Recollections based on the Diary of an Irish Volunteer 1898 to 1924, Part I

By Jim O'Donnell

I have written this booklet for the following reasons:

1. To fulfill a promise I made a long time ago to a gallant leader and a true friend, General Michael Kilroy, who at that time requested me and others to write out our own personal experiences as to the part we took in the fight for freedom – what we actually did and saw and any useful information about the Newport Battalion Area, in order that he might put them all together and write a true account of the noble part taken by the people in that area in the fight.
2. As a tribute to the members of the I.R.A. and the others who stood true to Ireland's cause through dark and evil days, and who thought no sacrifice too great and spared no effort when called upon to help in that cause.
3. As a special tribute to my father and mother, and to the fathers and mothers of all the volunteers. Also a tribute to the householders of those days who stood behind the fighting columns through thick and thin. When the column men who had billeted in their homes the previous night were far away, they had to stand up to the enemy troops and take whatever punishment they were given. Regardless of the consequences, they refused to give any information. These were certainly the silent heroes.
4. To give to the present and to future generations a general idea of the part played by every volunteer in the area, the difficulties they had to overcome, and the pattern of life they followed during that glorious and difficult period.

Jim O'Donnell, Shanballyhue, Newport, County Mayo, Ireland.

Diary of an Irish Volunteer

I was born on the twenty-third of October 1898 at No. 6 Bradley Place, Morley, Yorkshire, England. My parents, Richard O'Donnell and Catherine Mulchrone, both natives of Derrycooldrim, Newport, County Mayo, Ireland, emigrated to Morley shortly after their marriage and set up a home there. My older brother Michael and two sisters, Mary and Nora, and I were born there. I was sent to school at three years of age and I don't remember much about it. I do remember a school exam at which I won a

prize, and I also remember an old man named Taylor being drowned in a mill dam at the top of our street. I also remember the layout of the street in which we lived and a bridge we had to pass on entering it. In fact when I visited Morley Christmas, 1920, I asked my cousin who met me at the station to stand back and see if I could find the house on my own, as the memory I had of it was just like a dream of which I wasn't too sure. I walked straight on and found the house as I had always imagined it.

When I was five years old my parents bought our present home in Shanballyhue, Newport, County Mayo, from Peter and Ellen Burke. At that time it was just a thatched cottage with ten acres of land. I had just had my fifth birthday before we left for Ireland. My father often told us the story of how he was carrying me through the ticket office at Morley Station. The station master asked him how old I was, as anybody under five travelled free. He said that I was almost five. I then spoke up and said 'I'm five since last Tuesday!' The station master just smiled, gave him the tickets, and wished him luck.

When we arrived in Shanballyhue my parents furnished and stocked the place, and we settled into the usual family routine. As we grew up strong enough to take our places, we each were given our own tasks, and we had to have our work done on time. My father, though a kind and generous man, was also a strict one and his word was always law at our home. There were nine children in the family, four boys and five girls. Bridget, the youngest, died at the age of four months. That was our first great sorrow, as we all loved her.

When my father was a boy of eighteen he was stricken with rheumatic fever and was for twelve weeks between life and death. During his lifetime he had six attacks of it, each of twelve weeks duration. The doctors warned him to take no chances, but to be always careful. That left a heavier burden on my mother and more responsibility on each one of us. In spite of his handicap, he managed the home well and we were never short of good wholesome food and neat clothing, as he was always at the helm and directed every operation even though he could not do heavy work.

From 1909 to 1913 the principal topic of conversation at every gathering was Home Rule, which after a long fight was passed through the British House of Commons and the House of Lords, and placed on the Statute Books. Then Sir Edward Carson, at the head of the Orange Order, started up in opposition, organized the Ulster Volunteers, started gun running in public, armed them and defied the British government to put Home Rule into operation. The British made a half-hearted attempt to quell this defiance, but the army in the Curragh of Kildare mutinied and refused to disarm the Orangemen.

John Redmond, as leader of the Irish people, organized the National Volunteers a short time previously. Then in 1914 World War I started, and all the politicians called for recruits to help England to fight the war for small nations, while forgetting the fact that their own small nation was being trampled underfoot. Home Rule was then shelved, and the National Volunteers, disgusted with the turn of events, split into two

sections. The breakaway unit which was the larger, called themselves the Irish Volunteers and later formed the nucleus of the Irish Republican Army. The smaller unit, which stood by John Redmond, called themselves the National Volunteers. After a time this unit faded away.

During the big strike in 1913, Jim Larkin and James Connolly formed the Citizen Army within the labour ranks, armed them, and marched them out in public. Then Liam Mellows, Erskine Childers and others organized what was later known as the Howth gun running, and brought in a large consignment of arms – about 1,500 rifles and 50,000 rounds of ammunition on the yacht *Asgard*. The Volunteers marched down to the quays in broad daylight, received their rifles and marched back to their headquarters in defiance of British orders.

