

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 770

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 770

Witness

Colonel Frank Simons,
Abbey Street,
Roscommon.

Identity.

Second-Lieut. Kilgeffin Company
Irish Volunteers, Roscommon, 1917 - ;
Vice O/C. South Roscommon Brigade, 1921.

Subject.

National and military activities,
Co. Roscommon, 1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

N11

File No. ...S-2101.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY COLONEL FRANK SIMONS (RETIRED)
Abbey Street, Roscommon.

First Contact with Volunteer Movement:

About March, 1917, a Company of the Irish Volunteers was formed in Kilgeffin, Co. Roscommon. I joined this Company at its unauagation. The Kilgeffin area was always strong and to the fore in any Irish freedom movement and had a great record during the Land League days. The Company when formed was attached to the Longford area and acted as a bridgehead for the Shannon. Pat Madden was the first O.C. of the Company. Luke Duffy was 1st Lieutenant and I was 2nd Lieutenant. Our strength was about 30 all ranks. We had no arms except a few shotguns and a few small type revolvers.

Luke Duffy's father, who had served in the British army, acted as our instructor. This was the time of the North Roscommon elections.

The North Roscommon and Longford Elections:

The Volunteers took a very active part in both those election campaigns. We provided protection for the speakers during the meetings and guards on their hotels at night, as well as the ordinary work of canvassing voters and so forth. We were supplied with home-made batons which we carried under our coats, and during the election we had several small encounters with the supporters of the Redmondite candidate and with the R.I.C. During the Longford election a large number of the Volunteers crossed over into Longford and assisted the local Volunteers there. We carried hurley sticks as well as batons. During 1917

we continued our training as best we could and increased our strength slightly.

The Conscription Crisis:

During the conscription crisis there was a large increase in our strength, which was now about 60 approximately. When the crisis was over, our strength dwindled back again to the original number. To meet the threat of conscription we got orders from the Longford Brigade to construct dug-outs to hold food and equipment and to shelter men. We were told we would have to attack the British where they established camps with whatever weapons were available, such as, forks, scythes, shotguns, etc. It was understood that the British would establish camps in areas throughout the country to enforce conscription and comb the districts for the young men.

Companies of Volunteers had been started in Kiltewan, Kilbride, Roscommon and Athleague, but no battalion organisation existed in the County as yet and co-ordination of effort was a big problem. The Sinn Féin movement was getting strong by now, but the backbone of Sinn Féin was provided by the Volunteers who were nearly all members of that organisation also, and it was really they who kept it going.

After the conscription crisis was over, we were transferred from the Longford area to the Roscommon area. Ernie O'Malley visited the area around this time and did some organising and imparting instruction. As yet there was no higher organisation existing, such as, battalions or brigades, and the Companies of Volunteers just existed on their own. Pat Madden had gone to Dublin by now and had joined up with the Volunteers there. He had learned a great deal about organisation and training before he was

arrested for drilling in a hall in York Street and was sentenced to a period of imprisonment. On his release from jail, he returned to Kilgeffin and a Battalion was now organised in the area.

Organisation of the 3rd Battalion, South Roscommon Brigade:

Pat Madden was appointed O.C. of the Battalion; Luke Duffy, Vice O.C.; John Sinnott, Adjutant; and John Gibbons, Quartermaster. The Companies making up the Battalion were:-

"A"	Athleague	-	Captain John Conboy
"B"	Roscommon	-	Captain John James Doorley
"C"	Kilteevan	-	Captain John Brennan
"D"	Cloontuskert	-	Captain John O'Connor
"E"	Kilgeffin	-	Captain Frank Madden
"F"	Kilbride	-	Captain Peter Farrell

General Elections, 1918:

During the general election, which took place in the latter end of 1918, we had a very busy time, canvassing voters, protecting speakers, arranging transport for voters, etc., and on the polling day protecting the polling stations and guarding and escorting the ballot boxes, etc. The Kilgeffin area had a fighting tradition and always took an active part in any Irish freedom movement or any movement to better the conditions of the people. During the days of the Land League they took a very active part and special police barracks were opened in that area. They were great supporters of Parnell and many of the inhabitants did periods in prison for their activities.

On the day of the polling during the general election, we had to send Volunteer reinforcements to Aughnaderry, near Kilbride, where there was a disturbance

between the Redmondite supporters and those that favoured Sinn Féin. The R.I.C. were there but, of course, they openly favoured the Redmondite supporters. When our men arrived in the area, they soon got control of the situation and restored order. Our men were armed with home-made batons. They remained there until the ballot boxes were brought to the courthouse in Roscommon, where they mounted a guard on them. The R.I.C. also had a guard on the boxes but there was no clash. We had to travel around with the speakers and guard them while in their hotels.

Boycott of the R.I.C.:

A boycott of the R.I.C. was now started. People were instructed not to supply them with foodstuffs, fuel or transport. No one was to speak to them and girls were discouraged to associate with them. The police were not allowed to dances, football matches, sports meetings and such gatherings. We called on all the families in the area who had relatives serving in the R.I.C. and asked them to influence them to sever their connection with the force by resigning from it. This boycott was very effective and quite a few men resigned from the force and some others, who were anxious to resign, were instructed to remain on, as it was considered that they would be more useful within it. The police had to commandeer nearly all their supplies of potatoes, fuel and so forth. They paid for all such stuff that they commandeered.

I.R.B.:

A Centre of the I.R.B. was formed in the County by now. Pat Madden was the Centre for the County and I was the County Secretary. There was no particular activity. Meetings were held usually after Battalion Council meetings. We paid a monthly subscription - a small amount - towards

the funds of the organisation.

The I.R.A. and Oath of Allegiance:

In January, 1919, the First Dáil met and assumed responsibility for the Irish Volunteers and their activities, and declared them to be the Army of the Republic. Thenceforth the Volunteers were known as the I.R.A. Each Volunteer was now required to take an oath of allegiance to the Republic. This oath was subscribed to by all our active members and there were no defections because of it.

The Sinn Féin Courts and Belfast Boycott:

The Sinn Féin Courts were now established and functioning very efficiently. The operation of the Courts, however, placed a heavy responsibility and a huge amount of work on the Volunteers or I.R.A. The Volunteers had to do all the administration work of the courts, such as, making arrests, detentions, deportations, etc., and giving effect to the decrees of the courts. The people had complete confidence in the decisions of such courts and took all their cases for litigation to them and ignored the R.I.C and the British courts. There was, of course, a small section who were supporters of the British regime and who continued to use the British established courts. Later on, when things became hot, these courts really became military courts, as the civilian Sinn Féin judges and other personnel became inactive and the Volunteers had to carry on.

