

PREFACE

The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

This is the absorbing and poignant story of Jamie Moynihan, of a young man growing up in the Muskerry (Muscráí) valleys, and of his involvement in the turbulent years of profound and far-reaching social and political changes in both his native Cork and in Ireland itself. It gives a detailed and descriptive account of the War of Independence and the Civil War in the Mid-Cork region, and is unusual in that we can read about that historic period from a man who not only lived through it, but also took an active part in the revolution. Jamie also did something that few of his comrades thought to do: during the later years of his life he made comprehensive notes, wide-ranging in scope and content, along with audio tapes, which provide an extensive insight into that turbulent period of Irish history.

Jamie's foresight put in motion the following history of the 8th Battalion area of Muskerry and Mid-Cork during the War of Independence and Civil War, when, after his death, his family gave me access to his carrier bag full of material on the troubled times of 1916–23. I thought it unusual that this bag contained so much valuable historical material, as well as many items which most people would consider trivial or not worth attending to, which showed me his amazing and careful attention to detail. As I probed and

sorted through this mass of material and listened to the tapes he had made only a few months before his death, I realised that here was an invaluable source of information on the War of Independence and the Civil War in Muskerry and Mid-Cork.

It was an unequal struggle – the army of the British Empire versus the young, untrained Volunteer force from the glens of Muskerry, the men whom Major General Percival labelled ‘farmers’ sons and cornerboys’. The 655 Volunteers of the 8th Battalion were known by their local Irish names and not by high-sounding titles and ranks such as major general, field marshal, lieutenant, colonel or sir. Jamie’s story is a gripping account that captures the imagination and arouses the emotions of the reader. It is a story that wears its years lightly, and proof, if it were needed, that fact is often more interesting than fiction. There is also a summary of many periods of Irish history woven into the tapestry of these memories, especially the history of our ancestors’ persecution and oppression for their culture, their language and their religion, and of laws that created conditions of unbelievable hardship and destitution, savage laws that provoked the Volunteers of 1916–21 to make a determined effort to evict the foreign tyrant and invader from the land of Ireland forever.

History is best viewed through the eyes of those who lived it, and this story is told primarily by a man, now long dead, who took part in it and lived through every turbulent hour of the revolutionary years. It is a story of a journey through time, of a people and a landscape littered with treasured memories and a rich heritage, but most of all it is a candid and straightforward comment on life in Muskerry and in Mid-Cork during the period 1916–23. The past century has seen a greater change in rural Ireland than ever before, as hundreds of the old methods of work and ways of life have gone. What is not gone, however, is the history and the tradition of that period, which is etched permanently on the minds and the emo-

tions of the people in these rural areas, villages and towns, and it will live in history as long as history is written.

Terror was the business of the Black and Tans (temporary constables of the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) from Great Britain – also known as ‘the Tans’) and the Auxiliaries: to kill the innocent, to burn their homes, to bayonet to death helpless men who were ‘attempting to escape’ and to raze to the ground any houses that happened to be near an ambush site. A total of thirty-five people were murdered by British forces in Muskerry and Mid-Cork. You will read the roll of honour of Mid-Cork’s heroic populace who died during this period, including a seven-year-old child returning to his home after counting the cows and two youths of sixteen and seventeen years. These were the cruel atrocities that the local people in the Macroom area had to endure during those terrible years. Despite the constant threat of reprisals, Jamie noted that the local farmers and villagers of Muskerry, with their intimate knowledge of the mountain terrain, along with a network of sympathisers and ‘safe houses’, proved invaluable in this warfare of ‘hit and run’.

The Irish Volunteers of that time were men of no property, wealth or money. The majority had nothing but the clothes on their backs. They were not motivated by gain or promotion, but by a higher ideal of a free and a better Ireland for their families and for their neighbours. Their history now belongs to posterity and should be documented in print as well as in memory. We are indebted to Jamie Moynihan for keeping and preserving this hoard of old historical documents and manuscripts. They have been a priceless and invaluable source of information in this effort of mine to tell the story of those memorable years. Without Jamie’s notes it would have been practically impossible to undertake this task.

History usually records the life of a people, a country, a district, general events or an individual. The story that follows relates to an individual and to his memories of 1916–23. He was a man who

strove with every fibre of his body to free the people of his locality and country from the yoke of penal laws and foreign oppression. In Irish history and folklore there are a small number of people whose names live on in the memory of the general public, mainly because of their exceptional qualities or their outstanding contribution to their people, their parish or their country. Such a person was Seamus Ó Muineacháin, better known as Jamie Moynihan, who was born in the townland of Gortnascairte (Gort na Scairte), Cúil Aodha (Coolea), on 18 October 1893, and died on 1 October 1970. Jamie's ancestors had a long and chequered history in the fight for class freedom, stretching back to a miserable May day morning in 1778, when Jamie's forebear, Eóin Ó Muineacháin, his wife and six children were evicted from the little Moynihan homestead in the townland of Gortyrähilly (Gort uí Rathaille) by a crowbar brigade and bailiffs because the Moynihan's eldest, Concrubhar, was in the seminary studying for the priesthood. The same landlord continued to evict people for over a century. According to James S. Donnelly Jr's *The Land and The People of Nineteenth-Century Cork*, in the period 1870–88, forty-four families were evicted from their farms and cabins in the Colthurst estate in Baile Mhúirne (Ballyvourney).¹ Thankfully, those British oppressors are long since gone without trace from Baile Mhúirne, their defeat being assisted 140 years later by one of Eóin's descendants, Jamie Moynihan.

The passing of time has served to confirm the view of his own people that Jamie was a man of plain, unaffected patriotism, devoid of any personal vanity. During his life, he was sincerely devoted to the truth. Some people are born leaders, others aspire to leadership or have it thrust upon them, but Jamie was always content to be

1 James S. Donnelly Jr, *The Land and The People of Nineteenth-Century Cork: the rural economy and the land question* (Studies in Irish History, second series, vol. 9, Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1975).

an ordinary foot soldier, willing to help everybody, even those of a different political persuasion. His knowledge of local and national history was a revelation and he often added narratives on these topics to historical discussions. He had an enormous capacity for hard work, apparently inexhaustible energy, was dynamic and self-confident, and had a deep understanding of people. During the early years of his manhood, these gifts and talents were devoted to a single purpose – the destruction of the British army of occupation in Muskerry and the ending of their oppression of that region's people.

During the War of Independence, Jamie fought vigorously for what he believed in, and later in life he had a presence that resonated with the public. His bravery in armed conflict is legendary. He had many narrow escapes from death when the odds were often against his survival, and yet he lived to tell the story. Jamie had the unique distinction of being officer in command of the group of Volunteers who carried out the first armed attack on crown forces in Ireland during the War of Independence, at Béal a'Ghleanna (Mouth of the Glen) in Muskerry, on 7 July 1918, as well as being the commanding officer (OC) of the group of Volunteers who carried out the last armed attack of the War of Independence, at Céim Carraige (Ceimcarraige), Carriganima, on the day of the Truce, 11 July 1921. The Truce came into force at noon on that day, but Jamie and his men, who had waited two days to ambush an Auxiliary Crossley tender that travelled regularly on the Carriganima–Millstreet road, were not told about the ceasefire. The Auxiliaries eventually arrived at 3 p.m. Jamie's men rolled four large stones across the road and, when the tender stopped, the twelve Auxiliaries on board, facing the Volunteers' six rifles, quickly surrendered. They told Jamie there had been a ceasefire in force since noon that day, but he did not believe them. The Auxiliaries had to walk into Millstreet, but Jamie and his men drove home to Cúil Aodha in the Crossley tender.

