

IT has been said that Irishmen, with their highly developed sense of individuality and independence, besides making difficult subjects to command successfully, tend to produce more than the normal quota of leaders and aspirants to leadership. If this saying be true—and our history, as well as the record of Irish units in other armies, appears to support it—a standard of leadership above the ordinary is necessary if Irishmen are to give their best as soldiers. So it was, at any rate, on the eve of the Black and Tan campaign in East Limerick in 1918, as the then loosely linked Irish Volunteer organisation in that area strove to weld its component parts into a compact and unified brigade formation in preparation for the coming conflict.

The obstacle in the way of achieving this closely knit organisation was not a lack of leaders. On the contrary, it largely consisted of a multiplicity of talent and candidates for leadership. At this time the Volunteer movement in East Limerick was composed of a number of independent battalions. All of these could reasonably aspire to provide the leader of the proposed brigade in the person of their own commandants, nearly all of whom were of proved capacity with strong claims for selection. Indeed, more than one candidate was forthcoming, or in prospect, from some units. One battalion in particular was a prolific source of potential leaders. This was the Galtee Battalion, a unit which calls for special mention here, not only on the grounds of its relevance to the story, but

as the location for one of the first Volunteer training camps organised by G.H.Q., and in charge of the late Colonel J. J. O'Connell. But its proudest claim to fame rests on having originated the idea of the Flying Column or Active Service Unit, the Galtee Battalion Flying Column composed of Volunteers giving whole-time service as a unit, having been the first of its kind in the I.R.A. organisation. As is now so well known, the Active Service Unit system, once it became widespread, was the spearhead of the I.R.A. operations, and the chief medium of the military successes of the Volunteers from 1918 to 1921.

It was the affairs of the Galtee Battalion that gave rise to the circumstances leading to the formal establishment of the East Limerick Brigade, and the appointment of its first brigadier in the early summer of 1918. Deciding to investigate questions arising out of a conflict of personalities within the battalion, G.H.Q. detailed a staff officer to visit the area, and to examine the situation on the spot. The G.H.Q. representative, after preliminary investigations, ordered a formal Court of Enquiry at which he presided. With Lord French's Proclamation issued just then—purporting to outlaw the Irish Volunteers—to give a little added solemnity to the proceedings, this Court held protracted sittings at Knocklong. As the outcome, the G.H.Q. delegate decided upon the unprecedented step of selecting and, in effect, appointing a brigade commander. This step was not, of course, in conformity with the procedure then governing such appointments, these normally being made by election. That the assembled unit commanders did not seek to have this election system adopted—the right to which they were perfectly aware they could enforce under the Constitution of the Irish Volunteers—was of itself evidence of their *bona-fides*, and of the genuineness of their difficulties in choosing a leader in the circumstances already mentioned. This attitude, by the way, tends to refute the charges of mere factionism to which are sometimes ascribed

The Author.

This article, from the pen of Sean Wall's intimate friend and Brigade Adjutant, is written out of the experience of close personal contact with this well-known East Limerick leader and the events of his active career in the I.R.A. Major MacCarthy was associated with the Volunteer organisation from its inception, and was one of the original organisers, and at a critical period O/C. of the famous Galtee Battalion. Later he became vice-O/C. and Adjutant of the East Limerick Brigade, and as an Officer of the Brigade's Active Service Unit took a prominent part in the many actions in which the unit was engaged. His previous contributions to AN COSANTOIR include a valuable account of the ambush at Dromkeen, and other articles. When the 4th Southern Division was formed Major MacCarthy was appointed Deputy Divisional Commander and Divisional Adjutant. He has filled many important posts in the Army, and graduated with distinction from the Command and Staff School.

because it held a unique place in the Irish Volunteer and I.R.A. Organisations. Incidentally, the territorial title of this Battalion has been perpetuated with justifiable local pride in its associations, on the part of its present-day successors, being now borne by the Galtee District of the L.D.F.

Originally embracing that corner of Limerick County between the Tipperary and Cork borders (Galbally, Ballylanders, Kilfinane, Knocklong, Ardpatrick and adjoining townlands), the unit was one of the earliest and most active formations in the movement. Because of its status and strength, its area was selected in 1915

the features of the Irish character exhibiting a lack of the sheep-like quality of being easily led and which in reality, as previously suggested, arise from a deeply seated sense of individuality and independence.