Of course, this was only a small portion of the arms needed, and quite a big part of the arms and explosives used later was acquired in several ways. One of the most effective, I think, was that of Irish organized companies in England and Scotland who bought small arms and explosives from British ex-soldiers of World War I and also from regular soldiers, and from miners who used explosives in mines. Sir Roger Casement and his men worked on the Continent and arranged to have arms shipped from there to Ireland. He himself came to supervise the landing of the largest consignment of the whole operation, the landing of the A*ud,* with 20,000 rifles at Banna Strand. Hard luck hit the whole operation from the outset as two volunteer officers who had been detailed to meet the *Aud* took a wrong turn in dense fog, ran into the sea and were drowned. This left those on board without the necessary signals to guide them.

The ship was also sighted and followed by British destroyers and when those in charge of it saw they were going to be captured, they scuttled and sank it rather than let the guns fall into British hands. If that consignment had been safely landed it might have made a big change in the history of the struggle, for at that time England had her hands full.

Roger Casement was taken prisoner, tried for treason and later hanged. The Volunteers started planning an all-out rebellion and arranged for all the country units to rise at the same time as Headquarters. The Rising was planned for Easter Sunday. But just on the eve of the Rising, Eoin MacNeill, who was the 'chief of staff' and who seemingly had not been consulted previously, issued a countermanding order, calling it off. The result was that only two or three units outside Dublin took part. The fight made during Easter Week is now past history and there is no need to repeat it here.

After the general surrender the leaders were all executed except Éamon De Valera, who, although sentenced to death, was reprieved when the American government stepped in and said hands off, as he was an American citizen. The prisoners were then removed to Wormwood Scrubs, Frongoch and other British prisons where they started a series of hunger strikes and other forms of agitation.

In the latter part of 1916 all opposition seemed crushed, as all, or nearly all, of the leaders who were living were in jail. But the people were not by any means cowed

but were waiting their opportunity. In the early days of 1917 the volunteers again started to get active and to recruit large numbers. On 15 June 1917, I myself and several of my companions joined the Newport Company Second Battalion, West Mayo Brigade, and from that time forth I was a member of the Irish Republican Army.

Shortly after this I took the **Oath of Allegiance** and I can honestly say that I have tried during my life to live true to it. Let nobody think that then, or in later years, we had all the people on our side. A large number of the Irish people, and in fairness to them I will say good Irishmen and Irishwomen, thought we were mad, and did not agree with our methods as they thought we had no chance against the might of the British Empire and were only stirring up trouble which would gain nothing.

During the latter half of 1917 and the early part of 1918 we drilled intensively, sometimes in the valleys of Derrylahan, northeast of General Kilroy's old home, and sometimes out in the islands in Clew Bay at rifle practice.

Saint Patrick's Day 1918 was our big day in Newport. All the Volunteers in the area, about sixty in number, mobilized at the Old Parish Hall and marched to the Fair Green. We did all kinds of foot drills, including platoon drill. When drill was over we got the order to march, then to double towards Westport. The police came after us on the double. As we were light lads and good runners we led them a merry dance for an hour. Whenever we went on route marches, we always had four to six policemen after us and we often made them travel! As a general rule, there were no hard feelings between the Volunteers and the police at that time, nothing like that which developed later.

During the period 1918 to 1920 we often had to take our turns at patrolling the town, especially on fair days and holidays. We generally worked in twos, and our orders were to watch out for brawls or fights – be there before the R.I.C. and have the combatants removed before the police could get them, and take over, as far as possible, the functions of the police. We were equipped with police whistles to call for help if needed.

I remember on one occasion I was standing one night with a number of my school pals. They started gibing me about our drill display in the town that day. They said we were just a lot of gossoons, showing off. They got me so mad that I jumped on to the road and told them that they'd be glad to have the protection of the Volunteers before a month. And although I didn't dream I was telling the truth, it happened that inside three weeks, the Conscription Bill was passed three times through the House of Commons, three times through the House of Lords, and received the king's signature, all in one day.

Every party and creed then came together and united in one grand protest against conscripting any of our people. During that period, it would make any Irishman proud of his country and his people to see their splendid unity and determination against that threat. Very Reverend Canon McDonnell and all the other priests throughout the country spoke from the pulpits urging the young men to join the volunteers and resist

by every means in their power the menace of Conscription. Where there was only a handful of Volunteers before this, others joined up in hundreds and after nightfall every night could be heard the sounds of men drilling. As we all know, Conscription was defeated, and after that the attitude of the people in general changed towards the Volunteers – changed when it was seen what could be achieved by unity, and the people gave us more support.

At times all agitation died down and everything seemed quiet for a while, only to flare up again. We were working hard and were succeeding in turning public opinion in our favour.

