

THE TAKING OF NEWCASTLE WEST IN THE CIVIL WAR

By Michael Dore

This account of the events, culminating in the taking of the town by Pro-Treaty forces on Monday the 7th of August, 1922, is pieced together from memory, occasional conversations over the years with neighbours who were witnesses, and various literary sources. In no way does it presume to be definitive.

Essentially a military operation, all other factors are ignored - the political factor, particularly so. Except for two quotations from sources, I have strictly adhered throughout to the terms "Pro-Treaty" and "Anti-Treaty" to indicate the respective sides, though this might appear cumbersome. Such were the original descriptions. Later other terms with political and emotive implications crept into use which, I feel, could not be explained without violating my self-imposed brief. To avoid unnecessary repetition in the notes of sources, the full name of the publication will be given initially and the name of the Author only in subsequent references.

THE BRUREE-KILMALLOCK-BRUFF TRIANGLE¹

Limerick fell to Pro-Treaty forces, after a ten day battle, on the afternoon of Friday, July the 21st. The final outcome was determined, in large measure, by the arrival of a piece of artillery for the Pro-Treaty side on the 19th inst. The retreating Anti-Treaty force dug in at what was then called the Bruree-Kilmallock-Bruff Triangle, where a stubborn resistance was offered for fifteen days. At 2.00 a.m. on August the 2nd - by coincidence, the day on which a strong Pro-Treaty force under General Paddy Daly successfully landed from the sea at Fenit - an Anti-Treaty column set out from Kilmallock and travelled northwards to establish itself at Patrickswell. The purpose of the manoeuvre was to cover an Anti-Treaty counter-attack on Bruree against "enemy" intervention from the North. The loss of that village on Sunday, July the 30th had placed the Kilmallock defence at a serious disadvantage because its left flank was thereby exposed.

Since Patrickswell was in the Mid-Limerick Brigade area, the column consisted mainly of members of that unit, mostly Limerick City men²; but it also included a strong Cork element and some Kerry men. It was commanded by Michael Hartney in the enforced absence of the Brigade O/C, Tomás Malone, alias Sean Forde, who was a prisoner in Pro-Treaty hands³.

The column's stay in Patrickswell came to an

found itself confronted by a strong force of Dublin Guards⁴ under the leadership of two of Collins's "Squad", Tom Keogh and Jimmy Slattery and was, without much ado, ejected from it's position⁵. This was the Anti-Treaty column, augmented by local levies as it retreated, that eventually reached Newcastle West on the afternoon of August the 6th⁶.

It subsequently transpired that the brief occupation of Patrickswell fortuitously got in the way of the grand strategic plan which the Pro-Treaty G.H.Q. had put into effect for the conquest of the South-West. The Fenit landing was only part of a wider amphibious operation. On August 3rd, Colonel-Commandant Michael Hogan crossed the Shannon from Kilrush to Tarbert with a force of two hundred and forty men and within two days had captured Ballylongford and Listowel. The object of Keogh and Slattery's advance from Limerick was to link up with Hogan, and the confronting column at Patrickswell was an unexpected obstacle which they had to "bulldoze" ahead⁷.

THE SITUATION AT NEWCASTLE WEST

On Sunday April the 2nd, the Newcastle West unit of the Volunteers was taken on a route march to Monagea to take its place amongst other units of the Battalion area. Each man in the assembly was then



by the Brigade Vice-Commandant, Michael Colbert, to indicate by stepping to a particular side whether he was a Pro- or Anti-Treaty.⁸ As was the case with the Sinn Fein Cumann in January⁹ a substantial majority of the Newcastle West unit, including the Company O/C, Tommy McDonagh, opted for the Treaty. This was contrary to the line taken by the West Limerick Brigade as a whole which, following the lead of it's Divisional Commandant, Liam Lynch, supported the Anti-Treaty stance.¹⁰

Having divided amicably on the issue, the men marched back to town in separate columns. Henceforth the Pro-Treaty volunteers were quartered at Castlevew, the Anti-Treaty section retaining the buildings originally taken over from the British - the Barrack and the Castle. Garret McAuliffe, O/C of the West Limerick Brigade, established his headquarters at the Castle. He appointed the following staff:

Vice-Commandant
Michael Colbert
Adjutant
Jimmy Collins
Quarter-Master
Jim Colbert
Intelligence Officer
Ned Cregan
Provost Marshal¹¹
Jimmy Roche
Training Officer
George Wallace

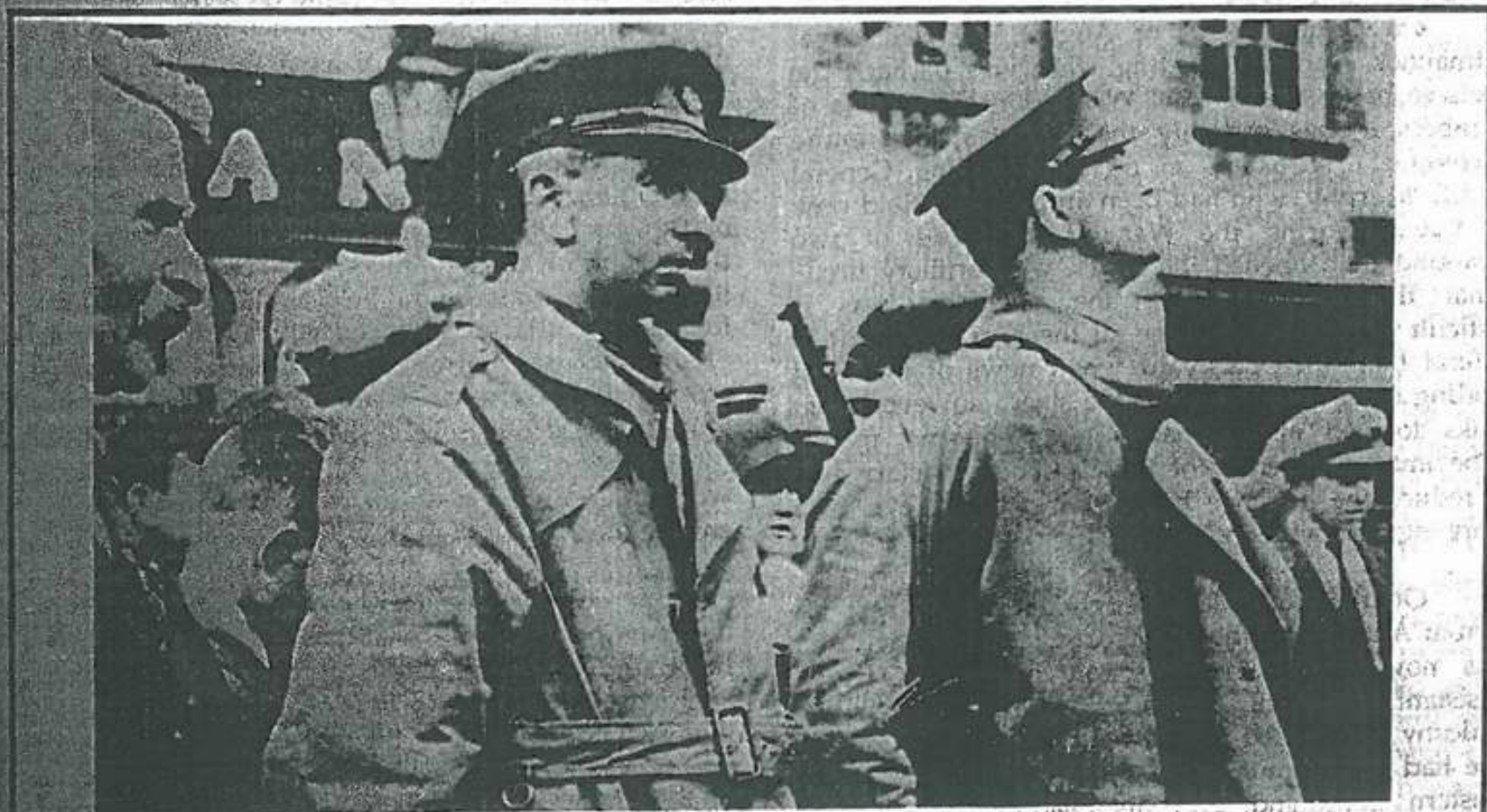
There were five Battalions in the Brigade. The O/C of the first Battalion, to which the Newcastle Company belonged, was Jim Liston of Liseniska, who took the Anti-Treaty side.

