

Statement by

**General Michael Kilroy**

on the Activities of the Active Service Unit

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**GENERAL MICHAEL KILROY**  
**NEWPORT, COUNTY MAYO**

**PART 1**  
**THE AWAKENING**

## THE AWAKENING.

Perhaps in dealing with the National movements of my experience it would be fitting to explain some of the National efforts of the past which <sup>now had</sup> led up to and produced the movements of our time.

Some of us who have been on "Active service" were very young when the 1798 Centenary Commemoration took place. Most of our boys were not born for years after.

In preparation for the Centenary Celebrations all over Ireland there had been a lot of meetings, writings and publications about the 1798 rising. In the newspapers of the day many of the famous deeds of '98 period were written up, particularly the noble stand made by the many leaders was well published.

The young schoolboys of our time vied with each other as to who knew most about any one, or all of the '98 Leaders. There was certainly a long list including - Tone, Emmet, The Brothers Shears, Henry Joy McCracken, Russell "The man from God knows where" etc.,

Who can render this resitation about Russell and keep a dry eye?. There was in addition Fr. Murphy from Wexford, Kelly The boy from Killane and very many others.

In the West General Humbert's landing at Laccan in Killala Bay gave cause for a further outburst of National enthusiasm.

The energetic display of the first Irish boys (who were handed their rifles) caused the General to realise that they were entirely untrained. They tried to display what they could do with the Sasanoght's head when they should come up with them. What a pitiable situation. Humbert's exclamation when he saw the idea that those actions represented - "The Lord save me from those Men". Yet those were the boys who saved him from the British a few days later in Castlebar, together with his own ability as a general.

Those were our Ancestors. What a deplorable situation for the decedents of the "Island of Scholars & Saints". What an achievement for the civilising influence of Britton, to have our people reduced to such conditions. Is this in itself not enough to excite resentment in the hearts of all thinking men.

lay broken and bleeding She looked for good men in the West". Yes, and she found them in thousands.

Humbert's landing in Killala Bay with only 1925 men all ranks, and some spare arms, was enough to set the West on fire. This little group formed a rallying point to which the men of Connaught flocked in their thousands. (This was a matter of history repeating itself.) Just in the same manner the men of Connaught flocked to Brian Boru almost 800 years before in his preparation for the National Fight at Clontarf in 1014.

What a glorious tradition for the men of Connaught. (Yet some will whisper, if they feel safe, about the West Asleep).

The Irish and French successes at Killala, Ballina and Castlebar were something to be proud of. As the song says of the "Races of Castlebar" "In a 40 mile race sure they never cried halt".

We can not overlook the disaster that befell our Irish Army at Ballinamuck. Notwithstanding the huge forces of British military then mobilised at Ballinamuck we have it handed down from our Ancestors, that, - but for the Treaty of surrender arranged by the French on the field of Battle the Irish insurgents would at least have got away, if not actually defeat the British. We have been told they could actually do that had they been given a chance. The Castlebar success left them with very high hopes.

Having listened to all those historic stories told and re-told over a period of two or three years, the youngsters of our time could not miss having a spark of the Nationality which animated the '98 period. In addition our Parish is in sight of the "Windy-Gap, the rout taken by Humbert with his combined French and Irish Forces in his advance on Castlebar. This was related to us as a great historic event. Also we had a school teacher? Mr. John Casey N.W. God rest his soul, who would remind us of our ancestors and what they suffered. The men of '98 and the Irish Fenians. But in later years he feared and lamented the blood of Irishmen seemed to be getting cold.

Talks like this would cause us youngsters to dream and wonder if there was any chance of something of a National Military nature likely to happen in our time. If so what part would we take in it? Were we to be ruled by the foreigner for ever? Was the responsibility falling on our shoulders? Were we to be submissive all our lives? Are we really inferior to other nations?.

This teacher was among the first organisers of the Irish Language Classes in <sup>Ireland</sup> Newport. Those classes were kept going without a break until 1916., and <sup>such</sup> such classes had, I understand, the same continuous record throughout the County Mayo.

The Irish Classes were a great help towards the development of a genuine National outlook and an encouragement to the young men who were asking - Why should our country be subject to any outside power. <sup>Why, indeed.</sup>

At that period also even the children insisted on keeping the step when two or more walked together, whether on business or pleasure. Those ideas persisted for years after the Centenary <sup>celebrations</sup> of 1898. Then the Bore was <sup>longer for completion of the</sup> created a fresh wave of enthusiasm for a further number of years until the poor Boars were defeated about 1902.

Then in 1908 we got in touch with Arthur Griffith's paper, Sinn Fein, which warmed the hearts of all the boys who read it. This paper certainly engendered a great National outlook and hope in all Irishmen who were in touch with it. <sup>+</sup>

A little later about 1910 we got "Irish Freedom" a paper which made us feel that after all there was "some good men and true in Ireland still". The editor was Sean MacDermot and I need not leave you in doubt but that there was enough of sedition printed in that paper to please any Irishman.

About 1910 also the Hibernians Board of Binn were started in our district and almost all the young men in the Parish joined it.

In 1911 we had the famous Fr. Manus Sweeney Commemoration. *7th November*  
After roughly two years some of us became dissatisfied with the type of men we had in the organisation so we formed another branch of the Hibernians called the "American Alliance".

With the help of a good organisor we got this organisation extended over a large part of West Mayo. The result was that on St. Patrick's Day 1912 about two thousand young men paraded in Westport.

This organisation continued very strong in West Mayo until the volunteers was well established. Shortly after that a number of us were invited into the I.R.B. (Irish Republican Brotherhood) in 1914 which seemed to be strong in the Westport district for a long period. To say it persisted from the old days would perhaps be more correct.

I attended several meetings of the organisation ~~xxxx~~ in the Westport district for a period of about three years. From 1913 to 1915. A few organisers called during that period. About 1914 Sean McDermot *called*  
on us in the Newport district. He told me that according to the Fenian records - of the three best organised districts in Ireland, two of them were in the Newport Battalion area. Those districts were Tiernaure and Kilmeena.

This was information of which I have been very proud ever since and I cherish that knowledge very highly.

From my experience the I.R.B. and the Irish Volunteers seemed to draw strength and encouragement from each other. Presumably because the Volunteer activities was the open expression of both movements.

The older men in many districts were very proud when they witnessed the activities of the younger generation.

In the harvest of 1913 a small number of men in the Newport district had a meeting at which it was decided to send a letter to the press asking for the formation of a National Army. This was some time before we heard anything either of the Ulster Volunteers or the Irish Volunteers.

Later that year of 1913 when Carson got the arms landed at Larne in defiance of British Law a few of us decided to get our rifles as quickly as possible so we paid for three rifles and 500 rds. of ammunition.

Towards the end of 1913 after the arms landing at Larne the Irish Volunteers were been rapidly formed throughout the whole country. I attended the first meeting called by Colonel Maurice Moore to form the Volunteers in Mayo.

I believe this meeting was held in the Foristers Hall Castlebar in December 1913 about 8 p.m. There was a good attendance. I can now remember only Colonel Maurice Moore, some of the Ryans and T.S. Moclair. Moclair raised so many reasons or objections why we would not start the organisation at once, that we failed to make any headway and had to adjourn. Very shortly afterwards local Companies were formed throughout the whole country and splendid progress was made.

From records I know that a company of I. Volunteers was organised and established in Newport on 1st Feb. 1914. This Newport Company, which was up to full strength, and with various and peculiar ebbs and flows, kept going until the cease fire in 1923.

When this Company was formed and for some years prior to that there was very serious differences between the old United Irish League and the Junior league.

This Junior League was composed mostly of the young men of the parish, with our older supporters and friends. We were just after failing, by a few votes, to take over the whole working of the U.I.L. in our Parish.

In addition there was a lot of opposition between the two branches of the Hibernians (Board of Eirn and American Alliance) when the Volunteer Co. was started on the 1st Feb. 1914. Almost all the American Alliance men refused to join the V.Co. (Again because of the men that composed it)

Those conditions persisted until Redmond's nominees were expelled by H.Q. executive on 24th Sept. 1914. When that happened there was a cleavage in Newport V.Co. as elsewhere.

From the date of re-organisation this Co. never lost ground until the cease fire 1923. All the men in the "American Alliance" united with those who remained in the I. Volunteers after the division.

A County meeting was called soon after and a Mayo Brigade formed. Mr. ~~ML.~~ Joe McBride was elected Brigadier,

Mr. ML. McHugh, Vice Brigadier.

Mr. Dick Walsh, Adj. and Organiser

Mr. ML. Kilroy, Q.M..

Dick Walshe was also our representative on G.H.Q.

Open air drilling was now a regular feature in the evenings and every Sunday. I acquired, about this time, one 7m.m. rifle in splendid condition with 40 rounds of ammunition and two .32 revolvers with 50 rounds of ammunition.

John Redmond and his Parliamentary Party were very busy about this time getting the Home Rule Bill through the British Parliament, or as was sarcastically termed "On the Statute Book" "at no far distant date." This was a bill in which quite a large portion of our population had no confidence.

At the time John Redmond, understanding the feeling of our young men, felt that he should have a controlling influence on the Volunteer executive. He made this request early in 1914, which was eventually met by accepting 25 of his nominees. <sup>10</sup>

In the meantime the older leaders of the Volunteers, <sup>at G.H.Q.</sup> purchased 1,500 rifles and ammunition in Germany. Those were landed safely at Howth and Kilcool, Co. Wicklow in July 1914. This landing of arms was productive of high hopes and much rejoicing throughout the whole country.

I believe it was in the harvest of 1914 the Castlebar Company succeeded in getting about 25 rifles. The Company made a very impressive display when on public parade with those rifles. In my opinion those parades done the Volunteer organisation a great service, particularly the display and drill on the sports ground at Castlebar was very impressive. I remember also a very fine display of theirs on another occasion in Achill.

7.

The European <sup>war</sup> ~~was~~ <sup>war</sup> was declared in August 1914.

When this happened Redmond started recruiting for the British Army. This at once brought about a crisis in the Volunteer organisation, which now numbered close on 200,000 men.

The Irish Volunteers at once expelled the Redmond nominees who were on the governing body of the <sup>our</sup> movement. This division and the discouragement it caused reduced the number remaining in the Irish Volunteers to a small fraction of the original numbers. I presume every parish in Ireland had its division as we had ourselves in the West.

Even after this grave setback the I. Volunteers ~~at once expelled the~~ continued to train, arm and recruit as best they could.

When Briton was hard pressed on the European Battle front there was a cry for more and still more men. This was kept up for a long time.

It fairly turned the heads of the Shammeens in this country. One could see the grave worry written plainly on all their faces. There were <sup>lots of</sup> ~~lots~~

of catch-cries for recruiting freely used, such as - Ireland must at least keep the breaches filled in the ranks of the Irish regiments at the Front. Yes, and the quicker they would come the faster Briton would feed them to the German guns.

Those cries failed to have the desired effect, so they talked about conscription in case we did not come up to scratch. Any suggestion of this nature only helped our I. Volunteer efforts in the organisations.

The first Irish Volunteer convention was held in the Abbey Theater or 25th Oct., 1914. I attended this Convention as a deligate from the Newport Company. The convention lasted for two ~~or more~~ days.

It was arranged one of those days that the Dublin Brigade would have a "March Past" by the Abbey. Eoin McNeill taking the Salute. The convention suspended business while this was taking place.

Many of the Companies were dressed at that early stage in their New Gray-green uniforms. It was a thrilling sight for me. I can always visualise that magnificent display. The first of its kind I witnessed. They set a wonderful example on that occasion and their proud bearing was a delight to behold. I had a great feeling of well-being as a result of what I witnessed.

The Brigade must be at full strength even at that early stage, as the March Past of Company after Company seemed to be endless. The whole turnout was most impressive.

May God bless the boys of 1914.

In 1915 I secured three rifles and 500 rounds of 303 ammunition.

On taking over those guns I had a funny experience with the men in charge of the Q.M. stores. "In Dublin's Fair City" no less, I got a delivery note for them from Sean McDermot in De O'Lier St., It was at night so I went directly to the store in Hardwick St., There was a man on guard. He was looking over the street towards me, whistling and beating time with a rod on the railing. The street was semi-dark and I was light on foot, I also had rubber heels on. I passed the guard but suddenly wheeled in behind him so that he did not notice me until he heard me knocking on the door at his elbow. When the door was opened slightly the man on guard ducked in under the other mans arm. They all got a fright as they felt sure I was a detective. ~~Afterwards they told me that I was covered from inside by other men.~~ A lot now depended on my conduct and speech in the first few seconds, but on producing Sean McDermot's ~~10~~ note the whole matter was ironed out at once. Afterwards they told me that I was covered from inside by other men.

In April 1915 we had Diarmud Lynch visiting the various centres in the County Mayo. He afterwards called a Co. Meeting in the Westport district. As far as I can remember this was about the middle of May 1915. At this meeting I was selected to represent Co. Mayo.

Mr. Lynch then summoned a Provential meeting in Claremorris, roughly 23rd May. He came there but was not able to remain more than a few minutes. His mother had just died and he had barely time to catch his train for Cork.

This was a disappointment to all of us boys, meeting for the first time under I.R.B. Auspices. We had an exchange of views, however, on the state of the organisation in general all over the various Connaught centres. In particular the strength in each district and the Irish Volunteer activities were discussed.

Satisfaction was expressed at the vigour of the Volunteer organisation and the rapid progress which was been made in all quarters of the Country. The one weak point expressed by all - if only we could get arms fast enough.

I visited several of the towns in Mayo on behalf of the I.R.B. and with the help of local men, a few additional recruits were secured in several localities including Ballaghaderreen, Kiltimagh, Castlebar, Ballina, Westport, Claremorris and Newport.

Once I had occasion to visit Alec McCabe, N.T., in Kesh, Co.Sligo. Another occasion took me to Castlereagh on an ordinary bicycle of a dirty damp Sunday morning. Those meetings were usually small but the incentive gained by association with men so far apart, and of such a splendid and patriotic National outlook was surely very encouraging. This was particularly so because of the attraction the I.Volunteers organisation was proving to have for the young men of the whole country.

During the Summer and Harvest months of 1915 many Volunteer Training camps were established by General Headquarters. P.J.McDonnell, Leenane Col Galway and myself attended one of those Camps which lasted 14 days. It was held in the Glen of Aberlow and started on the 15th of August. The training and lectures were most valuable to all of us, while the association with men from the other counties was very interesting. McDonnell and I cycled most of the way in both directions. The morning of our start/we had breakfast in Tuam at 9 a.m. To us who had not travelled much of the country up to then, we found the varied scenery in each of the counties most striking, especially the beautiful wooded districts.

After our return home from this camp we endeavoured to carry out classes for instructions in the local Company areas. The rifles we had secured were a great asset to us in training the young men, most of whom never had an opportunity of learning the mechanism of a rifle prior to this. The chance now offering was eagerly availed of by the men of the local Companies.

Our Brigade had regular monthly meetings and accounts were regularly checked up at those meetings. In the intervening weeks Dick Walshe visited the various Companies with a view of checking on the activities of the organisation and encouraging further development.

I understand it was in 1915 the Castlebar Company mobilised with arms to take part in some particular function. This function was delayed or postponed with the result that the rifles were foolishly stacked in the Rooney Runey Hall for the night. During the night the rifles were stolen and our Volunteers were naturally very annoyed. They suspected the guilty party but could do nothing about it, so they sat tight and waited their opportunity. Besides suspecting the party who stole the Castlebar rifles there was also a strong suspicion as to where they were stored, and our Adj. had this suspicion also.

There had been some failure about delivering word to Mayo regarding the ~~de~~ rising of Ester Week. This left many a group in Mayo very disappointed. Our Adj., Dick Walshe was also in the same disgruntled predicament at Balla. He went for a walk on the Kiltimagh road when suddenly a Castlebar car raced past him towards Kiltimagh. He knew at least some of the men in the car also, it flashed into his mind that they were going for the Castlebar rifles. He returned at once to Balla and got a few of his men together with some small arms and waited around. He correctly surmised that they would surely call there to the Hotel for a drink on their return. This was exactly what they did and left the car filled with rifles outside the Hotel door without a guard or any protection whatever. This was right into our boys barrow.

