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+ **The Battle of Benburb, 5 June 1646, and Owen Roe** +

Part 1

A young, red-haired, Franciscan-educated veteran of the Nine Years War, nephew of the great Hugh O'Neill, the son of his younger brother, Art, would leave Ireland and, in 1606 be commissioned a captain in the Regiment of his cousin Henry O'Neill, Hugh's son, in "The Earl of Tyrone's" (the first) Irish regiment in the service of Spain. Thus began the formal continental military career of **Eoghan Ruadh Uí Néill** ("**Owen Roe**" O'Neill). With the Flight of the Earls (1607) Owen Roe would also dedicate himself to the restoration, not only of the lands of the dispossessed native Irish in Ulster, and to the protection of the Catholic religion, but also to the **restoration of Irish sovereignty**. Over eight decades before the "Flight of the Wild Geese" would create an Irish Brigade in the service of France (patterned on the Irish who had been serving Spain, beginning in the Low Countries in 1587, and continuing to 1808, including service as an ally of France, fighting on the American side at Pensacola, in the American War for Independence), **Owen Roe O'Neill** would lead the double life of a professional soldier and Irish revolutionary conspirator. With the death of Henry, now Major Owen Roe became the functional commander of the regiment, then commanding in the name of Henry's too young brother, John, from 1614. In 1627, when England's difficulty with the outbreak of war between England and France might become Ireland's opportunity, he was among those Irish exiles who petitioned the King of Spain to send the Irish Spanish regiments back to Ireland.

An Irish Republic!

Owen Roe wished to see the establishment of an **Irish republic** (of necessity allied to Spain – if the English could aid the Dutch republic, against the interests of Spain, surely the Spanish could return the favor by aiding an Irish republic against what the English perceived to be their interests). Owen Roe O'Neill, although a member of one of Ireland's royal houses, favored a republic, in part to preclude in-fighting among prominent Irish families over who would be a king or prince for Ireland. In 1634 Owen Roe was given his own regiment, which was specially recruited in Ireland. Over a thirty-five year career he became recognized, by friend and foe alike, as one of the finest soldiers in all Europe.

A Most Distressful Country

Life in Ireland, however, was going from bad to worse. Even those native Irish Catholics who were still in possession of their land could, at best, only be inferiors in their own country, and that number was always shrinking. Owen Roe was irreconcilably opposed to the new order in Ireland, and to those responsible for the injury being done to his homeland. Owen Roe prepared himself to be able to sail to Ireland in little over a fortnight of receiving the news that the people had risen. In 1641 Irish frustration at the injustices of the Plantation, particularly in Ulster, erupted into violent opposition. However, it wasn't until 1642 that he was able to secure his release from active service in the Spanish Army, but, unlike "Bonnie Prince Charlie" who would return to Scotland

virtually alone in 1745, Owen Roe arrived at Doe Castle in Donegal in September of 1642 accompanied by some two hundred Irish professional soldiers (including many officers), veterans of the Spanish-Irish regiments, together with military supplies. The native force which he came to assist were no more the stuff of a professional army than were those American patriots who took refuge with George Washington in Valley Forge.

Over the next four years Owen Roe O'Neill, and his cadre of Irish veterans, would do as fine a job as the Baron von Steuben would later do for Washington in the creation of a professional force from men, many of whom were past masters at hit-and-run harassment, but had never stood in line of battle (this lack of formal training had been a fatal flaw at Kinsale at the beginning of the century, that even the intuitively brilliant Hugh could not overcome – sort of like Billy Conn, who had been bobbing and weaving and stinging Joe Louis for several rounds then trying to finish him off in a slug-fest).

Irish Confederation

Despite the nationalist intentions of the chief conspirator in bringing about the Rising and creating the form for a government for an independent Ireland, Ruairí Ó Mordha, King of Laois (and grandfather-to-be of Patrick Sarsfield), the revolutionary government of the Irish, however, wasn't all that revolutionary, but rather a coalition known to history as the **Confederation of Kilkenny**. There were the indigenous Gaelic "Old Irish", and the "Old English", who had lived in Ireland for generations, identified with Ireland, and had, by-and-large remained Catholic (most of whom sought the restoration of their former liberties, but were otherwise happy enough to live under the King of England – but NOT under its Parliament – which would have described many of the Americans who took up arms in defense of the public liberty in 1775).

