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My part in the War of Independence

By Paddy Kinane*

Part I

I was born in the year 1892 at Finnahy near Upperchurch in the County Tipperary. My father was a staunch follower and a supporter of Charles Stewart Parnell, and in my early years he was interested in the Sinn Féin movement, then in its infancy. Papers and periodicals such as *Scissors and Paste* and *The Irish Peasant* came regularly through the post to my father and, through reading these papers and books like *Speeches From The Dock*, I cultivated an interest in Irish history and Irish affairs.

After Mass on a Sunday in July 1914 a public meeting was held in Upperchurch at which a company of Irish Volunteers was formed. I cannot now recall who the speakers at the meeting were, nor can I recall the names of the officers of the company when it was formed, but I was one of at least 100 men and boys who joined it that day. On going home and relating to my father what had occurred, he warned me to be careful about the organisations which I joined, for at the time he was very distrustful of any movement with which the late John E. Redmond, then leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, was associated.

I attended the parades of the company, which were held at the creamery in Upperchurch. We had no arms, but we learned a fair share of drill, our instructor being a returned Australian named William Dwyer. The company was not long in existence when, with companies from other parishes, it took part in a massed parade of Volunteers which was held on a Sunday in Borrisoleigh. Colonel Maurice Moore, then a member of the Volunteer Executive, addressed this massed parade. A similar parade took place at Barnane, near the Devil's Bit, soon afterwards. I cannot remember the name of the principal speaker at Barnane, but my recollection is that neither he nor Colonel Moore, at Borrisoleigh, gave any hint that all was not well within the movement, nor of the pending split in the Volunteers which took place soon afterwards.

So far as we in Upperchurch were concerned, the split in the Volunteer movement did not affect us, for the simple reason that the company flopped suddenly, and parades and drilling ceased. Although there was a branch of the Ancient Order of Hibernians in the district, no attempt was made to organise Redmond's Volunteers. On the other hand, no one came our way to organise the Irish Volunteers. This, I think, was a great pity, for there were many good genuine lads in the area who would have been glad to enrol in the latter organisation. My father continued to receive publications of a nationalist or Irish-Ireland nature, and through them I kept in touch with the progress of the Irish Volunteer and Sinn Féin movements.

On March 4, 1916, a big *céilidhe*, to which I received an invitation from Patrick (Packy) Ryan of Kilcommon, was held in Doon. This *céilidhe* was organised on an extensive scale, and it was attended by many of the "brass hats" of the Irish Volunteer movement, including Ernest Blythe, Eamon O'Dwyer of Ballagh, Seumas O'Neill, then a professor in Rockwell College, Michael

*For Kinane's later career in politics, see articles in *Tipperary Historical Journal* 1992 & 1993 on *Clann na Poblachta* by Patrick D. O'Keefe - Editor.



Sheehan of Dundrum, and Seán Ó Muirthile. I was introduced to most, if not all, of those men during the night; but, as far as I can now recall, no approach was then made to me or to others present to become members of the Volunteers.

On the Tuesday morning of Easter Week 1916, someone (who I do not remember) called to our house with the news that the Rising had started in Dublin on the previous day. I went at once to Annefield, where I knew there was a small company of Irish Volunteers under the leadership of Eddie Meagher of Annefield. He was later ordained to the priesthood, and died in the U.S.A.

On my arrival I found Eddie Hayes, Michael Cahill and three or four men of the Butler family assembled with the Meagher family at Meagher's house. They were aware that the Rising had started in Dublin, but they had received no orders as to what they themselves should do. I had no arms, but some single-barrel shotguns and heavy shotgun ammunition were available at Meagher's.

Towards evening Eamon O'Dwyer, who was then the County Centre of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, called to Meagher's. He said he was on his way to Limerick to make some contacts, and to see what could be done to get the Volunteers in Counties Limerick and Tipperary to join in, and to play their part in the Rising. Before leaving, he instructed Eddie Meagher to mobilise the whole company and to demolish Knock No. 7 railway bridge, so as to impede railway communications.

It was the following day by the time the whole company was mobilised, living as they did over a scattered area, and, with what tools we could procure, it would have taken us six months to destroy that bridge! Without a good supply of explosives it was impossible to demolish it, so we contented ourselves by cutting the telegraph wires. On the understanding that they would be available for mobilisation at a moment's notice, most of the men were then permitted to return to their homes and to their work.

