

# Formation of the famous Flying Column

WITH the War of Independence rapidly developing into its full fury in the summer of 1920, the West Limerick Brigade of the I.R.A. was formed into an active service unit, with Sean Finn, O.C., in command.

Less than twelve months later Sean was destined to meet his death under tragic circumstances at Ballyhahill, when he was fatally wounded in an encounter with enemy forces. Meanwhile, however, I.R.A. activities were being intensified in the West of the county and most of them are recalled in a statement later prepared by the late Mr. Amos Reddy and from which the first instalment appeared last week.

In July 1920, the R.I.C. barracks at Ardagh, which had been evacuated, was demolished. It would have been set on fire but for the danger to adjoining premises and crowbars were used in levelling it to the ground. Around the same time an R.I.C. man named Masterson, travelling in a hackney car to Limerick, was held up near Sweep's Cross, three or four miles from Newcastle West, by four volunteers. Masterson, it would appear, drew his revolver but before he could open fire he was shot dead. Newcastle West paid dearly for the incident as that night Black and Tans ran amok in the town and in a night of terror the local library and creamery were burned down, several houses were ransacked including the office of the then local newspaper, the "Weekly Observer."

One of the first actions of the newly formed Flying Column was an attack on a Tan patrol in Abbeyfeale, on September 18, 1920. The attackers had been made aware that the patrol usually numbered ten or twelve men who left the R.I.C. barracks each night about 8 o'clock and patrolled up and down the street from the barracks to the Church of Ireland, about a mile to the South of the town. The men of the column took up positions on either side of the main street. As the patrol was approaching the ambush position one of the attackers, behind a hedge adjoining one of the houses in the main street, made a noise which attracted the attention of the Tans, who went over to investigate. Looking across the hedge they saw two armed men who, in the circumstances, had nothing to do but open fire. One of the Tans fell dead and as his colleagues opened fire the attackers replied but withdrew after a sharp encounter which lasted about ten minutes.

Also recalled by Mr. Reddy was the ambush of a train between Askeaton and Foynes on February 17, 1921. Having received information that a number of R.I.C. men were travelling on the train to give evidence in a court case in Limerick, Comdt. Finn decided to hold up the train at Borrignone. One member of the Foynes company travelled on the train and after he had given a prearranged signal with a handkerchief the late Con Boyle, of Rathkeale, halted the train opposite the ambush positions by waving a red flag. "As soon as the train came to a standstill," Mr. Reddy records, "the enemy inside, numbering at least twenty, opened fire on our positions. Just then a Tan jumped off the train on the higher side, crawled under the train towards the engine, and succeeded in reaching the cabin where he ordered the driver, at point of revolver, to proceed with the train. The action had lasted ten minutes. We subsequently heard that one Tan was wounded in the engagement."

The next incident of note recounted in the statement was the engagement which led to the death of Comdt. Finn at Ballyhahill in March 1921. After this seventeen of the Western men volunteered for service in East Limerick under Donnchadh Hannigan, leaving the

late Garrett McAuliffe Brigade O/C in West Limerick, Jim Colbert, Vigo O/C, and Ned Cregan, Brigade Q.M. By mid-April the seventeen men from the West were in the Galtees, where they joined the Mid-Limerick Column to give a total strength of approximately 80 men. After laying in wait for several days the combined columns, now under Hannigan, after an expected patrol of the Green Howards failed to turn up on the road between Galbally and Mitchelstown. On Sunday morning, May 1, the

freedom fighters were billeted in the Shraharla area of East Limerick. Four or five members had gone to Mass and were returning to their billets when several lorry loads of tans appeared. They opened fire on the men returning from Mass but the firing ceased after a few minutes. The column, having been alarmed by the firing, advanced towards the area of fire and opened fire on the attacking party to which the military and tans replied. "It was then a case of every man for himself," the statement continues. "The scrap was in progress for about half an hour when reinforcements of military arrived from Mitchelstown, which was only six miles away. The reinforcements were

followed by an aeroplane. We winnowed as best we could while the aeroplane kept spotting us all the time. Taking cover now and again the main body of the column succeeded in making good its escape. When the column re-assembled some time later we discovered, as well as I can remember, that five of our men were missing. I think they were East Limerick men. To the best of my knowledge three of the men had been killed and two others taken prisoners were executed in Cork Jail the following morning."

Next week's instalment will deal with the historic engagement at Lackelly, where the column lost four more men in an intensive fight that lasted eight or nine hours, and in which Mr. Reddy vividly recalls the moving scene when the remains of the four men were buried in the dead of the night by their sorrow stricken comrades.



Members of the cast of the Feohanagh Drama Group who made a very successful presentation of "Knocknagow" at Feohanagh and Castlemahon. The producer was Rev. T. Greene, C.C., Feohanagh (at extreme left, back row).

## Knockaderry branch had successful year

THERE was a large attendance at the first annual general meeting of the Clonacagh-Knockaderry branch of Macra na Feirme held in the Library, Clonacagh. The attendance was welcomed by the chairman of the branch, Denis Airey.

The outgoing hon. secretary, Miss Kathleen Wall, in her annual report, said that all the films and lectures during the year were very well attended and that the branch had a busy and satisfactory year since it was formed twelve months ago. The club members attended all the local field evenings and entered for the Macra competitions. She congratulated all who won cups and prizes and said that the club put a lot of hard work into preparing teams for question times, debating, and public speaking competitions. The highlight of the year was the field evening on July 24. It was a very big undertaking for a club only just four months old, but it was most successful and enjoyed by all both young and old. The secretary said that they held debates, question times and other social events among the members of the branch and they proved most enjoyable. They sent four members to the Leadership Course which was held in the Shannon Arms, Limerick.

Committee were elected for the coming year: President, Very Rev. Father Costello, P.P.; vice-president, Rev. Father Sheehy, C.C.; chairman, David Wall; vice-chairman, Eddie Linton;

secretary, Breda Magner; assistant secretary, Mary McCarthy; treasurer, Eileen Magner. Committee — Peggy Quaid, Kathleen Wall, Terry Meehan, Catherine Tin, Jack McCann, Denis Airey.

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