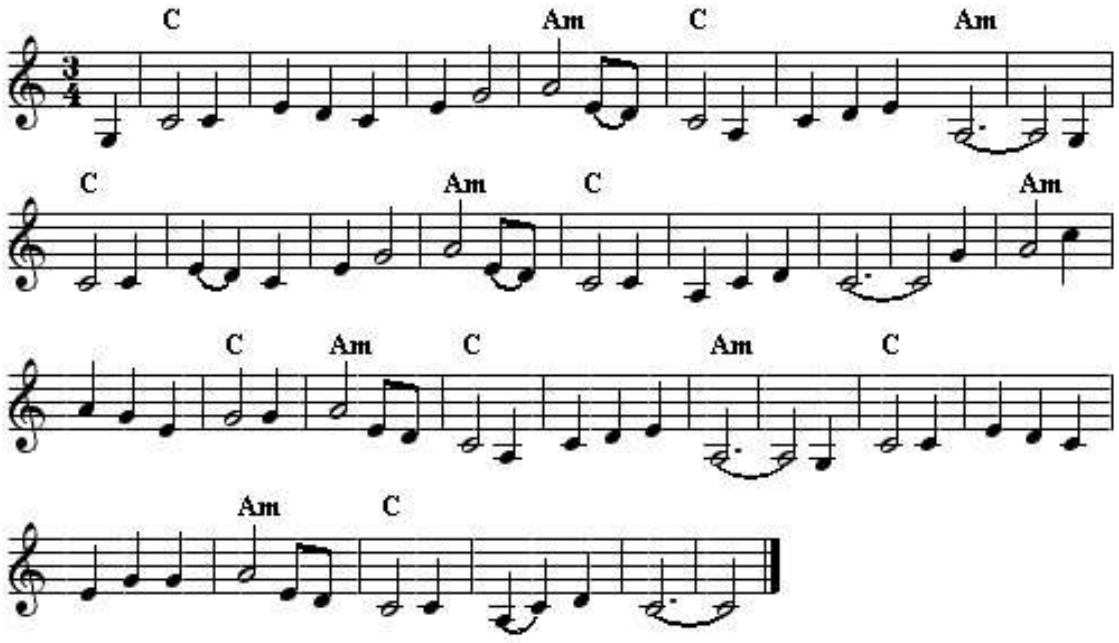
The Boys of Kilmichael



The first verse and chorus as I learned them:

1. On the eighteenth day of November
   Outside of the town of Macroom,
   The Tans in their big Crossley tenders
   Came hurtling down to their doom.
   For the boys of the column were waiting
   With hand grenade, rifle and shell
   And the Irish Republican Army
   Blew all their battalions to hell.

Chorus

So here's to the boys of Kilmichael
Of Passage, the Key and Macroom
With their canisters ready and lighting
Sent many a Tan to his doom

The lyrics according to most Irish song websites:

1. Whilst we honour in song and in story,
   The memory of Pearse and McBride.
   Whose names are illumined in glory,
   With martyrs that long since have died.
   Oh forget not the boys of Kilmichael,
   Who feared not the ice and the foe.
   Oh the day that they marched into battle,
   They laid all the Black and Tans low.

Chorus

Oh forget not the boys of Kilmichael,
Those brave boys both gallant and true.
They fought with Tom Barry's bold column,
And conquered the red, white and blue.

2. On the twenty-eighth day of November,
The Tans left the town of Macroom.
They were seated in Crossley tenders,
Which brought them right into their doom.
They were on the high road to Kilmichael,
And never expecting to stall.
'Twas there that the boys of the column,
They made a clear sweep of them all.
Chorus

3. The sun in the west it was sinking,
'Twas the eve of a cold winter's day.
When the Tans we were eagerly waiting,
Sailed into the spot where we lay.
And over the hill went the echo,
The peal of the rifles and guns.
And the smoke from their lorries bore tidings,
That the boys of Kilmichael had won.
Chorus

4. The battle being over at twilight,
And there in that glen so obscure.
We threw down our rifles and bayonets,
And made our way back to Granure.
And high over Dunmanway town, my boys,
They sang of the brave and the true.
Of the men from Tom Barry's bold column,
Who conquered the red, white and blue.
Chorus

5. There are some who will blush at the mention,
Of Connolly, Pearse and McBride.
And history's new scribes in derision,
The pages of valour deny.
But sure here's to the boys who cried, Freedom!
When Ireland was nailed to the mast.
And they fought with Tom Barry's bold column,
To give us our freedom at last.
Last Chorus
So forget not the boys of Kilmichael,
Those brave boys both gallant and true.
They fought 'neath the green flag of Erin,
And conquered the red, white and blue.

I learned this from John McGreevy who was an English instructor at the Altoona Campus of Penn State in the mid 1960's. He was the faculty advisor for our newly formed Ivyside Folklore Society.

The melody is a variant of "Rosin the Beau".

The Kilmichael Ambush (Irish: *Luíochán Chill Mhichíl*) was an ambush near the village of Kilmichael in County Cork on 28 November 1920 carried out by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) during the Irish War of Independence. Thirty-six local IRA volunteers of the West Cork Brigade's flying column commanded by Tom Barry killed seventeen members of the Royal Irish Constabulary's Auxiliary Division. The Kilmichael ambush was politically as well as militarily significant. It occurred one week after Bloody Sunday, marking a profound escalation in the IRA campaign.

The song refers to the Auxiliaries as "Tans" meaning "Black and Tans" although the Black and Tans were not the same unit as the Auxiliaries.

The Black and Tans (Irish: *Dúchrónaigh*), officially the Royal Irish Constabulary Special Reserve, was a force of Temporary Constables recruited to assist the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) during the Irish War of Independence. It was formed in 1919 and dissolved in 1922. The recruits were mainly army veterans returning from the Great War for whom employment opportunities were scarce. Some Irish maintained that the recruits were convicts who were offered shortened prison terms in return for fighting in Ireland. This is probably incorrect since the recruits were considered policemen and a criminal record would have excluded them from service. They earned a reputation of brutality for their conduct toward both IRA combatants and civilians. The nickname "Black and Tans" arose from the colors of the improvised uniforms they initially wore, composed of British Army khaki jackets.

For an extensive treatment of the history of the Irish struggles for independence, and the songs related to them, see **Irish Songs of Resistance** by Patrick Galvin.

Like "Down in the Willow Garden" this tune is another offspring of "Rosin the Beau".