Jamie was a man who dearly loved his native land, its customs, heritage and language. Like so many young people of his time, he was reared in an environment in which faith and one's country were seen as all-important, and from his ancestors on both sides of his family he acquired, almost unconsciously, the legacy of strong nationalist feelings that had passed from generation to generation of his forefathers. He had a deep love for the Irish language and culture, and reared his own family through the medium of Irish. He found it difficult to understand why people used the language, habits and the customs of the country that had robbed, penalised, oppressed, evicted and enslaved their ancestors century after century. His father and mother were of humble stock and his mother died while the family were very young, leaving his father, Concrubhar, with the demanding task of rearing six young children on his own in bad times. At the official opening of Ceárd Scoil Ghobnatan (a vocational school) in Baile Mhúirne in 1951, Jamie made the following remark: 'The world has been my school and the mountains and valleys of West Muskerry were my books.'

The Moynihan family tree has thrown up another name from that clan who rose to great prominence, this one in the far-off USA. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan was a member of the Democratic Party and one of John F. Kennedy's right-hand men. Senator Moynihan's father was born in the village of Barraduff in Co. Kerry, and his uncle, Pádraig Moynihan, an Old IRA man, also lived in Barraduff with his wife Molly, who was a member of Cumann na mBan. The senator never lost this link and occasionally visited his cousins, Pádraig and Molly, in Barraduff. Jamie Moynihan, along with his sons, Con and Dónal, were also frequent visitors to Barraduff, and he kept up the link with his distant cousins while he lived. Senator Moynihan strongly advocated the cause of Irish unity and believed that the Irish people had the right to govern themselves. On St Patrick's Day 1977,

Daniel Moynihan was one of four Irish-American politicians, dubbed 'The Four Horsemen', who issued a strong statement in Washington denouncing the violence and discrimination taking place in Ireland, and encouraging President Carter to take a stand on Northern Ireland, which seemed hopelessly deadlocked at the time. The Four Horsemen were Senator Ted Kennedy, Senator Daniel Moynihan, 'Tip' O'Neill and Governor Hugh Carey, and their call resulted in the American administration becoming much more involved with the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

From the beginning of 1920, the Moynihan home was raided round the clock, but while he was on the run for six years, Jamie was never captured. From July 1918 to January 1924, Jamie spent a total of 1,581 days and nights on the run. 1,101 of these days were during the period between the Béal a'Ghleanna ambush and the Truce and 480 were between June 1922 and January 1924, Jamie having taken the Republican side in the Civil War. Because of his long absence from his farm, he sustained a heavy financial loss. Things looked so bad that in November 1925 he decided to emigrate and got his passport for America, but at the last moment the bonds of home and country, which he had fought so hard for, were too strong and he chose to face the struggle for existence in his native Cúil Aodha.

Jamie Moynihan was a founder member of the Fianna Fáil party in Mid-Cork, and had forty-two years of unbroken service on Cork County Council from 1928 until his death. The council members in those earlier years did not receive any help with travelling expenses – they had to buy their own bus tickets as well as pay for their own meals. Jamie often recalled how he cycled to council meetings on his Raleigh bicycle, a journey of some thirty-five miles from his home in Gortnascairte, a round trip of seventy miles for the day. He bought his first car in 1948 – it was a Baby Ford which cost him £40.

A few months before his death in 1970, Jamie recalled his many exploits during the War of Independence and Civil War, recording them on tapes for his son-in-law, the late Micheál Walsh, as well as the history of the Volunteer companies in Cúil Aodha, Baile Mhúirne, Kilnamartyra, Ballingearry (Béal Átha an Ghaothraidh) and Inchigeela, which comprised the 8th Battalion, and many other stories relating to that period. Jamie also had a huge collection of documents and papers relating to the period 1916–23, lists of the Cúil Aodha and Baile Mhúirne Volunteers and Cumann na mBan members, and lists of the Volunteers from different companies who took part in ambushes, attacks and other engagements in outside areas, in which he himself was not involved. I have gathered these valuable tapes, papers and documents, just as Jamie narrated them over forty years ago, as he reminisced, talking about those stirring and dangerous years of his life, and put them together in the form of this book. Their accuracy and detail is a wonderful tribute to Jamie's phenomenal powers of memory and recall, and local historians have confirmed the historical accuracy of these resources.

The pages that follow are based on Jamie's memories and, as such, are just one man's recollection of events. The quotations that appear in the book, while they are attributed to the various politicians and military leaders who made them, do not in some cases have dates/times attached, and the same applies to newspaper reports. In all cases I have only one source for these quotations – Jamie Moynihan himself, but I have included times and dates where these are available. All items and narratives in this book, including the appendices, are Jamie's personal recollections of events during the War of Independence and Civil War, 1916–23, unless otherwise stated.

Dónal Ó hÉalaithe

INTRODUCTION

No king or saint has tomb so proud, as he whose flag becomes his shroud.

Thomas Osborne Davis, *Nationality*

Before my memory becomes dim with time, and while there are still some of my fellow Volunteers around to verify my recollection of the fight for freedom 1916–23, I would like to put my memories on tape, so that future generations will understand what happened in Muskerry, and in the Mid-Cork area generally, during that perilous period of danger, strife and upheaval.

What are memories? Remembrance, recollection, the life you lived, the people you knew, the friends, the worries, the attacks, the dangers, the ambushes, the ambitions, the comrades, the challenges, the disappointments and the successes. Looking back now over that bridge of fifty years since 1920, it seems a long time. During the War of Independence and the Civil War there were no records or accounts kept of any actions for reasons of security. The mention of a name or the publication of a picture was extremely dangerous and could well result in the issuing of a death warrant. The majority of actions of the War of Independence were not properly recorded for several years after the events, for various reasons, with the result that many details were confused or forgotten. Some people may regard this effort of mine as a history of the War of Independence in Mid-Cork, but this is not the case. History is the branch of knowledge that records and analyses past events, but I am not a historian. This narrated account is a collection of my memories and recollections of the momentous years 1916–23.

However, a new generation is rapidly taking our place, and for this new generation, and their descendants, I will endeavour to

give as clear an account as possible of the troubled times in my native parish of Baile Mhúirne, and in Kilnamartyra, Ballingearry, Inchigeela and Mid-Cork generally.

During the War of Independence there were many groups, organisations and individuals involved in Ireland's effort to rid the land of the scourge of the Sassenach. Many of these groups did not get the recognition, or the thanks, they deserved and I have always felt that the ordinary rank-and-file Volunteer was number one on this list, and I am afraid that, in the not too distant future, the names of many of these people will have faded from people's memories. This is why I intend to put on paper, before I finish this account, to the best of my ability, the names of the 680 Volunteers and Cumann na mBan members of the five companies in the 8th Battalion, namely Kilnamartyra, Baile Mhúirne, Cúil Aodha, Ballingearry and Inchigeela, so that future Muskerry generations will know who these dedicated people were.

