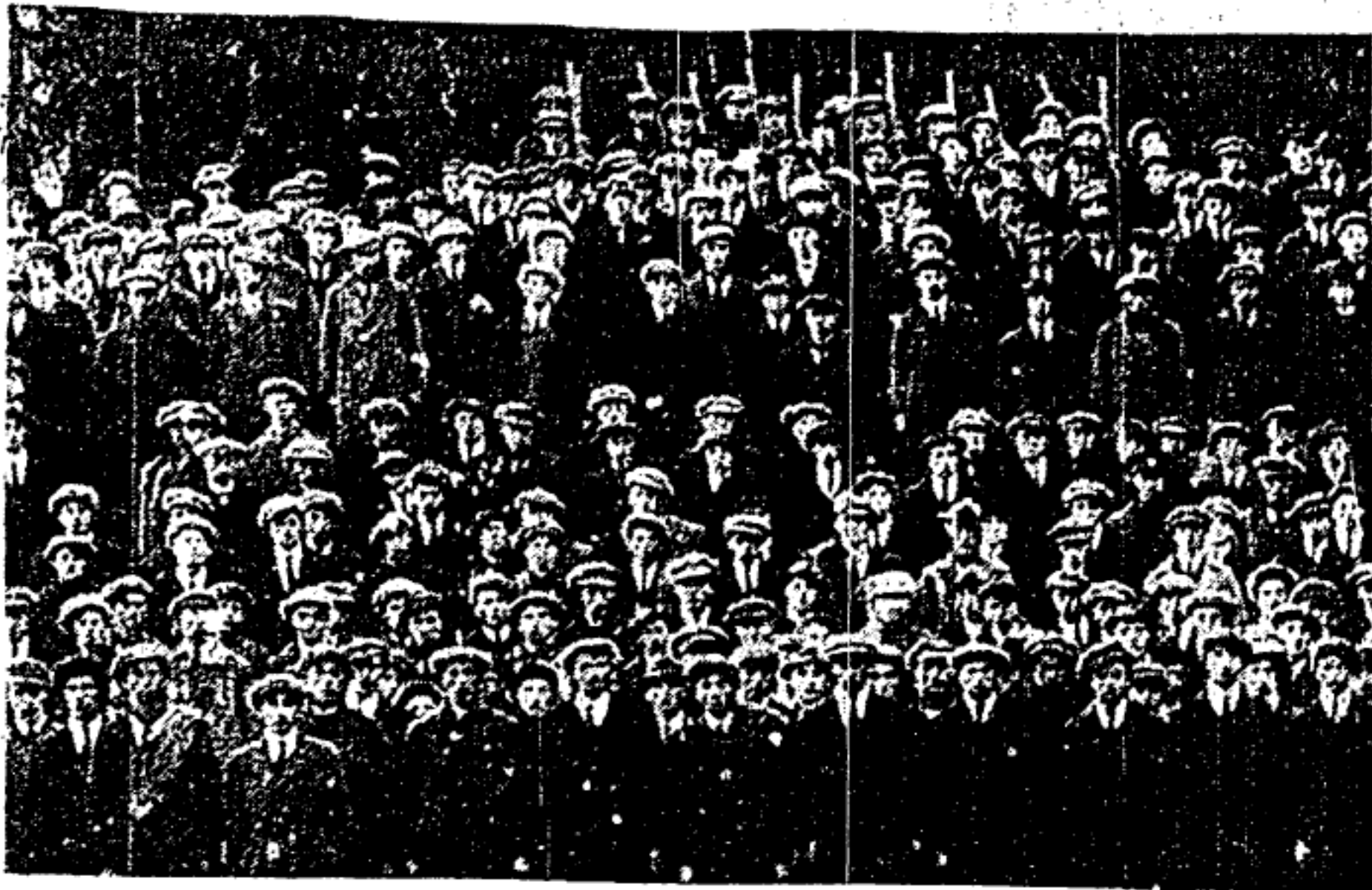


TANS SURRENDER
AT CARRAKENEDY

ARMS AND AMMUNITION
CAPTURED

KILROY WARNS POLICE
AGAINST REPRISALS

WEST MAYO'S FIGHTING STORY



As told to—

Anthony Lavelle

Another section of the West Mayo Brigade assembled in the Demesne, Westport. Photo (copyright)—J. Leonard & Son, Bofenaun, Ballina.

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.

AFTER escaping through the British net, Michael Kilroy and his Active Service Column came together at Tonlagree, Aughamore, towards the end of May. On the night of May 31st, 1921, the column moved across Curvey and Lanmore to the village of Oughty, where they remained all day on June 1st.

