

R.I.C. AND THE BLACK AND TANS

By WILLIE W. GLEESON

IN CONNECTION with the picture, titled "The Black and Tans leave Limerick," published in the Limerick Leader (13th ultimo), over my name, I have since had a letter from a "Limerickman" (name and address supplied) not concerning the Black and Tans; but the Royal Irish Constabulary; also several queries as to why both of H.M. Forces wore the same kind of uniform or dress.

The answer is simple. On being recruited from their denizens in Britain, the new police force(?) were fitted out with the black cap and tunic of the English policeman, and the khaki trousers of the "Tommy." Later, when drafted into the ranks of the R.I.C., they donned the same uniform and cap (the darkest of the forty shades of green) of the R.I.C. The only distinction by which they could easily be recognised was that of physique!

Letter

Before proceeding further, it may be well to publish what "Limerickman" has to say:

"Dear Mr. Gleeson - The photo of the William St. Police Force - in last week's Leader - prompts this letter.

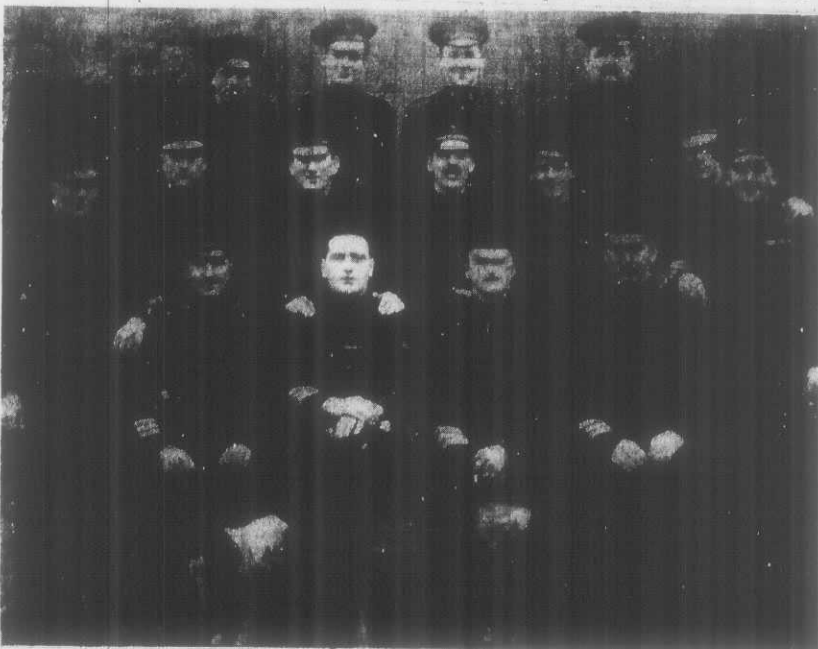
"I am afraid you were misled by 'Bottom Dog' propaganda - necessary and justifiable as it may have been during the War of Independence - but nowadays after more than 40 years have elapsed it should be treated for what it was.

"Actually if you are interested in the truth, there are at least 6 (eager to talk) old-timers around in their early eighties, who played a small part in the movement, but didn't take sides after the Truce - and they would tell you:-

(1) That the R.I.C. were an honest, hard working religious group of men, that their sons became bishops, priests, teachers, rose to high rank in Local Government and in the Civil Service - even attaining the highest ranks in the judiciary, in the army and the Garda.

(2) That "blighty" for those men meant (except for the few Black and Tans) moving away a country or two.

(3) That when, because of



Some of the R.I.C. men and Black and Tans of Limerick's Mary Street garrison during the War of Independence. At back: Dixon, Bob Tanner, Moriarty (R.I.C.), D. Naughton (R.I.C.). Middle row: Cassidy, Shoesmith, Richardson, Jack Jones, T. Hickey (R.I.C.), Porter, Charlie Rawson. Seated: Sergeant Chambers (R.I.C.), Sergeant Skellington (R.I.C.), Tom Kavanagh (R.I.C.), Sergeant Walsh (R.I.C.).

pressure on their relatives, recruitment for the R.I.C. practically dried up - the recruits came from England, interviewed there by Head Constable and Sergeant - given a minimum of training and spread thinly in various police barracks around the country - but their pay was the same as that of the R.I.C. Constable: £3 weekly.

(4) That it was the Auxiliaries - all ex-officers - whose wage was £1

per day.

(5) That they saw pillage and looting in Limerick, but aid, not done by the Crown Forces, by our own regulars in the Strand Barracks and their local adherents.

"I feel tempted to describe your accusing of Horan and Leech of the shooting of George Clancy and Callaghan, as scurrilous.

"I can truthfully claim - and I have witnesses to prove it - that Horan booted me up the behind. Why, oh why, Mr. Gleeson, do you not, in charity, draw the veil over those dark days, and, oh yes, and as a Limerickman and writer, engage your pen in something worthwhile."