Let us remember that these local young men and women, as well as all the Volunteers of the Cork No. 1 Brigade, were in an extremely unequal struggle during that period. They were opposed by the most formidable combination of high-ranking British officers and generals then in Ireland. We had Major General E. P. Strickland, military governor of Cork, and his feared second-in-command, Brigadier General Higginson. We had to contend with Major General Bernard Law Montgomery, adjutant to the Southern Division of the British Army in Ireland, and, of course, the commander-in-chief of the murderous Essex Regiment, who commanded the British forces in Baile Mhúirne during the round-up, Major General A. E. Percival, and finally the experienced Lieutenant Colonel F. H. Dorling, commander of the infamous Tans and Auxiliaries in Macroom Castle.

The typical characteristics of my fellow Volunteer comrades in the Muskerry 8th Battalion was number one, their love of God

and their love of Ireland, and number two, their qualities of loyalty and understanding, which made every individual a true and ideal friend, and in the latter years of my life their memory is indeed a valued treasure. They were deeply religious men and women, and they believed that the war they were fighting was morally right and justified. They were fighting to rectify a grievous wrong, which was contrary to conscience, and a grave and serious invasion and violation of people's legal rights, according to God's law and also according to the natural law.

The Irish Volunteers were founded in Ballingearry in 1914, in Kilnamartyra in the spring of 1915 and in Baile Mhúirne in March 1916. However, they weren't organised in Cúil Aodha and Inchigeela until after the Easter Rising. The Cúil Aodha Company was formed in February 1917, while that of Baile Mhúirne, though formed in 1916, remained inactive until it was reformed in 1917, when it sprang to life in a big way. I am indebted to seven of my comrades, who have in the past written summaries of the numerous engagements of that period, namely Dr Patrick O'Sullivan (OC of the 8th Battalion), Mick Sullivan, Patrick Lynch (captain of the Baile Mhúirne Volunteers), John and James Cronin from the Ballingearry Company, Katie O'Reilly (leader of the Cúil Aodha and Baile Mhúirne Cumann na mBan group) and Molly Cunningham, Macroom Cumann na mBan. Their contributions have greatly helped to refresh my memory.

My teenage years were a time of great change in rural Ireland. It was a way of life now long gone, and will never be again. This was the historic period which enabled the small farmers of Muskerry, and the farmers all over Ireland, to buy back their farms from the British landlords. As a result of the Land War of the previous twenty years a government loan was offered to tenant farmers, to be repaid by them and their descendants over a period of seventy years in the form of annuities, which gave farmers ownership of

their lands for the first time in 250 years, since the plantation of Munster in the 1660s. This scheme was very effective and had unforeseen results. Irish farmers, owners at last of their holdings, were able to keep some of their growing children at home, emigration decreased and once again a race and generation of men, hard and active, grew up on the Irish land.

Another huge change was also taking place. The Gaelic League was founded in 1893, and during the following years a torrent of enthusiasm for the Irish language and culture was released.

Looking back at our local history since the beginning of the Land War, there is little doubt that the people of Baile Mhúirne and Muskerry were fortunate in having a man of Doctor Dónal Ó Loingsigh's calibre in their midst, to ignite in people's hearts and minds a new spirit of national and cultural patriotism, which prepared them for the greater struggles ahead during the period 1914–21. He became a personal friend to Patrick Pearse, Dr Douglas Hyde, Cathal Brugha and to all the national and cultural leaders of his time. In 1904 Pearse undertook a tour of Ireland, feeling the pulse of the national re-awakening, and significantly Dr Ó Loingsigh and Baile Mhúirne were his first port of call on this nationwide tour. The following is a brief summary of Pearse's visit to Baile Mhúirne, as described in his own writing in *An Claidheambh Soluis* [The Sword of Light] in November 1904:

From Cork I travelled to Macroom, and making no delay there, I pushed on, on my bicycle to Baile Mhúirne. I was making good progress, and reached the Gaeltacht capital sooner than I expected. As I was being directed to the Dr's house, Doctor Dónal himself bore down on us, and carried me off. This Dr Lynch that I speak of is one of the most nationally-minded personalities in Ireland at the present time, not to mention his outstanding work for the Gaelic Revival. In fact, Baile Mhúirne would not be Baile Mhúirne without its doctor.

Dónal Ó Loingsigh is a man of high intellectual attainments, an ornament to his profession, and his support for national and cultural freedom is of the most practical kind. We need more of his kind throughout the country.

This amazing tribute from Pearse, placed on record for future scholars and generations the work of an outstanding and colourful personality. Zeal and hard work on Dr Ó Loingsigh's part did more to put the West Cork Gaeltacht on the map than the efforts of hosts of others, not to mention the strong sense of national identity which he instilled in the minds of the young people of his time. There is little doubt that his example and inspiration started the gradual process of national and cultural re-awakening in Baile Mhúirne that reached its peak in the Volunteer movement during the War of Independence, a period which produced over 300 Volunteers in our parish, 152 in Baile Mhúirne, 143 in Cúil Aodha and 24 full-time Cumann na mBan members, believed to be the highest number of Volunteers in any parish in Mid-Cork.

I have been asked the same question many times over the past fifty years: 'What inspired your generation to challenge and take up arms against England on a national scale?' My answer to this query has always been, and still is, that the Irish demand for independence was the result of British attempts to control, dominate and penalise our country, politically, socially, economically and culturally, over seven long centuries. Earlier invaders, such as the Vikings and the Normans, had adopted the Irish language, culture and Irish way of life generally. However, the English invasion, and settlement, was an attempt to destroy everything that our ancestors valued and cherished: the Irish language, culture, music, faith and traditions. The infamous order issued by the British generals in Dublin Castle to their troops in February 1642 remained relevant through each of the following centuries, up to my own time: 'to

wound, kill, slay and destroy, by all the ways and means you may, all the rebels and adherents and relievers, and burn, spoil, waste, consume and demolish all places, towns and houses where the said rebels are, or have been relieved, and harboured, and all hay and corn there, and kill and destroy all the men inhabiting able to bear arms’.

The plantations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries settled large numbers of English-speaking planters on Irish land, and in that terrible process deprived countless thousands of Irish farmers of their most valuable asset, namely their land, which began a confrontation destined to plague, torment and harass rural Ireland’s population up to the present day. The landed gentry supported the rule of the crown. These, like all settlers, were Protestants, while the landless Irish were Catholic. During the plantations of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, 3.8 million acres of the best land in the country was confiscated from the farmers of Ireland, plus 6.4 million acres of poor and mountainous land, and handed over to the English planters. It was during the Munster Plantation of the 1660s that the Colthurst family took legal possession of the 22,000 acres of Baile Mhúirne parish in 1663, and in the process confined our ancestors, and the tenant farmers of the parish, to the status of slaves for 250 years. The Great House at the Mills, known as ‘Ballyvourney House’, was their HQ and I have heard local women describe that their grandmothers, who worked in that great house, were expected to address the landlord as ‘Your Honour’ when he visited ‘the Mills’.

