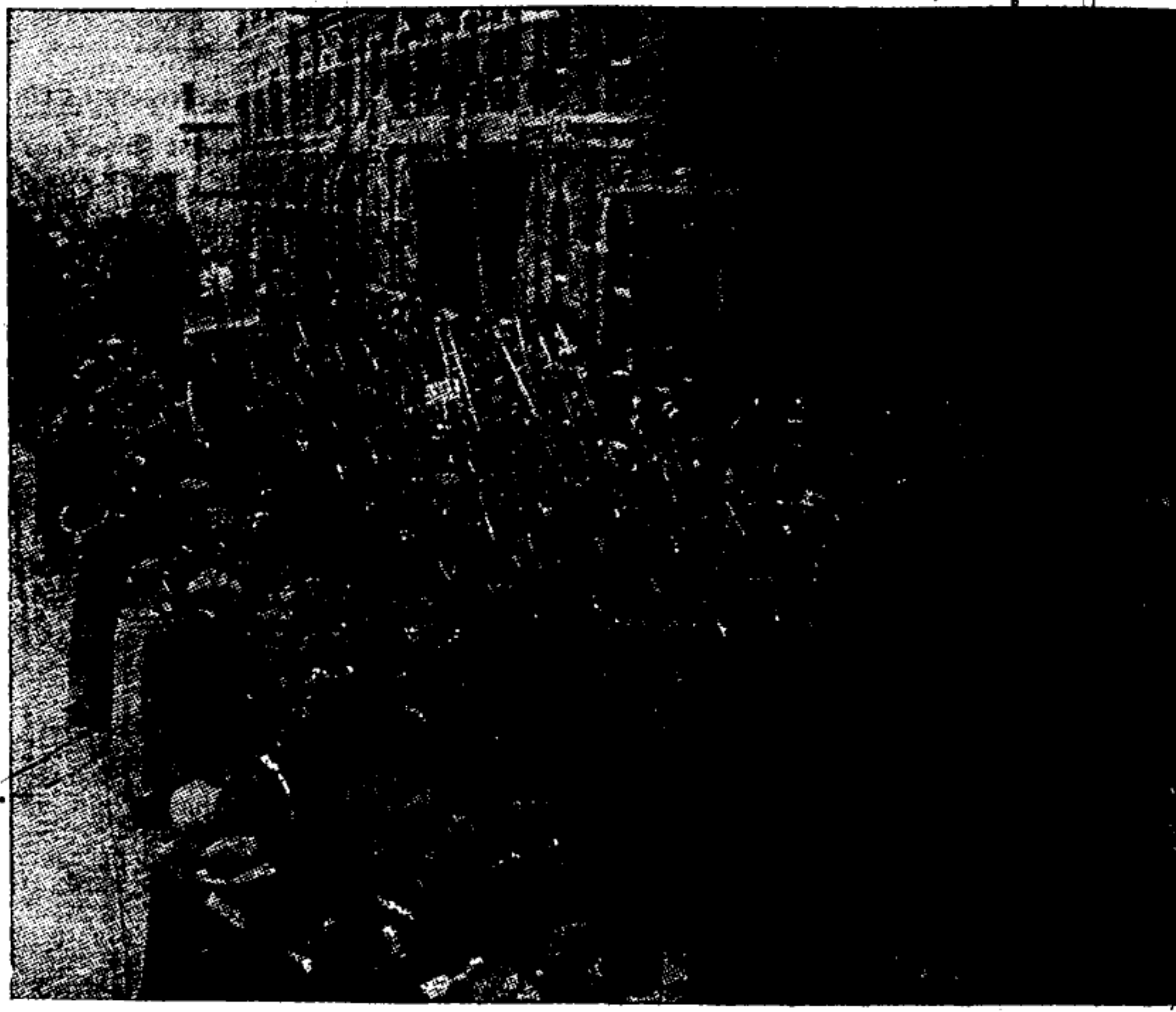


Waiting For Arms At Newport Volunteer Headquarters

I Was Michael Kilroy's Bodyguard

by Michael W. Moran



A group of Volunteers parading prior to 1916.

