

Edited And Prepared By Mary Griffin 11th September 2003

"THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM IN WEST WATERFORD".

Do thugas mo chul.
Ar an Aisling do chumas.
'S ar an rod so romhan.
M'aighidh do thugas.

Se an rod atha romham, is atha roimh gac mac mathair is nion athar sa tir seo, na críoch a cur leis an obair fionta a thosniod, sar ar rugadh tusa na mise, agus [gur] leanadh ar aigid [leis] ag muintir 1916, atha gha comoradh again an bhlian seo. Im thuairm se an comoradh bh'fearr a sasocaidh na laochraí den re sin, na críoch a chur leis an obair, se sin, an tir seo a saoru [6 ceartlár na tíre go dtí imeall bhanac na Mara Móire] on lar go dtí an fhairraige, agus a Ghaolu i dteangan agus i gcultuir. Tre ath fheachaint a [thubhairt ar an obair sin] ins an leigeact bheag seo, bfeidir go musclo ?? an spiorad ionnain-ne spreag na daoine idir 1916 agus 1923.

Proclamation.

"In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to National freedom and sovereignty; six times during the past three hundred years they have asserted it in arms."

...extract from the Proclamation of the Republic of Ireland. Easter 1916.

Six Times.

In 1602 this right was asserted at the Battle of Kinsale and was taken up again by Father Murphy and the men of Wexford in 1798, and in this connection we must not forget Edmond Power [leader of the local United Irishmen], who was executed at the Market House in Dungarvan. A monument to his memory stands in Dungarvan Park. Five years later in 1803 the same National urge moved Robert Emmet to strike his blow for freedom, and in 1848 the young Irelanders rose out. They struck the blow for freedom in Cappoquin in 1849. Next year will be the centenary of the Fenian Rising in 1867, and it has a special significance for us here in County Waterford, as it was at Helvick Head that the "Erins Hope" brought the Fenians ashore. While on the Fenian Rising, I must mention Michael Doherty's book, "The Felons Track" which gives wonderful descriptions of his episodes in the Comeragh Mountains. On all occasions Waterford has close connections with the [Fight for Freedom] and so it was 50 years ago.

Pearse's Oration.

"And if there is anything that makes it fitting that I rather than some other, I rather than one of the grey haired men who were young with him and shared in his labour and suffering, should speak here it is perhaps that I may be taken as speaking on behalf of a new generation".....

These are not my words ... but Pearse's at the grave of O'Donovan Rossa, so bear with me then if I, as one of the present younger generation try to re-live for you the most recent

assertion of the Irish people to their National Freedom, and particularly in relation to West Waterford, in the hope that we will be re-baptised in the Fenian faith and accept the responsibility of carrying out the Fenian programme.

National Organisations.

The Rising of 1916 and afterwards did not take place at the hasty whim of a few "reckless irresponsible young men" as those of the time were described. The natural instinct for freedom lay in all Irishmen and the seeds were sown when such National Organisations as the Gaelic Athletic Association [was founded] in 1884, which has as its aims the preservation of Irish games, culture and pastimes. The formation of the Gaelic League in 1893, which concerned itself with the Irish language [and other Gaelic activities] was a further step along the line of National Preservation, and both organisations worked hand in hand, as most of the members were affiliated to both. Underwritten in these Associations was National freedom and this was [often] the main theme at all gatherings, be it game or language class. They were both closely associated with the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Waterford had strong connections with [these] Associations as Pádraig Ó'Dálaigh from Abbeyside was one of the first secretaries of the Gaelic League, and he was followed in office by Pádraig Mac Piarais. The County was one of the first to play organised Gaelic games, and as far back as 1898 to part in an All-Ireland netball final represented by the Erins Hope. A Dungarvan man was trustee for the G.A.A. [for many years, and was mainly responsible for] the purchase of [the] Jones Road [Field], now Croke Park. These organisations fostered the Separatist Spirit, and were often the cover for more serious businesses.

When Pearse founded [his schools], boys [and girls] from this district were among its first pupils. Fr. Willie Landers of Ballinroad (Uncle of Micky Landers) was Chaplain to St. Endas [(boys) and St. Ita's (girls)].

It was because the National Spirit was very low that these and kindred organisations were founded at the time. So much so was this, that at the beginning of the first world war, 1914, the then British Foreign Secretary said that "Ireland was the one bright spot in a very dark situation for the British Empire".

Ulster Volunteers

When the Home Rule Bill looked likely to be passed the Orange element in the North, led by Carson formed the Ulster Volunteers to resist by force if necessary, any type of rule other than English Rule for the Irish people. This led to the founding of the Irish Volunteers in the Rotunda in Dublin in November 1913. The call was taken up with enthusiasm by young men and old in every parish. They practised foot drill, route marches and exercises with wooden rifles. The O'Rahilly and many other leaders visited this county on organising tours and addressed meetings in many places. In a few cases Volunteers had managed to obtain rifles by purchasing them from British Soldiers and licensed [arms] dealers. Some places had three or four Companies of Volunteers and they elected Company Officers, so in a short time the movement became a strong and virile force. Volunteers paid a few pence weekly to purchase arms from G.H.Q.

John Redmond

When John Redmond, the Leader of the Irish Party saw they were becoming such a force, he decided to step in and try to get control, which he did, and got his nominees on the Controlling Committee of the Volunteers. At this time the [World War 1] was on and on the 3rd August 1914 he said that Ireland would be defended by the Volunteers and he refused the request of Kitchener to have them sent overseas. Yet he seems to have changed his mind because three weeks later, on the 20th August he said, in a speech to the Wicklow Volunteers [at Woodenbridge] that "The interest of the whole of Ireland was at stake in the War in Europe and he urged them to continue training and drilling and to consider themselves as men, not only in Ireland itself but wherever the firing line extended in the European War. This meant he offered the services of the National Volunteers to the British Government to fight England's battles. This caused a division in the Volunteers. Those following Redmond were known as the National Volunteers, while those who adhered to the principles of Pearce were called Irish Volunteers. As a result of this members of the Irish Volunteers became greatly reduced, while the others gave their services to the British effort. It was a regular sight at Railway Stations to see the townspeople waving Union Jacks as they bade good-bye to those departing to military depots and munition works. The Separatist National and Republican spirit was at a very low ebb.

