

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 882

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 882

Witness

Thomas McEllistrim, T.D.,  
Ahane,  
Ballymacelligot,  
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

Lieutenant Ballymacelligot Company  
Kerry Brigade, 1915 - ;  
O/G. Firies Battalion, Kerry II Brigade;  
O/C. Brigade A.S.U.  
Subject.

Kerry Brigade activities,  
1916-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 887 . . .

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURD STAIRS MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 882

STATEMENT BYTHOMAS McELLISTRIM, T.D.AHANE, BALLYMACELLIGOTT, COUNTY KERRY.VICE OFFICER COMMANDING, KERRY 11 BRIGADE.OFFICER COMMANDING BRIGADE A. S. U.1916-1917.

After the surrender of 1916 three Officers of Ballymacelligott Company were arrested by police and military on the 9th May, 1916: Thomas O'Connor, Company Captain, John Byrne and myself, the two Lieutenants. We were conveyed to Tralee gaol where we were detained for three weeks with other Kerry prisoners. After about three weeks in Tralee we were conveyed as prisoners to Richmond Barracks, Dublin, detained there for a further two weeks, from whence we were transferred as prisoners by boat and train to Wakefield prison, England. We were kept four weeks in Wakefield, then transferred to Frongoch Internment Camp. From Frongoch we were brought back to Wormwood Scrubbs Prison where we were tried by Courtmartial. The Court was presided over by Mr. Justice Sankey and perhaps it was a Commission to determine the extent of our guilt, rather than an actual Courtmartial, for all the members of the Court were civilians. I cannot say what was the result of that 'trial' but we were again transferred to Frongoch after the trial and from Frongoch we were released, with a number of other prisoners, about the end of August, 1916

After my release from Frongoch I proceeded to re-organise the Ballymacelligott Company of Volunteers and at a meeting of the Ballymacelligott Volunteers at the Hall I was appointed

Captain of Ballymacelligott Company in November, 1916.  
From that period onwards I drilled and trained the Volunteers  
of Ballymacelligott Company.

GORTATLEA R.I.C. BARRACK ATTACK - 13TH APRIL, 1918.

On the 10th April, 1918, the following members of  
Ballymacelligott Company of Volunteers met at the old hall,  
Ballymacelligott, to plan a surprise attack on Gortatlea  
R.I.C. Barracks.

John Cronin.  
Maurice Carmody.  
Maurice Reidy.  
John Browne.  
Richard Laide.  
John Flynn and myself.

The attack was for the purpose of getting arms and we  
wished to avoid shooting, if possible.

The attack was planned in the following way. In  
Gortatlea R.I.C. Barracks there were four men and we had  
planned to capture the Barracks by surprise. I had dis-  
covered that two men from Gortatlea garrison went out on  
patrol every night. On the night of the 13th April, 1918,  
John Flynn was placed on guard by me at the Railway Station  
near the Barracks. With the other five men above  
mentioned, I waited on the railway line 60 yards from the  
Barracks for Flynn to bring word when two men had gone out  
on patrol. Cronin, Carmody and Browne were armed with  
shotguns, Reidy and Laide had batons and I had a revolver.  
We all were disguised for the attack as we were well known  
by the garrison party. At 9.30 Flynn reported that

Sergeant Boyle and Constable Fallon had gone out on patrol. I instructed Flynn to follow the patrol and to let us know at the Barracks when they were on the return journey.

We went to the Barracks immediately and walked to the door in single file. I was first, Cronin next, the others followed. When I reached the Barrack door I lifted the latch, believing the door would not be locked as we had information that the Barrack door was seldom locked at that hour. The door was locked and I had to knock. An R.I.C. man (Constable Considine) came to the door and asked, "Who is there?" I said, "It is me". He then asked, "Who are you?" I said in a friendly tone, "It is me, come on and open". He did open and as he did so I dashed past him, as we had arranged that I was not to remain with the R.I.C. man at the door but go right in to the Barracks and hold up the second R.I.C. man inside so that he could not get a chance of using a gun. The man who opened the door was taken over by Cronin and others who followed. Constable Denning, who was in the kitchen, when he saw me enter with mask and gun, made a dash for the inner room; he had no gun on him. I followed and he tried to close the room door on me. I pushed the door open and we got a body hold of each other in the room, which was now in complete darkness as the door had closed behind us. In the struggle that followed we both fell to the ground. Cronin, who heard the noise in the room, immediately came to my assistance and when he pressed the point of his double-barrelled gun on Constable Denning's chest there was no further resistance by him.

