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The Civil War — a teenager's recollections 70 years on

By Aodogán O'Rahilly

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

For over 40 years I have known members of the extended family of The O'Rahilly, who died in the 1916 Rising — sons, cousins, nephews, a niece, grandchildren. When in 1991 a biography of The O'Rahilly by his 87 year-old son Aodogán was published, I wrote complimenting him on the book. An invitation to lunch followed, at which I learned that as a boy of 17 Aodogán O'Rahilly had served with the Republican forces in Co. Tipperary during the Civil War. I invited him to record his memories of that year. Some weeks later the article published below (without change) arrived by post. Readers of the Tipperary Historical Journal will recognise in it many of the men who have appeared already in the series (concluded in this issue) by an tAthair Colmcille, O.Cist.

Aodogan O'Rahilly was born in 1904, qualified as an engineer in UCD in 1926 and established a successful roofing tile firm in Co. Dublin in 1929. From 1936 to 1974 he was a board member of Bord na Mona, holding the post of chairman from 1959. He has an honorary degree from the National University, and in the 1950s he purchased and successfully re-opened as a cargo ferry port the Co. Louth village of Greenore.

— Editor, THJ.

In the summer of 1921, just as the Truce was signed, I passed my "Matric" and I entered U.C.D. Engineering School that Autumn. I joined the Volunteers like so many other young fellows. I do not doubt that there were 100,000 young men in the Volunteers that summer; the Free Staters afterwards called us the "Truceleers"!

The Treaty was signed just before Christmas and the debates on whether or not it should be accepted took place before and after Christmas. Hindsight is great. Looking back, it is easy to see that Dev should have convened the Dail in a secret session, with no reporters present and no speeches. Then the issue should have been decided in a secret ballot. If the majority were in favour of acceptance then all should have accepted and *vice versa*, and the movement might have remained united.

Anyway, I passed my First Year Engineering the following summer (1922). To this day I wonder how I managed to do this, with all the distractions!

Then in June the whole family set off to Kerry for the annual summer holiday. We were not there very long when the Four Courts were attacked, and this started the dirty work. I immediately reported to the Volunteers in Dingle and volunteered for active service. As a result, I was given a revolver and set off for the barracks in Tralee, which was occupied by the Volunteers.



They were mobilising a detachment to set off for Tipperary to be part of a group to clean the Free Staters out of any positions they held in the South. Other than Limerick City and Thurles, the whole south-west of Ireland was in the hands of the Republican Volunteers. I would guess that, if there were 100,000 Volunteers when the Treaty was signed, then 90% of them were in favour of fighting on for the Republic.

Looking back, I have often wondered how Mother must have felt seeing her son aged 17 going off for the war, and the possibility that he would end up like his father, a casualty. She made no effort to dissuade me, any more than she did my father in 1916. But then he was a grown man and had been the prime mover in the formation of the Volunteers. I was just a boy, and she might easily have tried to oppose my leaving.

She packed a few things, some spare shirts and socks and a pair of pyjamas in a little kit-bag, and off I went. I doubt if I had begun to use a razor. I cannot recall how I got to Dingle, about five miles from our bungalow at Ventry. I probably walked and then took the train from Dingle to Tralee, where I reported to the barracks.

In Tralee barracks they were assembling 100 or so Volunteers to go off to join groups from various areas in the south-west to drive the Free Staters from any towns they held in the South. Some days later we set off for Buttevant, where we spent some days. I cannot recall how we left Buttevant, but I suppose by train. We ended up near Cashel; there was to be a concerted attack on Thurles, which was held by Free State troops under Col. Jerry Ryan.

I had been appointed (or assumed) the role of engineer, and in preparation for the attack it was decided that we needed land-mines, and I was sent off to Templemore Barracks to get them. I did not drive the car. I cannot recall if we succeeded in getting any land-mines, or what we were going to do with them if we had got them.

I suppose I spent the night in Templemore and returned to Cashel the next day. In Cashel we were told that the Free State troops under Jerry Ryan had moved out of Thurles to where the Kerry Column were encamped, and surrounded them while they slept and captured them all. As far as I know, they were all captured without firing a shot and spent the next two years in jail.