Then some time after Conscription came the General Election of 1918 which resulted in a landslide for Sinn Féin and Republican candidates who captured 73 seats out of 80. Then on 27 January 1919 they set up their own Parliament, appointed their own cabinet, their own courts of law, and their own police force. Then came a pause and everything seemed to be dying out, and people seemed to lose interest.

On 1 April, 1919, at the second session of the Republican Parliament, Éamon De Valera was elected President and Michael Collins director of Intelligence and Minister for Finance. Then there was a period of quiet. Most of the Volunteer activities were confined to route marches, raiding for arms and training. Anybody in the area who had shotguns or small arms and who did not offer them to the Volunteers, had his house raided and his arms commandeered. They were given receipts for those guns and were compensated for them at the end. A number of men were then left in charge of them and had to keep them cleaned and oiled and shifted from place to place, as things were getting dangerous.

In June 1920 a bunch of us went to a little mining town in Scotland, called Calderbank, about twelve miles from Glasgow, as everything seemed to have died out around home. We remained in Scotland for seven months. During that time we helped to organize a company of Volunteers about thirty strong between Calderbank and Airdrie. Our officers were Captain John O'Brien and John Timmons, First Lieutenant. Harry McStravick, adjutant, was son of the boss for whom we worked. That company did good work later.

About that time, Mrs. Mary Ainsworth, who, like all her family, was an enthusiastic worker in Ireland's cause, received a letter from her brother, Jim Clinton of Shanballyhue, Newport, Co. Mayo, telling her of a raid the Black and Tans made on his house. They beat up the family and took him out for a night, blindfolded him and drove him for miles. Then they made him walk out in a lake up to his shoulders, fired shots around his head in the water, and after a night of terror, brought him home. That raid was typical of the Tans' methods of terrorizing the people.

(Commandant Ned Lyons, one of our first officers, was arrested and so badly beaten that he never recovered and died after he was sometime in jail. We of the Old I.R.A. had a memorial erected to him and his comrades of the Newport Battalion a few years ago. It stands on the Newport Fair Green, a beautiful statue of native limestone.

His comrades in Chicago and Cleveland were among those who contributed to its erection.)

About the middle of January 1921, Tom McDonnell and I came home with dispatches from the Scottish Company, one of which was an offer of thirty men for the fight if need be. On the journey from Greenock to Dublin we had a company of Black and Tan recruits under a captain, and they were a rough lot. I delivered my messages to Commandant Clinton, and he told us to report at once to our company officer.

Shortly after our arrival, General Kilroy was considering forming a flying column with the limited supply of arms at his disposal – and they were limited indeed! Each company was mobilized on its own training ground. The organizer lectured us on the formation of the column. He said that a volunteer who agreed to join had nothing to gain from it but an early death, and that anyone who did not feel he could see it through would be thought none the worse of it if he stood down. Those who did volunteer should be prepared to see it through to the death if necessary, as they knew the odds we were up against. We had thirty-one men that night.

The organizer asked that anyone willing to serve should cross a given line which he made. Among the first to cross were Peter and Anthony Caine, Derryhillagh; Davy and Johnnie Gibbons, Acres Bridge; John T. Maloney, Letterlough; Mike Horan, Jim Sweeney, Tom McDonnell and myself. Of the rest I am not quite clear, but I do know that sixteen men crossed it apart from the officers who included Mike Gibbons, Rosslave (Captain); Mike Fergus, First Lieutenant; and Mike McNeela, Second Lieutenant. Willie Burke (former Captain) was in jail at the time. We were told we would be called when needed and when arms were available.

One night shortly afterward I asked my mother to prepare my clothes as we expected to be called any day. We had each received a haversack. She got all my clothes together and packed the haversack for me and left it ready. Some of my friends tried to advise me that I was acting foolishly as we were up against too much opposition. One man in particular complained to my father that I was at very dangerous work and bringing danger to the home also. The answer he made was, 'If he wants to fight for his country, I won't stop him. I took my place in my own day and nobody stopped me. He has my blessing.' Those words often gave me courage when things looked black. That was his attitude towards me to the end.

The Tans now roamed the country at will and beat and terrorized the people. Jim Moran and his brothers Tom and Patrick were savagely beaten in their own home. Owen Caine, Carrickaneady, was asleep in his home when the Tans called. They beat him until he was unconscious, then put a young filly into the room with him, fired shots at it until it went crazy, in the hope that she would trample him to death.

Then the house of Stephen McGough, Brockagh, was raided. They gave him a savage beating, then went to his cowhouse and roped a young heifer, put him up on her back, fired shots at her 'till she went madly out the door, in the hope that this would kill him. This was being done everywhere in the hope of demoralizing the people.