Dick Walsh took possession at once but he had not all ~~the~~ rifles removed when McClair and his pals came out, for their merry drive to Castlebar. Instead they found themselves staring bewildered into Dick Walshe's revolver. Dick told those boys what he thought of their conduct and after removing all the rifles he sent them off to Castlebar in disgrace.

About 20 of those boys offered their service to the British Forces Easter Week in Castlebar.

Castlebar, Westport, Newport and West Galway kept in touch all the week. Westport men got impatient and went for a rout-march. The result of this was they had all their names checked up by the R.I.C. and spent a long term in prison after the rising. As a consequence there were ~~ten~~ men standing-to in Newport day and night for the week and another man

and another man part-time expecting a call all the week.

John Kilroy of Newport cycled down to <sup>Dannel</sup> ~~Dannel~~ Figgus who was staying in the village of Pullogh in Achill. Mr. Figgus gave John a long statement or address on two sheets of foolscap about "Reaping Victory" A Mr. Joyce whom Figgus sent with another dispatch some day later to us was arrested outside Newport.

The Newport Volunteers got very good information every morning of Easter Week from the Railway men and oolher occasional sources besides. We got very impatient looking across at the local R.I.C. Barracks which is offosite our house. Eventually after a council of war it was decided that we would construct an armour car and drive to Dublin. Being Coachbuilders this would not present any serious difficulty to us at the time. There was a new Sunbeam car in the Parish. Our idea was to seige this, then go out with our rifles and tools, tear down the armour-plating on the Railway bridge take it to the workshop and construct our car body.

We went to bed for the first time that week on Thursday night with a view to getting up to work early next day. On Friday morning we got the sad news that the City was on fire and a gun-boat up the Liffey shelling the City. This forced us to decide against our Armour-car idea for the time being. at least. X On Friday morning also one of the Newport youngsters ran all round the town shouting - "Hurra there is a ship up the Liffey and "Liberty Hall" is shelled". This was very disappointing to us, having to realize that one of our own children could sink to such depths as to rejoice at the destruction of his own people and country. What mentality had the people who reared him and where did such tripe originate? X Best left out

From that morning on one bad news followed another so that we were left in a very depressed state of mind. Our cause lost once more even though very many like ourselves were armed and standing idle, while a few others had to make superhuman effort and fail in the attempt. What a sad period for all Irishmen who had been working in the National interests. Just because our communication system was weak the widespread national effort was lacking and we failed.

This was clearly proven in the succeeding five years when the enemy were in a much stronger position to handle a rising. The European war being over. etc.,

hard working &  
Mr Thomas Donnell  
Newport House told  
them the same

When Michael heard  
They were in town  
he went over to see  
how many.

Our big problem now following the "Easter Rising" was to dispose of our arms, ammunition and equipment. We expected raids immediately so we had a most anxious week until the job was most thoroughly completed to our satisfaction.

We knew of the raids and arrests elsewhere, so we spent days and nights watching and listening for what never came off. Just as we ourselves expected we were watched and this made our undertaking extremely slow and difficult. Living in town nothing but the shrewdest deception could carry us through. Sure enough after a week in comms a Company of Military from Castlebar with full equipment. They halted on the Fair Green right <sup>insert here</sup> in the centre of Newport for some hours and then returned to ~~Castlebar~~ without interfering with anybody.

*Insert here*

There were no arrests made in the Newport district as a result of our Easter Week activities. In the Westport district all the men who went on parade "Easter Week" 60 and many others outside the town, about 10 were arrested and imprisoned until the following Christmas when most of them were released.

*Military*  
They came to arrest, Pat O'Donnell, Michael Kilroy & John. They consulted the Newport D. I., Adderley & Thomas O'Donnell Newport House.

Both of those men told the Officer that they never saw ~~them~~ them do anything wrong; that they were hard working boys & mended their own business

In Spring of 1917 Dick Walsh gave us information that the Irish Volunteers were been organised again and asked us to help. Every man gave the required undertaking to start organising without delay. He called a general meeting in Michael Stauntons, Islandeady, perhaps the first week in May. There was a good representative crowd of young men from all over West Mayo. The news of reorganising the Irish Volunteers was enthusiastically received by all present.

From the date of that meeting every Parish seemed to fall in line without any difficulty. Dick Walshe as organising Secretary was extremely busy and spent all his time on the road.

In those days there was a continuous rumour about conscription for the British Army. The more this was published the better we liked it; as it was sure to make the I. Volunteer position stronger. It would keep our boys more enthusiastic and therefore more active.

There was now a great run on .22 rifles and ammunition over a wide area, even Nurse Linda Kearns would have no scruple in taking all we could bay hands on, all the way down to Sligo God Bless her. Poor "Mayo God help us" could do with what was left. She did get away with quite a ~~hat~~ but not all. Austin McDonnell, Louisburgh, Ml. Manion and P. Keane, Glenhest were regular callers also. However, we were fortunate in getting quite a few of those rifles and a lot of ammunition, which proved of great help to the boys in training. Those little rifles were a means of improving the marksmanship of the Volunteers imensley.

Occasionally G.H.Q. ordered a general parade and rout march to be carried out in all I. Volunteer areas on a given day. Those were faithfull observed and operated in West Mayo Brigade area with enthusiasm.

We had lots of reason for humour and enjoyment also as a side-line, which proved a great help in our serious training and long rout marches.

There was always an R.I.C. man or Sergeant detailed to keep us under close observation. He would accompany us quite close on all occasions. Not a long ranged field-glass business. Oh no, they must impress us that the law was watching every man. He would usually be much older than the Volunteers who were all young and active. He would be a man of sober thought and experience in Empire service. Perhaps a man aspiring for stripes.

Those fellows could not understand our brazen actions coming so soon after the Executions and blood spilling of our Leaders of the "Easter Week Rising" Also the mass arrests and imprisonments had proved of no avail.

Their eyes were popping out at <sup>us</sup> that they heard and saw on those occasions They could not understand this 'no fear of the Law' business. They would remind you of a hen with a brood of ducklings, when the poor hen passes by a stream for the first time she meets with disaster (she thinks). She suddenly finds herself deprived of all her brood for the ducklings (knowing a good thing when they see it) take to the stream like "a duck to water". The hen not understanding, thinks her youngsters are all gone mad. She is overwhelmed. What would a step-mother hen know about ducks anyway?

Neither could a dutyfull aspiring R.I.C. man understand our young men's interest in an Irish Republic. The R.I.C. man thinks we are surely gone crazy and <sup>it's</sup> not safe to be in the same street with us.

When this stage in his mental outlook was reached we usually administered a mental sedative, by the application of a dose of complete physical exhaustion. After the dose he would not have any desire to think. He would not be able to think, it would be too painful, in fact it would be impossible. All he would require was rest, rest, and then lots of relaxation afterwards. This dosage was simply an eight mile route-march. Four miles out and four back, with a good proportion of this done at the double. The exhaustion thus produced left the R.I.C. man very docile.

Owing to the conditions then existing we would not even pass him the consolation of sympathy, even if we felt that way inclined. But were we? with the tragedy of Easter Week so recent. Certainly not. He was the butt of many jests instead.

In 1917 the R.I.C. developed the habit of using their batons freely. <sup>AS</sup> On a counter measure the I. Volunteers decided to meet force with force. It was <sup>us</sup> customary for each I. V. to carry a baton in his hip pocket in order to stop this new development. I believe the idea was very effective.

The election of Mr. De. Valera for East Clare on the 11th July 1917 was the cause of much rejoicing all over Ireland. A number of our boys from Westport went down to Clare electioneering for the occasion. In Newport area we had a Torch-light procession and carried the Tricolour.

This was looked upon as a big achievement at the time because of the craze the R.I.C. had for pulling down the National Flag. They did not interfere with ours on that occasion, so we looked upon the event as another step on our road to freedom.

I believe it was in November or December of this year that there was a review of the Irish Volunteers called for in Castlebar. I know the various companies marched long distances. They could have travelled otherwise, but being army men they chose this as the correct method to adopt for the occasion. Kilmeena and Newport Companies marched 11 miles to the review.

The Green in Castlebar was entirely too small to contain all the men on review. The Companies had not room to move about. Mr. DeValera who came for the review was very well satisfied with the numbers of young men who were on parade. Every man mobilized for the occasion carried his customary baton, lest the R.I.C. might get notions of a baton charge. At that period it was a customary pastime of theirs, if they saw a few men together, to display the ability of "The Force".

At this period also Sinn Fein was organised all over the Country. We had a splendid organisation of that body in ~~the~~ West Mayo. Alternative monthly meetings were held in Westport and Castlebar. Fr. Conroy P.P., Kilmeena and Fr. Meehan, Castlebar were outstanding in their work and efforts. They were a tower of strength to the organisation.

This was a purely political organisation but it spread so rapidly in 1917 that the British Government seemed to get uneasy and were anxious to stop its spreading. As a result they had wholesale arrests throughout the country.

Training was still pressed on by the Volunteers but the lack of arms was felt as a serious difficulty all over the Country, but in the West we had scarcely any. We had raids for arms, but all that was secured in that way were shot guns and ammunition.

Early in 1920 we succeeded in getting some rifles and ammunition from G.H.Q. Those with about a half dozen we already had put great heart into the boys of the West Mayo Brigade. Mobilisation, number, place, time,

On March the 16th 1921 the Louisburgh Battalion Area, with a view to having some action there, sent a few men into Louisburgh in order to make touch with the enemy but they failed to do so.

We were informed on the morning of the 17th March that a number of police drove over to Louisburgh from Westport right along through Murrisk and Lecanvey, which is right under Croagh Patrick on the north side and bourdering the sea shore in many places. We marched along the side of Croagh Patrick that morning through fields of shallow snow and went into Ambush in the Murrisk district, west of Campbells and remained there until nightfall without any sign of the enemy.

So on St. Patrick's day we had our first experience of Active Service conditions in association with one another in a service unit.

Somewhere, somehow a beginning must be made by somebody.

More than three decades have passed since the A.S. period of '21, ended. Now the 4th set of youngsters are going through school with very little knowledge of the struggle etc.,

It is time to correct that weakness or deficiency in our Educational training.

Early organisation and outlook for the future.

'No emigration' The watchword as distinct from that of our ancestor

CONCERTS. Their effect owing to British attitude.

DAIL Courts of Law.

### TRAINING

By Elections. - Magnificent achievements in Roscommon, Longford and Clare also Kilkenny City.

ARRESTS Their effect on our organisation.  
Ned Moan's arrest and his return to Westport for trial.  
The sprig of Shelalagh used that day.

Effect on British recruiting. Complaint by Milling.

1920. October, Military raidings on our premises.  
Jack Quinn shot in foot and back.  
Paddy O'Malley beaten because of his answers.

We had The O'Rahilly and Lean Mellows at a Volunteer rally in Westport early in 1916. Perhaps St. Patrick's day?

Milling's remarks re Recruiting for British army in Westport.

General effect on organisation.

Active service in Mayo.

Success of our various Units.

Evading the enemy and achieving our objective.

Cuman na Mban Organisation.

Our objective yet unachieved.

Westport R.I.C. Barracks attacked with a bomb. March 1st 1918

I. Volunteers parade and control public roads at Kiltimagh. 3rd March 1918.

13th March 1918. Police baton charge Civilions at Westport.  
very embarrassing application of conscription, with Ireland resisting would proclaim to the world, an Ireland unfree, a very forceful reason for not enforcing it.

5th May, 1918. DeValera and John Dillon address on anti-conscription meeting from some platform in Ballaghaderreen.

1918 Flu Ravages.

2. Notes.

- 14th Sept. 1918 I.Volunteers carry battons to meetings . Law courts.
- 28th Oct. 1918. Civilians attack R.I.C. and military Band with stones after trial of I.Volunteers in Ballina.
- 29th March, 1919. J.C. Milling R.M. shot in Westport.
- 4th April, 1919 Dail Eireann, authorises issue of Republican Bonds (Dail Loan).
- 14th April, 1919 Westport S.F.Club closed by Police.
- 11th May, 1919 British Forces refuse to admit Irish Americal Delegates to Westport. Great excitement on their arrival in Westport district.
- 25th May, 1919. Mayo Gaelic League Concert at Ballinasloe prohibited?
- 17th Nov. 1919 Sligo Civilians attack R.I.C. and prevent arrest of Patk. Hegarty. Several R.I.C. injured.
- 1919 - 20 Brother Dominic's death, McMahon Training Camp, My sore leg.
- Dail Eireann Courts.
- Dail Loan.

912  
- 8

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Our .303 ammunition in Skirdagh.

Captain John Duffy.

Vice Com. Malone.

Jimmie Flaherty, Not Flannigan, was our gunner.

Joe Ring was alone and isolated out on the hillocks west of us about 200 yds. away.

I believe Mr. McGreal was alive and well in June, 1921. Therefore no widow.

Capt. Duffy had no cover to avail of when advancing with his men on the first lorry - but Joe Baker and his section moved down a little brook towards the road from the field at base on the first lorry, expressly to protect Capt. Duffy in his advance on the lorry.

STATEMENT BY GENERAL MICHAEL KILROY,  
Newport, Co. Mayo.

Part 11.

Active Service Unit Operations.

Several attempts having been made by the A.S.U. at Cardaragh,<sup>o</sup> Murrisk (Glosh Patrick,) Glenisland, Islandeady, Kilbride, Berrishoole Bridge, Yellow River, Drumultra, Clogher Cross and Westport to bring off an engagement without avail, a further effort was now to be made.

In addition, we felt the situation very grave ourselves. Owing to the many fruitless effort we had made, with all the planning and worries entailed, we felt disappointed. The hardships endured through spending whole days lying in ambush positions and sometimes hidden in trenches was not to our liking. The situation was becoming desperate. If possible contact must be made with the enemy without further delay.

Great care must be exercised in order to keep the knowledge of our movements secret. If any of our men indulged in loose talk about our operation plans and outsiders got to know about what was to take place, there would be grave danger of the enemy getting to know too-much and counter acting quickly and with advantage, on that knowledge. Secrecy of movement was a matter of extreme difficulty, when from thirty-five to forty men had to be billeted in two or more villages at the same time. This unavoidable risk imposed a restriction on the natural inclination of people to discuss unusual happenings. The people in localities where our A.S.U. were billeted realised the danger to us, what loose talk about our movements would involve, kept their knowledge to themselves and never gave us any reason to regret our confidence in their discretion or to doubt their loyalty to us.

On March 22nd, 1921, the A.S.U. arrived in Claddy village and was informed that it was customary for the Drummin police to visit Darby Hasting's public house occasionally. This house is on the Leenane-Westport road and close to Carrowkennedy Church. This would mean a journey for them of just over three miles by the Oughty Carrowkennedy road from Drummin Barracks to Hastings. It was a fairly bright moonlit night, so we decided to inspect the road to Oughty for an ambush position.

We had heard so much previous to this from many local and British propaganda sources of the cowardice of the Volunteers in shooting at British forces from behind fences that the taunt affected us very much. We felt it was up to us to vindicate ourselves. No man, least of all an Irishman, likes to be called a coward. We would make our slanderers swallow their ridiculous and ill-founded accusations, and attack the enemy in the open with the advantage of numbers against us.

Commandant Joe Ring, Vice Commandant James Malone and myself set out from Claddy at about 7 p.m. on Tuesday, 22nd March, 1921. It was a dull moonlight night. We crossed the Leenane-Westport road and turned in on the Oughty road leading west. We were in only about four hundred yards and past a small rise in the road, when one of the boys, Malone, looked behind him and saw a bunch of men on the horizon, cycling up towards us.

"It's the police", he said, "and there are four of them, on bikes."