It must have been in Cashel that I met Sean Cooney. He was a most unusual member of the Republican Army. For starters he was, as we regarded him, an "old man" — probably about 30 years of age! He was also a wealthy publican. He owned a pub at the Main Guard, Clonmel; the building in which he lived is supposed to have been designed by Sir Christopher Wren.

Cooney adopted me as his *protégé* and looked after me most of the time I was in Tipperary. I recall we had digs in the Archbishop's Palace in Cashel, the digs were so good that we did not tell anyone where we were, in case someone else would come and take them from us!

One morning we woke up and could hear some "bangs". When we went out we discovered that we were probably the only two people in Cashel that night who had had a good night's sleep. About 10 o'clock the previous night there was a strong rumour that the Free Staters were advancing on Cashel from Kilkenny, so it was decided that "discretion is the better part of valour", and that Cashel would be evacuated and the barracks burnt. It had been the old R.I.C. barracks, and there were any amount of rounds of ammunition lying around in various places; whenever the flames hit one of these there was a bang!

We knew the general direction the retreating troops would have taken and we set off walking after them in a southerly direction. We had not got very far when we see a car coming towards us and signalled it to halt. We got in. There were several men in the car but there must have been room for two more.

"Turn the car please, we are going in the opposite direction". But, they protested, "we are going



to Dublin". "You mean you *were* going to Dublin, but you are now going in the direction from which you came". "How far will we have to go?" "We don't know, maybe to Cork!"

The car was turned and we had not gone very far before we came across some of the Republican Army. This was my first meeting with Bill Quirke. He was decked out in a gorgeous uniform with a Sam Browne belt and all the accoutrements, including a tin helmet. He was reputed to be the most glamorous officer in the Irish Republican Army.

The next thing we were in Rockwell College, and it was a lovely summer's day. We found a little boat on a lake, and I said to Cooney: "let us go for a row on the lake," which we did. When we came back the army was gone and we were lost again. As we were walking along a road we see what looked like an officer on high ground about 100 yards ahead of us. He saw us coming and beckoned to us to come to him, which we proceeded to do. Then he gave the military signal for us to "double", that is, to run.

We wondered who this brass hat could be who was giving us orders in this way. When we got close to him, who was it but Dev. I cannot recall if he recognised me: he would have often been in our house both before and after 1916; nor can I recall what he told us to do. I suppose it would have been sensible to have told us rejoin our unit wherever they were, so there would be some sort of discipline.

My next recollection was living in Clonmel Barracks, which had been evacuated by the British and given to the Irish Republican Army. It was about this time that I achieved my great ambition of being some sort of a driver, both of a car and a small truck with which I was involved on several missions. At that time there were not many people who could drive cars, and I cannot imagine how I persuaded them that I was a driver.

I recall one mission which was to involve leaving Clonmel early in the morning. I met this officer with a girl, walking across the yard; I suppose she was a member of Cumann na mBan. I said I had to drive a party to Tipperary early the following morning to blow up a bridge, and I didn't know how I was going to wake up. One of them said: "If you like, we'll call you". I said that would be great.

At six the next morning I was woken by this girl kissing me furiously to wake me. She had brought a man with her to the window, which was on the ground floor, and climbed in through the window. The man at the window ensured that her reputation would not be compromised; but it was dark in the room and he could not see how she had awoken me!

On the way to Tipperary we had to pass through Cahir and had to go into a magnificent mansion that belonged to a man called, I believe, Capt. Charteris. I was walking through this mansion just to see "how the other half lived", when I opened a door and see the most fabulous bathroom — beautiful tiles from floor to ceiling and a hot rail for the towels to be kept dry and warm.

I decided that there will be a slight delay in the mission. I locked the door and drew the most luxurious bath I am every likely to enjoy. In the meantime the officer in charge of the mission was ready to leave. But where was that so-and-so driver? No doubt, if they had got another driver, they would have left without me.

