

## BRIGADIER-GENERAL JOE RING

**'A brave soldier whose courage was never in doubt'**

by Peadar Ó Flanagan

### *Introduction*

*The above quotation is from a fellow combatant-in-arms in the West Mayo Brigade, who, following the Treaty took the opposite side to Joe Ring, Commandant 3rd (Westport) Battalion, in the civil war that followed. The present article commemorates the 65th anniversary of the death of Brigadier-General Ring on 14 September 1922, at the age of 31, in the Battle of the Ox Mountains.*

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*Michael and Katherine Ring after they settled in Drummindoo in the 1890s.*

Michael Joseph Ring was born in Co. Galway on 17 August, 1891, fourth of a family of eight, to Michael and Katherine Ring (nee Conway). Michael Ring of Castlecomer, Co. Kilkenny, married Katherine Conway of Westport, Co. Mayo. He was a sergeant in the R.I.C. She was the daughter of a well-known Westport merchant family from Bridge Street, Westport. The family settled in Westport on Castlebar Street in the 1890s, and Joe and his elder brother Jim were admitted to the Christian Brothers' school on Castlebar Street on 4 January 1898.



*Rev. M. MacGréil's house Drummindoo (site of Joe Ring's home).*

The family later moved from Castlebar Street to a cottage and small farm in Drumindoo, one mile from the town. Three of his brothers, Walter, Jim and Jack, subsequently emigrated to the United States together with two surviving sisters, Tess (Flatley) and Nora (Walsh). His elder brother Jim served in the U.S. Forces during World War I.

From an early age Joe was involved with the Young Mens Sacred Heart Sodality and with the G.A.A. being captain of the Aghagower team. Summoned for playing Gaelic football in the 'Nuns' Field', he appeared before Mr. Milling, R.M. charged with trespass. He refused to give an undertaking as to future trespass and also refused to pay any fine.

On the formation of the Volunteers in Westport in 1915, Joe Ring was one of the many who joined up. One of the most prominent was Major John MacBride, a native of Westport Quay, and Boer war veteran, who was subsequently executed by the British following the Rebellion of 1916.

Joe Ring was appointed in charge of the Westport Volunteers. After the Rebellion in Dublin he organised a route march for his troops. Subsequently those identified by the R.I.C. were rounded up, to be interned in Frongoch south camp, in south Wales.

On 9 May 1916, Joe Ring, together with some thirty others, were arrested at their homes under the Defence of the Realm Act and brought to Castlebar jail where they spent the night. Next day they were sent under armed escort to Richmond barracks in Dublin, where they were joined by others from various parts of the country. From Richmond barracks they were sent across channel to Wandsworth detention centre in London, where they were visited by Joe's maternal uncle, Walter Conway B.L., formerly of Bridge Street, Westport.

From Wandsworth they were sent to a detention camp in south Wales called Frongoch. This became their university for the duration of their internment until the general amnesty at Christmas 1916. They were given a rapturous welcome on their return to Westport. Joe returned to his family home in Drumindoo having made many friends and acquaintances at Frongoch – among them Michael Staines of Newport, later to be an Alderman and T.D. for the city of Dublin and first Commissioner of the Civic Guards.

With most of the leaders interned, there had been little local activity among the Volunteers. Ring soon commenced re-organising the Volunteers and training the young members of Fianna Éireann, who were their prospective recruits. Regular assemblies and drilling took place, particularly in rural areas. As a result of one such manoeuvre Edward Moane from Carrabawn, Westport, was arrested at his home on Saturday 9 March 1918, and brought to the R.I.C. barracks on Shop Street, where he was charged before Mr. Milling, R.M., with unlawful assembly and drilling. He refused bail and was remanded in custody to Sligo jail, to appear in Westport courthouse on Thursday 14 March 1918.

Joe Ring organised the local Volunteers and they assembled on the Octagon on the day of the court case. Cushlough fife and drum band led the parade to the railway station for the arrival of the prisoner under heavy escort. They marched from there to the courthouse where Moane refused to recognise the jurisdiction of the court, under Messrs. Kilbride and Milling, Resident Magistrates. Mr. J. C. Garvey, solicitor, prosecuted. Moane was charged with unlawful assembly and drilling outside the Sinn Féin hall, and was convicted and sentenced to one month's imprisonment.

