

(By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH)

THE historic village of Galbally, nestling at the foot of the Galtees and opening to the beautiful Glen of Aherlow, has played no small part in keeping Limerick's and Ireland's name to the forefront of the athletic world.

I can never think of the place without recalling the mighty deeds of the renowned Jim Fahy. A writer in a leading athletic journal of some years ago had this interesting reference to the great Galbally world beater:

"Scattered among the hilly parts of the South, where the Galtees and the Comeraghs reveal a hundred moods in light and colour, are the remnants of a hardy race! Hill-side men who were champions all, they maintained a grand tradition in the once popular sport of jumping from a mark.

"We still wonder if the like will ever be seen again—if another illustrious breed of Leahys, Bresnihan's, Credons and Fahys will spring up to bring back past lustre.

To Jim Fahy of Galbally ('The Irish Kangaroo') belonged the distinction of being the last of the 'old glory' line."

**SET UP A NEW WORLD**

An exponent of an ancient art, possessing all the grace and power of those who preceded him, the Galbally man was approaching his fortieth birthday when he established a new world's record for the Three Standing Jumps, in September, 1923, at Chicago. His distance was 40 feet 3 inches and all who witnessed his performance deemed it characteristic of a man bent on defying Anno Domini. Sixteen years previously, Fahy had won his first Gaelic championship and in the years which followed was a noted competitor at sports meetings everywhere. That lion-hearted man shone on athletic fields for the unbelievable spell of thirty years, and his world's record was one of the greatest performances in the history of athletics.

However, we must leave Jim Fahy and the other great athletes, and pass on to another field of skill in which the sons of Hoary Galtymore proved themselves a force to be reckoned with. I refer to the football field.

**BOASTED A FINE FOOTBALL TEAM.**

About the end of the first decade of the present century, Galbally boasted one of the best teams in the county and were most unlucky that poor organisation on the part of the governing body of the time resulted in a number of junior football championship series being abandoned when the competitions were little more than half-way through. However, one championship was brought to a final stage but Galbally were foiled at the last fencé and deprived of the glamour and glory of a great win on the field of play by the non-appearance of their opponents, Glin.

Strange as it may seem, football at that period reached a very high standard in Limerick and had the various County Boards in the years from 1910 to 1920 been able to give even reasonable attention to the game, there is no doubt that the glories of the early days of the championship would have been recaptured. The big ball game boasted many noted exponents at the period, and it is one of the great regrets of the football lovers of Shannonside that the opportunities they deserved were not forthcoming in the measure necessary to prove their undoubted worth. Opportunity only knocks once, they say, but it pounded on Limerick's door much oftener than that, but without the response demanded.

**PARISH SPLIT BY COUNTY BOUNDARY.**

Galbally is very awkwardly situated as regards fielding the full strength of the parish in championship competition. The county boundary splits the parish and a

territory is situated on the wrong side of the boundary line, so some of the best football products of the parish had to play in Tipperary. That they were really top class footballers can be judged from their appearances in Premier County colours, notably Pat Hefferman, Bill O'Brien, Dan Dwyer and Pat Hyland—the last mentioned a one-time star with the famed Limerick Commercials.

Another product of the parish of Galbally who was well known on the Gaelic field as a first-class exponent of the code was Gerald Quinlan, who at one time played for the Mayo senior team and was one of their best performers.

**HIGH CLASS SERVICE.**

Limerick county got high class service from several Galbally men, and in the years of the border club's greatness James Scanlan, Mick Noonan and the subject of our sketch this week, Ned O'Brien, were right worthy representatives.

The Secretary of this great Galbally side was Mick Scanlan, a splendid type of Gael, who loved everything Irish from the language to the games. When called to participate in a more stirring field from that of football, Mick, like many another great G.A.A. man, responded nobly, and in 1920 in Limerick city an English bullet stilled for ever as true a heart as ever beat for Ireland.

Ned O'Brien was captain and chief inspiration of the team in its years of greatness, and the Vice Captain was James Scanlan—two men who were later to figure in one of the most daring deeds of the entire War of Independence.