Later on a boycott of traders from Belfast and other northern areas who were supporters of the British regime was instituted, and this also threw a great burden of work on to the shoulders of the Volunteers. All goods in transit or stores belonging to blacklisted firms had to be commandeered or destroyed.

Destruction of Income Tax Records:

Towards the end of 1919, on instructions from Headquarters, all income tax offices throughout the country were raided and the records destroyed by the I.R.A. Those offices were the machinery at the disposal of the British government for the collection of taxes. The local office in Roscommon was raided by us. The collector of taxes fired a shot to attract the attention of the R.I.C., whose barracks was only a short distance away. We succeeded, however, in getting into the office and took his gun from him. We collected all his books and records and destroyed them. The police did not come to his assistance.

Organisation of the South Roscommon Brigade:

At the end of 1919 a Brigade was organised in South Roscommon area. Daniel O'Rourke, now a Senator, was appointed Brigade O.C. James Brehony was Vice O.C. The Adjutant was --- Flynn and the Quartermaster, Matt Davis. Patrick Eager of Castlerea was Intelligence Officer. The Battalions were:-

1st Battalion	Castlerea area	O.C. Gerald O'Connor
2nd Battalion	Oran area	O.C. James Quigley
3rd Battalion	Roscommon area	O.C. Pat Madden
4th Battalion	Ballygar area	O.C. John Brehony

I was then Adjutant of the 3rd Battalion and, later on when arrests were prevalent, I was appointed as understudy to the Brigade O.C.; and, later still, I was appointed Vice Commander of the Brigade when the existing Vice Commander was arrested.

General Raid for Arms:

A general raid for arms was carried out around January, 1920. There was a country-wide operation. We

got an amount of stuff, mostly shotguns, but not much use, and shotgun ammunition. No service weapons were obtained. In one case we had to fire through a door to get a house opened, and in another case we had to arrest a young boy and hold him as hostage for a short while until his father gave up a gun, which he had, to us. In many cases the guns were given to us voluntarily and in nearly all cases it was only a matter of calling for them.

Destruction of Vacated R.I.C. Barracks:

On Easter Saturday night Beechwood and Athleague R.I.C. Barracks, which had been vacated by the police, were destroyed. Both were rendered uninhabitable by removing the roof and smashing the windows and so forth. It would have been impossible to occupy them again without carrying out extensive repairs. At this time the police had vacated nearly all their small stations and concentrated their men in the larger stations which were mostly in the towns. This was also a country-wide operation and gave us a good idea of the extent of the organisation of the I.R.A. when we read of the burnings in the daily papers.

The Ambush at Moneen:

The Assizes Court (British) was due to be held in Roscommon Courthouse on the 12th July, 1920. It was usual for the tallest policemen in each barracks or a number of barracks to be called in to form a guard of honour to meet the judge. We got information that two policemen would be travelling from Lanesboro' to Roscommon on 11th July for this purpose. They were to make the journey on their own cycles. It was decided that they should be intercepted and disarmed, and we chose Moneen as the spot to do this. A man was sent into Lanesboro to watch the barracks there and find out when they were leaving. This man did some

shopping in Lanesboro as a cover for his presence there. When the police were leaving, he mounted his cycle and passed them out on the road and proceeded in advance of them to warn us.

We had taken up a position at a place called Arratabeg and were on the side of the road behind a small wall. Pat Madden was in charge with about seven others, including myself. We all had revolvers and two service rifles, and the remainder were also armed with shotguns. We had taken some lengths of rope for tying them up. It was never intended to shoot them. No obstacle was placed on the road, as this would probably have been observed by the police and would have forewarned them.

Our scout came along and told us that they, the police, were coming about 150 yards in his rear. When they came to our position, we called on them to halt. They did not halt but, instead, bent low on their cycles and started to pedal faster and passed by. We fired over their heads. We then got out on the road and ran after them, firing over their heads. They began to move with greater speed down the incline on the road from us, and now we fired at them and one man fell off his cycle into the hedge. The other policeman continued to cycle on at a fast pace. We kept firing at him and got up to where the man who was apparently shot was. The second policeman kept cycling on at a fast pace for a couple of hundred yards, and then dismounted from his cycle, took his rifle from it and rushed into a house which was close by.

He came out a few minutes later on to the road with a white rag tied to the muzzle of his rifle and held high over his head and walked up to us. We took the rifle off him - a cavalry or police carbine. We also collected the

rifle belonging to the other policeman whom we now found to be dead. When the man who was surrendering came back to us, one of our men covered him with a shotgun. This policeman made an attempt to disarm our man, with the result that a shot was fired from the gun. We now thought that he, the policeman, had been shot also as he collapsed on the road. Having collected their rifles and ammunition, we sent for a priest and doctor and then withdrew across country. We had only gone a short distance when a lorry of soldiers came along. However, they did not stop or give any indication, although they must have seen the dead policeman on the roadside, but continued on their journey.

It transpired afterwards that the second policeman had not been hit at all when the gun went off and was only feigning death when he collapsed on the road. After we had left, he got up and walked back to Lanesboro. We took the cycles belonging to the police. They were collected by members of the Cloontuskert Company and were sunk in the Shannon, near Gallagher, for some time and afterwards retrieved and used by members of the Column.

Our armament was now increased by two more service rifles and about 50 rounds of .303 ammunition. The rifles we had prior to this ambush were got locally. One, a short Lee Enfield rifle or carbine, was got from Larry Davis of Lisnara. He had been a soldier either in the United States or British Army. The other rifle was also obtained locally. I think it had been the property of Redmondite Volunteers.

The men summoned by the British to attend the Court as Jurors did not do so with the exception of the Unionist element amongst them and were fined heavily for not doing so. We, of course, had warned them all previously that

they were not to attend. By now quite a few of the officers of the local I.R.A. were on the run.

Attempted Attack on Military Post at Kilmurray:

The British had a camp at Kilmurray in the Castle-plunkett area. This was a force of soldiers who were looking after a farm in that area in which there was trouble about land. At a Brigade Council meeting the capture of this detachment was discussed. The attempt was to take place on the second night after this meeting and a large number of Volunteers were mobilised for this. We had scouts watching the British camp and on the night of the attack they reported that the garrison were apparently on the alert and were waiting for us, as they had manned all the advantage points around the camp. They apparently had got some information about what was going to happen. The British force was about 100 strong and we, of course, had very little armament. We were going to use all sorts of weapons, such as, scythes, forks, etc. We were depending on surprising them. The plan was that our men were to creep up silently on the camp, when they would be sleeping, from all directions and overwhelm the guard and sentries and then rush the camp. On the scouts reporting that the enemy was seemingly awaiting us and alert, the whole thing was called off.

Four-Mile-House Ambush:

The ambush at Four-Mile-House took place on the morning of the 12th October, 1920. Prior to this, a number of the officers and men of our 3rd Battalion were on the run and were generally in the Slievebawn area. It could be said that the Active Service Unit or Column was in being at this time, as all those men were available for duty on a whole-time basis.