The choice of the G.H.Q. representative had fallen on Sean Wall, an officer of the Bruff Battalion, or as it subsequently became in the brigaded organisation, the 3rd Battalion, East Limerick Brigade. It is of interest to record the general reasons for the selection of this officer—until then acting as a company commander—in the G.H.Q. delegate's own words:—

“From all the investigations I had made I was satisfied that I was justified in taking this action and subsequent events fully confirmed the stability of his character, strength of purpose and determination and qualities of leadership which Sean Wall possessed, and in a higher degree than might be ordinarily required. He not alone possessed those qualities but he also exercised them in the handling of that very delicate situation which existed before my arrival in the area, and perhaps to a greater extent immediately afterwards. He had been as it were planted in authority and others had been dispossessed of even the right to attain that authority, and yet despite these obvious disadvantages, Sean Wall rose above them all and had his Brigade one of the best fighting units in the Volunteer Organisation up to the time of his heroic death in action.”

Born in 1888, near Bruff, of farmer stock, the newly-appointed brigadier was of more mature age than the great majority of those he was now to command. For long a prominent and very energetic worker in the Sinn Fein, Gaelic League and Volunteer movements, and coming of

a family closely identified with the national cause, he was well known either personally or by repute throughout the county. His brother, Fr. Tom Wall, was one of the two curates of the Limerick diocese round whom had centred in 1917 the famous controversy between the then Bishop of Limerick (The late Most Rev. Dr. O'Dwyer) and General Maxwell, the British C.-in-C. The latter had thought to induce the Bishop to intervene against the two priests in connection with their national outlook and activities, especially their encouragement of, and association with, the Volunteers.

Dr. O'Dwyer's stand in face of this demand, his rejection of General Maxwell's proposals, and his comments on the foreign, political and military regime, were so caustic and uncompromising as to receive nation-wide—one might say world-wide—publicity. Coming from such an eminent, respected, and for many, an unexpected source, the support thus given was invaluable to the national cause at a time when the Volunteer organisation was but slowly recovering from the aftermath of the Easter Week Rising, and when the people in general were but beginning to feel the fresh surge in the nation's life-blood which followed the insurrection.

From an early age Sean Wall had given evidence of possessing resource, determination and self-confidence—characteristics which figure prominently among the basic qualities required for leadership. The death of his father and mother within a few months of each other had terminated his secondary education at St. Munchins

feffion. Another project of this combine was the manufacture of milk-powder, concerning which they entered into negotiations with the authorities in Dublin. As a further instance of his progressive mind and his receptiveness of new ideas—both very desirable attributes in a leader—it may be recalled that he acquired a large steam threshing mill in the early days of its development, and shortly after he was to be found advocating and demonstrating the value of the newly-designed mechanical milking apparatus, being responsible for the introduction of this machinery to Co. Limerick. While thus busily occupied with many-sided activities, the things of the mind were not neglected. He was an enthusiastic member of the Gaelic League, the organiser of the local Feis and regular attendant at the local Irish language classes where his mentor was George Clancy, who later as Alderman Clancy and Mayor of Limerick was to be one of the two murdered holders of the Limerick's Mayoralty. In his spare time, which was little, nothing pleased him more than trips on his motor-cycle to visit places associated with the patriot dead, such as the scene of O'Neill-Crowley's last stand at Kilclooney Wood, and the grave of Father Nicholas Sheehy at Clogheen.

Like so many others of his generation who gave the Volunteer movement allegiance and devoted service, his national outlook was largely fashioned by a life-long adherence to the Fenian tradition. A maternal uncle of his had taken part in the attack on Kilmallock Barracks in the Rising of '67, being instrumental in recovering on that occasion the body of the single fatal Fenian casualty—a mysterious stranger whose identity was never fully established, and to whose memory as "The Unknown Fenian" a stately monument now stands in Sheares Street, Kilmallock.

With this background and trend of mind, Sean Wall's membership of the Volunteers from their inception in 1913 could be taken for granted. So too could

College, Limerick, leaving him at the age of sixteen to assume his parents place in charge of the family affairs. Developing the means at his disposal, he quickly launched out into many fields of activity, displaying an inventive and progressive outlook in all he undertook. He became an expert building contractor, founding the firm of Wall and Forde which extended his contracting business throughout the County of Limerick; and was responsible for the erection of some of the principal creameries in that home of the dairying industry. The name of this

firm, by the way, was to prove a stumbling block for the hostile Intelligence at the height of the Black and Tan struggle. By then a "much-wanted" man in the Limerick area was Tomás Malone, whose *nom-de-guerre* was Sean Forde. For long the latter was believed by the opposition to be the firm's junior partner who had no actual connection with the revolutionary movement. The many false trails thus followed, and the waste of time and effort involved, amounted to a "dispersal of force" by no means to be

despised in the circumstances then prevailing.

On the inventive side, Sean Wall devised new cheese-making machinery in co-operation with a young engineer from the same locality, Nicholas O'Dwyer, who has since attained eminence in his pro-



From a painting by Gertrude O'Flynn.

be assumed his subsequent refusal to take the false turning into which so many of the Volunteers were diverted temporarily in the following year by the then dominant political party through its policy of enticing Ireland's manhood to action in the "far foreign fields" of the First World War.