**HAD PRESENT MINISTER AS HIS OPPONENT.**

Both officials figured in some stirring football games in Limerick colours, but the occasion Ned always recalled with most relish as the exciting one of his many appearances was at Thurles on July 13, 1915.

Limerick and Cork were doubly engaged that day, and in the football game Ned had as opponent the present Minister for Agriculture, Senator Sean Moylan. The big ball game, although hard fought, passed off without incident, but the hurling tie was bubbling over with excitement from the start.

A big quota of disallowed goals only added to the keenness of the exchanges, and the match was abruptly terminated seven minutes from the end when two opposite players came into handgrips, after which the spectators invaded the pitch. A free for all developed, and it was found impossible to proceed further with play that day.

"Tyler" Mackey was one of the players involved on that occasion, and Ned O'Brien told me, a short time before his death, how the matter was recalled in unusual circumstances many years later.

**ON DEPUTATION TO OLD GAEL.**

Ned and "Tyler," both members of the County Council at the time, were on a deputation to Government Buildings in Dublin, and had reason to interview the then Minister for Lands, who happened to be Sean Moylan. The Minister had not forgotten the excitement of that memorable day in Thurles, and all three spent some time reminiscing on the men who held the Gaelic stage in those now far off days.

Ned O'Brien, and a number of his comrades in the Galbally Football Club were amongst the first members of the Irish Volunteers. The O'Briens were always staunch nationalists—they were born into the Fenian tradition, so it was not surprising to see Ned one of the leaders of the Galtee Battalion.

After the 1916 uprising the team

members, notably Ned O'Brien and James Scanlan found that their labours were needed at the crucial time to awaken the spirit of Irish Nationalism, which up to then lay dormant in the hearts of many an Irish youth.

The Galbally men were some of the earliest to action in the Anglo-Irish war, and some aspects of that struggle will be amongst the matters dealt with next week.

# No. 211—Ned O'Brien Of Galbally

(CONTINUED)

(By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH)

VERY few outside the narrow circle who were conversant with the re-organisation plans of the Volunteer movement, guessed the ability of the later famed "Galtee Battalion" of Galbally, prior to that memorable 13th day of May, 1919, when some of its most trusted members met at Knocklong Railway Station for an event which was to rally the fighting spirit of Ireland, and pit a new force against the ancient enemy.

On the afternoon of that fateful day, Eamonn O'Brien received a short message of a dozen words from Sean Treacy. It read: "Will operate in Knocklong, 7 p.m. Meet Moloney's, Lackelly, and bring help."

## KNEW THE PURPOSE OF THE MEETING.

Eamonn knew well what the purpose of the meeting was. He had heard of the arrest by the R.I.C. of the patriot with a price on his head—Sean Hogan, wanted for his part in the first ambush of the War of Independence—at Solohead. He knew, too, that Sean would face the hangman if the R.I.C. succeeded in lodging him in Cork Jail.

Jerry Callaghan was the bearer of the message, and besides Sean Treacy there was Dan Breen and Seamus Robinson in the party, planning the rescue.

Eamonn O'Brien was worthy of the trust placed in him. Without counting the cost he immediately threw himself wholeheartedly into the task allotted him. Two revolvers were all they could muster—they belonged to Eamonn and his brother, John Joe, but although he had no arms to give them, Eamonn also summoned Jim Scanlan, Edward Foley and Sean Lynch.

## DANGEROUS JOB.

Knowing full well the dangerous job before him, Eamonn told his brother: "If anything happens and I fail to return, look after my wife and child." John Joe, however, was every bit as determined as his brother to share in the risks involved, and insisted on travelling with the party.

The Galbally quintette reported as instructed and in excellent time. Treacy explained the plans they had drawn, which provided for a boarding party of four on the train at Emly. The Galbally men got this assignment—John Joe O'Brien, Foley, Scanlan and Lynch being instructed to cycle to Emly, board the train without arousing any suspicion, and ascertain if the R.I.C. party and its prisoner were travelling on it. Their instructions were to signal to the remainder of the party, who would be at Knocklong Station, indicating the location of the "quarry."

