

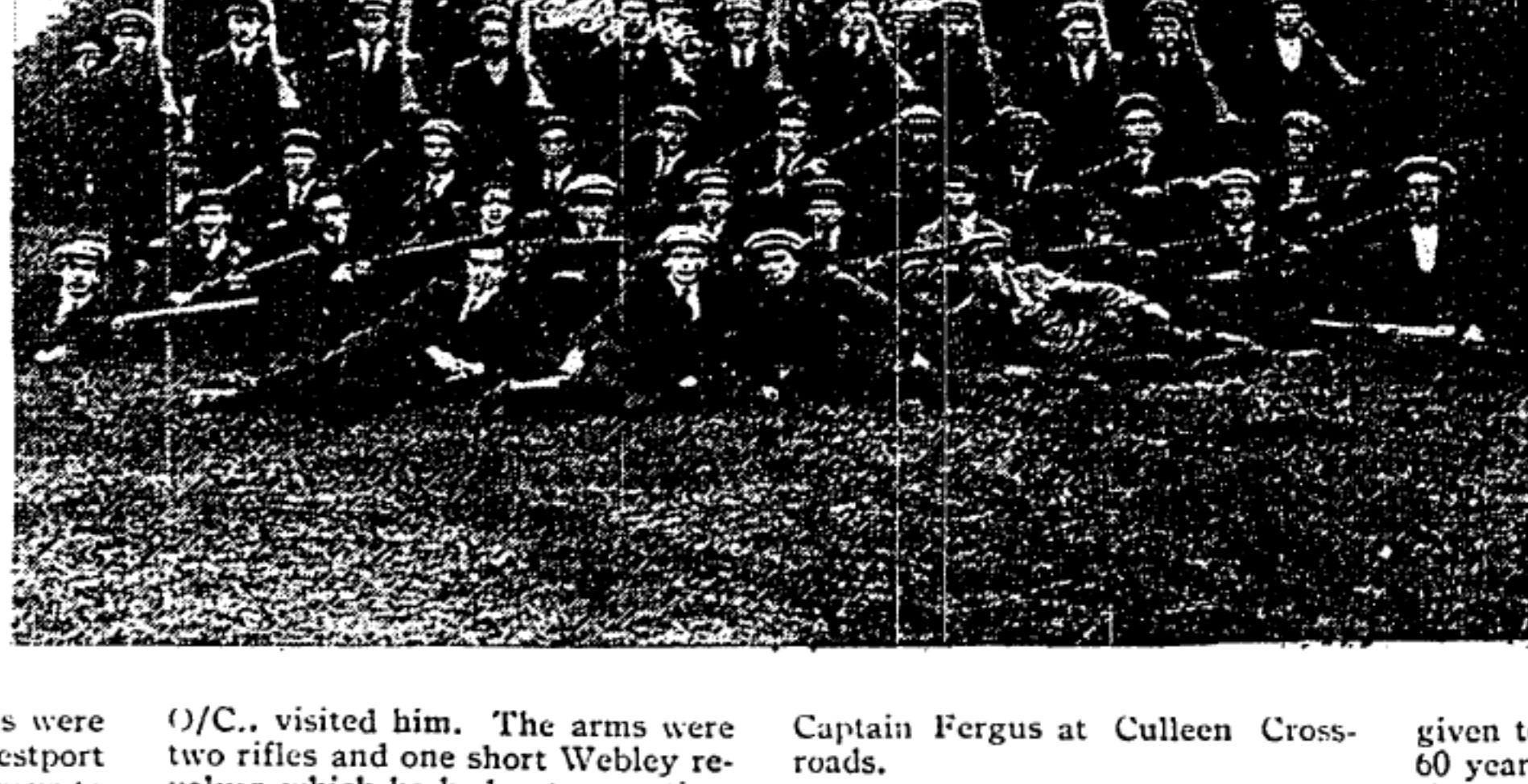
TANS ATTACK
LOUISBURGH
MEN

AFRAID TO LEAVE
LOUISBURGH
BARRACKS

TOM KETTERICK
WOUNDED, BUT
ESCAPES

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, 1962, 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

Michael Kilroy and some of West Mayo's fighting men. Photo copyright: J. Leonard & Son, Bofenaun.

THE Black and Tans were very active in Westport at this time and it was dangerous to go into the town if you were a wanted man on the run. Some took the risk to see their parents and wives.

One of these was the late Tom Derrig, of High Street, Westport, who was O/C of the West Mayo Brigade at this time, and later was Minister for Education. In 1920 he left the mountains to come to see his mother and while on the visit he was arrested by R.I.C. and taken to prison.

When Michael Kilroy decided to form a flying column to take the field against the enemy the men had to be fitted out with clothes, boots and tools for constructing dug-outs and trenching roads.

