

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 680

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 680

Witness

Nicholas O'Dwyer, B.E., M.I.C.E.I.,
6 Burlington Road,
Ballsbridge,
Dublin.

Identity.

O/C. 3rd Battalion (Bruff) East Limerick
Brigade, 1918-1921.

Inspector of Local Government, Dail Eireann,
1921.

Subject.

- (a) National and military activities,
East Limerick, 1913-1921;
- (b) Escape of General Lucas from I.R.A. custody,
July 1920.

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Nil

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Statement of Nicholas O'Dwyer, B.E., M.I.C.E.I.

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STATEMENT OF MR. NICHOLAS O'DWYER, B.E., M.I.C.E.I.

6, Burlington Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin.

I was born at Rahan near Bruff, Co. Limerick, in 1898. My father was a farmer at Rahan. In 1907 I went to St. Colman's College, Fermoy. I was there for six years and then came to University College, Dublin, where I did Engineering until 1916.

I joined the Volunteers in Dublin in November, 1913, at the first meeting in the Rotunda Rink. I was in "C" Company, 3rd Battalion.

I was not in Dublin during the 1916 Rising as it happened to be the Easter holidays and I had gone back to County Limerick. Hearing what was on during Easter Week, I tried to get to Dublin but only got as far as Limerick Junction.

During the next year there was very little doing in Dublin - 1916 and 1917. I was Demonstrator in the Engineering School of University College. About June of 1917 I went back to Co. Limerick.

I think it was late in 1917 that Sean Wall conceived the idea of forming a Company of Volunteers in Bruff and got in touch with some people in Dublin, as a result of which Con Collins was sent down to tell us what to do. Con Collins attended the meeting which we arranged and a Company of Volunteers was formed. Sean Wall was elected Captain. I was elected 1st Lieutenant and Jim O'Connor, 2nd Lieutenant.

We undertook a certain amount of training during the following winter and formed other Companies in the surrounding villages at Grange, Bruree, Dromin and Athlacca. These five or six Companies were formed into a Battalion at a meeting of the officers of the

Companies, at which we elected Sean Wall Commandant of the Battalion. I then became Captain of Bruff Company.

I think things remained in that shape until the inquiry in connection with the Galtee Brigade was held by M.W. O'Reilly at Knocklong towards the end of May, 1918. The result of that enquiry, as far as I remember it, was that neither of the parties mainly concerned, Donncadh O'Hannigan and Liam Manahan, was to hold Brigade rank. There was, therefore, a vacancy for a Brigadier and Seán Wall was elected Brigadier. Again I filled his place as Commandant of what we later called the Headquarters Battalion, that is, the Battalion in the district around Bruff; I believe it was the 3rd Battalion. The Brigade Headquarters was in that Battalion area just because the Brigadier lived there.

The first major activity of the East Limerick Brigade was the attack on Ballylanders Barracks. That was followed within about a month by an attack on Kilmallock Barracks, the date of which was the 28th May, 1920. One of the parties to the Galtee Brigade dispute, Donncadh O'Hannigan, turned up at the fight in Ballylanders and volunteered to take part. He was gladly accepted, did very well and maintained contact with Brigade Headquarters during the next couple of weeks when we were organising the attack on Kilmallock. As far as I remember, he was in immediate charge at Kilmallock, although Seán Wall, the Brigade Commander, was present, but we did our best to keep Seán Wall as far from the fighting as possible because we realised he was the one man we could not afford to lose.

Immediately after Kilmallock we learned that fourteen names had been put on the police "wanted" list and that the charge would be "complicity in the murder of police." We decided not to go home. Then the problem was - what should we do? Rather than the want of any better scheme, we decided we must remain together and we must get ammunition quickly. We had fired off practically everything we had at Kilmallock.

I knew just how much ammunition we had going into the fight at Kilmallock because I went to Dublin for it, and I had so much I had to get help to get it down the country. I had three big bags which were given to me by Joe O'Reilly in Parnell Square. When I asked him how I was to get them to Kingsbridge he replied, "That is your problem". I wired Seán Wall to send me up another man and he sent Liam Scully to join me in Dublin and help to get the ammunition back. Scully and I took the three bags from Parnell Square to Kingsbridge and got on a train which was mainly occupied by British troops. We conveyed the stuff to Knocklong. This was the same Scully who was killed in the fight at Kilmallock. The stuff we brought from Dublin was mainly bombs. There was some rifle ammunition in it, and we had a certain amount of rifle ammunition ourselves already.