Shortly after the tension between Pro and Anti-Treaty elements in Limerick City had subsided around mid-March, the Pro-Treaty G.H.Q. reorganised their forces in the area and created a new Division - the Fourth Southern. In command of it they placed Donnachadh Hannigan, who had been O/C East Limerick Brigade, the only Brigade in Ernie O'Malley's Second Southern Division to take the Treaty side.¹² By virtue of his new command, Hannigan was in control of all Pro-Treaty forces in Limerick City and County. When the Civil War commenced at the end of June, the Castlevew garrison immediately departed eastwards to join Hannigan's command.

Very many of those in early manhood in the town, whom I was aware of at the time, were associated with the Castlevew force. Prominent were Amos Riedy, the first volunteer I saw on duty with Sam Browne and revolver at the Barrack door on the day following the takeover from the Tans; Eddie Cregan of Dungeehy, subsequently killed in action, who introduced me to the mysteries within Barrack precincts, showing me various types of weapon, mills bombs etc; Jimmy Noonan, who subsequently emigrated, and Joe Ambrose.¹³

THE RETREAT

To revert to the situation at Patrickswell - from there the Pro-Treaty advance westwards was rapid. At 7.00 p.m. August the 4th, Adare was taken. As the village was on the periphery of the West Limerick area, a number of men from H.Q. at Newcastle West joined in its defence. Amongst them were Garret McAuliffe himself, Owen McAuliffe, Jimmy Roche, Charlie Foley, Joe Mahony and his brother who emigrated to America, one of the Sheehys of South Quay, brother to Paddy, Tommy and Jim, who also emigrated. Con Cregan was there,



Michael Collins in the Square, N.C.W. - 14th August 1922
L. to R. Tommy Roche; General Gearoid O'Sullivan; Noreen Histon; Michael Collins; Jimmy Ward.

had already fought at Limerick and was with column that came up from Kilmallock.

Local elements also came to the fore on the Pro-Treaty side: a column composed of West Limerick men, many of them from Newcastle West, but also including a contingent from the First Kerry, which had been encamped at Rockbarton, converged with Keogh's force from the South-East. The column was under command of Sean Keane of Feoghanagh, Brigade O/C (Garret's opposite number). Amongst the Newcastle West men were the Nine Day Warriors. This group consisted of the scions of business houses in the town who, at the time, would have been considered the representatives of the more "responsible" element in the community. They left to join the colours on Sunday, July the 30th, and on the ninth day following returned home with Keane's troops, whereupon they immediately donned their dust-coats and resumed work behind their parents' counters. Hence the appellation - Nine Day Warriors. There was nothing partisan in this label.

Indeed, those of them I knew always took the joke in good part, so much so that I got the impression it was they themselves coined the phrase. Perhaps it was that, in hindsight, they came to appreciate the Pickwickian aspect of the affair. I do not know with certainty who inspired the move. Once upon a time, I heard it was Father Hayes but could not get this confirmed. Having neither experience or desire for soldiering, they could not have been, militarily, other than a liability. Perhaps the object was to add gravitas to the proceedings.