During the court case District Inspector ~~Shore~~, R.I.C., left the court and was confronted by a party of Volunteers drawn up on Castlebar Street. He approached them and ordered them back, giving them three minutes to disperse. Almost immediately afterwards the R.I.C. baton-charged the Volunteers, who retaliated with stones. The battle raged for some time, and some of the pupils from the nearby C.B.S. joined in the fray with stones from the schoolyard. Many were injured on each side before the





*Comdt. Joe Ring in Volunteer uniform.*

police eventually cleared the street. That evening and night the R.I.C. took reprisals in the town, breaking shop windows at Lang's, Hughes's, Talbot's, Flanagan's and Shanley's, and raiding and ransacking Thady Walsh's public house.

Joe Ring was easily identified as the leader of the Volunteers who assembled on the day of the court case, and made no attempt to go into hiding. On the following Saturday morning 16 March, he was arrested at his home in Drumindoo together with Charles Gavin, Mill Street, William Malone, High Street, and William O'Malley, Drumilra, by armed R.I.C., and brought to the barracks on Shop Street where they were charged later in the day with unlawful assembly and drilling. Thomas Kitterick of High Street, had been arrested the previous night and was charged with the same offences.

At the court hearing O'Malley's case was heard first and he was remanded in custody to Castlebar court. Then the cases of Ring, Kitterick, and Gavin were heard. They stood with their backs to the court and their caps on, when the charges were read by J. C. Milling R.M. Ring spoke for them, stating, 'we are soldiers of the Irish Republic and do not recognise the court. You said already below in the hotel that you were going to give Ring eighteen months'. Constable Butler gave evidence that on 14 March he heard Joe Ring blow a whistle at the Octagon, Westport. Volunteers having assembled with the Cushlough band, Joe Ring gave the band orders and marched the Volunteers to the station. They marched back from the station to Castlebar street where the baton-charge took place. There were forty-eight volunteers and the band. Ring interrupted by asking 'what about the police that broke Shanley's windows?' They were remanded to Castlebar court on Wednesday 21 March and escorted to the two o'clock train through cheering crowds, handcuffed to R.I.C. men. The handcuffs were removed at the station except for Ring's. They were sent to Sligo jail.

The case was heard in Castlebar on 21 March. On their arrival at the station the prisoners were escorted by a company of the Essex Yeomanry and 100 R.I.C. O'Malley's case was heard first and he was given one month. The other three accused began singing in Court with their backs to the Magistrates, Kilbride and Milling, throughout the proceedings. They were sentenced to six months each, with hard labour. Afterwards there were baton charges on the large crowd of supporters on the Mall. Joe Ring, with his companions, left Castlebar courthouse under escort to the cheers of the crowd, to serve his term in Sligo jail.

On his return to Westport in September, he was to learn that his widowed mother had lost her R.I.C. pension as a result of his actions. He resumed his activities with the Volunteers and though not himself interested in politics, he was considered as a possible Sinn Féin candidate in the December 1918 election. The nomination went to Joseph MacBride of Westport Quay, who was elected.

Hostilities opened in the War of Independence in January of 1919 with



the ambush at Soloheadbeg in Co. Tipperary, led by Dan Breen. In the west the first shots were fired on the night of 29 March 1919, from positions along the Demesne wall, fatally killing J.C. Milling, R.M., at his residence on the Newport Road, (at present Dún Maeve, residence of Dr. H. Farrell). Milling was in the front room in the act of winding his clock, when four shots were fired. He died within twenty-four hours. The Milling Affair is still a matter of local controversy, and has been attributed to 'The three Joes'. It probably never will be established who fired the fatal shots. This act was widely condemned at the time and obviously did not have any official sanction. It was condemned by Most Rev. Dr. Gilmartin, Archbishop of Tuam as 'A dastardly crime'. Westport U.D.C. at a special meeting the following week issued their strongest condemnation of the horrible outrage. The *Mayo News* in their editorial of 5 April, stated that 'The murder of J. C. Milling, R.M. is the first foul crime of this character that has occurred in Westport'. The Chief Secretary in Dublin Castle sent his sympathy to Mrs. Milling, who was subsequently awarded £5,000 compensation, to be levied on the Westport Urban District. On the following Tuesday, it was announced from Dublin that the Westport District was to be a military area under martial law. Military were drafted in and sealed off the town, not even allowing carts into the market. The R.I.C. questioned the young men of the district as to their whereabouts.