Careful Selection ??

The few that remained in the Irish Volunteers (about 5%) continued to exercise drill and train. Recruits were taken in but a careful selection and scrutiny was made of each individual. Their movements became more secret from now on, and drilling took place only in secluded places, as they were constantly under observation by the Police. British Police Agents became more busy and generally a plain clothes detective was on duty at all stations and towns, checking on suspects. Also at this time where possible, A Unit of Cumann na Mban was formed.

Cumann Na Mban

These were a very valuable section of the Movement, and they acted principally as Despatch riders, and also helped by making haversacks, first-aid dressings, signalling flags, bandages, and took classes in First-Aid also.

O'Donovan Rossa Funeral

All these preparations and drilling were part of a plan for an armed uprising. The funeral of O'Donovan Rossa in 1915 was of tremendous significance, and Volunteers from the County attended it. Pearse's oration at the grave-side was prophetic and could be understood by all Volunteers that something more than parading was afoot.

Dungarvan Position

At this time the arms position in Dungarvan was about a dozen Martini Rifles, three or four Revolvers, and a few shotguns with

home made bayonet attachment. Other places throughout the County were [no] better off.

Harry Boland, Sean Etchingham, and Liam Mellows were now regular visitors to County Waterford, and they kept local officers informed of developments. On one of these visits Mellows transferred most of the Martini Rifles to Waterford as there were not sufficient men in the district to use them.

Easter Sunday

The general orders for mobilisation on Easter Sunday 1916 was received in [West Waterford]. All [Vols with] equipment and full rations were to be on the ready. Mr. P.C. O'Mahoney of Dungarvan Post Office was Q.C. of the district at the time. In his report afterwards he states that his instructions were that the Rising was to take place at 7 p.m. on Easter Sunday. He received this order from Miss Perolz, who had come from Dublin on Holy Thursday. He gave her a receipt for the message, and she asked Mrs. O'Mahoney did she realise the seriousness of it. Miss Perolz left Dungarvan by train for Cork.

Good Friday

On Good Friday P.C. O'Mahoney called the men together and told them to be ready at 6.30 p.m. on Easter Sunday. Also on Good Friday he sent the despatch he had received from Dublin to Waterford. His wife and Miss Broderick, Abbeyside, took the message to Waterford.

Easter Saturday

On Easter Saturday morning, they met Sean Matthews in Waterford and showed him the message. He read it and said to tell O'Mahoney that it was called off. He had received the countermanding order from J.J. O'Connell (Ginger) who had come from Dublin, and he (Matthews) told the ladies that O'Connell was then at the Metropole Hotel. They went to the Hotel and found that O'Connell had gone to the Railway Station. They met him at the station and he told them that what Matthews had said was correct and that the Rising was off, as he had come straight from Dublin with the instructions from Eoin MacNeill. [Willie Walsh had also got O'Connell's order].

As Mrs O'Mahoney was leaving the Station she met Willie Walsh of Waterford who was O.C. of [the city] and who was on his way to the G.A.A. Convention in Dublin. They arranged that he would send a wire saying "Convention off" if the cancellation of the Rising was confirmed in Dublin. Mr. O'Mahoney received Willie Walsh's wire on Sunday stating "Convention off".

On Easter Monday O'Mahoney was on the phone to Cork and was told that the Rising had commenced in Dublin. While on duty later that day, a code message came through for the District Inspector from the County Inspector in Waterford. He [(O'Mahoney)] had the key to the R.I.C. cipher and decoded the message. It was to the effect that an ammunition train without lights would pass through Dungarvan Station at 12.15 a.m. with a small military Guard, and instructing the D.I. to see that it passed safely.

O'Mahoney got in touch with local Volunteers, and it was decided to capture [or hold up] the train. It was then about 11 o'clock on Monday night. The Railway line was dismantled and a blockage

set up. No train came at the expected time, but eventually one did come in at 4 a.m. The Guard got out, he was questioned, the train was searched and was found that it was an ordinary goods train. There was no military or arms on it.

Confusion

As can be seen from this report, confusion was rife throughout the Country. Waterford was no different to [other places]. It must, however, be noted that the men were prepared to Rise, and in Dungarvan's case, took part in an actual operation, even though the train did not contain any munitions, arms, [or escort].

New Spirit

Shortly after the 1916 Rising a new found spirit was abroad throughout the County. Badges and pictures of the leaders were very much in evidence. Rebel songs became popular, and concerts were held to aid the prisoners of the Rising. Groups of Volunteers sprung up throughout the county, and shortly these little groups grew to Company strength. They were distributed in every area from the River Mahon at Kilmacthomas to Tallow on the Cork border, and from the sea coast to the River Suir [at Clonmel]. Each Company had an average strength of 30 to 40 men. The Companies were then organised into Battalions, and these Battalions later formed the Decies or West Waterford Brigade. Going hand in hand with all this was the Civil Organisation of Sinn Fein.

1917 Meeting

In 1917 a meeting was held in Dungarvan, and was addressed by Count Plunkett, Piarais Beasley, Harry Boland and local Sinn Fein Leaders. Volunteer Companies from West Waterford paraded at this meeting. George Plunkett {who was released prisoner} remained in the area afterwards and helped in training, organising, and visited many Companies on inspection.

Arms Subscription

Arms and ammunition were still very scarce in every area, and was a major concern. The [usual] method adopted was that weekly subscriptions were collected, as in pre-Rising days, and each man had to purchase his own rifle, but even then Head Quarters could not supply [any]. At the end of 1917 three men [in Dungarvan] were jailed for taking a rifle off a British soldier home on furlough. Others in Kilmacthomas and Cappoquin got Jail for interrupting British Army recruiting meetings. This brings us up to 1918, and the Volunteers were coming more into the open. Intensive day and night training and manoeuvres were carried out in all Companies. The British Government tried to enforce conscription in this country and this drove great numbers of young men into the Volunteers, but [most] of those left again when the danger of conscription had passed, and they were no good to anyone.