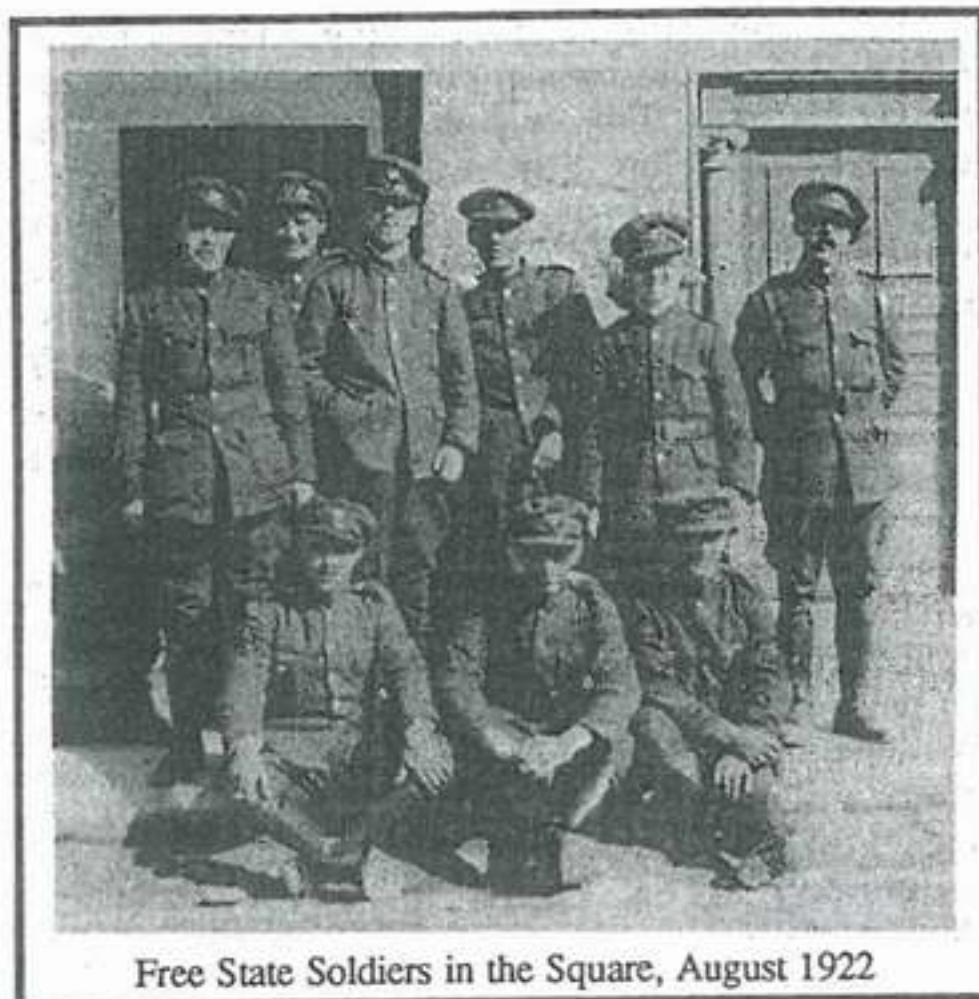
As had occurred in Limerick, artillery again played the vital role. The Dunraven Arms Hotel, the defenders H.Q., was hit by shell fire, wounding Michael Hartney, their Commandant and killing his wife.¹⁴ After that they immediately withdrew along the road to Rathkeale.¹⁵

On Saturday, 5th of August, the defence at Kilmallock crumbled, ending what was perhaps the decisive battle of the Civil War. On the criteria of numbers it was certainly the largest in the entire encounter. At 6.00 a. m. on that morning, General W.R.E. Murphy, who had been an officer of field rank in France during the War, at the head of two thousand men opened the attack with artillery fire.¹⁶ What the final tally for the defenders was is difficult to estimate because all the Kerry men left to defend their own backyard when news of the Fenit landing came to hand. At one stage, however, their ranks totalled approximately one thousand men.¹⁷

The immediate effect of the Pro-Treaty victory was to reduce the advance from Adare to the level of a mopping-up operation.

On the same day, Keogh decided to rest his men at Adare. All the Pro-Treaty activity in Munster was now under the direction of Eoin O'Duffy, Assistant Chief of Staff, who with Collins and Mulcahy constituted the newly formed War Council.

He had come South with the rank of G.O.C. South-Western Command, and his headquarters were in Limerick.¹⁸ Technically, Hannigan still retained command of all Pro-Treaty forces in the Limerick



Free State Soldiers in the Square, August 1922

area, but the real commander was the man with whom O'Duffy liaised - and I have a hunch that man was Keogh, at least for the purposes of this operation. During the Black-and-Tan struggle, Hannigan had been an intimate friend of Liam Lynch, now Anti-Treaty Chief of Staff.¹⁹ In an effort to avert the outbreak of hostilities in Limerick City, the two of them, in early July, signed a truce which was immediately repudiated by Hannigan's G.H.Q.

Against such a background, it was likely the higher command looked upon him as a "softie" - a man capable of being swayed by personal sentiment.²⁰

For whatever reasons, he was in fact relegated to a relatively passive role after Adare and remained very much in the background from then on. The original separation between Keogh's force of Dublin Guards and Keane's local levies was retained. Keogh's men became the right or active wing; the troops under Keane became the left wing, travelling on Keogh's southern flank as a protective cover.²¹

Such was the set-up when, at 10.00 a.m. on Sunday, the 6th, Keogh and Slattery with their Dublin Guards set out for Rathkeale, accompanied by an armoured car named "The Custom House" and a piece of artillery. The "Irish Independent" gave a lurid description on the Dubliners' advance. According to it, the battle was fought field by field and mid-day found the attacking force halfway to Rathkeale.

From 2.00 p.m. onwards the fighting was heaviest and consisted of frontal attacks on a series of machine-gun posts which were well sheltered in groves of trees.

The last of these was at the Five-Cross-Roads, which the Dublin Guards captured after a bloody encounter.

If what I have heard from conversations from men on opposing sides that day is anywhere near the truth, the foregoing piece of reportage is fictional.

According to Jimmy Roche, one of the West Limerick men who joined in with the defenders at Adare, there was no such field-by-field combat. The small amount of fighting that actually took place was in the area between the Five-Cross-Roads and the town and was directed towards impeding efforts to position the

n-pounder. This account was confirmed by men
Keane's column, who may not have been in the
vicinity, but who would have heard first-hand
accounts of the prolonged running battle, if it had
occurred.

In the meantime, Keane moved to repeat the
Adare tactic by bringing his men northwards to wedge
the defenders between two fronts, but his assistance
was not needed. A few of his men with knowledge of
the locality, however, forded the river upstream of
the bridge and emerged onto the street through
Lyons's Gate. The first out was a Rathkeale man
named Moore. According to the "Irish Independent",
six men of the Dublin Guards were first into the town.
But, at that very moment, Moore was in his own house
enjoying a hearty meal - so the accolade really
belonged to him.

Once the eighteen-pounder was securely in
position, the battle was over. The site selected was
on the road by Beechmount Hill, beside the double
cottages. Here the gunners had a direct line on the
Old Barrack. The first shell pierced the curtain-
wall; the second shell made a hole in the gable of the
building itself; the garrison did not wait for the
third. Their exodus was via the Newbridge Road,
the intention being to get to Askeaton. However, on
reaching Newbridge, they discovered that Askeaton
was already in the hands of Hogan's amphibians so,
changing tack, they swung westwards through the
fields for Newcastle West. On the way, they passed
by Ardagh. I spoke to people who witnessed their
approach to the village. They were a weary,
bedraggled lot, trudging along in disparate groups,
with seemingly very little fight left in them. The
description called to my mind an Irish phrase,
beloved of the poets, to express such a mood: *Go
laghtríoch*. However, they obviously made a heroic
effort to appear their best as they entered the town.