That is where they made their big mistake – for that is when all that is brave and noble in the Irish people shows – when they are fighting with their backs to the wall. For a time the Tans had it all their own way, and beat and terrorized the country, raiding homes every night, beating people in a savage way. General Michael Kilroy then decided to stop this, and prepared to form a flying column. As I have already said, the supply of arms was very limited and the position was that for every rifle or shotgun available, there were ten men anxious to use it. Michael picked a certain number of men from each Company and gave them the arms on hand, and made all the others go on the waiting list – sometimes causing a little disappointment or jealousy among those who were not picked. It could be done no other way as the arms just were not there.

He gave all the others their own jobs to do in the meantime, such as cutting roads, making dugouts or underground rooms, storing, cleaning and moving arms. Also, intelligence work, dispatch carrying, helping and acting as guides for the Columns, and finding out information about enemy movements which would be valuable to the columns – a highly dangerous job, a lot of which was done by the *Cumann na mBan* (Irish Women's Organisation).

There was another section of the movement, which we nicknamed the Irish Navy. Those were the boys who ferried the I.R.A. officers and men in boats across Clew Bay whenever needed. As everybody knows how vulnerable a target a boat can be from a position on the shore, you can well imagine how dangerous an occupation that was. The principal men involved were Tom Fergus, Tom Chambers and Mike O'Donnell, all of Ardagh and the Tiernaur Comoany; on the Kilmeena end the Morans, and Burkes of Ross, Barretts and Geraghtys of Drunnagh, and Pat Quinn, Inniscuttle.

In the last weeks of March, as the Column was preparing for action, Jim Moran, Pádraig Joyce and Jack Clarke, all of Tiernaur Company, raided the house of an Englishman named Good, who lived occasionally in Rockfleet. They got a short Martini rifle and other small arms. Jim Moran carried that rifle all through the Tan and Civil Wars and used it in many a daring raid. A few nights later Good came with the Tans to raid Jim's house, having with him a rope to drag him to his death behind the car – but Jim was not there.

As time went on, the I.R.A. made the Tans withdraw to their barracks, and soon they were glad to stay there. The wild raids then ceased, and unless travelling in force, they did not venture out at all. Ambushes were set in several places, and a few of them came off, such as Kilmeena and Skirdagh in the Newport area and Carrowkennedy in the Westport area. In Kilmeena, four I.R.A. men were killed, four wounded and captured, one captured unwounded, and three wounded who escaped. Those killed were Tom O'Donnell, Rossbannagh, Newport; Séamus MacEvilly, Castlebar; Pat Stanton, Kilmeena; John Collins, Westport. Those wounded and captured were Paddy O'Malley, Rossinrubble; Paddy Mulloy, Tiernaur; John Cannon, Kilmeena; and Paddy Jordan, Islandeady. Those who were wounded but escaped were Jimmie Swift and John Chambers, and Michael Hughes, Castlebar. The prisoners who were captured were

brutally handled and thrown bodily in across the side of the lorry and left lying on the floor on the journey to Dublin. Paddy O'Malley, whose leg had been broken by bullets during the fight, and which General Kilroy had set in a fair way, was again injured by being thrown into the lorry. He was most of the time unconscious, as was Paddy Mulloy whose hip was almost shot off.

Paddy Jordan died from his wounds the day after his arrival at the Dublin hospital. It was afterwards said that, had he been properly treated, he would have survived. In Skirdagh, Jim Browne, Drimgarve, Kilmeena, was mortally wounded and died two days later. Sergeant Munroe was wounded and one Tan killed.

Carrowkennedy was a great victory. Twelve Tans were killed and thirteen captured, together with 25 rifles, 25 revolvers, one Lewis machine gun, 60 Mills bombs and 5,000 rounds of .303 ammunition. This victory left General Kilroy in a good position where he could call in more of his men and arm them.

In the meantime, several other ambushes were set. One was at Burrishoole bridge, one at Yellow River bridge, and one in Carrickaneady, which did not come off, as the Tans were getting more wary and often did not return on the same route on which they went out.

The Black and Tans were made up of a collection of ex-British soldiers of World War One, and of ex-British criminals who were serving sentences in British prisons for murder and other crimes and who were pardoned if they joined up and came to Ireland to fight the I.R.A. They were recruited in such a hurry that they couldn't supply them with proper uniforms fast enough, and had to dress them in part khaki and part bottle green of the R.I.C. and from this they got their nickname. They were paid 10/- per day salary and were both feared and hated by the people. There was another section called the Auxiliaries who were ex-British officers and were paid one pound per day.

At the Carrowkennedy Ambush, where the Column had captured a number of R.I.C. and Tans, there happened to be one R.I.C. sergeant who had beaten the parents of some of the Column boys. Naturally, they felt like having some of their own back. General Kilroy then said, 'Boys, they are now our prisoners and they cannot be illtreated.' The Sergeant in question showed him a badge of the Sacred Heart and asked him in honour of that name to spare his life – he would not fight against him again. I heard later that he did not live up to his promise.

