

TROOPS PURSUE I.R.A. OVER HALF MAYO

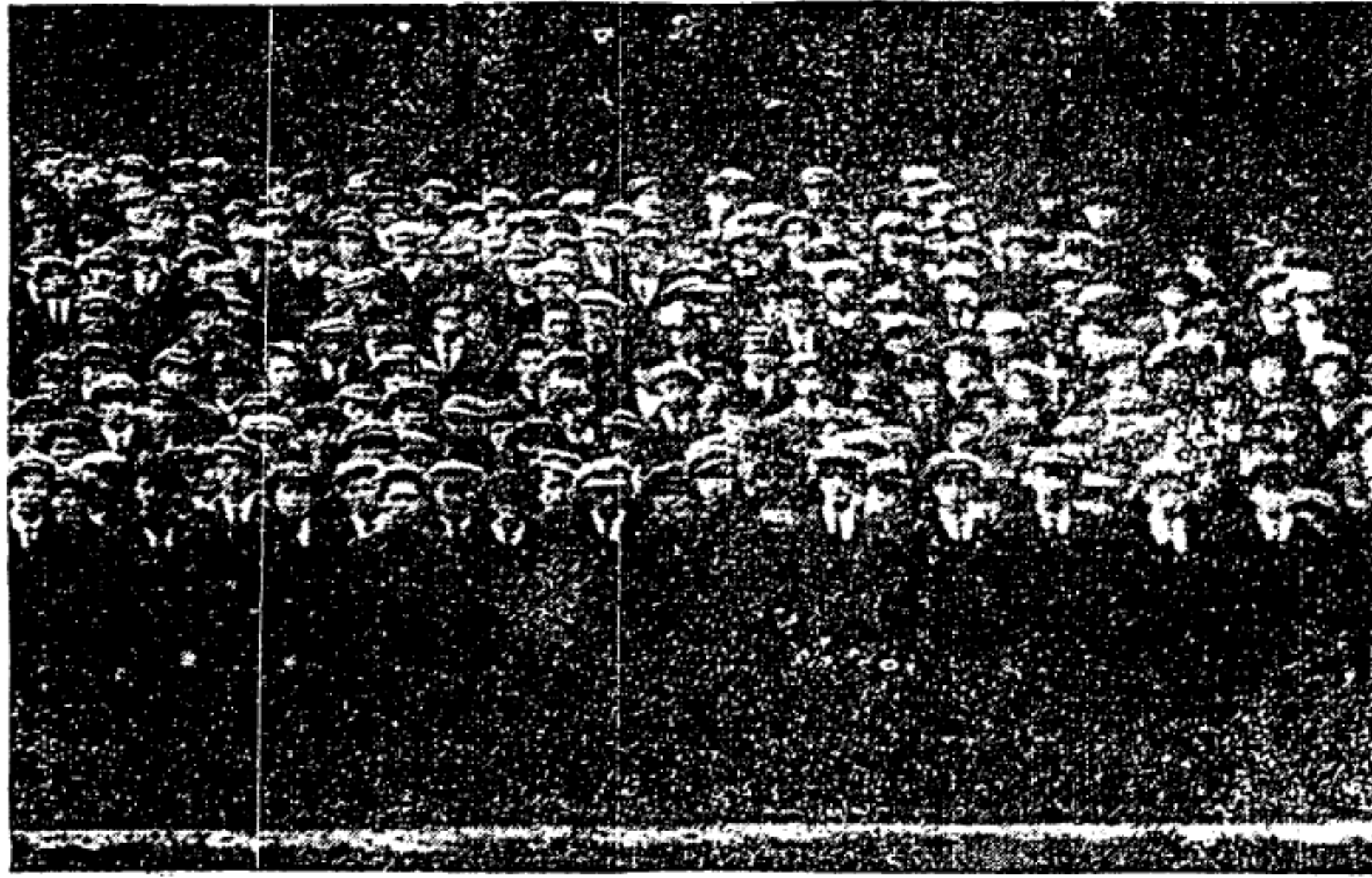
HOW A FAMOUS PICTURE WAS TAKEN

FIVE THOUSAND SEARCH FOR FIFTY

# WEST MAYO'S FIGHTING STORY

As told to—

## Anthony Lavelle



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, 1952, 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 it 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.

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

HAVING sent messengers to Westport to get doctors and priests for the enemy wounded men of the column, hungry and tired, and loaded down with arms, marched back to Clady where they enjoyed a hearty meal. That night they were on the move again in order to put as much distance as possible between themselves and the enemy. They moved West through the villages of Derryherbert and Lecanvey. From there they could see the first enemy aircraft from Castlebar searching around Carrakennedy for them. It was only when the area was searched from the air that help was sent to the wounded.