Denning, after the struggle, was uninjured, but Considine, who resisted at first, got a few baton strokes and was bleeding. We had the Barracks captured in less than three minutes and our two R.I.C. prisoners were placed standing face to the wall with their hands up. Cronin and I proceeded to collect the arms in the Barrack Room and had taken two rifles off a rack and placed them on the table when a shot rang out. I rushed to the kitchen and saw Browne, who had been doing guard with a shotgun over the prisoners, reel and fall flat on the floor. In less than a minute the Barrack floor was covered with blood. Browne was shot through the temple and the bullet came right out at the back of his head. We now found ourselves in a serious situation; here we were with the Barracks captured and our two prisoners inside; we knew that the bullet which hit Browne had come from the outside and we quickly decided that we would have to fight our way out of the Barracks not knowing what we had to meet on the outside. We thought first that we had been surrounded, that, perhaps, our planned attack had been given away. We thought, too, that, perhaps, police or military had arrived at the Station by train, by accident, as a train from Cork to Tralee had steamed into the Station as we entered the Barracks. One of our attacking party suggested to me, "Will we shoot those two prisoners before leaving?" and I replied, "How can we shoot them with their hands up?" We lifted up Browne, carrying himself and his gun through the door, firing two shots as we went into the darkness. There was no response from outside until we were lifting Browne's body over the railing which surrounded the Barracks, then

another volley of fire came in our direction. We were compelled to leave Brown's body where it was and rush for shelter. I believe Browne was dead in five minutes. That ended our first attempted attack on Gortatlea Barracks and we discovered the following day that our attack was a failure for the following reason. Flynn, the man we placed on guard the night of the attack, did not come to us immediately as arranged when the patrol had gone out on duty. He admitted later that after he had seen the patrol go out he conveyed another young lad who was with him at the Station part of his way home. He said he did this so as to throw off suspicion of his being there doing guard. The result was that Boyle and Fallon had returned from patrol duty and were, in fact, in the Railway Station only ten yards from me when I knocked at the Barrack door. They were armed with rifle and revolver, they saw the commotion and witnessed the capture of the Barracks. They stole up close to the door in the darkness, fired right in on us, killing Browne in the Barrack floor and wounding Laide, another member of the attacking party, who died a few days later.

TRALEE SHOOTING OF R.I.C.

In June, 1918, I got word that an inquest on Browne and Laide, killed at Gortatlea Barrack attack, would be held in Tralee on the 29th June, 1918, and that the two R.I.C. men, Boyle and Fallon, who did the shooting, would be in Tralee to give evidence. I called a private meeting

of four men who took part in the Gortatlea attack to meet in the old hall, Ballymacelligott, for the night of the 17th instant and it was arranged at that meeting that John Cronin and I would go to Tralee the following morning to shoot Boyle and Fallon. Our plan was made in this way. We selected a reliable Volunteer, Dan Stack, to take two shotguns for us to Tralee. The shotguns were to be taken by him in a donkey cart, concealed in a large sack, and he, Stack, was to sit in his donkey cart in front of the main entrance to Tralee Railway Station, as it was our intention to shoot Boyle and Fallon coming off the morning train from Cork. Cronin and I arranged to cycle separately to Tralee on the morning of the 18th and had arranged to meet at Ballybeggan Race Course gate, which would be only a quarter of a mile from Tralee Railway Station. I left home about 7.30 a.m., as the train on which we expected Boyle and Fallon to travel was due to arrive in Tralee at 9.30 a.m. On leaving home I told my people that I was on that day going to the bog with my workmen who were on the same day ricking turf in the bog. I cycled to Ballybeggan Race Course gate and sat there on a little bridge to await Cronin's arrival. It was a beautiful June morning and I had not long to wait when I saw a cyclist coming whom I thought first was Cronin. As the cyclist came near me I discovered that it was not Cronin but Moss Carmody, one of the four Volunteers who was with me in the hall at Ballymacelligott the previous night. When Carmody jumped off his bicycle I asked, "What's wrong, where is Cronin?" He replied, "That business is off; Boyle and Fallon came to Tralee last

night; they were seen passing by Gortatlea Station in the 10 p.m. train". I thought for a while and said to him, "The Court will adjourn for lunch; we will shoot them coming out of the Courthouse at lunch hour - what about it?" He replied, "By God, Mac, I could never do it". I said, "All right - go out and send in Cronin - tell him I will meet him at the back of Tom Harty's licensed premises - near the entrance to the Market". When Carmody departed I cycled to Tralee Railway Station where I found faithful Stack right in front of the Station - quite at ease - sitting in his donkey cart with his shotguns. I told him quietly our plan had to be changed and to bring his cart and guns to the back of Tom Harty's - near the Market entrance. Stack and I secured the guns near Harty's and I awaited Cronin's arrival there - having sent Stack to the Courthouse to bring back what news he could. Cronin arrived about 11.30 a.m. and we re-arranged our plans. We took our two shotguns, concealed in the sack, into Harty's licensed premises, got into a small snug where we were in full view of the main street, as Harty's premises opened into the main street. The snug we occupied was most suitable for our purpose; it was right opposite the bar, with the door opening inwards and the door, when opened, served the purpose of concealing our guns from those in the bar. No one in Harty's premises knew us at the time or knew our purpose for being there.

When Stack returned to Harty's, Cronin and I instructed him to go to the Courthouse, wait for the adjournment by the Court, watch out for Boyle and Fallon and when they left the Courthouse he was to keep on in front of them and give us word at Harty's when and how they were coming; having done that he was to go out Harty's back way and then look after himself. Harty's house was on the side of the Main Street in Tralee and was in direct line between the Courthouse and the R.I.C. Barracks. We knew that Boyle and Fallon would have to pass that way from the Courthouse to the Barracks. When Stack had left we drank a few bottles of minerals to throw off suspicion. The two ladies in the bar came across chatting with us and, in fact, came in to our snug. Our two shotguns, now fully loaded, standing behind the door, were hidden from their view by the door which, as I have already stated, opened inwards.