The truth

Having read, with disgust, what "Limerickman" had to say by way of an apology for these inhuman fiends, the only passage that interested me was when he stated:

"... actually, if you are interested in the truth, there are at least six (eager to talk) old-timers around in their early eighties, who played a small part in the movement but didn't take sides after the Truce, and they would tell you:-

"I would appreciate very much the names of the six you mention, "Limerickman," so that I may compare same with the official list held, namely, those I.R.A. men (1) on active service; (2) flying column; (3) bomb factory at Solohead, as well as a foolscap size of paper members - all belonging to the 2nd Battalion, Mid-Limerick Brigade, I.R.A., 1919-21.

Delving through my archives - a regular occurrence - I discovered the following letter which I had published in a Galway newspaper over twenty years ago, when involved in a similar districte as now. It speaks for itself.

The name

"How the Black and Tans got their name: Sir, for the sake of historical accuracy, and no other reason, I would have your ill-informed B. MacGowan of Galway, and other admirers of England's Black and Tans, know that these armed thugs depicted in Sean O'Casey's 'The Shadow of a Gunman' were NOT Black and Tans, but members of the Auxiliaries, a military force composed of ex-British Army Officers of World War I, sent to augment the regular army in Ireland.

"The Black and Tans outpourings of the prisons and denizens principally of Staffordshire, Wolverhampton and Manchester - were recruited by Prime Minister David Lloyd George and Sir Hamar Greenwood and despatched, post haste, to drive terror into the hearts and souls of the Irish people."

"That they succeeded to a great extent in their diabolical deeds, is amply borne out by the ghastly murders - in Mr. MacGowan's Galway - of Fr. Griffin, Mrs. Eileen Quinn, and the Loughnane

Tans arrived in Ireland, and were given their title by the late Christopher O'Sullivan, proprietor and editor of the old 'Limerick Echo,' under the following unusual circumstances.

"I have boarded the Limerick-bound train from Waterford at the Limerick Junction, O'Sullivan shared the same compartment with a 'strange type of individual wearing the black cap and tunic of the Royal Irish Constabulary and khaki trousers of the British soldier, and who spoke with a pronounced English accent."

"In a leading article in the following Friday's 'Echo,' O'Sullivan, referring to 'this strange encounter' of the previous Wednesday, goes on: '... the uniform looked two sizes too big for its wearer. Measuring a mere 5' 7" tall and around the 10 stone mark, this puny creature resembled something one would associate with the Scarteen Hut (the Black and Tans) of Ballagreen, judging by his strange attire. Most certainly, he bore no comparison whatever with our R.I.C. and heaven help Ireland with this latest 'innovation' in the cause of peace'.

"O'Sullivan also mentions that when passing Oola railway station his friend asked: 'What do the letters a big O, a small o and I and a stand for?' To which O'Sullivan replied: 'Some local, learning French, did it for a joke!'

"The 'new policeman' then produced a newspaper cutting which read: 'Are you 16 years old, 5' 6" in height and anxious to serve His Majesty's forces in Ireland? If so, join the Royal Irish Constabulary: £1 a day, and chances.' (Some time later, the Emmis comedian, Mike Nemo, when performing at Limerick's Theatre Royal, mentioned Ireland's new police, as described by Mr. O'Sullivan, as 'Black and Tans' - a quip which caught the public imagination immediately.

"In conclusion, might I add, as one who served in Na Fianna Eireann (pre-Truce), that the R.I.C. - the vast majority of them - were the finest 'body of men, morally, intellectually, physically, the world has ever known. They gave countless sons and daughters to Mother Church who are ministering in Christ's Vineyard, in regions far apart today.

"Whatever wrongs some of their members may have committed in the past, and they were many, would now seem to have been justified if I repeat, IF the events of the Civil War which followed 1921 is to be taken as a criterion!

"Let the dead past bury its dead."

Examples

"Limerickman" pertinently asks, "am I actually interested in the truth?" My answer is: Yes, sir, at all times, regardless of the consequences and the physical injury - which (at times) it has caused me.

□ Early March, 1920. Thomas MacCurtain, Lord Mayor of Cork, foully murdered in his home, in the presence of his wife and young children, by R.I.C. from King Street Barracks.

□ Mrs. Eileen Quin, 21-year-old farmers wife, standing at the gate of her home, in Labane, Gort, with nine-months-old baby in her arms, and 3 months from her confinement, shot dead by Black and Tans returning to Galway.

□ Canon Magner, shot dead by Auxiliary Cadet Harte, who pleading to spare the life of a young man named Taugh Crowley, in a County Cork village, whom Harte also murdered.

□ A father and son, named Lchane, shot dead in their home at Moy, Lahinch, and the home then set on fire by Crown Forces.

□ Two Limerick boys, Cecil and Aidan O'Donovan, aged 17 and 15, respectively (my former classmates in St. Mary's Convent), residing at Castle View Terrace, Thomondgate, shot dead while walking on the river bank, at Blackwater, by R.I.C. Black and Tans, Auxiliaries and military, on a blood-thirsty raiding expedition.

(This savage murder took place in broad daylight on Sunday, February 27, 1921, a bare week before the triple Limerick carnage of Clancy, O'Callaghan and O'Donoghue, mentioned in the "Black and Tans Leaving Limerick," published in the Leader, 14 fortnight ago).