## FIRST ARRIVALS AT KNOCKLONG STATION.

Breen and Robinson were first to arrive on the platform at Knocklong. They were followed shortly afterwards by Sean Treacy and Eamonn O'Brien. Treacy was expecting a message in code, from some Volunteer friends in Thurles, and when he did not see the messenger at the Railway Station despatched Eamonn to a business premises in the town in the hope of contacting him. This was about twenty minutes before the Dublin to Cork train was due at Knock-

long. That was a fortunate journey. Whilst O'Brien was away the Cork to Dublin train arrived at Knocklong. There was a party of armed soldiers in one of its compartments, but, more dangerous still, a number of Galbally policemen got off the train and made their way out of the station.

It often happened that both the up and down trains passed each other at Knocklong and, in view of the military party and the policemen, it would have upset all the plans had it occurred on this occasion.

## ALMOST A LAST-MINUTE HITCH.

And had the Galbally policemen noticed O'Brien on the platform it is fairly sure they would have decided on keeping a watch on him, for they knew enough about his political leanings to mark him a man to be kept under observation.

There was almost a last-minute hitch. The coded message which Eamonn O'Brien traced was delayed in transmission and actually referred to an earlier train that day. It stated that Hogan was not on board.

Just as the Cork bound train came into sight the messenger dashed on to the platform and handed Eamonn a second telegram, which the latter stuffed into his pocket, not having time then to read it.

Acting on the information in the first one—Treacy, a much-wanted man at the time, was in the act of leaving the station when the train came to a halt on the platform.

Before it had fully stopped, John Joe O'Brien jumped from the doorway of a carriage. Another of the Galbally men followed, both pointing to a compartment of the train near the engine, and shouting to Eamonn that Hogan and his captors were in same.

## DEMANDED SURRENDER OF THE POLICE.

Then nearing the station exit, Treacy heard the message. He whipped off his glasses, raced for the carriage indicated, drawing his revolver as he ran. Eamonn O'Brien was also on his heels, his revolver also now fully visible.

The pair were at the door of Hogan's compartment in a flash. From the corridor they threw back the sliding door and demanded the surrender of the police party, meantime instructing Sean to get out quickly.

For a moment, it looked as if the rescue was about to be completely successful and that the use of arms would not be necessary. The police jumped up, their hands half raised, but one Constable who was sitting near the window farthest from the door, beside Hogan, drew his revolver and put it to the head of his prisoner, using the latter as a shield.

To save Hogan's life, the attackers had no option but to open fire, and they did so to such effect that the policeman slumped back in his seat, still clutching Hogan's shoulder.

It was common knowledge at the time that the police had instructions that prisoners were to be shot in cases of attempted rescue, and it was only when the boarding party saw the attempt at carrying this into effect they used their weapons. Eamonn O'Brien often emphasised this point, and

stressed the fact that they made repeated appeals for surrender before firing.

## FIERCE FIGHT.

Hogan then wrenched himself free, and crashed his manacled hands in the face of his nearest captor. Treacy and the Sergeant in charge engaged in a fierce fight which turned into a wrestling match, as another of the policemen leaped on Eamonn O'Brien's back.

The other Galbally men reached the carriage at this point, and, unarmed though they were, they engaged the police escort in a hand-to-hand fight. One of them wrenched the carbine from the grasp of the policeman who had Eamonn O'Brien pinned, and crashed it on his head. He collapsed, unconscious of the floor. Another policeman hurled himself, or was thrown, through the carriage window.

## THE PRIMARY OBJECT.

Sean Lynch all the time kept the primary object of the attack in view, and determined that Hogan, handcuffed though he was, should escape. The Sergeant and Treacy were still struggling together in a life and death fight, and Lynch had extreme difficulty in getting Hogan out the doorway and to the comparative calm of the corridor, where they remained until the fight was over.

