

The Civil War in Galway

Part 4 of Nollaig O Gadhra's series to mark the 75th anniversary

THE WALDRON notes give a wonderful insight into the continuing "stand-off" situation that prevailed in Tuam as in other areas in the West of Ireland, during the summer months of July and August 1922, when historic moulds were being set.

These were the months when the Provisional Government, still unwilling to call the Provisional Parliament to which they said they were to be responsible (even after the "Pact" between DeValera and Collins had been dishonoured) pursued their main war effort against the South.

But other important legal moves were also afoot, though these probably went largely unnoticed down the country. For example, the Supreme Court of the Irish Republic which had functioned under Dáil Eireann law since 1920, in peace and war, and which could not, in theory, be dismissed without a solemn resolution of two thirds of the total membership of the Dáil, was now "suspended" by proclamation of "the Cabinet of An Dáil" even though, as we have seen, no Dáil of any sort sat during these months.

Two senior Republican TDs Cathal Brugha, Minister for Defence, (July 7th) and Harry Boland (August 2nd) died in this period. They were followed in August 1922 by two staunchly pro-Free State TDs, Arthur Griffith who died on August 12th and Michael Collins, shot in the Béal na mBláth ambush on August 22nd, 1922. Needless to say, these events shocked the nation, but no amount of spin-doctoring should hide the fact that the first two TDs to be shot were Republicans.

On July 20th, 1922 the Provisional Government revoked its stated intention to establish courts of law and equity and criminal jurisdiction and because of this, the Foreign Affairs Minister George Gavan Duffy, a distinguished lawyer, resigned in protest. Meanwhile, in places like Tuam the stand-off continued as is clear from the following factual reports and Waldron notes:

July 1st, 1922

Much uneasiness is felt through the country at the differences between the Pro- and Anti-Treaty followers. Many are hoping that better counsels would prevail. People generally await the outcome of the struggle with restrained anxiety and all are hoping that through mediation or some good counsel, peace may again be possible.

July 8th, 1922

Tuam, although completely in the hands of the Republican forces since the civil war began, was peaceful. To the credit of the local Commandment, be it said, order was well-kept and with the exception of one unfortunate *contretemps* there were no disturbances. Although goods were commandeered from several shops in town, receipts were given. Immediately there was sign of the railway closing down, a rush was made on the provision shops to procure supplies. Some not content with their supplies sought selfishly to capture more. This move was countered by Commandant Dunleavy who saw to it that supplies were evenly distributed and in one case a person seen carrying away two bags of flour was made to return one. A rumour went the rounds that the Barracks, and Cloonmore and Grange bridges were to be blown up, but there was no truth in the rumours.

The old RIC Barracks in Tuam were vacated during the week by its former occupants. The latter were followers of the anti-Treaty party and there were rumours around the town that the Free State Troops were coming along to take possession of the Workhouse soon, to use it as a Military Barracks.

July 15th, 1922

A sensation was caused in Tuam on Thursday when it was mooted that Brigade Officers and about 40 men of the 4th Western Division had resigned. No reasons were given for the resignations.

When the police vacated the local police barracks some months ago a local man, Commandant Dunleavy, was placed in charge there and had been Brigade Commandant for the district up to the unfortunate split in the army.

He and his staff officers joined the Republican forces and have since held the Tuam Barracks and calm and quietness have reigned over the area during their occupation. Commandant Dunleavy and his two brothers were on active service up to the truce in July last (1921).

July 29th, 1922

On the morning of July 25th the Free State Army

marched into Tuam and took over the Workhouse as their Military Barracks. It wasn't a pleasant morning to be on the road, as a matter of fact it was raining cats and dogs all night and the troops, 70 of them, were like drowned rats after marching all night. They had a hard time also removing the barricades they met with on the road.

The last of the English forces had left the Barracks about six months previously, they were the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. They had a jolly good time in Tuam, the only untoward incident during their stay was the execution of one of their privates for disposing of parts of a gun to a party in a Headford Pub. He was court-martialed in Headford and executed in England.

The forces on their departure from Tuam headed by their band marched around Ballymote, came down Bishop Street on the way to the station to entrain, and kept step to the tune "Marching Through Georgia."

Castlegrove House was burned down on July 25th, the residence of Mr. Tom Lewin. The I.R.A. were in occupation there after leaving Tuam Barracks. They have disclaimed responsibility for the burning and it is rumoured that the act was an agrarian affair.

An Interlude

We hear that Waterslade was the scene of great excitement on Tuesday evening when a young man was seen rushing over the bridge on Shop Street shouting "They're coming, they're coming! Hurrah!" The relief of Lucknow was nothing to it! Several of the inhabitants rushed out on the street, to see what it was all about, thinking the Free State Army, perhaps, had arrived, but they were evidently not in the know. The young man ran so recklessly that he ran over a poor man's ass tied to a telegraph pole at the corner and bumped straight into the "Mahdi" putting this six foot six and 20-stone body sprawling on the ground. Fortunately, the Mahdi's rotund body just rolled along the ground and saved him from serious injury. He had a few bruises all right, but when some Zam Buk was applied they all disappeared.