O'Neill's championing of the dispossessed, and his attitude toward sovereignty were potentially dangerous issues in a coalition which included descendants of Norman dispossessors. He was appointed **Provincial General in Ulster**, where he could be effective without being too close either to the center of influence in Kilkenny, or to the strategic center of gravity in Dublin. In 1645, the arrival in Ireland of the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Giovanni Battista Rinuccini, brought with him the weapons, gunpowder and money (but no fancy uniforms), O'Neill's share of which, would give Eoghan Ruadh the wherewithal to properly equip and pay his soldiers (the princely sum of 1 riall per day = 3 shillings 6 pence per week – cavalry got more – in contrast, soldiers in the Irish army in Leinster only received 2s 6d per week).

Thanks in large part to the exertions of Waterford-born, Irish Franciscan Friar Luke Wadding, then in Rome, Riunccini was sent to bring not only arms and money to the Confederate Irish (and particularly for the Irish army of Ulster and its battle-tested professional leader, Owen Roe), but, the Holy Father being not only the Vicar of Christ, but also temporal ruler of the Papal States in Italy, also diplomatic recognition, in/by the international community, of the Confederation of Kilkenny as the legitimate government of an independent Ireland.

[End of Part 1]

Part 2

A Force Well-Trained – A Plan Well- Executed

O'Neill's Irish army of Ulster, though smaller in numbers than their enemies, would now be not only the more highly motivated, but also the better trained and better equipped. The pike was still the principal infantry weapon, and when your pike is two feet longer than your opponent's, and with a more penetrating "four-square" head, the result is usually that the other guy is dead before the point of his pike can reach you. Owen Roe's enemies, however, didn't know this, because the Irish had never yet stood and fought a set piece battle, nor were they ever expected to do so.

O'Neill's nemesis was a very competent, brave and self-confident, Scottish Covenanter General called Robert Monroe, who commanded the "united British Protestant forces" in Ulster. His force consisted of Scottish and English (including Anglo-Irish) regiments of some 6,000 professional soldiers, many veterans of continental warfare, plus Ulster volunteers, recruited from among the Planter yeomanry, plus about six hundred horse and six field guns. Both Monroe and O'Neill had commanded in battle on the continent. Unlike O'Neill, however, Monroe had no scruples about waging war on enemy non-combatants.

The Plan and Campaign

With the coming of summer in 1646, it was Monroe's intention to coordinate the march of three forces south, into the midlands, and perhaps even to destroy the Confederate government in Kilkenny. In addition to his own force in Carrickfergus, there would be a second force of about a hundred mounted men and two hundred forty musketeers marching south from Coleraine, and a third force, known as the Lagan army, of some two thousand planters coming from the Foyle. However, Monroe also knew that he could not leave Ulster, especially Antrim and Down, undefended against O'Neill's wild Irish, and so determined to crush him before heading south. When he heard that O'Neill had left his base at the hill of Gallanagh near Lough Sheelin in Cavan, and was headed for Benburb, from which he could cross the Blackwater to the safety of the fort at Charlemont (across the river from The Moy), Monroe resolved to get there first, trap O'Neill and finish him off in a stand-up fight. O'Neill's intelligence network, however, was superb, and was very aware of his enemies' every move. G.A. Hayes-McCoy in Irish Battles: A Military History of Ireland (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1989 reprint) points out that **it was O'Neill's plan to manoeuvre Monroe into attacking him "precipitously and at a disadvantage."** Hayes-McCoy then cites Robert E. Lee and James Longstreet as exemplars of this strategy, as well as Stonewall Jackson (implying not only the surprises of Jackson's Valley Campaign in the Shenandoah, and at Chancellorsville, but also Jackson's taciturn security on the march).

On June 4th, some of Monroe's mounted scouts encountered some of O'Neill's, and after a brief skirmish captured one, who told Monroe that O'Neill had about six thousand men and were marching that day from Glaslough to Benburb and Charlemont, which was more or less true. Monroe, never realizing that **O'Neill wanted him to pursue and attack**, was excited at the prospect of catching O'Neill and so many rebels at one time,

and ordered forced marches to catch O'Neill on the march, but guessed wrong as to on which side of the river was O'Neill's line of march. He learned that O'Neill had already reached Benburb on the Blackwater, and discovered that the nearest undefended ford was upstream at Caledon, necessitating getting his troops up early, and again force marching circuitously to trap O'Neill.

Meanwhile, Eoghan Ruadh O'Neill sent most of his cavalry, under Lt. Colonel Con ("the lame") Brien Roe O'Neill, with some infantry to intercept the British force coming from Coleraine. They knew exactly where and how to find them, near Dungannon.

