MEMORABLE DAYS OF TERROR AND HEROISM IN COUNTY LIMERICK

How Fight For Freedom Was Carried On

Activities As Told By "Pen-Gun" From Commandant's Particulars

The particulars which appear in the following narrative of the activities of the I.R.A. in West Limerick and in the Eastern portion of the County were supplied by a Battalion Commandant who took part in most of the engagements mentioned:—

In the year 1919, the I.R.A. were continually active, and assumed the responsibility of guarding the Sinn Fein Courts, and endeavoured to collect throughout the district, various kinds of arms, such as shot guns, and where ever known to be found, Webly, or Colt revolvers. Drilling and manoeuvres were carried on openly, and were watched with hostile eyes by the British garrison of the R.I.C. During this year some I.R.A. officers were arrested, and the whole outlook presaged the fight for the old land, which seemed inevitable. The people enthusiastically supported the efforts that were then being made in An Dail, and the Volunteer Force, to end once and for all the thraldom initiated by Henry II. and his usurpers.

FIVE BATTALIONS.

In West Limerick the Republican Army made great progress, and in this year its numbers were divided up into five Battalions, forming one Brigade, known as the West Limerick Brigade, I.R.A. Over this Brigade, the late lamented Sean Finn, was made supreme officer, with Garrett McAuliffe, Newcastle West, as his Vice Brigadier. James Colbert, Athea (brother of Con Colbert, who was executed after Easter Week), was Quarter-Master, and Paddy Roche, of Rathkeale, Adjutant.

The Battalions were commanded by Jim Liston, Castlemahon, 1st Battalion; Mossie Harnett, M.C.C., Tournafulla, 2nd Battalion; Con Foley, Broadford, 3rd Battalion; Jimmy Halpin, Pallaskenry, 4th Battalion, and J. T. O'Connor, Ballyhahill, 5th Battalion.

MEN WHO BORE THE BRUNT OF THE FIGHT.

The Battalion Staffs, Company Officers and men, who bore the brunt of the Black and Tan War in the West were:—Jimmy Collins, Abbeyfeale, afterwards Brigade Adjutant; Con and Edward Cregan, Monagea; Ben Sullivan, Dromcollogher; Thomas Leahy and Jack Aherne, Tournafulla; Michael Colbert, Athea, was then Company Captain; Thomas Wallace, Pallaskenry; John J. Leahy, Slope Reidy, Paddy J. O'Neill, Danny Murphy, Larry Harnett, Jerry Moloney, Abbeyfeale; Con Boyle, Johnny Glenny, Jimmy and Paddy Roche, Rathkeale; Denny Lane, Mountcollins; James Roche and Paddy Aherne, Templeglantine; Paddy Naughton, Denis Collins, Johnny Harnett, Jim Guiney, Owen McAuliffe, A. Reidy, Tadhg Collins, John R. Leahy, T. Regan, O'Mahonys, Quinns, D. Harnett, T. Liston, Sonnie Quaide, J. McAuliffe, D. Curtin, D. Lenihan, D. O'Donnell, and Tom Boucher.

THE KNOCKLONG TRAIN RESCUE.

On the 13th of May an attack was made on a number of the R.I.C. who were conveying a prisoner to Cork Jail, named J. J. Hogan, a young Tipperary boy. The attack took place at the Knocklong Railway Station, and was planned by young Hogan's comrades—Sean Tracey, Dan Breen, Seamus Robinson, with Edward O'Brien, Galbally (now Area Administrative Officer, Volunteer Force, Co. Limerick), and others from the borders of Tipp. and Limerick—men who were afterwards famous in East Limerick in the successful campaign waged against the Tans. The prisoner was rescued and a couple of the R.I.C. were killed, including Sergeant Wallace, who was in charge of the escort. The news of this successful rescue electrified the country, and stimulated the zeal and daring of the Volunteers everywhere. The Republican attackers, having effected their object, dispersed. Tracey, Breen, Robinson, with young John Joe Hogan, were conveyed in safety to the West. The hue and cry rang through the country, and an intensive search by police and military combed the East and West.

CARE OF THE WOUNDED.

Such fearless exemplars of the new revolutionary campaign thrust a welcome responsibility, by their presence, on the I.R.A. of the West. The victors of Knocklong retreated to Danganbeg. Breen and Tracey were dangerously wounded, but they got shelter and protection at the home of the Kennedy family (now the proprietors of the Edenvale Hotel, Harcourt Street, Dublin). After a few days they were removed to the house of Mr. Mossie Harnett of Tournafulla, where they remained for nearly a fortnight recovering from their wounds. They were then conveyed to Knocknagoshel, Co. Kerry, to recuperate amongst the O'Connors and the Hickeys. Regaining some of their old form, they came to Gale View, Athea, where they remained for a time at the home of Jim Colbert (ex-T.D.), which was also that of Con Colbert, one of the youngest of the 1916 men who suffered the extreme penalty for his devotion to the old land.