It was a busy day in Tralee. The Court Judge being in town, there was great police activity. The usual parade and display for the Judge. At five minutes past one, a tap at the door of our snug brought the message we awaited. Stack put in his head and said, "Coming down the other side of the street, Boyle and Fallon". He then disappeared out the back way. We snatched our guns, which, as I have stated, were already loaded, and moved quickly to the door opening into the main street. We could now see Boyle and Fallon, in uniform, going down the other side of the street. The street was wide and scores of people were passing to and fro: it was dinner

hour. We had to cross that street with shotguns in our hands. I was leading and as I dashed through the door I collided with someone, slipped and fell on one knee. When I got to my feet Cronin was by my side and we dashed together across the street. There was great excitement and shouting and when we got halfway across the street Boyle and Fallon turned in our direction and saw us facing them with two shotguns. They first attempted to draw their guns. We lifted our guns to fire. We were now only ten yards from them. As we did they flung themselves backwards in a somewhat sitting position on the flags. We took aim and fired; they were both wounded. Cronin and I dropped our shotguns in the middle of the street, dashed again for Harty's front entrance, out through the shop to the back, where we jumped on our bicycles and got clear away. Our faithful scout, Stack, after delivering his message in proper style, slipped out Harty's back way and immediately joined the crowd in the main street to witness the excitement after the shooting. The Court in Tralee did not resume that day after lunch. The Judge decided to adjourn further Court work that day. Cronin and I on our bicycles made our way through Rock Street and out of the town unmolested, cycled uphill to Kilduff, a hillside which overlooks Ballymacelligott. The R.I.C., having a strong force in Tralee that day for the Judge, sent men out all roads but the search party never got near us that day. After the shooting Martial Law was declared in Tralee and all roads leading to the town were barricaded for a period of three weeks.

Cronin and I, after the shooting, evaded arrest in Ballymacelligott. There was great activity and the R.I.C. often raided as many as thirty houses a night to capture us. We were at that time fully armed and the R.I.C. knew we were well armed.

About the end of July, 1918, we had a felt hut erected for us at Carrignafeela, Ballymacelligott, where we slept and sometimes cooked. Police and military raided the same district on several occasions but our hut was never discovered. The hut was erected on the bank of a river in the centre of a clump of brush wood and we had access to same from the river bank.

After the Tralee shooting Cronin and I always travelled armed with revolvers. We often moved into the towns of Tralee, Castleisland and Listowel, both day and night, and often had encounters with R.I.C.

In September, 1918, one night when cycling through Tralee we were rushed by five R.I.C. men, knocked off our bikes, but, getting on our feet again, got clear away, leaving our bicycles behind us. The bicycles left behind were handed up a few days later by R.I.C. to two men from Ballymacelligott who claimed them.

From September, 1918, Cronin and I occupied ourselves drilling and training the Volunteers of Ballymacelligott Company. We collected shotgun ammunition, filled cartridges and had them loaded with buckshot. The Company for this period were engaged in collecting

shotguns in the district and before the end of 1919 we had in the Company forty serviceable shotguns with fifty rounds of ammunition for each man.

In February, 1920, I went to Dublin for rifles with my sister, Kathleen, travelling by train both ways. Six rifles were got by me through I.R.A. Headquarters in Dublin. I paid cash for them but cannot recollect now from whom I got the rifles. We brought down the six rifles for the Firies Battalion, as I was at that time appointed Battalion O.C. for Firies and Cronin was appointed Company O.C. for Ballymacelligott. When we got those rifles and had trained men to use them properly we decided on an armed attack on Gortatlea R.I.C. Barracks. This attack was planned by a small group in the old hall at Ballymacelligott. Cronin and I worked out all details for the attack. The attack was planned for the 25th March, 1920, and I was in charge of the attacking party. I called a meeting of the Ballymacelligott Company at the old hall in Ballymacelligott for the night of the 25th March, 1920. They assembled, fully armed, and then I explained the job we had on hands. We had in the hall forty men from Ballymacelligott Company, fully armed, and a few men from Cordal district who had rifles. They were - Michael O'Leary, Din Prenderville and Ned McCarthy. I divided the Company into Sections for road-blocking and outpost duty, taking with me to Gortatlea Barracks for the attacking party twenty-five men who were well armed and fully trained.

In Gortatlea there were a Sergeant and six R.I.C. Constables. The Barrack was a one-storey double building and was well fortified with steel shutters, sandbags and some barbed wire.

The attack was planned in the following manner. We knew that rifle fire would have little effect owing to the manner in which the Barrack was fortified all round. Our plan was to attack the Barracks from the roof. About six feet from the Barracks stood a two-storey building, roofed with slate, which was at that time occupied by Mr. Crowe, Stationmaster, and his family. We decided to use this building for the attack as the gable of Crowe's house was well over the Barrack roof. I marched with the attacking party from the old hall to within 100 yards of the Barracks; there we halted; the hour was about 1.30 a.m. Cronin, Jim Spillane and myself proceeded from there to get Crowe and his family out of their house. Spillane knew the pathway around the Barracks pretty well as he was at that time employed as a railway porter at Gortatlea Station where the Barracks stood. With Spillane as guide, Cronin and I crept, fully armed, to the door of Mr. Crowe's house, explained to him what was on and assisted to remove the family to an adjoining house. This was all done without a hitch. We then went back to our raiding party, who were armed with bombs, petrol and explosives, and brought them on tip toe into Crowe's kitchen, having put two other Sections of men at front and back of the Barracks, fearing the R.I.C. might get out in the darkness. When

