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With Tipperary No. 1 Brigade in North Tipperary: 1917-1921

By Seán Gaynor

Part I

Editorial Introduction

The *Tipperary Historical Journal* wishes to thank Mr. Eamonn Gaynor, Clonmel, for permission to publish in two instalments this detailed account of the War of Independence in North Tipperary by his late father, Seán Gaynor, Commandant of Tipperary No. 1 Brigade of the Irish Republican Army, and later Adjutant, 3rd Southern Division, who died in 1964.

I was born in Tyone, Nenagh on 25 July, 1894. My father was a farmer, and I was the eldest son of his second family. A step-brother of mine, Father Pat Gaynor, was a member of the Standing Committee of Sinn Féin from 1917 to 1922. I was educated at the Nenagh Christian Brothers School, but owing to my father having developed poor health, I was taken from school at the age of 13 to work at home on the farm.

My first association with the Volunteers in 1914 was short-lived. I was then a raw country lad of 20, on whom had devolved the responsibility of working my father's farm — my father being dead — and, though full of enthusiasm to strike a blow for Ireland, I became disgusted when the Redmondite split occurred, and was too little known by the men who controlled the extreme section of the Volunteers to be asked to join with them. So I finished with the Volunteers of that time.

All my sympathies were with the extreme element, and I was enthusiastic in support of the men of Easter Week, but had still made no contact with the local Volunteers and, in fact, did not know of the existence of such a body. It was early in 1917 at the house of Martin Ryan, Tyone, a staunch Finn Féiner — where I used to sojourn at night to play cards — that I was asked by Denis Carey, who was murdered by the "Tans" in 1920, if I would like to join the Volunteers, and I jumped at the chance.

A few nights later I attended my first parade at Christopher O'Brien's farm at Solsboro, about a mile outside Nenagh, where the Volunteers drilled in secret, and so at last I became an Irish Volunteer and a member of the Nenagh Company. I attended weekly secret parades until Tomás Ashe died in Mountjoy jail in September 1917 as a result of being forcibly fed when on hunger-strike.

From that time the Irish Volunteers in Nenagh were ordered to parade in public, and we formed up in the Courthouse Square every Sunday after second Mass in Nenagh, under Frank McGrath, our O/C, and marched off on a route march or on manoeuvres. All our movements were closely watched by the R.I.C. and soon the arrest of the leaders began.

Frank McGrath was arrested, and on the following Sunday we paraded as usual under the command of Bill Hoolan. He in turn being arrested was succeeded by Jimmie Nolan who, on



being arrested, was succeeded by Ned Kennedy. The situation at this stage was getting serious as all our prominent officers were in jail, with the exception of Frank Flannery who had been instructed by Frank McGrath to keep under cover, so that there would be someone left to keep the organisation going.

While Ned Kennedy was still at liberty, Frank Flannery asked for volunteers to step into the breach to fill recurring vacancies. About a dozen, including myself, volunteered and the names were drawn out of a hat. As the person whose name was first drawn refused to act when Ned Kennedy was arrested, I arrived on parade at the Courthouse Square as usual the following Sunday, to be informed that I was to take charge.

I had acquired a little experience in giving military commands at this stage as some time previously I had been appointed section leader of No. 4 Section in charge of ten men. I felt, however, very self-conscious as I stepped out to order 100 more men to fall in, this in the presence of a good part of the population of Nenagh who generally waited to see us march off, not to mention the two usual note-takers of the R.I.C.

I acquitted myself tolerably well, and gaining confidence after that initial experience, I became a reasonably good instructor. The R.I.C., however, no doubt believing that I was put up for a blind and having never seen or heard of me before, refused to take serious notice of me, and I continued to take charge of the Company parades until the boys were released from jail.

Up to this there was no real cohesion between the different units of the Volunteers in North Tipperary, but Headquarters now set out to build the Volunteer force on proper army lines. The unit of the Volunteers was the company, the company being based on the parish. Thus there was a Volunteer Company in every parish.