While at Danganbeg Dr. Edward Harnett, of Abbeyfeale, and R. B. Woulfe, M.P.S.I., attended the wounded men, and later, almost daily, at the other places mentioned. Dr. Harnett was arrested, and made a military hostage before the end of the fight.

REMOVAL TO KERRY.

The three removes of the wounded were not without incident. When Mossie Harnett received information from an old R.I.C. friend of the movement that it was the intention of the authorities to employ a large force of police and military to search Tournafulla for the wounded men it became necessary to remove them to Kerry.

At the dead of a summer night, and it happened to be intensely dark, a number of the Tournafulla I.R.A., assisted by half a dozen horse traps, set out, armed with shot guns and revolvers, to convey the "men on the run" to a more secure refuge. The unusual darkness for a summer night added to their risk of the undertaking over a rough road. The shaking he received over the latter indeed renewed sickness and suffering in Dan Breen. He had received a bullet wound between the arm and left lung. It was known that a large force of the enemy was stationed at Abbeyfeale, and so it had been decided to avoid the town on their way to the "Kingdom."

IN SERIOUS PREDICAMENT.

To do this it was necessary to take the "Hill Road," overlooking the town on the south, but the intense darkness and unfamiliar nature of the district led the escort astray. Instead of continuing directly towards Feale Bridge, which led into Kerry, they descended the high road, known as "Betty's Road," into Abbeyfeale. Now, this was one of the very last positions they would have cared to find themselves in if they were not exactly in search of trouble. Daybreak found the whole company in a serious predicament. Only a few hundred yards from the town, and to add to their complications one of the party, Danny Curtin, of Tournafulla, whose horse stumbled on the rutted road was flung clean over his head, rendering him almost unconscious. He was severely shaken, bruised and cut. There was no choice but to make the best of the matter, and risk even a surprise by the police. Mossie Harnett was in charge and after consultation a course was decided on, whose very effrontery made it successful. The hair-pen bend they were in consequence obliged to face led not only into the Square of the town, but must per force pass the back gate of the R.I.C. barracks as well as the front. It was about 4 a.m. and the order was to drive past the barracks. Each man looked to his gun, said a prayer, and drove past. That drive past, on the breaking of a glorious summer morning, will not be soon forgotten. The open country was soon gained, the wounded men and their convoy breathed more freely, and the broadening light and a good road brought them shortly into the cheerful welcome that awaited them shortly after crossing the Feale at Feale Bridge.

AN ATTEMPT TO CAPTURE TOMMY LEAHY.

At Tournafulla, early in the year 1919, the local R.I.C. adopted a determinedly aggressive attitude towards the district I.R.A. One dark night Constables Lyons and Hearst, armed with revolvers, lay in wait, outside the village of Tournafulla for the purpose of capturing Tommy Leahy, the Captain of the local I.R.A. company. Both jumped at him as he passed. He turned quickly, and ran into the village a hundred yards away, with both police at his heels. Suddenly he wheeled about and fired at Lyons with his revolver. In doing so he fell on the road with Lyons on top of him. He managed to get on his feet, and again fired and wounded Lyons. Several other shots were exchanged between Tommy and Hearst before he got away. He became one of the first men on the run in West Limerick, and was one of the friends John Joe Hogan made in the West. One day Tommy was surprised at Mountcollins Creamery by the Tans. Found in possession of arms, he was sentenced to death, but was saved by the truce after incarceration in an English prison.

TRIAL AND EXECUTION OF A SPY.

In the autumn of 1919, there appeared in West Limerick a man who for a long time travelled up and down the country getting shelter, protection and money, posing as an I.R.A. officer on the run from Mullinhone, Co. Tipperary. His name was Peader Clancy, and he came to Tournafulla from near Castleisland, Co. Kerry. He took part in raids for arms, and was passed along from company to company for safety. In other counties he raided and attacked barracks and police, and was generally accepted as genuine for over five or six months. At length some things led to his being suspected as a spy. Later, some of his correspondence, intercepted, showed it related to I.R.A. activities, and had been addressed to some unknown person in Cork. He was arrested near Castleisland in March, 1920, and brought to West Limerick, where he was tried by I.R.A. Courtmartial. His trial lasted a whole day, and judgment was suspended to enable a messenger to travel to Cork—no easy undertaking in those days for a suspect—for the purpose of ascertaining definitely if the prisoner had been in communication with the enemy. The betrayal of a large number had been in his power, and of those who trusted him. He would get every chance of proving his innocence. A letter, in code, however, sealed his doom. He was executed on a moonlight night, outside Newcastle West, in March, 1920. He died confessing his guilt, and with a courage worthy of a better cause.

THE ATTACK ON KILMALLOCK BARRACKS.

Early in May, 1920, the possibilities of attacking and capturing police barracks were discussed from every point, and it was finally decided to make the attempt. The East Limerick I.R.A. at this time were arranging for the attack on the Kilmallock R.I.C. Barracks, and the West were asked for their co-operation. The last attempt of the kind had been made in '67 when the unknown Fenian fell.