With a few others I remained on for about a week at Annefield, to await the return of, or instructions from, Eamon O'Dwyer; but the next we heard of him was that he had been captured by the RIC near Killenaule on his way to Dublin. We then disbanded, and I returned home.

Soon after the Rising Seán Broderick of Galway, accompanied by a priest (whose name was, I think, Father Freeney) came to our neighbourhood. They were both on the run, and they stayed at Stapleton's of Finnahy. The reason they came to our district was that Broderick was acquainted with a Galway lady, a Miss Walsh, who later became Mrs. Seumas Malone and was then a teacher in Drombane.

I cannot say how long the priest remained, but Broderick stayed until August 15 1916, when, with Jack and Eddie Meagher of Annefield, I accompanied him to Dublin. I parted from him at Twomey's of Little Denmark Street, after we had eluded a Dublin detective who, Broderick noticed, was following us in O'Connell Street.

About this time I was charged with not having a light on my bicycle at night. I did not attend the court, and I was fined 2s 6d (12½p)! As a gesture against English law in this country, and perhaps with the intention of giving the RIC all the trouble I could, I refused to pay the fine. This resulted in my arrest and serving a term of seven days' imprisonment in Limerick prison.

Very early in 1917 – I would say almost immediately after his release from Reading prison – Eamon O'Dwyer swore me into the IRB at his home in Ballagh, where I attended some meetings of the IRB. He gave me authority to swear in others, and I got a number of carefully picked men to join the Brotherhood.

The next move took place in February 1917, when a branch of the Gaelic League was formed in Upperchurch. The prime mover behind the formation of the branch was also Eamon O'Dwyer. Seumas Malone and his brother Tom came to Upperchurch as Irish teachers, and classes were



also held in Rossmore, Drombane, The Ragg and Ballagh. Soon afterwards Sinn Féin clubs were formed in the same areas.

Some months later a company of Irish Volunteers was organised which became known as the Upperchurch company, or the Upperchurch Volunteers. The nucleus of a company was there through the men who had been sworn into the IRB and through the Gaelic League branch and the Sinn Féin club. I was the first captain of this company; the other officers were James Larkin and the late James Stapleton. The strength of the company was about 35 or 40 men. No arms were than available, but we held regular parades and practised foot drill.

A raid on Molloy's hardware shop in Thurles for explosives and arms took place near midnight on 15 August 1917. The plans for the raid were made by the Thurles Volunteers, and I was one of those selected to assist in carrying out the job. Others present that night included Ned O'Reilly, then of Rossmore and now of Cashel, Jack Meagher of Annefield and Jimmy Leahy, later O/C of Tipperary No. 2 brigade. Admission to the premises was gained with the assistance of a Volunteer who was an assistant in Molloy's shop.

The keys of the magazine were easily secured, and we carried away a large quantity of gelignite, well over a hundredweight, a number of shotguns and a substantial quantity of shotgun ammunition. We had to carry our booty to the railway bridge near the sportsfield, where we loaded it on to a waiting horse-and-cart. All the stuff was taken that night to Meagher's of Annefield. Later the gelignite was brought to my area and, during the conscription crisis period, we transferred some of it to the South Tipperary brigade.

About this time too a British soldier, a native of Kilcommon, came home on leave, bringing (as was the practice at the time) his rifle with him. I had intended holding him up to take the rifle before he reached his home, but missed him. A few nights later three of us (James Larkin, Michael Ryan and myself) raided his house and got the rifle. With the exception of a revolver or two which I had got earlier, this rifle was our first piece of armament for the company. We were assisted in the raid by two other Volunteers, Jeremiah Ryan and Richard Fitzgerald.

The work of organising Volunteer companies continued during the year 1917, and companies were formed at Drombane, Borrisoleigh, The Ragg and Ballycahill. These four companies, with the Upperchurch company, were formed into the 3rd battalion of the 2nd (or Mid) Tipperary brigade. To the best of my recollection, this battalion was formed early in 1918.

The battalion staff elected at the time were:-

Battalion Commandant	- Patrick Kinane (myself)
Battalion Vice Commandant	- James Stapleton, Finnerahy
Battalion Adjutant	- Sean Dunne, Drombane
Battalion Quartermaster	- John Fahy, Upperchurch.

In 1921 James Stapleton went to the brigade staff and was succeeded by John Fahy, the Quartermaster, as battalion vice commandant. Thomas Gleeson of Gaile, Cashel, then acted as quartermaster; he was succeeded by John Meagher of Annefield, who held the position of battalion quartermaster for some time before the Truce in 1921.