□ Also, the brutal murder of Denis O'Donovan, Shannon Hotel, CastlecConnell, in the presence of his wife and four young children, by the Auxiliaries, 'for harbouring rebels,' who turned out to be four R.I.C. men, in multi, while having a drink at the bar

counter. In the exchange of fire, one on each side was killed.

To be fair to the R.I.C., there were some very good men among their ranks.

Prior escapes

I will recall when the William St. murder gang, having finalised their ghastly plan to get rid of Father Joseph Hennessy, O.S.A., Prior, St. Augustine's, O'Connell Street, an R.I.C. constable named Collins, attached to the clerical staff, who overheard the conversation, waited till dinner time to tell his wife to go at once and warn the good priest of the imminent danger.

That night, when the priory was raided, his reverence was safely tucked away in St. John's Hospital, and did not resume his day-to-day duties until another twenty-four hours had passed.

"What must have been the most outstanding epic throughout the whole campaign took place when a one-armed veteran of World War I, named Major Smyth, recently returned from the Mid-East, took charge of Listowel R.I.C. barracks. He vowed to avenge his brother's death, killed in an I.R.A. ambush.

Addressing the garrison, he said: "Shoot at sight, day and night, and shoot to kill, any man you see in field or street. Have no qualms... you'll be exonerated on any subsequent military enquiry."

The response was swift: "We're Irishmen and we're damned if we will shoot down our fellow countrymen," and with that, off came the tunes of 15 brave R.I.C. men, who threw them on the floor in front of the notorious Auxiliary Smyth, while at the same time, not knowing if his Black and Tan hirlings would shoot the lot.

Thirty years or so later, one of those former R.I.C. constables returned from the African mission fields as Bishop MacCarthy, to his native Meelick in County Clare, there to unveil and bless the 10-foot granite Celtic Cross, in the local churchyard, dedicated to three members of the I.R.A., namely, his brother, Christopher MacCarthy, Patrick White, and Michael Gleeson, all three who died in the fight for freedom.

Sgt. McCarthy

To bring this effort of mine to a fitting close, I will pay just tribute to one who, as a sergeant in the R.I.C., never failed to warn the proprietor of the Record Printing Works, 6 Cornmarket Row, where the sedulous Factionist and Bottom Dog were printed, of every impending raid, by giving three taps on the window pane nearest the door of the premises. However, notwithstanding his best intentions, the place was turned topsy-turvy no less than half a dozen times... but the work went on.

God rest your soul, Sgt. MacCarthy, of Clare Street.

□ ADDENDUM: The notorious Auxiliary, Captain Nathan, ex-convict, homosexual, rapist and everything opposed to public order, was the ringleader of the murder gang in Limerick, as well as the brutal CastlecConnell assassination of the proprietor of the Shannon Hotel. During the Spanish Civil War (1936-'39) he fought side-by-side with Bela Kun and his fellow Communists, where he breathed his last.

COMMUNITY WORKSHOP FOR WEST LIMERICK?

By PATRICIA FEEHILY

PLANS for the establishment of a community workshop for mildly handicapped people in Newcastle West have been proposed by the local Junior Chamber.

The project, however, will depend entirely on public response to the suggestion, which will be gauged at a meeting in the River Room Motel on Monday next, at 8 p.m.

The former president of Newcastle West Junior Chamber, Mr. Pat Riordan, who is now regional director of the organisation, says:

Hertz weekend rentals.

Rent a Ford Fiesta Friday p.m. to Monday a.m. with 100 free miles.

£28

For further details ring Georges Quay (01) 777377

Dan Ryan Locations Parkgate St. (01) 776631 Leeson St. Bridge (01) 602255 Limerick City (061) 45686 Cork City (021) 503211

"It would be a big venture and would only succeed with total local involvement and dedication."

Prospects

The idea was first mooted when local Junior Chamber members, Mrs. Eileen O'Brien, who teaches at the vocational school pointed out that pupils leaving the schools remedial classes had little or no prospects in front of them.

"They certainly had no prospects of work at home," Mr. Riordan said. "Some people from here did work at sheltered workshops in Limerick."

Mrs. O'Brien and Mr. Gerry Cronin, assessment officer, National Rehabilitation Board, Limerick, got together and planned a sheltered workshop and training centre to cater for an area around Newcastle West which would include Foynes, Rathkeale, Dromcollogher, Athea and Abbeydale.

Mr. Riordan says that if they get the right response at Monday night's meeting a committee will be formed, and work will go ahead immediately to establish the workshop.

"We'll get it off the ground," he said. "It will be on a small scale at first to cater for school leavers, but after that we hope to expand and provide employment for older people as well."

Interest

Mr. Riordan said that they had already found much interest in the project among the individuals they had contacted. A group of people from Newcastle West has visited Wexford to see how community workshops operated there.

Guest speakers at Monday night's meeting will include Mrs. Alma Daniels, manageress of New Ross Community Workshop, and Mr. Gerry Cronin of the Rehabilitation Board.

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Delirdo Casey



Sgt. McCarthy



From left: Kat

