

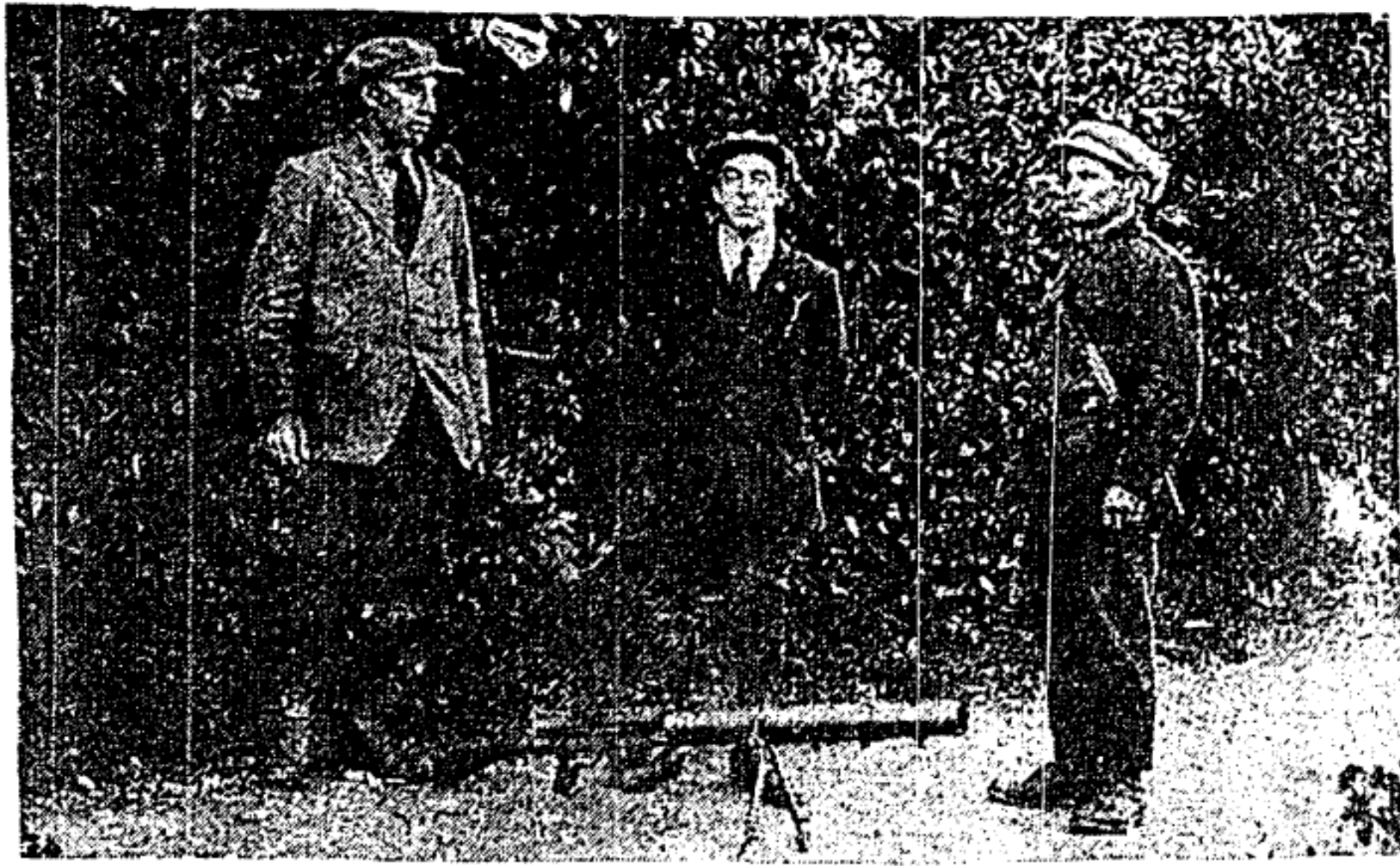
PROCESSIONS AGAINST CONSCRIPTION

BLACK AND TANS ARRIVE IN WESTPORT

THE I.R.A. GO INTO ACTION

WEST MAYO'S FIGHTING STORY

THIS is the story, according to the facts now available, of the fight for freedom in West Mayo, by the famous and fearless West Mayo Brigade I.R.A. led by the late Brigadier Michael Kilroy, of Newport, whose death in December, 1932, deprived writers of a valuable source of information on the exploits of Michael and his group of daring fighters. Many still remain to tell the story and this paper has the honour to give to its readers as told to staff reporters by men who fought side by side with Michael Kilroy in his campaign against the forces of occupation.



As told to—
Anthony Lavelle

This historic picture shows the Lewis gun taken from the British at the battle of Carrowkennedy. In the picture (l. to r.) are Ned Moane, Jimmy Flaherty (gunner) and Michael Kilroy. Photo (copyright—J. Leonard and Son, Bofeenaun, Ballina).

THINGS were quiet in the West between 1916 and 1920. Drilling and the collection of arms and explosives went on.

About the year 1917 the British Government made an order bringing the Conscription Bill into force in Ireland. They wanted men badly at the Front where the Germans were winning many battles. In applying the Bill to Ireland they made a grave mistake because the threat of Conscription united the people as nothing ever did before. All the Bishops and Priests called on the people to resist the measure by every means in their power.

Anti-Conscription meetings were held in every town and the young men not already in the Volunteers joined in large numbers. All were ready to take to the mountains. The young girls in every village started to learn first aid and prepared to go with the men. In order to escape conscription a large number of young men sailed to America. They were not long there when the United States entered the war and they were called up in America and were soon landing in France.

Seeing that the whole nation was against them and realising that it would take more soldiers than they had to round up the Irish, the British Government dropped the Conscription Bill. All it did was bring recruits to the I.R.A.

R.I.C. Barracks Burned