It is incredible that our parents and our ancestors, who lived in poverty, were paying an English landlord their hard-earned Irish money so that they might work the land as tenants, on lands which their forefathers had owned until Cromwell had handed it over to one of his own British followers during the Munster Plantation. It was immoral to have to pay back to the British Ex-

chequer by annual payments, or Land Annuities, the Irish money their landlords had received for handing back their own lands to the Irish farmers.

If England ruled the seas, as they often boasted, they did so on the back of Irish oak and pine. The massive trees of Irish forests were cut and transported to England by landlords and British agents during the seventeenth century to build the vessels that rolled out at an increasing rate from its shipyards. The English House of Commons and Parliament, and the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, also owed much of their stature to the fine timber and wood pillaged from Irish forests by the same landlords and British agents. At school we learned the lament for the end of the Butler family's huge plantation of oak trees in Co. Tipperary, cut to the ground by English landlords: 'Cad a dheanfaimid feasta gan adhmad, tá deire na gcoillte ar lár' [What will we do for timber, all our woods are cut down]. The British weren't satisfied with confiscating valuable timber from plantations in the good land. The landlords in poor mountainous districts like West Muskerry, not alone claimed to be 'owners' of the 'Verh', or bog-deal, which was exposed when the turf was cut off the bogs, but the unfortunate small farmer on whose land the 'Verh' was found was responsible for its delivery to the great house, where it was used for firing. Words fail me to describe this degrading behaviour. It was nothing short of inhumane, fraudulent and humiliating.

The Plantation of Ulster 1608, and the Plantation of Munster 1660, was the same as a sentence of death to the Irish farmers. Their lands, property and animals were taken from them. After the Flight of the Earls in 1607, King James I saw the Earls' flight as a golden opportunity to break Ulster's resistance for good. He declared their lands forfeit and offered them to British people, with the proviso that each one had to people their holdings with English-speaking Protestants. Later, during Cromwell's time,

soldiers who had fought against the Irish were rewarded with land (as happened in Baile Mhúirne parish). By 1622 the Plantation of Ulster had transferred some 13,000 adults of English stock to the province, which laid the foundation for the anti-National Northern Ireland we still have today.

In Munster, with 12,000 English settlers brought in, more serious was the fact that Catholics were prevented, by British law, from buying land or property, so that by the end of the eighteenth century ninety-five per cent of the land of Ireland was in the hands of English settlers. W. B. Yeats sums up the question of the land grabbing by the British in this poetic dialogue:

Peter: 'What is troubling you so much?'

Old Woman: 'My land, that was taken from me.'

Peter: 'How much land did they take from you?'

Old Woman: 'My four beautiful green fields.'

Peter: 'And what hopes have you to hold on to now?'

Old Woman: 'The hope of getting my beautiful fields back again, and the hope of putting the strangers out of my own house.'

The 200 years of the penal laws was the period when there fell upon Ireland that night of deepest horror, that agony the most awful, the most prolonged of any recorded on the blotted pages of human suffering the world over. I won't elaborate, because it would take chapters to do so. It is enough to say that Ireland has had a chilling inheritance of violence, oppression and dictatorship from our rulers across the Irish Sea. They stole and confiscated everything that our ancestors had or owned.

Every page of England's history produced some new plan or phase of their effort to conquer Ireland for the crown, yet, after 700 years, that task was still uncompleted when the men of 1916, and later the Irish Volunteers, struck another blow for that freedom,

and the people of Muskerry, sheltered and aided by their mountains and bogs, found plenty of ways and means to resist and harass the invader and plunderer.

The Easter Rising was one of the greatest events in Irish history because it began a process that led to the freedom we enjoy today. It was the spirit of 1916 that inspired and motivated the Irish Volunteers and Cumann na mBan to continue what the men of Easter week had started. There is not a nation in the world that does not celebrate its path to freedom, as well as important events in its history. I hope that the part played by the Muskerry and Mid-Cork Volunteers will be part of that history, and I also hope that my account of that troubled period will help, in some small way, to ensure that the memories of these men and women will not be forgotten. For this story of mine, Muskerry will be the focal point for my rag-bag of memories; an area from within my heart that can never be removed. This homeland of mine is a countryside of history, a district of great natural beauty, a mountainous district, some might say, of many faults, but to me these so-called faults are its most lasting and enduring attractions. The ruggedness of its landscape and of its people, appeal to something within me, as no other terrain and no other people can ever do. Its natural beauty is the result of millions of years of geological maturity, which all the money in the world could not duplicate or buy.

At the outset, I will give a run-down on the Volunteers' chain of command, then on the histories of the five Volunteer companies of the 8th Battalion, namely Kilnamartyra, Baile Mhúirne, Cúil Aodha, Ballingeary and Inchigeela, and after that I will try to give an account of the main engagements, ambushes and tragedies of the time, and especially of the individuals, the men and women of the Volunteer movement, the flying column and the active service units of the Irish Republican Army. I hope that the younger generations, who know about these times by hearsay only, will find

these survivors' tales of the fight in the area west of Macroom of absorbing interest, while the older generation will recall vividly a memorable era and the men and women who contributed to the making of that history.

There were many red herring stories doing the rounds concerning the period I shall be writing about, namely the years 1916–23, but the real issue was, and still is in a part of Ireland, why were British forces in the country at all, oppressing the Irish people? I shall endeavour, to the best of my ability, to give you the facts, as my Volunteer comrades and myself encountered them, in the Muskerry region and in the Mid-Cork area generally, during the War of Independence. I feel that the Volunteers were what they believed in; and what they did repeatedly during that three-year period shows that excellence is not a skill, but a habit.

THE VOLUNTEERS' CHAIN OF COMMAND

During the War of Independence, the Irish Volunteers had a highly efficient chain of command, intelligence and signalling systems in operation in both the 7th and 8th Battalion areas of Mid-Cork. Florrie O'Donoghue was the architect of the structures adopted by the IRA in this area, and indeed elsewhere, in the formation of the Volunteers' chain of command. Florrie was a very important figure during the years 1918–21. His involvement began with a raid for arms at the home of Captain Clarke at Farann in the Mid-Cork area in 1918 and peaked when he was appointed divisional adjutant and intelligence officer of the 1st Southern Division, under General Liam Lynch. The division had its HQ in Gortyrahilly, Cúil Aodha, where we became close friends. The structures Florrie adopted and put in place throughout Mid-Cork were accepted nationally in later years. The smallest group was the section (composed of eight to ten men), four sections made a platoon, four platoons formed a company, a number of companies made a battalion (the number of companies in a battalion was dependent on local volunteer numbers), several battalions formed a brigade, a number of brigades formed a division, several divisions formed a corps, and three or four corps formed an army.

The Macroom 7th Battalion was formed in October 1916 and this unit was made up of Volunteer companies from Macroom, Clondrohid, Carriganima, Rusheen, Kilmurry, Kilmichael, Canovee, Ballinagree, Toames and Crookstown, with Dan Corkery as OC, John Lynch as vice-OC and Charlie Browne as adjutant. Their HQs had to be moved frequently: from Macroom town to

Murphy's at Coolnacarriga, to Delaney's at Toames and to Derry-leigh, Clondrohid, because of enemy raids.