After the establishment of the battalion a further company was formed at Milestone, and when the battalion was finally organised, the companies forming it and their O/Cs were as follows:

A Company	- Drombane	- Captain Thomas Ryan
B Company	- Upperchurch	- Captain Thomas Kennedy (later Thomas Stapleton)
C Company	- Borrisoleigh	- Captain Michael Small (later Thomas Kirwan)
D Company	- The Ragg	- Captain Michael Ryan
E Company	- Ballycahill	- Captain Philip Purcell
F Company	- Milestone	- Captain Thomas Carr



Two further battalions, organised from the companies in the Thurles and Templemore areas, were similarly established. The three battalions were formed into a brigade, which became known as the 2nd or Mid Tipperary Brigade. James Leahy, then of Thurles, was appointed Brigade Commandant. At the same time, units of *Cumann na mBan* were organised in the areas, and thus we were well organised when the country faced the conscription threat in the late spring and early summer of 1918.

As happened generally in most areas, our ranks were swollen with new recruits when the British Government expressed their determination to extend conscription to Ireland. Drilling and training were intensified and anti-conscription meetings were held. Arms, principally shotguns, were collected from the owners who, as a rule, parted with them without much fuss, but, in the case of a few of the larger land-owners or so-called gentry, it was necessary to raid the houses and seize the guns.

Generally speaking, there was an air of independence and defiance of the British Government, but, when the threat of conscription passed in the autumn of 1918 this spirit waned. Many of those who had then joined the Volunteers left, and by the end of that year we found ourselves back again to the position we were formerly in, regarding strength of numbers and personnel.

Our activities in the early months of 1919 centred chiefly on Gaelic League work, holding of *aeríocht*, training and organising the Volunteer companies, circulating *An tÓglach*, and procuring arms and ammunition whenever possible. Due to raids by the RIC on my home I found it necessary to go on the run in the summer of 1919. From then until 1924 I rarely, if ever, slept at home.

On June 23, 1919, District Inspector Hunt of the RIC was shot dead in Thurles. He had been stationed in Thurles for some years prior to his death, and his unscrupulous and aggressive tactics towards members of the Volunteer and Sinn Féin movements caused much concern to the brigade and battalion officers. When the decision to shoot him was made, it was considered that a suitable opportunity to do so might present itself during the race-meeting on June 23.

I was present on the racecourse that day with James Leahy (the brigade O/C), James Stapleton, James Murphy and two other Volunteers whose names I cannot now recall. After we had trailed Hunt around for some time, it became evident that the job could not be done inside the racing enclosure with any prospect of getting safely away. It was then decided to make the attempt when the races were over.

It was expected that he would return on foot, accompanied by some RIC men. I moved down towards Liberty Square, where a couple of ladies of my acquaintance engaged me in conversation. One of them was actually taunting me about the way we were letting Hunt get away with his villainy when, about 40 yards away from where we were standing, the shots rang out which brought Hunt's career to a close.



Paddy Kinane outside Leinster House after his victory in the 1947 by-election – the first Clann na Poblachta TD.



During 1919 too I had some visits from Sean Treacy, Seumas Robinson, Dan Breen and Sean Hogan when they were eluding pursuit by the RIC after the ambush at Soloheadbeg. They rarely remained more than a few days or a week at a time. We provided shelter, guards and guides for them.

The first operation carried out by the battalion as a unit was the attack on Drombane RIC barracks on January 18, 1920. Holycross RIC barracks was attacked by units of the 1st battalion that same night. Drombane was in my battalion area, and the plans for the attack were prepared by Jim Stapleton, the Battalion Vice Commandant, Sean Dunne, the Battalion Adjutant, and myself.

The barracks itself was a one-storied building, originally used a concert and dance hall, which had been taken over the RIC for use as a barracks. Our original idea was to hold the garrison within the barracks with rifle and shotgun fire, and to force them to surrender by setting fire to the roof. Later we were advised that a more effective way of capturing the barracks would be to blow in the gable end wall with a charge of the gelignite which had been taken in the raid on Molloy's, two years before. The latter plan was decided on.

Paddy O'Dwyer and Jim O'Gorman, both officers of the Hollyford company of the 3rd battalion, South Tipperary brigade, came to assist us, and, under Jim O'Gorman's direction, the charge of gelignite was prepared in the house I now reside in in Upperchurch. Selected men from the Upperchurch and Drombane companies were chosen to take part in the attack, and units from the other companies were put on outpost duty on the roads leading to the village. Our arms consisted principally of shotguns, with a few rifles, and either two or three service rifles.

