day before he was executed 'why he gave us away to the enemy', and 'he said he could give no reason why he did it, but added that he had given the military a wrong address in my own case'—a detail that Collins confirmed. See Patrick Collins's WS 1707, 8 (BMH).

An IRA spy named Cornelius (Con) Conroy, who worked in Victoria Barracks as 'a confidential clerk', had fingered Herlihy as a person whom Conroy 'knew to have given information to the military authorities regarding certain prominent I.R.A. men in our area, in which he (Herlihy) lived. On instructions from our brigade Herlihy was taken out to the Farmers Cross district and shot. His body was buried there.' See Jeremiah Keating's WS 1657, 6 (BMH). Conroy was of extraordinary value to the city IRA since he was in fact the 'confidential secretary to the [British] O/C, 17th Infantry Brigade, in Cork'. Unfortunately for the IRA, in a British military raid on the house and land of Michael Bowles at Clogheen at the beginning of 1921, British forces captured correspondence and copies of orders issued to the British military that had been

obtained from Conroy. As a result, 'Conroy was discharged from his position, and we lost one of our most valuable intelligence officers.' See Daniel Healy's WS 1656, 12-13 (BMH).

Conroy went on the run but was eventually captured. He was among thirteen or fourteen 'civilians' tried in late February 1921 at Victoria Barracks for 'levying war against His Majesty' and for being in possession of arms, ammunition, and explosives. In the dock with him and the other 'civilians' was self-admitted Volunteer John MacSwiney, brother of the former Lord Mayor of Cork Terence MacSwiney, who had famously died on hunger-strike in Brixton Prison on 25 October 1920. A military witness identified Conroy as one of the clerks who had worked in the office of the battalion adjutant in Victoria Barracks. The prisoners had been captured at Rahanisky House in Kilcully parish near Whitechurch earlier in the month. Mrs Mackay, in whose house most of these men were captured, testified that Conroy had a standing invitation from her to stay overnight whenever curfew restrictions made that necessary, and that she had not seen any arms or heard any seditious words from him or any of the others with him. Volunteer John MacSwiney acknowledged in court that he regularly carried a revolver for self-defence because before and since Christmas in 1920 he had 'had definite information that what were known as the murder gang of the Black and Tans were after me'. See *II*, 25 Feb. 1921. See also *FJ*, 23, 24 Feb. 1921; *II*, 23, 24 Feb. 1921. Three of the prisoners were released after the military trial concluded on 26 February, but Cornelius Conroy and nine other prisoners were remanded in custody. See *II*, 28 Feb. 1921. How many suspected spies or British intelligence officers Conroy had fingered for the IRA is unknown, but James Herlihy was hardly the only person to be killed because of information secretly supplied by Conroy to the Volunteers.

James Herlihy's slightly older brother William had also been a British soldier, having enlisted at age 28 with the Royal Irish Rifles (4th Battalion) by attestation at Cork on 6 February 1915, when his address was 14 Malachy's Lane near Gillabbey Street, Cork city. He was quickly discharged as medically unfit on 10 March (about one month later) and just as quickly he enlisted with the Royal Field Artillery Regiment by attestation on 13 April 1915, only to be discharged again on 25 June of that year, with the striking notation in his record that he was 'not likely to become an effective soldier'. This scenario was repeated yet again, when William Herlihy enlisted with the Royal Munster Fusiliers on 3 August 1915 while 'wounded', and after having refused surgery on his foot (he could not march), he was discharged for a third time on 10 December 1915 as 'unlikely to become an efficient soldier'. See British Army World War I Pension Records, 1914-20 (WO 364, TNA).

At the time of the 1911 census William Herlihy (then aged 24) and his younger brother James (aged 22) co-resided with their older sister Kate (a housekeeper aged 26) and their parents Timothy Herlihy and his wife Helena in house 11 on Kearny's Lane in Cork. The pensioner Timothy Herlihy (aged 72) and both of his sons listed themselves as cab drivers for the census-taker, and that was the occupation given by William Herlihy when joining the Royal Irish Rifles and later the Royal Field Artillery in 1915. The Herlihys were Catholic. They had known more than their share of sorrow. The mother Helena Herlihy had given birth to as many as twelve children in her forty-seven years of marriage, but in 1911 only three of them survived; then their second surviving son James was shot dead and secretly buried by the IRA in July 1920. The ex-soldier status

of both brothers increased the suspicion with which the IRA regarded them. See Patrick Collins's WS 1707, 8 (BMH).