As a result of conscription, which swelled the ranks of the Volunteers beyond all expectations, Tomás MacCurtain formed the Muskerry 8th Battalion. At a meeting at Renaniree on Whit Sunday 1918, this new battalion had Kilnamartyra, to be known as A Company, with a strength of 104 men; Baile Mhúirne, B Company, with 152 men; Cúil Aodha, C Company, with 143 men; Ballingear, D Company, with a strength of 128 men; and Inchigeela, E Company, with a strength of 131 men – a total of 658 Volunteers. At its foundation, the following battalion officers were elected: OC Patrick O'Sullivan, Vice-OC Daniel MacSweeney, Adjutant Timothy Dinneen and Quartermaster Cornelius O'Connell.

In May 1920 Daniel MacSweeney took up special intelligence work and Paddy O'Sullivan was elected vice-OC, Neilus Sheehan elected as acting battalion adjutant, Timothy Dinneen appointed lieutenant of police, John Harrington lieutenant of engineering, and Eugene Crowley lieutenant of intelligence. After that there was no change in the battalion officers, and the men listed above were in charge all through the Tan and Civil War, with their HQ in Jack Sheehan's house in Renaniree. The total battalion staff during the War of Independence was eight men.

The battalion had the following arms and ammunition on the day of the Truce, 11 July 1921:

- Service rifles – 25
- Other rifles – 7
- Shotguns – 175
- Rifle ammunition – 1,145 rounds
- Shotgun ammunition – 3,510 rounds
- Revolvers – 28
- Revolver ammunition – 500 rounds

- Mills bombs – 17
- Home-made bombs – 360
- Gelignite – 50 lbs
- Shotgun bayonets – 116
- Pikes – 70

Of the twenty-five service rifles, one was purchased and twenty-four were captured in three ambushes: two at Béal a'Ghleanna, eleven at Keimaneigh (Céim an Fhia) and eleven at the Slippery Rock. (The above information on the 8th Battalion is courtesy of Dr Patrick O'Sullivan, Battalion OC.)

The 1st Cork Brigade was the next step on the ladder of the Volunteer movement. This brigade was in command of the eight battalions in Co. Cork. It was the biggest brigade in the country, with an active membership of 7,500 Volunteers under the command of Seán O'Hegarty and Vice-OC Dan O'Donovan (known locally as 'Sandow') since the murders of Terence MacSwiney and Tomás MacCurtain. The HQ of this brigade had been in Cork city for the previous six or seven years, but after the burning of the city by the Tans on the night of 11 December 1920 as a reprisal for the Kilmichael ambush, Seán O'Hegarty moved his HQ to Baile Mhúirne, to the house of Michael MacSweeney in the townland of Gortnafuinsion (Gort na Fuinsean), some two miles south-west of Baile Mhic Íre (Ballymakeera) village, and Seán directed the brigade's operations for the county from there up to the Truce. After the Cúil na Cathrach (Coolnacaheragh) ambush on 25 February 1921, Baile Mhúirne became recognised as one of the safest areas in Co. Cork, and so the HQ of the 1st Cork Brigade was upgraded, and the HQ of the 1st Southern Division, under General Liam Lynch, was established in Cúil Aodha, three weeks after the ambush.

The 1st Southern Division was formed at a brigade meeting

in the townland of Kippaghs, close to Millstreet, in April 1921, attended by Liam Lynch, Seán Moylan, Seán O'Hegarty, Florrie O'Donoghue, Tom Barry, Dan Breen, Liam Deasy, Humphrey Murphy, John Joe Rice, Paddy O'Brien and Andy Cooney, among others. The meeting realised that a new war situation was developing in Co. Cork, and indeed in South Munster generally, a situation that called for new techniques and strategies, and a change in the battle formation of the existing structure.

Liam Lynch was appointed OC of this huge division, with Florrie O'Donoghue as vice-OC. This new division directed the day-to-day operations of nine brigades in Counties Cork, Kerry, West Limerick and West Waterford, with a Volunteer army of 30,000 officers and men under its command. The HQ of this new division was set up in the farmhouse of Owen MacCarthy in the townland of Gortyrähilly, some three miles to the south of Cúil Aodha village, and only a half a mile from my father's house at Gortnascairte. In later years, Tom Barry told me about the meeting at Kippaghs, at which the 1st Southern Division was formed in early April 1921. The formation of the division was unanimous, but for the remainder of the meeting, the bitterness of the members was directed towards the IRA's GHQ in Dublin. Ernie O'Malley represented GHQ at this meeting, and he was dealing with shrewd, sharp, battle-hardened men such as Tom Barry, Liam Lynch, Seán Moylan and Seán O'Hegarty, to mention just a few of those who attended. O'Malley read a long memorandum outlining GHQ's conception of divisional function and guerrilla warfare. According to Barry, the document did not find favour with any of his listeners. 'Military terminology, militia, terrain and topography' were the words that rolled off O'Malley's lips repeatedly, and every word he spoke angered his listeners more and more. Eventually, Seán O'Hegarty jumped to his feet and told O'Malley to shut up, and voiced the bitter feelings that many of the Volunteers and

their officers in Co. Cork felt against GHQ in Dublin. 'The men of the south, and especially the Co. Cork Volunteers, have done most of the fighting against the British,' Seán O'Hegarty said, 'and I want to know why didn't a senior staff officer, like Michael Collins or Richard Mulcahy, think it worth their while to visit any of the active fighting units in Co. Cork, or in Munster, over the past couple of years. Our men in the south,' O'Hegarty continued, 'living daily on their wits, have now confirmed what they had suspected for a long time, that the men in the Dublin HQ have no idea what guerrilla warfare and fighting is all about.'

Tom Barry then spoke, telling O'Malley and the meeting, 'It is a complete waste of time to be using ornamental, showy and decorated language and meaningless military phrases to impress hard-bitten officers who are daily fighting foreign forces against all the odds. These men in headquarters in Dublin have no understanding of the mental and the physical capacity required to make split-second decisions when men are in danger of being surrounded. They don't understand what split-second action is needed when an ambush or a barrack attack doesn't go according to plan. It is a great pity that these fellows wouldn't spend a week or two in either North, West or Mid-Cork, because if they did, they would learn a thing or two about guerrilla warfare.'

Lynch's life in Gortyrally between April and July 1921 was an endless labour of planning, organising and inspection of brigades in the 1st Southern Division area. His staff at HQ – Florrie O'Donoghue, Maurice Walsh, Joe O'Connor and Jim Gray – worked twenty hours a day. Lynch asked me to take on the responsibility for staff safety and to attend to all their requirements, to provide transport and take dispatches and messages for them to the ends of the brigade, and gave me the names and addresses of some forty men from the four counties who would assist me in carrying out these duties and activities.

In this Southern Divisional area there were 21,260 armed British soldiers, 1,600 armed RIC policemen, 340 armed Auxiliaries and Tans, plus 570 armed marines. In this division alone, British forces killed 193 Volunteers and a further 2,004 were imprisoned. At the time – 1920–21 – there were 43,000 regular troops and 16,000 police in Ireland, all armed. The obvious, and only, course of action for the Volunteers was to capture some of these arms, and the RIC police barracks dotted all over the four southern counties were the targets for Liam Lynch and his men.