When we got to the assembly point near Drombane, some of the local Volunteers reported that two or three numbers of the RIC garrison were gone out on patrol. A small party of our men in charge of the battalion adjutant followed the patrol, captured the two or three RIC men, and held them prisoners while the attack was on.

We experienced no difficulty in surrounding the barracks, or in placing the charge of gelignite against the gable wall. Everything so far was done without a sound. Our first reverse came with the explosion of the gelignite. It failed to breach or destroy the gable wall, but split it to such an extent that, through the cracked wall, we could see the light inside the barracks. We felt so confident that the gelignite would demolish the wall and make easy our task of capturing the barracks that we had abandoned the idea of setting it on fire, and had no materials with us to put this alternative plan into operation.

It was, however, then too late for regrets, and after a short exchange of fire and after the RIC had fired several Verey lights for assistance, it was decided to call off the attack. In addition to the patrol, another RIC man was captured on his way back to the barracks, just before the explosion took place. He was unarmed; we kept him a prisoner until about an hour after the abandonment, when we left him in a farmer's hay barn about a mile from Drombane.

At that time, although brigade and battalion areas were well defined, men did not always confine their activities to their own areas. Men invited to assist in an attack on an enemy post or in an ambush in another area did not hesitate to go. This was easily understandable and was not discouraged.

During those years there was at least as much, if not more, co-operation between my battalion, the 3rd battalion of the South Tipperary brigade, the 6th battalion of the North Tipperary brigade, and the Doon battalion of the East Limerick brigade, than with the other two battalions of the Mid Tipperary brigade. Our four areas bordered on each other, and comprised hilly district on the borders of counties Tipperary and Limerick.

Thus it was that, when Yank McCarthy, commandant of the Doon battalion, decided to attack the RIC barracks in Doon, he invited Jim Stapleton, James Larkin, myself and some others from the



Upperchurch area to assist him. This attack took place on the night of March 7, 1920. The plans were more or less on a par with those which I have mentioned in connection with the attack on Drombane – the main idea being to breach the gable wall of the barracks with charges of gelignite.

But on this occasion the gelignite was placed between the wall and planks, buttressed to the ground. Tadhg O'Dwyer, Ned O'Reilly and Jim O'Gorman of the 3rd battalion, South Tipperary brigade, had made successful experiments with gelignite on those lines, and had come to Doon to try it out for the first time that night, in an actual attack on a barracks.

My position that night was at the front of the barracks, with a small party of riflemen and shotgun men. Our instructions were to open fire on the barracks immediately the gelignite exploded. It was snowing heavily, and as far as I am aware, the explosives party had no difficulty in getting the explosives to the gable wall and fixing the charges. Again, the gelignite let us down; instead of breaching the wall as we expected, the explosions just simply blew the planks away.

It is my opinion that the planks were not sufficiently staunch with supports. The work of fixing the charges had to be done silently and hurriedly without attracting the attention of the garrison within the barracks. The failure to breach the wall practically ended this attack at Doon. The barracks was a strong stone building, and we had only fired a few shots each when the signal to withdraw was given.

The next incident I can recall was an attack on Cappawhite RIC barracks which took place sometime after that at Doon. Cappawhite was also in the East Limerick brigade area. I am not altogether familiar with the plans of this attack, but remember that an attempt was made to set the barrack roof on fire. Jim Stapleton, Tom Stapleton and Martin Ryan accompanied me to Cappawhite, and our position was in a house opposite the barracks. Another I remember as being there was Jim O'Gorman of the South Tipperary brigade.

There was some delay in getting started, and the attack was on for quite a time before the efforts to set the roof on fire showed any signs of being successful. The fire was, in fact, only getting a grip when the attack was called off, as information was received that British reinforcements were on their way from Tipperary town. From Cappawhite we brought a wounded Volunteer to Hollyford, where he received medical assistance. He was wounded in the leg, and he had lost a lot of blood.

Dr. Power of Borrisoleigh was sent for and, after attending to him, he conveyed the wounded man safely to Thurles hospital. Thinking further back over the events, I now remember that this attack on Cappawhite RIC barracks did not take place until June 4, 1920. It occurred on the same night as Drangan barracks was attacked and captured by the 3rd Tipperary brigade.