Easter Week 1916 and ten days or so before it I spent almost continuously with Michael Kilroy, then the Newport Volunteer leader, and in the subsequent War of Independence the greatest freedom fighter west of the Shannon, a man at the time of the Truce, described by Cathal Brugha, Chief of Staff, as one of "the three guerrilla leaders who won the war." During this period in 1916 I lived at the home of the Kilroy brothers, John and Michael, at Carrabaun, Newport. Living there at the time were John and his wife Margaret, and their two infant daughters, now Mrs. Mary O'Grady and Mrs. Tilly McManamon), as well as Michael and his wife Nan, Margaret and Nan were sisters.

John was a carpenter by trade and Michael a blacksmith, but some time before 1916 they seem to have formed a partnership, and in the workshop adjoining the dwelling house in Carrabaun they had in 1916 four or five employees, tradesmen, apprentices and labourers.

Industry

Judging by the progress made by the firm prior to 1916 and in the few years immediately following there can be no doubt that, had the partners followed self-interest, and avoided war and poli-



MICHAEL KILROY

tics, a large industry would have developed in Newport to the great financial advantage of the two brothers and of the district. Michael, however, was not a man to devote his undoubted talents and unbounded energy to self-interest alone. Around about, neglect and poverty held sway, and when I first got to know him intimately he seemed to have only one great interest at heart, the improvement of the lot of the people among whom he lived, the righting of the wrongs of centuries.

It was in 1909 when I left the National School in Treengbeg and went to the Christian Brothers' secondary school in Westport that Michael showed an interest in me. Each week-end I returned to Newport and at first he often spoke to me about my studies. He had very progressive and at the time unusual views on education. Secondary education in particular was, in his opinion, lopsided, and neglected studies essential for the development of the resources of the country and for the well-being of the people. Scientific knowledge and method were necessary, he said, to ensure greater output from the land, and the development of its untapped resources.

Land Problem

At the time land was the great problem of local politics, and with it went the conviction that foreign domination and misgovernment were the root-causes of all the country's ills. Great hopes were placed in Home Rule, and the United Irish League and the Irish Parliamentary Party who fought for it in the London parliament were sorely backed by the people in the first decade of the century.

Early in the second decade it had become apparent to some that, owing to the action of the Unionists in the North, backed openly by the Conservatives in Britain and indeed, though not always openly, by many who were not Conservatives, Home Rule if it ever came was likely to fall far, very far, short of the measure which had been promised and was expected.

The older men generally who had devoted their lives to the fight for Home Rule could not believe that their life-work would be a

failure, and that the English government and the English people in whom they had learned to place their trust would betray Ireland once more.

There were other older men, however, survivors from Fenian times, who never trusted England and who believed that nothing except physical force would be effective against the conquest. Their aim, too, was not just Home Rule, even at its best, but independence and complete separation from England. Some of the younger members of the U.I.L., who had grown up in the atmosphere created by the Gaelic League, and were falling under the influence of such papers as "Sinn Fein" and "Irish Freedom", (I was a link in the underground chain that brought a bundle of copies of "Irish Freedom" regularly to Westport prior to summer 1914 I also, during my last year at school in Westport, made my own contribution to revolutionary journalism by providing a weekly Newport column in the "Mayo News" under a non-descript name which I have forgotten), began gradually to doubt the efficacy of what was called constitutionalism and to turn their thoughts to physical force. They were in a minority and their efforts to convert their comrades were ineffectual. In consequence a break-away occurred.

United Front

The break-away took place when in the middle of 1913 I was drawn into local politics. Michael Kilroy, who was the most active worker for the new development, asked me to become secretary to the break-away organisations — there were really two, the U.I.L. and an associated A.O.H. branch. When I became secretary discussions were taking place regularly between the opposing groups in an effort to provide a united national front.

At these discussions the parish priest, Canon Michael McDonald, presided. To those on our side it soon became clear that the Canon's mediations were always in favour of the status quo ante, and as a similar breach was becoming common all over the country, and the causes producing it were ever increasing the breach became permanent and the efforts at reconciliation were abandoned. It was, however, agreed that the parish hall would be available to both parties in turn for meetings to be held on Sundays after last Mass. On each occasion when our U.I.L. meeting came to an end the majority departed and our A.O.H. meeting began. When this latter ended most of those present left, as did I. As time passed we noticed that the handful who still remained behind were always the same, and looking back now I can only assume that this third meeting was a meeting of the I.R.B., the Irish Republican Brotherhood.