For this purpose a Brigade Council was held at the farm-house of Mrs. McEnery at Camas, Monagea. It was attended by Sean Finn, Michael Brennan, Clare; Sean Forde, East Limerick; Mossie Harnett, Tournafulla; Jimmy Roche, Rathkeale; Garrett McAuliffe, Newcastle West; Tom Wallace, and several others. The plan of the attack was decided on and the men appointed to take part were selected. In all about a dozen West Limerick men took part in that famous attack and were placed in houses opposite the barracks. All night a hot fire was concentrated on the barrack front until it fell a smouldering ruin in the summer morning. It was here Liam Scully, an Irish teacher from Kerry, fell, a few minutes before the I.R.A. evacuated the town. He was attended in his last moments by the late Rev. Father P. Woulfe, P.P., of Cappagh, who was then curate at Kilmallock.

CONVEYANCE OF THE ATTACKING PARTY.

Motor cars had been provided to convey the attacking party to Kilmallock, and one of the cars, then very scarce, belonged to Mr. Michael O'Mahony, Creamery Manager, Devon Road. Two cars returned to Tournafulla with the remains of poor Liam Scully, with Sean Forde, Michael Brennan, Sean Finn, and others, weary from the fight, but exultant at the destruction of such a strong enemy post. Strong guards were posted that night by Mossie Harnett, and a large number of the I.R.A. from the West took up positions along the road to engage any military or police who might visit the district. Larry McNamee, one of those who took part in the attack, drove Mr. O'Mahony's car, and when returning it on the following day nearly ran into a police patrol of ten men near Devon Road. Just in time he saw them, and quickly turned the car on a very narrow road to avoid being captured. The police were as much alarmed as Larry, whose antics seemed to portend something serious, for they mounted their bicycles and returned quickly for Abbeyfeale.

THE INTERMENT OF LIAM SOULLY.

With full military honours Liam Scully's remains were interred that night in the shade of the ivied ruins of the old Temple in Glantine Churchyard. Father McCarthy, C.C., of Loughill at that time, performed the last rites of the Holy Church, and once again the soil of Ireland was sanctified by the blood of one of her heroic sons. In life Liam Scully endeared himself to all who knew him by his gentleness and unassuming character. His love for his native land was intense, and her language he cherished and fostered by his teaching. I last saw him when he took part in a Gaelic League concert in the Courthouse at Abbeyfeale, which had been organised by Mr. Fionan McCullim.

In June, 1920, anxious to emulate the successful attack at Kilmallock, the East Kerry I.R.A., under Humphrey Murphy, enlisted the aid and the men of West Limerick. Owing to its remoteness, and being in the midst of bogs and hills, which offered favourable possibilities for its capture, Brosna Barracks were selected for attack.

At one time arrangements had been made to take this barrack, but the police became informed from some source of the intended attack, and it became abortive. Under cover of night, a surprise party of military from Castleisland captured a large body of the I.R.A. on the way to Brosna village.

THE SECOND ATTEMPT.

The second attempt took place on the 5th of June, 1920, and on this occasion the attacking party met in a large field across the river from Brosna. Charlie Daly and Humphrey Murphy were in charge of the Kerry column, and Mossie Harnett had under his command sixteen men, armed with police carbines and rifles. These men included Paddy Buckley, who subsequently lost his life at Ballyseedy; James Roche, Tommy Leahy, Con and Ned Cregan, Paddy Mulcahy, Jack Aherne, Paddy Aherne, J. Kiely, Strand, and T. Boucher. The men were divided up into sections and marched to various positions around the barracks.

Fire opened from the barracks before all the men were in position, for the unavoidable noise caused by some of the I.R.A. getting into vantage points, prematurely roused the police to anticipate the attack. Soon the village resounded to the continuous discharge of rifle fire, at and from the barracks, which occupied an isolated position at the South Eastern corner of the Square, beside the local cemetery. Some of the West Limerick men were placed in front of the barracks, near the Church, and the remainder in an old house at the back.

ATTACK DIRECTED BY HUMPHREY MURPHY.

Humphrey Murphy directed the attack himself, in person, on the barracks, and made every effort to break in the roof and gable, with grenades and bombs. The attacks lasted all night long, and even after dawn of another day had

The sound of shouting and firing, reechoing back from the hills and valleys around, was deafening. Verey lights were sent into the sky at intervals, rendering the scene more weird and terrifying. Inside the barracks the police and Tans could be distinctly heard in the breaks of the firing, playing a melodeon, and shouting: "Come on the rainbow chasers." Counter slogans were lustily flung back by the besiegers. The morning was advancing, and consideration of inadequate equipment suggested the advisability of raising the siege. Necessity called for this if an engagement with the superior numbers of the reinforcing military, then surely on their way to the relief of the beleagured garrison, were to be avoided. It was decided to withdraw and as a preliminary the attack was intensified, while the different sections were withdrawing. There were many hair-breadth escapes in the adieus. Over a soldier's breakfast of bread and cheese, incidents of the night were jokingly interchanged.