Even the English newspapers of that time gave a very favourable comment on the treatment meted out by General Kilroy to his prisoners. The *Manchester Guardian* in an editorial said that, considering how General Kilroy had treated the British prisoners he had captured that day, the I.R.A. must not be the mob of terrorists they were held up to be, as they had shown such good discipline. It was even hinted sometime later that it had a good influence on the calling of the truce. The truce was called on July 1, 1921 and everyone breathed a sigh of relief. All returned to their own homes. Dances and parties were held for the Column, and everyone was happy, little knowing the disappointments and heartaches that lay ahead before it was all over.

It was an uneasy peace, and no one knew whether the fight would start again. The I.R.A. again got busy. We had two weeks of intensive training at Sheeane Lodge, Ballycroy. All the officers and N.C.O.s of the West Mayo Brigade were called there. After that it was continued in weekend camps and preparations for resuming the fight if necessary.

Some time after that the British vacated all the small barracks, amongst them Newport police barracks on Castlebar Street. The officers of the battalion were ordered to take over and run the services. The officers were Jack Connolly (battalion commandant); Jim Clinton (vice-commandant); Dan O'Donnell (quartermaster); Willie McNulty (O C engineers); Mike Brown (O C transport); Tom Chambers, Shramore (O C Intelligence); I was O C signallers; and N.C.O.s Paddy Mulloy, Jimmy Kelly and John Murray. Captain Willie O'Malley was district Inspector of police, and Marcus McDonnell also a member of the police force. They were in charge of policing the entire battalion area and we had to help when needed. We had occasionally to run classes for the different special services at weekend camps.

After the truce was put into operation on 11 July 1921, Lloyd George invited De Valera and any colleague he might select to a conference in London to try to work out a settlement. The following day he crossed to London with three colleagues, including Arthur Griffith.

A short time previously, Winston Churchill, who was then Chairman of the Committee for Irish Affairs in the British government, advised Lloyd George to offer a wider scope of self-government than that offered in the Government of Ireland Act of 1921, and if the Irish did not accept to mount a tremendous onslaught on them, using an army of 100,000 specially trained men from a network of blockhouses all over the country. This was the big stick held over the heads of the Irish people. To their credit, although weary of war, they stood up to it splendidly.

The Volunteers waited anxiously for the outcome, but kept on with their preparations, little knowing the trials that lay ahead. Every day the Volunteer Army increased in numbers and efficiency.

At the conference in London, Lloyd George and DeValera argued the issue bitterly. Lloyd George offered Ireland something similar to Dominion status like Canada. The only difference was the cutting off of the six northern counties. DeValera stood firm for the thirty-two counties and independence. Lloyd George's proposals were put to the Second Dáil. Despite the threat of immediate and terrible war, they were turned down by a unanimous vote on 16 August 1921.

Every day the I.R.A. improved and the nation waited anxiously for the terrible onslaught. Instead, DeValera received another letter from Lloyd George, reopening negotiations. In October, a delegation from Dáil Éireann left for England with a draft treaty drawn up by the Irish Cabinet. It represented the irreducible minimum which would satisfy all shades of opinion in the Dáil. DeValera was often blamed for not leading the delegation himself. There were several views taken of this, and several

reasons given. Amongst these was that Arthur Griffith resented the fact that he was not allowed to lead the delegation, and that DeValera allowed him to do so. Another view was that his absence could be used by the delegation as an excuse for not allowing themselves to be stampeded into making any hasty decisions in London. The plenipotentiaries, as they were called, had definite instructions not to sign anything but to report back to Dublin.

In five long weeks of argument nothing was achieved from the Irish viewpoint. But the British did succeed in splitting the Irish delegation, and in tricking Griffith into believing Lloyd George's promise of a Boundary Commission to adjust the boundaries to the satisfaction of all concerned. The Irish delegation for their part failed to get the British to accept DeValera's viewpoint. The British would not hear of the phrase 'External Association' which means that Ireland, though independent of the Commonwealth, would remain associated with it, and would recognise the Crown only as the symbol or head of that association.

The delegation returned to Dublin with a set of British proposals which offered Ireland the status of a Dominion, envisaged the possibility of a semi-permanent border, retained the control of three naval bases, and insisted on an oath of allegiance – broadly speaking, the same terms that Lloyd George had offered DeValera at their first meeting.

The delegation was already divided. Now the Cabinet divided. Some of the delegates, as did some of the Ministers, began to think that this was as far as the British were prepared to go at this time, and began to wonder if it would be wise to accept it and look for more later.

Collins thought that the Oath was an unimportant piece of 'sugar coating' which might make the British swallow a settlement on other points. Even DeValera himself thought that the Oath might be phrased in such a way as not to commit them to anything against Irish aspirations. He even suggested an alternative form to be sent with counter-proposals to the British, though he remained insistent that nothing binding should be signed without reference to Dublin and to him. Griffith was now strongly in favour of acceptance. He believed that this was Britain's last word, and that the alternative was war. Two members of the delegation were dead against it in its then form, and so were part of the Cabinet. It was agreed that the delegation return to London and press for at least some of the amendments that had been discussed. When the delegation went back to England to conclude the talks, the members were so bitterly divided that they even travelled in two separate parties, one by the Dublin–Liverpool route, and the other by the Dún-Laoghaire–Holyhead route.