Tom Ketterick, the Brigade Quartermaster, and Paddy Kelly, O/C., Louisburgh, Company, went into Westport to get supplies one night. They went into Shanley's of Bridge Street, to get some of the supplies. As they were going in they noticed two soldiers outside. Tom ordered Kelly to keep watch while he went in. As Ketterick was talking to the draper in the shop he had his hand on his revolver in case the soldiers came in and accidentally it went off and the bullet wounded him in the leg. Paddy Kelly went to his assistance and got him out the front door as the soldiers had gone on hearing the shot. Tom said if he could be brought to a friendly family named Conway in James Street he would be safe. With the help of John Bourke, garage owner, Bridge St., the wounded man was taken to Conways. Kelly sent word to Brodie Malene who brought a doctor and a car to take Tom Ketterick out to a house in the country where he quickly recovered. They were only gone when all the houses in the area were raided.

Paddy Kelly had a narrow escape when he went up to Mulloy's of Shop Street, afterwards, to buy wire cutters. He was in the shop talking to a shop assistant named Glynn, when a member of the R.I.C. from Louisburgh, who knew him, came in. Kelly drew his gun and went behind a pile of paint tins. The policeman said something to the assistant and left the shop. Kelly had to hide on the premises until night, when Mr. Mulloy let him out the back way through the gardens and he rejoined the Louisburgh unit.

A Welcome Present

THIS Unit was staying at Tully Lodge, about 4 miles from Louisburgh, which was given to them by the owner, Mr. John O'Dowd, former Court Clerk for Westport and Louisburgh. He is in retirement now and still, I am glad to say, in good health. He was clerk of the Petty Sessions in Westport and was Intelligence Officer for Louisburgh Area.

He reported that the British were getting wise to him and said he would resign, but the I.R.A. told him to stay on as long as he possibly could. Son of a Fenian, he passed on useful information about the moves of the enemy. The first rifles the Louisburgh Company ever got were given to them by John O'Dowd, one night when Andy Harney, Battn. Adjt: Jack Feehan, a leading I.R.A. man from Leenane, and Paddy Kelly, Battn.

O/C., visited him. The arms were two rifles and one short Webley revolver which he had got some time before 1916 from his cousin, Major John MacBride.

They had to bring the guns across the country to the home of a farmer named Fergus. The farmer's daughter, who afterwards became the wife of Andy Harney, put the guns under her mattress.

One fair day in Louisburgh the Volunteers saw four police dragging a Volunteer named John Sammon of Carramore, to the Barracks. They surrounded the police and took the revolvers from them.

They could have taken the Barracks if they wished, as there were only three policemen there, but they did not do so as they had no permission from H.Q. to do so. The men who took part were known and had to go "on the run." The homes of the I.R.A. men in the district were raided and some of them were arrested in their beds. Later the garrison in the barracks was reinforced by men from other stations that were closed down or burned and by some Black and Tans. A friendly R.I.C. man, who tipped the I.R.A. off about intended raids had to resign as the others got suspicious of him, and he would be shot by the Tans if they got the chance. They could say it was an accident.

As police were raiding around the district Jack Feehan, a native of Kilmenea, took the arms to Leenane and hid them in the house of the Parish Priest—Fr. Cunningham.

Louisburgh Men Attacked

IN April of 1921, a party of Louisburgh I.R.A. under Captain D. Sammon, were billeted in a vacant house in the village of Askelaun, two miles from the town. They were suddenly surprised by a party of Black and Tans who fired on them at close range as they were escaping from the house. The Volunteers had only two revolvers but returned the fire. As there was no cover one Volunteer was wounded, three were captured and two escaped. The men who took part were Dan Sammon, Pat McNamara, James and Tom Sammon, Jos. Fergus and John P. Sammon.

Peter McDonnell of Leenane, who had a carpenters shop in Louisburgh, was at that time helping the local Battalion. Other members were: Tom Fergus, Mullagh; John P. Harney, James Harney, Martin O'Reilly, who acted as a scout; P. J. Kelly and the men mentioned above. Also James McDonnell of Cross and John J. Philbin.

Rifles From Westport

At this time Tom Ketterick, who was Brigade Quartermaster, summoned James Sammon and P. J. Kelly into Westport. They were told to bring a motor car. Joe Heneghan drove them to Westport and they were met by Tom Ketterick outside the town. He brought them to Owenwee bog, where there was a dump of arms under the care of Peter Joyce and his father. On the orders of the Q.M. they handed over six Lee Enfield rifles and two Peter the Painter revolvers. These arms were placed under the back seat of the car and handed over to

Captain Fergus at Culleen Crossroads.

Tans Afraid to Leave Louisburgh

ON the 16th March, 1921, it was the intention of the Brigade O.C. to attack the Louisburgh Barrack and the following men were mobilised at Culleen near Murrisk:

Ned Moane, Carrabawn; Ml. Kilroy, Newport (who was in charge); Brod Carney, Westport; John Maguire, Cordarragh; Charles Hughes, Lankhill; J. Heneghan, do.; F. Kilcoyne, Drummin-doo, Westport; N. Moran, do.; P. Jennings, Cloonskill; Thomas Basquill, Murrisk; Rick Joyce, John Gibbons and T. S. Gibbons, Westport, and Johnnie Duffy, Cloonskill. They were looked after by Culleen Company, of which Captain Fergus was O/C., and Michael Foy, 1st. Lieutenant. Mrs. Mackle supplied the Unit with refreshments. When it was learned that two lorry loads of Black and Tans had moved from Westport to Louisburgh that day the A.S.U. was moved into ambush positions at Glesh Patrick in order to attack the lorries on their way back to Westport. Although the I.R.A. remained part of two nights and all St. Patrick's Day the enemy did not return. They must have got word of the proposed ambush for they remained shut up in Louisburgh Barracks for a fortnight.