Monroe, having eventually crossed to the north side of the Blackwater, encountered resistance from O'Neill's scouts and pickets, first at Ballaghkillgevill, then at Knocknacloy, then crossing the River Oona, a tributary of the Blackwater, being delayed at narrow passes in traditional Irish hit-and-run manner. After crossing the Oona, and passing beside Thistle Hill, there was a relatively easy advance up to a ridge at Derrycreevy, but during that advance that ridge hid what lay beyond. Much to Monroe's surprise, when he came over the ridge he was looking across a stream with irregular vegetation, "scroggie woods" and bushes (which he would later discover concealed some of O'Neill's musketeers) at the opposing ridge of Drumfluch on which was drawn up **O'Neill's force, in good order of battle**, with banners flying – four infantry "brigades" or regiments in line, pikes in the center with muskets on the flanks, with spacing between, behind which spaces were three other brigades/regiments – able to advance into the gaps, Swedish style, without enlarging the front, with cavalry totaling six to nine regiments or "troops" (depending on the source) at the flanks. Lord General Eoghan Ruadh Uí Néill was noted for using a flag containing "**the Irish harp** in a field", now considered a traditional Irish flag. They had camped in Benburb the night before and were just resting in place, awaiting the arrival of their enemy, who had been force marching fifteen miles and fighting most of the day. Monroe found that he had more men than O'Neill but less good ground on which to stand, so his men were crowded in two very close formations, behind his guns, with cavalry to the rear. It was now noticeably after 6 PM.

Battle is Joined

Monroe opened the engagement with his artillery, but to his surprise, **the Irish didn't flinch**. He then attempted to turn O'Neill's left flank, and, after some hard fighting, was turned back by the Irish cavalry (mostly lancers) and musketry.

The principal effect of the cannon fire was to inform Brien Roe, who had defeated the Coleraine column "in detail", that the main engagement had begun, and give him the opportunity to ride to the sound of the guns.

O'Neill's men cried out to attack, but discipline held them in place. Brien Roe's horse took their place on the right of Eoghan Ruadh's formation. The Irish had concentrated on their own ground, and had prepared the battlefield; they were ready to engage Monroe. It was about 8 PM, and the sun was in their faces, with the south-west wind beginning to fall. The setting sun at that latitude in June takes its time and descends at a gentle angle,

shifting the sun gradually out of the eyes of the Irish army. The matchlock musket, which was the principal infantry weapon of the day, works best with the wind either at your back, or, failing that, still. *O'Neill did not rush as nature slowly gave him additional advantage over an exhausted enemy, crowded into what would soon become a killing ground.* Father Boetius Mac Egan, the Franciscan, who had been appointed chaplain-general by the Papal Nuncio, gave general absolution.

Eoghan Ruadh O'Neill then reminded his men that their opponents were the men who had persecuted them for their religion and banished them from the homes of their fathers; he also reminded them that they were the nobility of Gaelic Ireland – Robert the Bruce at Bannockburn had been no more inspiring than was Eoghan Ruadh O'Neill that day. Hayes-McCoy reports that O'Neill concluded by crying out, “Let your manhood be seen by the push of your pike. Your word is *Sancta Maria*, and so in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost advance! –and give not fire ‘till you are within pike-length!”

The Irish Attack – An Barr Buadh

The Irish advance was steady, and heavily resisted. They took the guns, and Eoghan Ruadh ordered Colonel Richard Farrell to close with his brigade and turn Monroe's left flank. The wind was falling and the sun would then be at O'Neill's back, in the eyes of his enemies. Monroe's cavalry attacking twice failed to break the Irish. The fight continued. Monroe's too tight formation did not permit the retirement of his first line through the second; the Irish delivered a Swedish salvo-style volley at close range, followed by the push of the pike, and the result was chaos. The British were forced back upon the river, and then overrun. Those who did not fall there to Irish swords or scian (Irish long knives), or drown in the river, fell as they ran back along the route they had come. The British lost probably more than three thousand killed, over half their force, and all their baggage, including flags, banners and weapons (including some five thousand stand of arms). Irish sources report their own losses at seventy killed and two hundred wounded. Monroe was lucky to escape with his life, fleeing so precipitately, that he left his hat, sword, and cloak after him, and never halted until he reached Lisburn.

