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PIERCE McCAN, M.P.

Part I

(1882 — 1916)

By Deaglán O Bric

Two centuries ago the Pennyfeather family, who had a castle some miles north-east of Cashel, and Kingsmills, who lived in nearby Newpark estate, were among the other great landowning families of county Tipperary. About 1710 a son of the Pennyfeather family married one of the Kingsmills. Newpark then became another Pennyfeather estate.

In the middle of the last century the land passed to the Davies and in 1864 the estate, known now as Ballyowen, was put up for auction. Among those at the auction was Joseph McCAN, who had returned from Australia with a fortune. At the time of the auction he already owned Herberton House at Blackrock outside Dublin, later the private dwelling of Eamonn de Valera, and another mansion in Kildare. He bought the 1,000-acre Ballyowen estate at Dualla near Cashel for the then enormous price of £17,000 and soon came to live there.¹

Frank McCAN, a son of Joseph, married Jane Power, whose brother P.J. Power was an M.P. for East Waterford and a member of Parnell's party. Frank and Jane reared four sons at Ballyowen. The eldest, Joseph, worked in a bank before taking over the farm in 1919. Anthony, the third son, also took up farming and went to reside in Meath. William, the youngest, died in 1911.

Pierce, the second son, was born on 2 August 1882 at Prospect Lodge near New Ross, county Wexford, a house Frank occasionally rented. Pierce was baptised in the local church of Rathgarogue and given the names Francis Mary Pierce.² His parents returned to Dualla and continued to live there.

After the death in 1914 of his father, Frank McCAN took over the running of the farm. Pierce began his formal education at home where the McCAN children had a private tutor, an Englishman named Southendy, who seems to have taken little interest in the boys.³ As a young man Pierce was interested in craftwork, and succeeded in making a boat for the small lake on the McCAN estate. For years this boat was the centre of attraction for young visitors to Ballyowen.

Pierce may have attended the Christian Brothers school in Cashel before going to Rockwell College.⁴ In 1899 with his brother Anthony he moved to Clongowes Wood College, possibly because one of the Jesuits there, a Fr. Hayden S.J., was an uncle of Mrs. McCAN.⁵ Pierce did not remain there for long. In May 1900 his health deteriorated; and, once he was sufficiently recovered, he returned home permanently. Already the future leader was beginning to assert his ability; "the worth of a boy like Pierce in a college like this could not easily be exaggerated", the rector commented on learning that he was not to return.

An incident that occurred during Pierce's days in Clongowes, together with another nine years later, show him to be a courageous person. During a school-tour to Tramore in the autumn of 1899 one of his fellow-students got into difficulty while swimming. Pierce went to his assistance and brought him ashore safely. For this he received the bronze medal of the Royal Humane Society. In 1908 Pierce swam across the river Suir near Cashel (which was then in flood), in a vain attempt to rescue a Mr. Tierney, the first whip of the Tipperary Hounds. For this attempted rescue he was given the parchment certificate of the same society.⁶

Editorial note The concluding part of this article will appear in the 1989 Journal.



The years after Pierce's return from Clongowes are difficult to trace in detail. He went to France in November 1900, where in Pau he studied French under the Abbe Pedoupe. By June 1904 he was back in Ireland.⁷ Sometime early in the century he attended a special agricultural course in Dublin.⁸

It is possible that during his stay in France Pierce travelled to Denmark to inspect Danish farming methods. His farming methods later in Ballyowen were widely admired; he introduced many innovations. He also bred horses which he rode at competitions. At Rosegreen point-to-point races in 1906 he narrowly avoided a fatal accident when his stirrup broke.⁹

After he left Clongowes Pierce began to study the Irish language.¹⁰ The arrival of *An Fear Mór* in Dualla in 1909 as a Gaelic League organiser gave Pierce an added opportunity to master the language. Pierce attended the League classes and apparently joined one of the clubs that *An Fear Mór* set up.¹¹

His interest in the Irish language brought McCan on holidays to the Gaeltacht. "You find him recuperating, after the hard manual toil of the farm, in the Aran Islands, by the wild coast of Mayo and Galway, down in Ring, over in Clare, and up in the highlands of Donegal, learning Irish."¹²

He seems to have had a special love for Connemara. "Is minic a thugadh se cuairt ar Ghaillimh is ar Arainn, mar is i Gaeilge Connachta ab fhearr leis labhairt".¹³ When the Gaelic League was organised in Tipperary Pierce involved himself actively in it. "He had all the enthusiasm of us novices in the Gaelic League for the language, and went about always with some Gaelic textbook in his pocket".¹⁴

By 1908 there were 18 Gaelic League branches in county Tipperary.¹⁵ Probably the most active Gaelic centre in the county then was in Knockavilla. Here Fr. Matt Ryan, locally known as "The General" because of an incident he had been involved in during the Land War, saw the value of combining the land and language movements. Pierce was a lifelong friend of Fr. Ryan, and received much of his enthusiasm from him.