Headquarters sent organisers from Dublin to North Tipperary, with Nenagh as its centre, and taking in an area from Roscrea to North of Borrisoleigh, through the mountain districts of Kilcommon, Rearchcross and Newport to Birdhill and Ballina and thence on the left bank of the Shannon to Portumna Bridge. From there to Lorrha and across to Shinrone was formed into a Battalion towards the end of 1917.

There were 33 companies in this area. Two representatives of each company met in Nenagh to elect a Battalion Staff to consist of Battalion Commandant, Vice Commandant, Adjutant and Quartermaster. The election was by ballot. Frank McGrath, Bill Hoolan and Frank Flannery were elected unanimously as Commandant, Vice Commandant and Quartermaster, respectively.

When it came to election of Adjutant, my name was proposed as was also that of Patrick "Widger" Maher, captain of the famous Toomevara Greyhounds hurling team and one of the most popular men in the area. I was elected, however, by a small majority, mainly because I lived on the outskirts of Nenagh and was therefore in a better position to keep in touch with the Battalion Staff, all of whom lived in the town.

I now found myself with a practically whole-time clerical job on my hands. It was my duty to deal with correspondence from all the companies in the Battalion as well as with Headquarters. It was then I first came in contact with Michael Collins, who was Adjutant-General at that time and the driving force behind the Irish Volunteers. The job of communicating with 33 companies was a heart-breaking one, and during this period I invariably worked to the small hours of the morning.

This did not last long, however, as the organisation was now growing apace and, about January 1918, Headquarters decided to form Brigades. There were three Brigades established in Tipperary. Our Battalion, converted into a Brigade, became No. 1 Tipperary Brigade, mid-Tipperary being No. 2 and South Tipperary No. 3. We now had to form companies into battalions, of which we had seven as follows: 1st Battalion — Nenagh; 2nd Battalion — Toomevara; 3rd Battalion

— Ballywilliam; 4th Battalion — Borrisokane; 5th Battalion — Templeberry; 6th Battalion — Newport; and 7th Battalion — Roscrea.

There were on average five companies in each battalion, and about 40 to 50 men in each company. Battalion staffs had now to be elected in each battalion area and, as the best of the company officers were invariably elected, new company officers had in turn to be elected. The following list gives the names of the commandants of each battalions from the date of its establishment to the Truce of 1921.

1st Battalion: Michael O'Donoghue, an Irish teacher who left the district soon after his appointment. He was replaced by David Shortall, a native of Waterford, where he returned after a few months. Succeeded by Ned O'Leary, who held the post until he was appointed O/C, Brigade Active/Service Unit in September 1920. He was followed by Austin McCurtain, and on McCurtain being transferred to the Brigade Staff as Intelligence Officer, Con Spain was appointed and held the rank until the Truce.

2nd Battalion: Jeremiah Collison held office until June 1921. Paddy Kennedy, Moneygall, a member of the Active Service Unit, succeeded Collison and he remained in the post until the Truce.

3rd Battalion: William Gleeson was succeeded by Paddy McDonnell, who held rank until Truce.

4th Battalion: Felix Cronin held rank until June 1921 when, on promotion to Brigade Vice Commandant, he was succeeded by Martin Haugh.

5th Battalion: Michael Hogan held office until about September 1920, when he was succeeded by Patrick Doherty who held rank until about December 1920, when he took charge of battalion police and was succeeded by John Caples. **6th Battalion:** William Gleeson in charge till Truce.

7th Battalion: Edward Quinlan in charge till Truce.



Sean Gaynor in military uniform on his wedding day

The battalions being now organised and officered, the next job was the election of the brigade staff. For this purpose, the four staff officers of each battalion attended a meeting in Nenagh. The election proved a formal affair as the original members of the battalion staff were unanimously chosen, and so I became Brigade Adjutant of Tipperary No. 1 Brigade. Frank McGrath became Brigade Commandant, Liam Hoolan, Vice Brigade Commandant and Frank Flannery, Brigade Quartermaster.

