

THE SPORTING NED BROY

*As a young man, Ned Broy dreamed of going to America and becoming a famous athlete. It's a good thing he didn't. Instead, he used his talents in other ways – exploits that included pulling off one of the most daring acts of espionage in the 20th century, writes **Christopher Warner**.*

Although his legacy has been largely overshadowed by other historical titans in the Irish War of Independence, Broy's immeasurable contributions warrant a well-deserved spotlight.

Eamon (Ned) Broy was born on 22 December 1887. His father, Patrick Broy, ran a small farm with his wife, Mary (née Barry), on the edge of the Bog of Allen in Ballinure, Co. Kildare.

The eldest of four children, he was christened Edward (Eamon in Irish) but went by the nickname of Ned most of his life. He attended local schools and competed in athletics, excelling in the hurdles, sprints, and jumping events. It's with noting that he competed during an era often described as Ireland's golden age

- a period that saw Irish-born athletes completely dominate the world stage with the likes of Olympic champions Tom Kiely, Peter O'Connor and the legendary throwers known as 'the Irish Whales'.

In 1910, Broy joined the Royal Irish Constabulary but left after a short period when a position became available with the Dublin Metropolitan Police (DMP). His decision had been primarily motivated by the DMP being a less political organisation and

having top-notch athletic facilities.

The move also allowed him to train under Inspector Denis Carey, a renowned Irish sportsman who won 13 Irish national titles in a career spanning some 30 years. As a coach and mentor, Carey helped to instil confidence and discipline in Broy - traits that would well serve him on the track and as a soon-to-be Republican hero.

The annual DMP Sports meeting at Ballsbridge routinely attracted many of the world's best athletes, such as three-time (1900, 1904, 1908) Olympic hammer champion John Flanagan. Born in Co. Limerick, Flanagan (a cousin of Carey) later emigrated to the United States, where he joined the NYPD.

His subsequent appearances in Ireland drew large crowds to watch him compete and Broy later described his first encounter with the sporting icon:



"Inspector Carey, aware that I was doing athletic training at Ballsbridge grounds at the time, directed me to take a 16lb hammer to the grounds for Mr Flanagan. He handed me a small leather case which was heavy enough but certainly not long enough to contain a four-foot hammer.

A textbook on athletics that I had, which was some years old, showed the athletic hammer as a rigid four-foot hammer. As practical jokes in the Depot were quite usual, I feared that Mr Carey was pulling my leg in order to give John Flanagan a good laugh.

Accordingly, when I got away from the depot, I opened the case and found there in the modern



Months after Broy's release in July 1921 following the Truce, he travelled to London with the Treaty delegation as private secretary and bodyguard to Michael Collins.

hammer athletic hammer, the handle of which was flexible piano wire with a steel handgrip and ball-bearing head consisting of a leather centre covered with a sphere of brass. I felt very proud of the honour of bringing a hammer to John Flanagan, something like what one would have felt in bringing a sword to Wolfe Tone in the revolutionary movement."

PROWESS FOR SPRINTS AND JUMPS

Broy's prowess in the sprints and jumps saw him periodically travel to England for competitions. One of these meets took place on 7 July 1914, near Manchester, as reported in the 'Sporting Journal': *"The seventeenth annual amateur athletic, sports in connection with the Rochdale County Police Athletic Society were held on the local athletics ground, Rochdale, on Saturday in magnificent weather before 10,000 people."* The results list Broy as the winner of his heat for 100 yards.

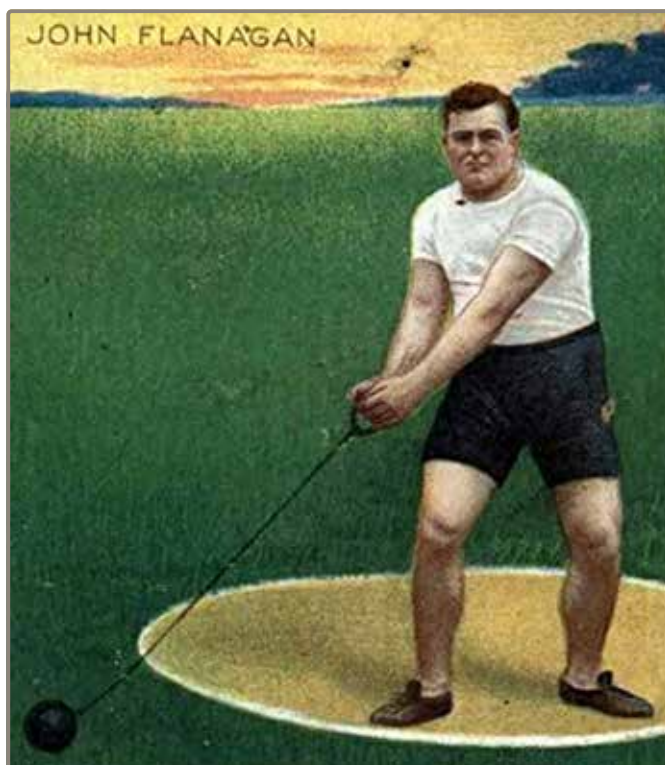
After a selection to the Detective Branch in 1915, Broy was assigned to the headquarters of G Division in the recently built Great Brunswick Street Station (now Pearse St Garda Station), a sombre-looking stone building designed in the Scottish Baronial style.