Organisation

This demanded more and more organising and each Company had special services, such as Engineering, Transport Communications, Intelligence, Medical [& Signal] Sections etc.

During the 1918 period highly confidential operations which had a bearing on the arming of the Volunteers was carried out off the Waterford Coast, [by them, Officers of West Waterford].

Courthouse Riot

Officers of the Brigade were arrested for illegal drilling activities and when some of them were being tried [in Dungarvan] a near successful attempt was made to rescue them. Stones were thrown, the Courthouse was broken up, the Riot Act was read, and a baton charge by the police, [who were preparing to fire], would have had very serious consequences but for the intervention of a local clergyman. During all this "buail amac" many private issues were settled. For instance a Mr. O'Connor took the opportunity to have a crack at an ex-policeman, who some years before had interfered with O'Connor in his duty as butter weight-master.

Classes in Engineering, Signalling, First-Aid, etc., were continued. The Intelligence Section tapped telephone wires for information purposes. Mails were taken from trains for the same purpose, to such an extent that an aeroplane was used to deliver the mails [to military and R.I.C.].

R.I.C.

About 1918/19 Police Barracks were sniped and attacked. Police were disarmed while escorting mails and doing patrol duty, and life generally became uncomfortable for them. The R.I.C. held posts everywhere. The term "policeman" is a bit misleading as regards the R.I.C. as they were never policemen in the strict sense of the word.....they were well armed and were the eyes and ears of British Law in Ireland, and were kept at a strength out of all proportion to a police force. There was hardly a village which did not have it's R.I.C. Barracks. They enforced British rule and spied on the people. Due to these activities, they began to be boycotted. In some instances they had to be removed. They got nervous in their Barracks and got trigger edgie as is instanced in the shooting of Michael Walsh at the R.I.C. Barracks in Ring. This was accidental but the R.I.C. thought they were being attacked and shot Walsh. Many of them resigned due to the hostile attitude adopted towards them, although some few of them may have had some bit of patriotism. Their Barracks were attacked in many places and later they evacuated the smaller [ones], which were promptly burned by the Volunteers to prevent re-occupation. They concentrated their forces in the larger towns.

Military Black and Tans

The enemy now started to re-enforce. The Black and Tans (who were not of a very high standard of British manhood) were drafted into the country. They got their name because of the colours of their hastily got together uniform....they wore a black tunic and tan or khaki trousers. They were augmented by the Auxilliaris who were a corp of ex-officers of the 1914 - 18 War. The military extended their forces.....places like Lismore, Dungarvan, Cloncoskerine, Ballinacourty (Marines), Ardmore (Marines) set up strongly fortified positions. They were well equipped with the latest fast moving transport and armoured cars.

Martial Law Curfew

The area was declared a Martial Law area and Curfew as imposed. House searches [local man made key and sent it to the Barracks] were regular and many Volunteers had to go on the run. Training, drilling, and organisation was now intensified. As well as the ordinary military duties the I.R.A. was also responsible for the maintenance of law and order.

Republican Courts

The Republican Courts were set up and these were another blow at British Administration. They functioned throughout West Waterford and litigants flocked to them because they got cheap justice and most of the solicitors and barristers appeared in them.

Volunteers had taken over many of the ordinary duties from the R.I.C. In the General Election 1918, they took over the guarding of the Ballot Boxes and protecting voters. In this 1918 Election, in almost every constituency, except Ulster, Sinn Fein deputies were elected. These elected Deputies, chose Cathal Brugha.....who was a member for County Waterford, and at the time Chief-of-Staff of the Volunteers, as President, and it was at that time that the Volunteers, officially came under the authority of Dail Eireann, and became the Arm of the Irish Republic. Some time later De Valera was elected President and he appointed Cathal Brugha as Minister for Defence.

Due to the R.I.C. inactivities as a police force, and as they ceased to function, the Republican Courts took over. Some people thought that no law or order existed and tried to take advantage of the situation, but found themselves in difficulties with the Republican Administration. The big problem was that in dealing with offenders, there were no jails to contain them. This gave rise to the following little song which was popular at the time.

Leamybrien

"This is how they do it in Ireland,
If you will not toe the line,
They'll take you off on a big long looney,
Down to a place called Leamybrien".

Income Tax

Another I. R. A. activity was to prevent the collection of Income Tax. Tax Offices were raided as happened Lismore and Dungarvan, and papers and records were destroyed. R.I.C. resignations continued. More Tans and Military were drafted into the area. They instituted a reign of terror throughout the country. Raids, suppressions, killings, confiscations and all the stock and trade [of Britain] failed to break the moral of the Volunteer soldiers. They [Military, Tans etc] held up unarmed people, and murdered some of them, as happened in the case of Mrs. Foley at Carriglea.....an old woman out gathering some sticks for the fire, was shot by the English Military. This [Brigade] area was also subjected to reputed raids by the Military from the surrounding garrison towns of Youghal, Fermoy, Clonmel and Waterford.

The Volunteers Organisation in West Waterford had grown from Company to Battalion strength, and from Battalion strength to Brigade, [all] Brigades being subject to G.H.Q. in Dublin. Later on divisions were formed and the brigade was part of [1st] Southern of which Liam Lynch was O.C.

Four Battalions

The four Battalions in the West Waterford Brigade [at this time] were: -

1st Battalion....Dungarvan, Abbeyside, Colligan, Brickey, Melleray, Ballymacarbry, Touraneena, and Kilbrien, NIRE.

2nd Battalion....Killrossanty, Stradbally, Pike, Ballinroad, Bunmahon, and Kilmacthomas.

3rd Battalion....Ardmore, Ring, Old Parish, Kiely's Cross, Villierstown, Clashmore, Piltown and Aglish.