For some days prior to the 12th October, we had members of the Four-Mile-House Company checking on the enemy traffic on the Roscommon-Boyle-Strokestown road. There were enemy garrisons in Roscommon, Strokestown and Boyle. The scouts reported that lorries of British troops were in the habit of passing in either direction, usually early in the mornings or late in the evenings. There were usually from two to four lorries in the convoy. As a result of this information, we decided we would carry out an ambush on these forces at Four-Mile-House. We knew the area well and no reconnaissance was necessary.

We mobilised at Ballagh on the night of the 11th October. About 40 men mobilised, and Pat Madden took charge. We had about 8 rifles. Four of these were our own and two we got from G.H.Q. and a couple from Brigade Headquarters. Ammunition ran approximately 20 rounds per rifle, probably less. The remainder of the party were armed with shotguns and a few of the officers had revolvers of different types. Buckshot and ordinary shot were available for the shotguns but were in short supply. We also had some hand grenades of the Mills type. We stayed that night in a cottage at Ballagh but not for very long, as at about 2 a.m. the following morning we started for Four-Mile-House and marched all the way. We marched via New Line, Aghamuck Crossroads, Clanboney. At Ballinderry we met the men of the Kilbride Company, about 30 strong. Some of them had shotguns and others pick-axes, shovels, crosscuts and felling axes. The Kilbride Company was divided into three sections. One section was sent to occupy a position on the Roscommon side of Four-Mile-House. Another section was sent to the Boyle road and a third to the Strokestown road, thus covering all the main roads leading into the area. Some of the Kilbride Company also

came with the main party to Four-Mile-House.

We arrived at Four-mile-House about 8 a.m. We commandeered a cart and a pole from a nearby carpenter's shop which we brought into the chapel yard. It was our intention that this cart with the pole tied on to it would be pushed out on to the road in front of the first lorry of enemy and so bring them to a halt. The cart and pole were being prepared for this purpose. The remainder of our party were on the other side of the road preparing it, by making loop-holes in the wall. One man had been detailed off to shoot the driver of the first lorry but we were not in position when it did come. We did not expect anything for some time at least. We heard a lorry approaching from Roscommon and all we could do was to take up positions as quickly as possible. The cart and pole to obstruct the load were not ready. We got into position as best we could.

A single Crossley tender, carrying about nine or ten police, was approaching our position at a very fast speed. We opened fire on it from our position which was a commanding one. The tender sped on, increasing its speed rapidly, and did not stop. The sections who were covering the roads had got instructions that, once they heard firing, they were to block the roads immediately with stones which were readily available from the walls on the roadside. The section on the Boyle-Roscommon road were working hard putting a barricade of stones on the road when they suddenly heard a lorry approaching. The tender and lorry went straight through the barricade which, of course, was not very extensive at this time.

At the ambush position the police made no attempt to return the fire when we fired on them. We afterwards

learned that five police had been killed and two or three badly wounded. The police tender proceeded on to Tulsk and then wheeled and made into Strokestown. We, of course, had no casualties.

We immediately got orders to retreat in the same direction as we had come to Ballinderry school. Pat Madden, Luke Duffy, Seán Bergin and I, however, remained behind at Four-Mile-House for a short while after the main body had left. We were discussing what had happened and, while doing so, we heard another car approaching, also from the Roscommon direction. This was an ordinary civilian car, Ford type. We stood where we were, wondering who it was. It turned out to be the County Inspector of Police and another man, both in civilian attire. As they were in civilian attire, we did not recognise them and allowed them to pass through. They could see us quite plainly. The County Inspector, I believe, got the impression that we knew him and did not want to interfere with him and, as a result of this, he saved the town of Roscommon from reprisals.

We captured nothing and only succeeded in using up some of our valuable ammunition. Our efforts, however, were not wholly wasted as, apart from the casualties inflicted on the enemy, the ambush gave a great fillip to our morale and developed a healthy respect for us amongst the British forces. We now dispersed to our own areas.

Meeting Reprisals:

For five nights after the Four-Mile-House ambush we went into Roscommon and occupied positions of advantage in the town to meet any attempt at reprisals which we expected would be attempted. A big number of the

residents of Roscommon had evacuated their houses and we found a number of places empty. With the exception of one shot which was fired inside the barracks at about 12 p.m. on the night of the ambush, no attempt was made to carry out reprisals.. The Lancers occupied the barracks at this time. No British troops appeared on the streets on any of the nights we were there. We also had men in positions in the Ballagh area to meet any attempt the enemy might make in that area. They did not go near Ballagh either.

The Column:

After the Four-Mile-House ambush, the Column became a whole-time job. It consisted of about 40 men all told, with Pat Madden in charge. Luke Duffy was second in command and I was Adjutant. Organisation inside the Column was to meet whatever circumstances existed at the moment. We had the rifles we had at Four-Mile-House, and the remainder of the Column were armed with shotguns. We slept in houses belonging to the local people and in dug-outs and, to a great extent, we depended on the people for our food also.

All men were instructed to report immediately any and every action of the enemy that came under their notice. A number of the men carried out their ordinary civilian duties during the day but were available, of course, on call. Ordinary training, such as, route marching and particularly "stalking", was carried out. During this period - October and November and on until after Christmas - the enemy carried out several large scale rounds-up in our area. Every man and woman that they could capture and even the Parish Priest were detained and brought to a selected point. They were usually brought to Beechwood where they

were made to parade before a cottage. In this cottage they had local men who were still serving in the R.I.C. for identification purposes. They even raided the local chapel while Mass was being celebrated. They entered the chapel with revolvers in their hands. The parish priest asked the people to remain calm and stay in their seats and that he would go and interview the O.C. of the British forces. The priest then got two of the oldest men in the congregation to accompany him. They carried lighted candles and the priest carried a crucifix. With the priest in the centre, they went off to see the British officer in charge. On his return, Canon Hurley, the P.P., assured the congregation that the Commanding Officer had given his word that the people would not be molested in any way, but that all males would be searched and that certain individuals, for whom they were looking, would be arrested. Some of the Column who were in the chapel had revolvers on them. They passed the revolvers to some girls who got them through the cordon without any trouble. They searched all men on leaving the chapel. One of the R.I.C. who accompanied the raiding party, a Sergeant Melady, told a local man, Mike Lannon, that they were out to capture Simons, Madden, Duffy and some others. The Sergeant said that there was no one in the barracks except himself who knew these men, but that he was not going to recognise any of them. He said, "There is Duffy coming out now but I don't know him".

