

The Civil War in Galway

Part 5 of Nollaig O Gadhra's series to mark the 75th anniversary

NATIONALLY the months of September-October 1922 were marked by the establishment of the new 26-county Dáil — or "Provisional Parliament of Southern Ireland," if you go by the British interpretation of how it came about with the co-operation of the pro-Free State elected members — in Leinster House, on September 9th, 1922.

There followed work on the preparation of a Free State Constitution, strictly in accordance with what Britain agreed were the limits of the Treaty. This was due to come into force, without a referendum, but by Act of the new U.K. Parliament, on December 6th, 1922. "The Dáil" as the Pro-Treaty deputies had the honesty to call this chamber, in order to distinguish it from Dáil Eireann — which came back into fashion in the 26 counties again later on! — also passed Emergency Powers legislations, which handed over the power to inflict the death penalty to a Military Tribunal, rather than the cabinet or a court of law.

A last chance amnesty was declared in October, and in November 1922, the execution of "rank and file" I.R.A. members began in Dublin, on November 17th, when Peter Cassidy, John Gaffney, James Fisher and Richard Twohig were shot "for possession of revolvers without proper authority" on the day that the infamous trial of Erskine Childers began. In the new Leinster House Dáil consisting of less than 60 pro-Treaty T.D.s with Labour, and Independents (Cumann na Gaedheal did not come into being as a party until the following April, 1923 when the Civil War was nearly over) General Mulcahy pleaded "military necessity" in general terms.

But Kevin O'Higgins, in an extraordinary speech, made it clear that they had to "take average cases" for the first executions. "If we took some man who was outstandingly active ... the unfortunate dupes throughout the country might say that he was killed because he was a leader, because he was an Englishman, or because he combined with others to commit raids." Clearly, this was a reference to Childers, then on trial for his life for possession of a Colt pistol, which ironically, had been given to him for his personal security by Michael Collins during the Treaty negotiations a year earlier.

But this did not deter the execution of Childers who became the fifth of the famous 77 "official" executions by the government during the Civil War, when he was executed on November 24th, 1922 while his case was still awaiting an appeal to the High Court.

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The heightening tension in the Tuam area during the autumn months of 1922 is also reflected in the Waldron notes of the period, which begin with the following, dated September 9th, 1922:

September 9th, 1922

Two sections of the National Army were ambushed near Tuam on Friday evening when Volunteer Walsh was killed and Volunteer Cooney wounded. The casualties on the Republican side are not known but traces of blood were seen in the area and men were seen carrying bodies through the fields afterward. Whether they were wounded or dead is not known.

Five motor loads of the army, travelling from Mountbellew to Tuam, stopped on the road at Lissavalley and dismounted within two feet of a land mine. Two officer members of the company named Lohan and Leahy placed their men each side of the road and immediately fire was opened on them by the Republicans who had been concealed behind some walls. There was a brief exchange of shots when the Republicans were seen to be retreating. They were following the army for some distance when the Commanding Officer of Republicans was captured with two of his men. A second mine was discovered and Brigadier General Fogarty and his two men were compelled to remove it from its position. The body of Volunteer Walsh was then conveyed to Tuam but on the way the party was ambushed. The Troops took cover but after 20 minutes crossfire, the Republicans seemed to be retreating leaving behind a pair of field glasses, an overcoat and ten rounds of ammunition. There were some important documents found on Fogarty, also the other articles captured in the first ambush were two bicycles, one belonging to the Post Office, two coils of wire, one Mauser Rifle, revolvers and ammunition.

September 9th, 1922.

On Friday night last some young men with picks and crowbars completely demolished what was left of Cloonmore Bridge outside Tuam on the Galway Road.

It had been blown up the week before and left with a gaping hole in the centre — a death trap across the road, but now there is nothing left.

The local people protested against its

destruction and said "the Black and Tans, as bad as they were, never did that." They got little heed, some shots were fired over their heads and were peremptorily ordered indoors.

September 12th, 1922

On Sunday last as the National Troops were searching the Ballinasloe area, coming to Clonbrock they surrounded a house there and learned that Republicans had been there, and beat up the occupant, an ex-policeman named Scully and took away his bicycle. The troops followed the trail of the bicycle which led to a gamekeeper's house on the estate. The call on those inside to come out with their hands up was met with a hail of bullets, coming thorough the windows of the house. The Troops took cover and returned the fire. Ultimately, a member of the attacking force named Goode, an old I.R.A. man, rushed the door and went into the kitchen and opened fire on those inside. After about a score of shots had been fired a prominent Republican named Jack Keogh walked from the house carrying a Weblev revolver in each hand fully loaded.

There was also found in a search of the house a new service rifle. Jack Keogh was in charge of the forces when the Free State Forces were bombed in Ballinasloe some time ago, when one of their killers was killed and three wounded. He was the leader of the Republicans in South Galway.

Also captured with Keogh was J. Downey of Ahascragh who had escaped from Portumna some time previous and an O'Neill of Tuam who had seen service since the Black and Tan times.

The troops' full haul was three bicycles, three service rifles, two Webley revolvers, fully loaded and 12 large bombs.

September 12th, 1922

Fr. Heaney, C.C., at Mass on Sunday, denounced the theft of timber from Headford locality. He also availed of the occasion to refer to the action of certain girls in the area who he heard were carrying dispatches from camp to camp for the Republicans. He said parents should exercise proper control over their children and conduct of this kind above all.