Perhaps I should mention that prior to this I think it was about Easter, 1920 - we decided to burn all unoccupied barracks in our area and we got approval for the idea from Headquarters. I think that idea originated in the East Limerick Brigade. The proposal was sent up to G.H.Q. for approval and duly sanctioned. Following this, there was a general order issued, as

far as I remember, to Volunteers in other places to do the same thing, but I think the original idea was the submission of the East Limerick Brigade which was generally adopted by G.H.Q. I got badly burned myself in the course of destroying one Barracks and, when I was throwing bombs at Kilmallock, my hands were still sore after the burning I had got in the destruction of the vacated Barracks. The Brigade became better organised after the Kilmallock attack but was hardly quite orthodox (See Page 9.)

The fight at Kilmallock was organised with some thought, and we had help from some of the neighbouring Brigades. Mick Brennan and some three or four others came from Clare and we had some friends from Tipperary. In fact, we had so many men there that we had some trouble to find suitable allocations for them all without overcrowding. We had given instructions to have the railway line cut on either side of Kilmallock. It was to be cut on one side to prevent the troops from Tipperary getting at us, and at the other side to intercept the troops from Buttevant. The cutting of the line was carried out on the Tipperary side but not on the Buttevant side. Fortunately for ourselves, nobody had tried to get through but we did not know that the Buttevant line was in tact until we had left the scene in the morning. The military presumed that it was cut. At least, we were told that they presumed it was cut. The planning was done mainly at Tom Sheedy's which is three or four miles south of Kilmallock. It was organised almost entirely by Sean Wall with the aid of Sean Forde (otherwise Tom Malone), Donnadh O'Hannigan, Tim Crowley and myself. These are the names I remember now; I am sure there were others. One of the main items at that meeting was to get the

ammunition and I was sent to Dublin to look after that. When I got back, I found that I was in charge of the southern end. Tim Crowley was in charge of the buildings right opposite the Barracks and Sean Forde was in charge of the northern end.

The scheme was to break through the roof of Carroll's house, that is, the house at the northern end occupied by Sean Forde, and pour paraffin oil - I am not quite certain whether in the original scheme it was paraffin oil or petrol; we did not in those days fully appreciate the risk associated with petrol - pour in paraffin oil or petrol to the roof of the Barrack in which a hole was to be broken with a 2 lb. weight or a 4 lb. weight and so get it on fire. There was also a scheme to pump the petrol or paraffin oil on to the Barrack roof but for some reason or another, that did not quite materialise. Forde did break the Barrack roof and get it on fire, but at more risk to himself than was originally anticipated. At the southern end we were relying on bombing only to keep them in and they used rifle grenades to keep us out. Naturally, the windows of the houses occupied by our fellows were unprotected except for what impromptu fire cover we could rig up and they tried to shoot rifle grenades from the Barracks straight into the windows occupied by our men. Actually it is difficult to do this, though we did not appreciate that fact at the time. All we knew was that they did not make much of a success of their efforts.

We were shooting at loopholes in steel plates which covered the Barracks windows, which again is very difficult as the target is very small, although it can be very, very interesting to be firing at a loophole for some time. I had experience of

this in Scariff at a later date. To return the compliment Brennans had paid us by coming to help us at Kilmallock a few of us went to Scariff for a fight there one evening. I had nothing to do during this engagement except mark one window and that meant one loophole. Of course, in the semi-darkness I could only go on the flash of the other fellow's rifle at the loophole to locate it. He hit the sill of the window in which I was, and I have no doubt whatever that that window sill was limestone. I can still taste the limestone against the crack of the bullet on it. It filled my mouth with limestone dust. I kept firing at his loophole until he ceased firing. That incident, however, was some months later in the chronology of events.

To go back to Kilmallock, we left it in the morning at about seven o'clock a completely ruined building in which there could not be more than a few people alive. There was a little annexe which may have been a cell or lock-up, or perhaps a lavatory or scullery. It was a very small stone building at the back, which we could not get at to put on fire. The main building was pretty well burned out when we left it. It was long after daylight - seven o'clock on a summer's morning. There was no point in staying longer, as we expected enemy reinforcements to be closing in on us from all directions at any minute, the fight having gone on all night long and our ammunition supply had run low.