Meantime Eamonn O'Brien got to the aid of Treacy but the Sergeant was deaf to every appeal to surrender, and his great physical strength and determination placed the whole party in serious danger, lest the shots should attract the attention of the Galbally police, who, it was expected, were still in Knocklong.

Treacy had lost his revolver in the struggle but the policeman still had his, rendered impotent, however, because Treacy had stuck his thumb between the trigger and cap. Scanlan had possession of the captured rifle but could not even use it as a bludgeon in the cramped compartment, while John Joe O'Brien attempted to use his revolver but found it would not fire.

The Sergeant fought himself free, a shot rang out and blood oozed from Treacy's throat. Eamonn O'Brien closed again with the enemy, as Treacy, with a superhuman effort wrenched the revolver from his grasp and fired. The Sergeant collapsed on the floor unconscious.

## SHARP BURST OF RIFLE FIRE

All was quite for a second, and the rescue party were about to leave the train when a sharp burst of rifle fire was heard. The Constable who had jumped through the window had returned to the attack, and his shots wounded Scanlan and Eamonn O'Brien, but not seriously.

At this point Dan Breen came into the fight with Robinson. He had been on guard outside the station. Both rushed in, and engaged the Constable, who was eventually silenced but not before Breen had received two serious bullet wounds.

Breen, almost on the point of collapse, was helped from the station by none other than a soldier in khaki—an Irishman who had cheered for the Republic when the fight was at its hottest. Sean Hogan was hurried to a butcher's shop, where his handcuffs were broken with the aid of the cleaver, and a 56 lbs. weight.

The injured Volunteers were quickly placed under friendly care. Treacy and Breen were moved to West Limerick, whilst Scanlan and O'Brien found harbour under friendly roofs in the Anglesboro' district.

(By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH)

**I**MEDIATELY following his arrival in America Ned O'Brien picked up the threads of the Irish national struggle and set about rallying his countrymen in the United States to the support of the soldiers of the Republic, fighting so desperately and against such terrific odds at home.

His Fenian background and his close association with the I.R.B. would have been sufficient to gain him access to the inner councils of the chief American centres of the Brotherhood, but the added glamour associated with one of the principal heroes of the famous rescue at Knocklong, which had received such publicity in Irish circles in the United States and had rallied the scattered remnants of the Gaelic race as no event since the 1916 Insurrection, ensured for Ned O'Brien a right royal welcome to every circle where Irishmen had any influence and which could be of help to the struggle, which was being intensified with such vigour against the age-old enemy of his native land.

#### ENGLISH AGENTS AT WORK.

The goodwill of the populace of Irish birth or descent was not everything in an America which had only recently been allies of England in the first great World War, and English agents were constantly at work trying to influence the American public and turn them against the Irish freedom fighters.

Every trick of British diplomacy was tried; false reports and lying propaganda circulated; noble deeds and daring efforts misrepresented; censorship, martial law and military courts established to ensure that the outside world was deprived of the real story of events in Ireland.

Ned O'Brien and a few companions had to counter the might of the then great British Empire on American soil, with the same vigour as other soldiers of the Republic employed in dealing with the armed minions of the Empire in an Ireland which had risen phoenix-like from the ashes of the 1916 fires, to re-assert its right to a freedom denied it for seven centuries.

#### MEN OF SET PURPOSE.

As the fight grew hotter and hotter in intensity at home, the work of providing the cash, and the arms and equipment that were so badly needed to counter the terrific effort the British were putting into their bid to crush the Irish Resistance, assumed frightening proportions, but Ned O'Brien and his colleagues were men of set purpose—men with a task to perform—and never once did they shirk the issue during a long spell of almost heartbreaking endeavour and many bitter disappointments.

Ned often told me in after years of the disillusionment he experienced in his dealings with many from whom he had reason to expect nothing but support and encouragement. Some of these had been very vocal in their advocacy of action in support of the Irish demand for freedom, but when something more was demanded of them they just failed to respond in the manner expected.

The "mighty dollar" came into the picture fairly forcibly, and when the Irish representatives had not the money to buy the services of some of these folk they were left very severely alone.