Arthur Griffith was another person whom Pierce greatly respected. At this time Griffith was in charge of *Sinn Féin*, a political party founded in 1905 with the aim of national self-development. This party had spread rapidly in the years after 1906 throughout the whole country.

Griffith's movement was especially strong in Dublin, where it successfully contested local government elections. In 1908 the party made an unsuccessful attempt to win the parliamentary seat in North Leitrim. Disillusioned, and weakened by the growing possibility of Home Rule, *Sinn Féin* then declined from 1910 to 1913.

Within *Sinn Féin*, however, were many Republicans who, finding no opening for their ideas now turned their attention to the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood. The I.R.B. was only a minority — "its whole membership could have been comprised in a concert hall" — but it included some of the best brains in Ireland.¹⁶ It had members everywhere and in every organisation; many were unsuspectingly controlled by it. McCan, however, was never in the I.R.B.¹⁷

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An article by Professor Eoin MacNeill of University College, Dublin, in *An Claidheamh Soluis*, the Gaelic League organ, in November 1913 called for the setting up of a National Volunteer force. To the I.R.B. this article presented a wonderful opportunity. Invitations to meet MacNeill were sent to a small group of nationalists by The O'Rahilly. Those invited included Padraig Pearse, Eamonn Ceannt and Sean McDermott.



The initial meeting was at Wynn's Hotel, Dublin on 13 November 1913.¹ A provisional Committee of 30 was formed, and a public meeting was held at the Rotunda on 25 November.² That evening after a huge meeting the Irish Volunteers were established and 3,000 enrolment forms were signed.

The Volunteer movement spread rapidly through the country. Cork and Galway were the first provincial centres to establish corps. Other counties soon followed — Kerry, Sligo, Wexford, Limerick and Monaghan.³ Tipperary too had a number of corps set up there in early 1914. It seems indeed that Cashel had a Volunteer group before the Volunteers were formally constituted on 25 November 1913. Two days before that, at a Fenian commemoration ceremony in Cashel a group decided to form together in the style of the proposed Volunteers.⁴

A corp was established in Clonmel near the end of January 1914. The two men mainly responsible were friends of Pierce McCan, Seamus O'Neill (then an Irish teacher in Rockwell College) and Frank Drohan. Both were prominent in the I.R.B., Drohan being head-centre for south Tipperary. A previous attempt to establish a corp in the town — probably in December 1913 — had failed because of opposition from the Ancient Order of Hibernians, then influential in Clonmel.⁵

On 28 January 1914 John Redmond, the leader of the Irish parliamentary party, spoke at a demonstration in Waterford. Among the addresses presented to him was one from south Tipperary county council. "We take this opportunity of offering you our loyal gratitude and confidence and . . . assure you that . . . in the few short months . . . before the crowning work of your lifetime is accomplished you can confidently rely on the unswerving support of the Premier County".⁶ This is indicative of the support that Redmond still commanded, with Home Rule almost certain to be granted.

The Volunteers continued to spread all over Ireland. In Tipperary, as elsewhere, new corps were springing up. A meeting (preceded by a torchlight procession), to establish the Cashel corp was held on 23 March 1914. A member of the urban council took the chair.⁷

Pierce McCan, who was on the platform, proposed the formation of a branch of the Volunteers, urging that Tipperary be brought into line with the other counties in Ireland "which had embraced this very desirable National Movement". The proposal was seconded and a very large number of recruits then enrolled⁸. Four companies were formed, the election of officers being on a temporary basis only.

About this time Pierce set about forming a branch of the Volunteers in his own parish. On Friday 13 April he presided at a meeting in the village for this purpose.⁹ In his address Pierce drew on the experiences of Irish history, with special reference to the 1782 Volunteer episode, to stress the need for the Irish Volunteers. He then stated the position of the Volunteers vis-a-vis Redmond:-- "Some people have got an idea that this movement is opposed to the Parliamentary Party. But that idea is quite wrong . . . It must be clear that the Volunteers will be a wonderful help and power behind the party in their fight for Home Rule".