Scully had been shot rather early in the morning. He was communications orders between the parties of our fellows in different houses and at one stage the fight seemed to be going very well for us. We did, by the way, hear some indication from

the police in the Barracks that they were willing to surrender. We had been calling on them to surrender and we thought at one stage that they had agreed to do so. Scully was going from the north to the south or from the south to the north and as he passed by the Barrack gate where he would have lost the shelter of the little wall in front of the Barrack he was shot. I did not actually see him fall because I was at Conneedy's house at the southern end and my recollection of it is from what I heard at the time. I did not see Scully fall, I am certain of that. Then we took Scully's body back to West Limerick. We had some people too at that fight from West Limerick whom I did not mention. We had Jacky Finn, the Brigadier of West Limerick, and a car load of his fellows.

I think our first notion was to take Scully to his home town in Kerry to bury him, but we found it too far. We got as far as Glounthaune, I think it was in West Limerick. We buried him eventually in Templeglantine late at night. I did not go down with the body. Sean Wall and I went there a day or so later when we heard that he was being buried in Templeglantine.

I had been teaching engineering in the Tech. in Limerick during the previous eight or ten months. I went into Limerick on the day following the attack but I found it was not a safe place to stay. I asked the late Ned Coolgan, who was Commerce teacher to take over the Engineering classes which he did for the remainder of the term. He was not an engineer but he was the type of man that could take over almost any class at Technical School level if you showed him what was wanted and gave him the book.

My recollection of the formation of the East Limerick Column is not, of course, very clear but here it is for what it is worth. As I said, fourteen names were listed by the Police as wanted, immediately after Kilmallock. A few of us who were concerned met at Sean Wall's headquarters which was at Uregar near Bruff, a day or two after. We found that we could not go home, so it seemed to be better to stay together. The great need was to get some ammunition as we had none left after the Kilmallock fight. The question of how to get it was discussed. Somebody had an idea that there was a military patrol between Emly Station and the Barracks there which could be captured easily without allowing them to use up the ammunition they carried. That operation was carried out, perhaps a week later, and I think something like a thousand rounds were got there. Then the group found itself able to move about and looked around for other handy fights. They continued to do that for a little while and I think somebody just put the name "column" on it.

My recollection is clearly that the column was accidental. The coming together of the men who constituted the column occurred in the way I have just stated, but the name "flying column" was not used then to describe the group. It was actually functioning as a flying column but the naming of it came at a later stage when flying columns were formed by the order of G.H.Q.

Actually I believe that the R.I.C. Sergeant Sullivan, of Kilmallock was more responsible than anyone else for the formation of the East Limerick column which was I believe the prototype of all the flying columns. When he published the list of

fourteen names as wanted for "complicity in the murder of police" after the Kilmallock attack, we had no option but to band ourselves together on the run, and take enough ammunition for self-defence from the people who had it - the British Forces. If Sergeant Sullivan had not published his list of names but let us go home quietly, we probably would have stayed quiet or comparatively quiet at any rate.

We had some difference with Headquarters about the column afterwards when Ernie O'Malley came down as organiser. Our notion was that the column should belong to the Brigade and that, when it came into a Company area, the local Company should simply scout for the column. I don't think that was Headquarters idea of the organisation. At least, as far as I remember, it was not O'Malley's idea. He wanted each Battalion a complete unit in itself and he did not want this "roving band", as I think he once called them, going around from one place to another. He wanted every volunteer to fight. We on the other hand did not want the young lads to fight at all. He wanted those who were already on the run and who had to remain afoot - we wanted them to do the fighting and those who were not yet suspect to remain quiet. O'Malley said we were not organising the Volunteers at all but that we were organising a column with attendants, which was true. That is what we were doing. I think it was towards the end of 1920 that O'Malley came to us. I felt that O'Malley wanted each Company to defend its own territory and each Battalion to defend its own territory, whereas our scheme of things was that the Company Commanders should report, through the Brigade Headquarters, to the Column of any chances they saw of

a fight, These reports would be examined by the Column Commander, who was Donncadh O'Hannigan, and if he thought it a feasible proposition he would bring in the men who were to do the fighting. A few of the local Company might be picked to fight but, generally speaking, they would be scouting and supplying information.