COLUMN'S NARROW ESCAPE.

That morning the West Limerick Column narrowly escaped being wiped out. They were saved by the courage of some I.R.A. members of the Abbeyfeale Company, under James Collins. On the night of the Brosna attack some seven or eight of these men were assigned positions at Glenesrone Wood to keep an eye on any supporting movement of the Abbeyfeale R.I.C. and if possible to frustrate it. In the early morning the "look-out" at the Abbeyfeale Barracks reported to his sergeant the appearance of Verey lights over Brosna. As a result nine of the R.I.C. were dispatched by the nearest route for Brosna. This happened to be by the old road at the rear of the barracks, known as Betty's road. This route cut across the line of the retreat from Brosna of the West Limerick section engaged there. It was vital to intercept the police, and prevent them cutting off the retreat of those returning from Brosna, and the men entrusted with the responsibility succeeded in doing it at Glenesrone Wood. The brunt of this fight was borne by Jerry Sullivan, of Springmount, the late Jim Leahy of Ballaugh, and William O'Connor, of Mountmahon. They were armed only with double-barrelled shot guns. At close range they opened fire on the advancing police, seriously wounding Constable Martin, and slightly injuring some others. The police halted at the challenge, and returned with rapid rifle fire, and retreated to the barracks firing as they went. Reaching the barracks, they kept up an intense and prolonged fire in the direction of the hill. None of the I.R.A. suffered any casualties, either at Abbeyfeale or the Brosna attack.

AMBUSHES NEAR TOURNAFULLA AND FOYNES.

One evening in early summer the presence of an enemy patrol was reported in Tournafulla. A sergeant and five constables had cycled from Abbeyfeale, with carbines slung over their shoulders, and revolvers at their sides. It was decided to attack the patrol at the Knocknadihe Cross road and word was sent out to this effect. The police moved out of the village and travelled a mile before reaching the cross. Only two of the attacking party had turned up; the rest were late. The two on the spot were armed with a service rifle and a shot gun when they took up their position behind a hedge. Both fired as the patrol came on but failed to hit anyone. The police dismounted, returned the fire, but failed to locate those who challenged them. They luckily escaped. The absent members turned up when too late, but the R.I.C. had been convinced that it was no longer safe to travel the country so armed with impunity.

At another point in West Limerick, in the summer of 1920, a police patrol moved out of Foynes to patrol the road to Glin. A party of the I.R.A., under Sean Finn, with Slope Reidy, Larry McNamee, Tom Regan and J. T. O'Connor lay in ambush awaiting them. The police consisted of eight men, well armed, and into ambush they rode unsuspectingly. Fire opened suddenly on them. Constable Fahey fell mortally wounded. The others immediately fired and worked themselves into positions over the fence, on to the side of the attackers, and enfiladed their position. A continuous fire was maintained for some time, and eventually the R.I.C. extricated themselves from the positions which the development of the fight made so precarious. They retreated in good order.

TEACHING R.I.C. IN NEWCASTLE WEST A LESSON.

In the late summer, or early autumn of 1920, it was decided by the I.R.A. to teach the police of Newcastle West a lesson. At that time they were making themselves abnoxious by their conduct towards the unarmed public. One of their number, Constable Masterson, was met on the road at Sweeps Cross and shot and disarmed.

About this time the "Black and Tans" were making their appearance. Terrorising and dragooning the people was made the order of the day. In Abbeyfeale a terror, in human shape, named Huckerby, made his appearance. This Black and Tan prior to coming to Abbeyfeale, was stationed at Shanagolden, where he murdered an old man named Reidy in cold blood. Two cows also fell victims to his brutality. He was removed to Limerick immediately. It was decided to attack the police patrol at Abbeyfeale to shoot, if possible, this Black and Tan.

A FIGHT AT ABBEYFEALE.

About September, 1920, the Active Service Columns of the various brigades were formed. The West Limerick Column was formed in Athea this month and comprised approximately about thirty men. It was made up of all the men "on the run" from the brigade area. This column moved into position, with a section from each company of the Second Battalion, on the outskirts of Abbeyfeale on a very dark night in September. There were nine rifles and revolvers; the remainder were armed with shot guns. Ten or twelve police and Tans were in the town at the time. Some of them were most aggressive and terrorising towards the people, and were particularly attentive to the relatives of those who were associated with the I.R.A. They usually turned out in force on patrol outside the town and included the road leading to Mountmahon. This night the I.R.A. were set for an ambush on this road on the ouskirts of the town when the patrol came along in loose formation. The I.R.A. were barely in position at the time, without orders what to do, in the event of firing being opened, and scarcely knew how to act in case of failure. Moving along in the dark the patrol heard noises inside the fence, and some of them went to ascertain the cause, when a revolver was fired and Constable Mahony fell mortally wounded. The fight had started and rapid fire was kept up for some time. Eventually, the police and Tans got away with one dead and five wounded on the roadside. The coolness and daring of Capt. P. J. O'Neill on the occasion was responsible for the I.R.A. victory under the circumstances.