Thenceforth, despite the claims of a now greatly expanded business, much of his time was given to political organising in the interests of Sinn Fein, and on the military side, his efforts were directed towards repairing the damage done by "The Split" in the ranks of the Volunteers. He gradually revived the Bruff Volunteer Company of which he became commander, though, as in most areas, this revival, as well as the propagation of the Sinn Fein policy, was uphill work until the nation's reaction to the 1916 Rising, followed by the Conscription Crisis of 1918, came to the aid of the faithful few, and began to convert the bulk of the people to an uncompromising national policy.

The occasion of the Roscommon and Waterford bye-elections in 1917 found him specially active in raising funds in aid of the Sinn Fein candidates, and in despatching to the election areas parties of Volunteers to act as election workers. And with the advent of the General Election in 1918 he became one of the leading organisers who ensured that his own constituency of East Limerick shared in the general triumph of Sinn Fein by returning Dr. Richard Hayes with an overwhelming majority.

That year also saw Sean Wall appointed Brigadier in the circumstances already set out. Setting himself to the task of equipping and developing the organisation of his new command he soon had its five battalions—previously of so independent and self-sufficient an outlook—functioning in full co-operation, and imbued with a strong pride of unit as brigade components. It would be tedious to list here the wide range of military engagements and activities to the credit of that brigade. It suffices to say that by

common consent the record has entitled it rank among the premier fighting units of the I.R.A. One operation in which Sean Wall personally participated and organised may, however, be singled out for mention as possessing some points of general interest, and as an event which had a special appeal for him because of historical and family associations. This was the attack on Kilmallock R.I.C. Barracks in May, 1920.

In that attack the Volunteers were attempting a task bristling with difficulties that seem insurmountable, but they had the satisfaction of successfully concluding an effort which had proved too much for their predecessors in 1867. As in the '67 Rising, the attackers on this occasion also suffered one fatal casualty. Curiously enough, the parallel was further continued in that the Volunteer killed, Liam Scully, like "The Unknown Fenian" of '67, was a stranger in the locality, being a native of Co. Kerry who, but a short time previously, had taken up a Gaelic League teachership in the neighbourhood, and was but little known locally.

Looking over old papers dealing with the Rising of '67, another notable circumstance comes to light. The roll of the participants in the Kilmallock attack in '67, who were tried and sentenced to transportation or imprisoned for—as the charge had it—"most wickedly, maliciously and traitorously making open war against our said Lady the Queen," was repeated almost name for name, and, in many cases, in blood relationship, by the attackers of 1920.

New expedients, some of which had their origin in the inventive mind of the Brigadier were used by the Volunteers to overcome the difficult obstacles in the way of this attack. One was the improvisation of what would now be called Molotov Cocktails, and to these missiles the destruction of the barracks was largely due. Their use ensured that a fire started by an incendiary bomb in a wing of the building was steadily expanded to embrace the whole barracks and defeat all

for his abundant energy and determination. The newly-elected Council, in common with most other such bodies throughout the country, declared its allegiance to Dail Eireann. This entailed a complete upheaval in local administration and brought to a head a very critical phase of the national struggle. It is sometimes overlooked that the 1918-21 fight for independence was conducted chiefly by three agencies—military combat, secret service and local administration—and that the latter was by no means the least important of these. Indeed the fight on the administrative plane is an aspect to which justice has not been done, and which merits to be fully chronicled if the events of the period are to be seen in their proper perspective. The revenues of local bodies were subjected to such severe demands under British legislation—specially enacted at the time—coupled with the withdrawing of grants and power to seize rate monies, that chaos in local administration would have resulted if special steps had not been devised to meet the situation. Had this chaos eventuated, or had the people in general succumbed to the very strong temptation not to pay their rates to what were virtually illegal bodies, the whole political position would have been undermined and even the military fight, would have been faithfully^[sic] compromised. It was in this sphere more than any other—except only that of the shelter freely given the members of the various active service units—that the loyal support of the general public made the 1918-21 struggle a really national one, and imparted to it the stamina which brought eventual success.

Under the Chairman's guidance and driving force Limerick County Council was second to none in the way the serious threat to the national policy of a paralysed local administration was countered, much needed reforms introduced, and the civic tasks assigned by the Dail authorities effectively executed. Here the tact of the Chairman, and his pleasing personality were particularly

Sean Wall was naturally endowed with many of these qualities, some of which have always been essential, others desirable, characteristics of a leader. His resource, energy, self-confidence and determination, so early displayed, enabled him to build up a thriving business from scratch, and were invaluable assets in the exercise of military command and the duties of his administrative office; his deep patriotism prompted him to turn aside from a lucrative occupation to give whole-time and single-minded political and military service to his country; his tact, engaging personality and integrity of character were prime factors in securing the ready co-operation of subordinates and colleagues.