SINN Fein, the political branch of the Irish Freedom movement, was now very strong all over Ireland, except in a few places held by the Unionists in the North, and branches sprang up in every village. The general election to the British Parliament in 1918 brought great enthusiasm amongst the people who turned out on election day and returned the Sinn Fein candidates to power by an overwhelming majority. Joe MacBride, Westport, was elected a member for South Mayo.

At the first meeting of the new members for Ireland in Dublin, it was decided that they would not take their seats in the British Parliament but to form An Dail or Irish Parliament in Dublin. This assembly formed an Irish Govt. to rule Ireland as the people had ordered at the election. British Administration in Ireland was to be ignored. Departments of Defence, Local Government, Justice, Industry and Commerce and Education were set up.

Following this Sinn Fein set up their own courts to deal out Irish law to the people. Local magistrates were appointed to hear the cases and Sinn Fein appointed police to see that the orders of the Courts were carried out. The late Justice Coyne and Mr. John O'Dowd helped with others, to establish Sinn Fein Courts in the Castlebar and Westport areas. The litigants and solicitors were asked to stay away from the British Courts and it happened that the British Courts were deserted and that the Sinn Fein Courts, often held in some barn, were well attended. One day two well-known legal men were caught by the I.R.A. going to a sitting of a British Court in the county. They were held up and imprisoned in a duck house for the day. On another occasion the late J. C. Garvey of Murrisk, a learned solicitor, was pleading a case before a sitting of the Sinn Fein Court in Westport. Addressing the farmer, who was presiding, he asked for a case stated. The members of the court retired to the room to consider this. After

some time the Sitting was resumed and the Presiding Magistrate said: "Mr. Garvey—We have considered your application and we refuse it."

Mr. Garvey then said: "Gentlemen, I bow to your superior judgment."

In most cases the people were pleased with the decisions of the local courts. The Courts were often raided by the R.I.C. and anybody caught taking part were sent to prison.

The members of the R.I.C. in barracks all over the country reported on all the activities of the I.R.A. and this held up the administration of the new government. The I.R.A. had no other choice but to drive them out of their barracks.

