

report "that the conversations between Archbishop Clune of Perth, Australia—whose nephew, Conor Clune, had been murdered—and Sinn Féin leaders have been resumed and that a leading Catholic bishop who carries great weight with Sinn Féin is also taking part . . . that there is a probability of a truce . . ." The leading Catholic bishop was none other than Doctor Fogarty, bishop of Killaloe . . .

As Christmas approached, Clare's three appointed men of destiny were once more to the fore.

The *Celtic* arrived from America. On board was the deputy for east Clare, Éamon de Valera, President of the Republic . . . he was in Dublin by Christmas.

The new Ministry of Irish, with Brian O'Higgins, deputy for west Clare, in its report to members of Dáil Éireann, on Friday, 17 September, acknowledged the fact that "good progress was being

made, especially in Clare and Cork . . ."

On 3 December, the Galway county council (six of its thirty-two members) called on Dáil Éireann to negotiate a truce with Britain. They sent their "resolution" to all the county councils of Ireland. Michael Brennan hastily called a meeting of the Clare county council to consider it. When they saw its contents they refused even to discuss it, but passed a resolution—which was unanimous—that it should be burned.

#### DA CAPO AL FINE

*The men of Clare had spoken!  
What answer would An Namhaid Chealgach  
get from Clare's three appointed leaders of  
destiny who were each in his own way amhail  
"fear go raibh fíis aige thar an gcoitiantacht agus  
a bhí ad'iarraidh léas éigin den fhís sin a  
thabhairt do'n slua . . .?"*

#### GABHAIM BUÍOCHAS LEO

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## Limerick 1920

BY

MANNIX JOYCE

THE dawn of 1920 found in Limerick three well organised brigades of the Irish Volunteers, or I.R.A. (Irish Republican Army) as henceforth they would be more popularly known. There was the West Limerick Brigade, the Mid Limerick Brigade (embracing Limerick City) and the East Limerick Brigade. An interesting fact is that each brigade area had supplied a leader to the 1916 Rising. Con Colbert had come from the area of the West Limerick Brigade, Ned Daly from the area of the Mid Limerick Brigade and Éamon de Valera from the area of the East Limerick Brigade.

It was in the latter brigade area, in May, 1919, that one of the most daring exploits of the War of Independence had taken place—the rescue of Seán Hogan at Knocklong Railway Station by his comrades from Tipperary, aided by men of the Galtee Battalion from East Limerick. Two policemen were shot during the rescue.

On Monday, 12 January, 1920, the *Limerick Leader*\* reported that Mr. G. M'Elroy, R.M., attended at William Street police barracks in Limerick city on the

previous Saturday and took some depositions in the case of the six men in custody in connection with the shooting of Sergeant Wallace and Constable Enright, R.I.C., at Knocklong Railway Station the previous May. (The prisoners were eventually returned for trial, tried in March, 1921 and two of them, Patrick Maher and Edmond Foley of Galbally were sentenced to death and hanged, 7 June, 1921).

Borough elections held in Limerick city on 14 January, 1920, resulted in a Sinn Féin victory, and this is part of an editorial comment headed *P.R. Vindicated*, that appeared in the *Limerick Leader* of 19 January:—

"There can be no doubt that the elections have justified the advocates and supporters of Proportional Representation. Many of the opponents of that system objected to it on the ground that the object of the British Government in imposing it on the country was to prevent Sinn Féin from being placed in power as a result of the contests. Whether that objection was really well-founded or not, the fact remains that those



who hold the national or political views of the majority in Ireland at the moment dominate the new councils—as it is right and logical that they should—while all substantial minorities—as is equally right and just—have got due representation in the popular bodies”.

Early on Saturday morning, 24 January, 1920, Murroe police barracks in East Limerick was subjected to a brief attack by the I.R.A. Roads leading from Limerick city had been blocked at various points and military and police reinforcements did not reach the barracks until after the attack had been called off.

During the first meeting of the newly-elected town commissioners of Newcastle West, a large body of British ex-service men from the town, who were opposed to Irish national aspirations, marched to the courthouse where the meeting was being held and sought to intimidate the commissioners. And this was done with the obvious connivance of a strong force of armed R.I.C. who were on the streets. When the commissioners left the courthouse they were set upon by the crowd. Word of what was happening spread and the local members of the I.R.A. mustered without delay, and upon their arrival the ex-service men and the R.I.C. immediately withdrew. For the moment the town was completely in the hands of the I.R.A. A few hours later, however, a fleet of Crossley tenders filled with soldiers and accompanied by an armoured car dashed into the town. Troops in full war kit jumped off the tenders and a bayonet charge was immediately ordered. But just then the street lights were cut off and the town plunged into darkness—this was done after a pre-arranged signal had been given to the workers in the power house by the I.R.A. Needless to say the bayonet charge didn't take place. A number of local I.R.A. men were subsequently arrested but were later acquitted for want of evidence against them. (*LFS* p. 61 *et seq.*)

The first meeting of the newly-elected Limerick Corporation was held on Friday evening, 30 January. Sinn Féin held twenty-six out of the forty seats and the Sinn Féin nominee, Michael O'Callaghan, was unanimously elected mayor. While he was being installed in office the Republican flag was unfurled in the gallery and the members and the public sang the *Soldiers' Song*.

Mayor O'Callaghan said that during the coming year they would have troubled times, but said that he expected he could count on the loyal support of his friends and, at least, the charity of his opponents. There were two parties in the Council, he continued, apart from Sinn Féin, and these parties would certainly get every tolerance from him because although Sinn Féin was in the majority they were not going to break down one tyranny and replace it with another. The platform of Sinn Féin was as broad and as long as the soil of Ireland.

(Perhaps one should add that Michael O'Callaghan, Seoirse Clancy, his successor in office as mayor, and Volunteer Joseph O'Donoghue were all three murdered in cold blood by British Crown Forces on the morning of 7 March, 1921).

On Saturday morning, 31 January, thirteen Limerick city men were arrested under the Defence of the Realm Act and conveyed to Cork jail; and that evening as Sergeant Wellwood, R.I.C. emerged from William Street barracks, he was fired at and severely wounded.