4th Battalion....Cappoquin, Tallow, Lismore, Ballysaggart, Knockanore, Glendine and Ballyduff.

Liam Lynch Campaign

On the 2nd Sunday in September, 1919, Liam Lynch opened his campaign in Fermoy, and Volunteers from West Waterford took part. The engagement was successful, widespread enemy action followed. Lynch was wounded in the engagement and was brought to West Waterford, via Youghal, Ardmore and Dungarvan, where his wounds were attended to. After a few weeks he was fit again. His presence in the area entailed a good deal of protection and scouting work, but he was undisturbed [by the enemy] though visited by a Doctor every day.

Ardmore Barracks (Jan. 1920)

A major engagement took place in January, 1920 when Ardmore Barracks was attacked. This attack was planned by the Brigade and intention was to blow in the gable end of the Barracks with explosives and land mines. All approach from Youghal, Clashmore and Dungarvan were covered off by scouts, and road blockages were set up. Heavy fire with rifle shots, and home made bombs were directed at the doors and windows of the Barracks, to cover the placing of the land mines against the gable end, which the attackers thought was not loop-holed. Subsequently, however, when the mining party were crawling into position, [concealed] loop-holes in the gable end were uncovered, and intensive fire was directed at the mining party, which forced their retirement. Firing continued for about two hours, and eventually the attackers had to withdraw, as ammunition was running out, and the old type guns (many of which were obsolete) were not effective against steel shutters. The attackers suffered no casualties, but it was reported that some of the R.I.C. were wounded.

Leigh Cross (Feb. 1920)

Shortly afterwards in February 1920, another engagement took place at Leigh Cross, Ring. From information received it was expected that a strong force of Tans and Military were to raid the Ring area in order to arrest some prominent Volunteers who were supposed to be on a visit to the district. All available men [and] arms were mobilised to take part as also were the Ring, Old Parish, and other adjoining companies. The idea was to

ambush the enemy at Killongford, but they came earlier than expected, and before the Volunteers had got into position. The Ring section which was coming down the road to join the [main body], encountered the enemy near Robert's Cross, where a sharp exchange of fire took place, while the Ring Party tried to gain cover. Firing continued for a short while, during which one of the Volunteers was wounded, and then the enemy lorries continued on and raided some houses in Ring. The main body of Volunteers remained in position near Killongford, in the hope that the enemy might return by the same route, but instead they returned via Old Parish, Kiely's Cross, Ballinameela, and home by the Bog Road.

Those are but two of the many engagements which took place not alone throughout this county, but all over the country at this period. R.I.C. Barracks and Military posts were constantly attacked as occurred at Stradbally, Cloncoskerine, Tallow and many other places.

General Lucas (June 1920)

Outside the county, an incident took place, which had a nasty reaction in many places here. I refer to the capture of General Lucas, by Liam Lynch, in June 1920. Lucas, and other British Officers were fishing on the river Blackwater near Fermoy. Lynch's party disarmed them, held them as prisoners of war, and sent back one of Lucas's attendants, to the British post at Fermoy notifying them of the capture. As a result, reprisals took place, first of all in Fermoy itself, where shops were looted and burned, windows broken, and the townspeople generally terrorised.

Intensive searches, over a wide area, in which aircraft and large forces of infantry in lorries were used, followed the capture. Every likely place was searched. The English garrison in Lismore, assisted by the Black and Tans, ran amuck in the town. Young men were beaten up, houses searched, shops looted and a good deal of property destroyed. The same took place in Dungarvan.

Hold Up of R.I.C. at Dungarvan Station (Aug. 1920)

Early in August 1920, a very daring incident took place at Dungarvan Railway Station. I have already made reference to the constant raiding of mails for information purposes. As a result of this the enemy were forced to provide armed escorts, in an effort to ensure the safety of the mail-bags. As soon as it became apparent that this armed party was likely to become a practice, it was decided that an attempt should be made to disarm them. A number of the Volunteers assembled at a spot near the Railway Station in Dungarvan. One of the Volunteers Officers was attired in a British Naval Officers uniform, and remained on the platform as if waiting for the train. Also on the platform was an enemy detective, who watched the arrival and departure of all trains, to report on suspects. When the opportune moment presented itself, this detective was pounced on, his revolver taken from him and hustled to the W.C. which was close by, and placed under guard. All this time four Volunteers were concealed in the waiting room where they observed all that happened, as well as having a clear view of the road leading to the station. The "Naval Officer" passed the word to the party in readiness at the end of the

waiting room, that the armed escort was approaching. They had now reached a point about ten yards from the gate leading into the station. They continued on to the platform and marched in the direction of the waiting room. Just as they came abreast, the Volunteers sprang forward and shouted "Hands Up". The R.I.C. were completely surprised, and all but one complied with the order. He attempted to draw his revolver, but was overpowered and disarmed. The Volunteers now collected the guns, belts, holsters, and ammunition and successfully withdrew from the Station.

Second Ardmore Attack

Sniping attacks on Barracks, raiding parties on R.I.C. and Military continued. Another attempt was made to rush Ardmore Barracks, but some of the R.I.C. saw the Volunteers moving into position and started [the alarm]. The R.I.C. opened fire, and sent up Verey lights and distress signals to call the Marines who were in a nearby station.

Reinforcements.....3 lorries with 60 men also arrived from Youghal, but by then the Volunteers had made good their withdrawal from the scene. Later in the day they re-mobilised, on receiving information that further reinforcements of Black and Tans were on their way from Dungarvan to Ardmore. The Tans were attacked at Monea, and a fight lasting about half an hour took place, during which two of the enemy were wounded.