Volunteer Corps

Some time in 1915 Michael asked me if I would like to join this organisation if it happened to exist, but I heard no more then although I told him I would join most willingly. It was not until late in 1915 that with four of the most active members of the University College, Galway, Volunteer Corps, I was invited to join the I.R.B. On being sworn in I was told that Michael Kilroy of Newport, Co. Mayo, vouched for me. Soon afterwards all five of us acquired Smith and Wesson revolvers.

At this time Alf Monaghan was assisting Liam Mellows as volunteer organiser in Galway city and county, and with Tom Derrig of Westport I got to know Alf well. He was a brother of Charles Monaghan, who on the night of Good Friday 1916, with two other volunteers was accidentally drowned off Ballyhissane Pier as they with others were travelling to Cahirciveen to dismantle the wireless station. Alf was a Northerner and had been expelled by government order from Belfast. He was under constant police surveillance. A few weeks before Easter 1916 he told a few of us that to avoid arrest he had to leave the city and was going for greater safety to Connemara.

Indispensable

Before leaving he told the same few that the rising should take place while we were away on our holidays, and on reaching home we were to report for duty to our local leaders. I have the idea that he told me that my main duty in the meantime would be to ensure as far as I could that Michael Kilroy,

who was considered indispensable, would not fall into the hands of the R.I.C.

Easter came late that year and our holidays were arranged to fall mostly before Easter. I reported to Michael, who expressed delight to have me as bodyguard. For about three weeks I was seldom far from his side, and then only on his instructions. It may appear strange, but in actual fact I knew little then or at any time about the members of the Newport Volunteer force. It is true that I worked with Michael when he was first organising the volunteers in the end of 1913. During holidays from University College, Galway, to which I went in 1914 I sometimes helped in the training of the volunteers.

For the ten days or so prior to Easter Sunday I had an opportunity of observing what had been done in preparation for the Rising, and I, who was then only a teenager, am now the sole survivor of the four volunteers who during Easter Week 1916 were continuously on duty at the Newport Volunteer headquarters, that is, at the house and workshop at Carrabaun. At that time Michael was about thirty years old.

Employed in the coachbuilding trade at Kilroys at the time were Jack Quinn, Kilmeeena (now living at Castlebar Street, Newport); Dominick Kilroy, Furnace, now living at Quay Road, Newport; Tim Lyons, formerly of Carrwohilly and now residing in Dublin and John Maguire, The Mills.

Alarm Bell

While work was carried out every day in the workshop the men worked late hours in the forge at the rear of the workshop repairing revolvers and guns and also making pikes.

There was a bell concealed in the forge loft which was connected to the workshop and when anyone not in the organisation approached the alarm was given.



DOMINICK KILROY

The military equipment in the building was small. Michael had an up-to-date service rifle with bayonet and there was at least one other rifle and a few shot guns. In addition to a large Webley revolver, Michael had an automatic pistol. I had a Smith and Wesson revolver. There were pikes, ammunition, explosives and stores of various kinds. What interested me most were the many metalworking tools and other equipment neatly arranged for speedy use in cutting sufficient iron plate from the bridge over the railway line which leads from the town to the church, and using it to armour-plate a motor car. The car to be armoured was the most powerful one available in West Mayo.

On reaching Westport, McNamara closed in considerably but as Michael desired to lose him for the day we decided to play out a little drama. In Bridge Street we called to a shop, made some purchases and came out examining them, apparently oblivious of McNamara and his bicycle parked, not many yards away. He on his side was apparently oblivious of us as he studied the goods in a shop window. Further up the street we entered a second shop but I reappeared at once and continued to a third. This I entered, passed right through, went from one backyard to another — this sometimes involved an arrangement of boxes or barrels to get over the walls — until I reached the lime yard which opens on James' Street on the opposite side of the block. Michael, who remained five or ten minutes in the second shop, followed more rapidly and we reached the limeyard almost at the same time. We were not to see McNamara again for twelve hours or so.

