

INTRODUCTORY NOTE :

During the year and in response to the publication of "Before I forget...", the Secretary received a number of letters from readers. One correspondent, Mr. Bill Hanna, a native of the district, now resident in England, later visited Poyntzpass and attended one of our meetings. At our request he recorded for us, some of his memories of growing up in Lisraw in the 1920's and 1930's.

Growing up in the 1920's - 1930's

by BILL HANNA

MY MEMORIES are of a fairly strict upbringing but never the less an enjoyable time, the first 15 years of my life being spent on my grandfather's farm in the townland of Lisraw.

The routine mainly consisted of : school, work on the farm and hunting with my dogs and ferrets, for apart from whilst at school, playing with ones friends was very rare indeed.

On the whole, I enjoyed my school days at Tanikey School but I didn't care much for having to walk the three miles when it was pouring down. In those days transport was a rare commodity and Shank's pony was the order of the day. Hot meals at lunch time were unheard of and you made do with a sandwich if you were lucky.

Frequently, the better-off children shared their biscuits etc. with some of the less well-off ones. Quite a few of the children came barefooted to school also wearing clothes which couldn't have been classified as warm clothing.

If you got wet coming to school in the morning, it was as likely as not, you had to sit around all day in your wet clothes. By the time it was time to come home you had dried out only to get wet again on the way home.

Ah well, it made you prepared for the rigours of life ahead.

Perhaps it might be as well that I start from the beginning or when I first appeared on the scene. My father, Abbe Hanna, was one of nine sons whose father was William James Hanna, a farmer, living in the townland of Lisraw.

Father was the oldest, born in 1892 and when the First World War broke out he joined the Royal Flying Corps as a mechanic. On demob from the services at the end of the War, he joined

the RUC. At the time of my birth, he was stationed at the police barracks at Jonesborough. I assume there's no longer a barrack there.

The 22nd September, 1925 was the day when I chose to make an appearance into the world. This happened to coincide with an armed attack on the police barracks, lasting some hours. At the time, mother was living in a police cottage adjacent to the barracks which also came under fire.

Due to the confusion and danger, it was impossible for the midwife to get to the cottage to help mother with the birth. This now meant that father had a dual role; being midwife, at the same time fending off the attackers. He placed a mattress on the floor underneath a window which offered some protection to mother and the new born as bullets were flying everywhere.

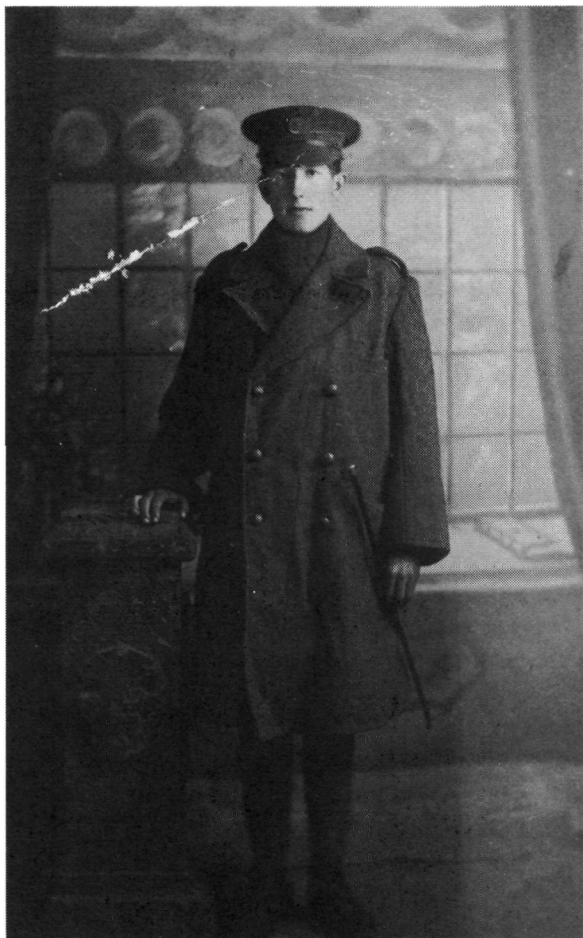
All the windows in the barracks and the cottage were shot out and some of the policemen were wounded. However, they held fast and in due course the attack subsided.

That was my real baptism of fire which has been repeated during my military service.

During this ordeal my two older sisters were also present but were much more aware of what was going on than I was.

When I was about six months old my father got itchy feet and decided to retire from the RUC and emigrate to Canada. The idea was that, after he got settled down in his new country, he would send for mother and us three children to join him. Unfortunately, the call never came, resulting in us all having to fend for ourselves.

I never knew my father, nor indeed have my sisters, as they were still young when he left. Nothing was heard of him except that we knew



Abbe Hanna, Royal Flying Corps, 1916.

that he joined the Canadian Mounted Police and had served with them for many years.

