



## **GUNNER JAMES MAGEE**

### **Defender of Values – The Artillery Corps – Óglaigh na hÉireann**

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### **Introduction**

2018 is the 95<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the establishment of the Irish Defence Forces Artillery Corps on 23 March, 1923. The year marks 60 years of continuous service by Óglaigh na hÉireann in peacekeeping duties with the United Nations.

2018 is also the 220<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Gunner James Magee's heroic action at the Battle of Ballinamuck, County Longford, the final military engagement of the 1798 Rebellion.

In addition to paying homage to Saint Barbara, patron saint of gunners worldwide, the Artillery Corps is unique within the Defence Forces, in that it has an historical figurehead, namely Gunner Magee, from who derives some of the Corps rich heritage and enduring values of respect, loyalty, selflessness, physical courage, moral courage and integrity.

Since the establishment of the Artillery Corps on 23 May, 1923, Gunner Magee's courage, heroism, and resourcefulness have inspired gunners of all ranks, and his heroic stand during the Battle of Ballinamuck has been commemorated and honoured by the Corps.



Under the auspices of the Artillery Club, the objective of this paper is to enhance the Artillery Community's understanding of Gunner Magee. Accordingly, this paper presents a subjective narrative on the environment and events associated with Gunner Magee's military service, based on historical sources, popular culture, folklore, and social memory.

## **Contents**

Setting the scene for the paper, a timeline is outlined, the accessible fire support available in Ireland during the 18<sup>th</sup> century is discussed, and aspects of the Royal Longford Militia are presented.

From an artillery perspective, an insight into General Jean Humbert's Franco-Irish campaign from his landing in Mayo on 22 August, to the Battle of Ballinamuck on 08 September, 1798, is summarised.

Focusing on Gunner Magee, the paper then discusses his heroic action in Ballinamuck, advances social memory sources including the National Folklore Collection. The paper also provides information regarding the association of Gunner Magee with Magee Barracks, the Magee Gun Trophy, the Battle of Ballinamuck Painting, the Magee March, and the Ballad of Gunner Magee.

For completion purposes, the Battle of New Orleans, which involved two of the participants in the Battle of Ballinamuck, and the Ballinamuck Visitor Centre are also included.

Any discrepancies in the paper, or additional information on Gunner Magee, will be gratefully received by the Artillery Club, and reflected, as appropriate, in future iterations.

## **Abstract**

An abstract of this paper is contained in Annex A. The content of this annex provides a basis on which presentations, articles, commentaries, and further studies, associated with Gunner Magee and the Battle of Ballinamuck, can be advanced. Information on issues relating to Gunner Magee is also provided: Magee Barracks Kildare, the Magee Gun Trophy, the Battle of Ballinamuck Painting, the Magee March and the Ballad of Gunner Magee.



## **Future Work**

There is ample scope for additional research in order to augment the content of this paper. For example, during the elaboration process, it was not possible to establish Gunner Magee's date and place of birth. The discovery of the Personnel Lists / Muster Lists for 1798 would facilitate the determination that Gunner Magee served with the Royal Longford Militia. Likewise, as Irish Militias did not have the rank of gunner, this raises a possibility that Gunner Magee, (and indeed Gunner Casey), may have received artillery training with the Royal Irish Artillery Regiment.

## **Credits**

The support of various institutions in the development of this paper is appreciated, including: Defence Forces Military Archives, Defence Forces School of Music, South Dublin County Libraries, County Westmeath Library Mullingar, and the Ballinamuck Visitor Centre.

Photographs are courtesy of the author. Sources used in the compilation of this paper are listed in Annex B. The paper, coupled with photographs associated with Gunner Magee, will be posted on the Artillery Club's website, in due course.

## **Timeline**

The following timeline endeavours to capture significant events regarding our understanding of Gunner James Magee:

**1798:** Battle of Ballinmore.

**1923:** Establishment of the Artillery Corps.

**1933:** The National Graves Association placed a cross at General George Blake's grave in Tubberpatrick Cemetery commemorating both General Blake and Gunner Magee. In 1948, the cross was subsequently moved to the Croppies Grave in Ballinamuck.

**1936:** Publication of *The Last Invasion of Ireland – When Connacht Rose* by Dr Richard Francis Hayes, in which Gunner Magee's action is recorded.

**1938:** National Folklore Commission's Schools Manuscript Collection, referenced Gunner Magee.

**1939:** Opening of partly reconstructed Kildare Military Barracks.

**1943:** Magee Gun Trophy commissioned.

**1949:** Eoghain Ó'Tuairisc *An Gunnadóir Mac Aoidh* composed.

**1954:** Government renames Military Barracks Kildare to Dún Mhig Aoidh, Magee Barracks.

**1962:** Eoghain Ó'Tuairisc Irish written novel on 1798, titled *L'Attaque* published.

**1964:** *An Gunnadóir Mac Aoidh* republished in *Lux Aeterna*.

**1992:** Composition of *The Magee March*.

**1995:** Ballinamuck Painting commissioned by the Artillery Club.



**1998:** Ballinamuck Visitor Center opened.

### **18th Century Artillery Fire Support in Ireland**

On 22 March 1687, a “train of artillery” was established in Ireland by royal warrant. However, it was not until 01 April, 1756 that a permanent artillery unit was established with the formation of the Artillery Company in Ireland, based in Dublin and Kilkenny.

The Royal Irish Artillery Regiment was established in 1760, with the Earl of Kildare as its Colonel-in-Chief and Master of Ordnance. Headquartered in Chapelizod, Dublin, the Regiment was equipped with the light 6-pdr gun.

Following the establishment of the Irish Militia in 1794, by 1797 most of its battalions were equipped with two light 6-pdr guns. At that stage, the strength of the Royal Irish Artillery Regiment was 2,085 all ranks of which 1,430 served in Ireland. A detachment of the British Royal Horse Artillery arrived in Ireland in December 1797.

As was the norm in England, the Royal Irish Artillery Regiment trained selected personnel in Irish Militias, such as the Royal Longford Militia, in the art and science of gunnery. This provided an enhanced fire support capability for the Crown Forces, both in Ireland and England.

The Bronze 12-pdr gun on display in the *Soldiers and Chiefs Exhibition* in Collins Barracks, Dublin, was one of a consignment of thirty-six guns, 6-pdr and 12-pdr, received by the Royal Irish Artillery Regiment in 1796. When the United Irishmen’s rebellion began on 24 May, 1798, the Crown Forces in Ireland had formidable artillery support.

The light 6-pdr saw action in locations such as Naas, Tara Hill, Bunclody, Tuberneering (loss of two guns), New Ross, Enniscorthy (loss of 4 guns) Antrim, and in the context of this paper Castlebar and Ballinamuck.

Made of brass or bronze, the light 6-pdr was a smooth bore muzzle loader with elevating screw and tangent sight, axle and wheels and a double bracket carriage. This carriage consisted of two timber planks, called cheeks or brackets, placed on edge, almost parallel, (narrower at the axle), and joined together by four crosspieces called transoms. In action the carriage was lifted and moved using two hand spikes. The light 6-pdr carriage could be moved by one man. In the 1790s, a single block trail was designed, making the gun easier to deploy. The light 6-pdr, complete with ammunition and equipment stores, was drawn by three horses. As a gunner, Napoleon Bonaparte thought so highly of the 6-pdr that he introduced it to the French artillery in 1803.

On the passing of the Act of Union in 1801, the Royal Irish Artillery Regiment was reduced to ten companies, and was incorporated into the Royal Regiment of Artillery, headquartered



in Woolwich, London, as its 7th Battalion. The Regiment's band was also absorbed into the Royal Regiment of Artillery.

### **Royal Longford Militia**

On account of the prevailing defence and security environment, a reorganised Irish Militia was established in 1793, with an establishment of 21,660, and 38 units. The units were designated regiments if they had more than eight companies, otherwise they were designated as battalions. As with all units, the Royal Longford Militia was a military auxiliary force raised from the civilian population to support the regular army, engaged in garrison duties, and as a contingency asset to deploy in defence of the country.