When we arrived over Tipperary town we drove down towards the bridge to be demolished, and the demolition squad took the explosives and did what was necessary. Then when all was ready the word was sent back to keep low as the charge was being set off. I recall the debris been strewn all over the place, but no one was hit. Then the problem was to get the Fordson truck started and driven away. I did my damndest but could not get a "kick" out of it. We were expecting the Free Staters (who were in occupation of Tipperary) to come charging out to engage us, but should have realised that they were just as much afraid of us as we were of them.

When I could not get a "kick" out of the truck, I decided that I could not leave it for the enemy to



augment his transport fleet, and that it was my duty to burn it. I stuffed some papers into the petrol-tank and put a match to them, and turned and ran up the hill, thinking that all that would be left of the truck would be some blackened remains. When I looked back there was no sign of a light of any kind.

I found a shed where I could get a few hours' sleep, and then decided I must go back the next morning to see if I could salvage my truck. I got some of the Volunteers to help me pull it back up the hill, and we were just over the brow of the hill when the Free Staters came out and began firing at us.

This was my first meeting with Jack Killeen. He was in charge of the Volunteers on top of the hill and he showed no trace of nervousness as he lined up his men to return the fire of the Free Staters. He was not bothered by the whistle of the bullets over his head. I was able to bring my truck back to Clonmel, so to that extent I had accomplished my mission.

There is nothing else which I can recall of those days in Clonmel until the last days when the Free Staters were advancing from Waterford through Carrick-on-Suir. De Valera had taken charge of the defence of Clonmel, and I imagine he wanted to make a serious effort to fight it out with the advancing troops. He sent for me to deliver some important despatches to an officer called Lieutenant Sharkey, who was in charge of Kilsheelan, a village about half-way between Clonmel and Carrick-on-Suir.

I set off in the car, and when I got to Two-mile-Bridge, a cross-roads I suppose about two miles from Clonmel, I saw the Republican armoured car parked on the side of the road. The officer in charge was Lieutenant Sean Morrissey. I stopped and asked him if it was all right to go through to Kilsheelan, telling him I had important despatches from Dev to the officer in charge.

Escape from Kilsheelan

Morrissey assured me that there was no problem going to Kilsheelan. At this time the shooting was getting very heavy — rifle-fire, machine-guns and the occasional sound of the 18-pounder artillery. As I drove along the road close to the River Suir, it seemed to me that the noise of the firing was getting to be between where I was and Clonmel, which I had left. This would have meant that I was going behind the enemy lines. My only armament was the 45 revolver which I had brought from Dingle; and I took this out of my pocket to have it ready for instant use if the Free Staters appeared in front of me. To this day I am not clear what I hoped to achieve — I suppose stop the car as soon as I saw them and try to escape on the river side. Anyway, no one appeared.

When I reached Kilsheelan, a village with a wide central street, there was plenty of noise of gunfire but not a person to be seen. There was a Republican house occupied by a family named, I think, Nagle, in the middle of the village, to which I drove. Before I even got out of the car one of the girls opened a window upstairs and shouted to me: "Get out quick. There is an armoured car just around the corner coming into the village".

I shouted back: "Where is Lieutenant Sharkey? I have important messages for him." The reply was: "He has left with his men and gone across the river to Waterford. Get back quick, if you value your life." I was able to turn the Model T with one sweep, and back with me as though the devil was at my heels.

When I reported to Dev in Clonmel he questioned me closely. He was obviously wondering if I had ever been to Kilsheelan. I was able to satisfy him that I had been there, and that Sharkey had left and gone across the river. Then he said: "My God, how can you deal with men who have so little sense of their responsibilities?"

The whole operation was more like a sham battle, with both sides ensuring that no one was hurt.



The Free Staters advanced with all guns blazing, and the Republicans fired some token shots and then retreated. The next day I was again on some mission to bring out some clean shirts and things to the men who were holding the line.

On my way back when I came to Two-Mile-Bridge I met for the first time Dinny Lacey with Bill Quirke. They stopped me, and Bill said: "you can drive us along the line of the Anner to make an inspection." That morning we were supposed to be holding the line of the Anner, a small river running down from Slievenamon into the Suir. I had no alternative but to do what I was told, without any enthusiasm. Lacey changed his mind, to my great relief, and said "No; we had better walk."