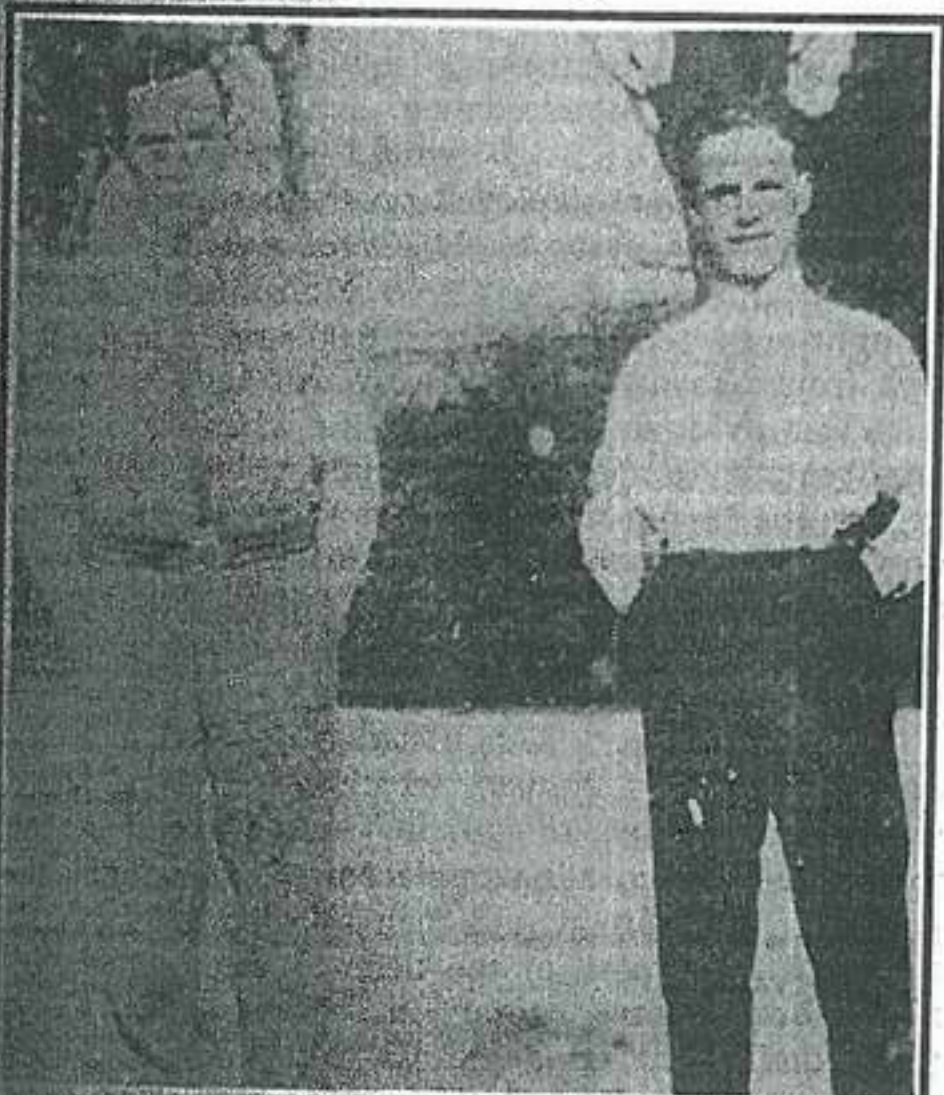
Somewhere along the way in, they formed ranks. As
an *ogánach*, I watched their entry from over the top of
Johnny Brouder's half-door in the Turnpike. In
orderly ranks, four deep and in step, they marched -
about two hundred of them - each man shouldering a
rifle. Missing only was tuc of drum! As they passed
down the street towards the Square, a man on the
outside of the first row shouted "Up the Republic".

THE END OF THE LINE

It must have been around 7.00 p.m. when the
marchers arrived. When I reached home I found two
Cork men, billeted on us for the night, having tea.
Perhaps it was the upset to domestic routine which
their presence caused that enabled me "duck" up to
the Square, unknown to my parents, immediately I
had eaten. It was now duskish and a few stragglers
were still arriving in bone-shaking Model T's.
Amongst them was a small truck on which a quantity
of mattresses were piled up - evidence that some, at
least, of their number, despite the bizarre
circumstances, were intent on having a good night's
sleep.

A group of about twelve had collected at the
entrance of the Castle. They were obviously late-
comers as, from their chatter, I gathered they were
waiting on arrangements for quarters for the night.
They must have been the machine-gun section,
because at least six of them carried - what appeared
to me at the time - an awkward looking weapon with
a barrel resembling a short piece of drainpipe, at the
stock-end of which was a small segmented wheel that
reminded me of a toy roulette. It was, of course, a
Lewis gun as I later learnt, and the miniature
segments on the wheel were, in fact, rows of bullets
which did not show up clearly in the twilight.

The element that most impressed me was the
array of military equipment evident on all sides.
Men were sauntering about with rifles, machine-guns,
most of them wearing leather bandoleers, some
decked out in ornate Sam Brownes with revolver in
holster. Our two guests were walking arsenals - not
alone were they weighed down with rifles, small
arms and ammo, but one of them had a sophisticated
pair of field binoculars. I found out afterwards that
the bulk of these arms and equipment came from the
pile which the British left after them at the New
Barracks, Limerick. Despite this display of fire-
power by seemingly resolute men, it is clear to me in
hindsight that all must have known in their hearts
Newcastle West was the end of the line. The forces
of Hogan and Daly were closing in on Abbeyfeale; Pro-
Treaty troops patrolled the road along by the
Shannon and had already established themselves as
far up the Estuary as Askeaton: Keogh and Slattery
were at Rathkeale, ready to spring. For the Cork men
alone, a tenuous escape route remained - by crossing
the hills at the back of Broadford they could still
reach Buttevant where the H.Q. of the First Southern
Division still remained intact under the command of
Liam Deasy. For the rest, the conventional military
phase was close to the end and they could only look
forward to a fugitive guerrilla existence in a
countryside at least fifty per cent hostile.