Pike Ambush

About this time the enemy adopted a policy of making hurried, quick dashes or sorties into the county on the hope of surprising the Volunteers. One such party composed of ten Black and Tans, and two R.I.C. men left Dungarvan Barracks in a Crossley tender and dashed at break neck speed up O'Connell St., and into the open country in the Cappoquin direction. At Brown's Pike where the Master McGrath monument now divides the Cappoquin and Clonmel roads, the Volunteers lay in waiting. They had very little arms or ammunition. Their chief weapons being one modern Lee-Enfield rifle, which had been taken from a British soldier at home on leave during the war. No. 2 was a long Lee-Enfield, which had seen service in the Boer War. No. 3 was a single loading Police Carbine, and No. 4 was an old German Mauser. They had also had 4 revolvers of various makes and calibres, and 100 rounds of ammunition, as well as a few home made bombs of the Cocoa Can variety. When the lorry reached the division of the Clonmel and Cappoquin roads, the 4 riflemen opened fire but because the tender was moving so fast, no damage was done, other than perforating the bodywork of the vehicle. Some revolver shots were also fired, but the bombers were a little more successful. One bomb landed into the tender and blew away a portion of the bottom and sides of it, as well as inflicting some injuries to the occupants. The lorry continued on its way and the Volunteers withdrew.

This attack was typical of the many which occurred all over the country. Another method used was to hinder the progress of the enemy through the countryside. Roads were trenched, bridges demolished, trees felled, etc. No great victory could be claimed in any particular instances, but they were of tremendous nuisance value, it kept the enemy uneasy, and made life generally

uncomfortable for them. In one area, for instance, there were numerous "attacks", all carried out by one man with his rifle, and the enemy never knew how many men were involved in the "attack" or "ambush".

Piltown (1 Nov. 1920)

"The roar of the guns it was glorious
The bullets flew round us like hail
From rifles of cowards and traitors
Mid the ranks of the sons of the Gael.
And every rebel's a hero
From Piltown, Old Parish, Ardmore,
And down from the slopes of the Comeraghs,
With Dungarvan's true sons to the fore".

This is a verse from the song "The Cross of Old Piltown", which was composed by Pat Keating of Killrossanty (and who was later killed in the Burgery Ambush) and it recalls for us the Ambush at Piltown Cross on all Saints Night, 1st November, 1920.

The R.I.C. in Ardmore Barracks and the Marines in the Coastguard Station were attacked simultaneously by a small party of Volunteers. The phone wires were left uncut, so that messages for assistance could be sent from the R.I.C. to the military in Youghal. These were only mock attacks to lure the military and police out from Youghal, as one particular policeman was required. The A.S.U. (Active Service Unit) and local company volunteers had taken up their positions at Piltown Cross, on the Youghal/Ardmore road. The road was trenched, and a tree felled, just at the Cross. When the mock attack in Ardmore commenced, Verey Lights and signals were sent up by the R.I.C. and this brought a combined force of military and R.I.C. out from Youghal, as expected. When they reached the road blockage, the lorry had to stop and the Volunteers opened fire. The driver of the lorry was shot, and others wounded, and an officer jumped over the fence, in an effort to get away, but fell into the hands of the shotgun men. The Volunteers charged the enemy, who very quickly surrendered, due to the surprise element attack. One policeman who was particularly wanted was captured, but he gave an undertaking to resign from the force, and after being disarmed was released. When the capture was complete, and all arms etc., collected, the lorry could not be re-started so the Volunteers procured some donkeys and carts, and allowed the enemy to take the wounded back to Youghal. The A.S.U. then withdrew towards Clashmore and Cappoquin while the men of the local companies returned home.

The arms and ammunition captured in this ambush were a great addition to the A.S.U. and it's "strength" was increased considerably.

The policeman who had promised to resign, failed to do so, and as a result he had to be dealt with later on.

Rockfield

At Rockfield near Cappagh, 2 of the enemy were wounded when their lorry was attacked by the A.S.U. who were on manoeuvres in that area.

Bealica

Also at about the same time a party of Tans and R.I.C. were ambushed on the Cappoquin/Mellery road at Bealica, while at Lisawn, near Grange, Youghal, a car carrying 3 British Officers was attacked. One of the officers was wounded, and the other two put him back into the car, and beat a hasty retreat. An attack also took place on Ballinamult Police Barracks [about this time].

Tramore (Jan. 1921)

In January 1921 the West Waterford A.S.U. took part in the Tramore Ambush. This attack was planned on the same lines as the Piltown Ambush of the previous November, but was not so successful, because some of the Volunteers opened fire too soon on the leading enemy lorry, which was only a pilot one. This served as a warning to the main body of the enemy who were in about 6 lorries, which they left, and carried out flanking movements and surrounded some of the Volunteer positions, further back the road, where exchange of fire took place in which 2 Volunteers were killed and several wounded. The main body of the enemy never got up to the barrier where the West Waterford Column was situated and they had to be satisfied by a few bursts of fire on the leading tender, the occupants of which got [out] and ran back to the main body.

Kilmanahan

Some members of the A.S.U. while they were in the Nire area and with the help of Volunteers from the local Company attacked Kilmanahan Police Barracks on the number of occasions during the months of January and February, 1921, and eventually it was evacuated. In March, the Marines were sniped at Curragh, Ardmore.

Durrow (3 March 1921)

The Assises opened in Waterford on 3rd March 1921, and it was decided to hold up the early morning train from Dungarvan to Waterford in order to prevent Jurors from attending the Court, and also to draw out the enemy into an ambush.

The A.S.U. were operating in the 2nd Battalion area (Killrossanty/Stradbally) at the time, and they, with all available local Volunteers were mobilised near Durrow Railway Station. The train conveying the Jurors arrived at Durrow Station and was allowed to proceed. About a half mile further along the line, it was held up and the Jurors taken off. Some time afterwards a Volunteer approached the Stationmaster and ordered him to send a message calling out the military, that the train had been held up. The A.S.U. and Volunteers then took up their positions at Ballyvoile, which is on the Dungarvan side of Durrow Station. They were anticipating that the military would arrive by the Coast Road from Dungarvan. At 11.30 a.m. a train carrying enemy troops arrived from Fermoy, and fire was opened on them, which they returned. The train carried on and stopped at Durrow Station. The Volunteers now moved into open country, and followed the train to Durrow. In the meantime 4 lorries of enemy did come via the Coast Road and also went on to Durrow. They joined up with the Fermoy Troops and moved out from the station in search parties, but were met with sharp rifle fire which

drove them back to the station. From there they sent out messages for reinforcements and afterwards about 150 military came by train from Waterford. By now the enemy had about 300 men in action, well equipped with modern arms and machine guns. Firing continued throughout the day, during which the enemy attempted a few sorties, but were repulsed on every occasion, and were forced to remain in their positions. Due to shortage of ammunition, the Volunteers withdrew under cover of darkness, having suffered no casualties, while two of the enemy were killed and several wounded.