At this particular point of the road, there was a low clay fence on either side, most suitable for cover. The fence on the north side was black and fresh, as if it had been newly-made that day, and there was no brush or briar of any kind to interrupt our view or impede us if we wished to take cover, so that we could slip across without any difficulty whatever. I had my mind made up we would not avail of those advantages.

There was a house within 150 or 200 yards of us, on the north-west side of the road, and as we drew near to it, the strains of Irish music came to our ears. We had heard little music that dreary wet winter in all our travels - as wet a winter as ever came in our time in the West of Ireland. <sup>T</sup> Almost every house we entered in West Mayo had always a portion of turf up the chimney to dry. The previous summer was so wet that scarcely anybody got the turf saved in any sort of fair condition.

The music, lilting and lively, impressed us a lot and one of the boys remarked: "There must be a dance on in there. They seem to be enjoying themselves."

While we had felt for many months past that all our planning, debating, marching and counter-marching had seemed so much waste of time, we now felt, all in a flash, that it was a splended and necessary preparation for this, our first engagement with the enemy. Thinking of conditions as they then existed throughout the country and the hardships we had endured steadied our nerves and prepared us for the impending encounter.

Now the police were within a few yards of us. In a matter of seconds, they would be in our midst with the odds in their favour. Here they were and, even now, I could not bear to order the boys to take cover, much less to do so myself. Instead, I ordered them to walk on the grass margin of the road, on the north side, while I remained on the other side. They may have thought me crazy, but they were late to do anything about it, and I never heard them complain afterwards. Joe Ring had a revolver; Malone and I had a Peter-the-Painter each. I had then carried mine for about six months. It contained ten rounds of ammunition, and I fancied it for that reason *which displayed my lack of experience* and because it was so quick to reload with a spare magazine.

On their coming up and seeing the road open, one of the police raced past us on his bicycle while the other three jumped off theirs, just about one yard behind us. This was all the challenge we needed. Those men represented a foreign power in our country and we were out to end their domination as quickly as possible.

Both parties opened up instantly, and the music-filled night was shattered by the rapid rat-tat-tat of gunfire. We were not surprised afterwards when the local people said that several machine guns had opened up in full blast. The lights went out immediately in the house nearby.

At once I sensed that the man who had cycled past us could be a serious danger. It was a manoeuvre apparently designed with forethought, as we heard no order issued; so I issued the foolish command while we were all extremely busy; "Look after that man gone up the road". (We had accustomed ourselves to avoid mentioning each other by name.) So that my simple order left me engaged with three men on a narrow road, the furthest man not more than nine feet away, and my gun rapidly becoming empty. My bullets were only .32 - shining and clean nickel - that had not the stopping power of a heavier lead bullet and would only sting and annoy if you did not hit some vital part of the body. There was not time to take deliberate aim; it was a case of blaze away and hope for results - results which showed no evidence whatever of coming. Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw the furthest man, with deadly intent, taking careful and steady aim at me. Just then, I had a terrible buzzing in my ear, as a result of a near miss by a bullet that must have almost got its mark. While this man was still aiming, the other two were blazing away at me, and I had to try and liquidate them very quickly, so I slung them one each and then snapped a third at the man who was aiming so intently to take my life away. I thought I might spoil his aim at least, if only I could be in time. I was doing the best I could to save myself, and perhaps it was not of Ireland alone I was thinking, for I was in a desperate hurry and wondering what was holding up that hunk of lead I expected. ~~Bread~~ ~~of road, a matter of nine feet only, separated us.~~ Thanks be to God, it never came, and later I picked it out of his gun myself.

The trigger could not fall because my bullet arrived first. It went through the policeman's fingers, hit the rib, or centre, of the revolver grip, bending it in and jamming the hammer at full-cock, so that it could not fall, thereby preventing further danger from that direction.

Then the three men turned and ran - two over the road eastwards to cover, and the third across the road. This man put his arm on the low sod fence, evidently intending to jump in, but his arm folded under him and he rolled in, head first, instead. I have always wondered why

the men ran when they did. Could it be that they knew it was no use expecting help from their man who had gone ahead because I had sent my two companions to deal with him, thereby cutting them off from all chance of reinforcement or help?. In any case, he was not likely to do us any harm, for fear of hitting his own pals, as our men prevented him from moving around. Was it that my seemingly useless little nickel bullets were stinging them so effectively that their lead slugs went everywhere but where they aimed them to go, because their nerves were seriously shaken? Or were they so badly hit that they did not know what was happening? Perhaps their guns were empty by this time, as my own was.

I immediately dived into the field on the opposite north side of the road for protection and re-loaded what was, by this time, my much despised pistol, with a fresh clip of ammunition. I then called Joe Ring to come along and help get out the two men who had taken cover. He came at once but engaged himself quite casually in disarming the man he saw lying down and apparently knocked out, while the other two policemen were only a few yards away and could easily enfilade him. He was using a brilliant torch which made him an easy target. I saw the danger but could not warn him, for fear of inspiring the other policemen with ideas. I did, however, order him back to help me get the other two but he was so obsessed with getting the revolver that I felt the seconds very long indeed under such risks. He came at last and, at my request, flashed the light up the trench, so that I could control it with gun-fire.

When the two men under cover heard my words, they immediately shouted a simultaneous "I surrender", and stood up. One of them was not more than three feet away from my face, as only the thickness of the low fence separated us, and I confess, the shout and his sudden appearance, so near, fairly startled me.

I ordered them out on the road. The furthestmost of the two, about five yards away, was slow in coming out, so I hurried to him and

kept the light shining on him. His revolver was attached to him by a lanyard. It was lying on the ground, at full cock, with his hand open and just over it. I felt he was going to grab it and fire at me. He looked very wild and aggressive, and took no notice of my repeated orders. He appeared as if he were about to spring on me. I threatened to fire, but it had no effect on him, so I did fire, as I thought, along his ribs.

"I am done now", he said, and walked out on to the road. I regretted this very deeply afterwards, because it may have been my own fault for standing too near to him on his way out with the strong flash-light in his eyes.

When we got the two men out on the road and disarmed them, the man Vice Commandant Malone was riding <sup>e</sup>hard on to the west of us, surrendered when he saw that the others had yielded. He was taken along to us without further difficulty. We then collected their bicycles and broke them up. This hurt us as much as it must have hurt the enemy. If we had presented the bikes to any of our friends, it might be the cause of getting them into trouble, if and when one of the frequent enemy raids took place and the bicycles were discovered. So there was nothing for it but to crush them with rock or our boots, for want of more suitable means.

When this was completed, we gave the police a short lecture on the unpatriotic stand the "Irish Constabulary" were maintaining against their own country and countrymen - in some cases, against their own brothers and cousins. We also gave them orders not to be found in the enemy ranks against us in future, as they would not get off so lightly a second time. We then left them to look after themselves and their comrade who seemed to be in a bad condition. We were told later that he died a few hours afterwards.

Our capture consisted of four revolvers, with a sparse supply of ammunition, and one shotgun, one or two scabbards and one egg-bomb. We then retraced our steps to Clady as quickly as possible, where we found all the boys and the villagers in anxious suspense, as they had heard all the gunfire and could not make out what was happening until we brought the news. This was received with much rejoicing when they saw we were back safe and sound without the slightest injury of any kind.

After a hasty tea, we left Clady and went eastwards to Ardree and a neighbouring village. We had been told that there was an expected arrival in Westport of bloodhounds, to be used in tracking down the I.R.A. Knowing this the various members of the A.S.U. insisted on carrying the three of us on their backs, in turn, until we came to the bed of a shallow stream which we followed for a long distance, thus ensuring that we left no trail to be picked up by the bloodhounds.

I believe it was on this night of the 22nd March that Dr. Madden joined us at Ardree. It was arranged at a meeting earlier in the year that he would join the A.S.U. when we started operations. His punctual arrival on the occasion was much appreciated by all in the unit. We knew that his active participation would add prestige, not merely to the unit, but to our whole organisation in the West.

On our journey that night, we saw the Verrey lights going up from Drummin Barracks, which meant a call to Westport for police and Auxiliaries. When we arrived in Ardree, about 2 a.m., we had our sentries posted as usual, and then retired to bed.

The following morning, I asked for a crowbar, to enable me to fix the jammed revolver we had captured. It was in McGing's I did this repair job. When Jack Connolly went out to look for the bar, he met Michael G. Brown who asked, "What's on, Jack?".

Jack explained about the crowbar.

"What! You damn fool! Ha, Ha, Ha!", laughed Brown.

"Don't you know it's pulling your leg they are? A crowbar to fix a broken revolver! Ha, Ha, Ha! Who ever heard the likes? I heard of the tobacco smugglers making poteen punch so strong for Captain O Maille, that they bent the big spoon they had when stirring it. They wanted to show their gratitude for the cheap tobacco he was bringing them. But a crowbar to fix a revolver! For goodness' sake, Jack, don't, or you will have the rest of the boys making jokes about the Newport 'flats'. We'll never hear the end of it. Don't you know that?"

"I can't help it - it's an order. Come along, Brown, and help me find one. I must get it."

"Clear off, you dope, or I'll give you a crowbar in the right place where it will do you most good. My God, look at that poor fellow off ..." Brown has a litany of swear words all his own. Some say he has it copyrighted. In any event, it would be unfair to use it here.

When I had stripped the fibre grip off the revolver frame, I found that the rib, which my bullet had bent inwards, jamming the spring movement, had put the mechanism out of action, so that the hammer could not fall. When the parts were dismounted, it was easy to force the bent rib into position, with the aid of a hammer and the crowbar, which had arrived notwithstanding the storm created by Brown. When remounted, it proved perfect, and it was this gun I carried through the rest of the campaign.

The success of this Carrowkennedy operation, small though it was, gave the whole A.S.U. a much better outlook, and was a great boost to morale. Our friends throughout the area even began to make jokes of the affair.

One man challenged by another, who asked, "What can they do without arms, no matter how good they are?", was heard to reply, "The enemy has lots of arms. The boys will take them when they want them". This was the reply of an old Fenian, Captain Patrick Kelly.

The report given in the 'Irish Independent' of the 24th March, 1921, reads as follows:-

"Sergeant Coughlin, R.I.C. Constabulary, was killed, and Constables Maguire, Love and Creedon seriously wounded in an ambush at Carrowkennedy, Westport".

Report says that attack took place at 8 p.m. on Tuesday night, 22nd March, 1921.

I would like to draw the reader's attention to the above report. Our honest-to-God stand-up fight in the middle of the road, with the odds in the enemy favour, is called an ambush. But this is the kind of news dished up to the general public at the time - presumably, 'under censorship.

This fight is not to be confused with our fight in the same townland on June 2nd, 1921, which I will describe in detail later.

There is another report in the 'Independent' of 28th March, 1921: The heading is "Property Destroyed In Westport Parish and Westport district many houses were burned. Goods were taken out of shops in the town of Westport and burned on streets: Those activities by the tans were intended as reprisals for the Carrowkennedy fight.

On 15th May, 1921 the Castlebar Battalion A.S.U. joined with the Westport and Newport units at the villages of Bunrower, Rockfield, Upper and Lower, just off the Westport-Ballinrobe road, at Aille.

An officers' meeting was held on 17th May, 1921, to consider ways and means of making touch with, and engaging the enemy.

Up to this time our efforts to get the necessary and correct information quick enough to intercept their movements was a failure.

After considering various plans, it was decided to cut all ~~the~~ roads in the Brigade area, save one. The Westport-Newport county road was selected as the most likely to give the opportunity we had in mind. It was decided, therefore, to leave this road open, and try to intercept any movement made by the enemy on it.

On the 17th, we had Confession, Mass and Holy Communion in Mrs. Geraghty's of Bunrower. That night, we crossed to the Ballinacorrige district.

The following evening, 18th May, 1921, we occupied an ambush point in the Drumneen district, at a bend on the Castlebar-Westport road.

All that passed was one car to Castlebar, with a priest and his driver. They had planks in their car to bridge a cutting we had made in the road.

A motor-cyclist came from the Westport district and was ordered back. We did not mind it being known in Westport that we were in this locality, for reasons of our own.

About seven o'clock in the evening, it was decided to order Vice Commandant James Malone, Captain Johnnie Duffy and six others into the Westport area, to try and create a bit of excitement by shooting any of the enemy they might see in there.

Commandant Joe Doherty, Newport Battalion, Staff Captain Jim Moran and Capt. Jim Brown were sent out earlier, and had left to do likewise over at Newport.

Those Newport men were only in position at 8 p.m. on Carrabaun Hill when the Newport Sergeant walked out into the Barrack yard. The distance was roughly, three hundred yards, straight south-east of the barrack to the post occupied by our men.

There was only one shot fired, but the Sergeant fell, mortally wounded, and died some hours later.

Immediately after the shot, a number of Tans and police ran out to the barrack wall, flanking the Newport-Castlebar road. They concentrated their fire on my house, which is almost opposite and about three hundred yards away.

When my wife heard the first I.R.A. shot, she looked out the front window and across at the barrack. She saw the first man run from the barrack to the wall. When he fired - luckily for her - it was in the front door the bullet came, as otherwise she could have been shot at the window.

She immediately lifted the baby out of the pram and lay down on the floor. She got the maid to do likewise with the older child. They were under concentrated fire until 10 p.m. When the firing ceased, they were almost smothered with the dust of mortar and plaster being torn off by the flying bullets.

The maid then brought a mattress from upstairs, and the four of them slept on it till 12.30 p.m., being overcome by exhaustion resulting from the heavy atmosphere and two hours' terrible strain.

They were wakened up by a loud knocking on the inner door and a demand by Tans to open up and let them in.

As the glass panels of the front door were broken by gunfire, it was easy for the Tans to put in a hand and undo the lock, which evidently was what they did.

Those men were immediately followed by others who went upstairs and all over the rooms, breaking the windows, presumably, to ventilate the fire which they got under way almost at once.

The women did not know how many police were present, but there seemed to be a crowd everywhere they turned.

Immediately on arrival, they ordered the women out with the children. My wife would not be permitted to take even the pram for the baby with her. When she was going out the door, a Tan, with an English accent, followed her with a rug and said, "Take this. We have babies ourselves".

When she went out, there was a line of police, eight to ten in number, firing up the hill. They were lined up against the road wall, shoulder to shoulder. She asked the nearest man of those what it was all about, but he did not answer.

She then went over to her sister Mrs. John Kilroy, Main St., Newport. Both of them, with their seven children and <sup>nieces</sup> ~~nieces~~, went out to my father and sisters, Maggie and Tillie, in Derrylahan, about a mile from town.

Mrs. John Kilroy says that they were fired on by a Tan that evening when Annie Mulderrig, the maid, appeared at the door.

The shop goods in brother John's were pitched out on the street by the Tans, after my house and the workshops were set on fire. The Tans were then going to set fire to John's house until somebody told them the house was owned by a very good friend of theirs.

John Kilroy was arrested and imprisoned since 6th January, 1921. He was in Galway for a period and afterwards in the Rath Comp, Co. Kildare. He, therefore, was away when all this excitement took place.

On the day of the 17th May, 1921, the Brigadier of West Connemara, P.J.McDonnell, and his Quartermaster, Jack Feehan, who was a native of Kilmeena parish,,arrived in Kilmeena. P.J.McDonnell got married to my sister, Tillie, on that day. They had a wedding party in Mrs. Feehan's, Rossow.

On their arrival from Connemara in our parish, very late on the night of the 16th May, they called in to Owney Kean's, Cuilmore, to discover they had only missed a raid by the Tans and police from Newport.

The police gave Owen a terrible beating and prodding with a shotgun. They forced his sister, Catherine, into one of the rooms and when, on hearing her brother shout with the abuse he was receiving, she would make an effort to get up to him, one of the Tans would then let fly a piece of delph or an egg at her.

A large portion of her delph was broken this way and a big box of eggs also. Any eggs they did not pelt were walked upon.

Catherine had about two hundred of them in a box, all of which were made into a terrible mess over the kitchen walls and floor.