I have no further recollections of the "Advance on Clonmel". I suppose it was that afternoon or the next day that it was decided to burn the barracks and leave the town. I just recall marching out of the burning barracks, and there were a crowd of poor women outside the gate, and one of them saying as we passed out: "Go back and get us some of those blankets in there and I'll give you 'me darling'". I was so young and innocent that I scarcely realised what she was saying. What I did realise was that these poor women badly needed the blankets which were then going up in flames with everything else in the barracks.

The next few days are all a haze in my mind, but I was soon back in my car driving a "brass hat" called Capt. or Commandant Lonergan. I suppose he was going around organising something; I cannot imagine what. Anyway, we had been driving all day and I was exhausted and it was getting dark. We finally arrived where we were to spend the night, at one of those mansions belonging to the Anglo-Irish landlords. The land around South Tipperary was excellent and the country beautiful, and it was a natural place for these landlords to have settled.

Shanbally Castle was south of the Galtee mountains, between them and the Knockmeldowns. There was a long avenue leading to the castle from the road, and we could see the lights in the Castle as soon as we turned into the avenue. We had no lights on our car, and I can only assume that I fell asleep with the feeling that there was now only a short safe drive to journey's end.

The next thing I realised was the light of a bicycle-lamp shining on the bonnet of a car coming towards us. I gave a violent swerve to the left in the hope of steering clear, but it was in the wrong direction. I rammed them broadside. If I had swerved in the other direction I might have avoided them. The car hit was another Model T, full of Volunteers who had come from, or were going to, Cork.

Lonergan had been leaning out to see if the road was clear (while his driver slept) and the impact knocked his head against the windscreen. He jumped out and was lying on the grass shouting that he was killed. I went over to him and saw that there was nothing wrong with him except a bump on his forehead. When I realised this, the whole incident seemed to me to be hilariously funny, and I burst into a fit of laughing; in retrospect, I suppose I was somewhat hysterical.

Our car did not seem too badly damaged, but the other car was an older model with wooden wheels, and the broadside "bash" I had given it had wrecked all the wheels; the car, or what remained of it, was flat on the ground. I could hear the driver say with a strong Cork brogue, "What a disaster, and I was going to America tomorrow", to which someone else replied; "I wish to Christ you had gone to America yesterday!"

Anyway, we all picked ourselves up and went the short walk to the Castle. All I recall about this was that I wanted a bed and was told that I would have to share a bed. "Like bloody hell will I share a bed. I want a bed to myself. There must be plenty of boody beds in this bloody castle. Anyway, I am going to find out".

There was a door in front of me with two little staples, one in the frame and one in the door and



a tiny padlock to prevent the door being opened. "What the hell is this?" I said, giving the door a good shove with my shoulder, and bursting it in. The man in charge said: "De Valera was here yesterday and he made us put these padlocks on all the living rooms so that none of the furniture was damaged". "Well, De Valera can take a running jump for himself. I am opening all these doors until I find a bed".

At this, I suppose he decided he had better give the "S.O.B." a bed before he does any more damage. So I got my bed!

The next day Lonergan had more organising to do. The only trouble was that the radiator had been damaged in the crash and was leaking. This meant stopping every 10 miles to get an additional supply of water for the car. This went on most of the day, and it was a blazing hot summer's day, and all the places we stopped for water would have been pubs at cross-roads or in villages. Lonergan was parched for a drink, but we had no money. He thought to himself: "I wonder is there any kind of old junk in the back of the car that I could hock in return for a drink?"

He went to the back of the car, and the next thing he pulls out was the top of my pyjamas, white with lovely vertical red stripes! "What the hell is this?" said he. There was no way I was going to admit to the ownership of a pair of pyjamas. Even if I had told him, he would not have known what I was talking about. I lied. "I have no idea," I said.

"What else could it be but a girl's blouse, and a lovely one too." He marches into the pub and gets two pints of Guinness in exchange for the top of my pyjamas. At that time I had never touched a drop of alcohol, so he had the two for himself. We continued on our journey with Lonergan considerably refreshed.