The next day the unit arrived in the Durlless and Cullen areas. Pat Joyce of Durlless gave the flying column a hearty welcome, and to celebrate the victory, killed two sheep. The men of the column were made welcome in Red Patrick Joyce's and Black Patrick Joyce's of Durlless; Ed. Kelly's, do., Brian Scahill's and Tom Fergus's Cullen.

Captain T. Fergus and A. Harney took charge of outposts. They sent local men up the mountains supposed to be looking for sheep but instead kept a look-out for the enemy.

While the column was safely passing the time in the West the British forces carried out a thorough search of the Tourmakeady area. Peter O'Malley of Clady, who spoke with a pronounced English accent, having informed the British that the I.R.A. had gone that way, the officers praised him for his help.

### SCOUTS REPORTED TROOP MOVEMENTS

THE troops then turned their attention to the West and when they got on the track of the column they relentlessly followed them for a month over half Mayo but always a day behind.

The column spent a few days in Cregganbaun and Aillmore villages near Louisburgh. All the time local volunteers and members of Cumann na mBan kept alert for any sign of the enemy. As this area was bounded by the sea it was unsafe to remain long as the unit could be surrounded. It was decided to move on again to Delphi and Glenamurray and through the Erriff valley, through Aughagower, Killawalla and on to Derryloughran north-east of Newport.

All the way scouts reported on the movement of British troops so that the column could keep a jump ahead of them. The British who did not know they way and were sent astray by friendly people, got lost many times. Sometimes the Column men were led at night through the British lines. When in Coolabinnia at the foot of Neiphinmore they got word that large enemy forces had surrounded

the Newport area. Although they suffered beatings and were tortured the wonderful people refused to disclose the whereabouts of the column.

### FAMOUS PICTURE TAKEN

WITH the enemy close behind the weary men of the Unit arrived at Derrymartin in the Boughadon area. It was here that the late J. J. Leonard took the famous photograph of the column, which included practically all the men then on active service, except some who were on sentry duty. These included Paddy Duffy Joe Baker and John Berry. From there the men moved to the other side of Addergoole Parish. The place is steeped in history. In 1798 the victorious Franco-Irish Army marched through here to capture Castlebar. The loyal people made them as welcome as the I.R.A. and sent them by the Barna Gaolha or Windy Gay to surprise the Red Coats who were watching the Foxford road. Fr. Conroy, Parish Priest of this place was hanged on The Green in Castlebar, because he was friendly to the French officers. Following the steps of General Humbert and his army the Column men went through Laragan, Gort and rested in Crimlin village.

Captain Staunton of the Crimlin Company billeted the men in the houses around, while he and his men kept watch.

### VILLAGES RAIDED

WHILE sleeping in the villages of Gort and Laragan, scouts reported that the villages were being surrounded by large forces of military. It was 3 in the morning and the men had only time to get out and take up defensive positions. All the men were called except Paddy Duffy and Richard Joyce who slept in Rowlands through all the excitement. There were 25 houses in the villages and 24 of them were raided. When darkness fell the I.R.A. slipped through the enemy lines. From there the column men went to Shunnagh in the Parke area where a large amount of poteen was made. The Parke Company was responsible for security. The next stop was at Carracastle, near Bohola, where a dance was organised for the column by the boys and girls of the area.

The Column then passed through Kiltimagh and were billeted in the village of Prizon and Tawnagh, near Balla, where they were again made welcome. While resting there word came that the British were on the way and the Column had to go on the move again. Moving on towards Aughagower they spent nights in the following villages: Cloonsunnagh, near Errew Monastery; Bawnogues, Bunecan and Dev-

lish, arriving at Toulagee on the 2nd July, a month after the Carrakennedy Ambush.

While there Tom Ludden of Curvey, brought word from Luke Sheridan, I.O., Castlebar, that large forces of British troops were closing in on them. These troops had encamped at Killawalla. This made the men move to Lannore. It was now getting like a game of chess with Mayo as the board, for soon after arriving at Lannore, Tom Ludden came with the word that another enemy camp had been set up on the Ballinrobe road at Cooloughra Bridge. On the move again the Column set out to get back to Owenree, Westport, stopping at Crickahimny and Triamlair on the way. All that Sunday news kept arriving of military pouring into Westport. That evening the military set up a camp at Brackloon Bridge, a mile from where the Column was resting.