As I said I had been teaching in the Technical School in Limerick during the winter of 1919-1920. It was a Technical School run by Sinn Fein and it was, I think, the first Local Government effort of Sinn Fein. It was a Dail Eireann institution. Michael De Lacey, who had been sentenced to death after Easter Week, was appointed principal by the Limerick Technical Committee. Up to that point, the Limerick Technical Committee was a law-abiding organisation within the law as it stood at the time. De Lacey was appointed and the "powers that were", that is, the British Authority, refused to sanction his appointment. The Limerick Technical Committee refused to get rid of him, broke loose from the law and were taken over by Sinn Fein. A couple of the teachers left. The whip was sent around to get people to fill the gaps and I was pushed in to teach Engineering in place of the man who had left. The position really was that the Technical Committee and the Technical Schools were outlawed by the British Authority and they were taken over more or less as they stood by Dail Eireann. We carried on. Terry MacSwiney and Liam de Roiste became our Technical Inspectors. I don't know which Minister - Education or Local Government - appointed them, but they did attend and carry out inspections at the School. Then in July or August 1920 when many of us on the staff were on the run and because of the stoppage of the grants by the British authorities

the Technical Committee decided to close the School.

One morning in August 1920 the local postman brought me a letter from the Technical Committee regretting they had to dispense with my services, as they were closing the School, and enclosing a small balance that was due to me. One of the Volunteers who was present said "Wouldn't it be terrible if you were shot with that in your pocket!" Liam Hayes, who was also present, remarked, "I have a few pounds in my pocket too." The man who was advocating the liquidation of the funds said, "Wouldn't it be awful, Bill, if you were shot and have the Tans drinking what you have in your pocket!" So the idea took. We had a motor car and a supply of petrol. Sean Wall the Brigadier, was in Dublin and I was in charge of the Brigade in a temporary capacity in his absence. It was arranged that we would use the motor car and petrol to dispose of the surplus money on our hands and we decided on a trip to Lisdoonvarna, organised mainly by Sean Forde. The party consisted of Forde Hayes, Crimmins who suggested the idea and myself. On the way to Lisdoonvarna we had tyre trouble which necessitated the purchase of a new tyre, something we had not anticipated and which ate into our financial resources. The result was that we were only able to spend a couple of days there and I think that some of our friends in Lisdoonvarna were very glad to be rid of us when, for financial reasons, we had to leave!

As we approached Limerick on the way home, Malone said he knew some people at Cratloe, Co. Clare, and we called there, mainly with a view to getting a meal. There we met some of the East Clare Brigade, Austin Brennan and some others. One of them said,

"We are attacking Scariff tomorrow night. Would you wait for it?" This was right into my barrow because it would give me an excuse for being away for some days, in case Sean Wall was home before me. We said, "Yes, we would be delighted to take part in the Scariff attack" and we did. The attack was not a success. We were allocated to positions and just told what to do. We did as well as we could what we had been told to do.

It was an ordinary R.I.C. Barracks. I don't remember how many were in it, perhaps ten. The scheme was that some of these were to be caught in the open before they had time to get into the cover of the Barracks, but something went wrong, with the plan and we found ourselves just shooting at steel shutters. Some of our people suggested getting on the roof, but the Clare people did not like the roof idea. Apparently no plan had been made for the burning or taking of the Barracks by a prolonged attack, and so the whole thing was called off after a couple of hours. We were thanked and told we could go.

It was on the day following that attack that Sean Forde, having decided to call on a friend of his who is now his wife, with a couple of others ran into the Tans near Annacotty.

The motor car we had going to Lisdoonvarna was a car that Dick O'Connell of Mid-Limerick had captured sometime previously from a D.I. at Pallas. It had been in West Limerick for some time after the Kilmallock attack when Sean Forde and I decided to go to Athea to collect it and, incidentally, to try to dispose of Sergeant Sullivan who had commanded the Barracks in Kilmallock during the attack

and was responsible for the publication of the fourteen names on the wanted list. Following the Kilmallock attack, Sullivan had been transferred to Athea, and so we thought we might kill two birds with the one stone by disposing of Sullivan and collecting the car. We contacted Jackie Finn when we got to Athea, and learned from him that Sullivan had been moved on to Listowel. We learned some time later that Sullivan had been accounted for by the Volunteers in Listowel. During that trip we also went to Ballybunion and Forde tried to organise an attack on the police barracks in Ballybunion. We found the whole population up against it. The local Volunteers would not have it because it was the height of the holiday season in Ballybunion and they thought any military activity there would injure the local tourist trade. They gave us as a reason for not having the attack that the Tans were expecting it and in fact, that the town was to be raided that night. They were so certain of it that they thought it essential that they and we should get out of the town. They thought the best way out of it was to get on a boat and go across to Clare. They took us across to Kilkee, deposited the two of us in Kilkee and we made our way back to Limerick.