The next thing I can remember was being at or near Knocklofty Castle, another one of those magnificent mansions. I recall a feast of delicious peaches from the conservatory in this castle. A group of lads asked me would I drive them to the mountain overlooking Clonmel. These were Jim Nugent's machine-gun squad — "Buddy" Donoghue, Sean Hayes and Dick Dalton. There was a big parade organised by the Free State to celebrate the capture of Clonmel, and Nugent or Killeen had decided that they would "interrupt" the parade.

I drove them to the hill over Clonmel, and we got digs in come cottages for the night, and next morning got into a good position overlooking the town, and waited for the parade which was to be after Mass that Sunday, to celebrate the freeing of Clonmel from those Republicans! No one bothered to recall that it was these same Republicans who had fought the Black-and-Tans and were responsible for the departure of the British after all those centuries.

The parade was headed by several hundred Free State soldiers, and when they came into view we opened fire. We were a long way off, and I don't think any of them were hurt; but they surely cleared off the street in double-quick time. It did not take them long to find out from where the firing was coming, and they then proceeded to return the fire and we could hear the bullets whistling over our heads. But the old soldiers, and there were several of them, including Jim Nugent and Jack Killeen, who had been through the Great War, said you need never worry about the bullet whose whistle you hear.

That morning, while we were waiting for the parade, I had heard Nugent and some of the men talking. They had got a local paper in which there was a description of how one of the Free State soldiers had been killed in the advance on Clonmel. I heard Nugent say: "When I got him into range as he was going across the field I gave a burst and he fell. Then I could see him trying to crawl away and I gave him another burst and finished him off."

I was quite appalled at this account of what seemed to me to be nothing short of wilful murder. When my mind goes back to that incident I am still appalled. There was no objective of any kind in giving that unfortunate boy that second burst of machine-gun fire to finish him off. But this was



war. Nugent had been three or four years in France and would have seen thousands of soldiers killed and it meant, quite literally, nothing to him. It was just part of a game. An enemy killed is a higher score than an enemy wounded.

I have no clear recollection of where we then went, but driving around South Tipperary in a car was no longer feasible, and the car was abandoned, and I was then one of Nugent's machine-gun squad. Jack Killeen was in charge of the squad, and I suppose there were about 20 or 25 in the Column. We moved all over South Tipperary and North Waterford, but never spent more than a day or two in any location. We sought out various opportunities of engaging the Free Staters troops.

I recall an incident in a village just across the Suir into Waterford called Derrinlaur. We were only to spend some hours in this village and were then to move out at about two in the morning. There was a dance some miles away, and most of the Column decided to spend the evening at the dance. I could never get enough sleep, and decided I would spend the hours from ten at night till two in the morning in bed.

I got into bed and was no sooner under the blankets than the fleas attacked me *en masse*. In a matter of minutes I realised that there was no possibility of having a night's sleep in this bed. It emerged subsequently that there were villages which were infested in this way, and the locals were quite immune. When I got up and came to sit at the fire, I was asked why I had changed my mind about sleeping. I gave some excuse, but it seems the locals did not know about this problem!

When the men returned from the dance, some time in the early hours of the morning, we left Derrinlaur, and set out across the river to Powerstown, about two miles outside Clonmel. On that march through the night there were several delays, and whenever I got a chance I just lay down on the road and went to sleep, telling them to wake me when they were moving off.

We ended up early in the morning in an ambush position at Powerstown. This was the day when we captured Col. Frank Thornton, a top officer of Michael Collins's personal entourage. It was known that Dev was in the Clonmel area, and Thornton had been sent down to Clonmel with the assignment to get de Valera dead or alive. I have described this ambush in the book called *Survivors* and I find it distasteful going over it again. Two of Thornton's party were killed, but he himself, although badly wounded, survived. I met him one night many years later outside the Gaiety Theatre in Dublin.

About 40 or 50 years after 1922, I was going through some of my father's papers and I came across this envelope which was marked on the outside "Reliable men in Britain". When I shook the envelope the first name which fell out was "Frank Thornton". The Civil War was a ghastly tragedy — so many of the best and bravest of the men who drove out the British getting killed or maimed in this futile shambles.

