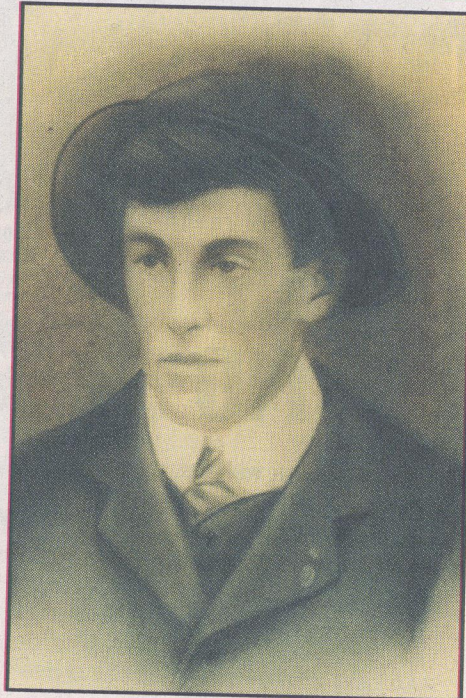
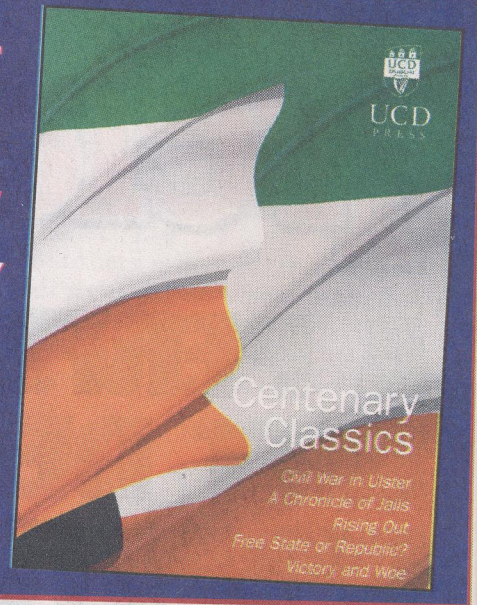


The following extract is taken from *Rising Out*, an eyewitness account by Ernie O'Malley of the actions of Seán Connolly of Longford. Connolly was a member of the Irish Volunteers, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, the Irish Republican Army and participated in military activities in Longford, Roscommon and Leitrim, where he was fatally wounded at the battle of Selton Hill on 11 March 1921. This extract describes an attack on a barracks in Longford, which was orchestrated by Connolly, and showcases Ireland's struggle for independence at a local level.

THE FIRST barracks attacked in Longford was on 6 January 1920 at Drumlish, close to the border of Co. Leitrim. The barracks was isolated and the intention was to use explosives on one gable end to demolish it. The post commanded the ground all around it for miles. Seán Connolly had sent his sister, Maura, to Dublin for arms and supplies, but like Mother Hubbard 'when she got there the cupboard was bare'. Cork had been given the arms which Connolly had expected to receive, but she got some Mills grenades, a revolver for her brother from Michael Collins, and a few odds and ends of war material. Seán met her at Edgeworthstown station but instead of the beaming welcome which she had expected as a result of bringing down the supplies in safety, her brother looked at her small hand cases and said sombrely 'Is that all you brought with you?'

There were explosives for the gable end and mines in reserve. These mines had been made from boxes of carts which had been collected through the battalion. Seán MacEoin

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had worked at his forge preparing flanges and bolts and these flanges had been placed at either end, strong bolts joined the ends together so as to strengthen the resistance of the metal to an explosive. Such a weapon could be made use of in a number of ways. It could be buried in the road to serve as a mine. When fully loaded it would weigh about nine or ten pounds. It could serve as a large grenade by packing broken scrap metal around the explosive, or it could be employed to blow in the door of a barracks while a storming

party waited near by to rush in. Roads had been blocked by felling trees although the main road was not interfered with. The explosive for the end wall was carried up by Volunteers and was placed in position at the base of the gable. The fuse was ignited and the men quickly and quietly got back far enough to lie down so as to avoid whatever splinters of stone might come their way. The men who were to cover the barrack windows with shotguns and rifles waited for the explosion and the men who were to charge the breach were ready for their dash across, but nothing happened.

IT WAS always dangerous to investigate a charge when for some reason, whether in fuse, detonator or explosives, there was a failure.

The fault might be some kind of delay in result and an explosion might take place a considerable time later. Connolly took a cart box grenade and walked over towards the Drumlish Barracks door. There was a fanlight over the door and he could lob his cart box through the glass. At the time of this attack barracks generally around Ireland were not properly protected by steel plates. He tried to ignite the fuse but it would not light. After the third attempt he did hear the splutter that assured him, and the fizzle of light that told the waiting men that the fuse was lighting. He threw

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the bomb through the fanlight and the heavy box fell inside, but the clatter of the falling metal was the only satisfaction in sound anyone heard, for the explosive did not work.

THE FAILURE of the cart box may have been due to its metal case. In cold weather the metal would seep up the cold and retain it for a long time. The broken scrap inside could again spread the lower temperature which would freeze the gelignite in the centre of it, and frozen gelignite could not be detonated. In addition these improvised grenades had to be hidden in unsuspected places and the gelignite which should have been kept apart from the casing was only too often allowed to run the risk of a continuous contact. Rifle and shot gun fire was kept up for a while. The Royal Irish Constabulary, as was their custom, sent up a series of Very lights.

These whizzed up high above the barracks, made the neighbourhood incandescent and sent the warning of attack to neighbouring posts. But the British were careful about leaving their comfortable barracks at night. In Longford eight miles away there was a strongly held police barracks, the county headquarters of the RIC and two military barracks, but the county itself and the darkness were linked up to join the IRA outposts as an additional protection against an enemy advance. The garrison of this now isolated post was left to their own courage and fears until the light of day came slowly. After what was known in the newspapers as an interchange of shots, MacEoin, Connolly and the men with them made for their own districts. ■

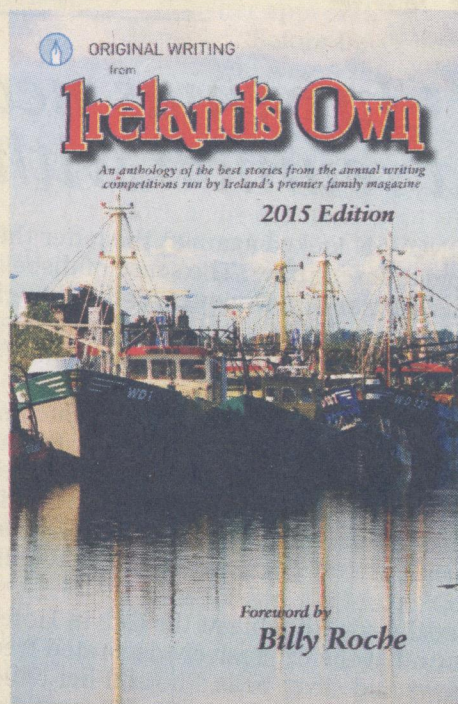
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