Con Gregan and Jimmy Collins in the Castle grounds
during occupation by anti-Treaty forces
August 1922

Early on the morning of August the 7th, we were conveyed, under our mother's wing, to what was then known as the Workhouse, to be out of harm's way. We spent the entire morning and early afternoon in the sittingroom of the convent, where mother and a few other matrons passed the time in, what was for us, boring conversation. The nuns very kindly served us with a mid-day meal. There were others of our own age also present, and when we at times became restless and tried to amuse ourselves with horseplay, we were immediately set upon by the maternal element. We envied those of our schoolmates who were left at home to enjoy the excitement. To add to our frustration, the day was dry and sultry but I do not remember much sunshine. We had few indications of a battle in progress. An odd Model-T, flying a red cross flag, pulled up occasionally at the main entrance, but it was obvious that these improvised ambulances were simply cruising about. A woman on an errand from the hospital side of the

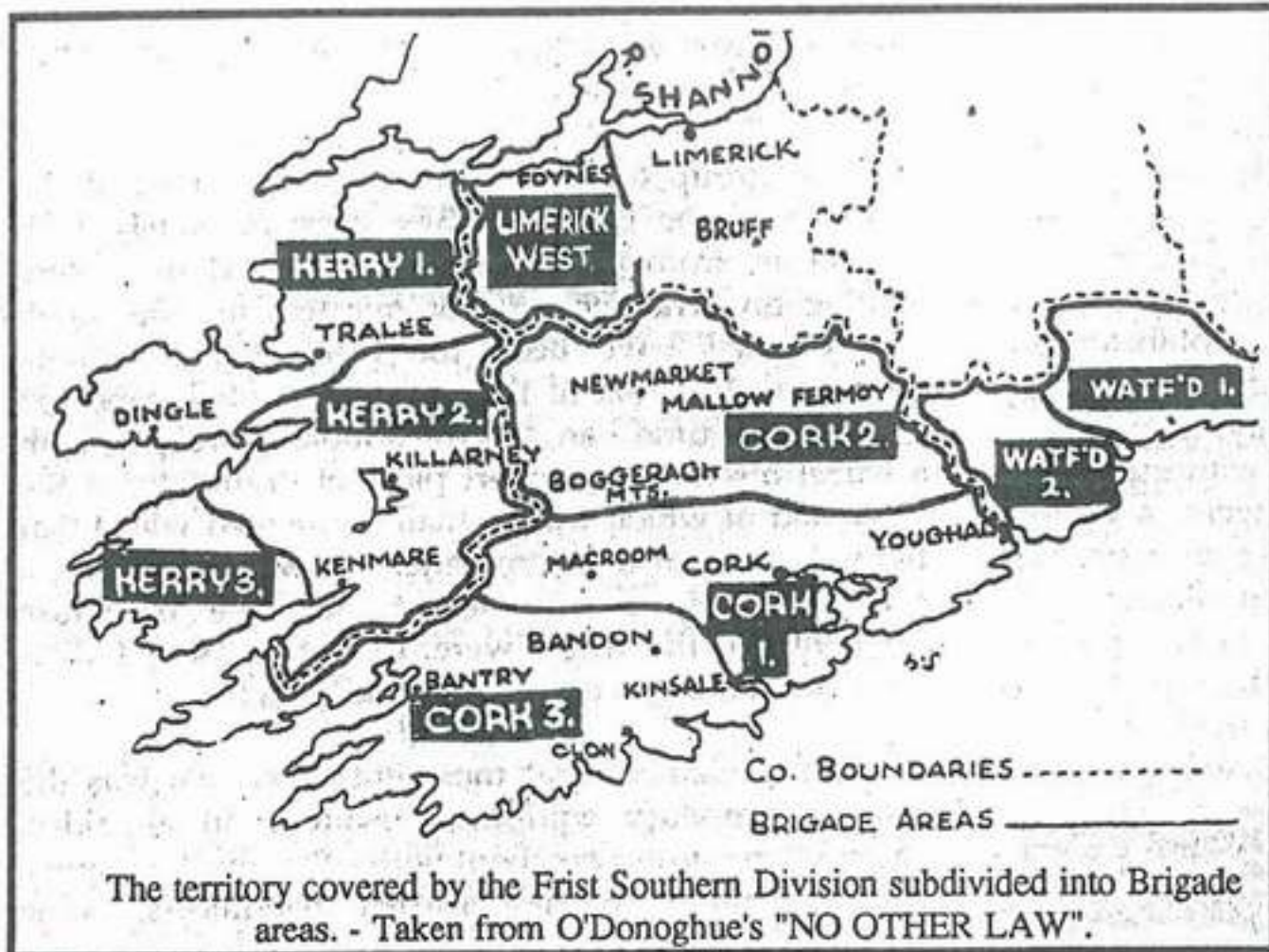
drain in Jim Kelly's quarry at Churchtown. A small iron cross marks the spot where he fell. The other brother was killed two hours later in an engagement on a field adjacent to the Cork road, close to the Tilery on the town side. It was around this area the left wing of the Pro-Treaty advance under Keane entered the town. They came by way of the Bruff Line. The Dublin Guards under Keogh and Slattery came by way of the main road from Rathkeale and entered the town under cover of the armoured car via Bishop Street. The eighteen-pounder was brought around to Churchtown via Boithrín na Plá and eventually sited at the "sunken fence" in Kelly's quarry. Here, as in Rathkeale, the gunners had a direct line on their target.

THE BATTLE

For the defenders the day had an inauspicious beginning. At the first light of dawn the Cork section pulled out and made their way to Buttevant. The small minority of Kerry men stayed put. Left to hold the town were approximately two hundred and fifteen men. We have an exact tally of members of the West Limerick Brigade present because there were Battalion roll calls: they consisted of one hundred and fifty men. It is estimated that the Mid-Limerick Brigade members totalled about fifty, and the First Kerry, fifteen. I cannot get figures for the Pro-Treaty attacking troops, but accounts state Keogh and Slattery took Patrickswell with a "strong force" of Dublin Guards. In a Civil War context, "strong force" would mean at least two hundred men. Attributing the same strength to Keane's contingent, one might estimate a total of four to five hundred men.

It would appear that Pro-Treaty troops were deployed on the eastern environs of the town as early as 3.00 a.m. This was the situation discovered by Owen McAuliffe when he brought out a scouting party at 6.00 a.m. to probe the area from Cregan's Cross in towards the Creamery Luck was on his side on one occasion when a concealed Pro-Treaty soldier had a gun aimed at him, finger on trigger; the saving hand of Amos Riedy intervened to prevent the discharge and, instead, they fired innocuously over Owen's head. Less than a year previously, Amos and Owen were comrades-in-arms.