The tempo of the organisation was now stepped up, and we were getting into our stride as a military force. The R.I.C. began to get perturbed, and a big round-up landed most of our officers in jail. I among the others was hauled out of my bed at 4 a.m. on a morning in March 1918 by a large force of police under two District Inspectors, Hunt and Wilson, both of whom were shot by the I.R.A. a couple of years later. I was conveyed in a police van (a Black Maria) to Templemore barracks, and from there to Limerick jail.

The Volunteers by this time, through hunger-strikes, wrecking of prisons and general indiscipline from the British point of view, had won political treatment. I found that life in jail was not as bad as one might expect, the confinement, for one used to an open air life, being the worst feature.

After a week in Limerick, I with others — one of whom was Tom Devaney, afterwards shot by Black and Tans — were brought for trial to Templemore. We were greeted in the street by a large crowd who cheered us, and then I witnessed a most brutal baton charge by the police on this defenceless crowd. It was a savage business which increased my dislike of the R.I.C.

Our trial was, of course, a farce. We began by refusing to remove our caps in court; but they were forcibly removed. In this connection, an awkward situation arose when my brother, Father Pat Gaynor, who arrived to watch the proceedings, refused to remove his hat when ordered to do so. He saved the situation by asking my permission to take it off, which I promptly gave him! We refused to recognise the court and treated the proceedings with contempt.

I was charged with wearing a uniform and illegal drilling, and got three months with the option of bail. This option was, of course, refused with scorn. The other prisoners got similar sentences. The proceedings were enlivened by Father Pat challenging Mike Gleeson, Crown Prosecutor, over an alleged statement by Dr. Fogarty, Bishop of Killaloe, who was a staunch supporter of Sinn Féin.

We were brought back to Limerick jail and, after a fortnight, transferred to Belfast. This was my first sojourn into the northern stronghold of bigotry, and no doubt the concentration of the I.R.A. prisoners there was due to the fact that the British were contemplating conscription for Ireland.

We were well treated in Belfast jail. We had our own officers and took orders from them only. We organised concerts as well as having strenuous games of football, played with a rag ball in the exercise yard! We had Irish classes and debates, and generally speaking the jail might be regarded as a military college. We studied tactics and made plans which later bore fruit when the fight began in earnest.

I was in Belfast only a month when an order came from Headquarters, with whom we were in constant touch, that all Volunteers who had the option of bail were to give bail and thereby secure release. The conscription threat was at its height, and it was felt we could do more useful work outside. A large number of prisoners, including myself, were thus set at liberty.

Meeting Michael Collins

On my release, I got a message from my Brigade O/C, Frank McGrath, who was also a prisoner but without the option of bail, to deliver to Mick Collins at 32 Bachelors Walk, Dublin. I was excited at the prospect of meeting Mick, who was my hero and with whom I had been corresponding for a long time in my capacity as Brigade Adjutant.

I called to Bachelors Walk and stated my business, and asked to see him. I was scrutinised through a grill before I gained admittance, and the first thing Mick said was: "You are Seán



Gaynor". I was amazed, as he had never seen me before and had no reason to expect me. On seeing my surprise, he said: "Your brother Fr. Pat was here yesterday and I knew you out of him."

Mick was a fine upstanding cut of a young fellow, with a cheery smile, and I took an instant liking to him, a liking which remained even during the Civil War and to this day. I was struck by Mick's business capacity and his thorough grasp of everything connected with the Volunteer movement. I got very clear and precise instructions as to our line of action and the steps to be taken to resist conscription.

After my interview with Mick I had a rather amusing experience. There was a great scarcity of silver at the time and, as my total cash amounted to three £1 notes, I was unable to buy anything in the city as nobody would change a pound. I tried several shops and purchased items varying from one to five shillings; but when I produced the pound my purchases were quickly removed. Eventually I went into the Wicklow Hotel and ordered my dinner. When I had eaten, I tendered the pound in payment and I was not long getting the change then!

When I arrived home excitement was at its height, and active preparations were being made to resist conscription. Nationalist opinion, and indeed many of the local unionists too, were all united in opposition to the measure. The hierarchy and clergy were solidly behind the people.

But, while the moderates were advocating passive resistance, we of the Volunteers knew that, if conscription came, it would have to be resisted by force. All our energies were devoted to training and arming the men under our command. Recruits were flocking in in hundreds, and during this period our numbers increased by 100 per cent.