TAN ESCAPED TO SPREAD FURTHER TERROR.

The Tan, so much sought for, never came into the line of fire, but escaped to spread further terror about the town next day. Within the week, as a reprisal, he shot two young fellows dead, named Harnett and Healy. The I.R.A. were fighting for their country and only attacked armed forces of the enemy, who were reinforced by Black and Tans, specially indemnified against such outrageous deeds as the shooting of those two young fellows, who never had any connection with the I.R.A. That night the I.R.A. column retreated to Athea, six miles away.

The vengeance of the Tans was not yet satiated, for Mick Collins, brother of James and Denis Collins, of the A.S. Unit, was arrested and chained to a tree in Bourne's field, while a machine gun ripped about him. It was sufficient excuse that he refused to say where the I.R.A. column was then located. After being badly beaten he was flung from a fast travelling lorry and left on the roadside on the way to Limerick.

BATHKEALE HOTEL INCIDENT.

In Rathkeale, in the autumn of 1920, a dispatch was received from the I.R.A. of Kerry respecting a certain Sergeant Neazor, who had journeyed to Rathkeale Fair protecting an enemy civilian. Both were armed and put up at Ward's Hotel. That night a couple of I.R.A., under Sean Finn, entered the coffee room, where they were, and in an exchange of shots the sergeant was killed and the other man disarmed. This event sent several of the I.R.A. "on the run" from Rathkeale, to join the army on the hillsides in their fight.

At Barnagh Railway Station, on the 27th of May, 1920, the train conveying the mails was held up, in broad day light, by the following:—Paddy Aherne, Jim Roche, Tom Boucher, of Templeglantine Company; James Collins, P. J. O'Neill, and "Bird" Collins, of Abbeyfeale Company. The "Bird" hopped on the engine and held up the fireman and driver. This gave the R.I.C. the long sought excuse to raid the premises of the late Sean Quirke at Templeglantine.

SEIZURE OF MAILS.

About a fortnight after the Abbeyfeale ambush a postman was held up near the Tournafulla Creamery, a mile from the post office, and deprived of the mails. This raid was carried out by Jack Aherne, Tommy Leahy and Batt Wrenn. Aherne was Battalion Adjutant, and they were armed with a revolver and an automatic pistol. They took the mails behind the fence to assort them at their leisure. The postman reported the matter at the post office and an official report was 'phoned Newcastle West. In half an hour two lorries of police and military, with the postman, whom they met on the return to Newcastle West, in their midst, pulled up at the exact spot where the mails were taken. All unconscious of the danger the letter sorters were still inside the fence at work leisurely in safety as they thought. Hearing the lorries halting on the road beside them, they started to run, but were sighted by the military, who opened fire on them. Jack Aherne was shot through the neck, and captured with Batt Wrenn. Aherne was badly wounded. Tommy Leahy ran along inside the fence, and although pursued for about a mile, made good his escape under fire. The other two got a long term of imprisonment in Epswich Prison, England.

TRAIN AMBUSH PLANNED.

At the commencement of the New Year, 1921, several attempts were made to attack small patrols of police and Black and Tans. The West Limerick Column alone could not hope to fight or beat large forces of the enemy, being poorly armed and equipped. Few small patrols of police ventured outside the garrisoned towns.

Information was received by the Brigadier, Sean Finn, that a party of Tans were to travel on a certain morning by train from Foynes to Limerick. A Council of officers was called, and details of the planned attack made. It was arranged that a young fellow named Liston was to travel in the train for the purpose of getting some teeth extracted in Limerick, although he had not an unsound one in his head. He was to travel in the last compartment, at the right-hand side, and when the train approached the ambushed position he was to put his hand out of the window, and with his cap signal to the I.R.A. the number of Tans travelling, by raising his hand up and down. At the appointed place this man was seen raising and lowering his hand frantically, as if a large number of Tans were travelling. The column was mobilised near Ballyhahill, and marched during the night, and placed in positions on high rocky ground on each side of the railway track. Con Boyle of Rathkeale was ordered to walk down the track, and halt the oncoming train with a flag at a place called Barrigone.

THE ATTACKERS AND THE ATTACK.

