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Vol. I. No. 10 (New Series). [Registered as a Newspaper.] JUNE 30, 1923.

Price TWOPENCE.



THE G.O.C. ATHLONE COMMAND.

Drawn by Frank Leah from a special string.

Όζιλάε.

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OUR FRONT PAGE PORTRAIT.

Major-General McKEON, T.D., G.O.C.
Athlone Command.

Major-General McKeon, T.D., G.O.C. Athlone Command, was born 30 years ago near Ballinalee, Co. Longford, and is the eldest son of a family of eight. He was educated at the local National School and at an early age went to work with his father at the trade which, after he joined the fight for Irish freedom, obtained for him the now world-famous name of "the Blacksmith of Ballinalee."

In 1914 he first became connected with the Irish Volunteers, and was Captain of "A" Coy., 4th Battn, Longford Brigade, a position which he held until 1917, when he was promoted Commandant of the Battalion.

In 1918 he served a term of imprisonment in Sligo jail in connection with a charge of being in possession of "seditious documents."

Shortly after his release he took part with the late Sean Connolly in an attack on Drumlish R.I.C. barracks, which was about the second attack of the kind in Ireland.

Many attacks and ambushes followed in quick succession in many parts of the country and in a large proportion of these he commanded successfully. Prominent amongst the engagements in which he led his men to victory were the Ballinalee ambush in November, 1920, and that at Clonfu, near Ballinalee, in February, 1921.

The story is well-known of his daring escape from the hands of the enemy in the cottage near Ballinalee when, single-handed, he accounted for two of his would-be captors and succeeded in getting away to the adjoining hills unharmed.

In March, 1921, he was arrested at Mullingar railway station by British military and police on the occasion of his return home from G.H.Q., where he had gone to discuss tactics with the Irish Army chiefs. While in the close custody of his captors (whose authorities in their anxiety to effect his arrest had set a large price on his head for some time previously) he made a sudden dash for liberty and succeeded in getting away a considerable distance before he fell wounded and was recaptured.

After spending a term in hospital he was brought to trial and sentenced to death. His speech from the dock on that memorable occasion will go down in Irish history as one of the best of its kind.

While in prison Commandant McKeon was elected, unopposed, T.D. for Longford, and on his release in August, 1921, with the other imprisoned T.D.'s he was the recipient of extraordinary public ovations everywhere he went.

He accepted the Command of the First Midland Division after his release, and was afterwards appointed O/C Western Command. Since the organisation of the Army he received the appointment of G.O.C. Athlone Command.