Burgery (19 March 1921)

A fortnight after Durrow, the Burgery Ambush took place on 19th March 1921. It is very difficult to describe this as an "ambush" in the strict sense of the word, as there were several smaller engagements within the main attack, and furthermore the main attack did not take place at the position planned, but was just a hurried interception of British Forces, and shortly beforehand the Volunteers did not know that there was going to be a fight.

In order to interrupt communications between Cloncoskerine (which was a military post) and Dungarvan, it was decided to demolish Tarr's Bridge by the Abbeyside and Dungarvan Companies on the night of 18th March.

The A.S.U. were to act as protection party for demolition squad. Earlier that night 5 members of the A.S.U. had gone to Dungarvan to attack an R.I.C. patrol, which they did, and after an exchange of shots, they withdrew, and rejoined the main body of the A.S.U. at Ballycoe as previously [arranged]. While they were [discussing] there, about the demolition, motors were heard and their lights seen coming from Dungarvan and going in the direction of Cloncoskerine. This was about 11.30 p.m. It was learned afterwards that there was a hostage in a lorry and that they were going, not to Cloncoskerine, but to Garranbane, where they arrested a Volunteer. With the A.S.U. at Ballycoe, were the demolition party from local companies, armed with pickaxes, crowbars etc.

When the enemy lorries were observed going towards Cloncoskerine a hurried consultation took place between the officer at Ballycoe Cross, and as it was nearly always the custom of the enemy not to return by the same route which they had taken going out, it was thought that the enemy would return by Ballycoe, and for this reason it was decided to place some of the A.S.U. on the road at the Burgery, and the remainder took up position on the Military road at Ballycoe. At about 2.30 a.m. on the morning of 19th, the enemy [20 men, 1 officer] party which consisted of a Crossley tender and a motor car were returning, it was seen, that on arriving at Tarr's Bridge they took the main road into Dungarvan. The Volunteers at Ballycoe proceeded with all haste to join their comrades at the main road at the Burgery. Before they reached them, fire had been opened on the leading car by the party already in position, while some of those who came from Ballycoe attacked the lorry, others rushed to the attack of those in the car. The car had proceeded after being attacked a short distance towards Dungarvan, and then stopped, the occupants got out, and returned to the assistance of those in the lorry. Fighting took place on the main road, and the enemy retreated and then ran pursued by some of the Volunteers and

were caught after a short chase. Among those captured was o/c enemy troops in Dungarvan – Captain Thomas and also an R.I.C. Sargent named Hickey, who had been acting as a guide, as well as some private soldiers.

Hickey was afterwards shot, as he had been warned on a number of occasions previously to refrain from certain activities and he had failed to do so.

Meanwhile the enemy in the Crossly lorry had given up the fight and had retreated across the fields, leaving behind them, their lorry and some equipment. The lorry and the car were then destroyed.

Seanacawl

While all this was going on an old itinerant flute player called "Seanacawl" wandered on to the scene. He was told to get out of the way, which he did. When the Volunteers regrouped at about dawn at Kilgobinet, who should show up again but "Seanacawl". Again he was advised to move on quickly and obliged.

Commandant Plunkett, who was with the Column remarked: "Well, one thing he can say is that he saw the English running from the Irish".

At Kilgobinet it was decided to send back a number of Volunteers to the scene of the ambush, to collect any arms, ammunition or equipment left behind in the darkness during the fight of the night. They proceeded across country, and were approaching the Burgery, when fire was opened on them by an enemy party that had come to try to retrieve what was left of their transport. The Volunteers were now in an open field without any cover, whereas the enemy were lined on the road firing from the cover of the fence. The Volunteers returned the fire and a sharp fight took place, until eventually the enemy retreated back to town. During the fighting Sean Fitzgerald, Captain of Killrosanty Company was killed, and Pat Keating of the Comeragh was wounded. When Keating was hit, George Plunkett left his position while still under heavy fire and carried Keating to some cover. It is interesting to note here that Plunkett did a similar brave act, when, during Easter Week, 1916 he dashed out of the G.P.O. and went to the assistance of a British officer, wounded during the fighting. Their first concern now was to have Pat Keating attended to, and this was done by two ladies of Cumann na Mban. He was taken to Monarud, where he received medical aid from Dr. Hackett of Dungarvan, but Pat Keating died later that evening at about 5 p.m.

Considerable enemy reinforcements now arrived from Waterford City, with armoured cars and lorries, and carried out widespread searches in the district, but by then the Volunteers had gone to the safety of the Comeragh Mountains.

Sean Fitzgerald's Funeral

The funeral of Sean Fitzgerald took place from Dungarvan to Kilrossanty, and beforehand the British issued an order that only 20 people would be allowed to follow the remains, and the military, with fixed bayonets, were there to see that the order was adhered to. The people however, defied the rule and a large number walked in the cortege as it left Dungarvan for Kilrossanty.

Grawn Ambush

Pat Keating had to be temporarily and secretly buried as the authorities were offering a large reward for his body. Later it was decided to re-intern him with his dead comrade, Sean Fitzgerald at Kilrossanty. This had to be a secret operation, and took place to Kilrossanty on 19th May, 1921. Information was given to the British and many of the [burial party] including [some] member of Cumann na Mban were ambushed at Grawn, on their way back from Kilrossanty. The enemy party numbered about 50, and the Volunteers were completely surprised and surrounded. Many of them were captured and [later] sentenced by Court Martial to long terms of imprisonment. (Grawn is a colloquial name for Garranmillon - Editor's note -).