On Monday night, 2 February, 1920, a mixed patrol of military and police were booed as they passed through Limerick city. The military retaliated by firing indiscriminately up and down the streets. Richard O'Dwyer, a publican, was shot dead behind the counter in his premises in Catherine Street, and Miss Lena Johnson was shot dead in Sarsfield Street.

The *Limerick Leader* of Monday evening, 23 February, reporting that there had been

unusual military activity in Limerick city the previous Saturday evening, said:

“From about 4.30 pedestrians and others coming to or going from the City were surprised by the appearance of fully-armed soldiers at the principal roads leading to the City. Police were also on duty. Country people returning home were stopped and their cars searched, while those coming into the City were also searched and not allowed to pass 'till 6 o'clock”.

Earlier County Limerick fighters for Irish freedom were remembered on 6 March when the outlawed tricolour of the Republic was flown from the national monument in Kilmallock, as a tribute to the Fenians who had attacked the local police barracks in 1867.

The pattern of the coming great struggle between nationalist Ireland and the British army of occupation was now beginning to unfold itself. On the morning of 7 March, Doon police barracks in the east of the county was subjected to a short but powerful attack. Arrests of Volunteers were becoming commonplace at this period. For example, three young Tipperary men, members of the I.R.A., were reported taken in a raid in Galbally, County Limerick, on 8 March.

Two days later, Volunteers from the West Limerick Brigade (which was commanded by the youthful Seán Finn, who was fated to be killed in action in March, 1921) entered a hotel in Rathkeale for the purpose of disarming a Sergeant Neazor and a Constable Doyle of the R.I.C., who were in the dining room. When the I.R.A. men gave the order “Hands Up!” Sergeant Neazor drew his revolver. The raiding party fired and the sergeant was killed and the constable wounded.

On 18 March, Sergeant Portobello and Constable Moran of the R.I.C. were fired at and wounded as they were returning to Kildimo after attending Pallaskey Petty Sessions. Armed men shooting at armed



Commandant Seán Finn of West Limerick brigade, killed in action, 30 March, 1921.

men is one of the inescapable facts of war. But the Irish War of Independence was war with a difference. On the night of 19/20 March, 1920, Tomás Mac Curtain, Lord Mayor of Cork, was murdered by British crown forces in his own home. In the course of an editorial the *Limerick Leader* of 24 March said:—

“Events of the past few days must inevitably strengthen and extend the conviction that the machinery of British Government in this country has irretrievably broken down. The system that rallies the aid of the assassin's hand and mind to its side, as it is clear the present régime has done, stands self-condemned and is unquestionably beyond redemption”.

The *Limerick Leader* of 29 March, reported that Tournafulla police barracks, which had been unoccupied for repairs, had



been blown up a few nights previously. By now resurgent Ireland had come to look upon the R.I.C. barracks as strongholds of British rule in the country. And what had happened at Tournafulla was but the beginning of a chapter. During the night of 3 April, 1920, a total of one hundred and fifty-seven police barracks were destroyed in Ireland. These were barracks that had recently been evacuated in accordance with the policy of concentrating the police in large groups in a couple of very strong barracks in each county. Of the one hundred and fifty-seven barracks that were destroyed seventeen were in Limerick:—Ashford, Ardagh, Ballyneety, Ballysimon, Broadford, Caherconlish, Caherdavin, Elton, Grange, Herbertstown, Kildimo, Kilmurry, Kiltely, Loughill, Pallaskenry, Parteen, Strand.

The unconditional release on 18 April of Republican prisoners who had been on hunger strike led to great rejoicing. In Kilmallock bonfires blazed, a band played, and practically every house was illuminated. Similar celebrations took place in Croom.

The situation in Limerick city continued very tense, with thousands of steel-helmeted troops in possession of the streets, and armed R.I.C. holding up and searching pedestrians. During disturbances on Monday night, 26 April, a Welsh Fusilier was shot dead. Next night the military broke out from the new barracks (now Sarsfield barracks) and paraded through the streets in groups, in a very menacing manner, firing indiscriminately as they went.

26 April was also the date of the first big barrack attack in County Limerick. It was at Ballylanders in the south-east of the county. Primarily, the First Galtee battalion of the East Limerick brigade had responsibility for the attack but it was decided that the operation should also be a test of the efficiency of all Volunteer companies between Limerick city and Mitchelstown and between Tipperary and Mallow. All

these companies were to be involved in one way or another in the attack, blocking roads, cutting communications and so on.

The actual attacking party consisted of twenty-nine armed men, under Seán T. Ó Riordán of Kilmallock. They fired their first volley at 11.20 p.m. The police replied vigorously and the fight raged furiously for half an hour, by which time the barracks was blazing. Finding their position untenable, the police surrendered; and now that the fight was over they were treated with great courtesy by their captors. A large supply of arms and ammunition was retrieved at great risk from the burning building, and this was to prove invaluable to the East Limerick brigade in their subsequent operations.

The methods employed by British authority in Ireland to break the morale of the Irish people at that time and for the remainder of the fight for freedom were many and included "frightfulness", reprisals and blows struck against the economic life of the community. A typical example of the latter method was the burning of creameries. The *Limerick Leader* of 28 April told of the burning of a number of creameries in the Limerick-Tipperary border district—Cleeve's creamery at Beary's Cross, and the co-operatives at Kilsully, Knockfune, Reaska, Kilcommon and Ballycahill.

The *Limerick Leader* of 7 May, reported the burning of Ballyneety courthouse by the I.R.A., and the evacuation of Hospital barracks by the R.I.C. The 12 May issue reported the burning of Garryspillane police barracks, and stated that three warships had sailed up the Shannon to Foynes. They were said to be part of a British fleet that would be stationed at Foynes for some days. The 14 May issue carried the news of the burning early on the previous morning of Bruree R.I.C. barracks, courthouse and post office; all these buildings formed one block. The barracks had been evacuated on 6 May and

the police transferred to Bruff and other large central barracks.

On 14 May it was also reported that the Lord Chancellor of England, "Gallop" Smith, speaking at the Newspaper Press Fund Dinner in London the previous night, had said that the Irish constabulary were now part of the armed forces of the crown. "He could not pretend", he said, "to say they had reached the solution of Irish difficulties but he could say it was the Government's intention to reinforce those brave men by every means in its power".