While we had been quietly getting what arms we could up to this, and these were very few indeed, the time had now arrived when some kind of a weapon would have to be provided for every Volunteer. Raids for arms were made on the homes of the ascendancy in the county, and friendly people were asked to surrender shotguns or any guns they had.

Patterns of pikes were secured, and every blacksmith in the county was pressed into the service of making pike heads. Handles had to be secured for them, and every suitable piece of ash was cut down. Many and varied were the pikes turned out depending on the skill of individual blacksmiths; but they certainly were turned out in thousands.

In the course of raids for arms which occurred in the houses of loyalists, there was one at Castle Otway, Templederry, owned by a retired British army Major named Finch. He was reputed to be a man who would resist the seizure of his guns by us. At the request of the local company, I personally conducted the raid on his place.

We met with no opposition, and collected two shotguns, three miniature rifles, one .45 revolver, found under the Major's pillow, and a couple of hundred rounds of .22 ammunition. Outside of my knowledge a sword was also seized. It appears that this weapon had been presented to the Major by King Edward VII. On that account it bore a very high sentimental value for the owner who, on its seizure, appealed to the Brigade to return the sword to him.

I delivered it to him one night soon after the raid on the castle, and he was so pleased with this action that he made me a present of a .45 British bulldog revolver. He also complimented me on the manner in which the raid was carried out and on the discipline and integrity of the men who assisted me.

On the same night, as far as I remember, members of the Nenagh Company were conducting a raid on R.I.C. County Inspector (for Galway) Foley's house in Ballytogh, when they were fired on by the owner from an upstairs window. The Volunteers returned the fire and wounded the owner in the head. Entrance to the house was then gained, and the first action of the raiders was to dress the wounded man; then, having got the shotgun, they departed.



Between collecting the shotguns from our own friendly supporters and the raiding for arms of the houses and mansions of those who were opposed to us, over 250 shotguns and a couple of thousand cartridges came under the control of the Tipperary No. 1 Brigade. Few, if any, of these stores were ever captured by the British.

Tipperary No. 1 Brigade was working smoothly and efficiently under Liam Hoolan, who had evaded arrest, and Frank Flannery who, acting on instructions, had kept in the background. The conscription threat, faced with the resistance of an organised, ill-armed but determined people, was withdrawn.

It was followed, however, by an intensification of enemy activity against the Volunteers. Day and night raids and arrests were now the order of the day, under the pretence of an alleged German plot, and many of our most important officers were put under lock and key. During long periods, the only officers who were left in the Tipperary No. 1 Brigade were the Quartermaster and myself. On these occasions, it was my duty to assume command of the Brigade as Acting Brigadier.

Side by side with the military organisation, the political organisation of Sinn Féin was growing apace, and in this the Volunteers played the leading part. In the 1918 general election, when political feeling was running high and the Irish Parliamentary Party had still some strongholds in the country, I was detailed to take charge of 80 men from Tipperary No. 1 Brigade and proceed to Waterford City, a hot-bed of Redmondism, to protect our voters at the polls. Here we were up against a hostile people and a more hostile armed police force, and our little band of Tipperary Volunteers, reinforced by men from other counties, had a very trying, nerve-wracking experience for the week preceding and particularly on the day of the election.

Were it not for the protection afforded by the many contingents of Volunteers from all parts of Munster, very few Sinn Féin voters would have got to the polls. There I met Seán Finn with his West Limerick lads, and Seán Wall with the men of East Limerick, both fine officers and splendid men, who were fated to give their lives for Ireland in the dark days of 1921.



Officers of the 1st Southern Division — a photograph taken during the Truce by Rory O'Connor, the Republican leader later executed during the Civil War. Seán Gaynor is on the right.

Nearing the close of election day in Waterford, an incident occurred that had a very amusing sequel. It was at one of the principal booths in the city where the Tipperary No. 1 boys, together

with several other units, were on duty. A large body of armed police under a District Inspector suddenly arrived, with their carbines at the ready. The District Inspector ordered us to disperse.