Eoghan Ruadh O'Neill, with the arms and equipment acquired as a result of his stunning victory was able to double the size of his army. The Nuncio celebrated in Saint Canice's Cathedral in Kilkenny (a church later desecrated by Cromwell in 1650), and the Pope celebrated in Rome, both believing that the deliverance of Ireland was at hand. Luke Wadding, OFM, Rector of the Irish College, would later celebrate a *Te Deum* and cause the captured enemy standards to be triumphantly displayed in Saint Perer's Basilica in Rome.

However, like his famous kinsmen Shane and Hugh, before him, Eoghan Ruadh did not use the opportunity of a military victory as a springboard to cleanse Ulster of all who could speak no Irish. They have all been criticized for this, particularly by some in Ulster. However, the focus of Eoghan Ruadh was national. *[End of Part 2]*

Sidebar follows.

The Battle of Benburb by Robert Dwyer Joyce (1908)

New Melody by Tommy Makem (1977)

O'er the hills of Benburb, rose the red beam of day
Gleaming bright from our foemen in battle array
But as brightly again, in the mid summer glow
It shone back from the troops of our brave Owen Roe

Munroe had his thousands arrayed at his back
With their puritan mantles, steel morion and Jack
And with him fierce Blayney and Conway had come
To crush Owen Roe at the roll of the drum

And who with O'Neill on that morn drew the band?
Brave hearts as e'er beat by the Blackwater strand
Sir Phelim, brave chief, with his bosom of fire
O'Donnell, McSweeney and gallant Maguire

From Derry's wild woodlands from Maine's sounding tide
From Leitrim and Longford came chiefs to our side
From Breffni's green hills, with his sabre in hand
Stood bold Myles the slasher, the pride of our land

We kept all that noontide, the foemen at play
Though we thought of their forays and burned for the fray;
For our chief bade us wait, till the eve had begun
Then rush on the foe with our backs to the sun

Hurrah for the red hand! And on to a man
Our columns poured down, like a storm on their van
Where a sermon was preaching to strengthen their zeal
'We'll give them a sermon' cried Owen Roe O'Neill

There was panic before us and panic beside
As their horsemen fled back in a wild broken tide;
And we swept them along by the Blackwater shore
'Till we reddened its tide with the Puritan's gore

A Kern by the river held something on high
'Saint Columb, is it thus that our enemies fly!
Perchance 'tis my coolun, they clipped long ago
Mile Gloria, the rough wig of flying Munroe!'

And we took from the foes e'er that calm twilight fall
Their horses and baggage and banners and all;
Then we sat by our camp-fires and drank in the glow
Good health to our leader, the brave Owen Roe.

1989 Shanachie release, ***Rolling Home*** by Tommy Makem (CD, 1992), Track 8.

Irish Independence Sought

After his stunning victory at Ben Burb on the 5th of June 1646, Eoghan Rua responded to the Nuncio's appeal to look south and use his influence to prevent the ratification of an agreement which would have placed the Irish Confederate government under the King of England. Historians will debate that he might should have cleaned house in Ulster first, but the Nuncio had provided him with the means to arm, equip and pay his army, without which there would have been no real "catholic army of Ulster", and no great victory at Benburb.

Irish Sovereignty vs Practical Necessity

Eoghan Ruadh O'Neill's insistence upon Irish sovereignty came to be more and more a minority opinion among the Confederate Irish, most of whom saw the Royalists as the only viable allies against the Parliamentarians. O'Neill's nationalist position would bring him into conflict with some of the Confederate Catholics over the next three years.

News of Cromwell's invasion of Ireland and the subsequent storming and **massacre of Drogheda** (11 September 1649) finally convinced O'Neill that an alliance with the Royalist Ormonde was Ireland's best hope. Ormonde was desperate to gain the support of O'Neill and the Ulster army and came to terms with him in October 1649, promising on behalf of the exiled Charles II, restoration of Irish lands in Ulster and freedom for the Catholic faith. Before they could join forces against the New Model Army, however, O'Neill fell suddenly ill. It is the traditional belief in Ireland that he was poisoned by an English agent. He died on 6 November 1649 at Cloughoughter Castle in County Cavan and was buried in an unmarked grave in the Franciscan priory at Cavan Town.

Assassination by deceit and poison – He now belongs to the ages

It has long been maintained in tradition that O'Neill was in fact poisoned at the hands of a woman who placed a toxin in his shoes before a banquet. O'Neill danced vigorously at the affair for several hours, causing the substance to be absorbed into his skin, leading to his death several days later. [Toxins are produced by certain plant processes, they are not living micro-organisms, but can be poisonous. In the aftermath of the first Gulf War (1990/91) Saddam Hussein used ("yellow rain") toxins against certain Kurdish villages in Iraq, with lethal effect.]