The I.R.A. numbered about eighteen and included Jimmy Collins, Johnny Leahy, Jerry Moloney, Michael Colbert, Jim Colbert, Danny Murphy, Owen McAuliffe, Larry Harnett, John T. O'Connor, C. Cregan, N. Cregan, D. Collins, Johnny Harnett, G. McAuliffe, Jim Guiney, Dan and Maurice Quinn, J. Liston and David O'Brien. After some anxiety, and thoughts, perhaps of their last fight, the train is seen approaching. The hand as mentioned was seen rapidly moving; Con Boyle has done his duty, and the train pulls up exactly between the attackers. Heads are thrust out to ascertain the cause of the halt, but are as quickly withdrawn on seeing rifles and shot guns pointed at them from the rocks and wall by the embankment. It was a deep cutting, and as Con Boyle mounted the embankment, fire was opened from both sides on the train, and continued for half an hour without result. Rocks were chipped in all directions by the Tans. Passengers had a harrowing time lying on the floors of the compartments. At length a daring Tan is seen jumping from a carriage, under fire, and makes his way along the cutting to the engine in front. There he compelled the driver and fireman to restart the train. It moves off with fourteen Tans shaken and wounded.

CO-OPERATION OF EAST LIMERICK COLUMN.

In February, 1921, it was decided by the I.R.A. Officers of West Limerick that the co-operation of the East Limerick Column was required to deal a smashing blow at the military and Tans on the hills of West Limerick. The result was that the whole East Limerick Column, some fifty strong, under the command of Donncead Hannigan, Column O.C., marched from the shadow of the Galtees to Athea. There they were billeted in the farm houses of the district and awaited a favourable opportunity of surprising the enemy. Now, it was not possible for such a large body of men to get over a whole county without some information reaching the British.

The Column reached Athea on Good Friday, 1921, and on Easter Saturday all received Holy Communion, in commemoration of the Easter Rising of 1916. During Mass in the Athea Church scouts were posted on the surrounding hills and also during the day, while the Column rested after their arduous march. In the evening information reached the I.R.A. that half a dozen lorries of military and Tans were approaching from the Newcastle West direction, towards Athea. In consequence the Column moved into the boglands of Toorcendaniel, where, behind two high turf banks, they took cover until the night came on.

TAN DECOY THAT FAILED IN ITS PURPOSE.

The Tans searched the country round about, and as darkness was setting in returned in the Newcastle West direction, abandoning a broken lorry three miles outside the village. This was a decoy to attract the I.R.A. to its vicinity, under the range of their guns from a neighbouring hill. The I.R.A. were not so easily duped, for their scout had already reported the presence of the enemy still on the hill, in large numbers.

During the night the I.R.A. columns of the East and West escaped to Ballyhahill. The British were now aware of their location as somewhere between Foynes, Athea, or Ballyhahill and their counter moves were active. The I.R.A., through necessity, were handicapped by elongated billetings. The columns were accommodated in houses extending five miles, from Whiskey Hall to Teenakilla Cross in Glin parish. Scouts guarded against surprise from the hills. In the course of the following day, while the men were recuperating from the excitement and hardships of the previous evening, some resting, others sleeping, an outpost at Whiskey Hall reported or signalled the rapid approach of some sixty Black and Tans in Crossleys. A scout at once hurried to Danaghet's, Wood Lawn, where Sean Finn, D. Hannigan, and James Colbert were billeted, to inform them of the presence of the tans in the vicinity. The movement of the scout did not escape the observations of the Tans, some of whom jumped from their lorries and opened fire on him. The alarmed men rushed from the house, half dressed, and only to find themselves partly hemmed in by the Tans, who at once fired on them and on a few others who were on the scene, and, in the fight that followed, were gradually forced backwards towards the Shannon.

SEAN FINN MORTALLY WOUNDED.

The fight lasted about fifteen minutes when the I.R.A. broke through the Tans towards Shanagolden in the East. It was during this that the brave young leader, Sean Finn, fell, mortally wounded. His comrades retrieved his rifle and paper as he fell.

His last dying words were:—"Carry on lads, I am done." And so perished as brave and chivalrous a comrade and leader as could be found within the four seas of Erin. In the fight Quain, of East Limerick, was shot through the head and badly wounded. When the Tans came up to the body of the brave Finn they consulted on recognising him, and, taking him with them, withdrew at once from Ballyhahill. The rest of the I.R.A. Column were at once notified of what had occurred, and they got into positions around Ballyhahill village, which they held until 3 a.m. the following morning, awaiting the return of the British. They received, however, definite information indirectly from an enemy source that the military authorities had ordered a concentration of troops from Limerick and Tralee into the Athea-Ballyhahill area, having the capture of the I.R.A. column for their objective. While the enemy were on the move for the district in overwhelming numbers, the I.R.A. column escaped into Kilbaha, Co. Kerry, on the Limerick border. That morning the British broke up many houses throughout the district, and in the Athea Church, where a deceased person was awaiting burial, opened the coffin before the altar in search of a victim. Only that morning some of the I.R.A. at Blain Bridge had scarcely left the houses at which they called for some refreshments when they were raided.

BOTH COLUMNS MARCH TO EAST LIMERICK.

The death of the gallant young Brigadier cast a gloom over the I.R.A. in the West, checking their military ardour for the time. A Council was convened, and it was decided that both columns evacuate the district and march to East Limerick, where the terrain was more favourable to guerilla warfare. It afforded better cover in dense hedges and the friendly Galtees for retreat when necessary.