I got into a very heated argument with him, during which the attitude of the police became very menacing. Suddenly a company of Volunteers at the end of our line lost their nerve and stampeded, to be followed by the whole body. I was still arguing with the District Inspector when I found that I was alone, and considering discretion the better part of valour, I also beat a hasty retreat.

I must have run faster than some of the boys for, after about three hundred yards, I found myself in front of the Tipperary No. 1 contingent, and, with the help of Matt Ryan (later killed in the Civil War) and Ned Quinlan, succeeded in stopping our own lads and getting them formed up again. As this was happening, another force of armed R.I.C. halted behind us. Our lads were now jittery as a result of the previous stampede. I was unable to hold them, and they took to their heels down the city, leaving Matt Ryan, Ned Quinlan and myself to gape after them!

It was then that the high-light of the proceedings happened. As our lads were flying helter skelter, another large body of police, coming in their direction, suddenly turned tail and fled. When I returned to our headquarters in Waterford, I was heartily congratulated on the fact that the North Tipperary Volunteers had put a large force of the R.I.C. to flight. I accepted the congratulations with my tongue in my cheek. I could not blame the Volunteers for these incidents, as they were unarmed except for batons, and it was their first experience of coming up against a well-armed force.

In the Spring of 1919 serious attention was paid to an aspect of the Irish Volunteer organisation that later on paid excellent dividends — lines of communication. Up to this our communications were coming by post under covering addresses. All despatches from Headquarters to the Brigade were posted to me under cover of the addresses of Mrs. Martin Ryan, Tyone, Nenagh, and Miss Nora Boland, Ballinaclough.

It was now decided to establish a net-work of communication lines through the Volunteers. For this purpose, "call-houses" were established in every company area and despatch riders appointed. The despatch rider in each area was ready day and night to proceed with despatches received to his next call house, and time-sheets were carried and signed, with the date and time of arrival and despatch, thus providing a check on delays if any. A special line had to be set up for Headquarters and inter Brigade despatches, and in our area all Headquarters despatches for Limerick and Clare passed through our hands.

Escape from Solohead

The ordinary routine of training, drilling, raiding for arms, etc., continued until in 1919 Dáil Éireann, the Government of the Irish Republic, was established and the Volunteers became the Irish Republican Army. Each member of the I.R.A. had now to take an oath of allegiance to the Republic, and the Brigade Staff had a busy time visiting each company area to administer the oath:

"I _____ do solemnly swear that I will uphold and defend the Irish Republic and the Government of the Irish Republic which is Dáil Éireann against all enemies foreign or domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same. That I take this obligation freely without mental reservation or purpose of evasion, so help me, God!"



Coinciding with the establishment of Dáil Éireann, a raid for a quantity of gelignite which was under a police guard was carried out by Seán Treacy, Dan Breen, Seumas Robinson and Seán Hogan at a County Council quarry at Solohead in the Tipperary No. 3 Brigade area. As the police resisted, some of them were shot dead. Following this, intense enemy activity resulted in the arrest of Seán Hogan, followed later by his rescue by his comrades at Knocklong railway station. Dan Breen was badly wounded in this fight, but he and his comrades got away and, after moving into Clare, they crossed the Shannon at Ballina and so came into North Tipperary.

Frank McGrath made arrangements for their transport from Clare in a motor-car owned and driven by Benny Gill, Nenagh. On the outskirts of Nenagh they were transferred to a post-car (a horse and side-car) owned by Frank Flannery, and were driven towards Toomevara, where Jim Devaney, (killed in action in 1921) and myself met them just beyond Ballintotty. We were naturally thrilled to meet such famous men, and when they got off the car, we could see they were provided with a small arsenal.

Each of the four carried two revolvers, and they also had a box of grenades. We took them on to Whelehan's of Clash, and all billeting arrangements and guards were made by the Toomevara Company. They remained in Toomevara district for a week, and as they were then anxious to get to Dublin via Offaly, I made arrangements for an escort, and went with them to Carrigahorig where they spent a few days.