On March 4 1920, Jim Stapleton, Jim Larkin and Pat O'Brien entered Fanning's (now Ryan's) public house at The Ragg, to disarm two RIC men who were inside. They were sitting on the counter and, when ordered to put up their hands, one of them did so; but the other got inside the counter. There followed an exchange of shots between this man and Larkin, in which the RIC man was shot dead. Due to faulty ammunition, Stapleton's and O'Brien's guns failed to work that night.

Immediately following this incident Lieutenant Thomas O'Dwyer of the Ragg company was shot dead in his bed by RIC raiders. A Volunteer named McCarthy was shot dead in his home in Thurles on the same night. They were the first victims in this area of the RIC "murder gang".

On Sunday, June 7, 1920, there was an exchange of shots between some local Volunteers in Drombane and a British army officer who passed on a motor-cycle. Volunteer Thomas Brett was wounded in the firing, and he died from his wounds in the Mater Hospital, Dublin, on June 19, 1920. Around that time too, in the summer of 1920, two Volunteers of the Borrisoleigh company – Jim Russell and Martin O'Shea – while unarmed, captured and disarmed a Black and Tan in Borrisoleigh. A similar incident occurred about the same time at Milestone. There a few local



Volunteers, acting on their own initiative, captured and disarmed a Black and Tan who had ventured out about a mile from Shevry RIC barracks.

Towards the end of the June and early in July 1920 Volunteers were mobilised on two occasions to attack Shevry barracks. These were brigade jobs, and men from the 1st battalion with men from my own battalion, in addition to some men from the 3rd battalion, 3rd Tipperary Brigade, were assembled to carry out the task. I am not familiar with what plans were prepared to take the barracks, but as I distinctly remember that a supply of paraffin oil was brought along, I assume that the intention was to attempt to take it by setting it on fire.

There was, however, lack of detail in the planning, for when we arrived at the assembly point near Shevry, it was discovered that the house nearest to the barracks was across the road and too far away to be of any use to us as a point of attack. We also learned that the barracks had recently been fortified and loopholed, and we assumed that mines had been laid in the ground, close in to the barrack walls. It was then decided to abandon the attempt. That was on a Saturday night, possibly the last Saturday night of June, 1920.

On the following Saturday night, we again mobilised for a second attempt to attack this barracks. On this occasion the Brigade Commandant sent a party of men to erect a barricade on the Thurles-Shevry road, and to occupy an ambush position at the barricade. This party were instructed to engage any reinforcements for the RIC garrison that might be sent from Thurles.

We then proceeded to the assembly point, from where we could see the barracks. While there we saw a lorry-load of military and police arrive and enter the barracks. We waited all night for the lorry and its occupants to leave, but daylight came with no sign of its departure. We concluded that the British authorities in Thurles had got wind of the proposed attack, and that the lorry-load of troops and police had been sent out as reinforcements. We decided to withdraw, and the men disbanded in small groups.

Later we learned that this lorry and its escort were just calling to Shevry with supplies from Thurles. As they passed, they had been fired on by the men who had been detailed to block and hold the Thurles road and who, when the lorry came along, had not got the barricade erected. Some of the occupants of the lorry had been wounded, and apparently fearing to face the journey back in the night, the whole party had decided to remain in the shelter of the barracks until morning.

One of those with me that night at Shevry was Captain Michael Small of the Borrisoleigh company. He was anxious to get away to attend to the milking of cows and to go to early Mass in Borrisoleigh, so he left soon after the decision was made to call off the attack. He was carrying a Lee Enfield rifle, and he crossed the road, about a quarter-mile from the barracks, on the Thurles side. The lorry and its party left the barracks a little later; the lorry moving silently down the hill. The military and police in the lorry saw Small as he entered or crossed the field, opened fire on him and shot him dead. We heard the firing, but did not think that anything serious had happened, as it was a custom then for British forces to fire a few volleys when leaving a town or village.

The following day we received word that Small had not returned to his home. Later that day, hearing there was a dead man in Templemore military barracks, we sent some people there who identified the remains as those of Michael Small.

Two other men, Tom Stapleton and Ned Corbett, had a miraculous escape that morning. They had been with the party on the Thurles road all night and were cycling in to Shevry to find out what was happening, when they encountered the military lorry at the time the shots were fired at Mick Small. Discarding their bicycles, they took to the fields, and succeeded in escaping, although pursued and fired on by the police and military.