In one of these rounds-up they captured Dan Madden and Patrick Farrell. Pat Tiernan, who was with them at the time, escaped. They were caught while hiding on the side of Slievebawn mountain in the evening time. Pat Madden had a revolver or something of that nature on him. Both men were in prison until after the Truce. On this particular day, the Column, or the greater part of it was

at Glebe House, Kilrooskey. We got through the British cordon right across the road to the village of Tunam. We tried to get all the Column together to ambush them but, when we found out the extent of the enemy operation on Pat Tiernan joining us after his escape, we decided otherwise very quickly. The enemy were keeping constant patrols on the roads by means of lorries of men, while other forces combed every house and nook inside the area. How we managed to get through that day, between the lorries and across bare country where we were very much exposed, is still a mystery to me to-day. However, we got outside the cordon and escaped being caught in their net. That was all the casualties that the Column sustained on that occasion.

Incident at Castlenode, Strokestown:

In November of 1920 Liam O'Doherty, who was the O.C. of the 3rd Battalion, North Roscommon Brigade, invited some members of our Column to commandeer a car from William J. Walpole, Justice of the Peace, who lived at Castlenode House near Strokestown. The car was normally kept in a garage close to the house. Pat Madden, John Gibbons, Peter Collins, Hugh Keegan, James McTiernan, Pat Meleady and I went to assist Commandant O'Doherty, who had also some men of his own with him.

Castlenode House is about a half-mile from the public road leading to Strokestown from Longford and is approached by an avenue without fences. The house is surrounded by a high wall with an entrance gate about twenty yards from the hall-door. The garage was at the rear of the house on the south side. It was night time and between 10 and 11 p.m. Some members of O'Doherty's Column were to start the car but they could not do so. Before we proceeded to the house, we left two men in a wood at the gate entrance at

the main road. Their job was to keep a watch on the road and warn us in case of any danger. They were armed with service rifles.

At this time I thought I heard voices as if some persons were approaching the house from across the fields. I moved in the direction from which the voices had come and, in the gloom, could distinguish a number of persons approaching. Almost immediately fire was opened by our two men whom we had left at the gate. I returned to Walpole's house. He was being attended by Pat Madden and two maids when I had left. When I got back, he was still lying there, with no one near him.

The firing was now intense. I ran towards the garage and met Pat Madden and Pat Meleady. All the others that had been in the garage had retreated towards Ashbrook across the Scramoge river, crossing it by a footbridge at the old mill. We got out on the road near Scramoge. The whole party were accounted for here, except the two men whom we left at the main entrance gate. We headed back towards Aghdangan and on to Lismahy crossroads. Here we held a council of war. Our chief worry was to know what had happened to the two men with the rifles and we decided we would go back and look for them. I suggested that we should get a grenade rifle from the dug-out. This would take about three-quarters of an hour, but Pat Madden who was in charge decided we would go on without it. We proceeded to the wood at the entrance gate but could find no trace of them there, so we got on to the avenue and went towards the house again. The house was well lighted and there was a motor car in front of the hall door. This was a pretty new car and it was not there on our first visit.

Some of the boys went towards the garage again and Pat Madden, Hugh Keegan and I went towards the car at the door to examine it. In the next few seconds fire was opened on us from the windows of the house. Fire was also opened on the garage at the same time. We ran along the boundary wall and got into a field and continued to the south of the entrance gate. The enemy bullets were knocking sparks off the wall and cutting into the ground around us as we ran. The cattle and sheep in the field were bellowing and bleating as if they had been hit and were in pain. We got on our hands and knees to the road and, as we tried to cross the road, fire was opened on us again from the bridge on the Strokestown side of the gate entrance. We had to lie down and roll across the road and into the water-table on the opposite side.

We crossed a wall there and this gave us protection. We now headed towards Cranskar church. There was only Pat Madden and I together now. The remainder of the party were missing, having dispersed in other directions. We now headed towards Moher, crossed the Deerran river there and continued on to Clooncagh school. We called at a house named Kerin's where we were given some tea and bread. At this time we thought that at least four or five of our men had been killed. We, Pat Madden and I, left Kerin's and came back to the main road. When we got there, we heard someone whistling a tune, so we took cover and, when he came up to us, called on him to halt. We were delighted to hear a voice saying, "O.K.! It's alright, boys!". It was Jimmie McTiernan of Roscommon whom we were sure had been killed. We decided now that we would return to the Column Headquarters at Old Glebe and, on the way there, we would call at Collins's house. It was now between two and four

o'clock in the morning.

On arrival at Collins's, we perceived light in the house and could hear people talking inside. We did not like to enter and tell them about the tragedy that had happened to the boys, so we hung around outside for a while. The door of the house opened and who should come out - to our great relief - but Peter Collins. When he saw us, he said, "Thank God, you are alive!". He had not mentioned to anyone that he thought or was practically sure that we had been killed.

We went to the dug-out and had a few hours' sleep. Next day about 2 p.m. we saw a horse and car approaching. There were two men on the car. As they drew nearer, we could see that one was what appeared to us to be a clerical man. This man was O'Doherty, the O.C. of the 3rd Battalion, North Roscommon Brigade. Naturally, we were delighted to see him. He had commandeered the horse and car and made the owner drive him. He was wearing the coat and hat belonging to the owner of the car, and it was this that gave him the clerical appearance. All our men turned up that day and we also learned that all of the party from the North Roscommon area had also got away safely. One of the soldiers, who had been a member of the enemy party, told one of our men the following day that they had fired over two hundred rounds of ammunition and never got even one Sinn Féiner.

We never could find out how the Walpole's had given the alarm to the British Camp at Strokestown. There were several theories put forward, such as, a prearranged signal which we did not observe, or that some one had got out of the house and gone on horseback to the camp which was only

a very short distance away across country. A car had been commandeered by the police that day in Strokestown and that was used by them to get to Walpole's. In that light, it would appear as if the police had received timely information of our intentions. None of our men were wounded. The enemy had stopped some distance from the main entrance and crossed in through the fields. It was while they were doing this that they were fired on by our two men at the gate. This saved us from being caught red-handed in and around the house.

Road Blocking:

A trench had been cut across the Lanesboro-Roscommon road at Cloondra near Moneen. A lorry loaded with British forces drove into this trench at night. It was a concealed trench. They fired extensively for some time around the area, probably thinking it was an ambush. They did not injure anyone, however. It was believed locally that two of the British were seriously injured.

Attempts to ambush Patrols at Lanesboro:

On two occasions we crossed Lough Ree to the Longford side and joined up with parties of I.R.A. from Longford Brigade in an attempt to ambush patrols of R.I.C. and Tans. We had information that the R.I.C. and Tans in Lanesboro were patrolling regularly around the Lanesboro district. We went into attack positions and blocked the roads but no patrols ever turned up. We crossed Lough Ree in boats which was a dangerous venture as the lake can be very rough.