According to *A Short History of the Royal Longford Militia 1793 – 1893*, on its establishment in 1793, the authorised strength of the Royal Longford Militia was 280 personnel. On 11 April 1793, the King appointed Lord Granard as Lieutenant-Colonel Commandant of the "Royal Regiment of Longford Militia". The Militia was placed under the command of Major-General Crosbie who commanded forces in the Connaught region. On 08 November, 1794, by order of the Adjutant-General's office, the Militia regiments were ranked, with the Longford unit ranked as the "15th Regiment of Irish Militia". In 1795, the authorised strength was increased to 460 non-commissioned officers and men.

It is worth noting that the Royal Longford Militia, the Royal Kilkenny Militia, or the Frazers Fencibles were not awarded a battle honour for deployment against the Franco-Irish force in 1798, whereas the Pembrokehire Yeomanry was awarded the battle honour "Fishguard" in 1797 following a French incursion in Wales.

Four times a year, inspection parades were held for the Militia units, with an allowance paid to those on paraded. With the imminent threat of either a United Irishmen rebellion, or a French invasion, personnel lists were compiled on a monthly basis. From a genealogical perspective, the lists could be viewed as a localised census.

It is interesting to note that the surname Magee is recorded twice in the "Muster List" for October 1799: Michael Magee (Colonels Company), and John Magee (Captain Armstrong's Company). This document, which reflects a nominal roll of personnel in six companies, was compiled by Ray Whittinger for *Genealogy of County Longford*. The ranking name was the Earl of Granard with the rank of colonel. According to this particular list, the strength of the unit, one year after the Battle of Ballinamuck, was 605 all ranks: sergeants, corporals, drum major drummer and privates. One should note that rank structure did not include "gunner".

Twenty six years after the Battle of Ballinamuck, on 09 October 1824, the list for Brigadier-Major S. Simple's company at "Carrickglafs" includes a James Magee – perhaps a relative named after Gunner James Magee!



For the purpose of the research into Gunner Magee, Personnel Lists / Muster Lists for 1798 have yet to be discovered. One could assume that the list for 1798 was destroyed on account of the embarrassment of the unit's desertions in Castlebar on 27 August.

It is generally believed that Gunner James Magee served in the Royal Longford Militia. Throughout all the narratives of the Franco-Irish campaign James Magee is mentioned as Gunner Magee. As Irish Militias, including the Royal Longford Militia, did not have the rank of gunner, this raises a possibility that Gunner Magee received gunnery training with the Royal Irish Artillery Regiment.

In his context, it is important to note that in the Forward of *Kildare Barracks – From the Royal Field Artillery to the Irish Artillery Corps*, Major-General P. F. Nowlan (Retd) advises that Gunner Magee was one of numerous soldiers serving with a Militia who were trained by the Royal Irish Artillery Regiment in gunnery.

*A Short History of the Longford Militia 1798 – 1803* informs that the Militias were ordered to provide a certain proportion of men to assist the Royal Artillery, and that when personnel were performing gunnery duty they were to receive pay as gunners. In 1798, two "battalion" guns (6 pdrs) were assigned to the Royal Longford Militia.

In the context of gun crews deployed with the Franco-Irish force, in addition to Gunner Magee's gun, this paper also refers to a separate gun manned by a Casey, who was mentioned as Gunner Casey on one occasion in available documentation. This paper also provides a range of personnel, which various sources claim, were part of Gunner Magee's gun crew, namely: Robin Gill, his younger brother from Edenmore; and the Farrells. In addition, a Tommy, a Paddy and a Bill are mentioned in the Ballad of Gunner Magee. It is likely that some of these individuals received gunnery training with the Royal Irish Artillery Regiment.

Despite Gunner Magee's rank, it comes as no surprise that tradition and social memory has claimed him as a member of the Royal Longford Militia, (less the "Royal" designation).

### **The Year of the French - 1798**

In 1791, the Society of United Irishmen was established. The United Irishmen endeavoured to obtain Catholic Emancipation, radical reform and independence. The British position was to preserve law and order, maintain the connection with Great Britain, and to resist French aggression.

On 06 August 1798, General Jean Humbert, from Saint Nabord, departed Rochelle, with part of General Jean Hardy's "*l'armée d'Irlande*", on board three frigates, commanded by the Chef de Division Daniel Savary - the *Concorde*, the *Médée*, and the *Franchise*. Due to unfavourable sailing conditions, the remainder of the force remained in Brest and Dunkirk. General Humbert's troops were seasoned, well equipped warriors, serving during Napoleon's



successful campaign in Italy during 1797. Many of the troops, including General Humbert, also experienced combat in the Vendée campaign.



Under the command of General Humbert, the long awaited French expedition landed at Kilcummin on the north Mayo coast near Killala on 22 August, 1798, to revive the efforts of the United Irishmen, and to provide the nucleus of a Franco-Irish force equipped with artillery, muskets, swords, pikes, ammunition and uniforms. With a strength of 1,019 personnel, (80 officers and 939 other ranks), and led by officers trained in the art and science of war, the well organized French component had 2,520 muskets and a limited artillery section consisting of three 4-pdr guns.

Shortly after arriving in Mayo, General Humbert requested reinforcements including additional artillery support. The French were joined by 400 Irish insurgents, the United Irishmen, a figure that increased as the campaign advanced.

### **Castlebar**

Having secured Ballina, General Humbert advanced on the Crown Forces who were concentrated at Castlebar. Reaching Castlebar on 27 August, only one of General Humbert's three 4-pdr guns was operational. Nevertheless, despite effective artillery fire from the Crown Forces, under the command of General Jean Sarrazin, the Franco-Irish force assaulted and routed a well defended position.

The Crown Forces deployed at Castlebar, under the command of Lieutenant-General Gerard Lake, had twelve artillery pieces: five light 6-pdrs and one howitzer from the Royal Irish Artillery Regiment, and two light 6-pdrs from each of the Kilkenny Militia, the Longford Militia and Frazers Fencibles.

Under the command of the Earl of Granard, the Royal Longford Militia consisted of four companies with a total strength of 14 officers, and 400 non-commissioned officers and men. The officers included the Earl of Granard, Major Thompsom, Captain Chambers, Captain Armstrong and Lieutenant Blundell.



Having arrived in Castlebar, after a 3 day march from Ennis, within 4 hours, the Royal Longford Militia was deployed in a reserve posture. Having been outflanked, the Earl of Granard withdrew to a bridge in the town, deployed his personnel, augmented by the Kilkenny Militia and Frazers Fencibles, in order to cover the retreat.

Apparently, a 6 pdr deployed at the bridge was manned by a Corporal Gibson, under the command of Captain Shorthall of the Royal Irish Artillery. Concurrently, a Lieutenant Blundell deployed another 6 pdr in support of this retrograde action. However, having sustained overwhelming fire from a superior force, and with the loss of half his unit, the Earl of Granard withdrew from the battle. He arrived in Tuam on 28 September.

According to *A Short History of the Royal Longford Militia*, 125 non-commissioned officers and men were taken prisoner, and states that “*of the latter, 53 entered the French Service, and it is satisfactory to know that, as a reward for their treachery, every one of them was subsequently either shot or hanged.*” The use of the word “subsequently” is significant in that it could refer to the aftermath of the Battle of Ballinamuck and the eventual fate of Gunner James Magee.

The withdrawal of the Crown Forces in haste, gave rise to the term “*The Races of Castlebar*”. All twelve artillery pieces were captured by the Franco-Irish force.

### **Republic of Connaught**

By 30 August, the Franco-Irish force had seized the strategic Mayo towns of Westport, Newport, Swinford, Ballinrobe and Hollymount. On 31 August, General Humbert proclaimed a Republic of Connaught.

Having been advised that Lord Charles Cornwallis (Viceroy and Commander-in Chief) had reached Tuam with a large number of Crown Forces, General Humbert departed Castlebar on 03 September, in adverse weather conditions, and marched north east towards Sligo, with the intention of crossing the River Shannon, and advancing in the general direction of Granard, with between 1,500 and 2,000 United Irishmen.

On 05 September, at Colooney, County Sligo, the Limerick City Militia, supported by the Essex Infantry and a troop of Light Dragoons, under the command of Colonel Charles Vereker, attacked the Franco-Irish force. Subsequently, General Humbert defeated the attacking force by a flanking charge, and captured two light 6pdrs.