in Crowe's house we were only six feet from the Barrack wall. I took the men in Crowe's house with me upstairs and having brought with us a small ladder we climbed from the top floor through a trap door above the upper ceiling. Having got there with about twelve men we procured a light and at a given signal proceeded to break out through the slates of Mr. Crowe's house at the gable nearest the Barracks. We had equipment to do this work. When the noise of breaking slate started, the Barrack garrison started shooting and fired some Verey lights which lit up the district like day. Not until we had got through the slate roof fully and had about twelve men with guns pointing over the gable wall did I give the order to fire. The other Sections in position around the Barracks had instructions not to fire until we started. Our fire from the roof took the garrison by surprise as they had no protection from that quarter. The shooting lasted for about twenty minutes or so and then we flung bombs and petrol on to the roof. The back portion of the Barracks was on fire and after a short time an R.I.C. man came to the door and said they would surrender. I ordered my men to stay in position and with Cronin and Johnny O'Connor I came down through the trap door and we walked through the Barrack door which was now thrown open to us. The back portion of the Barracks was on fire and the place was strewn with smoke. The seven men of the garrison walked out with their hands up; four of them were wounded. The four wounded men had bullet wounds in the legs, received evidently from our

fire through the roof. We collected the arms in the Barracks and with the light of the burning building bandaged the wounds of the wounded members of the garrison and when all was over a party of our men mounted the bridge crossing the railway at the station and sang "The Soldier's Song". The equipment we captured was six rifles, two shotguns, five revolvers and a quantity of ammunition. The attack on Gortatlea Barracks had to be carried out in the shortest possible time for the following reasons. The Barrack was situated in a centre near three garrison towns, Tralee, only seven miles away, Castleisland garrison, only three and a half miles distant, Farranfore R.I.C. garrison, only four miles away, and Killarney garrison, fourteen miles. The roads were so well blocked and communications cut that reinforcements did not reach Gortatlea from Tralee until 4 a.m. same morning. After Gortatlea Barrack surrender there was no enemy post left in Ballymacelligott.

In June, 1920, a road trap mine was prepared by Paddy Reidy and myself. Reidy was at that time First Lieutenant of Ballymacelligott Company. A mine case was filled by us with fifteen pounds of home-made powder and we planned to use it as a trap mine with a sawed off single barrel shotgun and cartridge to explode it. This is claimed to be the first trap mine used against British forces in this country up to that period. At Ballydwyer, Ballymacelligott, we knocked a good sized tree right across the main Tralee/Castleisland road. On the road under this tree we dug a large hole where

we placed our trap mine. We then inserted the barrel of a sawed-off shotgun into the mine, placed a cartridge in the gun, the hammer of the gun was cocked and the gun was itself covered by a small box. From the trigger of same gun we attached a wire and then attached same wire on to the tree which was felled across the road, covered up our gun and box and the mine so that it would not be noticed. The following day three lorries of Black and Tans had to remove this tree to get the lorry through the road; immediately they lifted the tree the wire which was attached to the trigger and the tree exploded the mine as the trigger was pulled. Six of the party were wounded. This made British forces very careful afterwards about removing road obstructions. This was made the subject of an article in "An t-Oglac" at the time.

In June, 1920, an I.R.A. active service unit was formed in Ballymacelligott district and was composed of the following: John Cronin, Moss Carmody, John Leen, Johnnie O'Connor, Maurice Galvin, John Herlihy, Pat Burke, Paddy Reidy, John Brosnan, Thomas O'Connor, Jim Bailey, Denis O'Sullivan and myself. All were fully armed with rifles and revolvers and kept on whole-time duty. The Unit provided itself with a motor car and two horses with spring carts. Some of this transport was taken from Major Blennerhassett of Ballyseedy. We travelled over a big area with this equipment and never had to bother much about road trenches as we just lifted our cars across trenches on our shoulders. This Unit planned many prepared ambushes and had encounters with

enemy forces on several occasions. In August, 1920, a prepared road ambush was laid at BallymacThomas on the Tralee/Killarney road at a point just three miles from Tralee. The intention was to ambush three lorries of Black and Tans and R.I.C. which passed that way occasionally. Forty men from Ballymacelligott Company were placed in position for the attack. Twenty men of the attacking party were placed inside a stone wall on the roadside and twenty on the railway, a distance of thirty yards from the road. It was planned to stop the first lorry with an iron railway track which was placed perpendicularly on the roadside. This rail was to be dropped right across the road when the lorry reached a given point. The men stayed in position from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. There was no attack as lorries did not come that day.

In September, 1920, another prepared road ambush was planned for Ballycarthy at a point three miles from Tralee on the Tralee-Castleisland main road. About forty men from Ballymacelligott Company were placed in position for the attack. The ambush was for the purpose of engaging three lorries of R.I.C. and Tans who travelled that road from Tralee to Castleisland about one day every two weeks. The ambush did not come off as no lorries travelled that day. The road block on this occasion was also an iron rail which was to be dropped in front of the first lorry. John Cronin and I were both in charge of the above prepared ambushes.