The delegation, which consisted of Arthur Griffith, Michael Collins, Robert Barton, Edmund Duggan and George Gavan-Duffy, with Erskine Childers as secretary, met in London on Sunday December 4, 1921. Three of them, Barton, Duggan and Gavan-Duffy, set to work drafting amendments to the proposed Treaty, to try and meet the requirements of the Cabinet in Dublin. But when the amendments had been completed, Griffith announced that he would have nothing to do with them. Collins

also refused to go to Downing Street with the counter-proposals. 'Let those who want to break with the British,' he said, 'go themselves and present the documents'. One theory as to what happened between the meeting of the Sinn Féin Cabinet and the meeting in London which caused Collins, of all men, to abandon the idea of an Irish Republic and to accept partition in return for less than Dominion status, is too strange to consider. One theory is that it may have been pressure brought to bear on him by the Irish Republican Brotherhood, of whose Supreme Council he was a member. They may have decided, without reference to President DeValera, who had resigned from that Conference five years previously, to accept England's offer without his knowledge.

For two days Collins refused to take part in any talks, but was talked into a private meeting with Lloyd George, who bulldozed the delegates into meeting and signing the Treaty as it stood. There is no doubt whatever that Lloyd George, having bullied them into meeting him, took advantage of their position. At one stage of the talks he snatched two envelopes from the table in front of him, and holding them up dramatically said, 'Look – here are two documents. One contains the Articles of Agreement reached by us here. The other says that the Sinn Féin representatives refused to come into the Empire. If I send the latter, it means war within three days – immediate and terrible war. Which is it going to be?'

Lloyd George had tried the same bluff on DeValera during former discussions, saying that if he refused to accept the document, the responsibility for renewing the war would be on his shoulders. DeValera, leaving the document on the table where Lloyd George had thrown it, pointed out that he wouldn't *dare* to take a document like that back to the Irish people, nor would he accept responsibility for renewing the war. 'If you attack us,' he told Lloyd George, 'the responsibility will be yours and not mine.' Had the delegation held out, and taken up the firm stand DeValera had formerly taken, the result would have been different, as the morale of the I.R.A. and of the people was never better.

Collins and the delegation, being under a terrible strain, now collapsed. Griffith and Collins persuaded the other three to sign, and in the early hours of 5 December 1921, the Treaty was signed by all five members.

Back in Dublin, DeValera read in the morning papers that an agreement had been signed, but he had still received no word from his delegation. Later in the day the terms of the Treaty were published, and immediately the split began to appear in the Sinn Féin party which had up to this fought the battle so valiantly. To say that the Irish people as a whole wanted – although sick and tired of war – to surrender, would be wrong. They faced the situation bravely and continued to support the stand taken by the I.R.A.

General Kilroy and more than 90% of the men of the 4th Western Division of which he was in charge stood firm and decided to see it through to the death if necessary. The tragedy of it was that Collins and Griffith, by over-riding their authority by signing the Treaty, had split the country from top to bottom. Having once taken that step, there was no going back.

On 7 January DeValera resigned as President, and he and his Republican deputies, numbering 57, withdrew from the Dáil. The pro-treaty deputies, numbering 64, met on 14 January, elected Griffith president, and formed a provisional, or caretaker, government. Collins, with the remnant of the I.R.A. who supported the provisional government, which was, in fact, only a committee, set about carrying out the terms of the treaty. The small section of the I.R.A. which supported the Treaty, together with a lot of young boys who were attracted by the nice new uniforms and the glamour of army life, as they thought it, and also those people who had sat on the fence during the fight to see how it would go, and who now decided to take a hand and join the Free State Army, now formed the army backing Collins. We now had two armies in Ireland: the Irish Republican Army, to which we were bound by oath, and the Free State Army. Tension increased daily, and everyone waited anxiously for the next move.

Liam Lynch, Liam Mellows, Rory O'Connor and Cathal Brugha declared their allegiance to the Republic and refused to recognize the provisional government. They then set up their headquarters in the Four Courts on the following grounds:

1. The Irish people had never recognized British rule in Ireland as lawful.
2. They had fought a bitter war for five years to maintain the Republic.
3. They had taken lives in its defence.
4. They had sworn to defend the Republic against all enemies, foreign and domestic.
5. The treaty had been signed behind the backs of the Cabinet of Dáil Éireann and of the army, and in violation of the signatories' oaths, credentials and terms of reference.
6. The treaty was signed under threat of war – an unworthy surrender for a proud and honourable nation.