In many respects, **the 5th of June 1646 should be commemorated as one of Ireland's greatest military victories** (the 5th of June is the birthday of James Connolly as well, also most worthy of commemoration). But, however brilliant, Benburb is a stand-alone victory. Benburb, whatever its potential, decided a day. Kinsale had decided a war. The tragic and untimely death of Eoghan Ruadh O'Neill leaves unanswered the question as to what would have been the outcome on the field between armies commanded by O'Neill and by Cromwell. The military professionalism of Eoghan Ruadh O'Neill, and his devotion to the cause of his country are beyond question. As Edwin M. Stanton said on the death of Abraham Lincoln, *he now belongs to the ages*. *[End of Part 3]*

“The Lament for Owen Roe O’Neill” – Musical & Poetic Heritage

“The Lament for Owen Roe O’Neill”, also known as "Uaill Cuma Eogan Ruaid Ua Niall," or ***“Caoineadh Eoghain Rua”*** was written, and is still played, in the memory of Owen Roe O'Neill (1582-1649), or, in Irish, Eoghan Rua Uí Néill. It is a caoine obtained by collector George Petrie (published, 1855) from the playing of fiddler Frank Keane (Co. Clare, then living in Dublin), who learned it from the singing of the women in Co. Clare but could not remember the words.

Hoffman (1877) included a version of it under the title “An Arranmore Tune” (No. 115) in his collection of arrangements from Petrie’s collection. The melody has become a fiddler’s showpiece. It is an Irish, Slow Air (4/4 time). G Dorian. Standard tuning. AB. Composed by blind Irish harper **Turlough O’Carolan** (1670-1738), or at least attributed to him by several authorities, including Hardiman (*Irish Minstrelsy*, London, 1831), Bunting (in *General Collection of the Ancient Irish Music*, Dublin, 1796), Clinton (*Gems of Ireland*, London, 1841) and Francis O’Neill (*Waifs and Strays*), on stylistic terms. Gratten Flood, however, in his *History of Irish Music* (Dublin, 1905), says that the Owen Roe’s “glorious” lament was composed soon after his death, in 1649, predating O’Carolan’s birth by a score of years. [The Fiddler’s Companion – on line.] In any case, whether an O’Carolan original composition, or something which he heard and then either preserved, or adapted, it has become associated with him.

[Turlough O’Carolan (Toirdhealbhach Ó Cearbhalláin) was born in 1670 near Nobber, County Meath and died March 25, 1738 at the home of his patron Mrs. MacDermott Roe in Alderford, County Roscommon; he was one of the last Irish harpers who composed. Carolan's fame was not due so much to his skill with the harp (having started only at 18), but to his gift for composition and verse.]

The ***“Lament for Owen Roe O’Neill”*** remains a popular piece among musicians; the following is but a sampling of 20th century recordings:

- * Clanad, on their 1976 Shanachie release, Dúlamán, have “Cumha Eoghain Rua Uí Néill” as track 2;
- * Dolores Keane on her 1978 Atlantic label There Was a Maid features it on track 7;
- * Boys of the Lough. *Fox Hollow 1972 - Vol VII*, Fox Hollow RI-3856, LP (1972), trk# A.04a, and Boys of the Lough. *Boys of the Lough / Music and Song from the Boys of the Lough*, Gilderoy, fol (1977), p 3 (Caoineadh Eoghain Rua);
- * Kinnaird, Alison. *Kinnaird, Alison / Small Harp - A Step by Step Tutor*, Kinmor, sof (1989), #33/p 70 (Caoineadh Eoghain Rua);
- * Masterson, Mark; and Guy Moore. *Morning Star*, DeWeese --, Cas (1991), trk# A.02a;
- * Robben, Janine O’Neill; and Al Radys. *Morning Star*, DeWeese --, Cas (1991), A.04f.

The memory of the same **Owen Roe** inspired the Irish nationalist (Protestant) poet **Thomas Davis** to write the first of his laments:

“Lament for the Death of Eoghan Ruadh O’Neill.” This poem initiated a fashion in verse that lasted for a long time.