Meanwhile, Lieutenant-General Gerard Lake’s army of 15,000 men was closing in on the rear of General Humbert’s force.



At Dromahair, on 06 September, General Humbert rejects an offer to surrender, but discarded some of the captured artillery as it was hindering advancement. Minor engagements took place between the opposing forces.

### **Shannon Crossing and Cloone**

On 07 September, having marched from Coolloney to Boyle, General Humbert's force headed east to join the United Irishmen in County Westmeath. The force crossed the Shannon at Ballintra, but were unable to destroy the bridge due to the pursuing forces led by Lieutenant-General Lake.

Later that day, at Cloone in County Longford, General Humbert was advised that the United Irishmen were defeated at Granard and at Wilson's Hospital (North of Mullingar), and that Crown Forces were blocking the route to Dublin. To make matters worse, a number of gun chains were stolen. Nevertheless, he was expecting his force to be augmented with 3,000 soldiers under the command of Harvey Montmorency Morris. Departing for Granard via Ballinamuck, General Humbert was obliged to leave an unspecified amount of his artillery assets behind.

At daybreak on 08 September, on entering Cloone, Lieutenant-General Lake discovered that General Humbert's force had just departed. He was ordered to attack the Franco-Irish force, without delay from the rear. Meanwhile by moving to Ballinalee, Lord Cormallis was blocking any further Franco-Irish advance.

In a letter dated 08 September, written after the Battle of Ballinamuck Lieutenant-General Lake records the following:

*“After four days and nights’ most severe marching, my column, consisting of the Carabineers, detachments of the 23rd Light Dragoons, the 1st Fencible Dragoons, and the Roxburg Fencible Dragoons, under the command of Colonel Sir Thomas Chapman, Lieutenant-Colonel Maxwell, Earl of Roden, and Captain Kerr; the 3rd Battalion Light Infantry, the Omagh, and part of the Kerry Regiment, the Reay, Northampton and Prince of Wales’ Fencible Regiments of Infantry, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Innes, of the 6th Regiment, Lord Viscount Gosford, Earl of Glandore, Major Ross, Lieutenant Colonel Macartney, arrived at Cloon about seven this morning, where, having received directions to follow the enemy in the same line, whilst his Excellency moved by the lower road to intercept them, I advanced, having previously detached the Monaghan Light Company, mounted behind dragoons to harass their rear.”*

### **Ballinamuck**

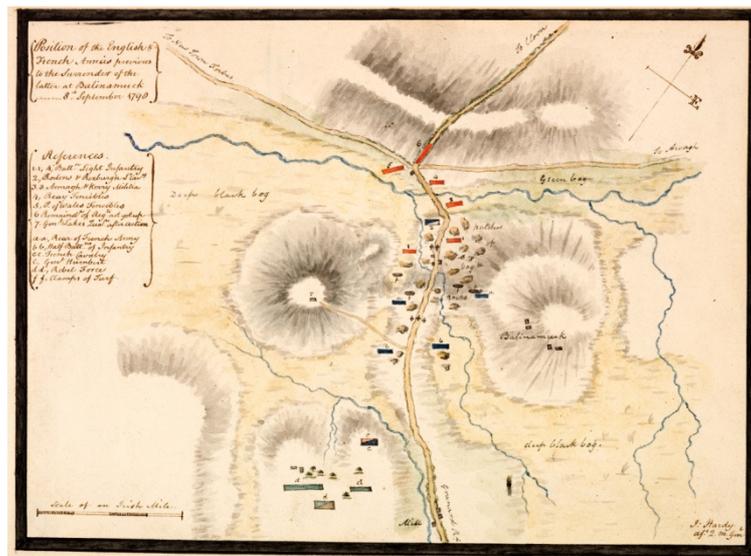
With Lord Cornwallis army in Ballinalee, and having endured probing attacks throughout the morning, General Humbert decided to adopt a defence posture against Lieutenant-General Lake's advancing troops, at Ballinamuck four miles from Cloone. The selected location on



Shanmullagh Hill represented key terrain, with limited maneuver space on the flanks for an attacking force with superior combat power. Two guns were deployed on the lower slope of the hill which was overlooking Ballinamuck.

General George Blake, a former Cavalry officer in the British Army, deployed pikemen and a company of French Grenadiers, under the command of Captain Jobit along the road.

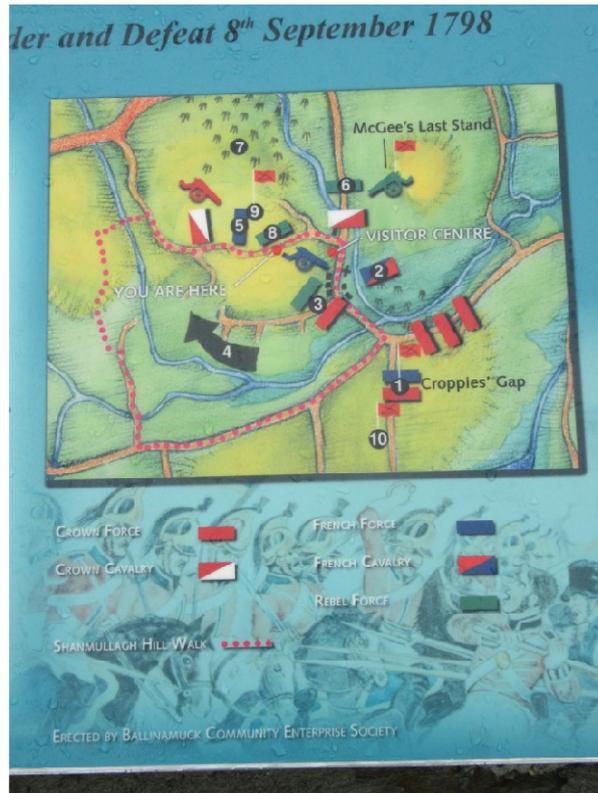
Lord Cornwallis was on General Humbert's right with 15,000 troops, Lieutenant-General Lake was to his rear with over 14,000, while another 6,000 were closing in from the flanks.



*Disposition of Forces by Colonel J. Hardy – National Library of Ireland*

Advised that a surrender was declared by General Jean Sarrizan at Kiltycrevagh Hill, Lieutenant-General Lake ordered Major-General John Craddock and Captain Edward Pakenham (Lieutenant-General of Ordnance) forward to receive General Humbert's sword. They were met with a volley of fire, wounding Major-General Craddock. General Humbert ordered an advance. His Grenadiers successfully attacked an element of the opposing Dragoons.

With Lieutenant-General Lake conducting a flanking movement, General Humbert withdrew to alternative high ground. On observing that a complement of pikemen was preparing to attack his artillery, Lieutenant-General Lake withdrew his guns, and continued the battle with cavalry and infantry.



General Humbert's artillery deployed on an adjacent hill was attacked from two sides and his guns were neutralised. With the battle technically lost, at their discretion, General Humbert and his officers surrendered their swords. The battle was terminated after an hour of hostilities with a decisive victory for the British forces, and marked the defeat of the French force which arrived in Ireland on 22 August 1798, in support of the Society of United Irishmen.

Whereas the French were offered prisoner of war status, their United Irishmen comrades were scattered with substantial losses *en masse*. It is believed that between 500 – 600 Irishmen died in the Battle, with additional casualties accruing from the Crown Forces clearing operations after the actual battle. In contrast, French and Crown Forces casualties were considered to be light. Around 100 Irishmen were taken prisoner, including General Blake, General Roach, and perhaps Gunner Magee.

Writing in Killeshandra, an English officer described some of the battle sequence, including artillery action:

*“The French being closely pursued, prepared for an unavoidable battle. They formed on a hill to very great advantage, having a bog on their left, and a bog and lake on their right.*

*Five flank companies, viz., the Dublin, Armagh, Monaghan, Tipperary, and Kerry, requested General Lake to let them mount behind the Hessians, Carabineers, and*



*Roxburgh, &c., so ardent were they to over-take the enemy. This request was granted, and they soon came up with the foe.*

*Seeing the enemy so advantageously posted, wisdom was needful on the part of our general. A column of our troops faced to the left, and marched behind an eminence; to this our artillery marched in front.*

*The enemy had their cannon covered with pikemen, who were about to take our cannon under cover of our own smoke. General Lake, aware of their design, ordered the artillery to retreat to another hill, and, finding his men so brave, he ordered his men to charge the French through the smoke.”*

### **Gunner Magee’s Action**

Gunner Casey and Gunner James Magee, who originally served with the Longford Militia, and who joined General Humbert’s force in Castlebar, deployed two guns at the Black Fort, near Gaigue, accompanied by French grenadiers and Irish pikemen. In parallel, cavalry and artillery elements of the Crown Forces deployed in the vicinity of the Church in Ballinamuck.