The man with the mutton head was the cause of it all. He could not retain himself anyhow when he realised that the "Brown Stuff" had arrived from Galway at last, the only road open for supplies. So when he saw the two cart loads coming down Shop Street he had to give vent to his feelings of gladness, because soon his thirst would be quenched. The Micawber of the gang was the only sensible man in the crowd that night. He recited the "Gander" in spirited style and everyone was so happy, forgetting the present troubles and of course the Mahdi forgot his ailments as well by the time he had let down two pints of his favourite Sarsparella. If the relief had not come so opportunely, there would have been many cases for the county home that evening.

August 1st, 1922

At 10 o'clock on Tuesday morning Quartermaster J.J. Coakley of the Free State forces in the Workhouse Tuam, whilst in Dempsey's Butcher Shop in High Street ordering supplies, was suddenly surrounded by armed men and told to put up his hands. He did not comply with the order and was knocked down, disarmed and placed in a waiting car on the street.

The car then proceeded at a hot pace through Belclare and Caherlistrane and on arriving at Mossfort it broke down. The captive and his guards then walked to Headford where they commandeered a lorry and drove to the ferry at Lough Corrib where a boat was procured. The captive and the six men crossed to the other side in the direction of Oughterard. After landing on the other side of the lake, they came to rest in a small village. Whilst the party were chatting near a farmhouse, one of the guards produced a bottle of poteen which Coakley was asked to share, but he declined. One of the men said "he could drink two bottles of the poteen without getting drunk". It was stated as a result of a bet made by Coakley that the man could not accomplish what he boasted he could, four bottles of poteen were produced and the six men proceeded to consume the contents.

The effort proved too much for them and after a brief period, we are told they departed to the land of Morpheus. In due course Coakley made his escape to Galway where he reported to the commanding officer of the Free State Barracks and was driven back to his headquarters in Tuam none the worse of his adventure.

Mr. Coakley was formerly an assistant in the establishment of Messrs M.S. Walsh & Sons of High

Street, Tuam.

He was active in the cause during the period of the Black and Tans and was arrested. Afterwards, when released, he went on the run.

A younger brother of his in Claremorris was accidentally shot whilst in the Barracks after the Treaty.

August 8th, 1922

The Pavilion of the Tuam Golf Club at Clooniascragh was burned on Tuesday night, August 8th, 1922. The burning was blamed on the Republicans but their O.C. Con Fogarty issued a notice to the effect that they were not responsible. Many of those burnings at this period had an agrarian purpose, not military.

Perhaps the largest raid made so far by the Republicans on the town of Tuam took place on Saturday night.

It was actually the first time that some members of both sides came to hand grips.

They appeared suddenly on the streets with rifles, searched a number of people and ordered them along with unarmed soldiers into the ruins of the burned Town Hall. A man named Pappy Whyte was driving a motor car down Vicar Street, when he was called upon to halt. Instead of doing so he put up speed even when shots were fired after him and escaped without injury. There were several Free State officers in the area dressed in civvies and on hearing the shots went to investigate. Two of them went in the direction of Canny's ruins and were immediately challenged to put their hands up. They refused to comply, there were three other men behind them with rifles so they were in a very dangerous situation. One of the officers made a grab for the rifle held by the man nearest to him. In the course of the struggle, a shot went off, grazing the officer's hand and a second shot passed by his chin but still the struggle went on between the two combatants, both being evenly matched. They next found themselves across the road at Stafford's (now Kilgariff's) hall door when the officer with great exertion pushed his assailant from him and getting inside the hallway pulled out his revolver and fired several shots onto the street. His attacker returned the fire, smashing Stafford's window, after which he retreated to join his comrades.

Whilst this was happening the other officer, taking advantage of the excitement caused by the noise of the shot, drew his revolver against the other assailant who, thinking he was being attacked from the rear, retreated and took cover successfully despite some shots being fired after him.

The officer then made for his barracks and secured extra men. Suspecting that some of the Republicans might be hiding in the Old Graveyard, the officer brought his men down High Street and shots were fired into it. There was no return fire so they continued their search around the Mall to Vicar Street. On coming to Whyte's corner they noticed a motor car without lights or occupants. They approached it cautiously and on searching it found inside a high explosive substance with a battery attached. Hearing footsteps they immediately took cover behind the car and noticed three men and rifles approaching. The officer called out "who goes there," and a voice replied "friend" and also gave his name (apparently the speaker was left to guard the car).

The officer answered "You are the man I want" at the same time firing his revolver. It suddenly dawned on the riflemen that they were conversing with soldiers of the Free State Army so they beat a hasty retreat. In the meantime, the soldiers drove the car to Walshe's yard nearby to recover it later.

In their raid on the town the Republicans kidnapped an armed Free State soldier and brought him along when they retreated. Apparently, when some distance from the town they received word that the troops were in pursuit of them so they placed their captive into a farmhouse with instructions not to leave there until 8 a.m. next morning.

The current report afterwards was that the real objective of the raid was to draw the Free State troops from their barracks, as the Republicans had a large force stationed near the Railway Line on the Dublin Road opposite the Military Barracks, waiting for the opportunity to attack in order to release some prisoners held inside amongst whom was Mr. Con Fogarty, a prominent Republican arrested a short time previously.

To be continued