That night Michael Kilroy took fifteen men with him and went to the village of Drummin, which lies across the bogs from Carrakenedy and burned the R.I.C. barracks there. The Column then moved across the bogs to Derrykillew village where they were often sheltered. Some of the boys called to McGovern's and Tunney's where they were always welcome.

While the column was located at Curvey in the house of Tom Ludden, the Duffy brothers went home for supplies and were nearly captured in a raid on their own house.

On the morning of June 2nd, the column arrived in the village of Clady and four men from the Louisburgh Battalion joined them there. They were Paddy Kelly, O/C., Dan Sammon, J. Harney and P. McNamara.

Previous to this a trench had been cut in the road South of Carrakenedy dance hall by the Keegan brothers of Owenwee village and other men from there.

TURF WORKERS FILL TRENCH

AT about 3 o'clock on that day sentries reported that three lorries and a car were pulled up near the dance hall and the Tans, with fixed bayonets, were rounding up turf workers and compelling them to empty their carts to fill the trench so that the lorries could cross over. It was first assumed that the enemy forces were going to Letterfrack, as there was a fair to be held there the next day. As a bridge on the road from Ashlea to Louisburgh had been broken the officers of the column knew that the Tans would have to return the same way. When the lorries were gone Ml. Kilroy decided to attack them on the return journey at Carrakenedy, on the main road between Westport and Leenane.

Temporary positions were taken up while Ml. Kilroy, Joe Ring and Dr. Madden looked for better ones in the direction of Thomas Navin's. Broddie Malone was in charge of the Westport Unit, assisted by Johnnie Duffy and Joe Baker. Jack Connolly and Jim Moran had charge of the Newport boys. The only Castlebar man present was Paddy Cannon. The arms of the column consisted of 16 rifles and two shotguns and a few revolvers. They had a few home made bombs of a very primitive type. They had about 800 rounds of rifle ammunition, 25 per shot gun and 12 rounds per small arm.

The I.R.A. fully realised that day that, if a haul of enemy war material was not made soon, their activities as an active service unit would be at an end.

POSITIONS TAKEN UP

BRODDIE Malone placed his section on a rise of ground 150 yards from the road on the

left as one goes to Leenane. On that side were the following buildings: the remains of the old police hut which was burned, and further back Widow Sammon's house. The first section was placed on the Westport side of the police hut and the second section was placed on the Leenane side of the hut. The third section of ten men was situated behind Widow McGreal's house on the other side of the road.

There was good cover for the men in all the sections, as in front of them were stone walls, in which they made loop-holes for guns. There was also cover to enable one section to communicate with the others. The men had just prepared their positions when a shout was raised that the lorries were coming a quarter of a mile away at Darby Hasting's pub.

In a few minutes the leading lorry shot around the turn. It received a volley from the I.R.A. rifles. It wavered and came to rest against the fence. Inspector Stevenson, who was in charge of the convoy, was shot at the wheel. He had taken over from the driver a short time before. The regular driver, who was seated beside him, was also shot dead.

Before the convoy left Westport a local R.I.C. Sergeant was to sit beside the driver but the D.J. ordered him to stay in the barrack and took his place and went to his death.

The Tans in the lorry jumped out and took cover beside the roadside ditch.

GUNNERS KILLED

THIS group had a machine-gun, which opened up on the I.R.A. positions. Soon an I.R.A. marksman got the range and the gunner got a bullet through the brain. Another who took his place suffered the same fate. A third gunner who took over the gun, fell dead from a bullet of a column sniper. From that on no man risked touching the that gun.

The other two lorries came to a halt in front of Mrs. McGreal's house and was fired on from both sides of the road. The police jumped out in an attempt to rush the I.R.A. positions but were driven back.

The police took possession of the house and prepared it for resistance until reinforcements could arrive. They poked rifles through the front windows and the window in the gable, which controlled a view down the Westport road. They used up all their ammunition and wanted more from the lorry. They asked Mrs. McGreal to go to the lorry for it but she refused. They then told her to send her young son and assured her the I.R.A. would not fire on him. The widow would not let her son go and shouted "Go out and get it yourselves and leave the boy alone. It is your ammunition." To the I.R.A. she shouted: "Fire away, lads. Give it to them."

The police started shelling the I.R.A. positions with rifle grenades but they fell short.

The motor car halted beyond the cottage and five police jumped out. Jimmie Flaherty of Westport, who had been nine years in the Connaught Rangers, was the farthest Column man out and as a policeman, from the car, came near him he fired and saw the policeman fall.