It is significant that the first attacks on the British in our area were made in the localities in which they billeted. Shortly after their departure a policeman was shot dead in an attack in Lorrha, and later two more were shot dead in Toomevara. The shootings in Solohead marked the beginning of guerilla warfare by the I.R.A. against the British armed forces in Ireland.

Up to 1920 attacks on the British were mainly confined to ambushes of armed police patrols, which had the effect of compelling the enemy to concentrate their forces and move out only in large parties. This made it difficult for the poorly-armed Volunteer units to handle them effectively. So, as a natural sequence, the decision was reached to attack them in their strongly fortified barracks on a big and organised scale.

Many barracks in the South were successfully attacked, and each Brigade O/C had a survey made to decide on which barracks in his area offered the most likely chances of success. During this period, the O/C and Vice O/C of Tipperary No. 1 Brigade were in jail, and the duty devolved on me as Acting O/C to come to a decision on the matter.

There were many angles to be considered, as these barracks were now very strongly fortified. With their garrisons constantly on the alert, it was impossible to gain admittance by ruse. The doors were secured by a strong chain, which only permitted them to be opened a few inches until a caller was identified. On the slightest sign of attack, Verrey lights were sent up to bring reinforcements from the surrounding military garrisons and R.I.C. stations.

Acting on the experience gained by other brigades where barracks were successfully attacked, notably Kilmallock, Co. Limerick, I concentrated on barracks which adjoined other houses — the idea being to break through the roof of the barracks, which was the only vulnerable part of the building. Borrisokane and Rearcross barracks were selected, and it was decided to begin with Borrisokane. This was situated in the middle of the main street and was adjoined by houses on either side. It had a garrison of 12 R.I.C. men and was centrally situated between Nenagh and Birr, both garrison towns with strong military and police forces, and about 20 miles apart.

The idea (as stated) was to get on to the roof of the barracks and, on smashing a hole through it, to pour petrol and lighted torches into the building, and so either smoke or burn the garrison out. Petrol being strictly controlled at the time, it presented a minor problem to secure a sufficient quantity for our purpose.

In the meantime, the important details of cutting communications and blocking the roads, to delay reinforcements and at the same time leave a line of retreat for our own forces, were gone into minutely. Sites for road-blocks having been selected and marked on the map, the carrying out of this part of the job was put in the capable hands of Ned O'Leary, then O/C, 1st Battalion.

The blockade idea was to isolate Borrisokane. Every road leading to it was to be blocked for a radius of 10 miles. The west was effectively isolated by the River Shannon, and along its banks we proposed having our line of retreat. O'Leary went into the job minutely and, a fortnight before the attack was to take place, he had every tree marked and men detailed to cut them.

The work of selecting positions for our riflemen was gone into, and officers were appointed in charge of each position. The men were carefully chosen from all parts of the Brigade for these posts of action and danger, and all details were worked out with precision, with the exception of securing the necessary petrol. Some abortive attempts were made to secure this, and eventually Austin McCurtin got word of a consignment at Nenagh railway station.

He secured a lorry and, commandeering the petrol, removed it to Moneygall in the 2nd Battalion area. The petrol, being in tins, was hidden in a sandpit, and fortunately it was removed from there early next day by the Moneygall Company, as before evening a large force of police came and seached the spot where it had been dumped, obviously having got information about it.

Borrisokane Barracks Attack

The securing of bottles and the bottling of 100 gallons of petrol was another headache, but this was successfully done by the Moneygall Company who, on the night of the attack, had it transported safely to the scene of action. All was now ready for the Saturday night in June 1920 that had been decided on for the attack. Midnight was zero hour, and all our forces were mobilised and ready at a quarry one mile from the town at 11 p.m. Frank McGrath, Brigade O/C, who had just been released from jail, took command, and the men fell in and marched off at 11.30 p.m.

By this time Ned O'Leary's road-blocking gangs were at work, and it was safe to assume that every road leading to Borrisokane was effectively blocked as we swung into the main street. As a matter of fact the blockade was so well done that it took the military a week to clear the roads to get there!

