



General Seán Mac Eoin in Mountcharles.

that sometime after the treaty was passed and before the attack on the Four Courts, Collins sent light German guns to the North which were unsuitable for guerilla warfare. These were to arm the Northern Volunteers against the Orangemen whom they were to attack. The arms were withdrawn as far as I understand because they had a sharp

reaction which knocked the wind out of the men who fired them.” (523)

After careful planning and wide ranging consultation, the operation began in Tyrone in early May. Some weeks later the campaign was focused on Belfast and East Ulster. May was a particularly vicious month of sectarian violence, with numerous deaths across Ulster. There was Unionist outrage when the Member of Parliament for West Belfast, William Twaddel, was shot by an I.R.A. unit. At Raphoe, in County Donegal, an ex-R.I.C. man, Head Constable Joseph Ballantine, was shot dead at his home. There was swift response from the Northern Government, who introduced internment on the 22nd May. During this swoop some 350 members of the Belfast I.R.A. were detained, while others sought sanctuary in border towns. In less than two weeks the Northern offensive was crumbling and the action along the Donegal border was now becoming increasingly important, in order to maintain unity and halt the slide towards civil war. It is suggested that Collins was conveying the impression to the British that his Northern offensive was, in fact, a defensive operation to thwart the activities of the Specials along the border.

FIGHTING ON STRABANE-LIFFORD BORDER

In June, 1922 the Derry Journal reported the build up of I.R.A. forces along the Donegal border and gave details of an early morning gun battle on the Strabane/Lifford border: “Reports from Strabane state: During Monday night and up till an early hour on Tuesday morning a terrific fusillade was kept up across the frontier separating Strabane and Lifford. The shooting commenced, it is stated, about midnight, from the Lifford side, where a section of the I.R.A. (Executive Forces) is concentrated; it was vigorously replied to by the Special Constabulary and was kept up till after 5 o’clock on Tuesday morning.