Ballylynch (29th April 1921)

On the 29th April 1921, two members of A.S.U. were returning from East Waterford, when they received information that a train load of troops would be travelling on the 11 a.m. train from Waterford to Fermoy. They decided to have a crack at this train and mobilised as many of the local Company Volunteers as quickly as they could. They took up their positions near the Railway line at Ballyvoile. When the train approached rapid fire was opened, but the train passed through without stopping. It was usual for this party of military to return with their supplies on the 4.30 p.m. train of that day. It was decided to wait in ambush for this train to return with their supplies at Ballylynch level crossing. In the meantime some more members of the local Company had reported for duty. The Crossing Gates were closed and a red flag placed on it. The men lay concealed on either side of the embankment. When the train came to the gates it stopped, and this was the signal for the Volunteers to open fire. A fierce burst of rifle and shotgun fire surprised the enemy. They returned the fire with rifles and machine guns. Two of the enemy were killed and six wounded. A man who had been ploughing in a field nearby, when he heard the shots, left his horses and moved nearer the scene of the fight. On his way down he came across a Volunteer who had been wounded in the neck, and he was, but his own brother. He [hurriedly] attended the wounded man, and then took up his brother's rifle and continued to fight. Firing lasted for about an hour, and then the Volunteers withdrew due to lack of ammunition.

Villierstown

The usual attacks and snipings continued all over the county. In the month of May in Villierstown two lorries of Black and Tans were attacked in Dromana Estate as they proceeded from Cappoquin to Villierstown. The Volunteers positioned themselves on the hill overlooking the road, and attacked for about half an hour with rifle fire at about 200 yards range. No casualties were reported.

Another attack took place on the military at Windgap, on the sweep near Dungarvan. Some civilians got into the line of fire, the attackers had to withdraw. From May to the Truce in July the Marines in Ardmore were being continuously sniped.

As a result of a raid on the mails, another engagement took place at Piltown. The Ardmore Marines surrounded the area, and opened fire on a party of Volunteers who were in the district at

the time. Volunteer Quaine from the Youghal Company was killed. The fight lasted about half an hour and the Marines moved on into Youghal. The Volunteers took up positions and waited for the Marines to return, but instead they (the Marines) returned by sea to Ardmore. Sometime afterwards the Volunteers burned the Military Storehouses in Ardmore, and on at least two occasions, a British cruiser was sniped in the Bay.

Cappagh (June 1921)

In June 1921, information was received that a train load of military would be travelling from Fermoy to Waterford on a certain day. It was decided to ambush this train at Cappagh, and for this purpose the A.S.U. and local Volunteers were brought into position. It was intended to remove some of the rails, but a Pilot Engine came earlier and this prevented the operation. When the Engine had passed the Crossing Gates and signals were put against the oncoming train. It slowed down as it approached the closed gates, and the Volunteers immediately opened fire on the two coaches which contained about 100 military. Some of the military got on to the engine and compelled the driver to crash through the gates and continued on it's way.

Ballyvoile (6th June 1921)

On the 6th June 1921, a military cycling column of about 30 men were ambushed at Ballyvoile. Tom Keating of Comeragh, a brother of Pat's who was killed at the Burgery was in charge of the ambushing party. It was first decided that the enemy should be attacked at Kilminion, near Stradbally, where the County Council quarry now operates. They lay in waiting for a time, but then received word that the British were returning by the lower Coast Road. The Volunteer party hurriedly made their way across country and had just reached Ballyvoile, when a volley of shots rang out. Evidently the military had seen them moving into position. Two of the soldiers moved into higher ground and opened fire again, and this time, Jack Cummins of Stradbally was shot just as he was getting over a barbed wire fence. The Volunteers returned the fire forcing the military to take cover. The fight lasted about half an hour and then the Volunteers had to withdraw due to lack of ammunition. A plaque to the memory of Jack Cummins can be seen at Ballyvoile.

Kilgobinet (9th July 1921)

On the 9th July, two days before the Truce, a very unfortunate incident took place at Kilgobinet. This is called the "Kilgobinet Booby Trap". As I've mentioned earlier, a very necessary operation at the time was to erect road blockages and trenches at different points, in order to impede the movements of the enemy throughout the countryside. One of these trenches had just been opened at Kilgobinet, on the road leading up to the local church, but the Volunteers had to partly fill it in again to allow a funeral to pass over. While the funeral had gone on to the Church, a party of military came on the trench and carefully hid some land mines in it. Later when members of the Colligan Company I.R.A came to reopen the trench, they disturbed the mines, which exploded, killing six and wounding several others.

Arms Landings "Anita"

You will have noticed in many of the engagements with the enemy, the Volunteers had to withdraw due to lack of ammunition, or weapons. At all times they sought to improve their supplies by raiding Barracks, holding up and disarming patrols and any other method by which they could obtain a rifle or a few rounds of ammunition. General Head Quarters were endeavouring to improve arms and ammunitions, but often their plans were upset by political changes in European countries where they were hoping to get supplies. For instance in Genoa before Christmas 1920, 60 tons of arms and munitions were purchased for this country, but the deal fell through due to a change in the political situation there. Efforts were then concentrated on Germany, our old ally, and everything was in readiness for a major arms landing on the Waterford Coast, early in 1921. Whether due to the British Intelligence System, or some other spies, the boat called the "Anita" loaded with arms and ammunition was [discovered] and confiscated by the [allies]. Reparations Committee, and [our] G.H.Q. agent, Captain Charlie McGuinness was arrested. He was charged before a court, but luckily through the officer of some Germans, who [naturally] were not in love with England, influence was brought to bear, and the Judge left McGuinness off with a very small fine. This landing was to take place on April, 1921. The incident had the effect of drawing the attention of some friendly Germans to our quest for arms, and they proceeded to try to secure another boat, and get more arms and ammunition. This was not an easy matter, because the Allies Reparation Commission, were closing down and smashing all munition factories in Germany. Still there were some secret caches of arms in the country, and it was hoped to get at some of these, but by this time the Truce had come to Ireland, on 11th July 1921. However, the preparations still went on for an arms landing on the Waterford Coast. Great secrecy had to be observed about our plans because the British Navy were constantly on the alert for any attempt at landing arms.