ROAD BLOCKING AND CAPTURE OF ENEMY EQUIPMENT IN  
BALLYMACELLIGOTT FROM AUGUST, 1920.

After August, 1920, bridges on the main Tralee/Castleisland road and also the bye roads were blocked by the members of the Ballymacelligott Company. Those bridges were kept open from this to the end of the Tan war though they were often repaired by British forces. The bridges in question were Carmody's bridge, Maglass, Ballymacelligott and Ballycarthy road bridge, Ballymacelligott. British forces attempting to repair those bridges were sniped by members of Ballymacelligott A.S.U. This shooting resulted in wholesale roundup where on two occasions about 1,000 troops were engaged in the round-up. The troops were composed of military, R.I.C., Tans and Auxiliaries.

In October, 1920, Major McKinnon flung a cordon of British forces around Ballymacelligott parish for a round-up, starting in the early morning, about 4 a.m. On that day I was with an A.S.U. of ten men and we were sleeping in a dug-out right in the centre of the round-up, near Ballyfinogue, Ballymacelligott. We heard of the activity in the morning and prepared ourselves. We were fully armed with rifles and for that day we took up positions in our dug-out, which was well concealed with brushwood. British military passed close to us on either side carrying out their round-up under Major McKinnon, bringing with them all the young men of the parish to a round-up centre at Ballymacelligott Creamery. By a stroke of luck they never found our dug-out and we

had not to fire a shot. That night we decided that our A.S.U. should change its position and we travelled to Ballyfinnane, a distance of ten miles, where we billeted in the early hours of the following morning, some of us in a dug-out near Knockane. Four of us slept that night in the house of Cornelius W. Daly of Knockane. About 8.30 that morning we were aroused by members of the Daly family to tell us that the place was surrounded and that military were coming towards the house. We had not time to dress. We rushed out with our clothes in a bundle in our hands. We could see the British Tommies within thirty yards of us as we rushed through the door. We were called on to halt but we kept going. They could easily have shot us and we were lucky it was not Tans or Auxies were in that section. We joined our other comrades who had previously been with us and had slept in the dug-out, moved towards a hillside and found ourselves again that day in the centre of another big round-up which was planned again by Major McKinnon. About 800 troops were engaged in this round-up. We took up positions in an old bog with British forces all around us. They passed on either side and we were left unmolested.

Previous to above rounds-up our Unit removed military equipment, such as bacon, barbed wire, off trains travelling from Tralee to Cork. This equipment was taken by us at Gortatlea Railway Station and Ballycarthy, where trains were halted; large quantities of petrol in steel barrels were taken off the trains and

dumped in Ballymacelligott district.

ATTEMPT TO DISARM MILITARY PICKET IN CASTLEISLAND.

On 1st November, 1920, on a cattle fair day in Castleisland, twenty men from Ballymacelligott Company went to Castleisland, armed with revolvers, to disarm a military picket who took military mails each morning from Castleisland Post Office to the Barracks. I was in charge of this party and it was decided for our twenty men to take up positions in the street mingled with cattle and people and as the picket came along to mix in with them. At a given signal by me the picket was to be rushed and disarmed by my twenty men. My men got into position as the picket passed through the street armed with rifles. I walked in the centre of the picket between two lines of soldiers and my men walked on the outside of the picket at either side of them. The picket this morning was stronger than usual and, in addition, one of my men rushed out to inform me that there were six police walking behind the picket. We travelled with the picket for about 100 yards but eventually I decided not to blow the signal whistle as our party was not strong enough for the job, especially with the armed police behind who were not manned by any of my party.

That night we decided to take thirty men armed with rifles into Castleisland town, occupy houses at each side of the street and attack pickets the following

morning. I got my men into position that night about 2.30, occupying houses at either side of the main street. About thirty minutes before the military pickets were due, Father Brennan, the Parish Priest of Castleisland, who had heard of our plan, came to us and pleaded not to start shooting in the town. We insisted we would have to carry out our work but he said if we were determined to do so he would be compelled to go to the Barracks and ask the picket not to go out that morning. We decided after a while to abandon the engagement and just walked with our rifles out of Castleisland where we had transport waiting for us to bring us to Ballymacelligott.

#### BALLYBRACK SHOOTING - NOVEMBER, 1920.

In November, 1920, an order came from G.H.Q. to the I.R.A. that all Black and Tans were to be shot at sight. At that time there were two Tans - Woods and Turner - in Farranfore R.I.C. Barracks who were giving considerable trouble and terrorising the natives. My I.R.A. Unit decided to get rid of them. On the morning of the 9th November I left Ballymacelligott by horse and trap with five members of our Active Service Unit, all fully armed with rifles and revolvers. The party consisted of John Cronin, Jim Baily, Bill Diggins, Moss Carmody, Paddy Reidy and myself. In the early morning we got into the house of Ulick O'Sullivan, who was only 100 yards from the Barracks, O'Sullivan having given us permission to use his house for the attack on Tans and R.I.C. who in the daytime passed by O'Sullivan's house