At this stage, Keogh had developed a pretty definite offensive strategy, which was to send skirmishing parties of Dublin Guards ahead of the main body to secure the emplacement of the eighteen-pounder. Shellfire would then be used to demolish the hard inner core of the defence, after which the main body could enter in comparative safety, proceeded by the armoured car, to formally take over the position. This strategy appears not to have worked too well at Newcastle West. It was later than 3.00 p.m. when the eighteen-pounder went in



building brought us news of the admission of Larry Curtin of Broadford (Anti-Treaty) bleeding profusely from a bullet wound in the buttock. There were the few reports of the eighteen-pounder in action which I, initially, mistook for sharp claps of thunder. Otherwise, for us in the sanctuary of the convent, it could have been a normal day.

Around 5.00 p.m. we secured our release. Reaching the Square on foot, we found an aura of normality about the place. A few soldiers in uniform chatted leisurely together at the Barrack door; pulled up at the kerb was a grey Ford truck to which an eighteen-pounder on wheels was hitched, while seated on forums in the body of the vehicle a few soldiers drank tea. One sensed a pervasive air of relaxation, shops were open and business being done.

The pall of black smoke, hanging over the Castle, was the sole reminder that a battle had been fought. We soon learnt that the Castle itself was reduced to a charred shell and that two brothers named Dwyer from Limerick, on the Anti-Treaty side, had been killed in action.²² One was killed at 10.00 a.m. in a

...which suggests there was some difficulty with
placement. Garret McAuliffe was in charge of
presence at Churchtown and was close to poor
when he was killed. It was they who held up
placement of the gun. When, after five hours
distance, they found themselves outnumbered and
gunned, they made their way direct to Barna,
which earlier had been arranged as an assembly
point. Other combat areas were Lacys' Cross, where
the advancing troops on the Rathkeale Road were
held up for an hour and a half, the Square, and the
Creamery, where Keane's men made their entrance.
While Garret was engaged at Churchtown, Michael
Colbert, Vice-Commandant, took over the command in
other sections. Shortly before the artillery fire
commenced, the armoured car broke into the Square.
Danny Maher, one of the Limerick City men, had
previously got the idea of improvising a barricade by
rolling across the road a quantity of large empty
barrels which R. J. Nash & Co. had stacked on the
Mall. This obstruction impeded the progress of the
armoured car and a group of the defenders maintained
a fusillade of rifle fire against the vehicle until
ammunition was exhausted.

There were three shells directed at the Castle,
two of which hit the target. There is some
controversy about how the building was set alight.
One theory is that the defenders deliberately set fire
to it; the other theory, that they had stacked sacks of
gun-powder in the hallway which exploded when hit
by a shell. What I do know is the building was
deliberately prepared for burning, so if the gun-
powder theory is correct, the sacks were stacked with
a purpose.

In his report of the battle, the "Irish
Independent" Special Correspondent again allowed
his imagination run riot. The following account
appeared in the issue of 8th August 1922:-

"After a twelve hours' battle which began at
3.00 a.m. this morning,* Newcastle West fell to the
National troops, thus clearing the Irregulars from
their last formidable position in Co. Limerick. The
advance was made from Rathkeale which had been
captured the previous night and the same troops under
Brigadier Slattery and Col. Comdt. Keogh were used
in the operation. Similar tactics were used as in
previous battles. Small skirmishing parties went
ahead of the main body which was extended over a
long line of country. The only opposition encountered
in the earlier part of the advance were small machine-
gun outposts of Irregulars. In each case these were
successfully routed with casualty. The troops pushed
steadily ahead slowly and cautiously. At times
there were lulls in the operation - only occasional
rifle shots or bursts of Lewis gun fire. The day was
gloriously fine and the going was easy. It was not
until the mainline was less than a mile of the town
that the real serious opposition came from the
Demesne of the Devon Castle and a field gun was
brought into action. Some sharpnel was showered
to the place and the Irregular outposts cleared as
over their positions were searched by the deadly hail.
The range then lifted and four high explosive shells
were dropped about the Devon Castle itself. At this

time The main road had been cleared of all
obstructions and the armoured car, "The Custom
House", dashed right into the market square and was
just in time to sight a column of Irregulars making a
hasty retreat from the other end of the town. The
Vickers gun was turned on them with terrible effect
and there were ten of them killed and several
wounded.

A short time later the troops entered the town
and the reception they received from the townspeople
was only equalled by the reception they received in
Kilmallock. In the midst of the scenes of welcome
there was a sudden hush as some of the dead
Irregulars were borne in on stretchers accompanied by
members of the Red Cross and a priest. The crowd
parted and allowed the sad procession to pass. It was
only a short time afterwards that a column of smoke
made known the destruction of the Devon Castle by
the Irregulars. They had fired it before they left. It
was impossible to save the fine old mansion. The
capture of this town has completed the clearance of
County Limerick. The National troops did not suffer
a single casualty." ("The report was telegraphed at
12.00 p.m. on the 7th inst.)

To set the record straight, one must critically
analyse the above account. One might infer from it
that the main body, which set out from Rathkeale
some time before 8.00 a.m., was subjected on route to
harassment by machine-gun fire. On the contrary, its
progress was leisurely and unmolested, so much so
that some locals along the way joined in with the
marchers merely for the "crack". The reference to
opposition from the Demesne has, obviously, Garret's
detachment in mind. We are not told, however, that
it took almost five hours to bring the field gun into
action. The general consensus is that three high
explosive shells were fired, but it may have been four.
However, no one with whom I spoke can recall the
discharge of sharpnel shells. The greatest exagger-
ation of all is the casualty figure. Early in the day
there were two Anti-Treaty defenders killed, the
brothers Dwyer, and one Anti-Treaty wounded - Larry
Curtin. That was the extent of the casualties!

The priest referred to in the report was Father
Con O'Sullivan, then C.C. Monagea and later P.P.
Askeaton. He had been doing the rounds all day on a
bicycle in readiness to administer the Last Sacrament.
It was he who anointed the Dwyers.

Of course, there has to be a grain of truth in
every exaggeration, though in the case of the above
report it is of atomic proportions. As the Anti-Treaty
Garrison abandoned their posts in the town they made
their way to one of Mike Foley's fields in
Ballinvallig, where they mustered for their
departure to Barna. In charge of the muster were Con
Cregan and Owen McAuliffe. A Pro-Treaty outpost,
which had been established at Roches of
Ballymackessy, harassed them with machine-gun
fire, but the troops there made no attempt to get any
closer. This fire may have come from a Vickers gun
mounted on the armoured car, which might provide a
very slender basis indeed for the exaggeration.