Ambush at Woodgrove

Halfway between Clonmel and Chair was a house called "Woodgrove" or something similar, where we had several encounters with the Free State soldiers. One day as we came near this house we saw a group of Free Staters just about to board a lorry. The range was far and, although we opened fire and they all quickly dispersed, I doubt if any of them were hit; but they certainly disappeared in double-quick time.

Another day we were in an ambush position near this house. Half of our party were placed ahead at the top of the hill, and the other half, with Jack Killeen as O.C. and Nugent's machine-gun group, were some distance away. The idea was that when the men at the top of the hill engaged the Free Staters, our group would advance and trap them between the two parties.

When the shooting started it seemed to me that inevitably the bulk of the Free State convoy would



take to the fields, and they would come across us and wipe us out as we would have no protection of any kind. I tried to explain this to Jack Killeen, but he would not listen to me. I was terrified. We could hear the shooting up on the top of the hill, and Killeen decided that his men there were in trouble and that he would have to advance up the hill to rescue them.

We began making our way up the hill and finally reached our men who had retreated away from the Free Staters. We were now all together and decided that we had better get away as there were many Free Staters with armoured cars in the convoy. As we were moving away, we found ourselves in the back of this house with the Free Staters in front of it. There was a lot of shooting but neither party could see their opponents.

I decided that, as I could not hope to hit anyone through the house, I would fire a shot at the roof, and when it went through the roof it would frighten the Free Staters in front. The only mistake in my reckoning was that when I raised my rifle to fire the muzzle was only inches away from Jack Killeen's ear. It is easy to imagine the blast of abuse which emerged from Killeen when I fired.

There was total confusion with the two parties only yards apart, but the house between them. Then an unfortunate Free State soldier emerged around the house with his rifle at the ready. It seems likely that he was ordered to go to the back of the house. He no sooner appeared than Nugent cut him in two with a burst of fire from his Lewis machine-gun.

At this point our party broke up and I found myself with Nugent's machine-gun squad. As we were getting away we had to cross a main road, and we saw an armoured car proceed along this road. We got the impression that there was more than one such armoured car and decided that when this one had passed we would move across the road. We fully expected that there would be other armoured cars; if one came when we were exposed moving across the field, this would be the end for us.

Nugent proceeded to lead the party across the open field. I decided this was entirely wrong. Nugent was probably the best and most fearless machine-gunner in the Republican Army, and it was ridiculous to allow him to take the risk of leading the party. I moved out ahead of him, and as I did so I drew my 45 revolver, thinking that I could fire six shots with this much more rapidly than six with my rifle. I should have known that firing at an armoured car with the lead slugs of a 45 would have been about as effective as hitting them with a pea-shooter.

I realised that if an armoured car came it was the end for me; but it did not in the least worry me. I just thought, with a feeling of happy anticipation, that I would see my father again. No armoured car came, and I lived to tell the tale.

An interesting aspect of this story is that the tale of the young boy who led the machine gun squad even reached Dublin. Ernie O'Malley, who was the assistant Chief-of-Staff of the Republican Army, commended me on this incident. No doubt it was the fact that the boy was the son of one of the 1916 leaders which made it of interest.

When we reached comparative safety I was exhausted and decided I could not go any further. I told my comrades to take my arms and I would lie down in some hiding-place until I regained my strength. They would not hear of it, and I suppose they carried my arms until I had recovered my strength.

Other episodes were mainly about moving around and finding billets and getting food. One morning a group of our "top brass" (of whom I was the only private) went to this mansion at Marlfield about two miles outside Clonmel, to get our breakfast. I think we had passed the night in some hay-barn. Whoever answered our knock at the door said when we asked for our breakfast that he would have to ask "His Lordship". As we waited for this VIP to appear, I expected to see an individual with some kind of an elaborate hair-gear and some flowing robes reaching down to the ground.



When he came he was wearing a pair of rubber boots and “plus-fours” and some sort of tweed jacket. When he saw the group — about six of us, armed to the teeth — he said: “which of you is the N.C.O.?” If he had asked for a Major-General, I am sure we could have found one — but an N.C.O.? One of them gave me a push forward, and said: “you talk to him”.