But more and more of those very same "brave men" of the R.I.C. were just then becoming so disgusted at the policy of the British Government in Ireland, that every day one read of their resignations from the force.

Seán T. Ó Riordán of Kilmallock, who had charge of the Ballylanders barracks attack, was arrested on 12 May. On 13 May, I.R.A. men demolished Shanagolden police barracks and Glin barracks was evacuated about the same time.

The *Limerick Leader* of 17 May carried a couple of sinister-sounding news items. One of the items, sarcastically headed, *Drastic New Plans for 'Civilising' Ireland*, said:—

"The Political Correspondent of the *Daily Mail* says:— 'The conference which took place last week at Downing Street between the principal members of the Government in London and Lord French and General Sir Nevil Macready have resulted in drastic new plans to deal with Irish outrages which are increasing in number. More troops are to be sent to Ireland immediately and one report, as yet unconfirmed, states that martial law is to be generally proclaimed there. The soldiers are to give assistance and protection to the police and to repress unlawful assemblies which the Royal Irish Constabulary have lately been powerless to deal with. It is believed in Ireland that chains of military posts in the nature of block-houses are to be established throughout the worst areas

but the Government, officially, naturally keep their plans secret'."

What all this meant of course was that the British Government, which six years previously had posed as the champion of enslaved small nations, was now cynically determined to crush with imperial might the efforts of one small nation to win the freedom that had been denied her for centuries.

Headlines in the *Limerick Leader* of 21 May read:— *Night of Horror in Limerick Streets. Civilian Shot Dead and a Number of Others Wounded*. These give an indication of a pattern of atrocities perpetrated by crown forces during the terrible summer and autumn of 1920.

The report said that on Wednesday evening, 19 May, police sergeant K. Dunphy had been shot dead and Sergeant Harty severely wounded in Mallow Street. Later that Wednesday night armed police appeared in strength in the streets. Soon afterwards volleys of rifle fire were heard from various parts of the city as the police fired indiscriminately in all directions. A man named James Saunders was shot dead in Ellen Street, and a number of people were injured by bullets.

24 May saw the burning of the evacuated police barracks in Castletown Mac Eniry; and in the early hours of Friday morning, 28 May, the opening volley was fired in the famous Kilmallock barrack attack.

This was the same barracks that the Fenians attacked in March, 1867. Daniel Blake, a Bruree Fenian, and the mysterious "Unknown Fenian" had fallen in that fight; and Doctor Michael Clery, a Fenian sympathiser, who had ventured out on the street, was struck by a police bullet and killed. The ballad maker immortalized the attack—

I was down then in Kilmallock—  
'Twas the hottest fight of all—  
And you see—he bared his arm—  
There's the mark still of a ball.





Brigadier Seán Wall, East Limerick brigade, killed in action at Annacarty, May, 1921

The Fenians failed in Kilmallock in '67, but grandsons and grandnephews of theirs were among the men who came back in the early hours of that May morning in 1920 to take part in "one of the fiercest of all barracks' attacks in the War of Independence". (*LFS* p. 75). One such was, in fact, the commanding officer of the East Limerick brigade, Brigadier-General Seán Wall of Bruff. The Kilmallock barrack was something in the nature of a fortress, and was strongly protected by steel shutters and sand-bagged defence works. A detached building, it stood in Lord Edward Street, in what is now an open space facing the garage and show-rooms of Messrs. Harris Brothers, garage proprietors. Three tall buildings directly in front of the barrack and another tall building owned by a man named William

Carroll, on the same side as the barrack and overlooking it, were occupied by the I.R.A. The actual assault itself was led by the redoubtable Tomás Malone (who was better known at that time under his *alias*, "Seán Forde"). At a given signal, of three flashes from a breach in the roof of Carroll's house, there was a deafening roar from thirty rifles, and simultaneously with that, some 56 lb. weights were flung from the breached roof and went smashing through the slate roof of the barrack. Bottles of petrol and bombs were then hurled through the hole in the barrack roof. (*LFS* p. 74 *et seq.*)

The police put up a tremendous resistance, concentrating their main efforts on one of the buildings in front of the barrack. Against this building they directed an unbroken stream of rifle grenades, each grenade bursting with tremendous force as it struck the front of the building. Fortunately for those inside, the police failed to put a single grenade through any of the windows. (*LFS* p. 74 *et seq.*)

It was a considerable time before the attackers succeeded in setting the roof of the barrack on fire; it was not until after a Mills bomb had burst on it that it began to blaze furiously. After two hours of fierce fighting the R.I.C. were called on to surrender. They refused, and the attack was renewed with fresh vigour. Three hours later when the barrack was a roaring mass of flames the defenders were again called on to surrender, and again they refused. And about an hour later when the roof collapsed and surrender seemed inevitable, the defenders succeeded in withdrawing to a small stone building at the rear of the barrack. (*LFS* p. 74 *et seq.*)

The fight had been in progress for about six hours and as the attackers now heard frequent explosions within the flaming remains of the barrack they realised that the arms and war material which they had hoped to capture had all perished in the flames. But the "impregnable fortress"



Commandant Liam Scully of Glencar, Co. Kerry, killed in action at the attack on Kilmallock barrack, 28 May, 1920.

itself was a smouldering ruin and would never again dominate the lives of the people as it had done in the past. And so the I.R.A. called off the attack. Again, as in 1867, three men had fallen in the fight. The R.I.C. lost two men, Sergeant Keane and Constable Morton; and the I.R.A. lost Captain Liam Scully, an Irish teacher, who was one of the dozen or so men from the West Limerick brigade area who had participated in the attack. (*LFS* p. 74 *et seq.*)

There was alarm in Government circles in Britain at the strength of Irish resistance and at the defiant mood of the people. But measures would be taken to remedy that state of affairs. The *Limerick Leader* of 31 May, quoting the London correspondent of the *Freeman's Journal*, told that "further

military reinforcements are to be despatched to Ireland".