He developed this further, by claiming that "no country can hope to keep its freedom and have its rights respected unless it is in a position to defend its liberty and protect its rights, with force of arms if necessary". That night 68 men from Dualla parish enrolled, and drilling commenced the following night. The committee chosen was Larry Luby, Thomas Walsh, M. Dunphy, Richard Delaney, Pierce McCan, J.J. Connolly (treasurer) and Sam Delaney (Hon. Secretary).¹⁰

So remarkable was the growth in the numbers of Volunteer corps around Cashel that a district council was set up for the area. This district included the parishes of Golden, Goold's Cross, New Inn, Rosegreen, Dualla, Boherlahan and Camas. The Cashel corp itself now numbered about 300.



By early summer of 1914 notices began to appear in the *Irish Volunteer* calling for the holding of county conventions and on 10 May in Tipperary town the first county Convention for Tipperary was held. Pierce and two others represented the Cashel district. The provisional committee in Dublin were then sending organisers around the country to outline the proposed structure of the Volunteers. Sean MacDermott and Lawrence Kettle attended the Tipperary meeting.

Redmond and the Parliamentary Party were fully aware of the potential of this new force. In mid-May William Redmond publicly expressed the view that, such was the size and spirit of the Volunteer force, the granting of Home Rule was not only certain but necessary. “These young men, *no matter what happens* will never tolerate the old system of rule being imposed on them . . .”¹¹

The italicised phrase was directed at the Ulster Volunteer leaders, now gradually becoming more vociferous. On 25 April 1914 35,000 rifles had been landed at Larne in Antrim. For a year the Ulster Volunteers had been arming themselves and by the end of 1913 had acquired many weapons.¹² Government action was too late to check the Ulster Volunteers. The Curragh “mutiny” in March 1914 served to bring the Redmondites and Volunteers closer together.

On 25 May the Home Rule Bill passed its final stage in the House of Commons. All over Ireland people rejoiced at the news; bonfires blazed from one end of Tipperary to the other. But a reason for the Bill’s easy passage through was the British Premier’s promise of an amending Bill, which would satisfy Northern Ireland. This amending Bill provided for the permanent exclusion of the nine counties of Ulster from Home Rule.¹⁶

The immediate result outside Ulster was a further growth of the Volunteers. On 23 May yet another corp was established in Tipperary; after Pierce McCan addressed a meeting in Killenaule, over 200 members enrolled. On 20 June in a speech at Clune Cross, Pierce reflected the dilemma then present. “This is essentially a movement of work and not of talk . . . But remember, we ought to be tolerant and respect the views of those who do not politically think as we do.”¹⁴ This reveals two characteristics of Pierce evident throughout his life—determination and tolerance.

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All through the summer of 1914 the Volunteers continued to grow. Training camps were organised in many places, where military strategy was studied. The Citizen Army was reconstructed in March; Cumann na mBan was streamlined, and prepared to deal with ambulance work and food supply. All this led to another change of attitude by Redmond. Having opposed the Volunteers at first he later came to ignore their existence; now he wanted to take control of them.

“In the best interests of the Home Rule cause, which the Volunteer movement has been called into being to vindicate and safeguard, I suggest that the present Provisional committee should be strengthened by the addition of 25 representative men from different parts of the country, nominated at the instance of the Irish party.”¹

On 16 June the Provisional committee reluctantly submitted to Redmond’s proposals. Of the 26 who voted only 9 opposed the proposal. The episode, however, caused a division and attempts to cover it up were to last only a short time.

The Volunteer movement continued to develop. In June The O’Rahilly reviewed a display by a large number of South Tipperary corps. The increase in numbers resulted in a greater demand for arms. Darrell Figgis and Erskine Childers purchased 15,000 second-hand German rifles, which were landed at Howth on 26 July and at Kilcoole later that week.



On 29 July Pierce McCan assumed the leading role in the Volunteers in Tipperary, when delegates from all corps of the county attended a meeting there. A temporary chairman (Mansfield) suggested that a permanent chairman should be centrally situated. Mr. Barry (Golden) proposed Mr. McCan. A Mr. D.C. Maher seconded his nomination, and on a poll the voting was Pierce McCan, 27 votes: Hanrahan (Fethard), 13.

