

expenditure was published later by Petie Joe MacDonnell who succeeded Kilroy as O.C. of the 4th Western.

OUTBREAK OF WAR

We could all sense the gathering storm and hoped it would not happen. In retrospect we were naive and under estimated the intentions of Griffith and his crowd. The first operation I was engaged in after the attack on the Four Courts was an attempt to relieve our men in Colooney. McKeon and McCabe were coming in from the north, and using artillery, had managed to surround our men who were led by Frank O'Beirne (3rd Western) and Brodie Malone. A Brigade active service unit had been formed under myself and Paddy Duffy, and when word reached us in Castlebar of their plight, we led a column of about thirty trucks to relieve them. We got as far as Cloonacul when we heard that the column had surrendered. After a strong fight Malone and about twenty others were surrounded in a house and, after fighting from 2 p.m. on Friday to 8 a.m. on Saturday, under continuous machine gun fire, surrendered when they ran out of ammunition. This was a severe blow to us. Shortly after this, Free State troops led by Joe Ring landed by sea at Westport with next to no opposition. A machine gun post that I had set up on the Quay had been dismantled. Westport was the only harbour they could have landed in outside of Galway and Ballina. If the post had not been dismantled, they might well have landed, but they would have had to fight for it.

On the 24th July, I was out mining bridges, when word came to me that Castlebar was evacuated by Michael Kilroy. An attempt was made to burn the barracks but it was only partially successful. Kilroy had divided his men into three columns, and I overtook Kilroy's column as it was heading for Newport. Shortly after this, Kilroy asked me to take a few men to McGraine's of Glenhest; I don't remember now what for. "Gas" Hughes, a man called McAndrew and some others were with me. Suddenly we walked into a Free State lorry waiting in the dark with its lights off. We were captured immediately. Two ex West Mayo Brigade men were in charge, Jack Keane and Joe Walshe. They were amongst the few who had gone Free State, and both had been great friends of Joe Ring. Keane said, *we got you very easy, Tom*, which was true. We were brought to Newport. I found myself in the house of Mrs. Walsh (mother of Walsh who later became Archbishop of Tuam), which was being used as some sort of headquarters. I was in uniform wearing my Sam Browne. There were a lot of Free State soldiers coming in and out, and I suddenly realised that I was being taken for one of them. I just walked out and made my way to a wood near the church. I stayed there for the night, and next morning was heading for Glenisland

when my luck ran out: I walked straight into a posse of troops and was again captured. I was taken to Newport where I met Joe Ring and he recognised me immediately. He was obviously pleased at my capture, as I was the first good cop he had got. He asked if I had been searched, and then ordered me to be searched again. They were overlooking nothing. This time they found my short Webley. I was taken to Westport and held for a night. The next morning I was paraded through the town to the railway station under guard. I wasn't too pleased at this treatment from a former comrade, but it was obviously meant to impress the people of the town. Maura Mullins said to me later, *the walk of you did us good*. I was then taken to Castlebar and lodged in the jail, where I became O.C. of the prisoners. This was a horrible job as you were constantly under the eyes of the guards. A Ballyheane fellow called Galvin was in charge of them, some of whom were from Dublin, with some local fellows as well. After a few weeks I was taken by train and was landed in detention in Athlone barracks.

ESCAPE FROM ATHLONE

At this time there were a few hundred Republicans in detention there and also some B Specials, who had been captured around Belleek. They were released soon after. It was some consolation to meet Brodie Malone, and also Jimmy Gavin of Castlebar and the others from my Brigade who were captured in Colooney. I quickly found out that there was an escape plan afoot, so I took some fellow's place. There were nine of us involved in the escape which was in August, three each from the 3rd and 4th Western Divisions. Macken and Brig. Seamus Maguire from Mullingar, and Seamus Fox from Athlone acted as guides. The Mayo fellows were Brodie Malone, who had been captured in Colooney, Paddy Cannon from Islandeady, who had been in action with Republican forces in Barry's Hotel, Dublin, and had been taken off the train in Roscommon the previous June while making under orders for his own area, and finally myself. The Sligo fellows were Frank O'Beirne, who was also captured in Colooney, Harry Brehony and Dominic Benson, whose brother Harry was one of those to be shot down along with Brian MacNeill and others on Ben Bulbin the following month, September 1922. We got out of our cell by cutting round the jamb of the door and lifting it off its hinges. To disguise the cutting marks, we used to fix it back with soap mixed with dust. The hacksaw blade came from a Northern Protestant named Hewton, whom the Staters dubbed the Sandy Row general. We then had a big hall to negotiate, so we had to be very quiet. By lifting up a large flagstone we were able to get down to the boiler house underneath. Big Jim Brown of Newport was the mainstay in this work. He lifted up the flagstone and, more importantly, was responsible for putting it back in its place when we had left. A door led down from