

The Civil War

1922 — 1923

The Treaty

1921, December 6th - A treaty between the British government and Ireland was signed in London. It was signed for the Irish by Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith. It gave Ireland the status of a Free State within the British Commonwealth. Those running for office would have to take the Oath of Allegiance: "I will be faithful to King George V, his heirs and successors by law."

What the IRA did now

The members who opposed the treaty aimed to make it impossible for Dáil Éireann and those who had accepted the treaty to govern the country. Now however, they were opposing, not the British government but the Dublin government. They again turned to guerrilla warfare and used what were known as "flying columns" to carry out ambushes and surprise attacks on the National Army. A flying column was a small group of armed personnel who could move quickly. They knew the countryside well and often under cover of darkness they moved in stealthily, made an attack and got away quickly, as they had done during the War of Independence on RIC Barracks.

Destroying bridges

One of the most effective ways to block communications, to disrupt business and stop the National Army from getting around the county was to blow up bridges. Bridges were damaged on at least 65 occasions in County Wexford.



The destruction of Taylorstown railway bridge/viaduct at Loughnagear, Foulkismills on 28th Aug 1922. Courtesy of Wexford County Archive.



Coolbawn House. Courtesy of Wexford Public Libraries Photographic collection.

Attacks on the Railways

The IRA tried to disrupt the railway services by every possible means. Signal boxes were burnt, signals were damaged and railway lines were pulled up to derail the trains.



The reconstruction of temporary signals and a cabin at Enniscorthy Railway Station following their demolition by the IRA on 16 Sept 1922. Courtesy of Wexford County Archive.

Roadblocks

Because the bridge at Wexford was damaged, there was only one bridge at Ferrycarrig to connect Wexford with Dublin. Roadblocks were placed across every road that led to this bridge. When the army stopped at a roadblock they were attacked.

Destroying Great Houses

During the War of Independence many great houses belonging to landlords were burnt down. This continued during the Civil War. Owners of large houses were considered supporters of the Free State. In 1923 the following large houses were among those destroyed: Ballynastragh, Bellevue, Castleboro, Coolbawn, Upton and Wilton. Some houses and farms belonging to those who were pro-treaty suffered in the same way.

The National Army

The National Army was the official army of the government of Ireland. It had many advantages. It soon outnumbered the IRA. The soldiers were well armed and had transport. They were paid and were organised as an army, though most of them had very little experience. Many referred to them as the "Free State Army". They took over the military barracks in Wexford when the anti-treaty IRA moved out on 9th July 1922. They also took over the courthouse in New Ross, the RIC Barracks in Abbey Square, Enniscorthy and Enniscorthy Castle.

Many of the men stationed in Wexford Barracks were from Carlow, Dublin, Kildare, Kilkenny, Meath, Offaly and Westmeath. The transport section was almost all from Wexford. Their job was to capture, arrest and imprison anyone suspected of carrying out acts of violence against the Free State.



Free State Army. Courtesy of the Browne family collection.

TIMELINE OF The Civil War in Wexford

1921

December 10th - Wexford newspaper "The Free Press" had the headline "We have won our Liberty". This was a direct quote from Arthur Griffith.



Michael Collins pictured with Philip Pierce's bike. Courtesy of the Pierce & Co. collection at the Irish Agricultural Museum, Johnstown.

1922

January 7th - Dáil Éireann voted for acceptance of the treaty. 64 were in favour 57 against. The Ceann Comhairle and three others did not vote. Those who voted for the treaty, led by Michael Collins, believed the treaty was the first step on the road to independence. For those who voted against it, it was a complete betrayal of the ideals of the rebels of 1916. The Irish people were completely divided in their opinions. Members of the same family even took opposite sides.

February 9th - Thirty-five soldiers of the IRA took over the military barracks of Wexford which had been evacuated by the British army. The tricolour was hoisted and flown over the barracks for the first time in its history. On the following day, the tricolour was flown over the Court House in New Ross, directly across the road from the RIC barracks where the Black and Tans still were. They and the RIC left the barracks one week later.

February 22nd - The RIC were replaced with the Civic Guards. They were renamed the Garda Síochána na hÉireann on August 8th, 1923. Those in the Black and Tans, who were not born in Ireland left in the weeks after the Treaty was signed.

April 9th - Michael Collins spoke to a huge crowd at St. Peter's square in Wexford town. All pubs in Wexford were closed on that day. He visited Pierce's Foundry and was given a Pierce bicycle by Philip Pierce.