Others elected were Messrs. O'Mahoney (Cashel) Secretary: O'Hanrahan (Fethard) Treasurer: and a board of six, three from South Tipperary — Mansfield (Cullen), Drohan (Clonmel) and Dawson (Tipperary) — and three from North Tipperary — Ryan (Newport), Mockler (Thurles) and McKenna (Borrisokane). Concluding the meeting Pierce again stressed the need for arms, not so much that they might be used, but to ensure that Irishmen would not be taken advantage of.²

On 3 August 1914 Britain entered World War I. Redmond assured the British Government that it might with confidence withdraw all its troops from Ireland, that the Irish Volunteers would co-operate with Ulster in guarding Ireland's shore.³

The effect this decision had was to polarise further the two groups — parliamentarians and republicans — so that when Redmond came to encourage Irishmen to go abroad and fight with the English Army, the final split in the Volunteers followed immediately. In September Redmond's nominees were expelled from the Volunteers Committee and a convention was called "to reaffirm the original manifesto to oppose any diminution of the Home Rule Act, to repudiate every suggestion of partition, and to declare Ireland's neutrality".⁴

Throughout the county committees began to vote on Redmond's policy. On 30th September the Cashel correspondent of the *Clonmel Chronicle* wrote of "the greatest indignation . . . felt throughout Cashel and district at the extraordinary manifesto emanating from the Sinn Féin section of the National Volunteers Provisional Council".⁵ This had followed a motion passed by the Cashel Volunteer corp some days previously to "place our entire confidence in Mr. John Redmond M.P. and the majority of the members of the Provisional Council".

However, the most important indication of the support Redmond received came from a meeting of the County Committee of the Volunteers held on 8 October in Thurles. Nine members attended out of a total of 13. The manifesto of the original Provisional Committee and correspondence from the Redmondite section were read. O'Hanrahan of Fethard then proposed "in the best interest of Ireland the only course to be adopted was to follow the leadership of Mr. John Redmond M.P." When the vote was taken only one person dissented — the chairman Pierce McCan.⁶

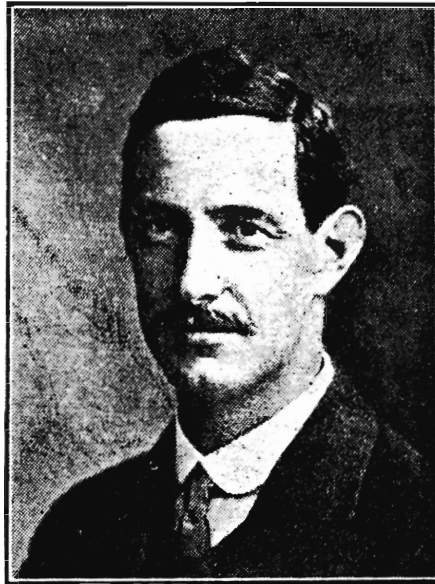
As with the county committee, there was very evident pro-Redmond support throughout Tipperary. Corp after corp adopted resolutions supporting Redmond. Some came out strongly against the "Sinn Feiners". At Kilcash the following motion was passed unanimously: "We the members of the Kilcash Corps condemn in the strongest possible manner the contemptible action of a set of political 'cranks' in Dublin in seeking to usurp control of the Volunteer movement, and we are firmly convinced that the Government of Ireland's 'citizen' army is safe in the hands of the true and trusted pilot who for long and weary years has safely guided the barque of Irish Nationality through dark and troubled waters".⁷

Only about 11,000 out of 180,000 Volunteers remained under MacNeill's leadership. The only corp reported in Tipperary papers as coming out in support of the 'Sinn Féiners' was that of Doon. The resolution, passed there on 27 September represents the stand taken by McCan. "We the Doon Volunteers declare ourselves Volunteers for Ireland and Ireland only. We deprecate any attempt by whomsoever made to turn the Volunteer movement into a recruiting ground for the English Army. We congratulate Mr. McNeill on the noble stand he made to preserve the integrity and purity of the constitution of the Volunteers, and we promise



him all support in whatever step it may be necessary to take to protect the movement from England's thirst for Ireland's soldiers".⁸

"God Prosper Ireland's Cause."



PIERCE McCANN,

A Message from an English Gaol :

TO THE ELECTORS OF EAST TIPPERARY.

Thank People East Tipperary for my
Nomination. God Prosper Ireland's
Cause.—PIERCE McCANN, Gloucester.

BY VOTING FOR McCANN

You will be Voting for Ireland's Cause.

Printed by "The Nationalist" Newspaper Co., Ltd., Clonmel; Published
by Clonmel Sinn Fein Executive.

Sinn Fein election leaflet for E. Tipperary constituency for the 1918 general election.



Men like Sean Treacy and Dan Breen probably had some influence on the Doon Volunteers; both were committed I.R.B. members. However, McCan was not in the I.R.B., though he was friendly with these and other I.R.B. men. What then influenced him to take this unique stand? One possible explanation is that by now he had come to accept the need for a policy which would involve non-co-operation with England, a full Republican programme. No personal statements of McCan's at this time, however, have survived that would explain fully his total rejection of Redmond's policy.

