

When The Tans Shot Up And Burned Michael Kilroy's House

A grim story of Tan brutality and an amazing escape from death by Mrs. Nan Kilroy, Newport, wife of the famous I.R.A. leader, General Michael Kilroy, O.C., Western Command is recalled by this historic photograph which is one of the most interesting photographic mementos of that bitter period when men on the run were forced to leave their homesteads and families to the mercy of hands of uniformed terrorists like that which featured in the following story.

NEWPORT is a picturesque little village sheltered by the mountains and fronted by Clew Bay. It is well known as a resort for its water and deep sea fishing. Theologists have been, and will be interested in the numerous "drummins" which are to be found in the surrounding districts. The Catholic Church, a fine example of modern Irish Romanesque architecture, occupies a splendid site above the bay. During the "Troubles," however, Newport was not such a famous resort, a place of interest to geologists, but rather an area famed for its great fight for Independence—famed for its men and the part they played in the struggle against the Black and Tans.

On the Westport side of the bridge and overlooking Newport town is the residence of the late General Michael Kilroy, O.C. Western Command I.R.A.—a man dedicated to the cause of freedom for Ireland—who is pictured this week in our new Pictorial Series in connection with current interest in the "Troubles."

OUR picture shows the late General Michael Kilroy with his son Paddy, and niece Mary now Mrs. O'Grady, New York, examining the ruins of his home which was razed to the ground together with his residence by the Black and Tans as a reprisal in May, 1921. This picture was taken in July, 1921, after the Truce was signed, and it was the first time General Kilroy saw the destruction carried out on his property.

TO get the story behind this picture our photographer and reporter visited Mrs. Nan Kilroy, wife of the late General, at her two-storey residence—occupying the same site as the original Kilroy house destroyed by the Tans—overlooking Newport River, last week.



General Michael Kilroy during the Truce surveying the remains of his workshop. Photo copyright J. Leonard and Son, Bofeenaun, Ballina.



Mrs. Michael Kilroy in her home at Newport.

West Mayo Scenes

In her sittingroom this grey-haired, motherly woman, recalled with amazing clarity and quickness incidents, both serious and humorous, during the time of the "Troubles." In an evening, which seemed to pass so quickly, Mrs. Kilroy re-created scenes and activities of life in the West Mayo area during the 1920's as if they only happened the other day.

MRS. KILROY'S account of the burning of her house and property by the "Tans" on May, 1921, ran as follows:

"At about 8 o'clock in the evening Mary, an employee, and myself, were attending to matters in the house. My two sons, Peadar (13) and Paddy (6), were in bed asleep. All of a sudden I heard a gunshot and I went over to the window and looked towards the Barracks. I thought that it was probably some Black and Tans shooting into the river at ducks or geese as was a habit of theirs. I saw a group of police lined up with rifles looking towards the house. I somehow knew that the house was going to be attacked and I rushed in and took my sons from their bed and told Mary to lie down on the floor. Just then, without warning, the bullets started to fly. Pots and pans in the kitchen clattered to the floor, glass and delf were shattered. A kind of blue light illuminated the place as each 303 bullet tore into the partition at the front. Somehow or other we crawled to the back room and lay down on the flat and cold earth amongs; the turf and timber. The firing sounded like the devil as it continued to ring out and pepper the house.

MARY said that she thought we would be killed, and although I also feared the worst, I told her that we would be all right in order to calm her.

Rifle Butts On Door

"THE attack continued until 10 o'clock when it suddenly stopped. Mary went out to a neighbour's house to see what it was all about, but the occupants were afraid to open the door for fear of being shot. We all felt very tired and couldn't keep our eyes open. It must have been the effect of the powder in the bullets. I told Mary to stay awake for a while to keep watch because I knew that the Black and Tans would come over and search the house. We couldn't, however, stay awake. At about one in the morning we were awakened by the banging of rifle butts on the front door. Mary went to open it and she was faced by the police with fixed bayonets. They came in and swarmed all over the place. An oil lamp was lit by the Commanding Officer and all the windows were broken.

"I asked the officer what was the matter. What was the reason for the attack?"

HE replied: "What happened to all our men who were killed by the I.R.A.? Clear out we are going to set fire to the place."

MRS. KILROY: "But where are we going to go?"

OFFICER: "I don't care where you go as long as you get out of here."

"A little Black and Tan, who had explained on several occasions to residents of the area that he had to join the Tans because he was out of work and that his sympathy lay more with the Irish than his own side, told me to 'take up the kiddies and get away while the going is good.' He got a bedspread from the bedroom and wrapped it around Paddy and Peadar to keep them warm. On my way to the door the bedspread fell and he picked it up and gave it back to me. I will always remember him. We went down the road to John Kilroy's house (brother of Michael Kilroy and at the time imprisoned) but it had also been fired on. We continued on to Derrylahan, which was about a mile outside the town, where we had relations. There beds were spread out on the floor and we got some sleep.

"IT was about 4 o'clock on the evening of May 19th, before I awakened. I had slept completely through the Kilmeena raid in which four I.R.A. soldiers were killed. On May 23rd Skirdagh was attacked by the Tans.

Saw Flames In Sky

"I later learned that the reason why the Tans destroyed our house was because one of their Military, a Sergeant Butler, was shot that evening (May 18th), and they thought that the shot had come from our house. The house was completely destroyed and all our belongings were lost. . . we were not allowed to take anything away with us before they set fire to it. My husband's workshop, which was at the back of the house, was also burned down. My husband told me later that he saw the flames leap into the sky from where he was hiding. At that time the boys (referring to the I.R.A. Volunteers) always went away from home when night fell because it was too dangerous to stay around the place."