Contemporary accounts record that for some time, the guns on both sides intermittently discharged their grape and canister at the opposing lines. A target round disabled Gunner Casey's gun. Encouraged by this, the Crown Forces rallied. According to tradition, a chain-ball from Gunner Magee's gun stopped their progress, and a second chain-ball struck and exploded a Crown Forces limber containing ammunition.

As a deserter from the Longford Militia, Gunner Magee would have expected little mercy from Lieutenant-General General Lake’s victorious army at Ballinamuck.

Gunner Magee’s heroic last stand is described by the historian Dr Richard Francis Hayes (1882 – 1958), in his publication *The Last Invasion of Ireland – When Connacht Rose*: M.H. Gill and Son, Dublin 1936. During the course of his research for this publication, Dr Hayes interviewed individuals along the route of the Franco-Irish campaign, and collected associated social memories.

*"Humbert's surrender had taken place and the slaughter of the insurgents there had commenced. On the roadway near Gaig, Gunner Magee with a small body of pikemen was still making a forlorn stand. Soon after the blowing up of the English magazine, his supply of ammunition became almost exhausted. To supply the deficiency, camp pots and kettles were hammered to bits, and the metal mixed with grape and canister.*

*And when once more an English cavalry squad tentatively approached, a discharge of these caused such confusion in its ranks that it was forced to retreat. Preparations*



*were being made to load again the last remaining French gun, but a ball from the English lines struck it and broke the stock of one of its wheels.*

*To render it capable of being fired, however, four insurgents heroically stepped forward and the gun was placed on their shoulders. Magee having applied the match, it boomed out, but the gallant volunteers were killed by the recoil. An enemy corps then moved rapidly towards the spot without opposition and, capturing the gun, made Magee a prisoner. A drumhead court martial on the battlefield subsequently condemned him to execution as a deserter from His Majesty's army".*

In his forward to *Kildare Barracks - From the Royal Field Artillery to the Irish Artillery Corps*, Major-General P. F. Nowlan (Retd) states that:

*"Magee, with four gunners to help, made a last stand at Ballinamuck, with a 6 pdr of the Longford Militia. The gun was broken when it fired its last shot, his comrades were killed and Magee – a British soldier was arrested and hung for desertion."*

Three names are mentioned in Eoghain Ó'Tuairisc's poem *Guannadóir Mac Aoidh* depicting the last stand of Gunner Magee, namely: "Tommy, Paddy and young Bill". In some quarters, it is believed that all, or some, of these three soldiers were related (cousins) to Gunner Magee.

Apparently, the monument erected commemorating Gunner Magee is located in a field closer to the road, rather than at the Black Fort, (the site identified in local folk history), for reasons of accessibility.

### **Social Memory Sources**

As with other events of the 1798 rebellion, the Battle of Ballinamuck has its share of folklore, heritage and social memory. Both Dr Richard Hayes, and the work of the Schools Scheme under the auspices of the National Folklore Commission, and the print media, provides an interesting interpretation of the Battle, and the exploits of Gunner Magee who received a prominent place in the associated documents.

The National Folklore Commission's Collection is entrusted with the care of the extensive archive of manuscript, audio and photographic collections inherited from the Irish Folklore Commission (1935-1971), and material collected since that time. Digitised transcripts of original hand written texts of perceptions provided by individuals on the Battle of Ballinamuck can be viewed at [www.duchas.ie](http://www.duchas.ie)

**Schools Manuscript Collection 1939.** The following extracts, which refer to Gunner Magee, written in May 1938, are hereby attributed to The Schools Manuscript Collection, Gaigue, Ballinamuck, Roll 13305, Teacher Peter Duignam, Volume 0758, National Folklore



Collection UCD. In the context of the Artillery Corps culture and heritage, and association with Gunner Magee's perceived actions on the gun line, as recorded in pages 433 and 434 are very significant.

**Action – Capture - Execution.** The informant was Johnny Campbell, Gaigue, Ballinamuck, age 71, as related by his father, and collected by Patrick O'Connor. Volume 0758, Page 056:

*“Gunner Magee had his cannon set in a field at breelaughter fort. His ammunition was all used and he could see the English guns facing him on Kiltycreevagh Hill. He broke up all the old metal pots and pans he had and put them in his cannon and fired. He burst a magazine of an English cannon and it went in flames. He was captured afterwards and hung at a house named Reilly's by Hempenstall the walking gallows as he was called. He hung people by putting the rope on their necks and slinging them over his shoulder.”*

**Killed in Action.** The informant was Anthony Curran, Cloone, Co Leitrim, and collected by Seán Ó hEolín, (Ballinamore National School) Volume 0758, Page 144 & 145 [extract from a poem]:

*“The following was written, I believe in 1898. It was published in some paper and I got the cutting from that paper from my mother. The cutting bore no date.*

*When Humbert, in haste, gave the signal advising the Irish to fly,  
He knows that he soon must surrender; these brave lads, if taken, must die.  
Some scorned to flee or seek safety, at his post died poor Gunner Magee,  
Freedom's torch gave a last feeble flicker, then sank in oppression's dark sea.”*

**Deployment – Improvised ammunition – Broken Wheel – Gun Crew Killed in Action.** The informant was Michael Grimes, Kiltycreevagh, age 86, and collected by James McKenna. Volume 0758, Pages 433 and 434:

*“Gunner Magee mounted his cannon on the "Black Fort" in Tom Heaney's field in Creelaughter and his first shot "riddled" an English magazine on Ballinamuck bridge.*

*Through want of ammunition, he fed his cannon with broken pots, bits of iron etc and it is said that before the end of the battle, all his fingers were burned off. Assisting Magee was a youth from Edenmore, known as "Robin Gill" and also Gill's younger brother.*

*The wheel of Magee's cannon was broken during the fight & seeing the Irish retreating and his cannon useless, Magee thought & knew all was lost. He put in an extra charge to his cannon; the Gills (brothers) held up the cannon, in place of the*



wheel & Magee fired. His shot wrought havoc among the English, but the gun "kicked" killing all three."

**Action – Withdrawal Advice - Possibilities of Death.** The informant was Michael Reilly, Shanmullagh, Ballinamuck, age 85 and collected by James McKenna. Volume 0758, Page 459:

*"He had his cannon mounted on rising ground on the road about 80 yards West of present Post Office. Seeing Cornwallis & his cavalry coming across the bogs from Fardromin, he said, "Boys, its no good now, take the hill for the Bog." He put in a last, heavy charge & hitting an oncoming English magazine - between Dolan's & Cassidy's did much harm.*

*The French & Irish, taking Magee's advice began to fight across Shanmullagh Hill to the bog & the fight was raging round McLoughlin's house. McLoughlin came out to J.F. Cassidy's (then belonging to Wilson, a yeoman) and meeting Cornwallis's cavalry, brought them round the lane to cut off the rebels from the bog. His descendants still live there.*

*There are many different versions of his death. Many hold that he was killed by the explosion of his own cannon with the last shot. More say he died on the hill, pike in hand. Michael Reilly states he was captured, handed at Ballinalee & his body brought back by his friends to the Cross-keys, Longford."*

**Action – Remains of Gun – Numbers Killed – Burial Ground – Cross Roads.** The informant was Paddy Dalton, Kiltycreevagh, Gaigue, Ballinamuck, age 85, and collected by Katie Cassidy. Volume 0758, Page 321:

*"Gunner McGee fired on the English army and killed hundred's of them. His cannon could be got all around the place and also his helmets and skeletons could be got at Kiltycreevagh Cross-Roads. There were about 700 Irish killed, 300 French and about 700 English in the battle. The Irish and French were buried in Shanmullagh Hill and all around Ballinamuck. How you would know the graves is that there are bushes growing on them and also heaped up in heaps. There are boxes buried around the Cross Roads with helmets and skeletons in them from the remains of the battle."*

**Longford Leader 1939.** "Ballinamuck – It's page in Irish Story" is the title of a half page article in the Longford Leader, published on 11 March, 1939. This article provides a flavour of the prevailing interpretation of revolutionary history, examples include: Ballinamuck was "the scene of one of the most momentous battles ever fought for liberty on Irish soil", and "would provide the site for another history-making transaction in the long series of events connected for the struggle for freedom from alien domination".