At the inquest that followed evidence was given by James Sheridan, a contractor, who lived next door to Milling's house, that on hearing the shots, he called to Milling's house and noted four holes in the window glass. The door was opened by Milling and he uttered the words 'I am shot'. He was put to bed and the doctor called. The doctor treated him for abdominal wounds, but he was too ill to be moved to the Co. Infirmary. The following morning his brother-in-law, Charles Walsh, a County Inspector of the R.I.C., visited him and he uttered the words 'they have got me at last'. The jury under foreman Mr. Good, after fifteen minutes, returned a nine to five majority verdict worded as follows: 'We find that the said John C. Milling was murdered by bullets fired at him by a person or persons unknown on the night of Saturday 29th March at 11 o'clock'. They were sent back and later returned with a unanimous verdict, in which the wording was changed to 'foully murdered'. Whether or not Joe Ring was one of the 'three Joes' will perhaps never be definitely known.

Despite martial law, surveillance and questioning by the R.I.C., no culprits were found for the Milling assassination. As a result the activities of the Volunteers had to be strictly curtailed. The Milling affair served no useful purpose. R. M.s could easily be replaced, and it must be seen rather as a personal vendetta, than an action sanctioned by the I.R.B.

In September 1920, The West Mayo Brigade of the I.R.A. was organised, and the brigade O.C. was Tom Derrig of High Street, Westport. The Westport district became a battalion area and the O.C. was Joe Ring of Drumindoo. In November 1920, the Black and Tans arrived in

Westport to augment the R.I.C. They were drawn mostly from ex-servicemen in England, and earned a reputation in this country which will never be forgotten. They depended on the local R.I.C. for their intelligence regarding I.R.A. membership and operations.

In January of 1921, Tom Derrig was arrested and interned, and Michael Kilroy of Newport became brigade O.C., Ned Moane of Carrabawn, Vice O.C., J. Gibbons, Adjutant, and Tom Kitterick, quartermaster. A new departure was the setting up of Active Service Units in all Battalion areas, of men who were reliable and would be available at all times for special operations. Joe Ring formed the Westport A.S.U. with Broddie Malone as Vice O.C. The Westport men were the best trained, organised and equipped, and could depend on sympathetic local businessmen for financial support. They possessed twelve Lee-Enfields, together with revolvers and shotguns. They trained in rural areas and stayed in safe houses. The remaining Volunteers formed a reserve which could be called on when required. Their intelligence on enemy intentions was drawn from various sources, in particular from shopkeepers and publicans, and possibly from sympathizers within the R.I.C. The new structure used military rank, and Michael Kilroy was brigade Commandant and Joe Ring, Commandant of the 3rd (Westport) battalion.

Ring organised route marches to train his personnel. Edward O'Malley in his *Memories of a Mayoman* relates such a route march in the Cushlough district and refers to him reading a dispatch which stated – 'The Crown Forces at Westport Quay have a life-sized photograph of you. If captured, you will be shot, and your body dragged through the streets of Westport. This information comes direct from Military headquarters'. He also relates that arms were stored at Owenwee, having been brought by Quartermaster T. Kitterick and Vol. John McDonagh in Breheny's lorry, including Mauser and Martini rifles, Lee-Enfields, and Webley and Bulldog revolvers, together with Parabellum and Luger pistols, and grenades. These were for the use of the Active Service Unit in operations. Commdt. Ring himself carried a Lee-Enfield and an ex-R.I.C. Webley revolver.

The earliest engagement involved three of the leaders, Michael Kilroy, Joe Ring and Broddie Malone. When walking at Derrykillew they engaged four armed R.I.C. men, and in this engagement they killed Sgt. Coughlan and wounded and disarmed the R.I.C. men. The next engagement in April 1921 was at Clogher cross-roads three miles from the town where the Westport A.S.U. under Ring ambushed three lorries of Black and Tans, wounding a number of them.