Howth Rifle

What additional rifles or other arms the volunteers held I cannot recall but my brother Padraic (now living in Mullanny) had one of the Howth rifles. There were some useful weapons in private ownership and these were marked for seizure immediately before the Rising. The whole stock of firearms was only a small fraction of the minimum considered necessary

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The Barracks

I was given full details of the proposed attack on Newport barracks (which was across the river from Kilroy's house). If a full-scale attack became necessary, but the possibility of securing it without the use of arms was not ruled out. The R.I.C. strength in Newport was, I think, six, including the inspector and the sergeant. Among the others was a constable named McNamara whose only duty for some time past seemed to be to dog Michael's footsteps. These men had up to a few years before been our friends, our intimates even, but I have never troubled to learn whether subsequent years were to prove that they or any of them were then or at any time our enemies. It is perhaps worth mentioning that barracks then had no sandbags, no barbed wire, no steel shutters, not very effective weapons, no Very lights, and no Black and Tans. The most sympathetic of the R.I.C. had also left the force before the War of Independence began a few years later.

Full preparations had been made for three days' manoeuvres for all volunteers all over the country to begin on Easter Sunday and we assumed that a leader, arms and the order to rise would arrive on or before that day.

In the absence of information which my memory fails to recall, but which I know would be far more interesting, I shall to the best of my ability give a brief account of some of my own experiences at the time.

Visit To Westport

On Good Friday morning I left home and joined Michael to go to Westport and beyond. For journeys of this length we normally used bicycles but on this occasion Michael, in the vain hope of misleading McNamara, decided that we should appear to be merely going for a morning stroll, but once out of sight of the barracks we would complete our journey on foot. Looking back, however, while descending the first slope beyond the rise south of the town we saw McNamara pushing his bicycle behind us.

On reaching Westport, McNamara closed in considerably but as Michael desired to lose him for the day we decided to play out a little drama. In Bridge Street we called to a shop, made some purchases and came out examining them, apparently oblivious of McNamara and his bicycle parked, not many yards away. He on his side was apparently oblivious of us as he studied the goods in a shop window. Further up the street we entered a second shop but I reappeared at once and continued to a third. This I entered, passed right through, went from one backyard to another — this sometimes involved an arrangement of boxes or barrels to get over the walls — until I reached the lime yard which opens on James' Street on the opposite side of the block. Michael, who remained five or ten minutes in the second shop, followed more rapidly and we reached the limeyard almost at the same time. We were not to see McNamara again for twelve hours or so.

From James' Street we had no difficulty in getting in touch with our friends on, I think, the southwest side of the town. We were busy for the afternoon and as dusk approached we were brought to a

halt about two miles out the country to the south.

Arms Expected

An I.R.B. meeting was about to begin as we entered. Joseph McBride, brother of Major John McBride, was in the chair. I had never been at such a meeting before and so when the oath was being taken I failed to place my hand on one of the prayer books lying about until the person next to me shoved one into my hand. My memory of what happened at the meeting is of the vaguest, and cannot be depended on for accuracy. There may have been twelve to twenty present; members from the surrounding districts reported on the strength of the volunteers in their areas, what arms and ammunition, if any, they possessed, or could lay hands on, and in general their readiness for the three days' manoeuvres. McBride addressed the meeting, said the day we waited for was at hand, arms and the order to rise could be expected to arrive at any hour. He added that when one hundred men fully armed and equipped took the field for action he would be with them.

On the return journey when passing through Westport we were each loaded with a pretty heavy bundle of locally made pikes; they had attachments for fitting to shot guns and were to be used as bayonets. It was well after midnight when we reached Newport and after a cup of tea it was decided I should go home. Michael thought it advisable to see me clear of the town. As we crossed the bridge in the darkness Michael drew his automatic pistol and I my revolver. At the town end of the bridge two forms came dimly into view; one seemed to be McNamara, the other advanced a step or two towards us, but apparently seeing something he did not relish withdrew rapidly. We passed on, reaching the end of the town we climbed on to the railway line, back along which Michael set off at a fast pace, leaving me with instructions to follow at the double if I heard shooting in the next few minutes. I waited a quarter of an hour but as the stillness remained unbroken I too set off for home. It was after 2 a.m. when I got there.