Lynch regularly stayed at Dan and Nan Lehane's house in Gurteenflugh, near Ballingearry, but before billeting or sleeping in any house he would inspect the layout, check the security arrangements and talk to the local scouts who guarded the house, explaining to them in detail what action should be taken in the event of an attack.

Lynch was one of the key figures in the War of Independence and in the subsequent Civil War, and is regarded by many as one of the main driving forces in the fight for freedom. A few weeks after the formation of this new division, he asked me to recommend a suitable house in the Baile Mhúirne district where he could establish his headquarters. I had no hesitation in recommending Owen's house in Gortyrähilly. Lynch immediately undertook responsibility for the administrative and supply problems for this huge Volunteer force, which meant the involvement of lorry drivers, railway workers, travellers, shop workers, public house and post office workers, not to mention many others who could help in getting dispatches to their destinations. Maurice Walsh of Mitchelstown, who had been Lynch's principal staff officer, moved to Gortyrähilly, where he took up his duties, and Lynch and he put in motion an intricate system to co-ordinate what was happening in the different brigade areas. For security reasons written orders were kept to a minimum and were always coded.

Lynch's first job after his appointment as divisional commander was to visit the brigades in his area. With Florrie O'Donoghue, they travelled on foot, on horseback, by pony and trap, and even by boat to cross the Rivers Lee or Blackwater. In each brigade area they met battalion and column commanders. Every aspect of the ongoing fight for freedom was reviewed in detail, from the point of view of security, intelligence, organisation, training, supply of arms and explosives, communication, availability of men and weapons for columns, leadership and control of all units, brigades, battalions and companies, and, where necessary, orders were given for changes and improvements.

During the months of April, May and June, I worked part-time at divisional HQ, organising twenty-four-hour security as well as delivering dispatches and messages, and it was here that I got to know Tom Barry, who came to Gortyrahilly quite often for meetings with Liam and Florrie, and a long-lasting friendship developed between us.

Also around this time, the establishment of a divisional training camp was being planned in the isolated Clydagh Valley. However, Barry was not in agreement with this plan, as he felt that by bringing together so many senior officers in one place, the IRA was taking the huge risk of putting the entire armed effort in the south-west of Ireland in jeopardy and, on Barry's recommendation, the plan was shelved.

But let us return to the Volunteer chain of command in Muskerry and Mid-Cork; and the next link in that chain was the flying column. The column could be described as a formation of full-time Volunteers with no permanent base, who for security reasons had to move at short notice from place to place, usually in isolated districts scattered over a wide area. The 1st Cork Brigade formed the local Baile Mhúirne flying column during the first week of January 1921. It consisted of four sections with fifteen riflemen in

each section, thirty-six of them selected from the five Volunteer companies in the 8th Battalion, plus Volunteers from the 7th Battalion in Macroom. The formation of the column was completed by adding sixteen of the best and most highly skilled Volunteers from Cork city, including two men from the Clogheen Company, who were later tortured and brutally murdered near Clogheen on 23 March 1921.

The names of the Cork city sixteen were: Seán O'Hegarty, Dan (Sandow) O'Donovan, Pa Murray, Seán Murray, Dick Murphy, Seán Culhane, Jim Gray, Miah Gray, Con O'Sullivan, Michael McAuliffe, William Deasy, Jeremiah Mullane, Patrick O'Connor, William O'Brien, Stan Barry and Seán Ó Luasa.

The list of the Muskerry members of the flying column was as follows. From Kilnamartyra Company: Patrick O'Sullivan, Mick O'Sullivan, P. O'Connell, Terry O'Connell, C. Vaughan, Michael Murphy, P. Casey and Mick O'Connell (the soldier); from Baile Mhúirne Company: Patrick Lynch, Dan Sullivan, Paddy O'Sullivan, Con Kelleher, Jim Lehane, Jeremiah Casey, Mick Leahy, John O'Riordan, Mick Dinneen and Con Buckley; from Cúil Aodha Company: Eugie Sullivan, Dan Lynch, Dan J. Quill, Neilus Reilly, Dan Healy, John Lucey, Ned Coffey and Jamie Moynihan; from Inchigeela Company: Michael O'Sullivan, Con Cronin, Danny O'Leary, James Quinlan and Timothy O'Connell; and from Ballingearry Company: John P. Cronin, James P. Cronin, Daniel Lehane, Patrick J. Cronin, Liam Twomey, Cornelius Cronin, John MacSweeney, John C. Cronin, Dan O'Shea and Cal O'Callaghan.

The following were from the 7th Battalion. Macroom Company: Dan Corkery, Charlie Browne, Richard Browne, Dan MacSweeney, Daniel McSweeney (Tich), Sonny Crowley, Dan McCarthy, Pat Cunningham (Jas), J. Murphy, James Murphy and Mick Murphy; from Clondrohid Company: Tim Buckley, Denis

O'Shea, Tom Connors and James Roche; from Carriganima Company: Redmond Walsh, Thade O'Shea and James Roche; from Ballinagree Company: Paddy MacSullivan, Jeremiah Cotter, David Burke and Matt Kelleher; from Rusheen Company: Edward Neville; from Toames Company: Denis Hennigan and Michael Shine; from Crookstown Company: William Powell, Dan O'Leary and Cornelius Murphy; and from Canovee Company: Cornelius O'Leary.

The twenty-nine Volunteers from the Macroom 7th Battalion were not members of the flying column as such, but an arrangement was reached where they would reinforce the column when necessary. This contingent established its own training camp at Liscarrigane (Lios Carragáin) in Clondrohid and linked up regularly with the main column at Ullanes. Constant contact was maintained between the two groups.

The brigade flying column I am referring to was known locally as 'The Baile Mhúirne column', mainly because they were billeted at different locations around the parish. It consisted of a small group of sixty committed and dedicated Volunteers, rigorously commanded, strongly disciplined and well trained; and, for security reasons, constantly on the move. Their primary objective was to be ready to strike when conditions were favourable, and to avoid disasters and destruction at all costs. The column's main training camp was in the townland of Ullanes, some three miles to the east of Baile Mhúirne village, in an unoccupied farmyard with a few empty sheds and cow houses, owned by a local Volunteer, John M. Lucey, and close to Patsy Lynch's house, who was the Baile Mhúirne Company captain. The column was under the command of Dan O'Donovan, or 'Sandow', as he was better known. 'Sandow' was a brave, well-trained and fearless fighter. He previously served as OC of the Cork City Brigade and had worked with both Terence MacSwiney and Tomás MacCurtain. The column was well

armed, with fifty-five rifles, six revolvers and two Lewis machine guns (while the local reinforcing Volunteers had approximately 100 shotguns), and the twenty-nine Macroom 7th Battalion Volunteers had twenty-six rifles, sixteen shotguns and three revolvers.