Help was given by Tom Gill, Captain of the Lecanvey Company, James Walsh and Austin Mortimer, Lieutenants. The Barracks was not attacked.

Whilst the A.S.U. was in position at Glesh, Paddy Kelly, O/C., Louisburgh Battn., arrived at the ambush position riding a white horse, the property of Austin Ball, Ballyhip, Louisburgh. As none of his men were required he was sent back to rejoin Louisburgh Unit assembled at Tully Lodge. He was instructed to carry out patrol activity in and around Louisburgh town and attack any of the enemy seen out. Each time the Tans saw any of the Louisburgh I.R.A. they ran for the barracks.

When there was no chance of the enemy coming and to remain any longer near Glesh would be dangerous, the O.C. took the A.S.U. to Prospect where suppers were supplied by Pat Duffy. They all remained for some time in Brackloon area. Ml. Foy acted as guide to prospect.

At this time it was not safe for the I.R.A. to travel on the public roads except at night, and they had to establish lines of communication over bogs and mountains. Hundreds of unnamed men in the backward villages acted as guides to the men of the column.

Lanmore Woman Saves Arms

IN case the enemy might get to know about them, dumps of arms and ammunition were moved to new sites for safety.

In March, 1921, arms and ammunition were taken in a bag from Owenwee bog to Berry's of Lanmore, about three miles from Westport. As none of the Berry boys were at home the stuff was

given to Mrs. Berry, who was then 60 years of age. Later Black and Tans were seen approaching and with great presence of mind Mrs. Berry took the bag of arms on her back, and driving some geese before her, went into the nearby slate quarries, where she hid the stuff. The raiding party paid little attention to the old woman. Her action saved the arms the Tans were looking for.

The gallant and fearless women in Cumann na mBan often risked their lives carrying arms from one area to another. They also carried dispatches.

Fourth Western Division Formed

IN 1921 after a meeting of officers from various districts in West Mayo and Connemara it was decided to form what was known as the 4th Western Division. It comprised Brigades from West, North and North West West Mayo and two Brigades from Galway in Clifden and Oughterard areas.

The officer were: O/C—Ml. Kilroy, Newport; O/C—Peter McDonnell, Leenane; Adjutant—Christy Mackin, Spiddal; Asst. Adjutant—J. Gibbons, Westport; Quartermasters: J. Feehan, Leenane; Training Officer—P. Higgins; Signals—P. Higgins; Transport Officer—John Dick Gibbons, Westport; Engineer—T. P. Flanagan, B.E., Castlebar, (former Co. Surveyor); Police—Charles Gavin, Westport; Medical Officer—Dr. Tubridy, Galway; Communications and Organisation—J. Rush, Kiltinagh; Intelligence—Tom Mullins, Breaffy, Castlebar, and J. Barrett, Crossnoolina; Operations—James Malone and Joe Baker, Westport; O/C and Deputy O/C of Active Service Unit.

Poem of the Fighting Men

Mr. Eddie Hallinan, of Cordarragh, Aughagower, recites the following poem about the West Mayo Fighting Men at many concerts in the area:—

One morning for torture and murder,
the Black and Tans careered
along
The hills and vales were resounding
with curses, vile language and song.
"Surrender ye rebels" they shouted,
"Carrakenny's answer was 'no'.
Few of them ever returned. They met
the smashing young men of Mayo.

Oh never, oh never could England, a
brave, hardy people destroy,
And keep them in bondage and
savery, with warriors like Ned
Moane and Kilroy.
She may calm the wild waves of Clew
Bay boys, or stop the Moy's crystal
waters to flow.
But she never could crush the wild
spirit of the dashing young men of
Mayo.
They are around their own firesides
again boys. The smashing young
men of Mayo.

'Ere the blue smoke of battle
and clouds boys, o'er famed Four-
makede arose.
Said Maguire to his men with em-
otion: "Before you to-day are your
toes.
Remember their devilish deeds boys,
strike hard though your heart's
blood may flow."
And victory gladdened that day boys,
for the smashing young men of Mayo.

(to be continued)

RECENT DEATH

A recent death in the Ballagh-
more area. Mrs. Katherine
McDonnell, 75, of the town,
died on March 8th, 1954, at
her home, after a long illness.

MISSION

The 61-annual retreat for the
Ballaghaderreen G.A.A. Club
was still busily preparing for the
Easter visit of the first cross-
country club to visit the town.

Justice Court on 20th

Justice Court on 20th of
Kilkenny. The court was
orderly and a fine day.
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