September 16th, 1922

Mr. Con Fogarty, O.C. of the I.R.A., Western Division, who was taken in an ambush a week from when Volunteer Walsh was killed was removed from Tuam to Athlone. He was arrested amongst others in Tuam in 1920 by the Crown Forces and interned in Ballykinlar with the Truce. When released he joined the I.R.A. unit and was in Tuam Police Barracks since its take over. After the resignation of Commandment Dunleavy he was appointed in his place and held Command until the approach of the Free State Army when they evacuated the Barracks.

Due to the intervention of Most Rev. Dr. Gilmartin the I.R.A. left without burning the Barracks which Fogarty said was in contravention of orders from his headquarters. But he acceded to the Archbishop's request, because there was anger the fire would spread to adjacent houses.

Beside the Barracks, too, were the ruins of Canney's Drapery burned by the Crown Forces in 1920.

In the town during the week the National Army were on the alert for a surprise attack by the Republicans and searched all cars entering the town and ordered all public houses in Tuam to close at 9.30 p.m. each evening, under pain of a fine of £20.

September 20th, 1922.

On Thursday night between 8 o'clock and 9 a large force of Republicans made a lightning attack on the town of Tuam. It was calculated that there had been three or four hundred of them, suppose under command of Commanders McGuire and Powell. They poured into town from all directions on cars, bicycles and on foot. They held up all pedestrians and made prisoners of all the Free State soldiers they met with. These were herded into the nearest halls and houses and deprived of their leggings and other equipment on them. Then an attack was made on the Workhouse Barracks, one from the Race Course and the other on the Dublin Road, above the Barracks. The attack was replied to vigorously by the Garrison. The incessant firing was kept up for two hours and now and again one heard a heavy detonation, probably a bomb; firing died down only to be resumed again with less intensity. At about 2.30 a.m. all was quiet again and the Republicans took their departure not before they had visited several houses in the town and carted away a lorry load of supplies without much regard of the owners' feelings. Members of the various clubs were held inside rooms while the shooting lasted, and as firing died

down they were allowed to go home. In all the excitement and shooting there were no casualties except for the terror inspired amongst the women and children. Planks were commandeered from a business house in town to place over the damaged Cloonmore Bridge so that vehicles could be hauled over it. Prominent citizens were said to be brought along but released later. Next day a mine and ammunition was found outside the Workhouse wall.

September 23rd, 1922

On Saturday night an attempt was made on the life of the sentry at the Tuam Workhouse Barracks. Several shots were fired at him and some lodged in the wall very close to him. The troops rushed to the Barrack gate where two men were observed running away; they gave pursuit. For three miles that was kept up, the Republicans turning at frequent intervals to fire at their pursuers. Nearing bogland the men endeavoured to lead the Troops to a dangerous part but were unsuccessful. But eventually they themselves were in difficulties, and had to comply with the order of "Put them up!" They surrendered and were arrested. They were found in possession of loaded Webley revolvers.

September 30th, 1922

It was reported that there were some disturbances among the political prisoners held in Galway Jail.

October 7th, 1922

A proclamation was issued by the Free State government offering a pardon and amnesty to all in arms against the State and who delivered up the weapons in their possession, and cease to take part in armed opposition on or before October 15th, 1922.

The Notice was made up of four explanatory paragraphs and signed. — Liam T. MacCosraigh (President of Dáil Eireann).

October 7th, 1922 — Surprise Raid

Another surprise raid was made by Republicans on Tuam on Saturday night last. About 36 of them took part, appearing in the streets of the town about 9 o'clock, holding up any pedestrians they came across and searching them for arms, then allowing them to pass on.

Some of the riflemen then proceeded to several shops and commandeered goods. The whole proceedings were carried out with clocklike precision; only one or two shots were fired. When they were satisfied with their seizures, they left the town taking with them two motorcars. One, however, was returned that night.

Rumour says the prime object of the visit was to search for particular members of the Free State Army. The next day, Sunday, typewritten notices signed by General T. Maguire, 2nd Division, were posted on the pillars at the Cathedral entrance warning persons who repaired bridges or removed barricades, that they would be fired on. The notices also threatened any persons giving information to the National Troops about the movements of the Republicans. On Wednesday last Cahergal and Grange Bridges were destroyed. They were only repaired the week previous. Vehicles travelling from Tuam to Athenry to catch the Dublin train, will now have to take the longest way round, as the shortest way home. The bridge destroyers must get "fed up" sooner or later with the futility of their efforts at self-destruction.

October 14th, 1922

After next Sunday the Army Council will begin to exercise the powers conferred on them by the Government by setting up Military Courts. By regulations made on October 2nd, certain offences are punishable by death, penal servitude, imprisonment, internment or fines according to the nature of the offence.

The amnesty expires the same day that these regulations went into force.

October 29th, 1922

This week it was reported that Commandant Tom Maguire of the Western Brigade was captured with some of his men around Ballinrobe.

October 29th, 1922

Mr. P. Dunleavy, Tuam, who was captured (kidnapped) some weeks ago has escaped whilst in the custody of the Republicans. He was well treated and moved from place to place and in a different house each night. His brother Tim was also kidnapped, but was released after a hunger strike of some days.

As November dawned the situation was about to change dramatically in the Tuam area, with the arrival of the first group of Garda Síochána in the town on November 4th, 1922.

• To be continued