It was the 8th Battalion OC and vice-OC, Patrick O'Sullivan and Paddy O'Sullivan, who selected the company Volunteers to be drafted into the column. The column was in constant danger compared to a company of ordinary Volunteers. The individual members of a company, while on the run, would always go their separate ways, hide on their own home ground or stay with friends outside the area. The column, on the other hand, was a large body of troops, billeted together in one location, easily identified by enemy intelligence, the general public or, more dangerously, by some individual who might, because of anti-national feeling or not having a particular liking for one or more member(s) of the column, inform the enemy of the column's whereabouts, which could be disastrous. I was constantly worried about this possibility, because some of my comrades and myself had prior experience of informers during the previous three years. Therefore the utmost security had to be maintained at all times for this body of men. The Volunteers of the local A, B, C and D Companies were always available to guard and to do outpost and scouting duties, twenty-four hours a day, wherever the column was billeted, and the column had to move regularly from one location to another for its own safety. Our main training centre was at Ullanes, but we frequently moved to other safe areas and houses, such as Clountycarty and Cnoc Sathairn (Knocksaharn) in the Kilnamartyra Company area, to Jim Lehane's, Bóna Bán (The White Pound), Dan Horgan's, Muinglia (Muing Lia), to Henry Good's house in the Baile Mhúirne area, to Paddy Sheehan's and Danny Murray's, Inchamore, Twomey's, Cúm Uí Chlúmháin (Coomuiclumhaine), and O'Reilly's in Fuhirees (Fuithrí) in the Cúil Aodha district, to

Carrigbán, Gurteenflugh and Gougane Barra (Guagán Barra) in the Ballingearry Company area, and finally to O'Donoghue's and Cronin's in Derryreague in the Clonkeen Company area of the county bounds in Co. Kerry.

In our travels from one area to another we had two powerful touring cars (captured from the British) for transporting heavy materials, such as our Lewis guns, rifles, ammunition, mattresses, cooking utensils and food. The cars usually travelled during the night on byroads, without lights, while most of the column members travelled on foot.

Discipline was extremely strict at the training camp at Ullanes. The men of the column were up at six o'clock every morning and we had to do eight hours of hard, army-style training every day. Seán Murray from Cobh was our drillmaster, and Seán O'Hegarty ruled the roost with an iron hand. Our HQ was an old, disused cow house with a leaking roof; it was cold and damp, with broken doors and windows. Some forty to fifty men slept on a bed of straw inside this building, while others slept with their backs to the walls and their feet towards the middle, with more straw packed around the doors and the windows to keep out the hard winter frosts. We were guarded twenty-four hours a day by local Volunteers, while the Cumann na mBan women prepared our meals, and we were never short of food. The local people of Baile Mhúirne and Clondrohid brought us daily supplies of bread, milk, butter, eggs, bacon and turf. The present generation will, I am sure, find it hard to understand the generosity, the willingness to give and share everything they had, and the friendship of those wonderful country people. They had a humane, kind-hearted streak in their hearts for us, and I can tell you seóinins [selfish people] were few and far between during that period early in the twentieth century. One of the most vivid memories I have of our stay at the Ullanes training camp was seeing two Volunteers going up the hill every

morning and returning with a haltered sheep, and so we had a slice of mutton for our tea every second day.

Having completed our training at Ullanes, the column moved to Jack Holland's farm, near Gougane Barra, where we did another two weeks of training, and after that moved to a disused farmhouse at Clountycarty, to the south of Renaniree, where we completed our training for the proposed ambush at Cúil na Cathrach, which was expected imminently. We moved to Clountycarty to be as near as possible to Cúil na Cathrach when the call to action came.

No history of the War of Independence would be complete without mentioning the part played by the women's movement, Cumann na mBan. This unit in our chain of command will occupy an honoured place in Irish history, of which they helped to write many glorious chapters. From 1917 to 1921 the organisation was an integral part of the Irish Volunteer body and without it that freedom force would not have succeeded. Leslie Price, later to marry Tom Barry, travelled the country from the Dublin HQ during 1917 and organised and moulded this new movement, which she named Cumann na mBan [The Women's League]. The women of Cumann na mBan organised support for the Volunteers. They carried dispatches, collected funds and gave help and support to all those engaged in physical resistance to the crown. In secret they nursed wounded Volunteers, as happened after the burning of the courthouse at the Mills, Baile Mhúirne, in 1920. They gave food, clothing and tobacco to the men on the run, but the most notable feature of their activities was intelligence work, which proved to be of invaluable assistance to the company, battalion and brigade officers. We had two intelligence women working in Macroom post office, who supplied us with valuable information up to, and after, the Truce. One of these young women was a sister of John Joe Rice, OC of the Kerry No. 2 Brigade. They were both able to read coded messages, which was a huge advantage to us. Greta

Graham, a sister of one of the intelligence men, Jim Graham, who had a public house in the square, became close to an Auxiliary soldier stationed in the castle and so was another source of valuable information to the battalion officers. This Auxiliary handed over to her ten revolvers, one at a time, for the Volunteers. In shops, hotels, bars, railway carriages, telephone exchanges, fairs and markets, the enemy's movements and conversations were noted and passed on. Many sick and wounded Volunteers owed their lives to these girls, who cared for and nursed them under great difficulties. Their work, especially in government concerns as intelligence agents, was vital to the well-being of the Volunteers. In post offices they removed copies of cipher messages passing from enemy HQs to garrison commanders, which the IRA quickly decoded and acted on, as happened regularly in the Macroom post office.

There were approximately 125 Cumann na mBan members in the Macroom 7th Battalion area, which included the town with fifty-one, while the figure for the 8th Battalion was approximately fifty-eight, which included my own local companies, Baile Mhúirne and Cúil Aodha, with twenty-four, making a total of 183 for both battalion areas. Let us hope that these wonderful women and girls will not be forgotten by future generations. Tributes to these women of the Muskerry district, who provided food and shelter for the members of the active service units, and the Volunteers, were paid by Dr Patrick O'Sullivan, former OC of the 8th Battalion, when he spoke at Cúil na Cathrach in the course of a tour to the Muskerry ambush sites organised by Scéim na gCeárd Chumann [Irish trade union group] in August 1963. Dr O'Sullivan said that adequate appreciation had never been given for the sacrifices made by the women, who helped the men of the flying column.

'What on earth could we have done without them?' he asked. 'They fed us, and they clothed us, and they went through

the enemy lines at the risk of their lives. I am rather hurt,' he added, 'because these brave and selfless women have never been adequately thanked for the enormous contribution which they made during the War of Independence, and it should be done, even at this late hour.'

A great weakness in the Volunteer movement during its earlier years was ignorance of the enemy's organisation and its sources of strength. During 1918 the Cork No. 1 Brigade in the city devised an elaborate communication system via cyclist dispatch riders, to every battalion HQ in Co. Cork. Eight routes radiated from the city, using different roads and byroads to the most isolated areas, and officers and men of a specialist cyclist company operated these routes. The Baile Mhúirne—Cúil Aodha communication with brigade officers in Cork was via Clogheen, Blarney, to Murphy's at Donoughmore, on to Kelleher's and Mac's at Ballinagree, to Walsh's at Carriganima and finally to Lynch's at Ullanes, Baile Mhúirne.