Dáil Éireann had approved the treaty by 64 votes to 57, but only three of those 64 deputies accepted it on its merits, 61 stating they were accepting it as the only alternative to war. I remember reading the terms of the treaty in the *Daily Press*, and it was so confusing and hard to understand that I had read it four times before I could grasp its full meaning. My final reaction to it was that it was a surrender of almost everything we were fighting for.

Dick Mulcahy, the new Minister for Defence, in the provisional government, at once publicly declared that the army would be maintained as the Army of the Republic.

An election was held on 16 June 1922. DeValera proposed that Sinn Féin put forth a panel of candidates, both pro-Treaty and anti-Treaty, who would go forward unopposed within their own party. Although they could be opposed by other interests outside the party, the party would show a united front. Collins and Griffith agreed to this, only to repudiate it the evening before the election. Collins also promised that he would draw up a Republican constitution in time for the election, but he did not have it published until the evening before the polls, too late for the people to see it before casting their votes. Such was the confusion that reigned the people did not know what to do.

During this time the I.R.A. was also busy, and both sections called for an army convention to ensure that Mr. Mulcahy's undertaking would be carried out. The Dáil agreed and Mr. Mulcahy called the convention for 20 March 1922. On 17 March, three days before it was to be held, Griffith proclaimed it. Here – as in every move made – the hidden hand of England was at work. Every day that passed showed plainly that the provisional government, instead of being an Irish government, was becoming more and more the tool of the oppressor.

It must be remembered that the army was an unpaid volunteer force, which was in existence before the Dáil was established, and which as a condition to coming under its jurisdiction had insisted on all the members of the Dáil taking the Oath of Allegiance to the Republic. Only one member, DeValera himself, refused to take the oath.

The provisional government started to obtain secretly from England a supply of arms including heavy artillery. The army executive decided as a precautionary measure to occupy the Four Courts and other buildings. The legality of this occupation was never questioned by the Dáil. No request was ever made by the provisional government that the Four Courts be evacuated.

About this time, Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson was shot dead on his own doorstep at his London home by two Irishmen, ex-British soldiers. It was well known that Wilson was responsible for the hanging of Kevin Barry, also for the Belfast pogroms and the murder of Catholics. The British government claimed that documents had been found which proved the I.R.A. had killed Wilson, and called on Collins to get Rory O'Connor out of the Four Courts. Actually, the order to shoot Wilson had come from Collins himself.

Mr. Churchill, in the English House of Commons, on 26 June, four days before the meeting of the Third Dáil, demanded an attack on the Four Courts. Shortly before this tension was high. The I.R.A. and also the Free State forces, far from being bitter, were anxious that things should be straightened out, and many and fervent were the prayers said by all that peace would be maintained. A large number from both sides met in Limerick in those early days. On one side of the street the I.R.A. was lined up, and on the other, the Free State forces, both fully armed. Everyone prayed that tragedy might be averted – but such was not to be the case, and Ireland now really entered on her Purgatory.

On 28 June, Collins, with guns borrowed from England, bombarded the Four Courts, and the Civil War was on. It dragged on for most of the summer. Griffith, worn out and now realising the situation for which he was mainly responsible died of a broken heart on 17 August 1922. He was succeeded by William Cosgrave. Michael Collins was shot dead in what was supposed to be an ambush on 22 August 1922. It has never been established by whom he was shot, or why. There have been several versions of his death, but I think the story told by some of the men who were his bodyguards on that day, sounded true. Collins, although forced to take the road he took, never liked it.

I was a prisoner in Hut 13, Tintown 2 Camp, the Curragh, during the hunger strike in the harvest of 1923. I was the only Western in that Hut – all the rest were Cork men and numbered 112. Among them were some of Collins's own bodyguard on the day of his death, and the story they told was as follows:

Collins rose on the morning of his death and announced to his men, 'I am going out today to meet the Long Fellow, and before the sun sets we'll settle this trouble, as there is too much good Irish blood shed on both sides.' (DeValera was nicknamed the Long Fellow and Collins the Big Fellow). His men said he was shot from behind by an ex-Black and Tan who had been detailed to do the job in just such a case as this, as the British government never trusted him. When others saw how Collins was treated, they deserted over to the Republican side and fought there until the end.

A large number of the Newport Battalion who were on the Active Service Unit in Castlebar military barracks, including Dan O'Donnell and the McNeelas, Derrylahan; the Gibbons and O'Malleys, Rosslave; the Caines of Derryhillagh, Newport, and representatives of all the families whose sons were volunteers, were sent on to Collooney and other parts of Sligo where heavy fighting was going on. There they had a number of successful encounters, in one of which they captured the armoured car B*allinalee,* which was later used by General Kilroy in the capture of the strongly-held garrison at Ballina.