The *Limerick Leader* of 4 June reported that a number of military had taken up their quarters in Abbeyfeale police barracks to supplement the local police force. Walls around the barracks had been levelled, obviously to put the building in readiness for any attack that might be made on it.

On Sunday evening, 6 June, as hundreds of people were returning from a Gaelic match in the Markets' Field, Limerick, they were held up and searched by police and military at various points in the city. The *Limerick Leader* of 7 June, reporting the matter, said: "The policemen on duty included a couple in khaki wearing R.I.C. caps and some wore army decorations and wound stripes".

This was the first reference in the *Limerick Leader* to the Black and Tans, for the police who wore a mixture of Army and R.I.C. uniforms were members of that notorious force which was to leave a record of conduct in Ireland that was not surpassed even by the enormities of the Yeos or the Hessians in 1798. It was because of their being dressed in a mixture of khaki and black that they were promptly named Black and Tans, after a famous pack of hounds of that name in East Limerick.

The Black and Tan "police" force was recruited in England, by advertisement, for service in Ireland. "It was composed of men of the type needed for work to which men of the British Regular Army were not accustomed and which the Royal Irish Constabulary, being composed of Irishmen, could not be relied upon indefinitely to perform. The despatch of this new force to Ireland helped to relieve England of a very dangerous type of unemployment—men of low mentality whose more primitive instincts had been aroused by war and who were now difficult to control". (*IR* p. 340).

It was this violent undisciplined force—and to a certain extent the Auxiliary Police Force ("Auxies") composed of



British ex-officers—which, for the next twelve months or so was to make headlines such as those that appeared in the *Limerick Leader* of Wednesday, 9 June—"Police Terrorism in Limerick City. More rifle firing last night". The *Limerick Leader* report told of a young man who went out to see what was happening and was promptly felled by a blow from a rifle butt. When two companions went out to pick him up bullets whizzed over their heads.

It was about this time that Ireland's first Flying Column of the I.R.A. was formed. Its formation took place in County Limerick. Two of the best known of the East Limerick brigade officers, Donncha O'Hannigan and Patrick Clancy, had gone to Tournafulla in West Limerick for the funeral of Liam Scully, who had been killed in the Kilmallock barrack attack. After the funeral they travelled over a large part of West Limerick, and later crossed the Shannon to Clare; and to the local I.R.A. leaders in these areas they gave valuable advice, based on their own experiences in East Limerick. Having returned from Clare to West Limerick, O'Hannigan, Clancy and some members of the West Limerick brigade decided to rejoin their East Limerick comrades. Says O'Hannigan:

"We set out to march from the neighbourhood of Glin, by Askeaton, Ballingarry, and Rockhill to Tankardstown, near Bruree, where we were received by Captain J. Lynch". (LFS p. 86).

Recalling that march, O'Hannigan had this to say:

"... it was our journey from there" (Glin) "to Bruree in East Limerick which gave rise to the idea of an Active Service Unit, as the Flying Column was first called... Fully armed we had travelled over thirty miles cross-country in daylight without any great difficulty. It occurred to us that since we had successfully done so there was no reason why a larger number, organised and equipped as a unit, could not

do likewise. Thus was conceived... the idea of the Flying Column. The idea was revolutionary in its implications in the circumstances then prevailing, for in fact it implied maintaining in the field a standing force for the duration of the struggle... an efficient, disciplined, compact and swift-moving body of men which would strike at the enemy where and when a suitable opportunity arose. That this intention was subsequently realised is evident from the fact that for the rest of the period until the truce, the major engagements of the Column averaged one each month with many other minor engagements intervening". (LFS p. 86).

The first recruitment for this first I.R.A. Flying Column took place in Tankardstown, and as Tankardstown happens to be my native place I cannot resist the temptation to introduce here a few limping lines that I once wrote to celebrate this connection between my native place and the first Flying Column:—

#### THE FIRST FLYING COLUMN

*They marched from Scully's funeral  
By Glin to Tankardstown,  
The men who in our freedom fight  
Won fame and high renown.  
They came with arms in their hands,  
And marched right proud and free,  
And Johnny Lynch he bade them stay  
'Till they would rested be.*

*In Lynch's house where Fenians stood  
The daring plan took shape,  
Those men who marched to Tankardstown  
Together now they'd stay:  
A fighting force ne'er to disband,  
A wholtime force who'd be  
The first Flying Column of them all  
In our Irish history.*

*Hannigan he was there that day,  
From near old Galteemore,  
And Crowley Tadhg and Murphy Tom,*

*And Howard who feared no foe;  
With O'Donnell, Clancy, Tobin  
And others too beside,  
They were Ireland's first Flying Column  
And Lim'rick's love and pride.*

*Oh, they fought at Grange and Emly,  
Shraherla and Dromkeen  
And as well near Annacarty  
And down near famed Bruree.  
Lackelly and Kildorrery  
Oh, these were places too,  
Where they struck their blows untiring  
And proved to Ireland true.*

*Wherever the fight was raging  
And death stood lurking nigh,  
There the men of the Flying Column  
Showed how to dare and die.  
They met the Tans and the "Auxies",  
And scorned the foeman's frown—  
Oh, they were the men who conquered  
And brought an Empire down.*

On 10 June, a military patrol going out from Limerick to Bruff was ambushed at Holy Cross and one soldier was wounded. The destruction of police barracks and courthouses that might be occupied by British forces still continued. On the night of 20 June, Dromcollogher courthouse was burned to the ground, but with the tragic loss of three Volunteers who were trapped in the building and perished in it. They were David Brennan, Willie Danagher and Patrick Buckley. About the same time an exactly similar tragedy happened at the burning of Croom courthouse, when Volunteers Edward Donnelly, John Moloney and James Hogan, lost their lives.

No day now passed without incidents of one kind or another—raids, ambushes, shootings, arrests, the searching of mails, the resignations of members of the R.I.C. and of magistrates and Justices of the Peace and, all the time, the calculated attempts to terrorise the civil population. But the people were not to be cowed. On the

afternoon of 21 June when armed Black and Tans boarded the 2.45 Limerick-Dublin train at Limerick the engine driver, fireman and guard walked off the train. The Black and Tans refused to leave the train. The crew refused to run the train. Eventually the Black and Tans had no choice but to leave.