On 3 May 1921, Ring and his men were at Brackloon bridge having received intelligence that enemy lorries were due to pass through that position on their way to Leenane. When in the process of setting up the ambush, they received information that Commdt. Tom Maguire, O.C. South Mayo Brigade, was encircled at Tourmakeady and required

assistance. They left to go to his assistance but received information that Maguire and his men had evaded the large force of encircling troops. They returned to their respective areas only to learn that six lorries had meanwhile passed through their ambush position.

Following the abortive ambush at Islandeady on 6 May, during which two Volunteers were killed, the various units returned to their respective areas. The Westport A.S.U. under Ring made nightly patrols into the town, but failed to engage the enemy.

On 19 May the combined A.S.U. set up an ambush at Clooneen, Kilmeena, on the Westport-Newport Road, under Commdt. Michael Kilroy. During this engagement five Volunteers were killed and six seriously wounded. Commdt. Ring with Volunteers J. Keane, Gortaroe, and N. Hoban were engaged in communication duties. They later joined the other members of the Westport A.S.U. under Broddie Malone, and on hearing that after the Kilmeena ambush, Kilroy and his men had retreated to Skirdagh, outside Newport, and were surrounded, they held up the morning train out of Westport on 24 May, in case any prisoners had been taken. In fact Kilroy and his men slipped through the enemy lines. The various units re-assembled at Curvey and Lanmore, later moving to Owenwee, and on 1 June burned Drummin R.I.C. barracks.

Ring had received intelligence that a combined R.I.C.-Black and Tan convoy was due to travel to Letterfrack. It was decided to set up an ambush position at Carrowkennedy on 2 June 1921. A trench had been cut in the road, but this was filled in and the lorries passed. It was decided to ambush them on their return. In the Carrowkennedy engagement, twelve of the enemy including a District Inspector were killed and thirteen, some wounded, surrendered.

A Lewis machine gun, together with all arms and equipment, was captured. The I.R.A. made a magnanimous gesture in sending one of the captured R.I.C. to seek medical aid. The Column went to Claddy Village and from there to Drummin and the Louisburgh district, where they remained until 9 June. They returned to Shraheen and from there to Newport district, when the well-known photograph of the Column was taken in the foothills of Nephin mountain. A large force of enemy troops, including R.I.C., Tans and military, was assembled to capture the Column, who returned to the Owenwee area, where on 4 July they dispersed into small groups and evaded the enemy.

Carrowkennedy was the last major engagement, and one of the most important, in the West, prior to the truce in July 1921. As a result there were reprisals by the R.I.C. and the Tans in Westport town and on the homes of the leaders. Michael Kilroy's house outside Newport and Joe Ring's at Drumindoo were burned to the ground. The authorities offered a reward of £2,000 for information leading to the capture of Ring. Tom Heavey relates that after the Truce, Michael Staines, T.D., arrived from





*Gárda officers in Kildare Barracks. In front row – Chief Superintendent Joe Ring (with stick), Commissioner Staines, Superintendent Delaney (later first Bandmaster Gárda Band).*

Dublin to meet Kilroy and requested the services of Ring to join him as Liaison Officer for Galway and Mayo. After consulting brigade staff, Kilroy reluctantly agreed. Ring took up office, first at University Road in Galway and later at Castle Street, Castlebar, and in his capacity as Liaison Officer dealt with such matters as the occupation of Rosturk Castle and Castle Gore by the I.R.A., and with various assaults and the shooting at District Commissioner Cruise's car. It was an administrative job and this did not suit a man of action like Ring. When approached by Staines in February 1922 on the formation of the Civil Guard, he relinquished his position as Liaison Officer and was involved with the formation and recruitment of the Gárdaí from their inception 21 February 1922, initially in the grounds of the R.D.S. and later at Kildare artillery barracks, where contingents of recruits arrived from all parts of the country. In this position he held the nominal rank of Chief Superintendent.