Inspired by Owen Roe’s greatest victory for Ireland, Robert Dwyer Joyce and the 20th century “Bard of Armagh,” **Tommy Makem**, gave us **“The Battle of Benburb.”**

Lament for the Death of Eoghan Ruadh O'Neill

by Thomas Davis

“DID they dare, did they dare, to slay Eoghan Ruadh O'Neill?”
“Yes, they slew with poison him they feared to meet with steel.”
“May God wither up their hearts! May their blood cease to flow,
May they walk in living death, who poisoned Eoghan Ruadh.”

“Though it break my heart to hear, say again the bitter words. 5
From Derry, against Cromwell, he marched to measure swords:
But the weapon of the Sassanach met him on his way.
And he died at Cloch Uachtar, upon St. Leonard's day.

“Wail, wail ye for the Mighty One. Wail, wail ye for the Dead,
Quench the hearth, and hold the breath—with ashes strew the head. 10
How tenderly we loved him. How deeply we deplore!
Holy Saviour! but to think we shall never see him more!

“Sagest in the council was he, kindest in the hall,
Sure we never won a battle—'twas Eoghan won them all.
Had he lived—had he lived—our dear country had been free: 15
But he's dead, but he's dead, and 'tis slaves we'll ever be.

“O'Farrell and Clanricarde, Preston and Red Hugh,
Audley and MacMahon—ye valiant, wise and true:
But—what are ye all to our darling who is gone?
The Rudder of our Ship was he, our Castle's corner stone. 20

“Wail, wail him through the Island! Weep, weep for our pride!
Would that on the battlefield our gallant chief had died!
Weep the Victor of Beinn Burb—weep him, young and old:
Weep for him, ye women—your beautiful lies cold!

“We thought you would not die—we were sure you would not go, 25
And leave us in our utmost need to Cromwell's cruel blow—
Sheep without a shepherd, when the snow shuts out the sky—
O! why did you leave us, Eoghan? Why did you die?

“Soft as woman's was your voice, O'Neill! bright was your eye,
O! why did you leave us, Eoghan? Why did you die? 30
Your troubles are all over, you're at rest with God on high,
But we're slaves, and we're orphans, Eoghan!—why did you die?”

The utterance is supposed to be made by one of O'Neill's clansmen, who is in Ormonde's camp in the south, and who hears of O'Neill's death from a messenger who has come into the camp.

[End of Sidebar]

Between **1641** and **1649**, for the first time since the Norman conquest, and before 1922, **Ireland was recognized by the international community as an independent nation.** Even though the Cromwellian conquest of 1649/50 made short work of Catholic Ireland's revolution, it nevertheless ranks as one of the most successful revolts of early modern history. The brightest star in the Gaelic firmament was **Eoghan Ruadh O'Neill (Owen Roe)**, and, on the road to that **sovereign Irish republic** he sought to achieve, his crowning achievement was the **Battle of Benburb, 5th June 1646.**

*The below is a small **BIBLIOGRAPHY** of works that could be helpful in the study of this period. Note, particularly, those in bold face type.*

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The Women of the Irish Rising, 1916

by

Raymond D. Aumack

The Irish (Celts) are unique among the ancient peoples of the world. Nothing identifies this more than the respect, awe, and honor given to women. The myths of all the people of history, though their history is not recorded as is modern history, still tell tales and provide traditions that reveal the beautiful and often profound beliefs of a passionate, resourceful, and creative people. For the record, every myth tells the story of the lives of a people, their relationship to their surroundings, the marvels of their discoveries, their appreciation of God, and how they understand the divinity. All myth reveals the truth of a people's experience. Before writing, that history was told in stories generated by vivid imaginations. The Celts did not have a written language so all the stories are told and retold orally with the embellishments and imagination of each story-teller.

For the pagan Celt, the essence of the universe and all its creativity was female and they left permanent traces of a culture in which women were the spiritual and moral pivot. The mother goddess and all her personifications of fertility, sovereignty, love, and healing was an essential basis of their very role in the world. Women feature prominently in Celtic myth and their goddesses occupy positions that represented the women of practical, every day Celtic life. They were free to bear arms, become Druids (priests), and engage in politics. The women of mythology are honored as weak and powerful, wise and cunning, serious, capricious, vengeful and ambitious. They were honored as much for their brains as they were for their beauty. These characteristics are to be seen in the lives of every Irish woman.

The sacred feminine was protected in Brehon Law and women had privileges previously unknown among the women of the known world. This mystique extended into the Christian era. We read of the exploits of St. Brigid. Each monastery became a town or a city and more than half of them were run by women. History suggests that some of these women had episcopal power, so some of them must have been ordained. The point is that these women had power, authority, and administrative skill.

