

THE RETREAT TO THE MOUNTAINS

R.I.C. UNWITTINGLY HELP TO SMUGGLE IN RIFLES

VOL. JIM BROWNE KILLED

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
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A training camp in Mayo used by the Volunteers. Photo (copyright)—J. Leonard & Son, Bofeenau, Ballina.

WHEN the wounded men were looked after in Aughagowla, Michael Kilroy held a conference with his staff and it was decided that they could not stay where they were within the triangle of 3 towns—Castlebar, Newport and Westport, and they could not do the long march back to Aughagower. It was decided to retreat to a village called Skirdagh in the mountains below Newport, where they would have cover and see the search parties of the enemy when they came in pursuit.

Putting the three wounded men on horseback, the column moved off through Derryloughan via Weir Bridge on the Newport River to Skirdagh. The wounded were left in McDonnell's in Skirdagh Upper while the column men were billeted in Dyan's, Devers' and other houses in Lower Skirdagh. Eight men stayed a Cloonchifinna, where Jack Mullarkey gave every assistance. While they were there Jim Moran and Jack Connolly went home to Tirnaur to visit their people and reassure them that they had not been killed at Kilmeena as was widely rumoured. They returned during the night and remained outside McDonnell's.

School and begin to move up the mountain in an effort to surround the Column. The wounded had to be moved further into the Ballycroy mountains, to a place named Creevagh. In this operation Green Chambers, who now lives in Newport, and William Chambers, Shramore, were valuable guides in the mountain passes. They advised the I.R.A. on the way to take so that they would not be surrounded by troops coming out from Castlebar and Ballina.

The Column men had to lie in cover for hours as an aeroplane sent out from the base in Castlebar, circled the mountains.

A number of the men of the R.A.F. had an aerodrome near Castlebar, in the field now owned by the Mental Hospital. They were there until 1922. They had about four planes and went off every day

Moane and his companions, guided to circle for hours over the Windy Gap, Lahardane, and the Nephin mountains.

A number of them crashed trying to land and the pilots were killed.

ESCAPED IN WOMAN'S CLOTHES

WHEN they got to Keenagh village the wounded were given women's clothes by the Hegarties and posed as a wedding party on the way to Glenisland, which was a safe retreat for the Castlebar column. They were on a side car and the driver was an R.I.C. man who had resigned some time before. When they came to Boughadon, scouts sent out by Luke Sheridan, I.O. Castlebar Battn., informed them that the Border Regiment from Castlebar, had held up a cross-roads to the South on the way to Glenisland. The driver went by the Windy Gap road and to safety in Castlebar.

A Tan lorry deliberately ran down and killed a 15-years-old Fianna Scout as he going with a dispatch on the Pontoon road. He was Jackie Barrett, son of Nurse Barrett of Market Square, Castlebar.

In this round-up by thousands of troops and police no I.R.A. man was captured and the British reported that the Column numbering 500 had vanished into the mountain mists.

The enemy, enraged at their failure, arrested all the men under 70 they could find and brought them into local schools, where they beat them with rifle and revolver butts and kicked them trying to get information out of them but they failed. In a week Kilroy and his men were billeted in the village of Clady, behind Croagh Patrick, waiting for the next move.

PRIEST THREATENED

BEFORE dangerous engagements the Column men assembled at the house of Mrs. Geraghty of Bunraver, Ayle, Westport, where Fr. McHugh, C.C., Aughagower, heard their confession, offered Mass and gave them Holy Communion. After that Fr. McHugh was visited by three lorry loads of Black and Tans, under Major General Cruise and questioned. The General is reported to have said: "Even though I am a Catholic myself and if I had any proof that you gave confession to those rebels I'd shoot you where you stand with my own gun and burn square miles of this parish."

Remembering how the Tans took out Fr. Griffin in Galway and murdered him, Fr. McHugh did not sleep at home afterwards.

AMUSING STORY OF RIFLES

AN amusing story was sent to me of how Tom Ketterick got the rifles in to Westport. This is how it was told. Tom had 12 rifles

to get through from Dublin and he travelled to Galway with James Gibbons, of Mullagh, a draper's traveller, who had large hampers in which in which he carried his samples. They arrived in Galway all right and Tom put the rifles under his bed in the hotel. A man sleeping in the same room was a Black and Tan. Anyhow Tom kept cool and he and Gibbons got the rifles on the train to Maam Cross.

When nearing the Station Gibbons looked out and saw 3 or 4 R.I.C. men on the platform. "We are finished," said Gibbons, but Tom, who was as cool as ice said: "Leave it to me." Tom got up and went up to the Sergeant of the R.I.C. and shok him by the hand and told him he was coming home from Dublin to his home in Mayo, as he could not stand the awful times up in Dublin. "Ambushes you know. By the Shiners, you know Sergeant, Terrible place Dublin. Come up to Peacocks and have a drink and bring the boys." So they went up. The Sergeant stood a round and Tom stood and they became friends.

Then Tom told the Sergeant how his friend the traveller was looking for some way to get his samples into Mayo. The Sergeant told him the only motor car there, was one they, the police, used to get themselves and offered to get it. Back the Sergeant came with the car and helped to load the samples on to it. He then warned Tom that there were a bad lot of Tans at Maam and to be careful. Tom thanked him and drove off in the direction of Maam but when the Sergeant was gone he turned towards Recess and on to Kylemore. In that way the rifles reached West Mayo.