This march was planned and carried through as secretly as possible in March, 1921, and was entirely successful. About eighteen West Limerick men took part in this quick march to the East, under the command of Michael Colbert, Column Commander, and included in its number:—Jim Colbert, Jim Liston, Jim Guiney, Danny Murphy, Jimmy Collins, Denis Collins, Larry Harnett, John J. Leahy, Paddy Naughton, Ml. Murphy and Fitzgeralds (Askeaton), Owen McAuliffe, Amos Reidy, James Sullivan.

Here the late Sean Wall, Brigade O.C., East Limerick, and Liam Hayes were in charge, and several important engagements with the British followed, notably at Shrahalla, where a big engagement took place.

AMBUSH OF ENEMY CYCLING COLUMN.

An ambush was prepared by the officers of the I.R.A. for a cycling column of the enemy, consisting of about fifteen men, who for weeks previously scoured the countryside, and during their raids several articles of jewellery and valuables disappeared. These were called the "Green Howards," and were under the command of one who displayed the instincts of a degenerate.

On the 1st of May, 1921, the Western Column of the I.R.A. occupied the old churchyard of Shrahalla, situate on a steep hill, and which overlooked the road on one side, and here awaited the patrol. About the same time Sean Carroll was crossing an open field across the road to positions marked out for him, directly opposite and beneath the positions occupied by the West Limerick men. The road led to a cross-roads, over one hundred yards from the positions taken up and led round a sharp bend. One of the roads was at right angle to the field in which Sean Carroll's men were.

LORRIES AND ARMOURED CAR ARRIVE.

Suddenly round this bend came four lorries and an armoured car. Sighting Carroll's men they ran some of the cars down the road mentioned and opened fire on the column in front and flank, killing four volunteers, and capturing one named Casey, who was tried that night by Drumhead Courtmartial and executed in Cork the following morning.

The West Limerick Column opened fire on the Tans from the hillside at their back, and so gave Carroll and his men time to take cover. The whole I.R.A. column retreated to Knockaney and billeted in houses in the Kilteely district. The following morning a decoy column of British cycled right in between the IR.A. columns. Dan Allis, one of the East Limerick officers, immediately got his men together and while doing so in a boreen entering to a farm house the enemy suddenly appeared and instantly opening fire on the I.R.A., killed four on the spot, and riddled the clothes of others, including those of Danny Murphy, Abbeyfeale.

A SIX HOURS PITCHED BATTLE.

The sound of the firing attracted further reinforcements of the enemy and a regular pitched battle took place all over an extended area from 12 noon until 6 o'clock in the evening. During the battle a party of R.I.C. and Tans retreated from the fire for cover to a farm house pursued by the I.R.A., and two Tans fell mortally wounded while crossing a gate. The enemy were forced to withdraw from the farm house, on which a hot fire was directed, and in an outoffice were discovered the bodies of the four volunteers killed earlier in the day. Twenty-five bicycles, abandoned by the enemy, were taken possession of. The bodies of the volunteers who fell were taken to Kilteely and secretely interred that night. For valour and bravery in this engagement the Column Commander, D. Hannigan, especially commended members of the West Limerick Column.

This engagement took place on the 2nd of May, and that at Kilteely on the 3rd. Yet another fight developed. Once more a decoy patrol was sent out and large forces of the British followed, aided by aeroplanes, to direct them. It was owing to the strategy and tactics of Liam Hayes and other officers that the columns were able to maintain their positions in the double ditches, or fences, common to the district. After a harrowing day they were eventually enabled to extricate themselves and break through from an untenable position under the circumstances. On the day of the Kilteely battle a column under Jim Colbert were surrounded near Emly, and after an engagement, in which there were no serious casualties, they forced their way from a dangerous position to a safer locality.

WEST LIMERICK COLUMN RECALLED.

After five or six weeks of this strenuous campaign the West Limerick Column was recalled. Necessity demanded their presence in their own district. At this time the Brigade Columns were broken up and every man sent back to his own Battalion. This, to line up with the local Battalion Columns, then formed under the orders of Liam Lynch, O/C, 1st Southern Division, at that time organised.

In West Limerick Garret McAuliffe was appointed Brigadier, Michael Colbert, Vice Brigadier; Jimmy Collins, Adjutant; Jim Colbert, Quarter-Master.

The West Limerick Column marched in two night marches from the Galtee mountains to Athea in the West, and passed successfully through a party of the enemy, lying in wait for them near Granagh, where one Volunteer lost his life.

In March, 1921, a Column was mobilised near Meenahela, Abbeyfeale, to ambush a police patrol in that town, but it had to be abandoned on that night, as over a hundred military marched there from Athea; being a Column of the enemy, then on the move from place to place.

AID OF NORTH CORK I.R.A. SECURED.