A lot of that was suppressed by the Penal Laws of the 17th Century, but no amount of suppression would crush the daunting power of Irish womanhood.

There is little wonder that more than 300 women participated in the Rising of 1916. In fact, it would be a wonder if they were not there.

Countess Constance Georgina Gore-Booth Markiewicz was prominent among the leaders of the Rising. Her royal title is derived from her husband who was part of Polish royalty. Greatly influenced by James Connolly, she was a leader of the Irish Citizen's Army. She was a drill instructor, led training sessions, was a leading officer, and even designed the uniforms. She

wrote the plans for the Rising among the cities and towns of Ireland that were never implemented because the anticipated delivery of arms had been intercepted by the British. During the fighting of Easter week, she was the second in command at St. Stephen's Green and was involved in close quarters fighting. She led a retreat to an apartment row on the west side of the park to escape the withering machine gun fire into the Green from the roof of the Shelbourne Hotel.

When she finally complied with the order to surrender, she had to turn her pistol over to her own cousin, who was an officer in the British Army. She marched with the other leaders of the Rising to their capital crime court martials. Though she was condemned to death by firing squad, the sentence was never carried out.

General Maxwell was not about to add a woman to the growing list of martyrs for the cause of Irish independence. This also suggests that the orders for the executions came from a higher authority. Already he could feel the mood of Ireland turning and the executed "wingnuts" were starting to be hailed as heroes and martyrs for Ireland.

It was around this time, while she was in prison, that Countess Markievicz began to take instructions from the prison chaplain and converted to Roman Catholicism. She later wrote that her conversion was inspired by the faith of the soldiers she met from Connolly's citizen army.

The Countess was released from prison in 1917 as part of the general amnesty granted by the British government to the participants of the Rising.

At the 1918 general election, the Countess became the first woman elected to the British Parliament representing Dublin's St. Patrick's district defeating her opponent, William Field, with 66% of the vote. She did not take her seat in the House of Commons in line with the abstentionist policy of Sinn Fein. Taking her seat would have required swearing an oath of allegiance to the King of England and that she would never do.

She was in Holloway Prison in Cork for making a "seditious" speech when her colleagues gathered for the First Dial, the Parliament of the revolutionary Irish Republic. When her name was called for the roll, she was described as "being imprisoned by a foreign enemy." She was reelected for the second Dial in the elections of 1921.

Markievicz served as Minister of Labor from 1919 to 1922. She became the first female cabinet minister in Ireland and the only female cabinet minister until 1979. She was only the second female government officer in Europe.

She left government in 1922 along with de Valera and others in opposition to the Anglo-Irish Treaty. Taking arms again, she fought for the Republican cause in the Irish Civil War, helping to defend Moran's Hotel in Dublin.

After the war, she toured the United States and was returned to the Dial the following year.

She joined Fianna Fail on its foundation in 1926, chairing the inaugural meeting of the new party. She ran as a candidate for Fianna Fail, which was pledged to return to Dial Eireann, but died only five weeks afterward, before she could take her seat.

Kathleen Lynn, MD

A little known woman had a tremendous influence on the Irish Rising. Kathleen Florence Lynn, MD was a member of Sinn Féin, a political activist, and medical doctor. She was born in Killala, Co. Mayo, the daughter of a Church of Ireland rector. As a sixteen year old she was deeply touched by the poverty and disease of the Great Famine. It was at this time that she committed herself to her vocational choice, to be a physician even though it was not considered to be a good choice for a woman. She was educated in England and Germany, before enrolling in the Royal University of Ireland, a forerunner to the UCD School of Medicine. Following her graduation in 1899, Dr. Lynn went to the United States, where she worked for ten years, before returning to Ireland to become the first female doctor at the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital. She was greatly influenced by the benevolent socialism of James Connolly. She joined the Irish Citizen's Army and served as the chief medical officer, rising to the rank of captain. During the labor lockout of 1914, Lynn and Constance Markievicz organized and staffed a soup kitchen to provide food for the laborers during the lockout.

For the Easter week Rising, she carried the rebel flag, the Starry Plough, leading the rebel procession from Liberty Hall to the GPO. This honor was given because she was a woman, a professional, a physician, a protestant living within a totally catholic bubble, and a suffragate reflecting the ideals of the type of Workers' Republic envisioned by Connolly.