**Social Memory.** The article reinforces the concept of social memory: “*The history of that day, is familiar to every student of Irish history and the story of the events as traditionally handed down are accepted as the true record of the fierce encounter which took place when the English came up to intercept the Irish and their allies at Ballinamuck*”. Elsewhere it states: “*The account of the engagement handed down to the present generation by those who lived in the period and those who took part in the engagement places the opening of the battle at the crossroads.*”

**Content.** The article consists of a comprehensive overview of the Battle of Ballinamuck, the content of which reflects the prevailing narrative of the event.

**Points to Note.** The article suggests that the gun chains were placed in the draw well of Mr West in Cloon, “stolen by a traitor”. It states that Gunner Magee and Gunner Casey were in charge of the guns, (note Casey’s rank – not mentioned elsewhere in documents sourced for this paper). Regarding Gunner Magee’s activities, the article states that “*two strong men named Farrell*” held up the gun and that their “*backs were broken*” as a result of the shot being fired. The article reports that Gunner Magee was taken prisoner “*condemned to death*”, hanged at Ballinalee and buried in the Bully’s Acre.

**Irish Own.** The article written by “OB”, provides the narrative of Gunner Magee’s involvement in the Battle of Ballinamuck as told to Mr James P. Farrell during his research for his book titled “*The History of County Longford*” published by Dollard, Dublin in 1891.

**Points to Note.** The article states that Gunner Magee was “*a soldier in the British Artillery*” and that “*the promptings of a brave and noble heart inspired him to desert from the English ranks to those of his countrymen*”. The article informs that Gunner Magee’s two cousins propped the gun on their backs, and that he was strangled at his gun.

**The Year of the French.** Gunner Magee is briefly mentioned, along with Gunner Casey, in the historical novel *The Year of the French* written by the Irish American author and literary scholar Thomas Flanagan (1923–2002). (Flanagan 1979). The book was adapted into a TV series and broadcasted by RTE and Chanel 4 in 1982.

**The History of the Artillery Corps Since 1922.** The Franco-Irish operations, including the Battle of Ballinmuck, Gunner Magee and the Magee Gun Trophy are included in a section of Ralph A. Riccio’s publication, *The History of the Artillery Corps Since 1922*. References to Gunner Magee and his gun crew reflect the contemporary understanding of artillery actions on 08 September, 1798.

**Ballad of Robin.** Oral traditions arising from the Battle of Ballinamuck included not only Gunner Magee, but a plethora of heroes such as General Blake and Robin Gill. The *Ballad of*



*Robin* has 27 verses and is referenced in the School Manuscript Collection. Tradition has it that Robin Gill was a member of Gunner Magee's gun detachment.

### **Onslaught - United Irishmen**

With the last of the Franco-Irish guns neutralised, the ensuing onslaught by the Lieutenant-General Lake's force was "Bloody and Unrelenting".

The United Irishmen, under the command of General George Blake, expecting no quarter, continued to fight. Eventually, they retreated to a bog, where they were further attacked at enormous cost by both cavalry and infantry. Casualties from this reign of terror were buried in locations such as the Croppies' Grave and Graves Meadow in Ballinamuck, and the Highlanders Grave in Gortletteragh, 5 kilometers from Ballinamuck. General Blake's grave is in nearby Tubberpatrick Cemetery.

At 1600hrs, on Sunday 03 September 1933, the National Graves Association conducted an unveiling ceremony of a cross at the grave in Tubberpatrick, commemorating both General Blake and Gunner Magee. In the associated Press Release, dated 25 August 1933, the National Graves Association referred to Gunner Magee, inter alia "*an artillery-man with the British Army*".

On 04 September 1933, The Irish Press reported that over 2,000 attended the ceremony, and that the monument was a hand wrought iron cross with a stone base, with the following words: "*In commemoration of the heroic sacrifices of General Blake and Gunner Magee who fell at Ballinamuck 8<sup>th</sup> Sept 1798*". The actual monument was moved to Ballinamuck, see the photograph below.

The same Irish Press report stated: "*General Blake was hanged from the shafts of a hand cart after the engagement which he fought with General Humbert. His remains were interred by the people of the district. Gunner Magee was hanged at Killnacarrow, near Ballinalee, and was interred in that district eight miles away*"



The following is an extract from a British officer's letter, written in Ballina, on 03 October 1798:

*"At Ballinamuck they drew up again, and extended their line across a bog to prevent the cavalry from charging them, and planted their cannon on a hill to the left of the road. As it led through the bog; and in this order they awaited our approach.*

*The Light Brigade attacked them first; our Light Company after a few fires, leaped into their trenches, and a dreadful carnage ensued. The French cried for mercy.*

*We ran for four miles before we could get into action; the men forgot all their troubles and fought like furies. We pursued the rebels through the bog; the country for miles was covered with their slain. We remained for a few days burying the dead, hung General Blake and nine of the Longford Militia. We brought 113 prisoners to Carrick-on-Shannon, nineteen of them we executed in one day, and left the remainder with another regiment to follow our example, and then marched to Boyle."*

A French account described it as follows:

*"A short time later he (Humbert) was presented to General Lake. All this time the Irish rebels were being 'mopped-up'. It is not for this history to give the details. Suffice it to salute in passing the heroic pikemen and improvised gunners hacked to death at their guns, the last cannon of the Army of Ireland"*.

### **Prisoners of War**

General Humbert along with 95 officers and 746 men, were well treated and respected as prisoners of war. They were transferred to Dublin in barges on the Grand Canal. General Humbert requested clemency for his Irish officers, especially those who joined him in France.

However, his ADC, Captain Bartholomew Teeling (Born in Lisburn, County Antrim, in 1774) was tried by court-martial for treason in the Royal Barracks, Dublin, and was executed in Arbour Hill Prison on 24 September. His colleague, who also held a French commission,



Matthew Tone (born in Dublin in 1768), a brother of Theobald Wolfe Tone, was executed on 29 September in Arbour Hill Prison. Both were buried in the Croppies Acre, which is located in front of Collins Barracks, Dublin.

*A Short History of the Royal Longford Militia* records an exchange of French Officers captured at the Battle of Quiberon (June – Jul 1795), for officers of the Royal Longford Militia captured at Castlebar, namely Lieutenant Telford, Lieutenant J. Sloane, and Ensign Richard Ledwith.

### **Historical Figurehead**

In a report Lieutenant-General Lake stated that *“he took three light French 4-pdrs, and that in pursuing the French-Irish force he had pressed them so hard as to compel them to discard nine pieces of cannon which they had taken in former actions with His Majesty's Forces”*.

Gunner Magee fired either a French 4-pdr, or one of the 6-pdr guns captured by the Franco-Irish force at Castlebar on 27 August, 1798.



The term "French gun" is used in the folklore accounts of the Battle of Ballinamuck, yet could imply French possession, rather than French manufacture. It is likely that the weapon used by Gunner Magee was a captured 6pdr from the Royal Irish Artillery Regiment.

Irrespective of which type of gun was used, since the establishment of the Artillery Corps in 1923, Gunner Magee's courage, heroism, and resourcefulness have been commemorated and honoured by the corps. As a historical figurehead, Gunner Magee's actions are reflected in the culture, heritage and esprit de corps of the Artillery Corps.

### **Magee Barracks Kildare - 1954**

Units of the Royal Field Artillery were garrisoned in the Military Barracks in Kildare from April 1902 through April 1922. By 1909, the barracks garrisoned five batteries from the 31 Brigade and 32 Brigade of the Royal Field Artillery, and the 1 Battery Royal Horse Artillery. Personnel of the 15 Brigade, Royal Field Artillery departed Kildare for France in 1914.



In 1924, the Army School of Instruction for commissioned officers was established in the barracks, and remained there until its move to Keane Barracks (later Pearse Barracks) in the Curragh in 1925.