Raid on Income Tax Office, Roscommon:

Orders were received from Headquarters that all income tax offices in the country were to be raided and all documents in such offices were to be destroyed so as to prevent the British Revenue authorities from collecting

the taxes. We raided the offices of the local collector in Roscommon who was William Black. Black was a Protestant and a staunch supporter of the British regime. He was also an auctioneer. Black's office was only a short distance from the police barracks and was part of his own residence. Black opened fire on us with a shotgun. We had broken into the office at the time. We got up the stairs and into the room where Black was and took the gun from him. We then took all his books and documents from the office and destroyed them. Previous to this, we had warned the people against paying income tax to the British. Black did not injure anyone when he fired his shotgun and, strange to relate, the police did not come to his assistance although they should have heard the shot. Amongst the documents we seized were a number of cheques which had been paid to Mr. Black by individuals in clearance of their assessments. A perusal of those cheques gave us an insight as to who were still loyal to the British regime and also to some who, while posing as out-and-out separatists, were at the same time playing ball with the enemy.

A British Ruse to get Information:

Around Christmas we were very active. We attempted a few ambushes, all of which proved abortive. We captured two British soldiers outside the town. They claimed that they were deserters. They were loitering around and did not appear as if they were anxious to put any great distance between themselves and their unit. They asked for civilian clothes and wanted to join up with us.

I had them provided with civilian attire and put across the Shannon into Longford, making sure that they did not hear or see anything that would be of use to the enemy. We kept their uniforms. One belonged to the Lancers and

the other to the Scottish Borderers. The third day after we put them across the Shannon, the same soldiers took part in a big round-up in the area and a number of young men of military age were brought before them for identification. They did not identify anyone although one of the men brought before them was my brother. He was one of the men who put them across the Shannon.

The Ambush at Scramoge:

Some time in March, 1921, there was a large scale round-up by the enemy in the Strokestown-Tarmonbarry-Ballincurry area. Over a thousand troops took part in this round-up. They combed Slieve Bawn, firing into every crevice that was not capable of being scrutinised by the naked eye. Captain Peak, who was O.C. of the British garrison at Strokestown, was in charge of the British forces during this round-up. He was heard to say at the end of the operation that he did not believe he had got one of the so-and-so's but that he would return and burn every bit of brush and cover on the mountainside and he would get us then. He had not got any of us. In the meantime, we planned an ambush at Scramoge on the Longford-Strokestown road and near Strokestown.

We had the road watched and a record kept of all enemy traffic on it. The reports told us that there were usually two or three lorries of men travelling this road at certain times each day. The lorries were always equidistant apart. We made a reconnaissance and decided on Scramoge as the most suitable area for an ambush. We mobilised the whole Company for this and made arrangements with the other and outer Companies to block all the roads leading into the area, particularly those leading from Athlone which was a major garrison area. All blocks were

to be put down at a certain hour (which was early) on the 23rd March.

We also arranged with the North Roscommon Brigade officers, Commandant Davy and Commandant Fallon, to meet us at a certain point. They were to supply some picked parties of men for special duties. The Curraghroe, Scramoge and Carnskag Companies were to block certain roads in the area.

Our own Column, reinforced by a few men from the North Roscommon Companies, were to carry out the ambush. I and a few others were directed to Scramoge, getting there before daybreak. We all met on the side of the hill at Scramoge. We had to dig a trench - a shallow one - to provide cover for ourselves, and we also had to move a family from a house which would be in the fighting area. This house was occupied by some of our men. We also had to cut some hedges and bore holes through the wall of a shed to facilitate us in a retreat from the position.

The road was blocked by trees on the Tarmonbarry side. Our men were so placed that the shotgun men could use their weapons on the first lorry or near target, while the rifle men could engage the second or other lorries and distant targets.

We were all in position by daybreak and well under cover. A man driving a pony and trap approached us from the Strokestown side. As this man came close to our position, we saw a lorry of military also coming from the Strokestown direction. Someone shouted at the man in the pony and trap to turn in to the side road which he did just in time. At this time there was no sign of a second lorry. As the pony and trap turned in to the side road,

the enemy lorry came into our position and fire was opened on it with shotguns and rifles.

The lorry pulled up, facing towards the ditch, and some of the occupants jumped over the ditch while others just fell down by the side of the lorry. They had a hotchkiss machine gun mounted on the lorry and they opened fire with this. They only got in a short burst from this gun when the gunner was knocked out by our fire and thereafter the gun was silent. We called on them to surrender and, after a few minutes, a fellow in civilian attire with his hands over his head came towards us. By now the firing had died down and a number of the enemy were lying around wounded. We moved out of our position and down towards the enemy lorry. As we did so, a second lorry was visible, coming from the Strokestown direction also. Pat Madden ordered us to fire on this lorry at long range, which we did, and the lorry turned in to a side road where it turned and made back towards Strokestown again.

When we got down to the ambushed lorry, we found that all the enemy had been either killed or wounded and some were dying. We took those that had crossed the ditch on to the road again and placed them at a safe distance from the lorry which we were going to burn.

We collected, as well as I can remember, five or six rifles, a machine gun and ammunition and seven or eight revolvers, two Verrey light pistols and a large stock ship with an enormous thong.

We now set fire to the lorry and retreated towards our own area, taking with us two civilian prisoners. The prisoners were really Black and Tan police who had been prisoners of the military for some breach of discipline.

After some time we divided forces, the North Roscommon men going in their own direction and we in ours. They took one of the prisoners with them and we took the other. We kept the machine gun and some of the rifles. In general, we divided the spoils between ourselves and the North Roscommon Brigade. We gave them some good shotguns that we had. I should have mentioned that the second lorry that had come out from Strokestown appeared, as far as we could judge at the distance, to be R.I.C. or Black and Tans.

We had just got back to our own area when the whole place was occupied by military from Athlone. The Company on this side had failed to block the roads on the Athlone side, thus enabling the military to drive right into the area. Our Black and Tan prisoner made attempts to escape and to attract the attention of the British troops. On one occasion, he was found dropping papers and letters which could be easily identified as his and would set a trail for them. He knew so much about us by now that it would be fatal for us to let him get back to his friends and we could not hold him indefinitely. We shot him that night and buried him in Clonboney bog. This man had also made an attempt to seize a rifle and turn it on us when he found the British soldiers close to us. The other prisoner was also shot that night.

The officer in charge of the British army at Scramoge was Captain Peak, the same officer who said he would return and burn all the scrub on the mountainside to get us. He was killed, and another officer, Lieutenant Tennant, died in Longford Hospital that night.

Our armament for this ambush consisted of about eight or nine service rifles. Four of those were our own and the others were supplied by the Brigade. We had about twenty-

five rounds of ammunition per rifle. The rest of the party were armed with shotguns and supplied with cartridges loaded with buckshot, but they were none too plentiful either. Some of the cartridges were loaded with bullets made of lead and specially cast for this occasion. A lot of the cartridges were damp and caused trouble in getting them extracted from the guns when fired.