While on a recruiting campaign in the west, Commdt. Ring was arrested on the evening of 1 April 1922 in the premises of Mr. P. Haran, court registrar, at upper Bridge Street. He proceeded to address the large crowd outside, before being removed, together with Mr. Haran, and Mr. Lavelle, to Castlebar military barracks, which was under the command of Commdt. General Kilroy. Haran was later released, and on Monday 3 April Ring went on hunger-strike, sending the following communication to Kilroy, with a copy to Staines in Dublin:

I wish to inform you that I am on hunger-strike since 11 p.m. on April 3rd and will continue to do so until I am set at liberty.

My reasons for doing so are as follows:

- (a) As Commandant of 3rd Battalion, West Mayo Brigade, I stand loyal to the oath I took to the Republic of Ireland and the Government of the Republic which is Dáil Éireann. As such I have a perfect right to my opinion, and any action I have taken or may take, I am responsible to that Government and none other.
- (b) Being loyal to my oath and the Government I took it to, I hold you have no legal right to arrest or detain me, as you are no longer recognised as officer acting for the official General Headquarters of the I.R.A.

Ring was later released and joined Staines, who was in the process of moving his staff and recruits from the R.D.S. to Kildare barracks.

On 25 April 1922, the 1,500 recruits for the new Civic Guard left the R.D.S. for Kildare artillery barracks, accompanied by the new Commissioner, Michael Staines, and his staff. Their first task was to clean out the barracks recently vacated by the British. Most of the senior officers were former R.I.C. who had co-operated with Collins during the recent troubles, and the rank and file were mostly men from the columns throughout the country. There was understandable conflict between the two groups, which broke out in what is known as the Kildare Mutiny, on the morning of 15 May 1922. Staines and his staff appeared before the assembled recruits under the command of Chief Superintendent Joe Ring. A number of spokesmen from the ranks stepped forward, but Ring called the parade to attention to be addressed by the Commissioner. He referred to the services of the former R.I.C. officers and warned about the seriousness of mutiny. There was heckling in the ranks and Staines called on those who supported him to move to the right; some sixty did so. Joe Ring with another sixty remained where they stood, and the vast majority of the recruits moved to the left. The Commissioner spent the day in discussion with such officers including Ring, as were acceptable to both sides, and finally that evening left by car for Dublin, accompanied by Ring, to break the news to a horrified Provisional Government. A party of national troops with an armoured car was sent to take over the barracks, but following discussions with Supt. Liddy, they withdrew. Staines set up his new H.Q. in the Ormond Hotel in Dublin and later took over Dublin Castle, the headquarters of the British administration in Ireland.

Following the Kildare Mutiny, Staines, as an Alderman and T.D. for Dublin, offered his resignation to the Provisional Government, but it was not then accepted. It would appear that at this time he offered Joe Ring an appointment as Assistant Commissioner of the Civic Guard. However with civil war now raging, Ring's services were required in the West. He was appointed a Brigadier-General of the National Army.

Major-General Seán Mac Eoin was in charge of the western campaign and was operating from Athlone. The strategy adopted by the G.H.Q. took the occupying Republican forces by surprise. West Mayo was a bastion which would have been very difficult to overcome by conventional means. It was decided to send a sea-borne force to the west to augment



*Brigadier-General Joe Ring in the uniform of the National Army, with Webley revolver.*



Mac Eoin's land-borne troops. Ring was picked out as the most suitable leader for this expedition and a cross-channel ferry the *Minerva* was fitted out as a troop-carrier, and sent via the Antrim and Donegal coasts, arriving in Clew Bay in the early morning on Monday 24 July 1922. The *Freeman's Journal* gives a graphic description of the capture of Rosmoney and Westport under Brigadier-General Joe Ring.

The relief of Westport was a well-planned and brilliantly successful operation. It was carried out without loss and with scarcely the cost of a rifle bullet. The famous old sea-port town, which had been the headquarters of the Irregulars in the West, and their chief base of operations, passed into the hands of the National troops on Monday night.

It was regarded as their surest and most strategic citadel in Connacht. Nobody ever dreamt its fall would have occurred so easily.

On the approach of the National troops the Irregulars fled into the fastnesses of North Mayo, portion of their forces going southwards towards Connemara.

The onslaught on Westport was made by sea, and there is a chain of interesting incidents connected with it.