The Tans also called on Thomas Lyons, Cuilmore, after finishing with Owen Keane, and gave him a most unmerciful beating. Then after strewing all the broken window glads of the house on to the floor, they forced Thomas to walk upon it in his bare feet. Later they put him to bed, brought in his horse to the bedroom and did their best to make the horse go into the bed. The horse did put his two forefeet in on Thomas but when Thomas groaned the horse withdrew on recognising his master and could,not be forced to do so again. This beating broke Tom's health and the poor man died a few years afterwards. Thomas was a brother of Commandant Ned Lyons. Ned was the choice of all the companies in the Newport Battn. and beloved by all. He was arrested about 20th Oct. 1920 and brought to Westport Quay where he was detained by the military

for some days. He was seen going through Westport in a military lorry without even a jacket on him. We were led to understand he refused to put on prison uniform and that he went on hunger-strike. I visited him during the Truce, but he did not know me then. He was very <sup>thin</sup> deduced and changed physically. I understand he had been forcibly fed for a long period before he died.

The Tans carried on in even more ridiculous fashion with Stephen McGough the same night. They shaved one side of his head and one half of his moustache, then brought in his cow and put Stephen riding on her through the house, after which they galloped her out the door. Evidently they expected he would be smashed by the lintel and brushed off the cow's back. This did not happen, however, for Stephen, though unpretentious, was able to rise to the occasion, though, perhaps, to "duck down" would be more in keeping with what he did. In any event he achieved what seemed impossible - going through a low narrow door on a cow's back in full gallop and without a scratch, with Stephen hugging the cow's neck. He says "he fairly laid in the spurs when he got out in the open". The cow turned up a byroad to the farm. The Tans <sup>out</sup> ran/after him and did their best to shoot him. "When I got in the clear", he says, "all the devils in hell would not catch me and the poor frightened cow". When Stephen got out on his own hill it was an easy matter for him to dodge his unwelcome visitors. Hours afterwards when he saw them, by the light of their cars, leave the district he returned to his house only to leave it again as quickly as the cow took him earlier in the night. Before the Tans left Stephen's house, they got a calf, rolled him up in the blanket and put him into the bed. On Stephen's return he immediately saw the blankets jumping and naturally thought it was some of the Tans who waited behind the others in order to get him on his return, so he cleared out mighty fast.

After their visit and interview with those people McDonnell and Feehan had lots of news for their friends over in Rossow, when they arrived in the early hours of the morning of the 17th.

The following night after the marriage and wedding party the two boys required to go across by Newport from Rossow on the south to Derrylahan on the north side. After proceeding cautiously they arrived in the corner of a field at Kilbride. They were about to go out on the county road within a half mile of Newport. They paused for a moment to make sure of their surroundings, as had to be done always on such occasions. There was a tramp of many feet immediately beside them. The two boys had to lie down in an elevated place about 4-foot over the road without any cover whatever. It was a large group of Tans and if they looked they could not miss seeing the two boys as they were on the edge of the bank. They had not time to move back even a few yards where there was lots of cover at their elbows.. The Tans crossed the fence just opposite.

It was at this point some members of the local I.R.A. Companies lay in ambush for an officer of the Tans, named Fudge, on the 17th March, 1921. We have been told that the Tans occupied this position many times after the I.R.A. attempted their ambush.

The problem for the two boys now was how to get out of this dangerous position without attracting attention. The enemy was only about 20 yards away and if the slightest noise was made the game was up. The boys first got their bombs and revolvers ready. If they were discovered their only chance was to sling the enemy everything they had in order to keep their position from being rushed. This preparation being made, the boys now started their tedious retreat. Moving backwards inch by inch, feet first, was no easy matter when such extreme caution had to be exercised. However, they succeeded, after a long suspense of this trying ordeal, in getting far enough back to come under cover. They were then able to stand up and walk off.

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A wide detour had now to be made in order to get to Derrylahan, owing to scarcity of bridges over Newport river. They succeeded in getting there without further mishap. The following day, 18th May, was very quiet in Derrylahan until evening came.

After the shooting of Sergeant Butler at 8 p.m. in Newport McDonnell was given a lively start for his honeymoon. The unceasing rattle of gunfire for hours was, I am confident, a most undesirable atmosphere. Such a condition, I am sure, would have a depressing effect on the most ardent spirited. The gunfire was only across the hill, half a mile away as the crow flies. P.J. McDonnell and Jack Feehan did not leave Derrylahan until after the Kilroy women and children from Newport arrived there. When they set out for West Connemara they had the first mile of their journey illuminated by the blaze of the timber shops and houses at Newport.

On the night of the 18th May we had all our arms thoroughly cleaned and oiled before leaving Ballinacorrigha. We left about 11 a.m. and went on to Brockagh where we arrived about midnight. This is a distance of over three miles.

It took us about two hours to arrange with the local company for outposts and communications, as some of the men lived quite a distance apart and were then in bed. We required the service of this company in connection with the fight we were looking forward to in Kilmeeena on that day; also it was likely our line of retreat would be through this district. Our eight riflemen, whom we had sent in to the Westport district, had not yet arrived. This caused us much grave worry. They were the most experienced men of the A.S.U.

At 2 a.m. on 19th May we left Brockagh and arrived at Knocknabolia railway bridge, Kilmeeena, three miles distant at about 3 a.m. The beautiful May morning was just beginning to creep across the lovely low green hill of the surrounding district. We expected that this elevated bridge, on which the county road crosses the railway

at right angles, would be our principal point of attack. There was a sharp right angle bend each side of the bridge. On the Westport side the hill of Knockabolia had been cut away to a depth of 14 feet in order to give space for the county road approach to the bridge. This whole layout was an ideal position for a few seasoned soldiers to occupy, if we had sufficient rifle men to protect their flanks. Without this it would be next to impossible to get safely away. I felt I could not put men into a position from which there was not a reasonable chance of escape. With 14 of our best rifle-men absent there was nothing left for us but to abandon this most favourable position.

On our arrival we had only 22 riflemen and 16 shotgun men. Now we gravely felt the absence of our dear Westport and Newport riflemen and wondered if they had run into serious trouble after leaving us at Drimeen. If we had only information of the enemy movements so as to know which side they were likely to come from, it would be a great help to us. We could then block the road to suit the occasion. This information was entirely lacking. The site around the bridge is very narrow and owing to its two right handed turns could be easily blocked in a most favourable manner from either side of approach. The only men of what was left of our A.S.U. now present, who had been under fire, were Paddy Cannon of Castlebar, and myself. The line of retreat from the bridge across Knockabols hill was very bare. The hill is about 150 feet high and rises gradually from the bridge for about 200 yards back.

Without any hesitation we decided against this position. Instead, we placed Vice Brigadier Ned Moane with Michael Staunton and Jack Connolly on top of the hill behind the new Congested District Board fence as our right flank protection. We then crossed southwards about 200 yards to Messrs Commins' and O'Grady's fields, where we had plenty of parallel fencing and cover. The first fence occupied, mostly by shotgun men, was within 50 yards of the county road. We sent the Adjutant, Johnnie Gibbons, to the top of Clooneen Hill on the south

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with Butch Lambert to protect our left flank. This position was south of us and covered the road leading from Westport, about 400 yards away from our main body. Gibbons had no rifle, only a revolver with four rounds of ammunition. Lambert's rifle was a single shot Martini. Our two flanking parties had now about one mile of the country road under observation.

Dr. Madden occupied a position about 200 yards east from the county road, behind a new C.D.B. fence which runs parallel to the county road. This fence is on the south side of Knocknabola Hill and within 250 yards of our main position from its lower end next to us. This was the corner Dr. Madden occupied most of the day. He had the liberty of moving up and down under cover of this fence at will. He availed of this movement <sup>advantage</sup> occasionally during the day.

Tailor John O'Flynn's house is about 70 yards south east from the bridge in a straight line, but about 40 yards in off the main road.

Our Quartermaster, Tommie Ketterick, and Captain Jim Kelly, with some other assistance, almost depleted Mrs. Commin's fowl yard <sup>in order to</sup> ~~yard~~ <sup>much needed food</sup>. How those two young smiling officers could lower themselves to be guilty of such a bloody slaughter was a surprise to many and the joke of the A.S.U. for years afterwards. The reply was always "We had to feed the troops". Mrs. Commin's was an aunt of Captain Kelly. Dear Me! what supporters those families of the Commins and Kellys always were. Wherever you met one of them you were sure of a welcome.

The hours were ticking away slowly and some of us could not help remembering our extremely weak left and right flanks. What a difference it would make if only our missing riflemen would turn up in time. All of us seemed to be very confident that we were sure of an engagement before the day was done. Our main position was within 30 yards of Commin's house, where the Q.M. and staff were so busy cooking dinner.

18  
19  
About 10 a.m. a car load of Nuns passed up from Newport to Westport.

About 11.30 a car with the Kilmeena and Newport Priests came from Moyne Church west of us, where <sup>The Center</sup> a general station was held that morning, and passed up to the Parish Priests - Father Conroy's - 300 yards away on the roadside towards Westport. The Nuns car returned from Westport about 2.30 after attending a meeting or perhaps an election of Rev. Mother in Westport Convent.

At last our left flank signaled the approach of the enemy. At 3.30 p.m. a Tan lorry drove down the road from Westport on which we opened fire when it came opposite our main position. It contained 8 or 10 police and Tans - accompanying them were two other lorries of police and Tans under District Inspector H.C. Donlon. Those two lorries halted at Fr. Conroy's and then the men dismounted. A number of them were ranged under the high wall on the West edge of the road in regular barrack square fashion and on one knee firing down at us. I never expected to get such an opening at an enemy, and here was I doing the officer without a rifle. I remember distinctly laughing at their capers. It was not long however until somebody in charge got wise. They seemed to get another order for they all rushed across the road to the low fence at their toes, where they had reasonably good cover.

About this time some of the tans got the idea - that the Priests car which was standing by would be a good position for sniping from, so he rushed into it and burst the wind screen with his rifle and started to operate. Some of our men who were watching operated first so he had to get help to leave the car quicker than he entered it.

When the first volley on the leading lorry was fired one man was falling over the side when a comrade of his pulled him back. There were several other volleys discharged at this lorry before it got across the <sup>200 yds away</sup> bridge and out of our sight. It was then under the fire of our right flank for another 200 yards.

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On reaching Duffy's of the Railway Cottage, Knocknabola, they had complete cover from our right flank. The men dismounted here and returned to the bridge under cover of a substantial county road wall. On their return to the bridge they came under the fire of our riflemen with the main body. From this position at the bridge they were able to enfilade our front line. We were able to hold them down there, however, for a considerable period, and got our men to fall back to the second fence, 50 yards in the rear.

Eventually some of the enemy worked their way from the bridge in as far as O'Flynn's and erected a machine gun there. This advance of the enemy eastwards, around O'Flynn's house again, left us open to enfilading fire along our second fence. There was a regular fusillade pouring in from both sides of us, but we had great cover from the Westport end. A machine gun was turned on us, but they did not seem to have a capable gunner, thanks be to God. After about an hour Sean Collins, <sup>one of our Westport men,</sup> an Artane Boy, was shot in the heart. I saw him in Cousin Patrick O'Malley's arms, who said an Act of Contrition for him. When I saw Paddy engaged I asked him for his rifle. He said "Yes, but it throws to the right and high", The front sight was badly worn with age. Up to this I could not bring myself to take a rifle off any man under such critical circumstances. I rendered the best service I could with this rifle but found it very much out of alignment.

The enemy now began to rain rifle grenades on us from the Westport side. It was soon evident to me that it was on Dr. Madden's position the grenade thrower was concentrating. The first grenade crossed over us and fell out in the bog about 80 yards from us, but did not explode. The second fell within 30 yards of Madden's position and immediately a third came and landed exactly in the corner where Dr. Madden spent most of the day. Madden was not there when it arrived, he had moved up to the other end of the fence.

Before this took place I remember chasing <sup>of the enemy</sup> two men from the position at the bridge which we had a notion of occupying in the morning.

By this time some of the enemy of the first lorry had worked their way in around O'Flynn's house and thereby made our second fence untenable. I ordered a general retreat and got Comdt. Paddy Jordan to come out in the open and help me keep down the enemy while our boys were getting away. Paddy was in among briar at a fence from which visibility was poor. He came out at once into the open about 10 yards (away) from any protection whatever and lay down beside me. There was much blood on his face, but I thought it was from briar scratches and he did not complain to me. We remained there for about a half hour. I was glad to find that the enemy had not the pluck to rush our position so that our boys had lots of time to get away.

When the grenades were coming so accurately, naturally Dr. Madden tried to get away with the rest. He was also under machine gunfire for some considerable time. I saw him run from his position but I also saw a policeman at the back of O'Flynn's house with his forearm along the fence, levelling his rifle to get Madden who was somewhat less than 200 yards away from him. Now what was I to do with my inaccurate rifle? Here was my bed-mate and the best friend a man ever had going to be shot down before my eyes. Speed was sure to ruin my effort. Sloth was going to rob me of my friend. The ammunition I had I got in 1915 from Sean McDermott. It was buried for over five years by myself and just about 10% of it had failed during the days <sup>engagement</sup> with O'Malley and myself. Now, along with my other difficulties if I chanced on a dud cartridge my friend was lost. I took aim and fired, a perfectly good cartridge. I hit the clay at the policeman's elbow so that he did not fire, but looked across at the "man from beyond" that dared to interrupt him in the 'discharge of his duty' while engaged in shooting down Irishmen in order that the Empire might live.

During this last half hour, while the enemy with their bullets dug up the ground all around Paddy Jordan and I, and even forced clay up into our nostrils, they still failed to give either of us a scratch.

Eventually I told Paddy to <sup>retire</sup> clear out and when he got through the first gap on the right I followed. All this time, from the first minutes of our contact with the enemy, their machine guns made an awful racket. This was in my opinion with a view to frighten us.

When we got through the first gap in the fence running from west to east in the line of our retreat, we found we were under fire from the south, that is, the men on the westport side of us. Luckily, there was a good depression alongside this fence, so that we could advance on our stomachs without being observed by the enemy. After 50 yards advance by this method, we came upon another fence running at right angles across our path. When we arrived in this corner, Paddy O'Malley, who was on the north side of our fence, heard us talking. He called me, but, owing to a stiff breeze through the firs on the fence, I found it difficult to know what he was saying, so he had to repeat it several times for me. His shin bone was broken by a bullet and he wanted to know if we could help him. This was impossible as the fence was high and topped with whins (or furze) and could not be climbed without exposure to the machine guns. I felt this very hard and it must be very trying on O'Malley as I knew it was on myself. But the continuous rattle of a machine gun directed against you helps one to make up one's mind very fast. I directed Paddy Jordan how we had to cross the fence in front of us with the greatest possible speed - just spring on and off again regardless of obstacles. It also was strongly planted with whitethorn which had been trimmed. We did not know what was on the other side, whether rock or thorn trimming, briars etc., I jumped first on to the top and off again. Naturally I was looking where I was going, not where I had landed. Oh dear! what this cost me. The trench was about 9 feet deep from my head, but clear and grassy. However, when I arrived on top of the fence both my shoes had gone under a very strong briar which was stretched along the top of the fence and evidently rooted at both <sup>ends</sup> sides.

23-

When I made the second spring my shoes remained anchored by the briar, so I put out my hands to break the fall. Even this did not seem to help me much because the smell of my back got a fearful snap. For some seconds I felt my back was broken and I dare not stir it.

Here again that darling machine gun was a great stimulant. After a short pause I did try to wriggle it gently and to my great joy I found it was not broken and with the music of the machine guns it was recovering very fast. Could I risk getting up? Yes, I did, and O My God save us all, there was Paddy Jordan high above the fence and could not get down unaided.

His rifle was caught in two gablogs (forks), one at each end, in the whitethorn bushes, and Paddy like an inverted V, hanging across it, and not able to go one way or the other. Now, here was Paddy with his posterior cocked up in the sky, a challenge to all the snipers in the barony. I was afraid of my life it would be shot off him. I saw at once the only way to release him was to push him still higher so as to take the weight off his rifle and free one end. When this was done they both tumbled down on to me.