Also the British ordered them to carry arms and one infamous Chief Inspector, a man named Smith, addressing members of the R.I.C. in Kerry said: "Shoot first and ask questions afterwards. The more you shoot the better I like it." Being Irishmen, drawn from country people, the R.I.C. resented this order and they resigned in large numbers. Their places had to be filled by a force known as the Black and Tans recruited in England from ex-soldiers and criminals. The new force had a rate of pay of 10/- per day. Members of the R.I.C. who were near pension age stayed on in the force and some of them gave very useful information to the I.R.A.

Action in Westport

HAVING collected some arms the I.R.A. in Westport District went into action in 1921. The first action was the burning of police huts at Carrowkennedy by a patrol of Aughagower and Cushlough boys under Captain J. Duffy. Ayle police barracks was burned by a patrol under T. Bourke, Doon. Preparations were moving at this time for more active work by the I.R.A. Petrol was removed from a train on the way to Newport, and stored in Owenwee bog. Sleepers were commandeered from the Railway Company for the building of dug-outs.

The Black and Tans arrived in Westport on the 2nd November, 1920, and swaggered around the town with revolvers strapped to their thighs, shooting them off whenever possible to terrorise the people. Their orders were: "make it a hell for the people. Take everything and pay for nothing."

Most of the wanted men had been forewarned and had made good their escape before their houses were raided. Most of them collected on Lannore Hill. Amongst them were: Charles Hughes, Eamonn Moane, Charles Gavin, Tom Heavey (now in Ballina) and J. McDonagh, all of Westport. Owen Hughes, Lankhill, and Manus Keane of Cloonskill.

Captain J. Duffy made arrangements for billeting them in the houses around but in a few days the scare was over, and some of the older men, whose houses were not raided, returned home and were not afterwards disturbed.

Arms Collected

AS most of the younger men, some of them boys, who left the senior classes in the Christian Brother's Schools to join the Column, could not return home, except at night, the task of forming an Active Service Unit was taken more seriously and a number of young men volunteered for full-time activity against the enemy. The idea was to strike him every time it was possible and give him no peace. Arms were being collected at Cloonskill.

The full armament of the Westport area at this time was eight service rifles, 3 revolvers, one Peter the Painter revolver, 8 good shot-guns, and a large number of useless guns, more dangerous to the men than to the enemy. They also had 1,500 rounds of .303 ammunition and 60 rounds of .45 ammo.

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A Raid on Cloonskill

LEARNING of these preparations, the Military swooped down on Cloonskill village on the 23rd December, 1920. They wanted the Duffy brothers and the arms but found neither. They pulled down hay, oats and walls, and even dug out the pit of potatoes, but found nothing. All they had for their trouble was a fat goose belonging to Phil Lyons of Cloonskill, which one of the soldiers picked up on his bayonet.

There was another raid on Christmas Eve, during which Pat Duffy arrived home from America, to find his home occupied by the Black and Tans and his sons outlawed. On the same night Hughes' Keane's and Berry's were raided. The enemy forces came again on Christmas morning and surrounded Aughagower Church and all the people were questioned at the Church door.

Men Lined Up

ON St. Stephen's night, Aughagower, was again visited. The village was surrounded as the dance in the local hall ended. All the men present were lined up in front of the Church to be identified by some of the local R.I.C. men. At the time three wanted men were having tea in Fr. McHugh's. They were Joe Ring, John Duffy and Charles Gavin.

On their way to meet them P. Duffy and T. Heavey were captured in front of Carney's. They were marched in front of a squad of soldiers to the Church, but as the soldiers' attentions were distracted by Mark Scott of Ballygolman, and John Reilly of Lekaun, who were standing at the Pound Wall, Duffy and Heavey escaped into the Old Graveyard, and got around to Fr. McHugh's to warn their companions who got away.

That same night the village of Curvey came in for its terror raid. Moran's, Heneghan's, Mulroy's and Scahill's were visited. About this time Paddy Duffy was accidentally wounded in the hand, which put him out of action for some time.