When hostilities began she was sent to City Hall to tend to the wounded. However, the British positioned their barricades in such a way that her return to the GPO was impossible. She treated the wounded and closed the eyes of the dead. After holding out until the end of the week, she followed the order to surrender. At first the British officer in charge would not accept surrender from a woman. It took a while to assure the British that she was the senior officer in the garrison and that indeed, her surrender was valid. She described herself to the arresting officer as "a Red Cross doctor and a belligerent."

There were ten women at the garrison and the British OC simply told them to go home. When they refused, many including Dr. Lynn, were sentenced to death. She was considered too valuable to be executed and was placed under house arrest until August. None of the women were executed.

It was later discovered that her family intervened and made appeals that she should not be incarcerated because she was really a lunatic and her involvement in the Rising was proof of that. Shortly thereafter she was drafted, and therefore released, to assist with the flu epidemic.

Lynn founded Saint Ultan's Children's Hospital, which she established in Dublin in 1919, with a group of female activists. Lynn's work with Dublin's inner-city poor had convinced her of the need for a hospital to provide medical and educational facilities for impoverished mothers and infants. Earlier in her career, Lynn had experienced discrimination in applying for hospital positions due to her gender, and Saint Ultan's was the only hospital in Ireland entirely managed by women. Saint Ultan's Hospital grew rapidly, and from 1937 became the center for BCG vaccination in Ireland, something that she pioneered some ten years before it became commonplace in Ireland. The hospital closed in 1983.

Lynn lived in Rathmines from 1903 to her death in 1955, sharing her home with her friend and confidante Madeleine Ffrench-Mullen. She was also once a housemate with Constance Markievich. Lynn died on September 14, 1955, and is buried in the family plot at Deansgrange Cemetery. In acknowledgement of the role she played in the 1916 Rising and the Irish War of Independence, she was buried with full military honors. Lynn's personal diaries for the period 1916–1955, and the administrative papers of Saint Ultan's Hospital are held by the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland archive.

Madeleine Ffrench-Mullen was born on the Isle of Malta. Ffrench-Mullen's interest in politics started young. Her father was a committed Parnellite and their Dundrum home was a campaign headquarters. She was a radical feminist and republican during her life. Like many other women of the time she regarded it as a woman's right to vote. She joined the suffrage movement, and met women with a similar worldview and values.

The women's suffrage movement was included in the Movements of Extremists reports of the Dublin Metropolitan Police. Ffrench-Mullen went on to join Inghinidhe na hÉireann, a radical nationalist women's group founded by activist actress, Maud Gonne in 1900. The organization evolved into Cumann na mBan, similar to a woman's auxiliary in 1913. The women's auxiliary comparison vanishes because they were trained for combat and to use weapons. Their charter expressly stated that they would overthrow British influence in Ireland by any means necessary. Suffragist values were central to Cumann na mBan's goal of standing side-by-side with men in the fight for the Irish Republic. Some members saw this as women regaining the rights that had belonged to them in pre-invasion Gaelic civilization. Ffrench-Mullen was on the socialist wing of the moment, holding to the ideals of universal social equality of the syndicalist James Connolly and the Irish Citizen Army.

During the Easter Rising of 1916, Ffrench-Mullen served as a lieutenant in the Irish Citizen Army. She saw action with the St Stephen's Green and Royal College of Surgeons garrisons.

At St. Stephen's Green she was in command of the 15 Citizen Army women who set up a medical station and field kitchen. While occupying St Stephen's Green, she and her comrades

came under sustained heavy fire from the Shelbourne Hotel and buildings on the north side of the Green. After the surrender of the College of Surgeons garrison, French-Mullen was one of the 77 women who had fought in the Rising who were imprisoned, among them her close friend Dr Kathleen Lynn. While in captivity French Mullen was moved three times, spending time in Richmond Barracks, Kilmainham Gaol and Mountjoy Jail. She was released on June 5th, 1916.

She went on to found St. Ultan's Children's Hospital with Dr. Kathleen Lynn. She lived at Rathmines with Dr. Lynn and passed away in 1944.

As we stated earlier in the article, there were more than 300 women actively involved in combat during Easter Week. I am not sure that we can identify each one by name. I singled out three who had significant roles and actually worked together. The stories of the heroism of these women is inspiring. They were involved in combat; they ran messages right under the nose of the enemy; they cared for the wounded. They were represented in all but one garrison, that commanded by deValera who refused to accept women combatants. As one woman stated, they did not do very well. They would have fared much better if there were women present.”