### COLUMN SPLITS UP

IT was reliably reported that at this time the British had five thousand troops in Mayo and that most of them were in the British area.

Michael Kilroy held a conference and explained that the 50 men in the Unit could not move about without being discovered and that they could not fight 5,000 picked troops. It was better to split up into groups of from 2 to 6 men and try to infiltrate through the enemy lines, and, if possible, to avoid capture. Each group then moved off by itself, and had amazing escapes from the British as they dodged them from village to village.

### WESTPORT UNIT'S ADVENTURES

ONE party was made up of Joe Baker, William Malone, Joe Walsh, Dan Gavin, Tom Heavey and P. Duffy. The adventures of this party are well worth recording. After leaving the others they made their way to Drummin. They decided that McGovern's in the Drummin bogs was the safest place on the earth and arrived at about 1 a.m. About 20 minutes later the clatter of horses' hooves were heard, and the six men escaped over the garden wall. A few minutes later 25 cavalry men surrounded the house.

The party proceeded to Lettermaglinskin, and were followed for some distance by the soldiers, who saw their tracks in the dew on the grass. From Lettermaglinskin, Baker took his men on to Sheaffry Hills behind Drummin and as dawn broke the men were asleep near McPherson's. A fire was noticed in the nearby garden and P. Duffy went to investigate. He found that there was a camp of

hundreds of soldiers. The six men started to creep away and P. Duffy became cut off from the rest, when six lorries of troops passed along the road between them, the last lorry coming to a halt.

### FAMILY IN BARN

DUFFY made his way to Kilmore to visit Pat Cox and found him sleeping on hay in a barn with his nine small children, his house having been burned some time before by the British Forces.

The Air Force was very active, planes flying low, observing all movements on the ground. The military started to search Kilmore and Duffy had to move to Derryherbert. Close to Derryherbert he noticed military searching the village. He took cover in some whins and slept for some time.

On awaking he went to Flynn's of Derryurla, where he had something to eat. Mrs. Flynn told him to go to bed and her husband said he would keep good watch, Flynn said that there was no danger in such an out of the way place. Fifteen minutes later Duffy was called as a strong enemy force was advancing across the bog from Lackdeirg. He had to escape through a window and hide in the garden. The search over, he went on to Hoban's of Erriff, where he again met Joe Baker and the five other men, who had come by Tanyard via Mark McDonnell's to Erriff.

From there they went on again to Kearins' of Derrinkee, and were about to sit down to dinner, when about 25 horse soldiers came around by Tunney's of Derryeroff, and proceed in the direction of Derrinkee. However, before reaching there they turned back, as the road was impassable.

That night the group tried to cross the Slievemagh mountains but found the place covered with soldiers who were shooting off Verey lights every few minutes. The men had to turn back and go on to Shraheen, arriving at Cusack's before dawn where they got rest.

The planes were out again early that morning but did not spot the men who lay in some whins by the Shraheen river and slept all day. They took off their socks and hung them out to dry and the Shraheen cows made a good meal of them.

The men spent the next day at O'Donnell's of Ayle, and then moved on to John Moran's of Deerpark on Thursday morning, but they only saw a few lorries full of soldiers flying around and had a very quiet day. That night they had to get socks from Tom Ludden, who was their storekeeper.

On Friday morning military moved along the Curvey road from all the camps towards Castlebar for hours and they were thankful the pressure was being lifted.

(To be continued)

### To Select Under 21 Team

At a meeting of the Mayo G.A.A. Board in Castlebar the following committee was appointed to select the Mayo under 21 team to take part in the Connacht Championships: Messrs. S. Dully, I. Reilly, Rev. Bro. Farrell, F. Brennan, J. Mulrooney, T. MacHale, J. Creaton, and T. Cavanagh. The committee was given power to co-opt new members.

### Muintir Mhuighen Quiz

The semi-finals and final of the Inter-Town Question Time organised by Muintir Mhuighen which was held recently in the Shelbourne Hotel produced an exciting finale to a most successful competition.

In the semi-finals Swinford beat Kiltimagh by a single mark (53 to 52) while Crossmolina beat Burrishoole by 58 to 52. In the final Swinford then went on to beat Crossmolina and thus became the first winners of what will, it is hoped, be an annual competition.

The winners were presented with four prize bonds and the runners-up with free Foxford ruggers.

The following were the members of the winning Swinford team:—Enda Marren, Misses Peggy McAvaddy and Kathleen Hanley and Mrs. M. Grav.

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