By the summer of 1920 the British court system in Ireland was in crisis. The public did not trust these foreign-dominated courts and judges any more, mainly because of their distrust of the Volunteer movement and of everything Republican and Nationalist. On 20 June 1920 the Sinn Féin Minister for Justice, Austin Stack, established three grades of a new Irish court system, namely the High Court, the District Court and the Parish Court. At the beginning people did not expect, or believe, that these courts would be successful, or that they would replace the old British system, but surprisingly the opposite was the case. The new courts got off to a good start and gained in popularity, despite every effort by the authorities to suppress them. The first sitting of the Baile Mhúirne Parish Court was held on the first day of October 1920 and that procedure took place in all the parishes of Muskerry and Mid-Cork, where they continued to operate very

effectively until they were abolished by the Free State government in 1922. While they operated, the Volunteers had the extra duty of ensuring that the court's rulings and orders were obeyed and carried out. The judges were picked from lists of nationally minded people who were intelligent, educated and fair-minded. The panel of judges in my native Baile Mhúirne included Tadhg Dinneen, Michael Ó Briain, Dónal Ban Ó Ceilleachair, Dr O'Brien and John P. Twomey.

History will recognise Florrie O'Donoghue as the architect, planner and deviser of the IRA's code of intelligence, a near-perfect system which proved invaluable to the Volunteer organisation, not only in the 7th and 8th Battalion areas, but also throughout Co. Cork, during the period 1919–21. In 1919 Florrie set about remedying the problem of the IRA's lack of intelligence sources by having men and women in every company and battalion in his brigade who were in a position to obtain information from post offices and telephone exchanges. Florrie's operatives opened letters, tapped telephone lines and intercepted and decoded telegrams. He had seven full-time workers dedicated to gathering facts and information regarding every aspect of enemy operations. Every IRA Volunteer in the 7th and 8th Battalion areas of Muskerry and Mid-Cork were instructed to keep a close eye on his own area, and to forward relevant information, such as the location of British posts, the identity of local spies and the political views of individuals, to local intelligence officers. The sixteen Volunteer companies in the Macroom 7th Battalion and in the Muskerry 8th Battalion each had a lieutenant of intelligence on their officer boards. Information on members of the crown forces was actively sought, and intelligence officers read the daily press for news of military appointments and social activities. The 8th Battalion OC, Patrick O'Sullivan, and his officers realised the importance of an effective intelligence service at an early stage, and so, in

conjunction with the 7th Battalion officers in Macroom, the IRA secret information services in Macroom town were scrutinised, overhauled and upgraded during the summer months of 1920. Intelligence personnel were put in place in every area frequented by the enemy: the post office, the banks, Williams Hotel, the railway station, the pubs, the main shops and stores, even the monthly cattle fair on the street. Believe it or not, the Macroom intelligence officer had a Black and Tan, who was stationed in the town, on his 'payroll'. This individual occasionally handed in small amounts of ammunition to Lynch's Bakery in MacCurtain Street and received cash payments for his services.

During the early days of June 1921, our intelligence people in the Macroom post office succeeded in unravelling a coded message from the British authorities in Victoria Barracks in Cork to the Auxiliaries in Macroom Castle, relating to a massive round-up in the Mid-Cork/Baile Mhúirne/Clydagh (an isolated glen on the Kerry side, bordering Baile Mhúirne) area, involving 10,000 British troops under Major Bernard Law Montgomery and Major A. E. Percival. Confirmation was received from our man in the castle and three days later, on 5–6 June, Baile Mhúirne and the Clydagh Valley witnessed one of the biggest manhunts in the history of the British Army. The round-up began in Baile Mhúirne on Sunday evening, 5 June 1921, but the flying column and the two local Volunteer companies had been disbanded the previous week as a result of our intelligence information, and I dread to think of the consequences had we not been forewarned.

The setting up of the 1st Cork Brigade HQ at Baile Mhúirne in December 1920, followed by the establishment of the 1st Southern Division HQ in the Cúil Aodha area, placed a huge responsibility on our local Volunteer and Cumann na mBan members. During this period the men and women of the two companies, and indeed also the Ballingearry, Inchigeela and Kilnamartyra Volunteers, were

constantly on the move for twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, doing guard, scouting and outpost duties, and delivering dispatches, as it was their duty to guard the divisional staff and their HQ at Gortyrahilly. On the Gortyrahilly mountain-top there was a sentry post commanding all approaches from the garrisoned towns of Dunmanway, Bantry and Bandon. Another sentry post at the Top O'Coomb covered the Kilgarvan to Kenmare road, while the outpost covering the Killarney road was on top of the Derrynasaggart Mountain. The Baile Mhúirne Company had the Millstreet road covered from a post on Ullanes hill. The Clondrohid road was covered by another sentry post on Danganasallagh (Dainghean na Saileach) Rock, and an outpost on top of the Curragh Hill in Seana Chluain (Shanachloon) had the Macroom road as far as Coolavookig (Cúil a' Bhúacaig) under surveillance twenty-four hours a day. A signalling post at Carrigaphooka (Carraig a' Phúca), manned round the clock by the Macroom Volunteers, transmitted news of the enemy's movements to battalion HQ at Renaniree, to brigade HQ in Gortnafuinsion and to the divisional HQ at Gortyrahilly, who in turn notified the column wherever they were billeted.

Likewise, the Ballingearry Volunteers had sixteen men per day continually engaged in sentry duty at Currahy, Béal a' Ghleanna, Leacabhán (Leacaban) and Keimaneigh, making sure that any British military or unauthorised people did not enter the Cúil Aodha, Baile Mhúirne or Renaniree areas. The MacSweeney sisters, from their sentry post on Murnabeag Hill, covered the Bóna Bán back road leading to Gortyrahilly and Gortnascairte during daylight hours and the Kilnamartyra Volunteers completed the Muskerry security circle with sentry posts manned day and night at Cathair Céirín (Cahircerin), Rahoona Rock and Gortnabinne. These posts completely encircled divisional, brigade and battalion HQs and staff, as well as the column HQ at Ullanes. The men on

sentry duties used flags during the day and paraffin lamps at night. As soon as they noticed any sign of danger a signal was flashed to the lowland hills, where two watchmen were stationed, and from there to divisional and brigade HQs as well as to the column. The above scouting and sentry duties accounted for approximately twenty-five to thirty men from my own Cúil Aodha Company, and the Baile Mhúirne, Kilnamartyra and Ballingearry Companies used the same system. The guard on sentry duty was divided into night and day groups, and every man in each company had to take his turn or get another man to take his place.

Some companies and battalions developed different systems to warn their officers of enemy movements in their respective areas. The Kilmurry Company had a unique method of warning their leaders and the local Cumann na mBan when danger threatened. Close to the village, on a high, sloping field facing north was placed a large white sheet to warn of the enemy's presence in the area. There were four positions in the field for the sheet, each position showing where the enemy was heading. If the sheet was at the eastern side of the field, then the enemy was to the east, in Lissarda or Crookstown, and so on. When there was no enemy movement in the vicinity, the sheet was taken in. This sheet could be seen plainly from the 7th Battalion HQ, almost five miles away, and it proved to be both a safe and an effective system. I'm sure that strangers passing that way must have wondered when they saw the 'washing' out every day of the week, even when it was lashing rain.