In broad daylight on 22 June, a small I.R.A. party attacked three Black and Tans in Henry Street, Limerick. Constable Oakley was killed and the other two disarmed. Their attackers succeeded in getting away with the captured weapons. However, there was a terrible sequel to this attack, as is related further on in this article.

The *Limerick Leader* of 25 June reported *More Terrors* in Limerick City the previous evening, and told of houses raided and attacked by armed men in disguise, and of indiscriminate shooting.

In the local elections of 1920, Limerick returned a Sinn Féin county council and the first meeting of the new council took place on 25 June. The members were:

Sean Wall, The Hill, Bruff; Anthony Mackey, Castleconnell; John Blackwell, Drombane, Pallasgreen; Michael Cahill, Corgrigg, Foynes; Michael F. Coleman, Crean, Bruff; John Cranwitch, Ballyshane, Kilfinane; Michael de Lacy, Raheen, Mungret; John Dunne, Main Street, Glin; Sean Hynes, Lisnagry, Bartholomew Laffan, Killonan, Limerick; Maurice P. Leahy, Templeglantine; John A. Lynch, Kilmallock; Thomas MacCann, Aughalin, Ballingarry; John MacDonagh, Bansa, Kilcornan; Liam P. Manahan, Ballylanders; David Naughton, Ballycanauna, Ballysteen; David O'K. Noonan, Grange, Newcastle West; Patrick Normile, Blaine, Athea; Sean Clifford, Carnane, Fedamore (the latter being in prison was deputised for by John D. O'Dwyer, Raheen, Holy Cross, Kilmallock); John O'Shea, South Quay, Newcastle West; Sean T. O'Riordan, Dromin, Kilmallock (the latter being in



prison was deputised for by Liam T. Purcell, Uregare, Kilmallock); John Quaid, Cloonlara, Milford; William Quane, Lackendarragh, Anglesboro'; Eamon Roche, Knockfenora, Bruree; Michael Ryan, Ballinamona, Hospital; Patrick Ryan, The Hotel, Doon; John Stapleton, Ballylahiff, Oola; John Tobin, Ballyfrawley, Newcastle West.

Sean Wall, commanding officer of the East Limerick brigade, was unanimously elected chairman. Seán Wall was a brother of the famous Father Tom Wall, one of the two patriotic priests (the other being Father Michael Hayes) who, after the 1916 Rising, had figured in the historic exchange of correspondence between the British General Maxwell and Doctor O'Dwyer, Bishop of Limerick. He was to lose his life the following year in an engagement at Annacarty.

At its first meeting, the new council pledged its allegiance to Dáil Éireann.

By 28 June, Limerick railway station was almost at a standstill as the strike against the carrying of munitions or armed police or military continued to spread. In the early hours of the morning of 28 June, the forces of the crown took revenge for the defiance of the railwaymen and the population in general by engaging in an orgy of shooting and wanton destruction. Shots were fired indiscriminately, houses were set on fire, windows smashed and Tait's clock subjected to a fusilade of bullets. At 12 o'clock Mass that day in the Dominican Church one of the priests asked the people to practice self-control in the face of "organised rascality and provocation".

Part of Dáil Éireann's tremendous effort to establish the supremacy of the Irish people in Ireland was the setting up of what were to be popularly known as the Sinn Féin courts. Of these courts the Limerick peer, Lord Monteaigle (father of the Honourable Mary Spring Rice), wrote as follows in a letter published in the *Limerick Leader* of 5 July, 1920:—

"The Sinn Féin courts are steadily extending their jurisdiction and dispensing justice even-handed between man and man, Catholic and Protestant, grazier and cattle driver and landlord and tenant. The Sinn Féin police are arresting burglars, punishing cattle drivers, patrolling the streets, controlling drink traffic, apparently in some areas with the acquiescence of the local military authorities who thus show themselves wiser than either the Castle officers or the British Government . . .".

Limerick City was swarming with armed military and police at this time; movable barbed wire obstacles blocked the roads and all passing vehicles were searched.

On 9 July four police were held up and disarmed by Volunteers at Ballinvara Bridge, in the vicinity of Ballinahinch near Bulgaden. On 16 July armed police raided a Sinn Féin arbitration court that was in session in the Central Rooms, O'Connell Street, Limerick, declared the assembly illegal, seized documents and arrested two of the arbitrators who refused to give their names—Alderman O'Mara and Thomas Geary.

In those early July days of 1920 the West Limerick I.R.A. had custody of a very distinguished prisoner. He was General Lucas, and he had been captured in North Cork by an I.R.A. unit commanded by Liam Lynch. He was later transferred to Clare, where he escaped from captivity. The friendliest of relations obtained between the prisoner and his captors at all times, so much so that after his escape, the general said: "My captors were delightful people. Of course I escaped at the first opportunity but I have no complaint to make. I was not a prisoner so much as an unwilling guest". (*L.L.* 9 Aug. 1920).

Bruff courthouse was blown up about this time; and on 16 July a party of police was ambushed near Foynes and one of their number, Constable Fahy, was killed.

Following the shooting of a Constable Masterson on Saturday morning, 17 July.

Newcastle West experienced a night of terror. Sometime before midnight, police and military poured into the town and paraded through the streets with fixed bayonets. At about 1.30 a.m. on the 18th, the inhabitants heard bursts of gunfire followed by the ominous sounds of explosions. Raids on houses then began, windows were smashed, the Carnegie Free Library was destroyed by fire, the creamery was partially destroyed and attempts were made to set various other premises on fire. And other towns and villages in the county were to know similar nights of terror.

It was on Friday evening, 23 July, when two Crossley tenders filled with Black and Tans drove into Kilmallock and behind one of the vehicles the Irish tricolour trailed in the dust. It was obvious that the raiders were very much under the influence of drink. Jumping down off the tenders they savagely attacked a few unsuspecting people who happened to be on the streets. They then burst into houses and beat people they found inside almost to the point of unconsciousness. They smashed furniture and looted drink and fired at anything that moved. Finally they repaired to Lord Edward Street where they set fire to William Carroll's shop, one of the houses that had been occupied by the I.R.A. on the night of the Kilmallock barrack attack. As soon as the flames took hold they discharged volley after volley into the building. Next they turned their attention to the shop of Con Herlihy in the same street. This they also set on fire. Three girls were trapped in the upper storey and but for the heroism of some young men who procured a ladder and rescued them, the three would inevitably have been burned to death.