Something between twenty and thirty men took part in this ambush but, of course, there were a lot more engaged in road blocking and suchlike work.

We were not able to do anything for the wounded except to put them in a place where they would be safe when we set the tender of fire - as we did. We could not afford to stay any length of time at the scene, as we were quite close to the enemy encampment at Strokestown and we were expecting enemy reinforcements to arrive from there at any moment. We suffered no casualties in this encounter and, as well as the very welcome addition to our armament, it gave a great boost to our morale.

Cold War on the R.I.C.:

In June, 1920, two R.I.C. men arrived at Ballagh chapel to attend Mass. They were on cycles and were in civilian attire - apparently on some special duty. Pat Madden and I remained near the door of the church. The policemen occupied seats in the body of the church. When they were settled in their seats, Pat and I left the church and took the cycles belonging to them and brought them for about half a mile along the road and then hid them in a field of corn. We then returned to the church and attended at Mass. After Mass the police came out and found their cycles gone. We came out at the end of the congregation. The police were very excited and were

inquiring from everyone about their cycles, but were not getting any information. They now went to Canon Hurley and asked him to ask Pat Madden and me if we knew anything about the missing cycles. The Canon refused, saying why should he incriminate these men. The police had to walk back to Beechwood police barracks, the object of jeers from the people who enjoyed having the police cycles stolen from them.

About 15th August that year, a sports and athletic meeting was held in Ballagh. Four R.I.C. men - a sergeant and three constables - tried to get into the field where the meeting was being held. We would not admit them. They threatened us but we told them they would not be admitted under any circumstances, even on payment. They walked up and down the road for some time and then went away.

On another occasion Pat Madden and I noticed a policeman at Kellerney, about three miles outside Roscommon town, and walking in that direction. He was wearing a police cape at the time and it was just getting dark. We concealed ourselves on the side of the road and, when he had just gone past, we rushed out and caught the back of his cape and threw it over his head, thus loosely blindfolding him. We were armed with revolvers. The policeman now cried out, "For the honour of God, boys, don't! I am an all-round man and I don't mean to harm anybody." We searched him and found nothing of any value to us in the way of despatches or suchlike and we let him go his way. He never reported the incident to his superiors or to anyone at the barracks. Those little incidents were all part of a general plan to make life unbearable for the R.I.C. and thereby force them to resign from the force. Mick Collins and G.H.Q. realised that the

R.I.C. were the eyes and ears of the British forces which were holding this country and that without them they, the British, would be operating in the dark.

A Narrow Escape by the Police:

Some time after the ambush at Scramoge, a Battalion Council and Column Council Meeting was held at Ballagh. The meeting had ended, and Luke Duffy, who was Vice-Commandant of the Battalion - the 3rd - left for his home, carrying on the back of his cycle a young lad, named James McDermott. At Hanley's Crossroads, Aghamuck, they spotted a large force of policemen coming from the Clooncagh-Strokes town direction. They were on the road that Duffy would have gone on his way to his home, and he, with McDermott still on the cycle, continued to cycle on straight towards Tuam and Four-Mile-House direction. The police were also on cycles. Duffy now put on all speed and, when the police came on to the road on which he was, they opened fire on him. He was then only about 100 yards away from them. Duffy continued on for about half a mile, hotly pursued by the police and being fired at by the leading elements of that force.

Pat Madden and I were at Canon Hurley's in Ballagh at this time. A messenger arrived with the information that the police were after Duffy and that some of the lads had gone out to intercept them. Pat and I rushed back to our dug-out where the hotchkiss gun, captured at Scramoge, was stored. This dug-out was near Connolly's of Fairymount. On arrival there, we found that the gun had already been taken out by John Gibbons and Peter Collins, so we continued on towards Cooney's Crossroads, which is near Hanley's Cross. The police had now retraced their steps as far as Hanley's Cross and were now proceeding via -

New Line towards Ballagh. They were now in a very scattered formation and they had civilian hostages in between them, apparently to save them from being fired at. Some of them had taken to the fields as flank scouts. When they were passing along the road east of Hanley's Cross, Gibbons had the machine gun trained on them. When he attempted to fire, however, the gun jammed and he could not get it going. No firing took place and the police got away. Had the gun not failed to operate, he would have created havoc amongst the police; in fact, he would have decimated them as he had them completely under his control, no matter what way they tried to get. The hill on which he had the gun completely controlled all the immediate countryside around.

The police returned via New Line, Doughill, Curraghroe and Scramoge to Strokestown. They did not release their hostages until they were quite close to Strokestown; in fact, they took a couple into the town with them. Duffy and McDermott had escaped from them all right. Duffy had jumped from the cycle and both had taken to the fields. Little did the police realise how they had escaped death on that occasion.

Ballagh House:

Ballagh House, owned by James O'Connor, J.P., was a large four-storey house containing a large number of rooms. O'Connor lived in Dublin and, although the house was furnished, it was not occupied. I was Acting Brigade O.C. at this time. Information was received from a policeman in Lanesboro', through Michael Ryan there, that the police, that is, the R.I.C. and Tans, or the Auxiliary Police, were going to take it over and convert it into a barracks. I called a Council meeting and we discussed whether the place

should be destroyed by burning or not.

At this time there was a certain amount of grumbling amongst the people that, when we did carry out ambushes or attacks, we always did so outside our own area, thus bringing down an amount of attention on such areas by the enemy and leaving our own alone. This was unfounded, as the enemy were quite well aware that the principal participants in such incidents came from the 3rd Battalion area. This was borne out by the numerous round-ups and searches they carried out in that area and, of course, the real reason there were no attacks in the area was that there were no regular enemy routes through it.

In view of this, we decided not to destroy the Ballagh House but to let the enemy take possession of it. Then we could get a crack at some of them occasionally, or we could attack them in their new barracks and thus bring the war to the 3rd Battalion area. The enemy never occupied the place, however. They may have given out that information just to see what our reactions to it would be, or thinking that we would rush off immediately and destroy it.

Spies:

Two men who lived in the Ballagh district were under suspicion for a considerable time of supplying information about us to the enemy. One was an ex-member of the R.I.C. and the other was the local postmaster. The ex R.I.C. man pretended to be a great friend of the I.R.A. and he often asked me to come and see him. He gave me information about forthcoming raids by the enemy and the districts that were going to be searched. He stated that he had been in Roscommon and had got the information from the police there with whom he was very friendly. He advised me to get all

our men out of the area that was going to be searched, according to him, and to put them in a safe area which he defined. I did quite the opposite, as I did not trust the man. I took a chance.