In connection with the escape of General Lucas I got instructions from Sean Wall to go to Jack Hartigan's at Castleconnell and collect General Lucas. Before going, I had decided that General Lucas was to stay in East Limerick for as short a time as possible and I had arranged, I think it was with Jack McCarthy, to have him handed over through Kilfinane on to Cork. We did not want to have the trouble of holding Lucas as it was difficult to find a suitable place to keep him and it needed a

general alertness and the services of a number of men to see that his whereabouts were not discovered by the British. The Cork Brigade, which had been responsible for his capture originally, were now agreeable to take him back and we decided to get him back to them as quickly as possible. On the day that we were to have taken him from Jack Hartigan's Bill Hayes and myself got the County Surveyor's car and left for Jack Hartigan's, but on the way there we were met by a friend who told us that the bird had flown. He had escaped that morning. After his escape and when he was being escorted by a British patrol, this patrol ran into an ambush at Oola. The ambushers did not know that Lucas was in the convoy of course. That was purely an accident.

The Brigade in East Limerick was rather an extraordinary organisation, mainly because our Brigadier, Sean Wall, was a very active man. He was Chairman of the Limerick County Council. He also had charge of the Dail Loan collection which incidentally was the biggest in the country. He collected £34,000. The next highest to that in any one constituency was £17,000 collected by Kevin O'Higgins in Laoighis. He ran elections and he ran Local Government, in addition to his military duties.

The extent to which Sean Wall controlled the County Council would be illustrated by this little story. Occasionally he asked me to accompany him to County Council meetings, although I was not a member of the County Council but nobody ever thought of asking what my business there was. On one of these occasions the Secretary reported a vacant rate collectorship at a place near Emly. The Chairman

looked at me and said, "Could you supply a man?"

I said I would want a day or two to think about it. He then said to the Acting Secretary, Maurice Fitzgerald, "He will give you a name in a few days." I did.

I rounded up the Volunteers in the area and asked who was a suitable man for the job.

It was not a very attractive job at that time because the funds collected as rates on behalf of Dail Eireann were being lodged in banks under the names of private individuals to avoid any attempt by the British to identify or discover the whereabouts of these funds. Funds could not be lodged to the account of a County Council as they would automatically come under the control of the British authorities. The position was that there were two rival systems, the British system, which endeavoured to collect the rates on behalf of the British Local Government Board, and the Dail Eireann system which tried to collect the same rates on behalf of the Dail Eireann Local Government Department. The Limerick County rates were being lodged to the name of Michael de Lacey at the National Bank in O'Connell Street, Limerick.

To come back to the incident of the rate collector, within a few days I had selected a person who seemed to me to be suitable. I brought him along to the Acting Secretary and he, without any questions and without bond, handed him the rate books and told him to go and collect and that I would give him the instructions on what to do with the money. He said before we parted, "I want another man. There is another man gone". The old staff of rate collectors were going pretty fast at this stage as the job was no longer a sinecure. They did not want to disobey our

instructions and neither did they want to fall out with their former employers - some of them - and so they were leaving the job. I looked around and got another man. For this other, there was no order whatever from the County Council. At the following meeting of the Council, which was held, by the way, in the Mental Hospital, the Acting Secretary read the minutes of the last meeting. Then he read out two names, persons appointed rate collectors for certain areas, Somebody who was not in very close touch looked up and asked, "By the way, Mr. Secretary, who proposed those two names? I don't remember them." The Secretary rising to the occasion, said, "Mr. Chairman, gentlemen, I proposed them and I seconded them myself!" - and that was accepted.

I was saying that the Brigade ran practically everything in East Limerick. We organised Dail Eireann Courts, providing not only the Bench but the Bar also where necessary, and of course enforcing Court orders. One one occasion I sat with Sean Wall in a cow-shed at midnight to hear a case in which Tim Crowley defended some wrong-doers Mick Mortel had arrested in Kilmallock when Donncadha O'Hannigan addressing us for the prosecution said "My Government takes a very serious view of the offence with which the prisoners before you are charged." Even under that circumstances which compelled us to hold our court in a cow-shed under cover of darkness we were not allowed to forget that we were acting on the authority of the Government.