On the evening of the sack of Kilmallock, sixty soldiers cycled into Glin and removed the tricolour flag which was flying from the old Geraldine castle, from the ramparts of which, a long three hundred and

twenty years before, words of Gaelic defiance had been hurled at the English soldiery of Carew.

In the early hours of Sunday morning, 25 July, the extensive drapery premises of Timothy Crowley, Ballylanders, were blown up and burned by a party of Black and Tans who arrived in lorries. While the flames raged through the shattered building the Black and Tans stood at some distance in a group cheering wildly. Three of Timothy Crowley's sons were prominent in the I.R.A. Tadhg was a member of the East Limerick brigade Flying Column, and Jack and Peter participated in the memorable ninety-six days' hunger strike in Cork jail.

On the same occasion that they burned Crowley's premises in Ballylanders, the Black and Tans also burned Garryspillane creamery, three miles from Ballylanders, on the road to Knocklong.

Headlines in the *Limerick Leader* of 28 July said: *Further Wild Scenes in Limerick City. Police run amok.* These events in Limerick City happened on the night of 26 July. Shots were discharged, people on the streets were attacked and struck by rifle butts and young men were taken to the barracks and ill-treated.

A number of the East Limerick Flying Column were staying in the Tankardstown district towards the end of July, 1920 and on the 29th of that month they and some of the local I.R.A. men ambushed a party of military and police at Ballynaught, a mile east of Bruree. One of the military was mortally wounded in the fight. That evening a mixed party of military and police drove into Bruree bent on vengeance. They shot dead Thomas Harris, an invalid, and Patrick Duggan, a schoolboy. Wrote a *Freeman* correspondent (quoted in *Limerick Leader*, 2-4 August) ". . . the funerals took place through the desolate, helpless village under the vigilant eyes of the armed Forces of the Crown".

On 31 July, James Mulcahy, an ex-



British soldier, was shot dead when a military patrol raided a public house in Nicker in East Limerick. A verdict of wilful murder by forces of the crown was brought in at the inquest held on 9 August, 1920.

The *Limerick Leader* of Friday, 6 August, carried the following headlines:— *Curfew Law for Kilmallock and Charleville. Drastic Order Issued. Fairs and Markets prohibited.*

The Order read:

"I, Major-General Sir E. P. Strickland, K.O.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., Commanding 6th Division Competent Military Authority . . . do hereby order and require every person within the area specified in the Schedule hereto, to remain within doors between the hours of 9 p.m. and 8 a.m. . . . The Schedule comprises the Rural District of Kilmallock, the Rural District of Charleville and No. 2 Rural District of Mitchelstown and No. 2 Rural District of Tipperary and also the District Electoral Divisions of Emly and Rodus in No. 1 Rural District of Tipperary . . ."

The prescribed area embraced the greater part of East and South-East Limerick and included Bruree and Ballylanders where the recent shootings and burnings had taken place. In the Kilfinane and Ardpatrick districts where "old Irish time" was still adhered to, the curfew order meant that the people in these districts had to be indoors by what they reckoned to be only 7.30 p.m.

The *Limerick Leader* of 9 August reported a raid by over one hundred military on Caherconlish. Houses were searched and windows smashed, and various items were missed from houses after the raiders had left.

Some men were standing by the corner of a public house in Ballyneety on the evening of 10 August. A lorry filled with Black and Tans passed. Shots were fired from it and one of the bystanders was wounded.

During this period additional military

forces were stationed at Ashill Towers, Kilmallock, and at Cappamore.

On Friday morning, 13 August, British crown forces indulged in further indiscriminate firing and further attacks on houses in Limerick city; and at Holy Cross near Bruff, soldiers passing in a lorry shot a valuable cow dead in a field.

At 11 o'clock on the night of 14 August, Patrick Lynch of Hospital, a harness maker by trade and the sole support of his father and three sisters, was saying the Rosary with the other members of his family when a party of soldiers called and said they wanted him. He was taken away a short distance and shot dead.

On 15 August, the Black and Tans again ran amok in Limerick city. During indiscriminate shooting on their part they shot one of their own comrades. They set fire to houses in Parnell Street and High Street, they smashed windows, broke into houses and wrecked furniture and searched and rough-handled everybody they met on the streets.

That night a party of Black and Tans sought to terrorise the people of Hospital—where Patrick Lynch had been murdered the previous night—by the discharge of rifles and machine guns and by the throwing of grenades.

In the *Limerick Leader* of 20 August, the Newcastle West correspondent told how for the previous three weeks indiscriminate firing had been going on in the streets of the town. People had been dragged into the barracks and ill-treated and others had been beaten in the streets and on the roads. Animals in fields near the roads had been shot from passing military lorries. Houses had been wrecked. The report added that generally the regular soldiers were well behaved and that practically all the cases of intimidation, destruction and terrorism could be attributed to the Black and Tans and the Auxiliaries.

British crown forces burned Cleeve's creamery at Knocklong on the morning of

26 August, and attempted to wreck the signal cabin at Knocklong railway station.

On Friday morning, 3 September, an attempt was made to set the *Limerick Leader* offices in Limerick city on fire. Fortunately, the fire burned itself out on the ground floor without doing any worthwhile damage. The issue of that day's *Leader*, as well as reporting the attempt to burn down the *Leader* office, told how: "About 8.30 p.m. on Wednesday another night of terror began in Limerick. The discharge of firearms resounded through the city and people ran panic-stricken through the streets for shelter. The firing was indulged in by police who alleged that some missile was thrown at a patrol in the vicinity of the railway . . ."

The following report appeared in the *Limerick Leader* of 15 September:

"About 600 Irish Volunteers—all men of splendid physique—recently assembled near Herbertstown, Co. Limerick, and took a pledge against all intoxicating drink. The Commandant had arranged in advance for the attendance of a priest by whom the pledge was administered. The whole scene which took place in picturesque surroundings was reminiscent of Father Mathew's days".