I said that we wanted our breakfast. He replied: “Is that a request or a command. If it is a request, I would have to refuse you, but if it is a command I have no alternative but to comply.” I said: “you can take it whatever way you like, providing we get something to eat.” He brought us into the kitchen, which was about 30 feet long with an enormous table and an endless collection of copper cooking-ware, lined up on the walls, probably gathered during many generations.

They gave us a good breakfast. When we were almost finished he came into the kitchen and said to us: “I am going into Clonmel now, but I will not mention to anyone that you are here until three o’clock this afternoon”. This was fair enough. He knew, of course, that if the Free Staters had raided the house soon after he went into Clonmel, he would have been held responsible for having sent them.

An interesting aspect of this visit is that this man was one of the feudal land-owners, whose antecedents had taken the land from the “natives” many generations previously, and these young men getting their breakfast there that morning would have been either *sans coulottes* or the sons of small farmers. But there was not a trace of bitterness or antagonism between these young “men of no property”, and this member of the feudal aristocracy.

In general, wherever we went for food we were given a kindly welcome. This was not just playing safe on the part of the people whose food we ate, since there was no penalty on those who were not hospitable. I suspect that most of these people realised that, however misguided we were and the vast majority of the better-off bourgeoisie would have had no use for our aims in fighting a civil war, we were well behaved and did not abuse the power we obviously had.

It would be incorrect to give the impression that we were received with open arms wherever we asked for board and lodgings. There was no question of any payment, as we did not have any money. One experience in which we were not welcomed was in the village of Newcastle which was alongside the River Suir. Normally I had teamed up with a young Cork medical student named O’Sullivan. I cannot recall his Christian name, if I ever knew it. We called him “The Doc”. As a medical student, he was supposed to know something about Red Cross work, but as I recall he would only have been a first-year student and probably knew as little about medicine as I knew about engineering!

When the Column moved into an area, we were divided up among the different houses. “The Doc” and I were sent to this house in Newcastle, a strong farmer’s house not far from the river. I think we did not behave very well. They said that they could not give us any bed as there was none to spare. We just picked the best bedroom and locked the door and went to bed. Probably we were in the “master bedroom”, and the farmer and his wife had to look after themselves.

I don’t think there was any problem with breakfast, but next morning as we were sitting near the river on a beautiful day one of the column threw a hand-grenade into the river, and anyone downstream could pick up a nice trout. We got a beauty of 2 pounds and gave it to the farmer’s wife for our dinner. We waited and waited, and coming up to three o’clock we went in to find out the cause of the delay.

“We have had our dinner long ago,” we were told. “What happened the trout?” “The cat got the trout and had a feast.” “Well, give us some eggs”. “We don’t have any eggs”. Who ever heard of a well-to-do farmer’s house without any eggs? We went to the hen-house to see for ourselves. The whole floor was covered with broken eggs. They had deliberately broken all the eggs on the floor. I suppose this could be called a scorched-earth policy!



They were courageous, as the Republicans did have pretty well control of the countryside at this time. Anyway, we had neither trout nor eggs for dinner. One of the clichés at that time was: "What did you have for dinner?" "Tea and eggs". "And what did you have for supper?" "Eggs and tea!" Then, if there was bacon hanging in the kitchen there were "stars in the sky". At that time there was a lot of American bacon sold in Ireland. It was very fat and badly cured with some sort of 'poisonous' chemicals.

Such an inhospitable reception was unusual. But I recall a similar experience in the Nire, a remote area in the Comeragh mountains. When the houses were being allocated, no one was willing to take the priest's house, as it was generally known how they detested us. The Doc and I said we did not mind.

In the priest's house we got even worse treatment than giving the trout to the cat and breaking the eggs. I recall when I asked for milk for the tea the house-keeper went over to a saucer on the floor from which the cat was drinking and put this on the table for our tea. I recall going up to the parlour where the priest and a companion were sitting, and I suppose I complained; but it did not do any good. The Republicans were the lowest scum of the human race, and the sooner we were wiped out the better. To this day my regret is that I did not tell them what I thought of them and punctuate my remarks with revolver-shots through the ceiling. But I did not think of this until the next day — what the French call an *esprit d'escalier*.