On 20 March, 1925, personnel, guns and horses of the Artillery Corps moved by train from Islandbridge to the Kildare, and were garrisoned in Kildare Barracks. Due to accommodation issues, the ack-ack guns and crews were initially garrisoned in the Curragh Camp. A graduate of the US Artillery School at Fort Sill in June 1927, Captain Trodden (1904 – 1947) was appointed the first Commandant of the Artillery School in November, 1931. To facilitate the reconstruction of the Barracks, in 1931 the Artillery units moved to Plunkett Barracks, Curragh Camp. In 1939, the partly completed barracks was opened, with the full reconstruction completed in 1942. Kildare Barracks was the first Defence Forces purpose-built barracks.

Arising from his defiant stand in Ballinamuck, Gunner Magee received national recognition in 1954, when the Irish Government formally named the Military Barracks in Kildare Dún Uí MacAoidh (Magee Barracks), which garrisoned the Depot and School Artillery, and the 1 AA Regiment. This reflects an appropriate tribute to Gunner Magee, recognising his resilience and unquestioning valour in the face of superior forces, a fact that is made all the more poignant considering the futility of his heroic stand.

As part of a consolidation process, the Barracks was closed on 24 September 1998, which also saw the closure of Murphy Barracks Ballincollig which garrisoned the 1 Field Artillery Regiment.



In 1928, the seven barracks in the Curragh Camp were named after the signatories of the 1916 Proclamation. Perhaps, when short listing names for Kildare Barracks, individuals involved in revolutionary conflict, such as the 1798 rebellion, were considered. Gunner James Magee would have fallen into that category.

It is likely that Captain Kevin Danagher (1913 – 2002) may have been involved in the staffing process regarding the naming of Kildare Barracks. In 1934, he became a part-time collector for the Irish Folklore Commission and graduated with a BA from UCD in 1937. Awarded a fellowship, he carried out postgraduate studies in Germany and studied comparative folklore and ethnology in the Universities of Berlin and Leipzig. With the



outbreak of the Second World War, he returned to Ireland, was commissioned, appointed as an Artillery Officer, and posted to the Artillery School in Kildare. After his discharge, he worked with the Irish Folklore Commission.

The Irish Press of Saturday, 04 October 1952, reported that the Government decided to rename Renmore Barracks as Dún Uí Mhaoilíosa “*in honour of Liam Mellows who commanded the Volunteers in Galway during Easter Week 1916*”, and the Military Barracks Kildare as Dún Mhig Aoidh. In the context of this paper, of significance interest, is the reported reason for the renaming of Kildare Barracks:

*“in honour of Gunner James Magee, who belonged to the Longford Militia at the time of the Insurrection of 1798, but who joined the Irish insurgents at the Races of Castlebar. After fighting heroically in charge of a French field piece, at the Battle of Ballamuck in September 1798, Gunner Magee was made prisoner by British forces, and a drumhead court-martial on the battlefield condemned him to death.”*

It should be noted that General Seán Mac Eoin was Chief of Staff in 1926, and the Minister of Defence from 07 March 1951 through 13 June 1951, and for a second term from 07 June 1954 through 13 March 1957. Born in County Longford in 1883, he fought in the War of Independence, Civil War, and was commonly referred to as the “Blacksmith of Ballinalee”. In 1921 he was captured, initially held in a cell in the Military Barracks Mullingar, and later sentenced to death. The 4 Field Artillery Regiment played the leading role during his State Funeral in Ballinalee in July 1973. Ballinalee is twelve kilometers from Ballinamuck.

### **The Magee Gun Trophy**

The Magee Gun Trophy honours and commemorates the unquestioning courage of Gunner Magee and his gun crew, their resourcefulness in their ability to keep gun in action, and their ultimate sacrifice for Ireland. Gunner Magee and his gun crew embodied those values which continue to inspire the present generations of Irish gunners of all ranks.

Under the direction of the OC Depot and School Artillery Lieutenant-Colonel A. Dalton, this magnificent replica of a French 6-pdr was designed by Captain Kevin Danaher of the Artillery School, and skillfully executed by the master craftsman, Company Sergeant James F. ‘Tiffy’ Scanlan. The mount was prepared by Captain T.J. Lambert, Depot Artillery.



Wrought in bronze in 1943 in the workshops of the Depot and School Artillery, the trophy is a model of a smoothbore gun with a double bracket trail, and with its right wheel broken to recall the scene at Ballinamuck.

Inscribed on the barrel are the words: *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité.*

Assistance in the research and construction was provided by Dr Richard Hayes (National Library), Dr Hayes Mc Coy, (National Museum), Dr J.H. Delargy (Irish Folklore Commission), Colonel J.J. O'Connell, (GHQ) and Commandant J. Doyle, (Ordnance Corps).

The *Magee Gun Trophy* was competed for by the seven Field Artillery Regiments of the Emergency years, and was won in 1944 and 1945 by the 3 Field Artillery Regiment, Ballinacollig, under the command of Commandant. Kevin O'Brien.

The trophy remains a reminder not only of Gunner Magee, but also the enduring loyalty, courage and professionalism of Irish gunners past and present.



Honouring the courageous and heroic exploits of Irish Gunners in the historic events of Ballinamuck in September 1798, the Magee Gun Trophy resides in the Artillery School, Defence Forces Training Centre, Curragh, County Kildare.



## **Battle of Ballinamuck Painting**

The Artillery Club focuses on projects to achieve its objectives. These projects include commissioning portraits of the four Artillery officers appointed as Chief of Staff which are on display in the Artillery School, Curragh, and the oil on canvas painting of the “*Battle of Ballinamuck*” by Thomas Ryan PPRHA. The painting was unveiled in the Officers’ Mess Magee Barracks, in 1995. On the closure of Magee Barracks, the painting went on loan to the Officers’ Mess, Column Barracks, Mullingar. Restored by Ciara Brennan MA in 2014, the painting is currently on loan to the 2 Artillery Regiment, and is on display in the Officers’ Mess, Custume Barracks Athlone.



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## **Defence Forces Magee March**

In 1992, the Depot and School Artillery invited the Army School of Music to compose a March honouring Gunner Magee, which could be played on appropriate occasions associated with the Artillery Corps. Captain Mark Armstrong, conductor Band of the Curragh Command, composed *The Magee March*. In addition to the original score, the march avails of the air of the traditional folk song *O Tannenbaum*, (also the air for the Artillery School’s Song *You’ll never be a Captain, Sir*”). The inaugural rendition of *The Magee March* was played by the Band of the Curragh Command, under the baton of Captain Mark Armstrong during an Open Day in Magee Barracks. Subsequently, *The Magee March*, or selected pieces, were played on numerous occasions by Bands of the Defence Forces School of Music, in the context of Artillery Corps ceremonial events.



## **Ballad of Gunner Magee – Composed in 1949**

The bilingual novelist and poet Eoghain Ó'Tuairisc (Eugene Rutherford Watters 1919 - 1982) was very familiar with the oral traditions of 1798. He entered St Patrick's Training College in 1939 and held a commission in the Defence Forces during the emergency 1939 – 1945.

In 1962, he published an Irish written novel on 1798 titled *L'Attaque*. The primary source for *L'Attaque* was Dr Richard Hayes's book *The Last Invasion of Ireland*.

In 1964, Eoghain Ó'Tuairisc "*An Gunnadóir Mac Aoidh*" was republished in a well-received collection of poetry titled *Lux Aeterna*. Using folk-history accounts of the Battle of Ballinamuck, the poem emotively depicts the last stand of Gunner Magee, noting that "*Ach ar éacht an Ghunnadóra beidh trácht go lá an bhráth* (the gunner's exploits will be eternally recounted).

I mBaile an Muc, Dé Sathairn, chailleamar an lá,  
Nuair a ghéill an ginearál Francach is a shaighdiúirí don námhaid.  
Bhíomar féin ar Shean-mhullach os comhair arm mór an Rí.  
"Go ndírí Dia an t-urchar," arsa an Gunnadóir Mac Aoidh.