On 3 October the National Volunteers (the pro-Redmond force) held their first county convention in Thurles. Mr. T. Dawson (Tipperary) was elected President, Mr. R. Gill Vice-President, Mr. O'Hanrahan (Fethard) Treasurer, and Mr. Barry (Golden) secretary. Resolutions of confidence in Redmond were passed. With the exception of McCan, (who was, of course, absent) the committee was the same as the previous committee.

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Greatly depleted in numbers the Irish Volunteers now prepared to reorganise. On 25 October the first convention of the Irish Volunteers was held in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. Among the 160 delegates was McCan, who with E. O'Dwyer (Kilnamanagh) and a few others, represented the Tipperary Volunteers. MacNeill was unanimously chosen as Chairman, with The O'Rahilly elected as Treasurer.

Throughout November the Executive organised the election in each county where there were three or more corps of county representatives for the General Council. By early December Tipperary had elected McCan as its representative.¹ Amongst others of ability who might have been elected were Sean Treacy, Frank Drohan and Seamus O'Neill.

However, these three were active I.R.B. and unknown to MacNeill a majority of the executive committee were members of that body, and it is possible that for this reason the Tipperary I.R.B. was anxious to avoid holding the primary county position.² In any event, McCan's election endorsed his previous election as chairman of the Volunteers in Tipperary.

On 6 December Pierce attended the first meeting of the General Council at the Volunteer headquarters. In all, 22 delegates attended, submitting reports from their respective areas. Although nothing is known of Pierce's report, on the previous Sunday, "All-Ireland Final Sunday", Volunteers from the provinces had met after the game. MacNeill, O'Rahilly, Hobson and Mellows attended and from Tipperary there were delegates from Fethard, Thurles, Roscrea, Clonmel and Nenagh. Afterwards the Tipperary delegates conferred together.³

During the summer of 1915 Volunteer training camps were organised in four centres — Tyrone, Cork, Wicklow and on the Limerick-Tipperary border. The object of these camps was to give officers a thorough grounding in military matters, so that they might be competent to train their own local units. Pierce attended the Wicklow camp, from 31 July to 14 August. Here he met Thomas Ashe and Dick Coleman, both of whom like Pierce were to die in an English jail. McCan and Ashe became close friends in the course of the camp, a friendship that lasted until Ashe's death in 1917.⁴

The Dualla Volunteers, like most other corps, had split in 1914. At the meeting called to decide which policy to endorse, Pierce spoke of Redmond's efforts as an attempt to hand over the Volunteers to the British Government. The corp split on the issue, and MacNeill's supporters reformed again under Pierce.⁵ Unlike many other corps, the Dualla Volunteers continued their activities. Training in the use of arms, manouvres, and general lectures were held during 1915. Among their instructors were Ernest Blythe, Liam Mellows, Colm O'Loughlin, Ernie O'Malley, Fr. Hackett S.J. and Pierce himself.⁶ The number of Irish Volunteers in South Tipperary at the end of 1915 was 357.⁷



In October 1915 a new factor entered into the situation. Feeling the need for more soldiers, Britain increased its recruiting campaign in Ireland. Recruiting meetings were held all over the country, one being held at Tipperary town on 6 October. The previous evening Sean Treacy, William Benn, Eamonn O Duibhir and others posted up anti-recruiting literature all over the town. Monsignor Ryan, a Redmondite, who was to speak at the meeting received threatening letters. Although the meeting was held it won few recruits. However, others followed and that year 1,448 men from South Tipperary joined the British Army.⁸

Throughout 1915 Pierce's work in the Gaelic League also continued. While his activities cannot be traced accurately, a few incidents give some indication of his involvement. He was a member of the Cashel branch, which in February he represented at a meeting in Carrick-on-Suir of all the branches in the Waterford or Deise district. Here *Dail Deise*, an executive to control the district was formed, with control of the Irish College in Ring as its special concern. Pierce was elected secretary to this new executive. In August he attended the annual congress of the South-East of Ireland branches of the League.

In Dualla, Pierce took up the work of *An Fear Mór*, who had taught Irish there many years earlier.⁹ Now, and also after 1916, he held Irish classes, usually in the house of Owen Keevin.¹⁰ About this time Fr. Hackett mentioned him as an ideal candidate for the presidency of the League.

Meanwhile, in the political arena matters developed rapidly as the year progressed. Although few knew of it then, a committee had been selected by the I.R.B. to prepare for an armed insurrection.¹¹ Throughout the country men trained, marched, and armed themselves. On Whit Sunday a huge Volunteer parade was held in Limerick. Contingents from Dublin, Cork, Tipperary and other counties attended. The reaction of onlookers was hostile.¹²

In the following months things changed. O'Donovan Rossa's funeral in August provided the I.R.B. with an opportunity to remind the country of its revolutionary history. Then came two unwise moves by the British Government. The first was the second postponement of the introduction of Home Rule, which led to a noticeable fall-off in Redmond's support. Then the enlistment scheme which was vigorously pursued from November tended to direct former supporters of Redmond into the Irish Volunteers.