The plainclothes 'G-Men' unit served as the Intelligence Branch of the DMP, primarily tasked with monitoring individuals and groups deemed politically subversive in the Irish capital. Standing 6'1" and full of muscle, the square-jawed Broy certainly looked

the part of a strong-armed lawman. However, his deep-rooted nationalism and unwavering support of Home Rule made him increasingly conflicted about his position on the force.



P. Quinn (Discus Thrower) and Inspector Dennis Carey (Hammer Thrower) represented the DMP at the Stockholm Olympics in 1928.



John Flanagan – three-time Olympic hammer champion (1900, 1904, 1908) – was one of the world's best athletes.

The events surrounding the 1916 Easter Rising and its harsh aftermath carried out by Crown authorities would ultimately dictate his future, leading the ambitious Detective Sergeant down a slippery path fraught with danger. His career as a spy began in earnest during the spring of 1917, actions which saw him routinely provide crucial information to members of Sinn Féin.

In his lengthy witness statement for the Military Bureau, he recounted a particularly harrowing incident that combined nerve, courage and athleticism in equal measure: *"On a date which I indirectly place as August 14, 1917, a warrant arrived at the Detective Office, 1 Great Brunswick St. at about 6pm,"* Broy stated.

"Detective Sergeant Fagan and I were the only officers present, Fagan in one office and I in another. So we were ordered to arrest de Valera, who was stated to be residing at 34 Munster St., Phibsborough. We were told not to enquire for him at the house, for fear he might happen to be absent and our calling there might put him on guard. We were to watch for him in the vicinity."

METTLE FOR THE REBEL CAUSE

Eamon de Valera had been recently released from prison, the only rebel leader from the Rising who managed to avoid execution. However, as the drumbeat for Irish independence grew louder, 'Dev' once again found himself in the crosshairs of the British authorities.

Broy, intent on thwarting the arrest, saw an

opportunity when Detective Fagan went inside the Mountjoy Police Station to report that they hadn't seen "that man". The Kildare speedster then made a mad dash to the home of an Irish volunteer named Peadar Healy, who lived in the area. After delivering his message, Broy sprinted back to Mountjoy before Fagan emerged from the station.

Broy continued to prove his mettle for the rebel cause, crisscrossing Dublin to deliver covert messages on vital intelligence matters. The stakes were never higher than on the night of 7 April 1919, when Broy smuggled Michael Collins inside the file room of G Division. There, beginning at the stroke of midnight, the 'Big Fella' spent some five hours poring over detailed archives of Republican activity. The findings ultimately allowed him to identify the most virulent of the detested 'G-Men', seven of whom would be killed by the IRA.

Broy's work as a double agent required taking extra precautions to avoid detection, actions which, more often than not, relied on his fleet of foot. One of the tactics involved waiting until a tram had got well underway and then sprinting after it, much to the annoyance of conductors, *"who never failed to lecture me on the danger of that unorthodox method of boarding their vehicles. However, no man legs on two legs could have followed me onto the tram when I adopted that means, and so I was safe from that method of shadowing"*, Broy said.

STEADY SUCCESSION OF APPOINTMENTS

Despite such careful manoeuvres, a paper trail of police documents linked to Broy eventually led to his arrest on charges of high treason. He spent five months in solitary confinement at Arbour Hill Prison, where he faced likely execution before being released in July 1921 following the Truce. He stayed busy in the proceeding months and travelled to London with the Treaty delegation as Collins's private secretary and bodyguard.

A steady succession of appointments soon followed for Broy, including a promotion to Colonel as Adjutant to the first Irish Air Corp. The amalgamation of DMP with An Garda Síochána saw him named Chief Superintendent and later became Commandant at the Garda Depot at Phoenix Park.

In 1932, the arrival of a Fianna Fáil government brought widespread changes to the political landscape in Ireland, exemplified by Taoiseach de Valera dismissing Garda Commissioner Eoin O'Duffy and replacing him with Broy.

Broy's lifelong passion for athletics led to him serving as President of the Olympic Council of Ireland, a position he held from 1935 to 1950. He was also an ardent supporter of Kildare GAA and took great pride in the triumphs of fellow Lillywhite and Garda, Larry Stanley



The DMP's amalgamation with An Garda Síochána saw Ned Broy named Chief Superintendent and later became Commandant at the Garda Depot in the Phoenix Park.

(for more, see Síocháin Winter 2020).

In addition, Broy and his wife Elizabeth raised five children, two boys and three girls. In a recent interview, his daughter Áine reflected on her father's steadfast pursuit of good health: *"He walked faithfully every night"* she said. *"He'd go for walks in our area in Rathgar right up until the end of his life"*.

Broy passed away on 22 January 1972, at the age of 85. In 2016, a ceremony took place to unveil a monument in his honour at Coolegagen Cemetery near Rathangan, Co. Kildare.

About the Author: Christopher Warner is an Irish American actor and freelance writer. He's a frequent contributor to Síocháin and has written for several magazines and websites across multiple genres, including *'Military History Matters'*, *'WWII Quarterly'*, *'Aviation History'*, *'Ireland's Own'* and *'Irish America'*. He currently resides in Co. Kerry with his wife, Maureen and their brood of cats.