#### GOLDEN LINING TO THE CLOUD.

There was a golden lining to the cloud, however, and the materialistic ones were outnumbered by the many who threw everything they had, and risked their very all, to ensure a free flow of arms, equipment and money to Ireland.

It will be readily understood that the procuring of arms in an America closely allied with England

was no easy task. They had to be rooted out of the most unsuspected places, stored in some convenient hide out, often for weeks on end, and eventually smuggled out of the country by friendly seamen, remembering all the time the great mastery of the seas Britain boasted in those days.

Ned O'Brien and his conferees eventually wormed their way into the confidences of important figures in many American services, and the flow of equipment got smoother and smoother, whilst the way also was eased for the shipment of consignments, despite the vigilance of British agents, who were well aware of the traffic but rarely succeeded in getting any reliable information concerning the means employed of transmitting it to Ireland. They certainly never suspected that a lot of it was shipped in boats which had no Irish port of call, and was actually landed in one of the big English ports. There, members of the I.R.A. took over control and it was their responsibility to see that it reached its ultimate destination.

The growing influence of the Irish emissaries in New York is best illustrated by an incident which occurred early in 1921, when the war against the British was at its zenith.

#### SUSPICIOUS AND AN ARREST.

Amongst the centres used for the storing of arms was the basement of the Carmelite Church in New York. Ned O'Brien and a companion were busily engaged one night taking a consignment to the port for shipment when they had the misfortune to encounter a police squad who were engaged in the efforts to enforce prohibition. In the belief that they were bootleggers, the police accosted them and the pair were placed under arrest and lodged in the Penitentiary.

By a remarkable coincidence the incident was witnessed by a Galbally man, who was aware of O'Brien's identity and knew the mission upon which he was engaged. He lost no time in contacting Harry Boland, great Gael and patriot then on an Irish Republican mission in New York, who worked through the night contacting Irishmen high up in American Governmental positions, with the result that early morning saw Ned O'Brien and his friend set free with profuse apologies, and no questions asked concerning the contents of the parcels which had aroused such suspicion the previous night.

#### THE TASK OF RAISING MONEY.

In addition to procuring the arms, Ned had also the task of raising most of the money for the purpose of purchasing anything which could be secured either on the open market or through some of the secret channels then freely operating.

As an old G.A.A. man his thoughts naturally turned to that source, and although matters Gaelic were by no means in a flourishing condition he quickly gained the support of the Association and their pledge to do everything possible to help the cause.

Ned arranged matches in many centres for the Arms Fund, and despite his heavy work in other branches of Republican activity, found time himself to play in these games. In the course of one such match in Chicago he figured in goal for what proved the losing team. An old Limerick friend of football days by the Shannon was the net minder for the opposition side—appropriately named the "Thomas Clarkes."

#### AGAIN MET HIS OPPOSITE NUMBER.

Two years later, when the British had left Ireland and the bitterness of the Civil War was on the

wane, Ned again met his opposite number of that occasion. It was in a match for the South Limerick Championship and Ned manned the Bearna Baoghail for Galbally. Imagine his surprise at seeing his Chicago friend holding the net for Klbhenny.

Ned, who never lost his abiding love for Gaelic football, was to continue for many further years one of the great stalwarts of the Galbally Club. Disappointment was their portion, when after winning the South Limerick crown in sparkling style, they went under to Castlemahon in the County semi-final, but perseverance eventually had its reward, and three years later they captured the coveted County crown at the expense of Shanagolden.

#### THE GALBALLY SIDE.

The champion Galbally side will be recalled with interest: John Wallace, captain; Robert Moore, goal; Pat Hanley, Timothy Donovan, Edmond Crowe, Denis Donovan, Andrew Scanlan, Michael Quane, Thomas Daly, John McGuinness, Michael Barry, Brendan Riordan, Edmond Heffernan, Patrick Frewen, William Noonan, Eamonn O'Brien, Thomas Cahill, Thomas Mulvey.

So passed from the arena in glory, a man who remained steadfast to the end in his attachment to the games of the Gael.