The early months of 1916 were politically a continuation of the latter half of 1915. In Tipperary the pattern was the same. "During the early months of the year Sinn Fein (the Irish Volunteers) were active organising and drilling especially at Clonmel, and between that town and Cashel. The local press was moderate. A seditious newspaper called *The Gael* put out by Eamonn Dwyer was seized and his house searched".¹³

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Because he was not in the I.R.B. — a matter difficult to explain — McCan was left in ignorance of the proposed insurrection. This was regretted by the local I.R.B. leaders, who had every confidence in Pierce.¹ E. O Duibhir (Ballagh), county centre for the Brotherhood, knew of the insurrection a fortnight beforehand,² and passed on the word to others like Treacy, Benn, Breen and Drohan.

All over the county preparations began. Drohan's coach-building yard became the munitions factory, as men worked night and day filling cartridges, and preparing explosives and field kits. However, the orders remained known only to sworn I.R.B. members.³

Exactly when McCan got news of the insurrection is not clear. Late in Holy Week he left for Dublin to discuss the situation with the Volunteer leaders.⁴ On Saturday O Duibhir sent a telegram to O'Neill, with what may have been definite information on the insurrection. Con



Deere arrived in Clonmel soon afterwards, with news that the rising was to start at 4 p.m. on Sunday, and that armed revolt was necessary in all areas.⁵

Deere knew that McCan would be returning that night. O'Neill who was instructed to meet McCan, left for Con Deere's house in Ardmayle. That evening in Deere's home, Treacy, O Duibhir, Michael Sheehan, O'Neill and others waited for the return of McCan. In the interests of security, only O Duibhir went to meet Pierce at the station. Later he returned with the message McCan had brought:

"The Rising is on, starting at 4 p.m. tomorrow (Sunday)⁶

The role allocated to the provinces by the leaders in Dublin was mainly to be disruptive. The plans for Tipperary seem to have been relatively simple. Because of the heavy concentration of British forces in Clonmel, Cahir and Fethard, these barracks were not to be attacked.

Instead, it was decided that the Clonmel Volunteers would march to Lisronagh. There they would be joined by the Fethard corps. Together they would attack the Lisronagh barracks. Then they would besiege the barracks in Clerihan, before proceeding to Cashel, where they would join forces with Pierce McCan.

The three units would then attack Cashel R.I.C. barracks. This, it was hoped, would disrupt British authority in the area. It would also lead to the sending of reinforcements from Cahir, Clonmel and Fethard, which could be ambushed.⁷

In the early hours of Sunday morning men uncovered hidden arms and began oiling them. The general feeling seems to have been one of relief that the long waiting was over.⁸ In Clonmel preparations were well advanced by 10 a.m. That morning too, men had begun to gather at Ballyowen, waiting for the order to march.⁹

But the order was not given. Around 8 a.m. The O'Rahilly and Brian McNeill arrived at Ballyowen with Eoin MacNeill's countermanding order. MacNeill's son remained in Ballyowen, while McCan left to bring the countermanding order to Limerick and Kerry.¹⁰

The O'Rahilly left for Cork.¹¹ Before he left, McCan sent the latest message on to Fethard; from there it reached Clonmel. Drohan then made for Waterford and New Ross with the countermanding order.

This was MacNeill's second countermanding order. The first had come on the Thursday, when he learned of the coming insurrection. Then hearing of the approaching German aid, he was "converted" on Friday and decided to let matters go ahead as planned. With the arrival on Saturday of the news of the fate of the German Arms ship *Aud* MacNeill issued another countermand, and at midnight sent messengers to the country, The O'Rahilly going south.

The I.R.B. military council met in Liberty Hall on Sunday morning. They decided unanimously to carry on as planned --- to strike at noon on Monday.

Late on Monday evening news of the Rising reached various centres throughout Tipperary.¹² The Tipperary volunteers met to decide on a course of action. Although some — Michael O'Callaghan and Dinny Lacey among them — were in favour of action, the meeting was adjourned until the following evening. On his way home from the meeting O'Callaghan was mobbed by Army sympathisers. In an attempt to arrest him later that evening two R.I.C. men were shot dead — the only victims of Easter Week in Tipperary.¹³

From Monday night houses of prominent members of the Volunteers were under surveillance by the police. In Dualla groups of local Volunteers guarded the McCan home in case of military reprisals.¹⁴ Tuesday was the day of messages and suspense. Drohan contacted Pierce with the news that the Clonmel Volunteers were ready to fight.¹⁵ Why nothing constructive happened that day is hard to explain, for O Duibhir later attested to McCan's willingness and



determination to take part in the insurrection.