Perhaps the outstanding feature of his actual exercise of authority was decentralisation. It may be said that anyone can decentralise. So he can, but only the commander who is himself efficient, is a good judge of men, and has the confidence and respect of these under him can do so without harmful, and probably disastrous results. If he is inefficient, those to whom he delegates tasks will be encouraged to make the decisions which properly lie within the province of the commander; if he is a poor judge of men, he may select inefficient or weak deputies, while if he lacks the confidence and respect of subordinates, the conclusion will be reached—with consequences fatal to the discipline and efficiency of his command—that he is shirking responsibility, work, or danger as the case may be. Totally devoid of these

efforts by the garrison to extinguish the blaze.

If Sean Wall had nothing else to his credit as a commander, his ready appreciation of the value of the idea of a whole-time active service unit when this was initiated by the Galtee Battalion, and the official backing he gave the unit's first C.O., Donnadh O'Hannigan (now Lands Officer at the Department of Defence) would alone entitle him to a place among the outstanding leaders of the Volunteers. If his attitude on this matter now appears merely as the acceptance and support of an obvious and logical development of the Volunteers' operational system, it should be realised that at the time the new scheme was a revolutionary proposal cutting across the accepted framework and lines of action of the organisation. Indeed, when first formed, the active service unit—then somewhat derisively known as "The Circus,"—had to contend against such obstacles arising from the existing system of control, especially the sole responsibility of the local commander for operations in his own area, that it could have made no headway had these difficulties not been smoothed out by the tact, authority, and zeal of the Brigade Commander.

The latter was soon called on to add another office to that of his military command. Elected unopposed to the County Council he was appointed Chairman of that body. It is here worthy of remark how, without any formal policy or pre-determined design to unite military and civic functions in one individual, such unification did in fact take place in very many counties and boroughs at this period. It was an early instance of the now fully demonstrated fact that the successful waging of a war, big or little, requires not only effective military action, but the close and efficient co-operation of the economic and administrative machinery of a nation.

As Chairman of Limerick's first Republican County Council he found a fresh outlet for his organising abilities and progressive mind, as well as further scope

valuable in securing the willing co-operation of those executive and administrative officials of the Council whose services might otherwise have only reluctantly, or not at all, been forthcoming under the new regime, co-operation with which for many of them carried numerous risks, financial as well as physical. Among the projects undertaken by the new Council at the Chairman's instance was a survey of the Shannon, and the taking of levels of the river, thus anticipating by some years the preliminary work of the Shannon Scheme.

To add still further to his many-sided activities, Sean Wall was intimately associated with the organisation and working of the Dail Courts and in the drive for the Republican Loan. It was in no small measure due to his energy in the latter connection that a record subscription to the Loan, some £30,000, was credited to the East Limerick Constituency. His work for the Loan had its lighter aspects which also displayed his painstaking and tactful methods. In suitable cases, it was his wont to follow the strategy of indirect approach when soliciting subscriptions. Giving his visit the appearance of an ordinary social call he would in due course entertain the household to a song or two, a favourite being "The Bold Fenian Men." Then, having softened the heart and awakened possible dormant patriotism, the assault on the pocket began as by an afterthought—and he rarely departed empty-handed.

Glancing back over this outlined study of a leader's lifework one notes the extent to which inborn, as distinct from artificially cultivated, qualities contribute to fitness for leadership. Also, one sees the degree to which the everyday problems and trials of life and livelihood, if manfully, and realistically faced, can shape those inherent characteristics to the point where they are of military usefulness, and may indeed develop many other attributes of leadership where these have not been already implanted by nature and have to be acquired.

defects, Sean Wall could take full advantage of the principle of decentralisation as the important factor it is in securing good organisation, planning and execution, not to speak of the greatly expanded scope it gives to a commander's vision and capacity for work.

Had Sean Wall been spared he possessed all the attributes necessary to have brought him far in a military career, though his gifts as an administrator might well have called him to other fields of endeavour and confirmed him in high office and responsibilities. But his allotted span was short. It drew to a close in May, 1921. On the sixth of that month, while on the way to a Divisional Council Meeting, he and his staff were attacked by a police raiding party in a house near Annacarty, Co. Tipperary. In the ensuing fight along the approaches to the house he was cut off from his companions, his dead body being subsequently found on the roadside beside that of one of the raiding party. The exact circumstances of his death were never known, beyond the fact that the fatal wound appeared to have been inflicted by a shot-gun fired at close quarters. His remains were removed to St. John's Cathedral, Limerick, for a requiem and a civic funeral attended by the Bishop of Limerick and a great concourse of people, being interred in The Republican Plot in St. Lawrence's Cemetery. There they rest midst a goodly number of Limerick's patriot dead.

Beannacht Dé le na-n-anamna go léir.