As we entered Borrisokane a diversion occurred. We noticed barbed wire tied across the street from one telegraph pole to another, and we held for interrogation three men we found on the street as we suspected they had erected the wire. These turned out to be three local robbers — ex-British soldiers — who had selected that night to do a bit of burglary. Our arrival nipped their little enterprise in the bud, and I arrested them and put them under an armed guard while we proceeded to take up our allotted positions.

The Brigade O/C entered the house adjoining the left-hand side of the barracks from which the attack on the roof was to be made, and at midnight gave the signal to open fire. Immediately, the windows and doors of the barracks were peppered with rifle-fire but, as we knew rifle-fire was ineffective against the sand-bagged and steel-shuttered building, it was merely kept up as a cover for the all-important work of breaking through the roof of the barracks.

Immediately the first shots were fired, the garrison got to their loop-holes and returned the fire, while they kept sending up a constant stream of Verey lights. My particular job was to ensure that a constant supply of bottles of petrol reached the men on the roof, who very quickly had a breach made and, in a matter of minutes, the barracks had started to burn.



I and my men, who were bringing the petrol from an archway next to the house occupied by the Brigade O/C, were the only ones in the open and exposed to the fire of our own men and splinters from enemy hand grenades. Being our first time under fire, as we dashed from the archway through the street and into the house adjoining the barracks, we were a bit nervous in the beginning. In fact I had to threaten some of the lads with my gun to force them to take the first bottles. After the first few runs they were as cool as veterans — walking in and out in their shirt sleeves, singing and joking, while bullets spattered in all directions around them.

The barracks was well ablaze when we had our first piece of bad luck. One of our men on the roof, Michael Kennedy of Nenagh, was shot through the upper part of the leg. He was carried down and handed over to me, and I had him removed to Dr. Quigley's of Borrisokane, where I left him to have his wound dressed. On my return to the attack, more bad news awaited me. Jimmie O'Meara of Toomevara had been shot through the arm as he replaced Kennedy on the roof. Jimmie was also taken to Dr. Quigley's, and his place was taken by Andy Cooney who was to become famous for the part he took in the fight in later years.

Shortly after this, when the fight had been on about two hours, the Brigade O/C sent me word that he was going to withdraw. I was terribly disappointed at this, as it was obvious to me that nothing could now save the barracks and it was only a matter of time until the garrison would have to come out and surrender. I sent back a message, appealing to him not to withdraw, and he consented to remain another hour.

At the end of the hour, he sent against to me orders to notify the men in the different positions to withdraw, and it was in a very disappointed frame of mind that I carried out these orders and withdrew from the attack when we were on the verge of success. We discovered later that, half an hour after we had left, the garrison were forced to leave the burning building.

As I was last to leave the town, having kept my section of men to remove to a safe place what was left of the petrol, I was further annoyed to discover that the Brigade O/C and the main body of the Volunteers had gone and had left our two wounded comrades behind. It was at this stage that I was thankful for the prisoners whom we had arrested in the beginning and who were still under guard. They were able to give us information as to where we could get a lorry to bring the wounded men with us, and one of them was able to drive.

Our surplus petrol now came in useful, as the petrol tank in the lorry was empty. And so on a commandeered lorry, driven by a confessed burglar, and with his two comrades brought along to prevent them giving information, we collected our wounded men and set out from Borrisokane via Kilbarron, this being the road left open except for one road-block — a stone wall — without any clear idea of where we were going, or what was best to do for our wounded comrades.

The wounded men were brought by us as far as Puckane where we left Jimmy O'Meara with the local curate, Father Fogarty, who only kept him for a few hours when he drove him in his pony and trap to O'Meara's own home at Toomevara. The second wounded man, whose condition was much more serious, was brought to Ned Slattery's, Ballycommon, three miles from Nenagh.

Andy Cooney cycled from there into Nenagh and brought out Dr. Louis Courtney who first treated Kennedy's wound, then went back to Nenagh Hospital and got two Sisters of the St. John of God nursing order to come with him to avert suspicion. With his passengers, he returned to Ballycommon and took Kennedy from there to Barrington's Hospital, Limerick, where he died after a fortnight. His remains were taken home and, after a military funeral, he was buried in Kilbarron.