ASSAULT ORDERED

EDWARD Moane, Johnnie Gibbons and some others had by this time taken up positions on the Westport side of Carrakenedy to intercept any reinforcements that might come from Westport, where the sound of shots could be heard.

The fight was dragging on and the ammunition supply of the column was running out. The Black and Tans were holding out although their position was hopeless. Michael Kilroy was worried as he feared reinforcements would arrive at any time. He decided that nothing less than the assault on the enemy position would give him victory and the much needed war materials.

After consulting with Malone, Kilroy decided the lorry would have to be rushed. Johnnie Duffy, his brother Paddy, the youngest man in the column, and Jack Keane were to advance on the right flank. Joe Baker, "Ladeen" Hogan and Tommie Ainsworth were to move down on the right. Tom Heavey and Jack McDonagh moved in to support them. The rest of the column gave sustained covering fire and watched the assault on the lorry. As the party advanced on the lorry a rifle grenade which was being fired from the lorry, fell back into it and exploded. It killed two policemen in the lorry and wounded R.I.C. Sergeant Creggan.

A white flag of surrender was seen from the lorry and the column men came and took their arms. Only one of the police was un-wounded. He was hiding under the bank and had not fired a shot.

The column men were delighted with the Lewis gun, which beat them at Kilmcena, and now realised they would be on more equal terms with the enemy in future battles.

Madden brought the machinegun up to Flaherty, who was an expert gunner in the Great War, and he found that it was in perfect order.

THE PRISONERS

WHEN Broddy Malone came down he saw that the door of Widow Sammon's house was open. He teared for her safety as the house was raked with cross-fire all day. When he entered he found the widow uninjured and seated by the fire smoking a pipe.

A door was taken from her house and the wounded police were carried on it up to her house to receive first aid. Having suffered when evicted, the widow, at first refused to let the police in but was eventually persuaded to make hot drinks for the wounded and provided blankets to make them comfortable.

POLICE WARNED

THE police were still holding out in Widow McGreal's house and had to be got out quickly. Flaherty, an expert gunner, set up the Lewis gun and trained it on the house. After a few bursts of fire through the door Joe Baker called on them to release the widow and her children. This they refused to

do. They were warned that if any thing happened to the widow or her children they would be held responsible. They were told if they did not surrender the prisoners might be shot. Sergeant Hallinan refused to surrender.

Then Jimmy Flaherty opened up with the machinegun, made a sieve of the door, cut the thatch of the roof and broke every pane of glass in the windows. Soon a rifle, with a dish cloth attached, was shoved out the window and firing stopped. Then fourteen police came out with their hands over their heads and were taken prisoners.

WIDOW SMOKED THROUGH IT ALL

THE I.R.A. went into widow McGreal's cottage to collect the arms and the widow made light of the damage. She said the many holes in the door would make the house fine and airy.

The prisoners were frightened-looking, especially the Tans, as they considered that their record of raids on the houses of the column men in Westport were enough to condemn them. They did not know whether the I.R.A. would shoot them or not. They knew an order had come out from I.R.A. H.Q. that all Tans were to be shot on sight. Sgt. Hallinan asked for a priest in case they would be shot. One of the column officers asked Kilroy would they shoot them and Michael replied: "No. We can't do it; our nature is not hard enough."

The prisoners' wounds were dressed and they were given cigarettes and refreshments. A policeman was sent to Westport on a bicycle to tell them to send out a doctor to attend the wounded and bring them and their dead comrades, in to the barracks. Six police had been killed and four wounded, two of the latter died during the night. Petrol was spilled over the lorries and they were burned. When the policeman arrived at the barracks the Barrack Orderly refused to let him in. He then shouted: "They are all killed in Carrakenedy." He was then allowed in and fell on the floor.

McGREAL'S HOUSE RIDDLED

BEFORE the police and Tans left for Westport, Michael Kilroy spoke to them and warned them that reprisals on houses would mean that their own houses would be burned first and that others would follow. If there was any shooting of I.R.A. or civilians as a result of this encounter the captured police would be held responsible and if I.R.A. wounded were not respected in future it would be hard on any further police captured.

The I.R.A. immediately set about collecting all the arms and equipment. The haul yielded 25 rifles, 1 Lewis Machinegun, 28 revolvers, 60 hand grenades, 5,000 rounds of .303 and 500 rounds of revolver ammunition and much material.

Next Week:

THE BRITISH SEARCH