This move was made primarily to effect a lodgment on the western seaboard, whilst at the same time, a vigorous sweep forward under the supervision of Major-General McKeon was conducted from the east, the object of both movements being to hem in the Irregulars and cut them off from all connection by sea or land.

Taken thus on both flanks, the occupying forces simply had to bow to the inevitable. Their rule, or rather orgy, of lawlessness in the west, at once fell to pieces. There was no pretence to put up any sort of opposition. They are still congregated in some force in a number of places scattered over Mayo. But they are there precisely because the National troops has not reached those districts. Some trouble may be anticipated from such places still. There may also be some annoyance caused to the National troops by roving bands who are located in the hills. But to all intents and purposes the physical defiance is at an end in Connacht.

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The expedition arrived, anchoring safely in Clew Bay on Monday morning. It was just then daybreak. Little sign of life appeared in the harbour. A few hookers were gently bobbing their heads on the broad bosom of the waters. All was otherwise calm and quiet. In a twinkling the lazy old hookers were swarming with life. The troops had taken possession of the craft. Brigadier-General Ring was despatched to reduce Rossminey, a coastguard station, five miles from Westport, and situated on the north side of the bay. He had also instructions to effect a landing there. His mission was crowned with success. The landing was effected from both sides of the peninsula upon which the coastguard station is situated.

For this purpose the force under Brigadier-General Ring had to be divided. Accordingly the latter detailed two captains to the north side,

while he himself superintended the operations on the south side. The men landed in rowing boats from hookers which were brought to within about 50 yards of the beach. The officers occupied the neck of the peninsula, thus cutting off the garrison from the mainland. At the same time Brigadier-General Ring advanced on the stronghold, coming within 50 yards of it. Fire was then opened on the station.

There was no reply from the garrison, and after a few minutes the white flag went up. The occupants then came out cheering with their hands up. They proved to be National troops who had been made prisoners and detained in the coastguard station by the Irregulars. They numbered about 90 men. They had been rounded up during the last 3 weeks from Mayo and Sligo. Amongst them was Commandant Reynolds, who is attached to the North Western Command under Major General McKeon.

The garrison, numbering a dozen men, fled with their arms and ammunition on the approach of the National troops. They were making for the mainland when they were captured by the northern detachment.

All surrendered without firing a shot.

A number of grenades as well as rifles and revolvers were in their possession. In the building itself two rifles, some bombs and shot-guns were also found.

When the Captain was about to land, he noticed two men running along the peninsula. He at once jumped out of the boat, thinking he had bottom. He was in deep water at the time, but he managed to keep his rifle above the water until he reached his depth. Then, standing breast high, he fired at the retreating figures. They disappeared, but were subsequently taken prisoners, uninjured. After placing a guard in the coastguard station, the detachment returned to assist in the landing at Westport.

Here the garrison retreated on hearing of the presence of the National troops in the harbour. The military barracks were burning and the troops were just in time to save the building. The fire was promptly put out. A mine was discovered outside the main entrance.

Following the successful Rosmoney operation, the national troops landed at Westport Quay, took over Westport town and district, and in a historic photograph outside Westport town hall, which they used as their H.Q., Brigadier Ring and his staff and troops are pictured with the armoured-car known as 'The Big Fella'. It was during this period that the troops billeted in the town hall, shot the head off the Clendenning statue on the Octagon.

A military dispatch regarding the engagement which led to the death of Joe Ring was sent to the Commander-in-Chief and Adjutant-General, dated 6 p.m. 14 September 1922:

Big action in the West. Am sending cipher despatch which will reach you in an hour's time or so. Casualties including - Brigadier Ring killed. Tony Lawlor - badly wounded, armoured-car *Big Fella* captured by enemy. Note - connection bad, could hardly hear.



*'Ring's Own' outside their H.Q. at Westport Town Hall with armoured car 'The Big Fella'.*

A contemporary report in the Military Archives, Cathal Brugha Barracks, Dublin dated 28 October 1922, relates the events in the western operations leading up to the death of the Brigadier-General in combat, in what became known as the battle of the Ox Mountains:

The late General Joe Ring co-operated with us, he landed in Westport, released 103 national troops who were interned there at Rosmoney Island. Also captured irregular leader Browne and Column of thirteen men, with guns, bombs and transport – three lorries. Also captured irregular Comdt. Healy and 100 others near Castlebar, being ambushed on the way to Newport; we captured a Thompson-gun, ammunition and rifles.