We carried on for another 150 yards and came to a stone fence which we crossed easily, with the help of the machine gun music. After turning to our left, about 10 yards, under good cover, we came upon Paddy O'Malley with his broken leg, Cannon, Westport and Thomas Nolan who was wounded in the left knee slightly, and the right leg shot through the calf, ~~the shin bone~~ the shin bone was broken and something like paralysis set in. Also present was a chap called Pearse, who was unwounded but would not leave his pal, Tom Nolan.

Those wounded boys felt they could not get any further and Jordan also decided to remain with them. I tried to persuade them to keep moving but failed to convince them that it was the right thing to do, or else it was impossible for them to do so. They were in a low secluded trench and perhaps they did not hear what I heard. I was then in a desperate hurry to get away and still felt I should not let those poor boys see my feeling. I heard the enemy shouting and

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cheering. Evidently they had advanced to the first fences we occupied and came upon our dead and wounded companions.

The dead were:

Captain Seamus McEvelly	Castlebar.
John Staunton	Kilmeena.
Thomas O'Donnell	Castlebar Company.
Sean Collins	Westport. "

I have been told by one of the priests who attended those boys on the ground that Seamus McEvelly was the only man dead.

O'Donnell, Staunton and Collins had some small flicker of life when he attended them.

The wounded and captured were:-

Comdt. Paddy Jordan	Castlebar.	Died about 10 days later.
Captain Paddy O'Malley,	Newport.	Broken Leg
Thomas Nolan	Castlebar.	Wounds in both legs. One shin broken.
Paddy Mulloy	Tiernaure	Flesh wounds.
J. Cannon.	Westport	Badly wounded.

The wounded who escaped were:

Jimmy Swift,	Castlebar.	Broken toes.
Michael Hughes (Whack)	"	Flesh arm wound.
John Chambers.	"	Disjointed knee.

On 18th December, 1952, I was told the following by Thomas Nolan (above) that after I left them Comdt. Paddy Jordan made another dash to get away. <sup>in a south-easterly direction</sup> Nolan says the field I left them in was ploughed. <sup>in the same field</sup> They were under the crest. (in the south-easterly direction) He must have been exposed to gunfire from the enemy on both sides. Nolan says he saw the clay being torn up around Jordan and then the poor boy fell and did not get up until the enemy found him there. This, I assume, is where he got his wound in the head.

<sup>hearing</sup>  
Having heard this evidence of the enemy advance, I bade goodbye to my dear comrades and moved off under cover of a low fence. This was a bitter pill for me to swallow, but time was pressing and I had to get away. I had not gone far, however, only about 200 yards, until I came upon Jim Brown, a great soldier with only a shotgun. He was entirely unconcerned and discussed our problems freely.

25.  
He knew that all the rest of our boys were gone and though we still had the music of the machine guns he did not seem to mind in the least.

When crossing the byroad leading east about 300 yards from Jordan and the boys, on our way to Drumhuskert, the road was cut up beside us with machine gunfire, but those were the last we had to dodge for that day. Brown and I made for Kean's of Fahey Hill, about two miles away, where we got much needed refreshments after our enforced abstinence of 22 hours. Most of the other boys were billeted in Gortnacllassor and surrounding villages where they were also refreshed.

God bless the girls who came along and rendered first aid to the wounded boys. Their names were:

Miss Joyce A qualified nurse.  
Miss Gallagher (now Mrs. John Kelly)  
Mrs. Brigid Kelly, (now Mrs. Martin Gibbons Chicago)  
Miss Mary Mulchrone. (now Mrs. Lou O'Connell Chicago)

There may be some others who unfortunately I can not now remember. The above very capably helped Dr. Madden with his dressing of the wounded and attended to their comforts afterwards.

#### Lessons to be learned from our experience

##### In the Kilmeena Fight.

- (1) In future, when going into action we must have both flanks better protected if at all possible.
  - (2) After this fight every opportunity was to be availed of to instruct all Officers and men that if, and when, again engaged with the enemy, particular attention was to be paid to all enemy machine guns and the men who operated and attended them. On no account were they to be allowed to get into action, if at all possible.
- We were not likely to forget what such guns cost us in Kilmeena.

Those instructions became a daily topic with every member of the unit from this onwards. The knowledge thus acquired paid rich dividends later on. I would venture to state that never were instructions more closely observed and seldom with better results

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as a consequence. The Carrowkennedy engagement clearly demonstrated this fact.

We lolled around here under the protection of a strong outpost, ably assisted by the local population both young and old until nightfall. We then mobilised, got three horses from local Farmers for the three wounded men and moved off at midnight.

We went north east by Cortoon, crossed the Castlebar-Newport road on to the Horsefield road, north to the Owennadarryveea or Newport river. We crossed the new bridge near Jack Dever's and called on Jack - where we were given several cans of fresh milk to drink. He then gave us a present of two beautiful home cured hams, which were much appreciated by all of us. We then moved on another 1½ miles into Skirdagh Upper and Lower as well as the village of Cloontafinna containing five houses, where we had a good rest Friday, Saturday and Sunday. This was a route march of over six miles.

The two wounded men, Hughes and Swift were billeted in Mrs. McDonnell's of Upper Skirdagh, while Dr. Madden and I stayed in John Dyra's just across the yard. Some of those days Dr. Madden felt he must amputate two of Jimmie Swift's toes. Jimmy was put on the table and I was instructed in what assistance I had to render, including administering the additional anaesthetic should it prove necessary. He got the job done to his complete satisfaction and made Jimmy quite comfortable.

On Saturday I undertook "to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear". The rifle I had was almost useless because the front sight was so badly worn and out of line. I stuck the point of the barrel and front sight in a hot turf fire until I got the projecting sight very warm. I then hammered it over to what I considered the correct Alignment. After it cooled, Dr. Madden and I went up one of the mountain ravines close at hand, to try it out. To our delight we found it just about perfect. So this was another of the <sup>arms</sup> tools salvaged in order to bring about John Bull's downfall.

27. On Sunday evening 22nd a number of Brockagh girls came down to their cousins in Skirdagh. They had all the latest news of the happenings around Westport since the Kilmeena fight.

The same evening also Comdt. Jack Connolly and Staff Capt. Jim Moran came from Lower Skirdagh. They asked permission to go over home to Tiernaur, six miles west of us, to ease the minds of their people at home. It was rumoured they were both killed in Kilmeena. They promised to be back at nightfall.

In coming from Lower Skirdagh Jim Moran foolishly came without his rifle, a most unusual mistake for him, but Connolly had his rifle. They were back from Tiernaur as promised at nightfall and had a splendid salmon from my cousin, Michael Kilroy "The Leap".

I had arranged to meet my wife ~~at Tawneywoogane~~, and two sisters, in Jimmie Keane's of Tawneywoogane,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles outside Newport that night.

When the two boys had a rest we started off for Keane's where we arrived about midnight. We had  $2\frac{1}{2}$  hours of pleasant conversation, exchange of recent news and recent rumours, of which there was plenty, while Jimmie Keane and his son did guard for us outside.

When the time of departure arrived I felt a great urge to get away quickly. The feeling was like a distinct sharp call and so sudden. What was it? Had we overstayed our visit? What was happening? Was I foolish to have come? We must get out quickly but no person here must know the urge. Surely there must be something happening or about to happen. Jimmie Keane was called in to bid him good-bye and thank him for his kindness.

When Jimmie came in he advised us:- as we had justified our stand by all the fighting we had taken part in, we should now go easy until the harvest was gathered, and perhaps a settlement might soon be made. In any event we could be more independent when our own food would be secure. I passed the joke that 'Perhaps the next fight may be in Jimmie Keane's cabbage garden' What a remarkable coincidence

as this was exactly what happened in the next village within an hour.

We said good-bye and left, bringing some beautiful presents of wafers, biscuits, etc., from the women. We hurried over the ancient road leading from Newport to Crossmolina. This same old road is the one chosen by the Tans and police to steal in on the A.S.U. in Skirdagh this morning while it was still dark and the boys asleep. They must be only 15 minutes behind us.

We came to the stepping stones which then led for a  $\frac{1}{2}$  of a mile across the bog to high ground leading to Upper Skirdagh. We crossed in along this passage now at our leisure and feeling very much at ease.

There was nothing but peace and contentment this lovely May morning in Skirdagh. It was now beginning to dawn, the light slowly enveloping us, and the grey shades disappearing.

The lambs in the surrounding gardens were up stretching themselves, flexing their muscles for the daily romp, and glad to be alive. Some of the lambs were feeding and oh, how their tails quiver while this operation is on. I doubt if there is anything in nature faster, unless perhaps the tail of a fish.

Did our City folk ever hear of anybody doing a job in "Two shakes of a lamb's tail" ? Dear Lord, protect us all. That's it. That's the speed with which disaster is now approaching Skirdagh and Cloontifinna. "In two shakes of a lamb's tail " it will be upon us, if the Lord Himself does not avert it.

When we got to our billets in Upper Skirdagh, we felt it would be unfair to wake up our friends in order to get to bed ourselves, so we decided to wait outside and let our friends have their normal rest, the idea being that later we could sleep all day if we felt like doing so.

We then went around at the back of the houses, only a few yards, discussing the problem of escape from Lower Skirdagh, should the need arise, and what a fine cover Michael Dyra's ault (gully) and other natural folds in the terrain offered. We were only a matter of seconds discussing this problem when we heard a shot fired by our

281  
29-  
outpost in Lower Skirdagh. This was immediately followed by a  
rat-tat-tat from the enemy.

It was only beginning to dawn and our outpost did not see  
the enemy until they were quite close. He was not likely to recognise  
them either. John Murray, who was returning from the wake of Pat  
McManamon of Skirdagh Cross, observed the police coming down the old  
road from McNeela's. This was about 3.30 a.m. They then turned  
in at the old bridge and walked up to Pat O'Malley's and John McManamon's  
in extended formation. Murray raced in the short cut to our out-  
post and between them they saved the situation.

I was informed later that a number of our boys of the A.S.U. left  
their billets and went down to Pat McManamon's wake at Skirdagh Cross.  
Presumably the close confinement of the last three days was having its  
boring effect on them. (It is likely to affect towns-boys in this  
way). They thought that a period of association with the local  
community would be of interest and enable them pass the time in a  
more social manner.

Whatever their reasons were they should not have done this.  
Conditions were not normal. The Skirdagh people were always splendid  
nationally, but no matter how good their <sup>dispositions</sup> intentions were our boys must  
know well that <sup>our Skirdagh friends</sup> they were taking a great risk in putting up the A.S.U.  
immediately after the Kilmeena fight. If some of the older people,  
men or women, were frightened or nervous it was no wonder at all, as  
those conditions were new to all concerned.

I desire to add that I did not see or hear of the slightest  
sign of either nervousness or fear. At the same time their feelings  
should have been considered and respected, and this was the only way  
we had to show our gratitude. They fed us, did our washing and gave us  
shelter when we badly needed it.

29. 30. Newport was only three miles away and that in itself should have been sufficient to impress all with the need for quietness and secrecy. But 'Boys will be boys' and it is easy for us now to criticise in the light of what happened afterwards. But it did seem to the rest of us at the time that from association with the A.S.U. and seeing the care exercised in general by everybody, those boys should not have taken such liberty by "exposing their hand" so to speak, in this way. They risked letting the whole A.S.U. down badly, as well as the Nation, and our dear friends with whom we were staying.

At that wake there were people out from Newport, some of whom were not worthy of trust, so far as we were concerned. I am also informed that a large quantity of cigarettes had been purchased the previous days in a local shop, the owner of which was anything but favourably disposed to our movement. It was no wonder that under all those conditions the Newport police and Tans decided to raid us in the small hours of Monday morning.

If we only knew they were coming what a lovely reception we could have prepared for them. Now they had "To take pot luck". We did the best we could and it was not at all to their liking. In fact, but for the loss of dear Jim Brown, it was the most interesting engagement of our whole campaign.

Now owing to the prompt action of John Murray and our outpost several valuable minutes were gained for everybody concerned, and that meant a lot.

The outpost fired at once. The time was then just 3.45 a.m. It was not possible for our outpost to send word around to all the boys who were in bed. He felt that by opening fire, would be the best all round method of getting the boys to hit the floor, and force the enemy to cover at the same time.

31- Some were actually out on the street without their boots, but the housekeeper quickly followed up with them. One man had his right boot on his left foot and vice-verse. He found this high pressure did not make for speed. Another had two socks on one foot, still another put two feet into one leg of his pants. You see the Tans were only 25 <sup>yds</sup> years away from some of the houses, and most certainly our boys did not like this kind of music so early in the morning. Besides it was too near and on too discordant a note for peaceful slumber.

The boys in this end of the village were in real danger and they knew it.

All this excitement was over in a few seconds. The speed which was developed only goes to show how fast one can be, when he has "A coal on each foot" especially if the feet are bare.

Now was being enacted what, in my opinion was one of the most remarkable chain of circumstances, covering a period of 24 hours, that happened in Irieland during our campaign for Irish freedom.

When we three boys in Upper Skirdagh heard the firing in the lower part of the village, about a half mile away, we sprang into action at once. Whoever had the large paper of beautiful biscuits slung it violently away from him, just as if he had got an electric shock. He gave it such a dash against the grassy fence of the garden that the paper seemed to dissolve and there were the beautiful pink wafers with an admixture of other sorts strewn for yards all over the fence.

What a treat the hens must have had when they came around the corner some hours later, and what a sprint must have developed when they spied the sumptuous spread on the side of the fence.

Captain Jim Moran, not having his rifle, was to go into McDonnell's and Dyra's here beside us so as to help Dr. Madden get

30. 32. The boys got out very hurriedly, and dressed to the accompaniment of rapid fire by 24 of the enemy, who had run to cover immediately when our sentry opened up on them.

Skirdagh is a large extended village of twelve houses and there were some of our boys in every house, and about a dozen boys in Cloontafinna village, east of Skirdagh, which consisted of five houses. The 17 houses extended for about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile.

The first rat-tat-tat of the enemy fire left no question to be asked or answered. Everybody - villagers as well as A.S.U. men - felt like as if they had the proverbial "Red hot coal on each foot", and had no time at all to throw the coals off.

What with the boys dressing (in "Two shakes of a lamb's tail") and the women chasing around collecting haversacks, washed socks, shirts, sweaters, caps, bandoliers etc., then chasing back again to make sure nothing was forgotten! They knew only too well what a mistake or oversight would mean for them.

Afterwards re-making the warm beds and occupying them in double time in order to allay any likely suspicion that may be coming later.

Then the sudden eruption of men, diving out the back doors and windows. One man, after diving out a window and getting on to high gear with the first or second spring, was hit on the back of the head by his haversack, which was catapulted out the window after him. This promptly sent him spinning on to his knees.

Another man raced out the door but raced back faster. He had everything but his rifle. He wondered what was missing when he could sprint so easily. A third actually got away without his bandolier of ammunition. But on this ammunition hangs another tale.

3 - out the wounded boys and get them away. What an innocent ~~move~~ on the evening before deprived us of this man's rifle. His marksmanship, which was excellent, would have made his assistance in the fight a great help to us.

Comdt. Jack Connolly and I ran down towards the lower section of the village in order to help cover our boys' escape. Ned Moune sent a local volunteer named Michael Murray out to Captain Thomas Cleary of the Shramore Company, for local help and guidance for the security of our wounded men of the Kilmeena fight.

It was almost flat for 300 yards in front of McDonnell's. Just a very gradual rise and then a dip of 50' or 80'. When we got on this crest we saw, owing to the dull light, what we thought were our boys coming towards us in an extended line over the flat bog, and at an elevation over the hollow which was between us of from 10' to 15'. We still kept hurrying and were down in the flat in a few seconds.

Now we could see those in front more clearly between us and the eastern sky, and I began to observe the regularity of the Policemen's caps. Whether we had some cloud which obscured the light or not I can not remember, but it was a quarter to 4a.m. and still visibility was poor.