Pat Moore of Castiebar Street, Westport, told me how he used to go to England with others to purchase much needed arms. They bought the arms from British soldiers and got them home in coffins addressed to firms in Westport. Friendly detectives and customs men let them in, he said.

During the Christmas raids the following Volunteers were arrested: Hugh Reid of Knappagh Beg, Pat and Ml. Tunney, brothers, of Cushlough; John Hastings of Derryherbert, Brod McLoughlin of Oughty, and Tom Bourke of Doon. Charley Gavin of Westport, was arrested in the house of T. O'Connor, of Loughloon.

Active Service Units

AT this time it was dangerous for any member of the I.R.A. to stay in his home or "digs" and it was necessary for them to go "on the run" as it was termed. Headquarters had planned that active service units were to be formed in all areas and ambush the enemy forces every time they came out of their heavily fortified barracks in the towns.

During this time Michael Kilroy of Newport, was touring his area selecting men for his Active Service Unit. They were the young men with the best training in rifle marksmanship, as with the scarcity of ammunition every bullet had to find its mark. The following were selected for the Westport Active Service Unit: Joe Ring, O.C., James (Broddy) Malone, Johnnie Duffy, Joe Baker, Batty Cryan, James Flaherty, (who had British Army training), Tommy Ainsworth, Jack McDonagh, Dan Gavin, Ml. Staunton, Paddy Duffy, Jack Keane, Tom Heavey, John Collins, P. Pearce, "Laddeen" Hogan, "Maneen" Naughton, J. Cannon, John Bradley, Tom Basquill, James Duffy, "Butch" Lambert and Richard Joyce. The above were in addition to the Brigade Staff made up of Ml. Kilroy, Ned Moane, J. Gibbons, J. R. Gibbons, T. Ketterick and Jim Rushe.

The Louisburgh Active Service Unit was made up of the following: P. Kelly, O.C., A. Harney, his brother, J. Harney, Dan McNamara, and Dan Sammon. They had only 4 rifles in the Louisburgh area.

Capture of Arms

THE most frequent action of the A/S Unit now was the capture of arms from police or military on patrol or from military stores. The Column wanted a good supply of arms for attacks they were planning on large military or police convoys travelling between the towns.

The first success in these operations was the taking of two rifles and 500 rounds of ammunition from the Military Station in the Distillery at Westport. A few rifles were bought from soldiers, Tom Ketterick, a daring I.R.A. man, drank in pubs, which the Tans frequented, trying to find out information about their plans. He took his life in his hands in doing this. He was always armed with a Peter the Painter revolver. He was prepared to sell his life dearly.

The first ambush planned was attempted at Glospatrick, Murrisk, on St. Patrick's Day, 1921. Ml. Kilroy was in charge of both Westport and Louisburgh Units. Information was received that an enemy convoy was to pass between Westport and Louisburgh. After waiting in position for two days the Units withdrew, no enemy convoy having passed. "Somebody on the road may have sent in word that the Units were waiting in ambush."

Shooting of Policeman

THE first casualty of the fight took place after this. It happened when Ml. Kilroy, Joe Ring and Broddy Malone were travelling through Derrykillew, Cushlough, when they encountered three members of the R.I.C. Shots were exchanged and Sergeant Coughlin was killed. Constable Love was wounded and the other man surrendered. Their arms were collected.

(To be continued)

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LEITRIM-SLIGO MENTAL HEALTH BOARD. YEARLY AND HALF-YEARLY CONTRACTS.

A decree for £95 with costs and expenses was given by Judge Durcan in Ballina Circuit Court.

has received

I have received instructions from Mr. Michael Harrington to accept private offers for the sale

containing 21 acres, 3 roods and 18 perches. Half-yearly revised annuity, £1 1s 2d. Poor law annuity, part of £19 3s 0d.

Tenders are invited for: (a) Sundry provisions (bread, butter, sugar, oatmeal, etc.) for the half-year ending 30th