On 18 September, a party of R.I.C. and Black and Tans were ambushed on the outskirts of Abbeyfeale and a Constable Mahony was shot dead. At about 6.30 on the evening of 20 September a Black and Tan named Huckerbery—a notorious character—was standing at the gate of the R.I.C. barracks in Abbeyfeale when two men passed by on foot. They were Patrick Harnett, a twenty-four year old postman and Jeremiah Healy, an eighteen-year-old blacksmith. Huckerbery walked after them and shot them both dead. A member of the Auxiliary corps, giving evidence at the subsequent inquiry, said: "The shootings struck me as being rather drastic in the circumstances". (*L.L.* 24/9/1920).

Two days later—to be exact, in the early



John A. Lynch, Kilmallock, honorary secretary, Limerick Sinn Féin Executive, shot by British forces in the Royal Exchange Hotel, Dublin on 22 September, 1920.

hours of the morning of 22 September—armed and uniformed men entered the Royal Exchange Hotel in Dublin and, breaking into one of the bedrooms, shot the occupant dead. The victim was John A. Lynch, a native of Kilmallock and a member of the Limerick county council. He had been a very active member of Sinn Féin. When the remains of the murdered man arrived at Kilmallock railway station, and again on the day of the internment in the local cemetery, the place swarmed with military.

All approaches to the town were guarded by armed troops and everybody entering the town was searched. Armed military patrolled the streets and Black and Tans were very much in evidence. Military with



machine guns were stationed at all junctions, and an armoured car was drawn up in the centre of the town. As the coffin was borne along the streets to the cemetery, soldiers standing at the edge of the street kept their guns trained on the funeral procession. Only relatives and the clergy were allowed into the cemetery.

The *Limerick Leader* of Monday evening, 25 October, announced the death that morning in Brixton Prison, England, after seventy-three days' hunger strike, of Terence MacSwiney, Lord Mayor of Cork. The *Leader* editorial began as follows:

"The Brixton tragedy is at an end and the pure soul of Terence MacSwiney has winged its way to a heaven to which it cannot be pursued by the vengeance even of Lloyd George".

Limerick city, despite all the show of armed arrogance in its streets, paid fitting tribute to the man who by his long-drawn-out agony had personified the agony of the Irish nation in that terrible year of 1920. Michael O'Callaghan, Mayor of Limerick (himself to be martyred the following year), expressed the sympathy of the citizens in telegrams he sent to the widow of the dead Lord Mayor and to his sister. To Mary MacSwiney he said:—

"To you and your sisters and brothers I tender the sympathy of the city on the death of your heroic brother. His name will be remembered forever. His example will teach his people to endure".

Michael Scanlan, commandant of the first battalion, East Limerick brigade, I.R.A.—a native of Galbally, who was teaching in Kilmallock—was being conveyed in military custody to William Street R.I.C. barracks, Limerick, on 27 October. Knowing the kind of mercy he could expect from his captors, Commandant Scanlan, taking his escort unawares, jumped off the lorry as soon as it stopped at the entrance to the barracks. He succeeded in reaching Thomas Street safely and took shelter in the basement of a house there. But minutes



Commandant Michael Scanlan, East Limerick brigade, Kilmallock, killed in action on 27 October, 1920.

later a party of Auxiliaries found him and opened fire on him. He died that evening of his wounds.

The struggle for Irish freedom had now reached a white-hot intensity. And soon another well-loved name would be added to the long list of Irish heroes. The *Limerick Leader* of Monday evening, 1 November, carried the news of the execution of eighteen-year-old Kevin Barry that morning in Mountjoy Prison.

Objective observers, and distinguished people of humane and liberal opinions in England, had been pleading for months with the British Government for the ending of the campaign of terror which it was supporting in Ireland. But despite the force of public opinion the campaign went on, and in the British Parliament approving

wild cheers and handclaps invariably greeted the blatant and cynical falsehoods of the Chief Secretary, Sir Hamar Greenwood, as he continued to whitewash the conduct of the Black and Tans and Auxiliaries, even to the extent of attributing some of their terrible and well-proved crimes to the I.R.A. One has to read the Parliamentary reports to realise the depth of hatred for Ireland that was so often demonstrated at that period in the Mother of Parliaments.

Men of the East Limerick brigade Flying Column and of the third battalion, East Limerick brigade, took part in the Grange ambush near historic Loch Gur on 8 November. The fight began at noon that day when a lorry load of military drove into the ambush area and was attacked. What the attackers did not realise was that the one lorry was part of a convoy which included two armoured cars. A short sharp fight took place before Donncha O'Hannigan, the officer in charge of the attacking party, succeeded in extricating his men and leading them to safety out of a particularly dangerous situation. The known dead on the British side was one officer but from their own observations, the I.R.A. believed that the fatal casualties incurred by the British were more than that. (*LFS* p. 95 *et seq.*)

During the week beginning 15 November, 1920, the trial opened in Dublin of James O'Neill and Patrick Blake of Rosbrien, Limerick, both ex-soldiers of the British army, who were charged with the shooting of Constable Oakley, a Black and Tan, in Henry Street, Limerick, in July of that year. Neither had anything to do with the shooting, and both were acquitted. Returning home from the trial on Saturday evening, 20 November, Patrick Blake, his father and his brother Michael, were travelling in a motor car, which had been procured at Limerick Junction. James O'Neill, with his parents and friends, was travelling in a char-a-banc.

It was a bitter wet night and Patrick Blake was feeling cold. His brother Michael changed places with him, considering his seat more comfortable than the one Patrick had been occupying. Near Oola, Co. Limerick, car and char-a-banc were stopped by a party of armed men. They were Black and Tans. A group of them went up to Michael Blake and shot him dead—obviously having mistaken him for his brother Patrick because of the switch of seats. Another group went to the char-a-banc and shot James O'Neill dead. These two brutal murders served to make the Black and Tans more hated and dreaded than ever in Limerick city. (*LFS* p. 181).