Irregular Column with armoured-car *Ballinalee* took Ballina while most of the garrison attended Requiem Mass. Our troops under the command of Commdt.-General Lawlor arrived in Ballina the next day and left the following morning for Tubbercurry; ½ mile outside Bonnyconlan our troops were ambushed on both sides of the road. In this engagement Brigadier Joe Ring, R.I.P., was killed and Comdt.-General Lawlor wounded, together with five of the rank and file; we advanced then to the hill and captured fifteen prisoners.

The *Mayo News* in their edition of the 16 September gave the following front page editorial, edged in black:

As we go to Press on Thursday evening news reaches us that in a fight between National troops and irregulars at Bonnicconlon, Ballina,



to-day, General Joseph Ring was shot dead. The news has caused most poignant grief here in his native town of Westport. During the recent reign of terror the enemies of Ireland like sleuth hounds pursued him, but they failed to get him. Is it not melancholy to think he should have gone down at the hands of his own countrymen, many of them his former friends and fellow fighters on the hills of Mayo. Joe Ring was the first man in Ireland to form a flying column, and he gathered about him a faithful band who in many a scrap gave a good account of themselves. From his earliest infancy he was a great personal friend of ours, and we hope and trust he is to-day enjoying the reward of a good and exemplary life. Opposition to tyranny is obedience to God, and in this certainly Joe Ring obeyed. When the fact of his death became known in Westport, though market day, all the business houses immediately closed and shuttered their shops, while the blinds on private residences were drawn. It bore eloquent tribute to the esteem in which he was held by his neighbours in Westport – the friends of his boyhood and admirers of his manhood – R.I.P.

The remains of Brigadier Ring were removed to Ballina workhouse, then under military occupation, where they were laid out. The following evening 15 September, his brother Jim, accompanied by Charles Hughes, Edward Haran and John O'Donohue, travelled to Ballina to remove the remains, under military escort, to St. Marys Church, Westport, where they were received by Rev. Fr. Patterson and placed on a catafalque, draped in the tricolour and with his cap and insignia of a Brigadier-General, in front of the high altar. The Church remained open all night to accommodate those wishing to pay their respects. Solemn Requiem Mass was celebrated the following day at 12 noon, and when it was learned that the military band and firing party were held up at Castlebar, because a line was up at Islandeady, the funeral procession was delayed for an hour. Finally at two p.m., led by a military contingent with reversed arms, the funeral



*Funeral on the Quay Road with National troops with reversed arms, followed by the First Gárda Pipe Band.*

procession moved off. The remains were borne by ex-comrades of the deceased, flanked by members of Mayo Civic Guard in their smart new uniforms. The newly-formed Gárda Pipe Band from Kildare Barracks, under Pipe-Major Meighan, played funeral laments, and the Irish Army Band from Athlone, funeral marches, on the three mile route to Oughaval Cemetery. Also following the cortege were members of Fianna Éireann, Ladies of Cumann an tSaorstáit and members of the Men's Sacred Heart Sodality wearing their medals. The funeral was the largest ever seen in Westport.

At the graveside Fr. Patterson presided and orations were given by Michael Staines, T.D., dealing with Joe Ring's involvement with the Gárdaí, and by Colonel Cooney dealing with his military career. The last post and reveille were sounded by military trumpeters and three volleys were fired by the military firing-party.

In the following week's *Mayo News* there appeared an Appreciation by the well-known Kerry Irish author, Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha, which ended:

The marching tread of his fighting column will never again re-echo in the night through his native hills, and the red grouse squat in the purple heather undisturbed. Woods and stream and western sea are hushed in sorrow. A chivalrous heart is stilled, a brave and generous soul gone. MAYO YOU DARE NOT CLAIM A BRAVER SOUL THAN RING.

An Seabhac.

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PEADAR Ó FLANAGÁIN, B.A., B. Comm. Officer in charge, Westport Order of Malta Ambulance Corps. Local historian and lecturer. Founder member and Vice-Chairperson of Westport Historical Society, and regular contributor to *Cathair na Mart*.