Cheekpoint "Frieda"

Captain McGuinness in a light tug boat called the "Frieda" with a German crew on board succeeded in dodging the Navy, and land his cargo of arms which consisted of Mauser Rifles, and Peter the Painter, at Cheekpoint, in Waterford Harbour, and from there they were transported to the Comeraghs where arrangements had been made to store them. They were later transferred to Midland and Northern areas selected by G. H. Q. The "Frieda" was sold by Liam Mellows and Captain McGuinness to a Captain Collins of Cork, who used her for ferrying coal. With the money obtained in this transaction, McGuinness returned to Germany and purchased the schooner "Hannah" which had an auxiliary motor engine. She was loaded with arms and ammunition, and carried barrels of cement, as ballast, and a decoy cargo. Ballinagoul was the chosen spot for the landing. Scouting parties, observation posts, and all detailed preparations were again made. Reception Boats, landing parties, transport lorries, were organised. [Different languages on the pier - Irish, English, German, Danish]. Strict secrecy was observed to counteract the vigilance of the British Navy, but the "Hannah" arrived on schedule, and met by the fishing boats, and berthed

at Ballingoul. The cargo was unloaded in record time and transferred to the waiting lorries. Dick Barrett (who was executed on 8th December 1922) was on the pier as representative of 1st Southern Division, and saw that everything went according to plan. The whole job was completed without a hitch in a few hours, and the largest single shipment of arms and ammunition ever to reach the Irish Republican Army was efficiently completed. Those arms were later transferred to Birr, Co. Offaly, where they were taken over by General Head Quarters.

Civil War

Shortly after what is called the Civil War broke out, and during the period of 1921-23 the Comeraghs and Nire Valley, were very busy areas.

Bill Lennon Rescue (23 April 1922)

During the Civil War, Bill Lennon of Clashmore was wounded and captured by Free State soldiers. He was placed in Dungarvan Hospital to receive medical treatment, and two armed guards were put on the entrance to the ward. To complicate matters still more, an officer of the enemy was at the time a patient in that particular ward, and furthermore a large number of troops occupied a portion of the Hospital Buildings. These had easy access to the grounds of the Hospital proper by means of a doorway in the high wall which divided that section from the Hospital. Another high wall surrounds all part of the Hospital. It was decided to rescue him (Lennon) as soon as possible, because if he became well enough, he would be removed to more secure quarters.

The local Volunteers succeeded in gaining the sympathy and promise of aid from the nurse in charge of the Ward where Lennon lay. On the appointed night 6 members of the A.S.U. made their way to the vicinity of the Hospital where they were joined by some of the town Volunteers. The plans were outlined and 5 men took up their positions in the field opposite the main entrance. A ladder was placed against the high wall, from the roadside, and two men quickly mounted it, taking with them a second ladder. They used this second ladder to descend on the inside of the wall. They made their way quietly, to the doorway in the dividing wall. Two more men quickly climbed the ladders again, but this time when they got to the ground they took the second ladder, and ran about 20 yards with it and placed it against the window sill of the ward to be entered. All had gone according to plan so far. The nurse, in the meantime had given a sedative to the guards on duty and also to the officer in the ward. The Volunteer now climbed up and entered through the window which had been unfastened by the nurse. Lennon had been previously acquainted of all the plans and was ready. He was helped to the window by his rescuer and nurse. The Volunteer got out on the ladder, took Lennon on his shoulders and climbed to the ground. They now moved to the outer wall, but here the Volunteer experienced some difficulty in climbing the ladder with Lennon on his shoulders. Finally it was accomplished and they safely descended to the ground on the outside. The Volunteers who had remained on watch on the inside now climbed out, and the party withdrew to freedom. So ended an adventure, which was in keeping with the spirit of

chivalry and comradeship which was a marked characteristic of the I.R.A.

De Valera and the Republican Executive were visitors to the Nire and Sliabh gCua, and it was from there that [meetings of the Republican Government were held]. The ceasefire order was drafted and [later] issued from Dublin.

Such was West Waterford's part in the struggle for National Freedom. As you can understand, I have not mentioned every incident which took place, but all were equal importance in the overall campaign. The destruction of Income Tax Records, the setting up of the Republican Courts, the major and minor ambushes, the sniping parties and raids on mails, were all part of the general picture, and all served the one main purpose.

Billeting, Feeding, Shelter

Things like the billeting and feeding and sheltering of the Volunteers were of major importance, and those to whom I spoke were very emphatic that but for all the help and assistance they got from the "plain people" they would not have been able to carry on the fight.

One of the difficulties I was faced with in compiling the material for this lecture, was in getting members of the West Waterford Brigade to talk about their activities. Situated as they were at the time, it was difficult for them to keep records of any description, as they were subject to raids and searches, and as a result they did not commit much to paper. Some other areas seemed to have been fortunate in having amongst it's Volunteers personnel, someone of literary turn, who was able to write up the various things that happened and put them down on record. We were not so lucky.

Those [to] whom I have been speaking to and endeavouring [to get some information from, all feel that the task which they set out to accomplish was not finished and now we've got something short of what they wished to achieve.

There is a spirit abroad today, which is not helping to realise their objective. We have local councils objecting to the putting up of road signs in Irish, we have the banning of our National Songs and Ballads, vicious attacks on our National Language, Games and culture, and the most potent means of propaganda – T.V. being used for everything anti-Irish, and against the Irish way of life.

If these represent the National feelings of the present time, it must be something like the feeling which permeated the country before the Rising, and prompts one to ask? – Will history have to repeat itself? If it does, let us hope that we will be spared the confusion of countermanding orders!!]

[Domhnall O Faolain
Dun Na Mainistreach
Aibrain 1966]