On becoming suspicious I turned by head and spoke over my shoulder to Jack: "Be careful, I think this is the enemy". We still kept advancing, but, my oh my, there was no desire at all now to run forward. However, the need for this pretence or deception suddenly ended.

For immediately I took my eyes off Jack and looked forward again I saw the next man in front of me raise his rifle and start to aim. Naturally I took it that it was at me he was aiming and he could not be much over 150 yards away. Surely he could not miss at this

23.  
34 short range. Now I had to estimate how long it would take him to aim and pull the trigger. If I flopped down too soon he still would have his live cartridge, which I desired to deprive him of, and I would then be at an even worse disadvantage.

If only God would help me to make this deception complete, otherwise I was a "dead duck" immediately. I waited so long, oh so very long, and was still walking forward. It must have been at least two seconds and then I pitched forward to the ground. Thanks be to God the deception was so complete that I heard him say, immediately and distinctly, to one of his pals: "Wasn't that a good shot? "First shot in the morning a man down".

Now here was Jack and I caught in this hollow with the hill immediately behind us and no chance of escape. If we attempted to run in any direction we would be noticed at once. We would then have twenty-four rifles pumping lead at us, dear me, what amusement that would yield. Oh yes, to the enemy I mean of course, not to poor Jack or me.

Jack and I were now placed at every possible disadvantage, while the enemy had every advantage in the calendar. They were on a tableland over us. The most perfect cover was at their very toes. They had the rising sun at their back while we had it on our eyes. They got the first shot in, and there were twenty-four of them extended along that tableland to back up that first shot.

They were a lot too close to us for comfort. Where we lay was as bare and flat as it could possibly be.

Their cover was such as seldom occurs in any kind of soil, and very rarely even in bogland. I can only compare it to a huge jumble of large boxes or crates from four to twelve feet long, about three or four feet wide with rounded ends, and about two feet six inches high. There was a passage made by cows around every one of them. This was done by constant usage down through the ages.

I understand that the cows in this district were lazy. They created the trenches for walking in so that they could feed on the banks

35. without having the trouble of stooping down for it. Also by this convenience they could keep an eye on the scenery and their pals as well.

Anyway here were the ideal and ready-made trenches over which the advancing enemy was walking when we were fired on. We gathered in our rifles quietly and very slowly so that the enemy would not notice any motion in the supposed dead man. We knew that, owing to the poor light, we had to aim very low. I aimed as low as the hips at least, and fired. As his head was encircled by a bright patch in the sky, at his back I actually saw the dust leave his cap. He was saved by the worn sight of my rifle.

His comrade with an English accent asked: "What's that, Whats that?" "Oh" says the other, "the peak of my cap, he struck the peak of my cap". The Englishman says back to him: "Take cover, take cover You should always take cover in a case like that".

Still Jack and I got three or four rounds each into them before they were all under cover.

Now there was at least several minutes of rapid firing in which the enemy discovered that we could shoot straight. This discovery on their part proved a great asset to us, as after events proved, several of them got their caps riddled with bullets. They had been expressing gratitude for their escape afterwards and showing their caps to prove what narrow shaves they had.

Naturally this was a good incentive towards keeping them under cover. A most desirable proceeding from our point of view!

If Jack and I felt at the outset that they were a lot too near us, now we had the tables turned, and they felt we were a lot too close to them for comfort.

36.

From now on there was only an occasional round fired from either side. This was most important to us as our ammunition was running very low.

The minutes were ticking away very slowly while Jack and I realised that it was becoming very serious even if we had the best of the encounter so far.

Retreat in any direction was next to impossible. There was in our rear about 100 yards of a steep incline so that any effort to run up this in front of an enemy so close might prove disastrous. A greater distance to either right or left without any cover whatever left our chance of escape in any direction very slim indeed.

I was now anxious to fall back to the base of the hill if possible. I whispered my desire to Jack and asked him to shout if he saw any movement of the enemy while I was up.

When running back Jack fired where he saw some movement. "Wasn't that quicker and better" says Jack "and he will give us no more trouble".

So far this engagement gave us another reason for further elation, now that we had control, and the build up of a great store of confidence. There were many excellent reasons for this elation, if only our position was not so serious from the point of view of depleted ammunition.

. For instance, here was the evidence that two men could force twenty-four men to cover and keep them pinned down. One man could do the same, as Dr. Madden proved successfully for the half hour while Jack and I were retiring back to him.

Under such conditions an additional dozen experienced riflemen could achieve a lot by either a flanking movement or even a front attack.

37 In my opinion, given those conditions, the Skirdagh fight would be over in an hour. It could only end by the complete surrender and capture of all the enemy then engaged, and their equipment.

We were there at least twenty or thirty minutes, and we were down to our last round of ammunition, when we heard Dr. Madden, like a grouse on the heather, calling behind us. "Michael, Michael, where are ye? Where are ye?".

It is only fair at this stage to remark on Dr. Madden's difficulties when getting out in the morning, First he had to help Jim Moran get out the wounded boys, Jimmie Swift and (Whack) Michael Hughes, to a safe passage up the ravine towards Glenlaura. Swift had to be carried about 2 1/2 miles by Moran and others until they secured a horse.

Madden then turned down to join us against a hail of bullets which were flying wild, for the first half-hour, up from the enemy then in mid-Skirdagh.

Clear proof of this danger, even though the enemy could not see across the crest of the hill or elevation that intervened was, old John Dyra being wounded when getting out of bed, and McDonnell's pig been shot on the street.

This risk was taken by Madden of running into the enemy, without knowing exactly where to go, What chance he had of getting in touch with us, or how many friends of his were about.

When he arrived on top of the hillock he could not see any trace of a living soul. The only indication he had of anybody being around was an occasional shot and this by now would be after long intervals of perhaps 10 to 15 minutes, so his position was <sup>u</sup>pozzling in the extreme.

The enemy might be anywhere, he had no means of finding out,

38. In my opinion it would take a man of the greatest pluck and determination to face such a problem and to persevere in carrying on alone to the end. A person would actually need to be placed in such a trying ordeal before one could fully grasp all that it takes. The feeling of complete isolation can be very trying and difficult, and it is only a man of the greatest mental endurance could face such a problem and carry it through.

Notwithstanding all his difficulties he was in touch with us in twenty or thirty minutes, though he may have been 10 minutes or more weighing up the position before he called out to us. After he studied the situation for some time he started his subdued calling tactics.

I can assure the reader it was one of the greatest joys of my life to hear that call. Our ammunition was exhausted by then so our chance of escape was very slim indeed.

When we heard Dr. Madden's sweet voice on the mountain air our hopes suddenly soared like a kite in a lively breeze. We knew he had a commanding position in our rear, as we had run down that way just a half hour earlier.

It was most difficult under our conditions to let him know where we were, but we managed somehow and told him the enemy was right in front of him, 180 yards away. We asked him to keep a sharp look out as we wanted to get back. We were directly under him but the curve of the hill-crest hid us from his view.

We had a lot more confidence now as we knew Madden had perfect control of the situation, being on a much higher and more commanding position than the enemy.

There was no pressure whatever needed to get Jack and I retire from our exposed perilous position of the past half-hour, so

37, we moved at once. I started to go up the hill feet first, A most difficult task, with my revolver sticking in the <sup>2</sup>ground and pushing me over every move I made. Jack Connolly had the same trying ordeal. It must have taken us at least a half hour to get back under cover beside Dr. Madden, *only about 40 yards*

Fortunately we got Moran and Connolly to bring us, back from Tiernaur Sunday evening, 200 round of .303 which they had charge of. This was needed now for distribution among our boys as, after 2½ hours fight in Kilmeena, they had very light bandoleers. It also gave us great heart this morning, as Madden had the 200 rounds with him when he came out to us, because our supply had run very low, *only one round left.*

We were now joined by Tommie Ketterick, Q.M., Johnnie Gibbons, Adjt., Paddy Cannon, Castlebar, and Jack McDonagh, Westport. We immediately pooled and divided all our ammunition equally. This was necessary because our 200 rounds of fresh ammunition was exhausted by the time those four boys arrived.

Now Ketterick started with his endless jokes and as everybody felt we were in control, we did enjoy them. "Look at that fellow away in the rear 500 yards. Is it his rifle or his leg he has up daring us? Will I make him take it down?" Then a bang and there was nothing to be seen but grey sedge or mountain grass, the cover was so complete.

This went on for hours. Ketterick wanted permission to do a right flank movement, but as this would mean a wide detour and delay. our numbers (only seven) were too small to divide up for a movement of this kind against such odds. We knew there was a big number of men down there, but we did not then know exactly how many, *it was 24*

We were about eight hours engaged and we felt that reinforcements might arrive any minute. Sure enough at 11.45 the first of the lorries came. We saw three racing down from Skirdagh school about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles away. We then withdrew at our leisure, feeling sure that the enemy would be slow to follow us. In this we were very much mistaken.

Pat McLoughlin and his pal Brown escaped from Skirdagh to Buckagh village. They saw a number of police, approx 30, passing Buckagh village at about 11 a.m. Travelling in an easterly direction. I assume that it was this party who arrived so quickly on our trail at the entrance to Glanlaura. If this was so we had a miraculous escape from being surrounded. 10 minutes delay on our part would leave us practically surrounded. ?

They must have been watching us going up the old passage which leads around Buckagh Mountain. When we left their sight by crossing the shoulder of the hill we moved diagonally down to the right, leading to my dear friends Mr. Patrick Chambers and his wife.

We were hungry and dry so we got a beautiful home-made cake and a can of fresh milk. We would not dine inside but we took the food out to the gable of the house where we could have a delightful scenic view of the towering hills each side of us, and Beautiful Glanlara from end to end with its lovely placid serpentine stream, over which some of the locals had to cross as many as thirty times on their journey up or down the glen.

We had only just started our meal when, to our dismay, the low shoulder of the hill we had just crossed on entering the Glen twenty minutes before was swarming with police. We told Patrick Chambers he would find the can over the hill later. As we had not

all the milk drank we took the can with us.

We now came on a wide space of perhaps twenty yards or less that seemed to be effected by an ancient landslide. We were impressed by this depression very much because the moss, grass and old rushes there were about exactly the shade of our trench and Gaberdine coats. We considered it very much better than the heather on either side, so we turned straight up on this surface.

Immediately the enemy appeared at the entrance to the Glan they started letting off bursts from the machine gun. We judged by the change in the echo and noise as a clear indication to us that we were not yet sighted. While this continued we still kept moving slowly up. If we rushed, it would be like calling on the world to watch us. At the same time we knew that every yard gained might make the difference between success and failure.

We were perhaps one third of the way up and the gunner still firing and swinging his machine gun in many directions. Suddenly the ground was torn up in our midst by many rounds from a burst of the machine gun in an zig-zag fashion.

Instantly there was a cry of "halt" and an explanation as to the reason why <sup>we</sup> they remain upright. In other words, no movement, as the gunner was not likely to be looking over his sights under those conditions. If that were so we were yet safe. We would quickly know if he had sighted us. Also any movement on our part would only help his vision as our colour was very close to that of the grass.

In a few seconds he sent another burst in an entirely different direction. The idea behind those machine gun bursts seemed to be that if a group of men were anywhere about hiding, they would get panicky, jump up and run for their lives like frightened hares.

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Should such a foolish thing happen, what delightful sport those 'limbs of the law' would have that blessed sunny May day on the beautiful slopes of Glanlara. Their gun bursts were in vain, *however* as there was no evidence of panic to be found anywhere in the Glan.

We then decided to take what cover we would on the steep bare hillside and not risk further movement. There was an occasional clump of decayed rushes available which was not nearly so high up on our hill as on the opposite one (Buckagh). Our early movement, when we started to retreat, let them to think we were on Buckagh *mountain slope*.

In a very few minutes their highest flanker on our side passed right under us just about thirty yards away. We could easily put a finger stone further than him. How he missed seeing our milk can is more than I can understand, because it was foolishly left in the open. Perhaps he did see it, but knew that, "It was better to be a coward for five minutes than a dead man all his life"!

How many hundred tanks and police passed in we do not know. They covered a mile wide from hillside to hillside in extended formation and I believe they were at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mile in depth. There should be at least four or five hundred for there were about (fifty) 50 lorries on the roads. *According to Peter Murray, Shramore, who saw them in marching formation through Shramore, later in the day, they covered 800 yards, two deep. They were not in section formation. In close formation from end to end. Between 500 + 600 at least*  
A platoon of Military were at Skirdagh Cross roads, but refused to go up the hill. They told the police that they were not paid for that kind of work, but the police were. We do know that a lot of the police, on their own admission, came from Athlone and intermediate stations without breakfast.

In many houses which they entered they ate up several home-made cakes and drank many basins of sweet milk. Lots of them were astonished how those people could have such beautiful bread, not forgetting the old saying that "Hunger is great sauce".

148. Gradually the main body moved in past us. Then a struggling rearguard and finally, strange to say, a bunch of the real "Brass Hats", about six of them. Lo and behold you, what did they do but sit down to rest on some garden fences straight under us and only four hundred yards away. What a temptation! If only we could rope them in. Here were we too far away to do it silently. Too far also from the top of the hill to have a chance of getting away from that machine gun, if we opened fire and thereby draw attention to our position. What a galling situation.

We had everything (almost) that one could desire, arms, ammunition and a quantity of rare bulls' eyes. "But" (ah how annoying that work can be) Our hands were tied so to speak. We had to lie there with lots of time on our hands and let our desires dissolve into thin air. What a strain this was on all of us. However, we found much consolation in the saying "He that fights and runs away shall live to fight another day".

Until all had passed in we remained where we were and soon they were "Gone like the snow of last year". Not a trace of them in sight. Yes, they were gone from our range of vision, but they were then arriving in the village of Shrarevagh. On arrival there they fired off many more rounds of ammunition, and started shouting to the people of the houses to put them out. "Put out the hares the hounds are here: Put them out" . They then made a thorough search in all those houses.

On Saturday, 4th Feb. 1956, Pat Chambers, Derrybrook, told his son, Lieutenant Thomas Chambers the joke about O'Brien and himself regarding the hole in the cap. They got a lot of refreshments in those houses; also in Pat Chambers's house of Derrybruck, that is father of Lieu. T. Chambers, who was at the moment with the A.S.U. playing hide and seek with the crown forces. Many had refreshments from Pat his wife and daughters that day. They were badly in need of same,

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as they had walked 6 miles of mountain from the Glenhest road in sweltering heat.

The last man that came was O'Brien from the Newport Barracks. He was recounting the hard time they had in there in Skirdagh all morning - and then what a joke followed - "Look what I got in the morning " said he, pointing out the hole in the peak of his cap. Then the innocent and bland reply of my dear friend Pat - "Too high". "What "? exclaimed O'Brien, "TOO HIGH be d....., It was entirely too low for my taste, He nearly got ME ".

I would venture to say that the lesson O'Brien and his pals learned in Skirdagh that morning saved Pat Chambers's life from the consequence of what his innocent remark may otherwise being upon him. For O'Brien had been a bad boy in the Newport District. There were many men murdered in Ireland during that period for very much less provocation than what Pat's remark amounted to.

I have reason to believe that the enemy who spent from eight to eight and a half hours in the moist bog trenches in Skirdagh had a very much different outlook on life after the engagement. When a few of them got up to Arthur Devine's some day after the engagement, for refreshments, they started immediately to hug Arthur and tell him how lucky they were in Skirdagh. In order to prove their statements they then produced their caps to show how they were riddled with bullets. Eight hours is a long time for thought under such unpleasant conditions.

Also the fact that our bullets went up through the peak of O'Brien's cap proves two things that we have stated earlier :-

- (1) That we were very near them when O'Brien fired on Jack and X, me
- (2) That we must have been very much lower than them when the bullet went up through his cap. If it was down the bullet went he could not tell any tales.

I always thought that the first man who fired at me was like O'Brien. Now after almost thirty-five years Pat Chambers of Derrybruck

verifies it.