The following morning, enemy forces consisting of military, police and Lancers from Strokestown surrounded the area which he had declared would be safe. This area comprised the townlands of Ballincurry, Ballinvolly, Carrowmoneen, Aghamuck and Fairymount, all of which were given special attention. There was not a bush or a crevice of any size or description that they did not fire into and they used up some thousands of rounds of ammunition in combing the area. They took everyone of military age, both male and female, and brought them to a cottage at Beechwood where they were required to parade past a window. Some local individual who knew the people of this area was apparently inside for the purpose of identification. They got none of the men they were looking for. The ex R.I.C. man's home was kept under observation for a considerable period at night time. On a few occasions some unknown person was seen to visit the house in the very late hours of the night, or very early morning between 1 and 3 a.m. This took place at considerable intervals of time. We had a dug-out constructed near the Glebe House and opposite the ex R.I.C. man's house, where he could see us. We never stayed in this dug-out but showed ourselves there occasionally for his benefit. The next big round-up the enemy went straight from Glebe House to the dug-out. About three miles away from this place, we found a map which they had lost and this dug-out was marked plainly on it.

On a Saturday night in May, 1921, this man was again in Roscommon and visited the police barracks there. He

asked several young lads from the Ballagh district, who were in the town that night, to accompany him home and offered to give them seats on his vehicle. He was apparently ill at ease and was anxious to have company to his home, or had some premonition that we were coming for him. That night, or early on Sunday morning, we went to his house. I had men posted at the back windows. We had only knocked once at the door when he tried to escape out the back window. We had to break our way into the house. He had barricaded himself into his room. We captured him but he refused to dress himself. When we had left the house and gone some distance, I sent a man back for his overcoat which we placed on his shoulders. We took him to Canon Hurley to have him receive the rites of the Church. He asked me to promise him that his death would not react on the welfare of his family and also that I would take his sons into the I.R.A. if I thought they were worth it. I promised him that I would do as he wished. Canon Hurley administered to him. When we had come away from the priest's house some distance, he said he would like to see the priest again, so we took him back to him. He was blindfolded this time. We had only gone a few hundred yards from the priest's house along the road to the place we had selected for execution when we met some more of our men with another prisoner. This second prisoner was the local postmaster, who was also being taken to see the priest. The ex R.I.C. man, Scanlon, on hearing me give instructions to the second party as to where they were to go, said, "Is that another one, Frank?". "It is", I said. "Who do you think it is?" "Would it be John McCauley?", he replied, and I said, "Correct, first time!". McCauley was the postmaster.

Some short distance further on, we met another

party of our men with a third prisoner, a lady this time. She was a daughter of Scanlon. Scanlon now asked me if that was another one and I said, "Yes". He then remarked, "You must be going to make a clean sweep of them to-night". I said that after tonight there would be no information for the enemy in this parish.

The two men were taken to Kilrooskey and, about a quarter of a mile on the Beechwood side of it on the road leading to Roscommon where a trench had been cut across the road, they were executed by shooting. The usual label, "Spies And Informers, Beware!", was placed on their bodies which we left on the side of the road. The lady was tied to the gate outside Kilgeffin church. I understand she was released in the morning by someone who was going to early Mass which was at 8.30 a.m.

The bodies of both of the executed men were taken to Roscommon where some sort of Inquiry or inquest was held by the British authorities. Subsequently, when their funeral was taking place, the Tans and R.I.C. went along the route of the procession in Roscommon and compelled the people to close their shops and draw the blinds on the windows. The two men were buried locally by their own people. Extensive searches were carried out by the British in the area after this, but without any result. No further information was supplied to the enemy after that from that area.

Incident at Kilrooskey:

Sometime after the execution of the two spies previously mentioned, there was terrific enemy activity. One night our Column was divided into sections to block all the roads leading into the Kilgeffin area, which was the Battalion Headquarters. With each working party there

was an armed protection party. On the road leading from Roscommon via Beechwood to Kilrooskey a trench, which had been cut across the road by our men, had been filled in by the British forces using local commandeered labour. A party of Volunteers from the Column was detailed to re-open this trench. One Volunteer with a rifle, one with a Mills hand-grenade and a few others with shotguns formed the protective party. This party took up a position on the Roscommon side of the trench. The night was a dark one and visibility was down to a few yards.

Around 12.30 p.m. approximately, one of the protection party noticed some movements as if a man was approaching him along the side of the road. He took this to be some local person who was out late and was making for home. He called on the person to halt and immediately the rifle was knocked out of his hand by a bullet which was followed immediately by a regular fusillade of shots. It would now appear that the enemy were advancing in single file along the road. The Volunteer with the grenade pulled the pin from it and threw it in the direction that the first shot had come from and from where the enemy were approaching. Our whole party then retreated back towards the bog.

Terrific rifle fire was kept up by the British forces for about half an hour. They went into Devine's house which was close by and fired out of there also, although there was nobody firing at them. All our working and armed parties, including the one at this incident, made their way back to Column Headquarters and no one received any injury. At Headquarters we had no information about the strength of the enemy force; nor was there any means of obtaining this at this hour.

The enemy forced a man who lived in a cottage at the

scene of the shooting to go into Roscommon to the barracks for reinforcements for them, and stated that some of their men were killed and others wounded. No reinforcements came out until about 8.30 a.m. next morning, which was Sunday. Three lorry-loads of Tans came out from Roscommon under District Inspector Cole. Sergeant Joyce was in charge of the original party of Tans and R.I.C. who did all the firing. He was the man who drove the lorry through the ambush position at Four-Mile-House.

The District Inspector was heard by some of the local inhabitants to say to Sergeant Joyce, "We will go down to Ballagh church and catch some of the -----; they will be at Mass there". The Sergeant replied, "Not with all this crowd!", which seemed to indicate that they had insufficient numbers to carry out an operation of catching a few fellows at Mass. Their morale was pretty low and they were badly shaken by the bomb in the dark.

One Constable - I think Reddin was his name - had been killed and a few others had been wounded. The whole enemy force now returned back to Roscommon without making any search or doing any raiding in the area. An inquest on the body of Constable Reddin was held in Roscommon. Mr. Black, who was a Protestant in religion, an auctioneer in business and a collector of taxes under the British government, was foreman of this Jury. At the proceedings he condemned what he called the murder of this young constable and referred to the terrible state of the country. Sometime after this, Mr. Black was conducting an auction at the residence of James O'Connor, Justice of the Peace, at Ballagh House. Eleven of us walked over to the auction which had been on for some time. There was a big crowd present. We produced a copy of the local paper in which

the proceedings of the inquest had been published and asked Mr. Black if he was the person concerned. He admitted he was and we then informed him that he had been condemned to death. Mr. Black became very upset, naturally, and made excuses that he did not understand the circumstances or otherwise he would not have acted as he had.