MRS. KILROY talked about the many daring escapes her husband had had from being caught by the enemy; the time he passed the Black and Tans on the road to Westport without them recognising him, although they had been sent out to capture him. She recalled with a smile the time her husband stayed in a Westport hotel while Black and Tan officers laid plans to "get him"

in the same establishment. A waitress overheard a group of officers saying "Kilroy is at home and we'll get him this time." She (the waitress) went out in search of someone to carry the warning to General Kilroy and the only one she could see was an elderly man sitting on the windowsill. She told him to go and warn Kilroy of the Tans plan. The man told the waitress that Michael was just after going into the breakfast room of the hotel where she worked. She went back in and found General Kilroy and told him what she had just overheard, but all he said was, "Well, I will finish off my soup, anyway."

SHE remembers, humorously, the time when a group of I.R.A. Volunteers were gathered together one Sunday night before they set out. Amongst those present were Jack Connolly, Jim Moran, General Kilroy and Jimmy Keane. The latter made the suggestion that "it might be better to lay-off for a bit until the harvest was in because I heard that the English are going to blockade the country and starve us out."

REPLIED General Kilroy amidst laughter: "Who knows but the next battle might be in Jimmy Keane's back garden."

The Battle Of Skirdagh

AT the time General Kilroy wasn't far out for the group had only left the house and travelled about a mile up the road when they met a Black and Tan patrol and the ensuing encounter is known today as the "Battle of Skirdagh" in the area.

MRS. KILROY said that her husband, who died in 1962, would have given anything to have met the late President Kennedy when he visited this country. However, he died before the then American President came to Ireland. General Kilroy held John Fitzgerald Kennedy in great esteem and the American people for the support they gave the Irish Volunteers in the struggle for Independence.

MRS. KILROY took an active part in Cumann na mBan during the "Troubles."

LIVING with Mrs. Kilroy is her son Peadar, who manages the family workshop and forge and who is a Lieutenant in the F.C.A., his wife, Mary, and their son, Paul, aged 3½.

Tubbercurry Notes

The annual general meeting of Tubbercurry Comhairle Ceannair was held recently and most of the local clubs in the area were represented.

Deputy Gallagher addressed the well attended meeting.

The following officers were elected: Chairman, Mr. Tom Kelly; Vice-Chairman, Mr. Paddy Marren; Secretary, Mr. Paddy Walsh, and Asst. Secretary, Mr. Tom Butler.

Mr. Gallagher, addressing the gathering, spoke about the current economic and political situations with particular reference to the Second Economic Programme. He emphasised the importance, which the achievement of the figures as outlined in the programme by the Taoiseach, meant to the overall economy of the country.

In referring to the recommendations which emerged from the recent Employer-Labour Conference, the Deputy stressed that, in order to avoid any tendency towards inflation, it was very necessary that the national output should increase at least in proportion to the increase in wages, which will have to be absorbed as a result of the ninth round.

The Chairman, Mr. Tom Kelly, thanked the Deputy for his address.

Mr. Tom Butler proposed a vote of sympathy to the members and their respective families who had suffered bereavements during the year.

On the proposition of Mr. Butler, it was decided that regular meetings of the Comhairle Ceannair be held.

The next meeting was fixed for April.

DRAMA FESTIVAL

Entries from Navan, Lifford, Naas, Tuam, Charlestown, Newport Westport and Crossmolina Dramatic Societies have been received for this year's Western Drama Festival at Tubbercurry. The Festival will open on Sunday night next and will conclude on 22nd February.

Plays to be staged by the above groups are "Honey Spike," "King of Friday's Men," "Letter to a General," "Shadow and Substance," "Rising of the Moon," "Shadow in the Glen," and "Today and Yesterday."

A feature of this year's Irish festival will be the attendance of three school bands to play during the intervals. The bands will come from Carrowmore National School, Tubbercurry Convent N.S., and Mullaghroe N.S. The Carrowmore School band appeared on Telefeis Eireann recently.

GOLF CLUB

The following officers were elected at the annual general meeting of the Tubbercurry Golf Club held recently: Captain, Dr. J. Cullen, President, James Gallagher, T.D.; Secretary, Mr. Tom Butler, and Treasurer, Mr. M. J. Wrafter.

BALLYGLASS CROSS-COUNTRY EVENT

P. J. O'Rourke, (Eire Og) won the individual prize in the Connaught novice cross-country championship which was held at Ballyglass.

In all seventy-five runners took part in the event, and the team prize was won by Eire Og (Galway) with a total of seventy five points. Kilcorn (Galway) finished second with 85 points with Mayo third with 95 points.

In the individual section, the runner-up was B. Feenee (Derrydonnell) and J. Riordan (Eire Og) was third.

The first Mayo runner to finish was J. Ryan (Newport) and he was placed seventh in the individual grade. Other Mayo placings were J. Gullifoye (11); R. O'Byrne (16); S. Reilly (20); E. Nestor (21); G. Lally (24); J. Hanrock (28); N. Murphy (30); T. Clarke (32); T. Gibbons (34); T. Kenny (36); N. Kenny (38); N. Toher (39) and J. Hanley (40).

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