on their way to Farranfore Railway Station. We waited at O'Sullivan's all that day until dark in the evening but no Tans or R.I.C. came our way from the Barracks. When darkness came we dispatched our rifles by Paddy Reidy in the horse and trap to Ballymacelligott; the other five, armed with revolvers, stayed on in Farranfore. We walked in twos from O'Sullivan's past Farranfore Barracks and learned that two armed uniformed men were in the licensed premises of Daniel O'Sullivan, quite close to the Barracks. Moss Carmody and I walked into this pub of Daniel O'Sullivan and when O'Sullivan saw us he knew us and felt that there was danger and begged us not to shoot the two R.I.C. men in his premises as he said they were two of the decentest men in the force. The R.I.C. men at the time were standing quite close to us but they never moved. We left the premises after a drink and assured O'Sullivan that we would not shoot them, that we were looking for the Tans. About half an hour later we got word that the two Farranfore Tans had gone to Killarney and would be returning to Farranfore by the night train. We decided to meet them at Ballybrack on their return journey. Ballybrack is a small Railway Station between Farranfore and Killarney. The five of us immediately boarded a goods train at Farranfore Station which was travelling to Killarney, taking with us Ulick O'Sullivan who volunteered to point out to us the two Tans as they were travelling in civilian dress. We got off the train at Ballybrack and waited there for the passenger train from Killarney to Farranfore. We stood at the end of the platform and before

the train arrived I instructed O'Sullivan to walk along the platform in front of us when the train arrived and to touch with his hand the door of the carriage in which the Tans were travelling. When the train arrived O'Sullivan walked along in front of Bill Diggins and I, behind us walked Cronin and Carmody, Jim Baily being left to board the engine to prevent the train from moving until the job was done. O'Sullivan, walking along in front, touched a carriage door with his hand and kept moving on. When we reached this carriage door I pulled the door open and Diggins and I shot the two Tans as they attempted to draw their guns. They were alone in the carriage. We pulled them on to the platform, took their arms, and the five of us travelled on the same train in the direction of Farranfore. We halted the train midway between Ballybrack and Farranfore where we left the train and travelled on foot to Firies village. From Firies we got transport to Ballymacelligott.

At Ballymacelligott that night we decided to continue our pursuit of Tans. We knew there were Tans in Castleisland. Cronin and Moss Carmody decided to go to Castleisland the following day to shoot the Tans there. In Castleisland they met Din Prenderville and Michael O'Leary of Cordal, two men who were with us in the Gortatlea attack, and the four of them that day in Castleisland Main Street shot one of the Tans. On that day I took a party of ten men from Ballymacelligott, armed with rifles, and lay in ambush at Ballyseedy, two and a half miles from Tralee, as we expected a raiding

party from Tralee to come out for reprisals after the Ballybrack shooting. Twelve lorries of R.I.C. and Black and Tans did, in fact, come out that day to Ballybrack district for reprisals. They took a lot of prisoners, burned the house of Ulick O'Sullivan, Farranfore, who had pointed out the Tans to us the previous night, and O'Sullivan only escaped with his life. He had to go on the run afterwards; they evidently got information that he was at the Ballybrack shooting. This raiding party from Tralee, out for reprisals, did not pass our way at Ballyseedy. They returned to Tralee through Farmer's Bridge, where on the same evening they shot Frank Hoffman, an active member of the I.R.A.

BALLYDWYER CREAMERY AMBUSH - 12th NOVEMBER, 1920.

On the 12th November, 1920, ten lorries of Tans and R.I.C. travelled from Tralee on the main road to Castleisland. When they reached Ballydwyer Creamery they stopped their lorries at both sides of the Creamery. Some members of the Ballymacelligott A.S.U. happened to be near the Creamery at the time and made a dash for escape. Fire was opened on them immediately by Tans and R.I.C. Two men were shot dead and two wounded, while others escaped. The two men shot were John McMahon and Paddy Herlihy; the wounded were Jack McEllistrim and Tim Walsh. At the time of the shooting I was about one mile from the Creamery with an A.S.U. of twelve men, fully armed. We heard the shooting and saw the lorries depart. We immediately got to the Creamery

to assist the wounded, placing a guard at the Tralee side of the Creamery. After being a short time in the Creamery yard we were surprised by three lorries of Auxiliaries which sailed in on us from Castleisland direction. This section was not a raiding party but was, I believe, making a tour of the country. When they saw our men take cover the lorries stopped immediately and shooting started. We had only six rifles in action but two of our party, armed with rifles, who had left the Creamery yard five minutes earlier, came to our aid and opened fire from a little hill on the Auxiliaries at 300 yards range. At the same time a lorry coming from the Tralee direction, seeing the ambush, pulled up immediately about 300 yards from the lorries which had been occupied by the Auxiliaries. The Officer in charge of the British forces, believing that they had been surrounded, rushed to his car, ordered his men to turn the lorries and they drove back into Castleisland. Our riflemen kept on firing at them as they retreated. The above engagement was described by the British later as the Battle of Ballymacelligott and showed some films of it. The fact is that one of their group did actually attempt to take a film of the ambush while it was in progress.

About February, 1921, I was appointed Vice O.C. of Kerry 2 Brigade. The Staff Officers of the Brigade at that time were: John Joe Rice, O.C.; Tom McEllistrim, Vice O.C.; Tom Daly, Adjutant; Edmond McCarthy, Quartermaster; Daniel Mulvihill, I.O. and Alexander Mason, Brigade Engineer.