During this period too, the Brigade Engineers, Staff Captain Jim Moran, Lieutenant Willie McNulty, Thomas Moran, who was the brains of the job, assisted by Jim Grey, Achill Co.; Willie Walshe, Tiernaur Co.; Jim Grehan (miner) and others, commandeered a boiler from the Railway Hotel, Mulranny, fitted it to the chassis of a Crossley lorry, and transformed it into an armoured car which they named the *Queen of the West*, and which some time later was the principal factor in the capture of the important military past at Clifden, County Galway.

General Kilroy, who had early in the fight set up his own little foundry in Shramore and later moved it to Castlebar, now turned out from it larger supplies of hand-grenades about the size of the Mills bomb, but far more effective as the sections were smaller and therefore would cover a wider area when exploded.

Fighting now broke out in all parts of the country and went on for three or four months, the I.R.A. having the better part of the exchanges in most cases. Even then there was no real bitterness between the rival forces as one would expect – only a feeling of unbelief that such a thing would or could happen. We who were in charge of the barracks still held on to them.

Orders were then sent out to all Republican garrisons to evacuate and burn their barracks and again take to the hills in guerilla warfare, as it was becoming impossible to stand up to frontal attacks. The provisional government was now being supplied with heavy guns by England.

We received orders from headquarters to evacuate and burn Newport barracks.

Everything was stacked up and set on fire, and in a short time the building was a blazing inferno. Some of the locals who later became the foundation of the Free State Army in Newport, but who had no previous connection with the Volunteers, looked on.

By some oversight, the Tricolour, which waved at the top of the flagstaff, was not removed before the fire was started. The flames raged around the flag and rose at times to a height of twenty feet above it. Strange to say, when the fire died down, it wasn't even scorched.

The fight was not going to England's satisfaction and the reaction may be summed up in a leading article in the *Irish Times* which at that time was always the mouthpiece of English interest in Ireland. It was said that ex-members of the Imperial army would have to be recruited if the Republicans were to be defeated. The *Irish Times* summed up the military position as follows:

1. The colonial army (meaning the Free State Army) is unable to crush the IRA.
2. The IRA has doubled its efficiency since July.
3. The civilian population was becoming more friendly with Republicans, and little information was reaching Free State divisional headquarters.
4. The IRA was trained and tried in guerilla warfare – the Free State was not.
5. Free State drives and sweeps had failed definitely and were becoming too costly.
6. One chance of speedy success remained: the Free State must have a definitely larger number of troops, better officers, and unlimited transport.
7. Even the insufficient troops of the Free State are neither trained nor properly led.
8. The I.R.A., better led, have skillfully seized their chance of attack, and have succeeded in putting to their credit the capture of certain garrisons.
9. The war will go on indefinitely unless the Free State can recruit enormous numbers of trained men and experienced ex-British officers.

England, taking the hint, cracked the whip. The Free State had no option but to obey and carry out the orders. Ex-British soldiers, ex-Black and Tans and ex-Auxiliaries were recruited in large numbers. The tone of the fighting became more bitter every day.

Then the most deadly blow of all came. In October 1922 the Bishops of Ireland issued a joint pastoral giving full support to the provisional government, and condemning all those who opposed it and who upheld the Republic to which they had pledged their oath. Excommunication followed, banning them from receiving the Sacraments which they loved more dearly than life itself. You can well imagine all those young boys who had been trained by good Catholic parents to love God and country, travelling day and night with death staring them in the face every hour, without even the consolation of the Sacraments to comfort them in their last hours.

The only alternative was that we give up the fight for freedom and prove traitors to the Oath we had taken. It was a terrible decision to take, but we, one and all, decided

to trust in the mercy of God and to carry on. I do claim without hesitation that time has vindicated our stand. We have only to refer to the achievements of Mr. DeValera in having removed every article of the Treaty in 1938 to which he objected in 1921 with the one exception of partition to prove that. Had the country stood firm behind DeValera at that time he would have succeeded, notwithstanding England's threat of war. The articles removed in 1938 included the oath of allegiance; the return of the three naval ports, namely Cork Harbour, Berehaven and Lough Swilly; the governor general, the land annuities, and every other objectionable feature of the Treaty.

While not wishing to censure the action of the Irish Bishops, I do wish to state that I read in the daily papers of that time and distinctly remember a report of the Papal Legate, Monsignor Luzzio, whom the Holy Father had sent to investigate the case. His ruling was that the action towards the Republicans was a mistake and never should have been made. His Holiness also received Dr. Conn Murphy and Mr. Arthur O'Cleary of Dáil Éireann, who were sent to Rome to present a petition to the Pope and give him the facts of the situation. On his return, Dr. Murphy was arrested and cast into prison. When the news reached the Holy Father, and also the news that he was on a hunger strike, not only did he write to the Cardinal Primate to use all his influence to have him released – he also sent the Papal Blessing to the prisoner himself. I believe this goes to show what the Holy Father himself thought of the Republican fight for freedom, and how right or wrong he thought it.

(To be continued)