Next day, 21 November, was "Bloody Sunday". That morning the I.R.A. shot fourteen British secret service agents in Dublin. Reprisals took place in the afternoon. Black and Tans arrived in lorries outside Croke Park, where a football match was in progress, and fired into the crowd, killing twelve people and wounding scores of others. Among the wounded was Tom Hogan, a native of Tankardstown, Kilmallock, a member of the Dublin brigade, and a former member of the Bruree I.R.A. company. He died of his wounds on 26 November.

On 10 December, Lord French signed a proclamation putting the greater part of the province of Munster under Martial Law. The proclamation applied to the following areas:—

County of Cork. East Riding and West Riding.

The County of the City of Cork.

The County of Tipperary (North Riding).

The County of Tipperary (South Riding).

The County of Kerry.

The County of Limerick.

The County of the City of Limerick.

The proclamation of Martial Law meant in effect the superseding of the whole fabric of civil law in the areas proclaimed





Tom Hogan, Volunteer, killed in Croke Park on Bloody Sunday.

and the making of the General Officer Commanding the troops in Ireland virtual Governor.

Two lorries of military were ambushed at Glenacurrane in South-East Limerick on 17 December. The attacking party which consisted of the East Limerick brigade Flying Column and men from the North Cork brigade was led by Donncha O'Hannigan. Four of the British soldiers were killed and many wounded. The attackers seized all the rifles, some boxes of grenades and about 300 rounds of ammunition, as well as a large consignment of mails which they censored before forwarding to their destinations. (LFS. p. 99).

It was also during December that the Cross of the Tree ambush took place in East Limerick. During the fight reinforcements for the British, consisting of an

armoured car and four Crossley tenders loaded with troops, arrived on the scene. Completely outnumbered and outgunned, the I.R.A. had to retreat. The retreat was covered with great courage by Seán Riordan, an ex-sergeant-major of the British army who had recently joined the I.R.A. He saw all his comrades to safety, but was very severely wounded himself, and died a few days later. (LFS p. 102).

Towards the end of 1920 the third battalion, East Limerick brigade, learned of a source from which arms could be purchased. The battalion, however, had no funds, and when someone jokingly suggested holding a dance for the purpose of raising funds the suggestion was received with amusement. But what was at first treated as a joke was later taken seriously as being the only practicable way of obtaining funds, and it was arranged that a dance would be held on Saint Stephen's Night in Cahirguillamore House, an unoccupied residence situated about three miles west of Herbertstown. The wisdom of that decision was subsequently severely criticised but there was little opposition to it beforehand. (LFS. p. 103).

Shortly after midnight on the night of the dance the house was surrounded by British forces, in all some seven hundred men, including regular military, R.I.C. and Black and Tans. An I.R.A. sentry who challenged the military was promptly shot down. This was the prelude to a savage attack on the house, which was bombed and raked with machine gun and rifle fire. In all, five of the I.R.A. were killed in the fight—Daniel Sheehan, Martin Conway, Éamon Moloney, John Quinlan and Henry Wade. Unarmed men were clubbed and savagely beaten inside the house, and the women were reduced to a state of terror. Many arrests were made, some of those arrested being subsequently sentenced to terms ranging from three months to ten years. The ballad maker chronicled the tragedy in due course:—

O Roisin Dubh, your sorrows grew,  
On a cold and stormy night,  
When Caher's woods and glens so bold  
Shone in the pale moonlight.  
Within your walls where alien balls  
Were held in days of yore,  
Stood many an Irish lad and lass  
At Cahirguillamore.

I need not tell what there befell  
All in that crowded hall,  
The Black and Tans worked quite well  
With rifle-butt and ball.  
Unarmed men lay dying and dead,  
Their life's blood did out pour—  
They sleep now in their hollow graves,  
Near Cahirguillamore.

The commander of those legions  
Would more suit a foreign field,  
Where he would meet some savage foes,  
His methods they would greet;  
And not those laughing youths  
Who were taught to love and pray  
And who received the Blood of Christ  
On that same Christmas Day.

So did the year 1920 end in Limerick, in blood and tears, with the county and city under Martial Law but with the fighting men, gallantly supported by the people, still unbroken and unbeaten. Surely it was men such as those who fought for Irish freedom in 1920 that the poet, Aonghus Mac Daighre Uí Dhálaigh, had in mind when, the most of three and a half centuries earlier, he addressed the men who fought for freedom in his day in his great poem, *Dia Libh, a Laochra Ghaidheal*—God with you, Heroes of the Gael.

The *Limerick Leader* was one of the main sources consulted in the preparation of this article; the initials, LL, rather than the full names are used in the article. The initials, LFS, are used for *Limerick's Fighting Story*, Kerryman Publications and IR for *The Irish Republic*, Dorothy Macardle.

Dia leo ag lui 's ag éirí,  
Tréinfhir is treise i dtachar,  
Dia 'na seasamh 's 'na lui leo  
Is i dtráth chuirthe an chatha!

God with them lying down and rising,  
The strong ones stoutest in stress,  
God with them standing or resting  
And in the time of the fighting of the battle!

And God was with them, for they  
always gained the spiritual victory that  
ensured that the nation would live.

#### FOCAL BUÍOCHAIS

I would like to include in this brief note of thanks the names of certain men who were my neighbours when I was growing up, men who were members of the Bruree Company of the I.R.A., and from whom I first heard accounts of many of the incidents and engagements described in the foregoing article. Some of them are gone to their reward—Solas na Soilse dá n-anamacha!—Tom Finn, of Ballygibba; Dan, Mick and Paddy Hogan, of Tankardstown; Johnny Lynch, do; John O'Brien, do; Joe Keeffe, do; Donncha Ó hArgáin, of Ballynaught. Others still survive:—Mick and Larry Keeffe, Tankardstown; Jack Wall, do; Roibeárd Ó hArgáin, Ballynaught. All these men took a very active part in many of the events described in the article, and I am proud to belong to the district that produced them.

My sincere thanks to Mr. Tom Tobin, Editor of the *Limerick Leader*, for putting the 1920 file of his paper at my disposal; and also to Miss Patricia Mac Mahon, Limerick, for her help in the preparation of the article.