In 1981 my wife and I visited Canada and whilst in Edmonton, we came across a Canadian Mounted Police (that's their HQ and Depot) information centre. It was here that I met an ex-Mounty who was in his eighties and we got chatting. I told him about father coming to Canada in 1926 and then joining the Mounties and gave him his name. The old boy's face lit up whereupon he told me that he knew my father well and that they had served together for many years. Also that they had been good friends. It was obvious that he knew father as he was able to relate various details about him. He said that father had died about five years earlier in 1976. That would make him about 84 when he died. Mother died in 1977 aged 83. My mother never did remarry.

Abbe Hanna, my father, was well known around Poyntzpass during the early twenties. It would appear that he was quite a character and a pretty rough diamond when roused.

During the period of waiting for our father to send for us, mother and the three children stayed at grandfather Bicker's in Poyntzpass. After a period of six months or more a decision was made that we should all go our separate ways. My two sisters were fostered by two childless married aunts. I was taken in by granny Hanna who already had reared nine sons. She seemed to prefer boys and I believe it was to my advantage as she really was a lovely person and respected by everyone.

Her life had been an extremely hard one, what with helping grandfather to run a farm, at the same time rearing such a large family. In those days, there was no such thing as free time or going off for a fortnight's holiday in Spain. Grandmother died when I was about 13-years-old. It was a sad day for me as she really was just like any good mum would be.

During the period 1926 to 1941 my life and upbringing was very much involved around school and working on the farm. Despite having reared so many sons, only uncle Jack remained at home on the farm. He wasn't always there as he went round the country with a steam engine and



Mrs. Marion Hanna (nee Bicker).



Lisraw Fort, overlooking the Hanna farm.

threshing machine. Later he graduated to a tractor which I learnt to handle at a very early age.. From about eight years old, I became very much involved in helping grandfather on the farm in all aspects. It was a case of learning fast. The farm was very much a mixed one. There were : cows, pigs, sheep, beef cattle and, of course, horses. There were the normal crops, potatoes, corn, barley, wheat, flax and turnips etc.

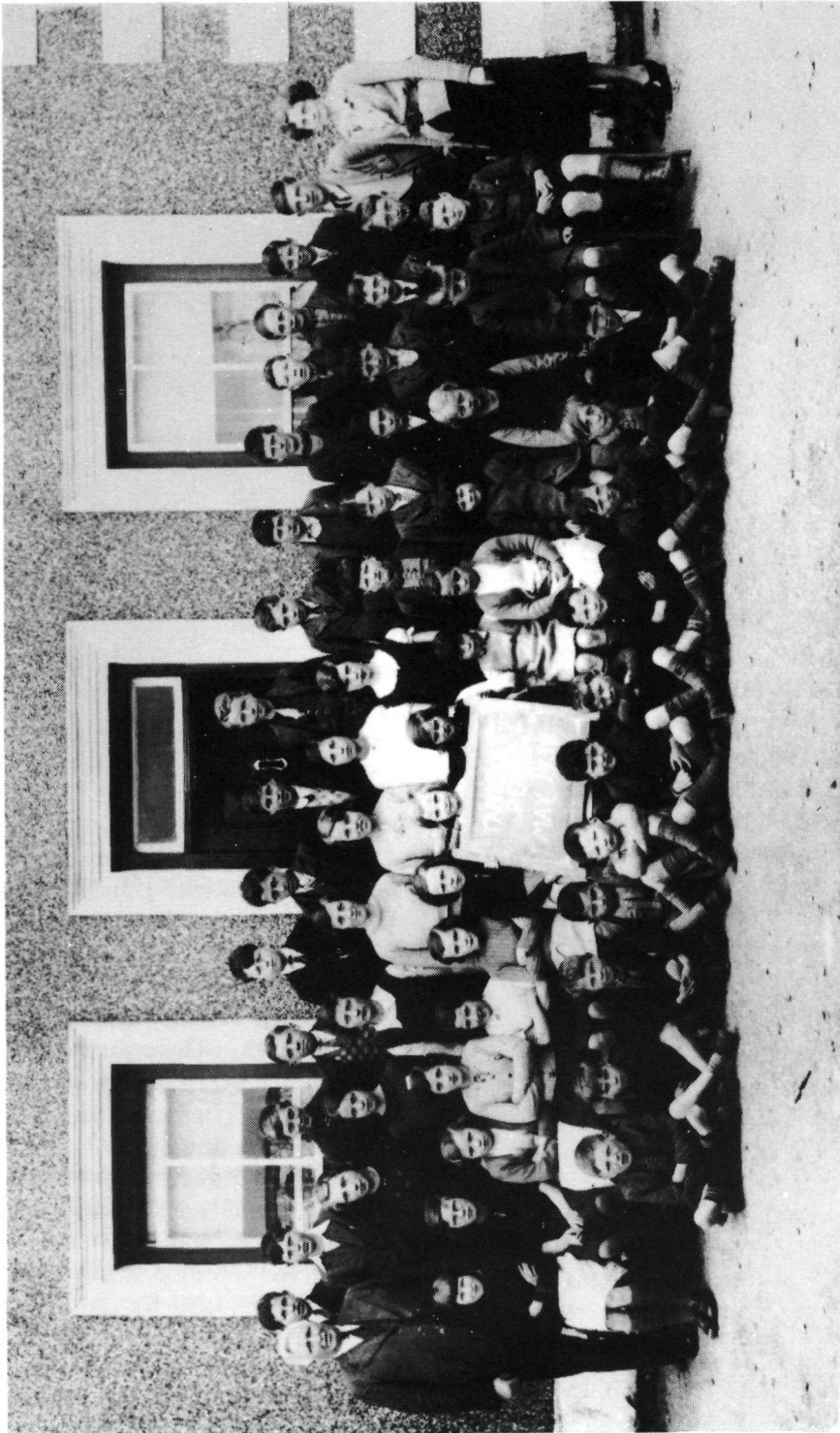
To many people, my life may have seemed very dull and routine. Not a bit of it. I enjoyed every minute of it. I suppose I didn't realise that there was an alternative. I guess I would have liked more time to play with my school friends such as, Harry Poole, Reggie Clarke, Harry Brown etc. There were never any toys at Christmas, just an orange and a bar of chocolate. For this I was grateful, as I knew my grandparents were rather short of cash.