The Brigade also administered Local Government in the county with the full co-operation of the County Staff.

Maurice Fitzgerald, Acting Secretary of the County Council was not a Volunteer but he was a great admirer of Sean Wall, the Chairman, and maintained a staunch loyalty to him. Anything the Chairman ordered was all right with Maurice, It might not be legal but Fitzgerald would carry it out. In fact, I think all the staff in Limerick County Council at that time were with us. There were two County Surveyors, one a Belfast man, Davidson, and the other, Tommy Ryan, a local man, and we could have a car from either of them to take us anywhere at any time. Of course, these were always safe cars to travel in, at least safer than most cars. Phil O'Sullivan, the County Solicitor, though handicapped by a personal friendship for Joe Devlin, admired the "man of action" in Sean and was always at pains to keep his local Government activities as nearly in line with the Law as possible - a task in which he got little help.

It was also quite a normal thing for Sean Wall to ask me to attend a meeting of some other local authority on his behalf. Following the 1920 (may have been 1919) Local Government Elections he was interested in the Chairmanship of the Croom Rural District Council. At that time the practice was that the Chairman of each Rural District Council automatically had a seat on the County Council. He wanted a certain person, Jack Clifford, appointed to represent the Croom Rural District Council. Clifford was a Battalion Commandant in Dick O'Connell's area, that is, Mid-Limerick Brigade. He was a very good Volunteer and seemed the right type for the County Council. I looked up the law on the question and probably consulted Phil O'Sullivan before I went

to the meeting and I found it was not essential that he should be chairman, that it was simply the practice that the Rural Council sent their Chairman but that they could have nominated some member other than the Chairman. The West Limerick group had a majority of one in the Croom Rural District which was on the borderline between East and West Limerick. West Limerick turned up to the meeting with their candidate selected for the Chairmanship and he was duly proposed and seconded. A member of the Council proposed my man, Clifford, and he was seconded. Then I got up and spoke to the meeting in favour of Clifford's candidature at least for the County Council seat, having in fact no legal authority to speak or to be there at all. I explained why I wanted Clifford appointed. Some of the older people on the Council from West Limerick were not disposed to take my advice. The candidate whom the West Limerick people were supporting was a dismissed civil servant, a victim of the oath regulation introduced in 1916. He stood up and said he thought the case I had made was a reasonable one and that, as we wanted an active Volunteer on the County Council, he would withdraw.

There was a follow-up to that some six months later when I had become a Local Government Inspector. We were very very short of Inspectors in Local Government and de Lacey asked me to find a couple more. I was rather at my wits' end to find some suitable people. I suddenly remembered this dismissed civil servant who had stood down in Croom and I thought that he was probably the type we were looking for. I got in touch with Dr. Kelly, who was then Assistant Resident Medical Superintendent in Limerick Mental Hospital, and asked him to find the man who

stood down at the meeting of the Croom District Council and send him up to me. About two days later, a young man came along and said, "I understand you want me?" That was James McLysaght. We made him a Local Government Inspector there and then. He died in harness about a year ago.

Perhaps I should mention how I came to be a Local Government Inspector. A few days before Christmas, 1920, the Captain of the Grange Company came along to me and told me he was having a dance at a place called Caherguillamore on St. Stephen's night. I said I thought it was very foolish. He said "The Bloody Tans could have a dance and why couldn't we have a dance?" I soon realised that I either had to have a row with this Captain or let him go on with his dance. I decided, wrongly I think, to let him go on with the dance rather than have a row with him. On St. Stephen's Day Sean Wall had asked me to go and see de Lacey, who was then in Local Government and was down in Limerick for Christmas staying at Crecora with Jim Dundon. He had asked me to see him about some County Council matter. I went home to get a horse to go across country to Crecora, which I did. I saw de Lacey, got back home, stabled the horse and started to wend my way on foot towards the dug out at Uregar where we stayed, I had to pass through Caherguillamore going to the dug-out and I thought that, having regard to the circumstances under which the dance was held and what I had said about the danger, it was up to me to look in and say good-night. I went in and I was there perhaps half an hour when I was told the house was surrounded by British forces. There was a certain amount of shooting and I think five of us