There were many occasions when we took up ambush positions and waited for hours for the Free Staters to come, but nothing happened. I can remember one day we took over the village of New Inn, a village (as I recall) half-way between Cashel and Cahir; but no Free Staters appeared. Three or four of us went into this enormous house, in which the only occupants were two men who seemingly were acting as caretakers. They let us in and brought us to the rooms in the top of the house in which they were living.

It must have been about midnight, and as they were making the tea I lay down on the floor and went to sleep and told them to wake me when the tea was ready. There were only about three or four slices of bread and butter. I took one slice, but none of the others took any. They pressed me to take another and said they were not hungry; I took a second. It ended that I took most of them, and when we had left one of them told me that everything was so filthy that none of them could bring themselves to eat anything. What the eye does not see, the heart does not grieve for!

A final adventure took place near a group of houses near Kilcash. We were divided among the various houses, and the Doc and I were allocated to the same one. Having fixed up the column for the night, Jack Killeen and Nugent went off on some mission. They got one of the local volunteers to keep watch. He was an ex-soldier and urged Killeen to give him a rifle, but Killeen would only give him a 45.

Early the next morning a large convey appeared coming from Clonmel. The soldier keeping watch waited until the first lorry was within revolver-range and fired at the driver, hitting him in the shoulder and the lorry swerved into the ditch. In this kind of situation every soldier with a weapon fires it. Within seconds there was an ear-shattering fusillade of shots — revolvers, rifles and machine-guns. With all the shooting, the Free Staters did not realise that it was all from their own comrades!

We woke at the first shots and were dressed and out of the house in seconds. We could see all the houses being searched and dodged from cover to cover to keep out of their reach. Our greatest danger was when Killeen and Nugent heard the shooting and were on their way back to rescue the column. Nugent saw two men whom he assumed were the Free Staters, and was about to give them a burst of machine-gun fire when Killeen said: "Wait a minute until I have a look at them with my



field-glasses". Then he said: "Don't fire; those two are O'Rahilly and the Doc!" The Free Staters captured half-a-dozen of the Column. My guess is that many of the men were just as well pleased to be under lock and key in an internment camp.

The interesting thing about this skirmish is that the following Christmas or New Year the *Sunday Independent* printed a whole page listing all the major fights of the year up till then. At that time I was on active service with the South Wexford Brigade and I was reading this account. When I came to this heading "Major ambush and heavy fighting on the slopes of Slievenamon", I looked at the date and said to myself: "I was in South Tipp. near Slievenamon at that time. I cannot recall any such big ambush and heavy fighting". Then I realised it was the one revolver-shot fired by the guard at the first lorry. So much for newspaper reports!

The Autumn was now coming on and the University was due to re-open, and I decided that I had done my duty and could get back to my engineering. I told the O/C that I was leaving and he made arrangements. I cannot now recall if Jack Killeen had been captured before I left, but I doubt it. We were camped about 16 miles from a village near where the road goes over the end of Slievenamon and not far from Grangemockler.

I was given a house to stay in at this village and the next day headed for Grangemockler, where I remained for some days until I could get a lift in a horse-trap going to Callan and from there to Kilkenny, where I could get a train to Dublin. A Free State soldier on duty in the station questioned me closely. "What was my name? Where had I come from? Where was I going?" I was able to tell him truthfully that I was on my way back to the University. But if he had asked me where was my luggage, I was lost! He finally let me go, and I was safe.

Many of the South Tipperary leaders were killed, including Dinny Lacey. Jack Killeen was captured and was locked up until the general release two years later. Nugent was captured after the war, and was in Mountjoy when it was raided and the Republicans released.

Cooney was captured and was sentenced to be shot. There was heavy pressure on all senior Free State officers to have executed some Republicans in their area, so that none of them could claim that they had not been involved in this butchery. When Cooney was sentenced, Lacey sent a note to every member of Clonmel Corporation. "If Cooney is executed you and every member of the Corporation will be held personally responsible and death with accordingly; War, Truce or Peace."

They all knew what this meant. The Council took the first train to Dublin and saw Cosgrave. Cooney was not executed.