There were only two big days in my annual calendar. One was when Cremore Church held a fete or sports day for the local children. This took place on James Shaw's (the eggman) field, followed by mugs of tea and currant buns which

were served in the big sheds. The other grand occasion was the Sunday School outing where we either went to Newcastle or Warrenpoint for the day. This was very special to us. On the morning before I left home, grandfather would give me sixpence as pocket money, with the instructions : "Mind you don't spend all that, I expect something back". For that large sum, I would buy a bottle of pop and a couple of currant buns. That was my lunch. There were times when I would bring back a penny or two so as to hand over to grandfather.

My first bicycle was a real museum piece! It consisted of a very rusty old frame on two wheels. There were no tyres on the wheels, no saddle—if there had been one I couldn't have reached anyway. I rode with my legs through the frame. The braking system was a work of art. This meant pushing your foot against the wheel frame and hoping that you would stop. This contraption was really only for use around the farm and was certainly a bone-shaker.

It was very much a case of making your own



Taniokoy P.E. School, 1939 (Bill Hanna, centre, back).

there were time when I'd get the orders mixed up or the wrong change. I can remember buying packets of five Woodbines which were the in thing in those days.

At the time the War broke out I had just about reached 14 years of age and was still at school. During the Battle of Britain and hearing about all those dog fights in the sky, I decided that I was going to join the Services as soon as I possibly could.



Bill Hanna with Lord Mountbatten, Jamaica 1962.

Just after I left school in 1941 and I was about 15½ years of age, I planned to go to Belfast Army Recruiting Office and join the Army. My mother was aware of this and I think she must have had a word with the Recruiting Sergeant who was Sgt. Taylor from Poyntzpass. I say this, because he seemed to have smoothed the way for me during the selection process. After all, I was under age by over two years, this entailed me telling a white lie that I was 18. When I was asked for my Birth Certificate, I made the excuse that I didn't have one with me, because, that morning as I was about to leave, my dog got hold of my Certificate

and chewed it up. I got an old fashioned look but my explanation was accepted and I signed on the dotted line.

I had just joined the Royal Ulster Rifles and was given a railway ticket and told to catch a train to Ballymena. I had to report to St. Patrick's Barracks on arrival. This meant a walk of about five miles from the railway station to the Barrack. On arrival I reported into the Guardroom which was around 7 p.m. I was directed to a barrack room where I would sleep the night, but was told that the store was closed for the night and that I would therefore be unable to draw bedding. However, one of the chaps in the barrack room lent me a blanket which I wrapped round me and, fully clothed, I settled down on the hard wooden floor for the night.

I spent a rather restless night and at times I must have asked myself: "What have I done?" Anyway, I was pleased to hear the bugle blow at 6 a.m. when I could uncoil myself. The sleep was soon gone when I had a wash and shave in cold water. I think this must have been my first shave!

I was now about to embark on a new and exciting period of my life and one which lasted for 24 years. During that time I served all over the world and certainly made up for the lack of travel during my young days in Lisraw. That is a story for another day.

During my travels I found myself a wife who hails from Hamburg in Germany, we've been married for 35 years.



Bill Hanna receiving the Grand Challenge Cup for Shooting, 1967.



Pictured with the N. Ireland Shooting team (seated, front, right).