Réab an liathróid iarainn a bealach tríd an aer;  
Bhuail i measc an phúdair is séideadh é go spéir;  
Is d'eirigh ceo an phléasctha gur chlúdaigh sé an ghrian:  
"Mo ghrá go deo an t-iarann," arsa an Gunnadóir Mac Aoidh.

Ach bhí shin an liathróid deiridh a bhí fágtha againn ar chlár;  
Bhriseamar buiceidí, potaí, ciotail, cannaí stáin;  
Baineadh tairní as bróga, cuireadh cnaipí ins an líon:  
"Tá goile láidir ag an gunna," arsa an Gunnadóir Mac Aoidh.

Briseadh carráiste beag an ghunna le hurchar na nGall;  
Bhí an roth ina smidiríní, bhí an bairille ar sceabha,  
Léimeadar chun gnímh, Taimí, Paidí agus Liam:  
"Cuirigí na guailí fúithi," arsa an Gunnadóir Mac Aoidh.

"Seo chugainn an Coirnéal Crawford," chuir sé lasán chuig an bpoll;  
Is a Dhia! nárbh uafásach an t-ár i measc na nGall  
Píosá de photaí réabtha ina gceathanna le gaoth.  
"Tá tasc ansúd don tincéir," arsa an Gunnadóir Mac Aoidh.

Ach nár thrua linn an t-amharc nuair a ghlan an smúit ina dhiadh!  
Bhí an triúr fear gan anam, Taimí, Paidí agus Liam!  
Ghluais na mílte Sasanach dár n-ionsaí ar gach taobh  
"Tá deireadh leis an gcluiche," arsa an Gunnadóir Mac Aoidh.

I mBaile na Muc, Dé Sathairn, chailleamar an lá;  
Ach ar éacht an Ghunnadóra beidh trácht go lá an bhráth.  
Ar chrann boltraí a crochadh é as an ghrian ag dul inna luí:  
"A Chríost, bí liom den dul seo," arsa an Gunnadóir Mac Aoidh.

**Eoghan Ó Tuairisc - 1949**



The following English version of Eoghan Ó Tuairisc's poem was translated by Lieutenant-Colonel Denis Burke OC Depot and School Artillery, and was included in the publication associated with the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Artillery Corps in 1998.

*At Ballinamuck one Saturday we lost the fateful day,  
When the French General and his soldiers to the enemy gave way.  
We, ourselves were on a hillock, engaging forces of the Crown,  
"May God direct the Missile" said Magee with Hopeful frown.*

*Our cannon ball, its deadly path it tore across the sky,  
And landing midst the powder it blasted it sky high.  
The cloud from the explosion obscured the midday sun.  
"Oh Bravo to the iron" says Magee. "Good work! Well done"!*

*But that was the final missile of our meager little stock.  
We broke buckets, pots and kettles, tin cans and bits of rock,  
We ripped hobnails from our footwear, we rammed buttons down the bore,  
"This has a mighty appetite" Magee says with a roar.*

*But a ball from English cannon broke the carriage on our crew.  
Its wheel in smithereens was smashed, the barrel all askew.  
They quickly jumped to action, Tommy, Paddy and young Bill,  
"Put your shoulder underneath it" shouts Magee with dogged will.*

*But sad the sight to witness when the smoke of battle cleared.  
The three poor chaps lay lifeless, 'twas what Magee had feared.  
He quickly was surrounded by a horde of foreign men.  
"The game is up, come take me" spoke Magee's defiant grin.*

*At Ballinamuck one Saturday we lost the fateful fight.  
But the saga of this GUNNER is recounted day and night.  
On a gallows tree they hanged him as the sun sank in the sky.  
"Christ be with me on this journey" - prayed Magee to God on High.*



## **Battle of New Orleans**



On his return to France, General Humbert participated in campaigns in both Europe and the Caribbean. In 1812, he left France for America under the assumed name of Jean Berthrum and resided in New Orleans. During the war of 1812 between the United States of America and Great Britain, while under the command of Major-General Andrew Jackson, later to become the President of the United States, General Humbert fought at the Battle of New Orleans.

Captain Edward Pakenham, brother-in-law of the Duke of Wellington, also participated in the Battle of Ballinamuck, serving with the 22 Light Dragoons. After his distinguished service with Wellington in the Peninsular War against the French in Spain, Major-General Pakenham was selected to lead a large British invasion force to capture New Orleans. This was to be the final and most decisive battle of the War of 1812. Unknown to the combatants, the battle was executed after the Treaty of Ghent was formally signed on 24 December 1814.

Major-General Pakenham, General Humbert's enemy from his days in Ireland, and again at New Orleans, was killed on the battlefield on 18 January 1815.

During the battle, Major-General Pakenham was first hit by artillery grapeshot, killing his horse and wounding him in the knee. As he rose from the battlefield to mount another horse and continue riding forward he was hit in the arm. A final shot proved fatal, hitting him in the chest. He died on the battlefield, shortly after giving the order to call forward the reserves and keep pushing toward New Orleans.

His body was returned to Ireland in a cask of rum and buried in the Pakenham family vault in Killucan, County Westmeath.

General Humbert died on 02 January, 1823 and is buried in the Saint Louis Cemetery, New Orleans.



## **Visitor Centre – Ballinamuck**

Located on the R198, 18 kilometers from Longford Town, Ballinamuck is a small picturesque village in County Longford, adjacent to the border between Caven and Longford.

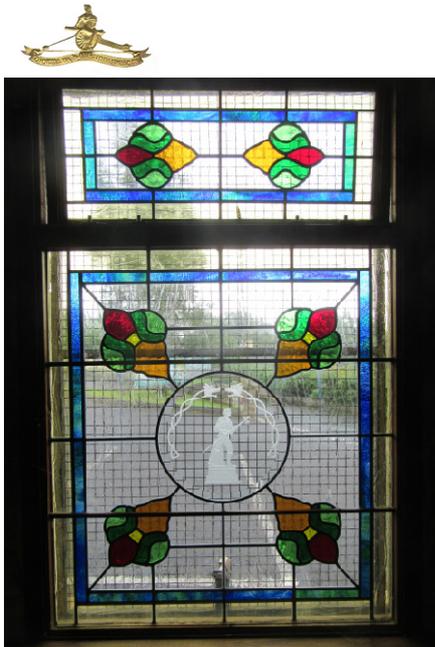
On Saturday, 18 July, 1998, President Mrs Mary McAleese officially opened the Visitor Centre. The project was initiated by Ballinamuck Community Exercise and UCD, with funding from Longford Community Resources.



On display in the centre is a series of panels outlining the historical context of the Battle of Ballinamuck, complete with maps and illustrations. The exhibition explains the national and international significance, coupled with the social and political background to the historic battle. Pride and place is Gunner James Magee. The Bicentennial Monument, alongside the Peace Park, is dedicated to all those who fought and died in 1798.



The 1798 Pikeman, located in front of the Visitor Centre, was constructed in 1928.



An antique artillery gun, popularly known as "*Gunner Magee's Gun*", was unveiled on Sunday, 12 May, 1985 by Jack McHale of Ballina. Prior to the event, the gun was fitted with new wheels and a carriage made by local blacksmiths (the Corrigans), and donated to the people of Ballinamuck. Following the unveiling several critics raised objections, advising that the gun's association with Gunner Magee is questionable.

In 1998, the Artillery Corps presented a print of the Battle of Ballinamuck to the Visitor Centre. On 04 December 2012, the 4 Field Artillery Regiment presented a plaque to the centre, on the occasion of the laying up ceremony of its Regimental Pennants.

Opening hours for the Ballinamuck Visitor Centre vary according to the time of year. Phone: 00353 (0)87 – 2055462

**Annex A.** Abstract

**Annex B.** Select Bibliography

*End*



## **GUNNER MAGEE**

### **DEFENDER OF VALUES - THE ARTILLERY CORPS**

*This is an abstract of a paper, prepared by the Artillery Club, commemorating and honouring the 220<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Gunner Magee's death on 08 September 1798. The paper provides a basis on which presentations, articles, commentaries, and further studies, associated with Gunner Magee, can be advanced.*

*The paper is based on research carried out by the Artillery Club in August 2018, which derived from existing narratives on Gunner Magee, information from publications and in the print media, and in particular, specific information arising from historical sources, popular culture, folklore, and social memory.*

*Information on issues relating to Gunner Magee is also provided: Magee Barracks Kildare, the Magee Gun Trophy, the Battle of Ballinamuck Painting, the Magee March, and the Ballad of Gunner Magee.*

*The complete paper can be viewed on the Artillery Club's Website: [www.artilleryclub.ie](http://www.artilleryclub.ie)*

### **Introduction**

In addition to paying homage to Saint Barbara, its patron saint, the Artillery Corps is unique within the Defence Forces, in that it has an historical figurehead, namely Gunner James Magee, from whom derives the Corps unique esprit de corps, its rich heritage, and its enduring values of professionalism, respect, loyalty, selflessness, physical courage, moral courage and integrity.