...identally, a man on his way in from the road
...he muster was hit in the leg by a chip of stone
...d from the kerb by a machine-gun bullet. If it
...be admitted that he was a casualty, then the
...Anti-Treaty wounded amounted to two.

One cannot help suspecting a purpose in exaggerating the casualty figure. The "Irish Independent" figure obviously came from an official source, since the same figure is given in the bulletin of Field G.H.Q. South Western Command. The public would expect a "respectable" casualty figure to justify so much troop movement and the armoury and ordnance it involved. From the beginning of hostilities, both sides seemed loathe to issue official casualty lists - in my view, because the casualties were trifling. The campaign from Patrickswell to Newcastle West is a case on point. Leaving wounded aside, because a wound can mean anything from a dislodged thumb-nail to a hole in the head, there were two Anti-Treaty combatants killed and one non-combatant woman. Having shown such a "satisfactory" casualty list for the "enemy", perhaps General Eoin O'Duffy felt he might give the true figure for his side: one dead. In the Ireland of today, such figures for road deaths over the Christmas period might not be deemed excessive, even by the National Road Safety Association. In the ten day battle for Limerick, Anti-Treaty fatalities were said to be exceptionally heavy. I have checked every Anti-Treaty source I could find and in all of them the question of casualties at Limerick is treated with dismissive vagueness. Connie Neenan's account in "The Survivors" is typical. He was a member of a small party of Cork men who travelled to Limerick via Broadford. There they lost a man named Spillane when caught in crossfire between two Pro-Treaty posts (some of the posts Garret alleged should have been removed by Hannigan under the agreement). Neenan continues: *"Then we arrived in Limerick where we lost a couple of great lads. One of them was Paddy Naughton who was very good in the Tan War. He was hit crossing Georges Street."* From the context it is clear he is referring here to the Anti-Treaty force as a whole. My guess is that Anti-Treaty fatalities in Limerick did not exceed six.²³

If the foregoing was the position in the part of the country where the Civil War was said to be at its fiercest, surely Younger's observations (page 394) on the situation, generally, ring true, viz - *"There was amongst many Republicans a lack, not of conviction or courage, but of heart in the fight. They wanted to make their protest as urgently as they could and keep on making it; to stop the Provisional Government from working the Treaty and building up an administration. They did not want to take life if they could avoid it and neither did most of the Provisional Government troops, and so, flights of bullets hurtled through the air harmlessly as migrating birds."* Of course when the guerrilla phase got under way, things became nastier by far, but that is another story.

IN THE LION'S DEN

Just as we arrived home from the Workhouse,

my father received an urgent message, from Raymond K. Sheehy's pub on the Square, informing him that a number of important Anti-Treaty personnel were trapped on the premises. Apparently, the armoured car had burst into the Square so suddenly that this group, who were then on the pavement, were compelled to dodge to safety through the nearest doorway. The group consisted of Tadhg Crowley and his brother Jimmy from Ballylanders, Michael Colbert, who had been inspecting the position at that side of the Square, and a fourth man whom I shall not name as I am not one hundred per cent sure of his identity. By this time, their comrades in Mike Foley's field had departed for Barna, after Father Con O'Sullivan, on his bicycle, had scouted the road ahead and given them the "all clear". As no contact could thus be made with the main body, all that remained to do was to get them safely out of town in any direction possible. They were in a very exposed position as Raymond's was only three doors down from the Barrack. My father made discreet enquiries and discovered that the Orderly Officer appointed by the Pro-Treaty command for the night was none other than the O/C of the local Volunteer Company, Tommy McDonagh.²⁴ My father immediately contacted him. Tommy's response was generous. There would be a change of sentries at 8.00 p.m.; he would find some pretext to delay for ten minutes the new sentries taking over. Therefore, at 8.00 p.m. sharp the four were to exit Raymond's by the back-door onto the laneway; walk unconcernedly past the rear of the Barrack, paying no heed to anybody, on to the Market Yard where they had open country before them. These directions were strictly adhered to and the four got completely away.

As all participants are now dead, I feel free to refer to this episode as a tribute to Tommy McDonagh's memory. The military purist might look aghast at it, but I feel that the majority of people would see it as an act of magnanimity. Of course Tommy's heart was not in the Civil War. It is said of him he never wore the uniform and, shortly afterwards, he handed in his gun and retired to civilian life. Some years later he got into bad health and ended his days in the T.B. ward at the County Home. A constant visitor at his bedside was Garret McAuliffe. There was another group trapped at Curtin's Hotel - Jimmy Collins and four others. They spent an entire fortnight in concealment before managing to get away. Again, there is a strong suspicion that McDonagh was aware of their presence but did nothing about it.

Following the capture of Newcastle West, the remaining Anti-Treaty strongholds fell in quick succession - Abbeyfeale on August the 9th, Clonmel and Cork on the 10th, Fermoy on the 11th, Buttevant on the 14th. All these towns were evacuated peacefully without a shot being fired in defence, except Clonmel where there was some rear guard action. Cork was evacuated before the Pro-Treaty troops arrived, though General Emmet Dalton encountered some opposition along the way from Passage West. Newcastle West might, therefore, claim to have been the last centre of organised resistance in the Civil War.

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SCRIPT

Exactly one week after the town was taken, on the sunny afternoon of August the 14th, I ambled up to the Square to find a section of troops in uniform being drilled outside what is now the Allied Irish Banks. They were surrounded by a ring of spectators. The man putting them through their paces was in "civvies" with Sam Brown, rifle and velour hat. Observing the routine close by was a tall erect broad-shouldered man in officer's uniform and great coat, to which was attached distinctive red epaulettes. Two other officers stood close behind him. The tall man had a scowl on his face as he watched the drill and I got the impression he did not like what he saw. Soon the man in "civvies" brought the drill to an end and, marching across, rifle on shoulder, stood to attention before the tall man. The latter, still scowling, uttered a few words and "civvies" marched back again to his troops and got them to repeat the exercise. This time he apparently made the grade as, on an approving nod from tall man, the troops were dismissed. An adult standing beside me enquired, "Do you know who that man is, sonny?" "No". I replied. "That is Michael Collins". said he. "And who is Michael Collins?", I asked. "He is a great general".