Final Preparations

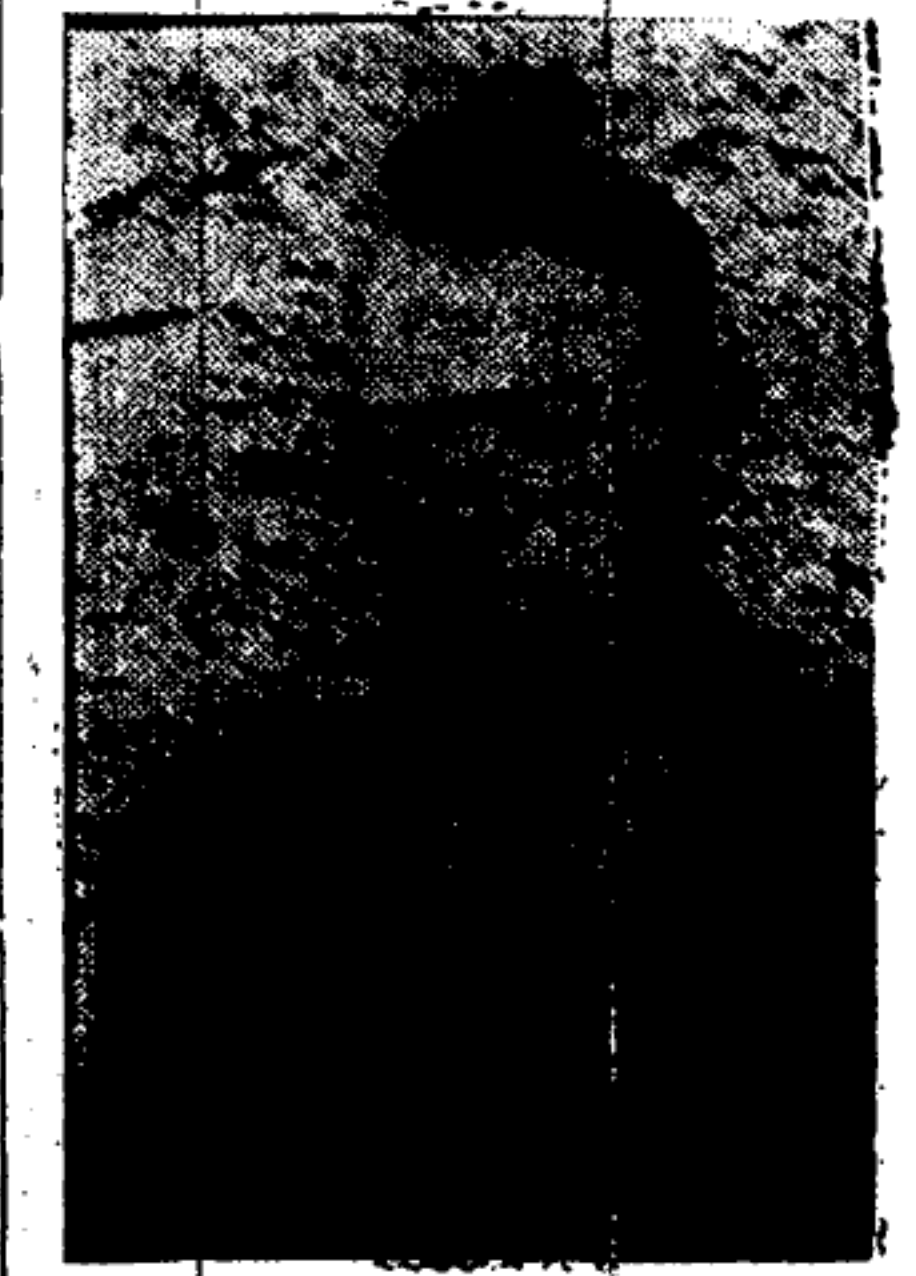
Next day we busied ourselves with final preparations for the three days in the field ordered to begin on the morning, Easter Sunday, 23rd April, 1916. When early on Sunday the day's paper arrived, we were shocked to read McNell's order cancelling the manoeuvres. Michael dismissed the volunteers, who had mobilised, but gave orders that each man was to get to his appointed place immediately on re-

ceipt of the order to do so. As will be seen the opportunity to issue this order never came in spite of communications with Westport and Castlebar, no arms arrived, no leader and no order to begin operations.