Since the establishment of the Artillery Corps on 23 May 1923, Gunner Magee's courage, heroism, and resourcefulness have inspired gunners of all ranks, and his heroic stand during the Battle of Ballinamuck has been commemorated and honoured by the Corps.

### **Magee Barracks Kildare**

Arising from his defiant stand in Ballinamuck, Gunner Magee received national recognition in 1954, when the Government formally named the Military Barracks in Kildare Dún Uí MacAoidh (Magee Barracks), which garrisoned the Depot and School Artillery, and the 1 AA Regiment. This reflects an appropriate tribute to Gunner Magee, recognising his resilience and unquestioning valour in the face of superior forces, a fact that is made all the more poignant considering the futility of his heroic stand.

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The Magee Gun Trophy honours and commemorates the unquestioning courage of Gunner Magee and his gun crew, their resourcefulness in their ability to keep the gun in action, and



their ultimate sacrifice for Ireland. Gunner Magee and his gun crew embodied those values which continue to inspire the present generations of Irish gunners of all ranks.

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The trophy remains a reminder not only of Gunner Magee, but also the enduring loyalty, courage and professionalism of Irish gunners past and present.

Honouring the courageous and heroic exploits of Irish Gunners in the historic events of Ballinamuck in September 1798, the Magee Gun Trophy resides in the Artillery School, Defence Forces Training Centre, Curragh, County Kildare.

### **The Battle of Ballinamuck Painting**

Honouring Gunner James Magee, the Artillery Club commissioned oil on canvas painting of the "*Battle of Ballinamuck*" by Thomas Ryan PPRHA. The painting was unveiled in the Officers' Mess Magee Barracks, in 1995. On the closure of Magee Barracks, the painting went on loan to the Officers' Mess Column Barracks, Mullingar. Restored by Ciara Brennan MA in 2014, the painting is currently on loan to the 2 Artillery Regiment, and is on display in the Officers' Mess, Custume Barracks Athlone.

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Familiar with the oral traditions of 1798, in 1949, the bilingual novelist and poet Eoghain Ó'Tuairisc composed "*An Gunnadóir Mac Aoidh*". Using folk-history accounts of the



Battle of Ballinamuck, the poem emotively depicts the last stand of Gunner Magee, noting that " *Ach ar éacht an Ghunnadóra beidh trácht go lá an bhráth* (the gunner's exploits will be eternally recounted). The poem was republished in 1964, in a well-received collection of poetry titled *Lux Aeterna*. Lieutenant-Colonel Denis Burke, OC Depot and School Artillery, translated the poem into English.

### **Service with the Royal Longford Militia**

Following the practice in England, the Royal Irish Artillery Regiment trained selected personnel in Irish Militias, such as the Royal Longford Militia, in the art and science of gunnery.

The Royal Longford Militia was a military force raised from the civilian population to support the regular army. It is generally believed that Gunner James Magee served in the Royal Longford Militia. Throughout all the narratives of the Franco-Irish campaign, James Magee is mentioned as Gunner Magee. As Irish Militias did not have the rank of gunner, it is likely that Gunner Magee trained with the Royal Irish Artillery Regiment.

Nevertheless, despite Gunner Magee's rank, it comes as no surprise that popular culture and social memory has claimed him as a member of the Royal Longford Militia, (less the "Royal" designation).

### **1798 Franco-Irish Force**

Under the command of General Jean Humbert, the long awaited French expedition landed at Kilcummin on the north Mayo coast near Killala on 22 August 1798, to revive the efforts of the United Irishmen, and to provide the nucleus of a Franco-Irish force equipped with three 4-pdrs, muskets, swords, pikes and ammunition.

Having secured Ballina, General Humbert advanced on the Crown Forces concentrated at Castlebar. Reaching Castlebar on 27 August, only one of General Humbert's 4-pdrs was operational. Nevertheless, despite effective artillery fire from the Crown Forces, the Franco-Irish force assaulted and routed a well defended position. Twelve artillery pieces were captured by the Franco-Irish force: five light 6-pdrs and one howitzer from the Royal Irish Artillery Regiment, and two light 6-pdrs from each of the Kilkenny Militia, the Longford Militia and Frazers Fencibles. After their defeat in Castlebar, 53 men of the Longford Militia joined General Humbert's Franco-Irish force, including Gunner Casey and Gunner Magee.

By 30 August, the Franco-Irish force had seized the strategic towns of Westport, Newport, Swinford, Ballinrobe and Hollymount. General Humbert departed Castlebar on 03 September, marched north east towards Sligo, with the intention of crossing the River Shannon, and to advance in the general direction of Granard. Following an engagement in Colooney, the Franco-Irish force captured two additional light 6pdrs.



On 07 September, the force crossed the Shannon at Ballintra. Departing for Granard, General Humbert was obliged to leave an unspecified amount of his artillery assets behind, as a number of gun-chains were stolen.

### **Battle of Ballinamuck**

At daybreak on 08 September, Lieutenant-General Gerard Lake was ordered to attack the Franco-Irish force, without delay. General Humbert decided to adopt a defence posture against the advancing troops, at Ballinamuck, County Longford. The selected location on Shanmullagh Hill represented key terrain, with limited maneuver space on the flanks for an attacking force with superior combat power.

Gunner James Magee and Gunner Casey deployed their two guns at the Black Fort, near Gaigue, accompanied by French grenadiers and Irish pikemen. Concurrently, cavalry and artillery elements of the Crown Forces deployed in the vicinity of the Church in Ballinamuck.

Contemporary accounts record that for some time, the guns on both sides intermittently discharged their grape and canister at the opposing lines. A target round from the Crown Forces disabled Gunner Casey's gun. Encouraged by this, the English rallied. According to social memory, a chain-ball from Gunner Magee's gun stopped their progress. A second chain-ball fired by Gunner Magee's gun struck and exploded a Crown Forces limber containing ammunition.

With the Battle of Ballinamuck technically lost, General Humbert and his officers surrendered their swords. The battle was terminated after an hour of hostilities with a decisive victory for the Crown Forces, and marked the defeat of the French force, which arrived in Ireland on 22 August 1798, in support of the Society of United Irishmen.

As a deserter from the Longford Militia, Gunner Magee would have expected little mercy from Lieutenant-General General Lake's victorious army at Ballinamuck. Rather than retreating to an adjacent bog, Gunner Magee remained with his gun. Supported by his gun detachment, a small number of pikemen, and a limited amount of ammunition, Gunner Magee made a gallant stand against all odds.

Soon after neutralising an ammunition limber, Gunner Magee's ammunition supply was almost exhausted. To address the deficiency, broken pots and pieces of metal were mixed with grape and canister. Using this improvised ammunition, Gunner Magee fired at the advancing cavalry forcing them to withdraw.

Whilst preparing his gun for further action, a chain ball struck Gunner Magee's gun, and broke the stock of the right wheel. In order to bring the gun back into action, Gunner Magee's gun detachment heroically stepped forward, and balanced the weight of the gun with their shoulders. When Gunner Magee fired the gun, his gallant comrades were killed by the recoil.



Without any subsequent opposition, the gun was captured, and Gunner Magee was taken prisoner.

With the last of the Franco-Irish guns neutralised, the ensuing onslaught by the both cavalry and infantry was “Bloody and Unrelenting”. Casualties from this reign of terror were buried in locations such as the Croppies’ Grave and Graves Meadow in Ballinamuck, and the Highlanders Grave in Gortletteragh, 5 kilometers from Ballinamuck.

A drumhead court-martial condemned Gunner James Magee to execution by hanging, as a deserter from “His Majesty's Army”.

End



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