It was decided at that period to seek the aid of the famous North Cork I.R.A. Column, and bring them into Abbeyfeale to help in the attack there. A meeting was arranged between Mossie Harnett, Battalion O/C, and Michael Sullivan, a prominent officer in the North Cork's, near Meelin, Newmarket. As a result of the arrangement a Column of the best men in North Cork were transported one night towards the end of May to Meenahela, four miles from Abbeyfeale. The O'C. in charge was Paddy O'Brien, of Liscarroll, then Battalion Commandant, and the others included Michael Sullivan, Meelin, Bill Moylan (since dead R.I.P.), Con Moylan, Newmarket, Conny D. Curtin, Rockchapel and about sixteen others. They were met at Barrett's house at Meenahela by the A.S. officers, and men of the 2nd Battalion, and arrangements were made at a Council meeting to occupy positions on the steep road about half a mile from the town. Here the Black and Tans frequently patrolled.

NOTICES ORDERING TANS TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY.

Prior to the arrival of the Cork Column for days previously, insulting notices were posted up in the vicinity of the town on gateways and places available, ordering the Tans to leave the country immediately. These notices were as often looked for within half a mile of the barracks and torn down. From Dromtrasna the Column moved to Abbeyfeale Hill, and were billeted for the night in three or four farm houses close together. When dawn came, positions were examined, which were to be taken up only when the Tans were seen advancing. There was good view of the town, and about 10 a.m. the Tans left the barracks and proceed through the town on to the Newcastle road. They came to one of the I.R.A. notices, stopped and took it down. Returning they came directly out the road leading to the positions occupied. Half way up, and for no apparent reason, they halted and returned to the barracks, and did not leave them again that day. The I.R.A. remained until night, and then moved on to Mountcollins. The North Cork Column retired to Rockchapel.

From this the Tans were loath to leave their barbed wire fortresses, but the I.R.A. did not despair of teaching them a lesson for all their acts of brutality and terror about the place.

MEETING OF OFFICERS AND A DECISION.

Once more the local officers met, including Jimmy Collins, Mossie Harnett, Johnny Harnett, P. J. O'Neill, Jeremiah Mcloney and some others. It was decided that the only way to attack the Tans was to enter the town in the early morning, and to occupy houses converging on the Square. On the morning of the 5th of June, 1921, about twenty of the Column marched into the town from the Newcastle West side, halted at the Protestant Church, and were met by the following scouts:—John O'Connor, Pete Collins, T. T. J. O'Connell, Eddie Sheehy, Michael Shannon, D. Cullinane, and Michael Collins. Eight men from the Column were selected, and ordered to follow the scouts barefooted into the town, to occupy the houses appointed to them. The rest of the Column followed similiarly. Two of the scouts posted up on the door of the barracks one of the notices offensive to the Tans. It was owing to the daring of these two scouts, Thomas O'Connell and Pete Collins, that the Tans moved up the town to avenge the insult placed at their very door. There was an anxious time in waiting, for it was known that almost every Sunday morning large numbers of Tans usually patrolled the town.

THE TANS WALK INTO IT!

Sometime about 6.30 a.m. about a dozen Tans proceeded into the Square in extended order from the barracks. They were armed with rifles and revolvers, and all unconscious of the impending attack, halted where another offensive notice had been attached to a telegraph pole. Immediately fire was opened on them from the adjoining houses, following a prolonged whistle. Taken by surprise, they paused for a moment startled. Some dashed for the shelter of the barracks, others returned the fire as they retreated. Constable Jolly was mortally wounded and most of the others were wounded more or less seriously. In a few minutes the I.R.A. were on the street, retrieved whatever weapons were abandoned, fired several volleys towards the barracks, and left the town orderly by the Newcastle West road. While still on the outskirts of the town, some of the uninjured Tans returned to the Square, from which they fired repeatedly without effect in the direction taken by the I.R.A. Jimmy Collins was in charge of this engagement.

ARRANGING ATTACK ON MILITARY LORRIES.

After the attack at Abbeyfeale it was decided to become interested in the military lorries plying between Abbeyfeale and Newcastle West. Weeks were spent arranging this. The help of North Cork was again requisitioned, and Paddy O'Brien, Michael Sullivan and Brislane, Cork, with Mossie Harnett, James Collins, T. Sexton and T. Boucher, examined the country round Templeglantine and Barnagh. It was decided to make an attack from the west side of Barnagh Hill. Larry Harnett and Denis Collins had been sent to Cork for instructions in mine laying, and mines were prepared in the forge at Kingwilliamstown. Early in July, 1921, they piloted forty men of the North Cork Column to Killacullecn, Tournafulla, who were billetted at Kellys. Here they were met by the West Limerick Column in full strength. Preparations were made for the following day, as it had been learned that sixty military and Black and Tans would pass over Barnagh to Abbeyfeale from Newcastle West. Eight mines were laid with connections. Signallers were posted on the hillsides. The engineers had wired the mines for a distance of a hundred yards inside the fence running parallel to the road. The fence ran along for over a mile, covered with furze, and was the main position.

LORRIES OF MILITARY ARRIVE.

The men were ready to take their