On Tuesday morning word came that Dublin had risen at noon on the day before. I got word from a neighbour returning early from market and set off immediately for Newport. Nearing the town I was overtaken by a large car, which stopped beside me and a voice from inside asked me to sit in. It was the Canon. "You heard the news," he said, and when I answered he broke out: "Young men like you have no idea of the unrest and misery this country will have to endure for the next decade as a result of your folly."

Over The Bridge

Cooling down he added: "You would like to cross over to Kilroy's. The police are holding up everybody crossing the bridge, but I think I'll get you through." By this time we had climbed George's Street and could see the police at the bridge entrance. Going down Main Street the Canon pressed on the accelerator and approached the



JACK QUINN

bridge at a rapid pace. An R.I.C. man stepped out with hand raised to halt the car, but recognising the Canon, or more likely the car, waived him on. It was too late to do anything about it when he realised who the passenger was. We were already over the bridge and on the far side had turned to the left towards Kilroy's and not to the right towards the Canon's. Swinging round he stopped long enough to drop me saying: "God be with you and may He forgive us all and keep us safe." I was in the safety of Kilroy's in a minute or two and the Canon presumably at home. Sometimes I wonder if he was really so wholeheartedly against us as he seemed.

NEXT WEEK I WILL TELL YOU OF MICHAEL'S EFFORTS TO OBTAIN SOMEONE IN WESTPORT TO LEAD THE MEN OF THE WEST IN THE RISING.

Too Much Coddling At Westport U.D.C. Meetings

"There is too much coddling going on here and it is time there was an end put to it," said Mr. Joe McNally at a meeting of Westport U.D.C. as a result of remarks made by the Town Engineer, Mr. A. Malone.

Reporting on roadworks, the Town Engineer said it would cost £12,000 or maybe a little less, to do a proper repair job on the Sandhill Road.

Mr. Dan O'Brien—How much? Town Engineer—£12,000 approximately. Mr. O'Brien—You told me here at the last meeting that it would cost £27,000.

ONLY CODDING—Town Engineer—I was only coddling you that night. Then followed Mr. McNally's comment, as at the outset. Discussion on the Sandhill Road



MR. JOE McNALLY "... too much coddling"

was raised by Mr. McNally who asked how much money had been expended filling pot-holes on the road.

The Town Engineer said, as instructed by the Council, he had expended £50 on the work.

Mr. McNally—Well, I've seen it and it was a waste of time and money. The road is as bad as ever it was.

A WASTE OF £50.

Town Engineer—I know that. I told the Council it would be a waste of £50 but the Council insisted on having the work done. Nothing short of major repairs will improve that road.

Mr. McNally—What was done didn't last a week. What was thrown into the pot-holes is gone again—they're all opened up.

USELESS TASK

Mr. C. Kenny said it was useless trying to keep pot-holes filled on a road on which there was heavy traffic. "It was alright in the days of the horse and cart when the wheels pounded in the gravel, but that day is gone," he added.

Mr. Malone, Town Engineer, said only a major job, costing £12,000, would put the road in proper repair. Until this was carried out the pot-holes would remain.

Mr. Michael Kelly (Acting Chairman) said in "cheap" times a former Town Engineer had asked for £25,000 to tar all the Westport Urban roads. "Just like now, we could not allow that money for the work, as much as we would like to," he said.