Now we would stretch our limbs and made for the top of the hill "Like the goat in fine weather". On getting there what a pleasant surprise was in store for us. God himself had the place prepared for us for centuries. The turf was washed away to the bare gravel for perches around, and at various angles, so that we were left with an assortment of ramparts breast high.

Here we felt very secure as we knew that even the hundreds of men, who had just passed in, were not capable of dislodging us, even if we were discovered which was most unlikely, as the last of them were by now miles away and the evening was advancing.

Our position now was on a shoulder jutting south from Berreencorragh and just 1,600 feet above sea level. We had a splendid view of a large tract of the country south, east and west.

With the aid of our telescope we noticed two lorries and a red cross van at Cloontafinna, two miles away. We saw a number of stretchers being carried to the van and apparently put in. We knew now that the officer in charge of the (in the) mornings fight was Munroe and that he was badly wounded in the chest by a bullet that entered the arm or shoulder. Another policeman was killed and one wounded.

Jim Brown of Kilmeena, was badly wounded in the abdomen and died in Castlebar Hospital. It was our friend Michael Dyra of Alth Bue who went down to Ballatigue for Fr. McNamee to come up and attend Jim Brown, The Priest was up to him in a short time. Brown crept as far as Dyra's house, a few hundred yards after getting wounded in the abdomen.

We do not know how Jim Brown got caught, but we strongly suspect from what I saw of him in the retreat from Clooneen, Kilmeena, the

45.

previous Thursday that he may have been rather incautions. This could have been encouraged in a man like Brown by the short range of his old shotgun, which necessitated getting close to the enemy. While he was a very quiet man, he was big and powerful and not likely to fancy running on every occasion. It was only when we got down off the mountain we learned of Jim Brown's misfortune. In his retreat from Skirdagh village I am informed he crossed a large open space instead of keeping to better cover, which was available. His life could have been saved if he had got Dr's attention earlier.

We remained in our ramparts until nightfall and then came down to Mrs. McDonnell's and Drya's, right in the heart of the battlefield of early morning. They set about cooking for us at once. I assure you Cousin Michael's salmon was not forgotten. However, he escaped the round-up was a pleasant surprise to us all.

My dear Lord, what beams of joy shone from the faces of those people for sheer delight in seeing the seven of us safely back again after the past twenty hours' excitement. I would mention especially those of Mrs. McDonnell and her three daughters, Mrs. McNulty now of Chicago, Nora and Maggie, now Mrs. John J. Ketterick of Newport.

There was a <sup>hit</sup> ~~rip~~ of McDonnell's shot on the street in the morning. When old John Drya next door was getting out of the kitchen bed in the morning another bullet came in the front door and flattened on the wall beside him. This bullet actually blackened his hip when passing.

Ellen McDonnell told me she knew where the forgotten bandolier of ammunition was hidden in a reekle of turf. She also suggested that we could collect it while the meal was being cooked by the others.

Ellen and I went down right beside where some of the Tans were under cover in the morning. We searched a good deal but failed to find the Bandolier. Nevertheless, I thought this girls hiding of

the Bandolier, under the noses of the Tans, was a wonderful feat.

She was little more than a child, and it was then approaching midnight and very dark.

When Ellen and I got back to the house we had a beautiful meal of salmon "fresh run" - (from the sea.)

In the morning when the Tans and Police started to follow us up they immediately came on McDonnell's and Dyrá's houses. A number of them were very excited, they saw a lot of blood around the street and their faces began to beam with the joy of an impending capture.

They shouted for the wounded men "Where were they hidden? Put them out immediately" Mrs McDonnell told them casually "There were no wounded men here and the blood was the blood of their pig that was shot on the street", That was not enough to satisfy atal. They had to go into the two houses and turned every article of furniture upside-down and inside-out, in search of the elusive I.R.A. men who had been engaged in "A battle Royal" all morning with them.

After those men cleared away Mrs. McDonnell sent her daughter, Maggie, over to Frank Chambers to get him draw the blood from the pig. Evidently the Tans made a messy job of the pig, as they did with most other things they put their hands to.

When Maggie was going over the hill an aeroplane came down so close to the child that she felt she could leave her hand on it, it was so low. This happened two or three times. She was very much frightened. It was well for her she did not understand. The girl was young and small at the time. The Pilot dived down, evidently to make sure whether it was a man was in it before he would open up his guns.

In my opinion she had a narrow shave and it was well for her she was not grown up, as evidently the Pilot recognised.

48  
When Supper was over it must be about midnight, so we said Good-bye and started on our trying journey.

Gerald Flynn, N.T., and Joe Murray, brother of Patrick Ellen, were compelled by the Military to help in extracting a field gun and the Mules that were drawing it, from a bog hole alongside the road. The Mules and the gun had slipped into the boghole on a bend at the bottom of the hill at Treenlaur lodge. The Soldier who was riding on the mule got his leg jammed between the mules in the hole.

<sup>N.T.</sup>  
~~Gerald~~ Flynn counted the mules near where he was forced to help and he found there were at least 16 and perhaps 20 mules. This would give this Military party two or three Field guns and Two or three Field Kitchens, with 6 mules to a gun, and two to a field Kitchen.

<sup>N.T.</sup>  
~~Gerald~~ Flynn reminds me it is now 34 years since Skirdagh Fight and he can not be very accurate about details. He reminds me also that he could not count the military, as they were all over the place around the wood at Treenlaur Lodge. There were also Police in this vicinity.

My! but it is a great consolation when one is in a tight corner to be able to anticipate the other fellow's move. Then you can slip between his fingers and sit down for a good smile. Dr. Madden was always about perfect at this game.

Our objective now was to get across the Newport river, over two miles south of us, as quickly as possible. We wanted to get outside the likely cordon that was possibly already established. This must be done at all costs before daylight.

At this stage the reader might reasonably ask - Why were we so set on apparently running into the enemy in this particular direction - The enemy's point of arrival all day, The road covered with lorries and all the possible risks those conditions offered - Were not the Mayo Mountains wide enough, high enough and God knows, neumerous enough for us to hide in.

48- John Bull's men would answer no. At their leisure for a full week they were to search out every inch of the North Mayo hills with Aeroplanes, Carrier pigeons, Big guns, Field Kitchens and a huge array of their army, together with all the Pálíce and Tans they could collect from Newport to Athlone and Galway.

Our answer also is NO. There was not enough of room for us in the wide sweep of the North Mayo hills. Besides we had no field Kitchens to take with us to the top of any hill, if we decided to go there. That meant we would have to go without breakfast and perhaps many succeeding meals also.

To have that happen to us two days in succession was not good enough for us, so we decided to have breakfast in Broody O'Toole's of Loplough South of the Newport River, if God enabled us to make it.

We knew we would most likely meet up with the enemy as we crossed either of the roads or the river. That was by now very natural to expect, but it was also our best chance and probably our only one.

Our reasons for going South were many, and easy to grasp:-

- (1) We knew from the McDonnell's while having supper, that there was a large group of Military already on the scene, both on the Skirdagh district as well as in Treenlaur, on the opposite side of Buckagh mountain. Also there were the hundreds of Tans and Police we saw during the day as they passed us, when going North through Glanlaura.
- (2) We expected they were not likely to give up without a thorough search of the North Mayo Mountains, having, as they thought, bottled us up. It was plain to us that our chance of escape inside this supposed cordon was very slim indeed, notwithstanding the height of the many mountains, 2,000 ft. High and more.
- (3) Our best chance was to get out, and get out quickly, as daylight was coming very fast.

- H. J.
- (4) The majority of the enemy were North, East and West of us.  
(At Skirdagh)
  - (5) The enemy were likely to lay this cordon all around the Nephin Beg range of mountains including Skirdagh, which they did.
  - (6) A segment of that cordon was likely to be laid along the Newport - Glenhest road running West to East, one mile south of Skirdagh; or along the Newport - Glaniland road, also running West to East within three miles of Skirdagh, with the Newport River and Beltra Lough Intervening.
  - (7) This means we were on the Southern edge of the supposed cordon with a good chance of getting through, by the exercise of great caution, before daylight.
  - (8) In any of the other directions for escape the distances were so great we would not have a chance to cover half the distance before daylight, and even less of a chance after the sun got up.
  - (9) The enemy was not likely to expect we would walk right through the battle-field and cross the roads where everybody, including ourselves, saw such heavy traffic during the past day.
  - (10) If this cordon was been laid around us it was not likely that it would be so perfectly done, in such a short time, that a few armed natives could not slip around them or through them. So our great essential was speed, and our direction South.

But how could we hurry? Such a method was impossible to adopt with safety. We had to investigate and be suspicious of every cow, calf, donkey and whin-bush along our passage to the bridge. We knew the enemy was likely to be met with anywhere, but most certainly some of them should be at the river bridge, we had to assume. Having arrived there our problem was to reconnoitre the bridge and its approaches from both ends. A slow undertaking, but to our delight we found the bridge and its surroundings unoccupied, so we crossed over like one Tom Smith.

Rejoicing in our great good fortune we thanked God for our success so far. But how He must smile at our puny efforts and antics, especially if He gave us a thought at all or remembered the tit-bit He had arranged for us.

50  
Our whole equipment of rifle, revolver, ammunition, bandolier and haversack weighed over 30 lbs. In all our marching, carrying this outfit was "A labour of love".

We were now passing at the South West corner of Beltra Lough. When we rounded a "criggaun" or hillock we were close to the shore from which stretched that beautiful lake, with its yellow sands at the northern end upon which the Glenhest Races are run in the summer. It is three miles long, and one of the best fishing lakes in the west of Ireland. To the school, and cross roads, at the end of the lake was another quarter mile.

Oh! to our consternation, there was the headlights of many lorries. "Jump to it boys" says Madden. "They are setting outposts there now and as quick as we can run to the Derryloughan, or Newport-Glanisland road they will be there before us".

Seeing those headlights and their position was a clear indication to us that our estimate of their tactics was correct. Our confidence was thereby strengthened, especially, as we had almost all our Major difficulties already overcome. If we did not get to the Glanisland road before the lorries arrived we still had lots of wide open spaces of heathery land on either side of us with plenty of cover. Further; our knowledge of the enemy position now led us to assume he had not yet completed his encircling movement. So here we were on equal terms at last. Our joy was unbounded, after 22 hours of a grueling test in which the odds were overwhelmingly against us.

What a relief! We would now give him "A run for his money" It was clear to us now there would be no scouts on the remaining section of the road in front of us. We were as early as he on the job with much greater interest at stake - our lives. We could now use all the speed of which we were capable without any danger of running into the enemy. We were extremely anxious to achieve our objective,

51. the final section of our ordeal, by crossing the Glanislund road.

Now seconds, even quarter seconds, were going to count tremendously, and they did. The Glanislund road was just a mile away. Our passage was over a new coarse sandstone and gravel road. The lorries had just about three miles to do over a much better old road. In other words, they should be at the head of our road in six minutes or less.

Could it be done? Could it really be done by all seven of us, even if we were dressed only in tights, over such a bad road.? Surely no. Then what with our heavy boots, full suit, overcoat and thirty pounds of equipment? Surely it was impossible. But it must be done.

We had lots of experience by now that "God helps those who help themselves". We asked Him to lighten our load, and he not only did that but, figuratively, dressed us in tights as well, and perhaps carried us along.

When we started the race the order was "Run boys run, and if you fall don't wait to rise". As we approached the main road we were forced to observe that on our left, about thirty yards away, there was a very slight hill, over which the road came. As the leading lorry was climbing it on the far side the beams of its headlights were shot upwards just slightly over our heads. We were not yet on that road but we must cross it in order to be safe. We made a last spring and, I assure the reader, there was not one "laxter" (lazy fellow) among us.

We were now crossing the road and making for our final jump to freedom. But, oh! what a trench was in our path. Who wanted to measure it? Nobody. Nobody cared a d... what breadth it was. All were going to jump as far and as fast as they could anyway. This is where the quarter second counted. Here is where the sprouted wings helped, or was it the lorry lights? However, the trench was

52 taken in great style by six of us, but the seventh, we found later on, made a boggy landing. He failed to clear the trench and sank down to his hips or perhaps deeper. At the time the rest of us did not know because we kept up our speed to get beyond the lamp beams which we knew were coming. I assure you we did not stop even then.

On getting in a hundred yards we suddenly found ourselves enveloped in a dense fog. So dense was it that we could not see the lights on the lorries, though we heard the men talk. This was one of the many blessed fogs by which we escaped in almost every pinch, during our whole service period, when the going was proving too much for humans to endure.

Now we were secure and at ease - here on the flat bog - so we got together and discovered, to our consternation, that someone was missing. We quickly realised it was Dr. Madden. This was a stunning blow to us all. We tried at once to extend and search for him but this order was countermanded immediately, as the fog was very dense and we saw the great danger of losing others owing to the many bog-holes that were around. Also there was great likelihood of us all losing our sense of direction, as often happens in a heavy fog. Then God only knows where we would land, even if we were lucky enough to escape the bog-holes.

When Dr. Madden failed to clear the trench he had to settle down as the headlights would be on him in a second or two. He had to turn his face<sup>e</sup> and hands away before the shining lights would show him up to the enemy.

The enemy lorries halted right beside Dr. Madden, set down the outposts with instructions to go down and occupy the bridge we had crossed a few minutes earlier.

The lorries then drove off towards Newport.

Dr. Madden joined us in a short time afterwards. We retired

53.

to the village of Loplough, just a quarter of a mile up from the road.

After the Battle of Skirdagh a persistent rumour originated in the West that Dr. Madden and myself were killed in that engagement. It was only our appearance in various localities, later on, quenched the belief in our death.

As far as I can remember not one of the boys showed any sign of exhaustion after their mile race. How this could be possible is beyond my comprehension. I can only see one explanation for it, and thank the great God of Heaven who enabled us to perform such a marvelous feat.

After having breakfast we found the fog had lifted a good deal.

As the village is in an elevated position we could, with the aid of the telescope, see <sup>but</sup> faintly the police at the bridge, about 1½ miles away.

Owing to the fog and the distance we were away from the Glenhest road which leads from Newport to Crossmolina, we must have missed a lot of real fun. As the newspapers of the time suggested the whole Nephin range of mountains in North Mayo were surrounded by police and Military. In support of this huge operation, free use was made of aeroplanes and carrier pigeons, the Infantry was also flanked by Artillery. All this was done apparently with a view to create consternation and awe among the people of West Mayo.

The police spent six days combing that whole district but did not capture one man of the A.S.U.

In this parish there had been a well-known prophecy of Brian Ruaid (a local seer who had an uncanny knack of forecasting events) regarding a big fight in Skirdagh. - It runs:- "There will be a big fight in Skirdagh and one of the British party, a red-haired man named McManamon would jump on a horse and ride bare-backed to Newport for help". When he would arrive in Newport he would be asked what's

54 wrong. His reply would be - "Unless help arrives quickly we will be all killed". Now every detail of this speech and all particulars took place on that 23rd day of May, 1921.

We knew this tall red-haired McManamon well in Newport Barracks for some time before the fighting started. The morning of the fight he jumped on Pat O'Malley's horse and rode bare-back to town. When he arrived at Newport crane he dismounted and was asked by Miss Lizzey O'Boyle and Mr. John McGovern, both of whom are now dead, - "What's wrong". The answer was "Unless help arrives soon we will be all killed".

In addition to the foregoing, when the police returned to Newport they reported freely that - they saw St. Patrick walking around among us all day.

They also reported that they could not put up their rifles - but it was ding-ding every time. If that was correct, they must have been very careful of their heads for the eight hours they were under cover during the fight, otherwise there would be a lot more casualties.

Our stay in Laplough was uneventful. We left there on the night of the 24th May, and went across to Letra where we remained until the following night. We then went across to Butler's of Rockfield where we were royally received. The people in that locality heard sounds of fighting in Skirdagh about eight miles away as the crow flies.

The following night on 27th May, the seven of us moved into the Aughagower district where we met the members of the Westport Unit in Curvey and Lankhill villages. There were the boys we missed so much in the Kilmeena fight.