or four of us got out. Three of us were coming together, Conway the Captain of the local Company who had organised the dance, my brother and myself. We got as far as the back road, having got through the inner cordon. Then we had to cross the road. There was about two hundred yards of straight road, and I thought the best place to cross it was in the middle of the straight where we had about a hundred yards clear view each way. It was a very, very bright night. Presuming that there would be Tans at one or other of the bends and having looked in both directions to satisfy ourselves that there was nobody near us, we charged across the road and across the fence at the other side. Then one of the boys remarked, "Look at the lorry!" There was a lorry creeping along very silently from one side. I heard a shout, "Hey! Pull up! Fire!". I said to my companion "Scatter and run, we have a gambling chance". I think these were the only words spoken at the time. We were running already, of course. I went off to the left. My brother, Jed, went to the right, and Conway went straight on. I think Conway must have headed for a gap in the fence opposite us, because he was shot dead actually in the gap. Jed was hit in the hand. I was not hit. I injured my arm crossing the next fence. It got very bad in the next week or so and the local doctor said that I ought to go to Dublin for treatment.

I came to Dublin and I was pushed into Jervis Street Hospital. There they talked about taking off the left arm. The doctor decided to give it another day or two, to see would it improve. A clot was what he was talking about. Anyway, it improved and he did not take it off. I got out of hospital in perhaps three weeks.

I was staying at a house in Clontarf, Jack O'Mahony's, where de Lacey had sent me. Sean Wall either came to town to see me or was in town, and he turned up at Jack O'Mahony's the first evening I was there. Liam T. Cosgrave, Minister for Local Government was also staying there. Rory O'Connor who was his Engineer, had recently decided that he should give up his Local Government activities and give his whole time to the new **bomb** factory which had been started in Westland Row. Rory decided that it would be safer to live in than to be going in and out of the premises. He brought his bed there and lived there. He gave up coming out on the street, and that prevented him doing any Local Government work. That was early in February, 1921. This was what I understood at the time as the reason for Rory O'Connor not being available for Local Government work but it may possibly have been because of his arrest some time about then. For whatever reason, Rory was not available, at any rate, the Local Government Department wanted an engineer to replace him. Sean Wall thought that I looked so awful that I should not go back to the dug-out. I had been living in the dug-out with him since the previous May and it was not a very healthy place to live. He arranged with Mr. Cosgrave — he gave me six months' leave from the Army, and Mr. Cosgrave appointed me Temporary Local Government Engineer. Before the six months had expired, the Truce was on.

When I took up duty as a Local Government Engineer my brother, Jed, took over the command of my Battalion in East Limerick. I had also been Brigade Engineer and I don't know who took over that function. Probably Sean Wall looked after it

himself. When the 2nd Southern Division was formed, I was appointed Divisional Engineer, but I was actually in Local Government then and never took up the appointment. I think de Courcey of Limerick carried on the job in my absence.

At one stage of the Treaty negotiations there was a rumour in Dublin that the Truce was breaking down, and I got an order to be ready to return to the East Limerick Brigade. A few days later all officers were to return to their units. I went down found my unit with Jed in command and I took it over. I was also on my way to Youghal at the time to hold a Local Government Inquiry. I was trying to carry on the two appointments together. I nominally took over from Jed on arrival, went on to Youghal the next day, held the Inquiry, came back to him again and learned that the Treaty had been signed so I came back to Dublin.

De Lacey came to Limerick some time about August 1919. He came there when he was appointed principal of the Technical School in Limerick by the Limerick Committee, probably on recommendations from Dublin. The Limerick Technical Committee had advertised the vacancy for a principal for the Limerick Technical Schools. De Lacey had applied for the job and the Committee accepted his application but the British authorities refused to sanction his appointment because of de Lacey's National record. This was the beginning of the break between the Limerick Technical Committee and the British Authorities which led to the taking over of the Limerick Technical Schools by the Dail Local Government Department.

I had no discussion with Mr. Cosgrave about

my appointment as a Local Government Inspector. I think this was all arranged between himself and Sean Wall. I was in the next room and knew nothing at all about this until I was told that I was appointed.

Signed: Nicholas O'Dwyer
(Nicholas O'Dwyer)

Date: May 21st 1952

Witness: J.V. Lawless Col.
(J.V. Lawless), Col.

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