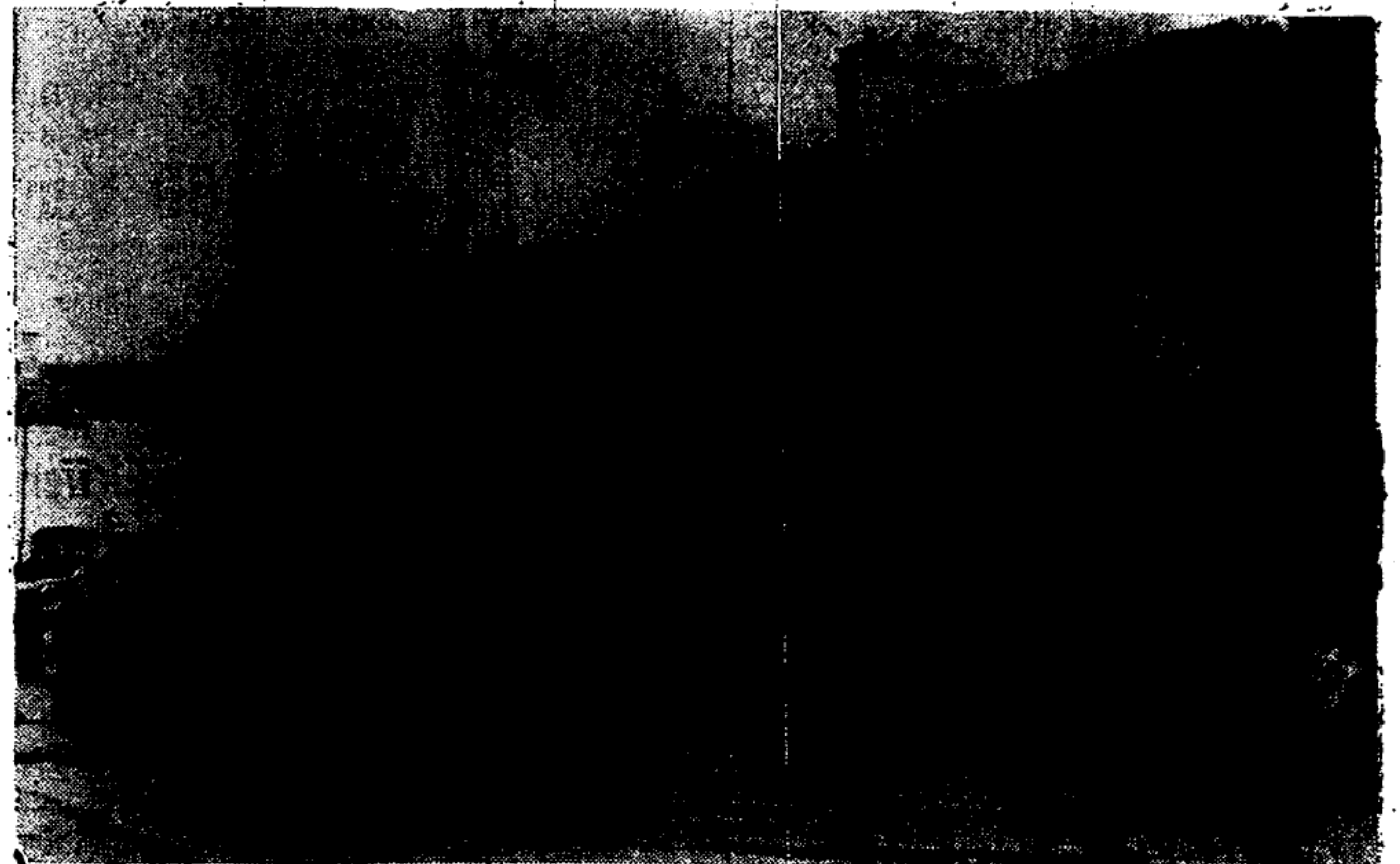
DON'T WANT TENNIS LAWNS—Mr. Dan O'Brien—We don't want tennis lawns. We only want roads good enough to walk on and travel on I'm fed up listening to all this talk of thousands of pounds.

CHALLENGE GAME FOR BALLINROBE

Ballinrobe G.A.A. Club was given permission at a meeting of the Mayo G.A.A. Board in Castlebar to hold a senior football challenge game between Mayo and Roscommon on April 17.

MAYO MEET KILDARE AT WESTPORT

A meeting of the G.A.A. Board was told that Kildare had agreed to play Mayo in a challenge game at Westport on Easter Sunday as part of the 1916 Commemoration ceremonies.



WESTPORTS ONLY BIT OF COLOUR' ON ST. PATRICK'S DAY: Pictured by McLoughlin's Studio, Westport, as they parade up Bridge Street, Westport to F.C.A. H.Q., are the Guard of Honour and Colour Party of "A" Company (Westport) F.C.A. who attended 11.30 a.m. Mass in St. Mary's Church, Westport. The Honour Guard was under Capt. Paddy Hoban (at left of file) and Lieut. Martin Curry (bearing the Tricolour) was in charge of the Colour Party. (See "Westport Topics").