On Wednesday at mid day O Duibhir went to Ballyowen and asked Pierce to bring out all the Volunteers in the county. McCan agreed to do so, but felt that, if their effort was to be of any use, the Limerick and Cork Volunteers would also need to join in.

That evening O Duibhir left Dualla, with despatches for the Limerick and Cork commandants. At Ballagh as arranged he met Treacy who went towards Cork, while O Duibhir set out for Limerick. At Tipperary, Ballylanders and Galbally men turned out at Treacy's call. The response to O Duibhir's message in the small towns and village was positive also.¹⁶

However, when Treacy reached Mitchelstown he learned of the failure of the insurrection in the South and of the disbandment of the Cork companies.¹⁷ In Limerick too things had reached a climax before O Duibhir arrived. The loss of the *Aud*, the success of which was central to Limerick's part in the rising, left the Limerick leaders in a dilemma. On Easter Sunday about 130 men had mobilized; on Monday the officers met, but felt that since their plans had centred on the arrival of the arms ship, they could do nothing. On Monday evening the assembled men were dismissed.¹⁸

This was the situation that O Duibhir encountered on arriving there on Wednesday night or Thursday morning. Treacy and O Duibhir met at Doon on Thursday evening having disbanded any units that had mobilized. By this time McCan had learned of the failure of the rising in Cork and had disbanded the Tipperary companies.

On Thursday morning Pierce had begun a general mobilization. A message reached him that Cork and Kerry were in action, and that Limerick was about to join in.¹⁹ Drohan had been ordered to march his men to Market Hill (Fethard), where he would join McCan's unit. A quantity of arms and ammunition was taken out in a bread-van along the Fethard road, for the Volunteers to arm themselves outside the town. Because of R.I.C. vigilance it was impossible to get the company out into the countryside unnoticed; the mobilization never took place. Instead, Drohan cycled to Market Hill to await McCan and his men. They never arrived. Pierce had learned of the failure of the Cork Volunteers to mobilise and had called off the proposed movements of the Tipperary Volunteers. Nothing further happened on Friday. Treacy and O Duibhir tried to teach Dublin. O Duibhir was arrested on the way and was imprisoned. On Saturday news of the surrender in Dublin arrived, and that evening arms were returned to their hiding-places.²⁰

It appears that the task of the Tipperary Volunteers was to facilitate action by the Limerick men. The attacks on barracks, destruction of transport and communications systems and the ambushes proposed for Tipperary would have ensured that troops stationed in Tipperary could not be sent for use against the Limerick Volunteers. The Tipperary town unit was detailed to put Limerick Junction railway station out of action and, having disarmed the local police units, was to proceed to Limerick city.²¹

While the failure of the Tipperary Volunteers to rise was a cause of disappointment to many of them, their actual number was relatively small (and more important) inadequately armed.²² In Clonmel, the largest town in the county, there were a mere 50 or so Volunteers. Their arms consisted of 33 Lee Enfield rifles and 3,000 rounds of ammunition.²³ They might have delayed the movement of the troops, but could hardly have succeeded in taking any sizeable target.

For McCan, the events of 1916 were a disappointment. Months of preparation had given rise to hopes. "I met him towards the close of 1917. He congratulated me on having been in Dublin during Easter Week, and expressed the wish that he had been there with us. The fact that he was in Frongoch (internment camp) for a time after the Rising was not enough for him".²⁴



FOOTNOTES

Chapter 1

1. Interview with John Ryan, Dualla, who was on the local committee of the Irish Volunteers in Dualla 1914.
2. *O Broin Papers*, Bk.I p.1.
3. *Ibid.*, Bk., p.12
4. *Nationalist* (Clonmel) 8-3 1919.
5. *List of Students*, Clongowes Wood College.
6. *Tipperary Star*, 15-3 1919.
7. *O Broin Papers*, Bk.I, p.1
8. See n. 4.
9. *O Broin Papers*, Bk.I, p.33.
10. *O Broin Papers*, Bk.I, p.30.
11. Interview with John Ryan. See also *Blathfheasc O Thiobrad Arann*. (Conradh na Gaeilge, 1943), p 47 et seq.
12. *Tipperary Star*, 15-3 1919.
13. *An Stoc* (Gaillimh) Márta 1919.
14. *O Broin Papers* – Recollection of P. McCann (author unidentified).
15. O’Cuiv, B: The Gaelic Cultural Movement and the New Nationalism, in *The Making of 1916*, ed. Nowlan, K. (Dublin, 1969), p. 12.
16. O’Hegarty; *The Victory of Sinn Fein* (Dublin, 1924). p. 8.
17. John Ryan; also Desmond Ryan, D., *Sean Treacy and the Third Tipperary Brigade*, p. 19. *The Making of 1916* op. cit.