CLONBANIN AMBUSH.

In March, 1921, I took a column of twenty men from Kerry No. 2 Brigade to assist the Cork I.R.A. Columns at the Clonbanin ambush.

I arrived with my men at Clonbanin about 5.30 a.m. on the morning of the ambush, the 5th of March. We were all well armed with rifles. The ambush at Clonbanin was prepared by the Cork Column leaders and while we were in position at Clonbanin in the early morning three lorries of British military passed through our position going in the Kerry direction. They passed through due to the fact that road mines which had been laid for the ambush failed to explode. Both Columns stayed in position at Clonbanin and later in the day six lorry loads of military and an armoured car coming from Kerry sailed into our ambush position. Shooting started immediately and fighting lasted for more than an hour. Several British soldiers were killed and a British General, who had been touring the country at the time, was also killed, Brigadier General Cummins.

After the ambush I brought my Column of twenty men back to Kerry through Ballydesmond.

2nd March, 1921, it was decided to form a Brigade Flying Column from Kerry No. 2 Brigade. The Column was to be composed of thirty men, drawn from different units of the Brigade. There were eight men from Ballymacelligott Company selected.

The Column assembled for training at Dunloe Gap on the 8th March, 1921, and while billeted there did a ten days' course of training in the use of rifle, revolver and bombs, also in the laying of road mines. The men were trained in the use of rifle, revolver and bombs by John Flynn, a British ex-Army man who was also a member of the Column. Instruction was given to Column men on the laying of road mines by Alexander Mason, Brigade Engineer.

After a ten days' course of training our Column, which consisted of thirty men, well armed, started on the move for action. Dan Allman of Rochfield and myself were appointed in charge of this Column; it was a joint command. On March 21st, 1921, while our Column was billeted in a district  $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Headford railway junction a dispatch came to us that a party of military troops over 30 strong had travelled that day by train from Tralee to Kenmare and were expected to return that evening. We immediately decided to ambush those military troops at Headford Junction. Our time was short to prepare as we had only an hour and a half to travel a distance of four miles to get to Headford in time for the oncoming train. We reached Headford Junction just about twelve minutes before the train arrived and took up positions at both sides of the Railway Station. The positions we occupied were only about twenty yards from where the expected train of military was to land. I was in the Stationmaster's house with four men. Dan Allman took up position in

the station at the back of a lavatory; he had two men with him. Others occupied an embankment overlooking the station. The train of military arrived from Kenmare and most of them had got on to the platform as they had to change at Headford to board the Cork train for Tralee. It was our intention to allow them all to get off. One of the military party went to the lavatory where Dan Allman and two other men were placed. Dan Allman attempted to disarm this man without shooting him but the soldier jumped aside and attempted to use his rifle. Dan Allman shot him immediately and took his rifle. The ambush started immediately and several British soldiers were shot on the main platform. Three soldiers tried to take cover in front of the engine and were shot by my party from the Stationmaster's house. They were only ten yards from us. Shooting was very brisk for a while and after about ten minutes a certain number of soldiers had taken cover under the train and were still resisting. When the ambush was on for about fifteen minutes shooting died down a little as it was difficult for our men to get sight of the soldiers. Bombs were thrown by my party from the Stationmaster's house under the train where the soldiers were taking cover. Johnnie O'Connor and his section fired bombs also at the rear end of the train. In the course of the fight the British military tried three times to use a Vicker's gun which they had erected in a railway carriage but each time only a few bursts came from this gun. The fire from our men on the railway embankment seemed to put the Vicker's gun out of action. Jim Coffey, one of our men, brought word to me

in the Stationmaster's house that Dan Allman and Jim Bailly were shot. We were then making arrangements to rush the military who had taken ambush under the train. We called on them to surrender and one of their group, a Sergeant, every time cried "Never". Then a change in the situation came. A passenger train from Cork, going to Tralee, arrived near Headford Station. On this train there were British military. The Officer in charge was standing on the footboard as the train came near Headford Station. A section of our men, Jack Shanahan, Scardeen O'Connor and others, saw this oncoming train with the military officer on the engine. They fired on the train immediately. The train stopped, military got out and attacked, opening fire on our section of men who engaged them. When word came to me of the reinforcements I decided to abandon our position. Those in the Stationmaster's house with me retreated Southwards with other men at the South side of the Station. Jim Coffey and I then crossed the line to the North side of the station to call off our men who were in position on the railway line there. We succeeded in crossing the line and found Johnnie O'Connor and his men still in position. We then retreated together along the North side of the Station, crossing the railway line again at the Kenmare side of Headford. Machine gun and rifle fire were played on us as we retreated. We joined the other section of our unit some distance from Headford Station and retreated across the hills to the South.

The ambushed party of British troops consisted of thirty men with a Vicker's gun. When the ambush was over it was discovered that twenty-five of those, including the Officer were killed or wounded. We lost two men in the fight, Dan Allman and Jim Baily. We took thirty-two men into the ambush position but ten of our party could not take part in the attack as the position they occupied was some distance from the station. Those men later served a good purpose when reinforcements arrived while the fight was on in Headford Station.