July 2nd - A battle began in Enniscorthy between the National Army and the Anti-treaty IRA. It lasted for four days and terrified people escaped from the town during a break in the fighting. The National Army were in the old RIC barracks and the IRA were in the courthouse. Many other buildings were taken, including the Castle. The National Army in the castle surrendered because the IRA had cut off food and water supplies. The IRA allowed them to go free. Two anti-treaty IRA volunteers died, Maurice Spillane and Patrick O'Brien. There was great damage done to buildings in the town.

July 6th - When word reached Gorey that the National Army was on the way the IRA blew up the courthouse and the RIC barracks. The army occupied St. Patrick's Club on Main St and later the old workhouse buildings at Ramstown.

July 9th - The National Army took over the military barracks at Wexford.

July 24th - A train was attacked at Killurin Station. IRA prisoners were being taken to gaol in Dublin. The IRA led by Bob Lambert fired on the train. Two members of the National Army died on the day. A third died a few days later. A special train was sent to take the prisoners to Dublin.

August 9th - The IRA surrounded Mc Donald's Pub in Ferrycarrig where a small group of the National Army who had been guarding the bridge had taken shelter. After hours of fierce fighting the National Army surrendered. One of their soldiers was killed. The IRA took their prisoners boots, arms and uniforms and let them go.

August 15th - A goods train was derailed at Killurin.

September 6th - From early morning the IRA fired on Wexford Military barracks. A stray bullet hit the window of the Convent of Perpetual Adoration but injured no one.

October 22nd - In an ambush at Ferrycarrig bridge four National Army soldiers were killed.

November 20th - A train engine was unhooked and run into a marsh at Sparrowsland, near Bree Hill.

December 3rd - A young Free State soldier, Private John Dooley from Drogheda was killed in an ambush at Ferrycarrig.

1923

January 3rd - General Mulcahy, Commander in Chief of the National Army, visited Wexford and took over the County Hall and Wexford jail for IRA prisoners. He ordered that anyone found bearing arms should be executed in accordance with a law enacted by Dáil Éireann in September 1922.

January 7th - Máire Comerford, Cumann na mBan, from County Wexford was arrested by Free State soldiers in Loughlinstown, Dublin. She was carrying a loaded revolver at the time of her arrest.

January 10th - Twenty-six wagons of pigs were unhooked by raiders before two goods trains were made to collide at Ballyanne.

January 16th - The 5 o'clock train from Macmine carrying cattle was attacked at Rathgarogue. The carriages were unhooked and the engine sent off the rails where it steamed along the road for about a mile until they got it back on the rails.

January 27th - Another mail train was derailed at Killurin.

March 13th - Three young IRA prisoners were executed at Wexford gaol, they had been found to be carrying arms. Their names were John Creane, Patrick Hogan and James Parle.



Patrick Hogan, James Parle and John Creane who were executed in Wexford Jail on 13 March 1923. Courtesy of Wexford County Archive.

March 23rd - Four anti-treaty IRA men, John Lacy, John O'Connor, Martin Nolan and Denis Lacey were killed in a fire fight with Free State troops after they ambushed an army car at Kyle crossroads. Privates Cooke, Murphy and Bergin were wounded.

March 24th - The bodies of three soldiers of the National Army were found in a barn at Adamstown. They had been shot by the IRA. They were Thomas Jones, Edward O'Gorman and Patrick Horan from Dublin and Kilkenny.

April 24th - Wexford Cumann na mBan members, Nell Ryan and Annie O'Neill are released from Kilmainham gaol after 34 days on hunger strike.



Ryans of Tomcoole. Standing: Kit (Mary Kate) and Jim (James). Seated: Phyllis and Min (Mary Josephine). Courtesy of Wexford Public Libraries Photographic collection.

April 30th - The IRA called a ceasefire. They had neither the men nor the arms to continue the struggle.

May 2nd - Twenty-seven prisoners escaped over the wall at Wexford gaol.

By **May 30th** the Civil War in Ireland was over, but the bitterness and hurt it generated is still now remembered by families one hundred years later. The number of deaths in Wexford and of people from Wexford who died elsewhere is estimated as 32 Free State or National Army, 27 Anti-Treaty IRA and 10 civilians. Not all of these were shootings or executions. Some were caused by accidental discharge of weapons or trying to use handmade missiles. The IRA also cited "hardship" as a cause of death because of untreated wounds, beatings under interrogation and being in the open air constantly on the run.



Wexford gaol. Courtesy of Lee Robinson.