Chapter 2.

1. Martin, F.X. *The Irish Volunteers* (Dublin 1966), p. 24.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
3. *Clonmel Chronicle*, 21-1-1914 (lecture by S. O’Neill).
4. *Cluain Meala 1916* (Clonmel 1966), p.6. (While O’Neill is adamant on this point, the local newspapers do not mention a group being formed).
5. *Ibid.* p.6.
6. *Clonmel Chronicle*, 28-1-1914.
7. *Irish Volunteer*. 4-4-1914.
8. *Ibid.*
9. There is confusion as to the date of this meeting. The *Tipperary Star* gives 24 April, the *Irish Volunteer* 3 April. I would accept the earlier date, as the report of the Volunteer display in Cashel on 9 May states that “the Dualla corp marched in grand military style”.
10. *Tipperary Star* and *Irish Volunteer*. 25-4-1914.
11. *Nationalist*. 13-5-1914.
12. Hobson, Bulmer: *A Short History of the Volunteers* (Dublin, 1918). p. 43.
13. Macardle, Dorothy. *The Irish Republic* (Dublin, 1951), p.110.
14. *Tipperary Star*, 20-6-1914.

Chapter 3

1. Letter from John Redmond to the Press, 9-6-1914: cf. Hobson op.cit., p.108.
2. *Clonmel Chronicle*, 1-8-1914.
3. Macardle, op.cit., p.116.
4. *Ibid.*, p.116.
5. *Ibid.*, p.122.
6. *Clonmel Chronicle*, 10-10-1914.
7. *Ibid.*, 17-10 1914.
8. *Tipperary Star*. 3-10 1914.

Chapter 4

1. *Irish Volunteer*. 16-10 1915.
2. See O Luin. Sean. *I Die in a Good Cause*. (Tralee. 1970), P.71.
3. *Irish Volunteer*. 5-12-1914.
4. *Nationality*. 15-3-1919. Recollection of P. McCann by J.J.B.



5. Interview with John Ryan.
6. Ibid.
7. S.P.O. C.B.S. Intelligence Notes 1915 (Carton 3).
8. *Tipperary Star*, 13-10-1915, and *Blathfheasc o Thiobrad Arann*, op. cit., p.44.
9. Cf. *Blathfheasc o Thiobrad Arann*, op. cit., pp. 47-49.
10. Interview with John Ryan; also *Blathfheasc o Thiobrad Arann*, op.cit. p.59.
11. Nolan, K.B. ed. *The Making of 1916* op. cit. p. 164 et seq.
12. Breen, Dan, *My Fight for Irish Freedom* (Tralee, 1964), p. 24.
13. S.P.O. C.B.S. Intelligence Notes, 1916.

Chapter 5

1. This chapter is based primarily on the pamphlet *Cluain Meala 1916*, op. cit. Ryan, D. *Sean Treacy*, op. cit. p.19.
2. Ibid, p. 17.
3. *Cluain Meala 1916*, op. cit., p.10.
4. Ibid. p.10, also Ryan, D. *Sean Treacy*, op. cit. p.10.
5. Ibid. p.10.
6. Ibid. p.11.
7. Ibid. p.11.
8. Ibid.
9. Interview with John Ryan.
10. *O Broin Papers*.
11. *Cluain Meala 1916*, p.11.
12. Ryan, D. *Sean Treacy*, op. cit., p.17.
13. Ibid. p.20-21.
14. Interview with John Ryan.
15. *Cluain Meala 1916* op cit., p.12.
16. *Blathfheasc o Thiobrad Arann*, op. cit. p.44.
17. Ryan, D., *Sean Treacy*, op. cit. p. 21
18. Ryan, D., *The Rising*, op. cit., pp.234-235.
19. *Cluain Meala 1916*, op. cit. p.12.
20. *Cluain Meala 1916*, op. cit. p. 21.
21. MacCarthy J.M. (ed.); *Limerick's Fighting Story* (Tralee) p. 32.
22. Ryan, D., *The Rising*, op. cit. p. 241.
23. *Cluain Meala 1916*, op. cit. p.21.
24. *Nationality 15-3-1919*. Recollections of J.J.B.