After Dan Allman's death I was in sole command of the Column. In April, 1921, I brought the Kerry No. 2 Flying Column into the Castleisland district and while billeted there two road ambushes were prepared, one at the Blackbanks, near Brosna, and the other at Glounshanoon near Castleisland. I had information that three lorry loads of R.I.C. and Black and Tans travelled one day each week between Castleisland and Brosna and Castleisland and Knocknagoshel. We waited two full days for them, once at the Blackbanks and one day at Glounshanoon, but the expected lorries did not come our way. On each occasion I had a Column of thirty-five men, fully armed.

On the 3rd June, 1921, I received a despatch from James Spillane, one of our men who was at the time employed at Gortatlea Station, informing me that thirty British military and six R.I.C. men had travelled that morning from Castleisland to Tralee and were expected to return to Castleisland that same evening. I got my Column into position immediately midway between Gortatlea

and Castleisland and decided to intercept the trainload of military and R.I.C. by removing a rail from the railway track. I placed the Column in position and at the same time procured railway tools to remove the track. One railway track was removed at a curve and we had not sufficient time to remove the rail at the other side. The train was on its way towards us and we knew the police and military were on board as Spillane had arranged to hold the train at Gortatlea if the military were not on it. He could do this by informing the driver that the track had been removed. The position we occupied was ideal for an ambush and we placed the loose rail track back in position on the line, having tied it to a strong wire with which three of our men were to displace the loose rail by pulling it aside when the train reached within a hundred yards of our position. As we lay crouched on either side of the railway ready for action the trainload of military sailed into our ambush position at good speed. The railway track was pulled out of place but, to our amazement, that train travelled along that railway line on one track. The wheels on the other side of the train rolled on the line without a track. It travelled a distance of thirty feet in that way and jumped on to the railway track at the other end of where the railway line had been disconnected by us. The train was composed of the engine, three carriages and a guard's van; all parts of the train got right on to the track again with the exception of the guard's van. The guard's van did not regain the track but tore on behind the train and got disconnected near Castleisland town.

We had only time to fire a few volleys as the train tore past us. We could scarcely believe that it was possible for a train to travel a distance of thirty feet without an iron rail at one side and jump on to the track at the other end. When the train rushed through we had to leave our ambush positions in quick time as we were only one and a half miles from Castleisland, a garrison town, and eight miles from Tralee.

The rail removed was the rail at the inside of the curve, which accounts for the train staying on the line.

LAYING OF ROAD MINE IN BALLYCARTHY - JUNE, 1921.

In June, 1921, Paddy Reidy and I prepared a road trap mine which we intended to lay at Ballycarthy bridge on the Tralee/Killarney main road. We were there with a party of ten men, having sent a scout in advance as Ballycarthy bridge was at that time well watched and guarded by British forces. Our scouts were sitting on the bridge and when we got within fifteen yards of the bridge, about 10.30 p.m., we understood the coast was clear. One of our men was carrying the mine on his back; we were walking in the centre of the road when a voice shouted "Halt" just twelve yards from us. We thought it was a joke but the order came again, "Halt, hands up". Moss Carmody and I fired in the direction of the voice, which came from inside a stone wall. Our party jumped immediately for cover to either side of the road. Fire

was opened on us at very close range. One of our party, Broder, was shot dead, and shooting continued for about fifteen minutes in the darkness. It happened that a party of military had come through the fields and taken up ambush at the bridge, heard our approach and waited for us at the ready. Our scouts sitting on the bridge were not aware of the presence of the military inside the wall quite near to where they were sitting.

About the 20th June, 1921, it was decided to form Battalion Flying Columns in Kerry No. 2 Brigade. The members of the Brigade Flying Column at that period returned to their Battalion Units and joined up with their Battalion Columns. From this period onwards I operated in the districts of Firies and Castleisland. Two weeks before the Truce I took a Column of men into Castleisland town for the purpose of attacking a curfew picket which paraded Castleisland town each night. My men occupied houses on either side of the main street and we held our positions up to 11.30 p.m. The curfew military picket did not parade that night in Castleisland.

In the period from the 1st June to the 11th July, 1921, it was difficult to ambush British military as by this time they had moved into the towns, holding strong positions, and very rarely came out in lorries except in strong force. During this period we kept them busy by laying trap mines very close to their own positions, which had the effect of making them very careful of their movements.

A few days before the Truce of 11th July, 1921, it was decided at a Brigade meeting that two large scale attacks be waged on British forces, one in Castleisland town and the other in Killorglin. Those attacks were arranged for the 10th July, 1921. The Castleisland attack took place; Column men, taking up positions on either side of the street, attacked a military picket. The fight lasted for about forty minutes; several British soldiers and an Officer were killed. Three of the I.R.A. attacking party were killed in the fight. I was not in this Castleisland attack.

The Killorglin attack, which was arranged for the 10th July, did not materialise. I was one of the Officers in charge of the attack. When our men entered Killorglin town it was found that an attack on the British military post in that town would endanger the lives of scores of civilians whose houses were within a few yards of the Barracks, and a large scale attack of the nature planned appeared to me to be too serious an undertaking on the eve of a Truce; therefore, I took responsibility for calling off the attack.

SIGNED: Thomas McEllistrim  
( T. McELLISTRIM )

WITNESSED: C. Saurin LT. COLONEL.  
( C. SAURIN )

DATE: 1st July 1953

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