NOTES

1. The Kilmallock encounter is dealt with in great detail in Ireland's Civil War by Carlton Younger (Fontana 1970) pages 402f as also is the Battle for Limerick in Chapter 17. The Civil War in Ireland 1922-1923 by Eoin Neeson (Mercier 1966) has a chapter on "The Battle for Limerick", but only scant reference to Kilmallock.

2. The West Limerick was only Limerick Brigade in Liam Lynch's First Southern Division. The other two Limerick Brigades - the Mid which included the city, and the East, were in the Second Southern commanded by Ernie O'Malley. The First Southern, consisting of ten Brigades and a total of 33,550 men before the recruitment of "Trucers", was the largest Division in the Army and represented a quarter of its entire strength. See No Other Law by Florence O'Donoghue (Irish Press Limited 1954) Appendix 5, page 334.

3. Malone's own account of his activities during this period is in The Survivors edited by Uinseann MacEoin (Argenta Publications) page 75f.

4. The Dublin Guards were an elite force originally composed of members of the Dublin Brigade who had taken the Pro-Treaty side. When recruitment of mercenaries commenced on July 5th, the force was expanded and divided into units composed of members of the demobbed regiments of the British Army and men who had been in action against the Germans. These units, officered by Pro-Treaty members of the Dublin Brigade, many of whom had belonged to Collins' "Squad", were immediately sent southwards where the main theatre of war had shifted. The troops landed at Fenit consisted entirely of this force.

See Neeson pages 82, 132, 135f; Younger pages 390, 404, 406; O'Donoghue page 261.

5. Keogh and Slattery are usually mentioned together as if they were in joint command. The significance for the chain-of-command of various military titles, emerging in the course of the Civil War, is difficult at times for the layman to appreciate. This is not surprising in view of the fact that the higher command of the I.R.A. were themselves perplexed by the problem when it was decided to issue commissions in March, 1921. Keogh was a Colonel Commandant and Slattery a Brigadier.

I presume Keogh held the higher rank; the poor fellow was subsequently blown to bits by a booby-trapped land mine at Carrigaphoooca, Co. Cork. See Younger page 462; Neeson page 278; O'Donoghue page 199; The Singing Flame by Ernie O'Malley (Anvil 1978) page 56.

6. It is likely there were also subtractions from the column. At this stage, the Anti-Treaty command structure had become rather nebulous and men usually came and went as they pleased. It was not considered desertion for a man, where ever he was, to depart to defend his own Brigade area. In the circumstances, some members of the Mid-Limerick Brigade may not have proceeded beyond Adare.

7. See Younger page 407; Neeson page 239.

8. The new I.R.A. executive, formed by the Anti-Treaty section, then in the majority, were anxious to determine how the rank-and-file stood on the Treaty issue. With this end in view, Battalion parades were ordered throughout the country for Sunday, the 2nd of April, at which the men would be asked to declare their allegiances. See O'Donoghue page 221.

9. A Division was considered Pro- or Anti-Treaty depending on the side taken by its Commandant. In most cases, the Brigadiers under his command followed his lead and brought the rank-and-file with them. There were always, however, dissident minorities which often were substantial. For example, a responsible Pro-Treaty source claimed that if "Trucers" (i.e. those joining the ranks subsequent to the Truce) were eliminated, Ernie O'Malley's Second Southern would show fifty-fifty for and against the Treaty - see Neeson pages 83/84.

The stand of the Newcastle West Company is another example of a dissident pocket. There was also strong support for the Treaty in the Feoghanagh area. A list of Divisions with their putative positions on the Treaty issue appears in The Irish Republic by Dorothy MacArdle (Irish Press Limited 1957) page 964.

11. See Younger page 374.

12. The troops at Castlevew were apparently given safe passage to Hannigan's command under the terms of an agreement made between Hannigan himself and Liam Deasy. The latter replaced Lynch as O/C First Southern on Lynch's becoming Chief-of-Staff - see O'Donoghue page 261; Neeson page 145. In after years, Garret was wont to become upset at the

tion of Hannigan's name, his grievance being that Treaty outposts remained at Ashford and Ashford for a time subsequent to the signing of the agreement. See *Brother against Brother* by Liam Neeson (Mercier 1982) pages 52, 53; Connie Neenan's account in *The Survivors* page 244.

Eddie Cregan must have been in command at Newcastle West since he held the rank of Commandant in the Pro-Treaty Army. The ambush in which he was killed took place at Lisscarroll on the 21st of August, the day before Collins was killed at Beal na mBlath - see Neeson page 266.

14. Michael Hartney was afterwards Mayor of Limerick.

15. Accounts of the fighting in Adare appear in Younger page 405 and *Irish Independent* August 7th, 1922.

16. See Neeson page 232.

17. See *ibid.* page 227f.

18. See Younger page 378f.

19. The relationship between Lynch and Hannigan is dealt with in Deasy as per ref. number 13, also in Younger page 371.

20. See Younger 373.

21. The Campaign from Adare to Newcastle West is covered by reports in the *Irish Independent* of August the 7th and 8th. These reports were, of course,

censored.

22. The father of the brothers Dwyer was a daily visitor to Newcastle West throughout the 1920's and 30's in his capacity as Guard on the passenger train from Limerick. He was a pleasant and obliging official, liked by all who came in contact with him.

23. O'Donoghue on page 274 gives casualty figures for Pro-Treaty forces to mid-September, 1922 at 183 killed and 674 wounded, which he appears to have taken from *The Free State* of October the 7th, official organ of the Provisional Government. It is difficult to accept his opinion that these are heavy casualties when one considers that, by September, the Pro-Treaty Army consisted of 60,000 men. Compared with casualty figures of the American and Spanish Civil Wars, the Irish figures, on a relative basis, are insignificant. However, fatal casualties amongst the leaders were relatively heavy: Michael Collins on the Pro-Treaty side, Cathal Brugha, Liam Lynch and Harry Boland on the Anti-Treaty side.

24. When a town was taken by Pro-Treaty forces, it was customary to appoint the local O/C of the Volunteers Orderly Officer, if that unit had taken the Pro-Treaty side.

APPRECIATION

I am indebted to two sources for many of the details in this article, viz. - 1. Carol Cregan, originally of Ballyshane and now of Kilkenny, who had two brothers involved on the Anti-Treaty side. 2. The recently deceased Dick McGrath of the *Irish Press* Limited who was in the detachment of Dublin Guards that advanced from Limerick to Newcastle West.