LIST OF PRISONERS

A further list of prisoners in Rath Camp in 1921, is to hand. On it are: Ml. McHugh and B. Kitterick, Castlebar; Tom Mullell, Breaffy, do., (later T.D. for County Dublin), W. Joyce, Clogher.

The men from East Mayo were: Hubert Lyons, Paddy Waldron, Tom Mullee, Billy Comber, J. Finn, P. Cloonan, Jack Griffen, J. Rodgers, Ballyhaunis; Dr. Ferran, Foxford (Sinn Fein M.P. for East Mayo), P. Cosgrave, Foxford; Maurice Mullens, N.T., Aughagower, was brought in badly wounded. He was captured with Brigadier Sean Corcoran from Kiltimagh, when Sean was shot dead, Tommy Campbell, solr., Co.C., Swinford.

Some of the South Mayo prisoners were: Captain Tommy Collins, Mark Fox, P. Foy and Peadar Waldron, Cong; Commdt. P. Farragher, Tom Flynn, Ml. Murphy, J. Conroy, P. Connor, J. Cuddy, Ballinrobe; Dick Langan and Tom Burke, Ballglass; Ned Mannion, Ml. Joyce, J. Macken and P. Maloney, Hollymount; Harry Burke and J. Giffin, Claremorris.

Next Week:

Tans Beaten At Carrowkennedy

NEARLY CAUGHT

AT 3 a.m. on the 23rd of May, as the weary column men slept, P. Lambert and M. Naughton from Westport, who were on sentry duty, noticed large numbers of police slowly making their way up the mountain path. Naughton opened fire on them to make them take cover while Lambert had only time to waken the column. Ml. Kilroy and Connolly went down and were fired on. They replied from cover. Tom Ketterick and Paddy Connor, aroused by the shots, came out to keep back the enemy.

All the I.R.A. men got into positions and found a battle with the police during which Jim Browne of Kilmeena, was killed. Some of the enemy were killed and wounded.

When the engagement opened, Ned Moane, J. D. Gibbons, B. Cryan and P. McLoughlin took the three wounded men (J. Chambers, J. Hughes and J. Swift) on horseback through Glenlura to Letterkeen on Shramore area.

While the Swift was in the house Dr. Madden laid him out on a kitchen table, and with Michael Kilroy administering the anaesthetic, he amputated three of his toes severed by a bullet at Kilmeena.

Kilroy, Madden, Jack McDonnell, Cannon and P. J. Gibbons, protected the main body as they made their way into the mountains.

BRITISH REINFORCEMENTS ARRIVE

FROM their positions at Letterkene, British military could be seen arriving at Skirdagh

MALLRANNY AUCTION RAIDED

IN order to draw the enemy away from Ml. Kilroy and his hard-pressed men, Eamonn Moane and his companions, guided by Willie Chambers of Shramore, raided an auction in Mallranny where the goods of a well-known English supporter were being sold. T. M. Joyce, Westport, was auctioneer, and Miss A. Gallagher was his clerk.

Michael Kilroy and his men kept gong and at one time in the darkness they were hiding behind a stack of turf when a lorry of British troops halted on the road near them. The officer in charge of the troops had a torch out looking at maps of the area and the column men nearly got caught when laughing at the officer trying to pronounce local names. Going across a bog Madden fell into a bog hole. The rearguard had only crossed a bridge when the English put a guard on it.

In the Skirdagh fight a head Constable was killed and a constable wounded. D.I. Munroe of Newport, was wounded. He was a fair man and he had prevented the Tans from burning houses in Skirdagh village when they knew they had only to deal with women and old men. Another R.I.C. man named Sergeant O'Brien, told the I.R.A. that they had heard that there were wounded men in Upper Skirdagh. They were gone when the police arrived.

When darkness came, the column men came down and had a good feed of boiled salmon, bread and tea. The poached fish came in handy.

BALLA COURT BRIEFS

Martin McDonnell, Cunnagher, Castlebar, was fined 30/- by Justice Hugh C. McGahon at Balla District Court for not

the lorry displayed and for having a rear number plate which was not easily distinguishable on March 3rd.

Evidence was given by Guard Sullivan and Mr. P. J. McEllin, defendant.

P.O.A APPLIED

James Garvey, of Shraheens, Kiltimagh, was given the benefit of the P.O.A. for not having rear red or white lights on a motor tractor on November 2nd last.

NO DRIVING LICENCE

A fine of 10/- was imposed on Anthony Gibney, Enniscrone for not having a driving licence on October 25th at Balla.

DANGEROUS PARKING

Peter Carney, Slon Hill, Castlebar was fined £2 for parking in a dangerous manner on November 28th at Ballyrouks, Balla.

£3 FINE

Alo Lan... m... was fined £3 for parking a rear... tor and 10... number plate... Carrowkennedy

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Mayo M Ap

Francis P... South Prin... Illinois. US... a director o... gage Banke... two-year ter... will help s... tration of... affairs... Mr. Callag... St. Mur... Co. Mayo. F... National E... Chicago a... cety of R... Arlington H... of Appeals... Toastmaster... Real Estate... He and... four childr... llam and J... The Chic... Association... firms whos... money on... and selling... real estate... better safe... persons wh... finance the... tate, and in... mortgages... interests of