We withdrew a short distance and consulted amongst ourselves and then informed him that the sentence had been mitigated to a fine of £20. He paid £10 of this fine on the spot. I cannot say if he ever paid the balance. We warned him that he was not to enter that area again under pain of death. The remainder of the auction was carried out in quick time and purchasers got some great bargains, so anxious was Mr. Black to get finished and get out of the district.

Brigade Appointment:

Sometime after the ambush at Scramoge around Christmas time, I was appointed as understudy to the Brigade O.C.. This came about as a result of orders issued by General Headquarters that all senior officers were to have understudies who would be in a position to carry on their work in case of the existing officer becoming a casualty or being arrested.

In January, 1921, I was appointed Vice O.C. of the Brigade and about the 3rd March of that year I was appointed Brigade O.C., which position I held until the Truce in July, 1921. I would prefer to leave it to other persons to give the reason for those changes in the personnel of the Brigade Staff.

I did not make any changes amongst the senior officers of the Brigade. The Brigade, as a brigade, had

never really functioned as such, except perhaps in the administrative side of the work and certainly not in the operation side. Every operation which had been initiated by the Brigade proved a "flop" and we of the Battalion decided to "hike" along on our own and to do our own bit in the fight without reference to the Brigade, and this is actually what took place. My object, as Brigade O.C., was to get the other Battalions of the Brigade to carry out operations against the enemy and become as active as my own Battalion. The advent of the Truce prevented us from attaining this object.

Several attempts to ambush parties of enemy were made throughout the period, but nothing came of them, the reason being that in nearly all cases the enemy did not oblige by turning up. Early in July, 1921, we had information that the Black & Tan garrison in Lanesboro were wont to come out on fine afternoons and sit on the walls around the bridge over the Shannon and we decided to hit them up. We took up positions with the Column in the houses overlooking the bridge on the Roscommon side and waited for them to appear. Only one Tan came out and sat on the wall. But we did not fire at him. We wanted bigger game. They did not come out that afternoon and, after waiting there for some considerable time, the operation was called off. Quite a few attempts had been made to get a crack at the men of this garrison but they all failed to materialise.

The Truce:

The coming into effect of the Truce was received with mixed feelings by the men of the Column and the other members of the I.R.A. We were glad at least to get a respite and to be able to sleep in an ordinary bed and partake of normal meals once again. At the same time we

were anxious and rather fearful of what negotiations with the enemy would bring us. Our morale was high and certainly on the day of the Truce, or the days preceding it, the idea of giving up the fight, or in any way conceding anything to the enemy, had never entered into any Volunteer's head. All ranks were enthusiastic and anxious to carry on the fight.

On the other side, the picture, however, is not so good. Supplies of war material were almost exhausted and there was no hope of replenishing them. The chances of capturing any from the enemy were remote indeed. We had about ten rounds of ammunition per rifle left and about one hundred rounds for the hotchkiss gun. Other such stuff as hand grenades and explosives were practically non-existent. As far as we were concerned, and I think the pattern was pretty well the same elsewhere, a few more months would have seen the end of aggressive action on our part. The position did not improve a whole lot during the Truce, and I doubt if we could ever have started again.

Intelligence in the Brigade and Battalions:

There were Intelligence sections organised in the Brigade and each Battalion Headquarters. But, with the exception of keeping local activities under review and reporting same, they were not of much military value. We had the Post Office in Roscommon tapped and, in this way, we were able to receive the telegraph messages being sent to the enemy from their headquarters. Such messages were in code. We were supplied with the key to these by our own headquarters and, in cases when this was not available, we were able to construct our own key. Instrumental in this work were Mr. Monahan, McNamara, William Kilmartin and Tommy Farrell. From these messages we received

information about impending raids and operations by the enemy and of individuals who were to be arrested and suchlike and we took the necessary precautions to ensure that they were not successful.

Sergeant Harte, who was Clerk to the County Inspector, R.I.C., and worked in his office, was friendly disposed towards us and, through a Constable Duffy, he passed to us from time to time some valuable information. Duffy contacted us through Tommy Farrell and McNamara. We often had the contents of messages which were sent to the police in Roscommon for some considerable time before they had them. Harte and Duffy were able to tip us off in regard to informers and people who were giving information to the enemy. They were also able at times to warn us of round-up operations by the enemy which were impending.

A pocket wallet belonging to Head Constable Doherty was picked up in a business house in Castlerea where he had dropped it. In this was found a document which contained the names of about twenty prominent I.R.A. men who were to be shot on sight. These included Pat Madden, Luke Duffy, myself and others.

Making and Supplying of Munitions:

The only thing that was done in the area in the way of producing munitions was the production of buckshot and the filling of this into shotgun cartridges. We also made some black powder but this was not a great success. No bombs or hand-grenades were produced in the area. In the early stage of the fight, we were able to procure some gelignite and detonators from the railway quarries at Lecarrow. This supply ceased, however, when the British authorities tightened up on their security regulations. All the supplies we received from Headquarters during the

period were two rifles and two .38 automatic pistols.

Conclusion:

During the Truce, Michael Brennan - afterwards Major-General of the National Army - Seán Hyde and General Eoin O'Duffy travelled the whole of the County on inspection. They congratulated us on the state of our organisation and preparedness. They told me that they were amazed that we were able to carry out ambushes where we did. They were satisfied that there were only two places in the county suitable for an operation of this type and the enemy did not frequent these spots.

I would like to pay a tribute to Canon Hurley who was then Parish Priest in Ballagh and who is still alive, thank God. There was nothing he would not do, or risk for us and he was always available to us in either a material or spiritual manner. An instance of what he was prepared to do was shown on the night of the shooting at Kilrooskey. When he heard the firing, he arose from his bed and made his way to the scene in the dark where he was in danger of being shot, in order to help us should we be in trouble. It was quite a usual thing to find him pacing up and down the road outside the house where we were holding a meeting or having a meal.

Finally, I would also like to place on record my appreciation of the people - the ordinary people of the area - for all they did for us. They fed us, clothed us to a great extent, provided us with a place to sleep, nursed us when we were sick and protected and cherished us at all times. All this was done despite the fact that the enemy considered it a very dastardly crime to harbour a rebel and dire punishment was meted out to those who were found to do so.

No stranger could enter the area but he would be picked up immediately and brought before an officer of the Column. With the exception of the cases already mentioned, the enemy could get no information about us. Even the children would not give us away. And any Volunteer who was in trouble could rely on everyone as his friend. Without the assistance and co-operation of the people we could never have carried on.

Signed: Frank Simons,
(Frank Simons)

Date: 2nd Dec 1952
2nd Dec. 1952.

Witness: Matthew Barry Comd't.
(Matthew Barry), Comd't.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
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