Naturally they felt in high spirits on hearing what happened in Skirdagh, and congratulated us on getting some of our own back for the reverse we sustained in Kilmeena.

Yes, this was war, grim war with all its nakedness. While

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congratulations were in order and well intended, they only served to remind us of our dear comrades we lost in Kilmeeena and Skirdagh. It was only nine days since we parted on the Castlebar road at Drumneen. We had lost five comrades, killed. Four wounded and captured, three wounded and escaped. There was also one volunteer captured.

Whether in victory or defeat, we know, by now that it was painful departing from the battlefield, having to leave some dear comrade behind.

56. After spending some days in the Aughagower Parish we moved on to the Carrowkenedy district and we then moved over to Oughty. We had travelled about 8 miles of mountain country which brought us close to Drummin R.I.C. barracks so we decided to burn down this stronghold before leaving.

Instead of breaking in the door we entered by a window and discovered on getting in that there was a trap set for us.

Inside the door there was a bomb held to the floor by nails. There was then a twine tied to the ring of the bomb and fastened to the door in such a way that the opening of the door pulled the pin of the bomb, and set it to explode by having the fuse ignited.

We disconnected the bomb and preserved it for future use. To return it to its former owner, with explosive results, was our particular desire.

Now the boys prepared the place for a raal blaze, which was set going in a few minutes.

It was now nightfall so we set off eastwards to Claddy where we billeted again, and in the neighbouring villages, all in the Carrowkenedy district.

On the following day about 12 o'clock the 2nd June, our outpost sent us word that the enemy was on the Leenane-Westport road in force at Carrowkenedy.

They had a group of turf workers collected off the nearby banks, and compelled them to fill in a road trench which we had got cut some weeks earlier.

Immediately we got word we ran out to a point where we got a good view of the operation being carried out on the road. This was about three quarters of a mile from us. Some of our billets were much closer. In a short time the trench was filled and the convoy drove off towards Leenane.

One of our officers remarked that as the road leading roundby Delphi Duisburg was blocked, as a result of our order issued on the 17th May, they would have to return back our way again.

24. Others suggested they were probably going ~~out~~ to Letterfrack Fair. Even so when returning to Westport they would have to return our way, the poor boys, by Carrowkennedy !! Was our long wished for opportunity in the offing at last? Would we be so favoured?

Surely "Mayo of the welcomes" never prepared a reception with such a fluttering of hearts, such anxiety for realisation, such enthusiasm for accomplishment, such desire to have everybody in position, and such anxiety to obey. Could we really be so favoured as to have them "come our way" on their return to Westport.

The self-reliance engendered by the many contacts with the enemy was very apparent to-day.

The inefficiency displayed by our enemy at the recent fights in Kilmeena and Skirdagh, as well as the first Carrowkennedy fight in March and later at the Railway Bridge, Westport, inspired our boys with the utmost confidence.

In all those instances we were hopelessly outmatched by supposed trained men, with up to date equipment. In some instances we were outnumbered to the extent of 8 to 1 and 12 to one.

What wonder then if our boys were anxious to enter on a trial of strength or efficiency where the odds were reduced to something like equal.

Yes, you could see the confidence blooming to-day, like the first of the summer roses, a delight to behold.

Mobilisation "At the double" was the order. As the men were to come up they were to rush over to V. Comdt. Malone at the county Road.

Dr. Madden, Comdt. Ring, V. Comdt. Malone and myself ran the distance to the County Road and had a quick look round.

58. /s stationed Malone overlooking the County Road in the neighbourhood of the burnt-out R.I.C. Hut, with instructions to wait there for the men and where to place them for the time being as they came up.

Madden, Ring and myself then hurried forward along towards Westport parallel to the road in the direction of Thomas Raven's, where there is a bend in the road.

After examining the ground in this neighbourhood the three of us were agreed that it was a much more favourable site for us than the position where the boys now were with Malone.

We were probably not more than fifteen minutes on this job until we turned back. Immediately we turned, Malone and others were whistling, shouting and doing their best, evidently to pull the sky down. It was quite clear the enemy were coming. This would not now permit us to occupy this last selected ambush position.

Joe Ring suggested that the double creaggane (hillock) out in the fields 150 yards west would be a great point for one of our men. We agreed, and he volunteered to go if given permission. This was granted and he set out at once.

In his crossing the intervening ground between the road and the hillocks under the protection of a low fence, he was continually being sniped at. His haversack was projecting higher than the fence.

He got across safely and succeeded in rendering valuable service from that post. The fact of the enemy seeing him go there was in itself a great asset to us, and a great set-back, to them. It confined their movements very much.

About the moment Joe Ring left us, the leading lorry had halted under our main position, which was about 60 ft. higher than the road.

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54- It was a splendid location, well protected by a rough stone fence.  
Another section of our men occupied the top of a high hill behind Mrs. McGreal's to the South of us and on the other or West side of the road about 250 yards from our main body.

A left flanking party extended from our main body down by a wood and out into a bare flat in a level with the road.

Capt. Jim Moran of Shralogga was out in this flat. He told me of the sniping he had at the enemy as they ran into McGreal's. I was not surprised when later, during the taking of their surrender, some of the enemy came out of McGreal's leaving a heavy trail of blood along their path. Jim was an expert shot and had a lovely mauser rifle.

Our right flank was protected by V. Brigadier Ned Moane, Adj. Johnnie Gibbons, and I thing another, I cannot now remember.

I believe it cannot be said whether the driver of the first lorry steered into the position where the lorry halted. I do believe he was dead when it came to a stop. I also believe that is where he would halt had he been alive. It was the best place of protection for the men and the Lewis gun they carried.

The driver was D.I. Stephenson and he was shot "dead center" in the forehead.

Now the fun <sup>legion</sup> started. Our boys started singing "Kelly the boy from Killane". They kept it up for a long period; much to the discomfort of the enemy. I am confident it helped materially in hastening their surrender also.

The enemy pushed and kicked out the Lewis gun from the rear of the lorry. Several men followed it on the flat like salmon jumping. They knew they weren't rise their back, head or any part of the body. When they

landed on the ground they had about a 2'6" <sup>high</sup> sod fence <sup>for protection</sup> to protect them.

Under this cover the Machine gun was set up.

"Boy oh Boy" did our ~~comrades~~ <sup>men</sup> remember the instructions talked of day and night for about a fortnight. "Dear oh Dear" how they attended to those gunners and with such effect.

There was a burst <sup>from the gun</sup> let up into the air to frighten the supposed rabbits. Then a poor fellow tried to level it across the fence at us but that was all. Suddenly there was too much lead in his head, ~~in~~ <sup>he</sup> ~~himself~~ <sup>expressed himself</sup>

Another comrade pushed him aside and started the same game. This second man had scarcely caught the gun until he also was lead.

Then a third <sup>man</sup> ~~gun~~ made a like effort and met with the same fate. After that poor "Lady Lewis" was left all alone. There was no other man found with the nerve to embrace her. She was looked upon as one to be avoided rather than courted.

While all this was taking place at the front lorry the men and officers of the second lorry and car had dismounted and taken cover around the bridge and its walls about 80 yards in rear of the front lorry. All those Tans were under the fire of our men on the left flank of our main body, ~~of~~ <sup>our</sup> section on the hill to the South of the bridge under the command of Comdt. Joe Doherty, and <sup>of</sup> Comdt. Joe Ring to the West of the enemy. Under those conditions with a hail of bullets coming from three angles, all the enemy around the bridge had a very hot time indeed.

The driver of this second lorry was a civilian and his lorry had been commandeered for the occasion. He took cover under his lorry and had a very hard time dodging Joe Ring's bullets, in whose line of vision he was. There was one man killed and at least one badly wounded at the bridge. Some had taken cover under the bridge.

When they found themselves under such concentrated fire at this point they made a dash for McGreal's house on the roadside about 40 yards

61. <sup>to</sup> In their rear. This isolated them from taking further part in the engagement. It also enabled more of our men to concentrate on the front lorry and thereby bring about a more speedy capture of the whole party as results proved.

For some reason a man's two legs were protruding from the rear of the front lorry and when the boys had nothing else to fire at they were popping at those legs. The two calves were practically shot off them.

Now there was yet a live man in this armour plated lorry and he attempted to shell us with a grenade. Evidently he did not like "The Boy from Killane" or the boys that were singing it. He also seemed to know that he must not expose any part of himself, having already experienced the accuracy of our riflemen.

It would be easy and simple if he got us running away like rabbits. But cramped up in the lorry with tools and ammunition boxes, tyres etc., the poor boy had scarcely room to roll on his side.

In addition, those numerous, unfriendly Republican bullets were most unpleasant and they kept coming. How then could he adjust his grenade-throwing rifle, or fit his grenade into it. He couldn't; it was impossible, but evidently he tried. When trying in his cramped up space apparently the bomb fell beside his head and nearly blew it off.

Bombs are very dangerous things to handle and he should not have tried this with so many disadvantages. There was a big groove taken out of the side of his head when we found him later.

I suggest the foregoing disadvantages are what brought about his disaster.

Some of our boys suggested:- It was how they shot the ring pin out of the grenade and set it off. Perhaps; even a chance in a million is possible and "your guess is as good as mine".

12- Now that bomb explosion, as was expected, sped up matters in our favour a good deal. In a few minutes there was a white flag waved from his lorry.

While this fight was going on, one of their men kept up a steady fire on our position. I believe he kept completely under cover, as the keenest eyes could not detect him, and his shooting seemed to go wild all the time, thanks be to God. Nevertheless the danger was there while he had his liberty.

It seemed he must have dived into this thicket of sally bushes first thing when the lorry halted. Now this man was a real danger, as quite possibly he could not see the white flag in the lorry behind him. He was much lower than the road, with a fence at his back, and very likely he was not looking behind him.

Time was pressing on us very much. We were probably well over two hours fighting already.

Here was partial victory within our grasp which could easily be snatched from us by the arrival of reinforcements from Westport or elsewhere.

We decided that Joe Baker with some of his men would carry out a flanking movement, by working down towards the road from our left centre under cover. This Joe gladly undertook without hesitation.

Capt. Johnny Duffy, his brother Paddy with some others fixed bayonets and did a right flanking movement to the road, no cover being available.

The main body, and Baker's section which were by this time in position quite close to the enemy, kept up a protecting fire for Duffy and his section.

When Duffy and his section approached the lorry, the hidden man in the trench came out when ordered to do so. Perhaps the shining steel "lightened" him. He was the only man from the front lorry that escaped

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unwounded.

63- This man was taken over immediately by *Jack Keane and others* ~~Duffy~~ and his section to Mrs. McGreal's and was instructed to tell his pals what had happened at the front lorry. Up to this they must have been ignorant of what had happened <sup>to</sup> those in the front lorry. They were confined to the house and had no view from it.

My individual point of view has been that the enemy by occupying McGreals house isolated themselves from their comrades and by doing so were guilty of an error in tactics, which contributed to our success in this fight.

Immediately a number of our boys including Jimmy Flaherty advanced on the captured lorry to take over Lewis gun, rifles and all available material without delay. All equipment was brought up at once to our main position for security.

Then followed one of the most extraordinary fits of antics one could possibly expect to witness from a grown up man. Poor Jimmy Flaherty seemed to be demented. He was carrying on like a well-fed kitten with Miss Lewis, kissing her, rubbing her down, patting her, then patting her again and then a further romping. It was almost heart-breaking to interrupt him, but time was pressing.

Night was approaching and the capture only half completed. He had to be reminded the war was not yet won and to train his "Lady love" Miss Lewis on McGreal's at once, but to be sparing on ammunition. He did this without further delay, and with very much pleasure. We found Jimmie to be a splendid machine-gunner.

While one section of our men looked after the booty from the first lorry, others attended to the wounded.

Fras. Cregan was badly wounded and seemed to bleed a lot. He was carried up by our boys on a door-leaf from the road to a neighbouring house,

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and some drink secured for him, also a pillow and blanket to try and comfort him. We <sup>e</sup> then removed the dead men out of the lorry.

The man who had had the bomb accident was found to be in an awful condition. There was a semi-circular groove about 2" wide gouged out of the side of his head, over the ear from front to back. It was as if done with a sharp instrument. The wound was covered over with fine dust from the lorry, which had settled down after the <sup>bomb</sup> explosion. This dust hid a lot of the gruesome appearance that would otherwise be so apparent.

On searching D.I. Stephenson's pockets we found instructions issued to him from Galway directing him to call on the Wallace Brothers, at the head of the Killary Bay, near Aasleagh.

So these were the instructions that took them on their fatal journey. Both of those boys were safe and sound in McDonnell's A.S.U. of West Connemara and were among the best men we had.

Having completed our work with the captured contents of the first lorry, all attention was now directed on those men who were herded in McGreal's house.

A number of us now converged on McGreal's with <sup>Sgt. Keane</sup> ~~Captain~~ Duffy and his prisoner.

When they were informed what had happened, <sup>Jack Keane</sup> ~~Captain~~ Duffy demanded their surrender which they refused. I then arrived and demanded that the people of the house be let out unhurt. This was also refused. I then reminded them that there was a way ~~or~~ which they evidently had not yet grasped.

I told them that if they were not coming out at once we were not going to take any risks by delays of this sort, that we were not going to allow them to hold us up, that we would set the house on fire and that if any member of the McGreal family ~~would be~~ injured as a result of the fire

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we would shoot them down to the last man.

This brought immediate results. The Tans all marched out at once with their hands up and they were lined up on the road and disarmed without delay. The Tans seemed to be very much afraid and the Officer inquired from me what we were going to do with them.

I told him this fight was over, and that we were not the savages he and his Government were so busy describing us to be; that we were Christians first and above all else, and that he need not have any fear whatever. They were told they would be released as soon as we were ready to leave.

This they did not seem to be able to grasp. The whole thing was positively painful to us. The worry that moved them all was most embarrassing to anyone with a spark of Christian charity, and we were most anxious to dispel it.

Any assurance of ours did not seem to have any effect on them.

I then observed one poor fellow who seemed to be badly wounded in the leg or foot trying to stand to attention with the rest. He seemed to be in great pain and losing a large quantity of blood.

I ordered him to the fence at once to sit or lie down, and blamed both himself and his pals for not letting us know and for assuming we would be so heartless as to impose such unnecessary punishment on any human being.

This simple act of charity, and the few words of compassion associated with it had just the effect we all longed for, but so far had failed to achieve. It was electrifying in its results.

The whole outlook of the prisoners changed just as you'd clap your hands; They sensed now that they were in luck.

Immediately our boys and themselves started conversations and jokes.

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The O.C. was requested to send one of his men for Spiritual and Medical aid to Westport. He was informed how badly some of his men were up at the other lorry. He dispatched a man at once on this errand.

Our toughest problem now was to break off the conversations. It did not seem to occur to our boys for one moment that there would be 10,000 additional men out for our blood after this evening's engagement.

I was amazed: It was entirely beyond my comprehension. But then there are a lot of things I do not understand at all, at all.

The relaxation seemed to be very tempting indeed, after the high pressure operation of the past few hours. Every tongue seemed to loosen up with redoubled energy.

However, we <sup>put</sup> got the lorries on fire and took our departure. Even then the O.C. was very anxious to get a further promise that we would not fire on them when we were retiring. We gave him that promise, whether it allayed his inner feelings or not I am not in a position to say.

Anyway he had not long to wait, for we covered a lot of ground in a short time. As on the occasion of the first Carrowkennedy engagement on 22nd March, '21, not one man of the whole unit got a scratch or wound of any kind.

It was now darkening rapidly, as we had some hurried refreshments in our beloved Claddy once more, and made a speedy departure.

We had been informed later that it was hours after daylight the following day before any man came to the wounded and dying enemy at Carrowkennedy.

We were also told that the whole district was thoroughly scouted by enemy planes in the morning before any help was permitted to come along.

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We did not know for quite a while afterwards what was thought of the removal of D.I. Stephenson, Evidently he had been scourging the people of Erris in North Mayo for some time before he came to Westport.

When the Erris people heard of his demise they just about "Set the Barony on fire" so great was the jubilation.