

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 954

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

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**Witness**

Sean Leavy,  
Scramogue,  
Co. Roscommon.

**Identity.**

O/C. 3rd Battalion,  
North Roscommon Brigade, I.R.A.

**Subject.**

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1917-1921.

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STATEMENT BY MR. SEÁN LEAVY,  
Scramogue, Co. Roscommon.

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During the North Roscommon election in January-February, 1917, Joe McGuinness and another man from Volunteer Headquarters were organising Irish Volunteers in County Roscommon as well as campaigning for the election which acted as a cover for their activities. I joined the Volunteers at Rooskey. Joe McGuinness took me in as a member. I had not to take any oath then but gave my particulars and was issued with a membership card. I now started organising a Company in Scramogue. Plunkett's election made the task easier, as a wave of great enthusiasm existed and soon we had Companies organised in Strokestown, Cloonfree, Carnistra, Curiaghroe, Tarmonbarry, Kilbrustan, Northyard. We also got small units going in Slatta, Kilglass and Rooskey. All the Companies were very small at first.

During the election in Longford we attended meetings there and helped the Longford men. One night seventeen car loads of us went to a meeting in Longford town. This meeting was a huge success, but British soldiers' wives and families and friends (separation women they were known as, on account of receiving separation money from the British War Office) and other hooligans broke the windows in McGuinness' premises and were guarded in doing so by the R.I.C.

The units mentioned above comprised the 3rd Battalion, North Roscommon Brigade, when that unit was organised later on. We had practically no arms except a

few shotguns and a revolver or two of an obsolete type. Very little in the nature of training was done until 1918 when Ernie O'Malley came to the area. All the Companies were very small.

When the conscription scare started, our Companies expanded rapidly and soon some of them had a strength of seventy to eighty men. Most of this expansion faded out again when the crisis was over. During the scare period drill parades were frequent and well attended. We constructed dug-outs and collected arms in the area which were given to us voluntarily. We also made a census of all food supplies. We also listed bridges and culverts for destruction and made arrangements for blocking the roads, and awaited instructions from G.H.Q. to put our plans into operation.

When Ernie O'Malley arrived in the area, he went around each Company area and drilled them and gave them lectures and pep talks. I do not think he made a favourable impression on them and was not a good choice for this work. He was altogether too forcible and did not come down to their level. If he had gone into detail with them and discussed their troubles and what they could do, it would have been much better - instead he spoke like a high-ranking officer of a regular army which was unsuited to ordinary country lads.

During the General Election in 1918 we had a busy time carrying out such duties as canvassing voters, guarding meetings, acquiring transport to take the voters to the polling stations and, on the day of the voting, guarding the polling stations. Our men carried home-made batons. We found it hard to convince a lot of people to

vote Sinn Féin as they were afraid the candidate would take his seat in the British House of Parliament. We had trouble with the Redmondite supporters in a few places and had to use our batons. The R.I.C. always took the side of the Redmondites as is instanced as follows. One evening James Lennon, who was local Company Captain at the time, and I went into Strokestown. We went into a publichouse. He had one bottle of stout and I had a mineral water and, when we came out, the R.I.C. arrested Lennon and brought him to the barracks and charged him with being drunk, and he was found guilty at their local Court and fined.

The first Dáil met in early 1919 and took over the Volunteers as the Army of the country, and accepted responsibility for them. We all now had to swear an oath of allegiance to the Republic of Ireland. A lot of our men would not subscribe to this oath as they thought it savoured too much of being a secret society, and the strength of our Companies went down to about thirty. I had joined the I.R.B. about February 1918 and we had a local Circle established here. By now, most of the Volunteer officers were members of the I.R.B. and also certain selected men. This was deliberate policy on our part to have I.R.B. men in all the key positions and in civilian ones as well, where this was possible. The politicians were trying to get a controlling hold on the movement and this was Mick Collins' method for seeing that they did not, and an effective one it was. Had the politicians got control, they would probably have wrecked the movement.

I think it was early in 1919, or late in 1918, a Battalion was organised in the area. The O/C was James Ryan: Adjutant, Andy Nevin and Quartermaster; Martin Killilea. The Companies comprising the Battalion were the same except

Strokestown which by now had fallen away. They got cold feet there, so to speak. There was a garrison of British troops there, about 150 strong, and 60 police. We now had four or five service rifles, which had been bought or captured from the garrison, and about a dozen assorted revolvers of .45, .32 and .22 calibre. There were a number of shotguns available. Ammunition for all such weapons was very limited, or did not exist at all in some cases.

A greater effort was now made to get our men some training. We had not the services of any ex British Army men available to us and had to do the best we could by studying some British Army drill manuals which we succeeded in procuring. The R.I.C. surprised the local Company at drill, arrested two of them and two more had to go on the run as a result. The arrested men were given a month each in jail.

The R.I.C. now made a drive to obtain recruits for their force and succeeded in getting a few. A couple of Volunteers joined them. We effectively stopped one man from doing so. We raided the mails and found in an official letter to him a voucher to cover his journey. We reported the matter to the Brigade and they instructed us to wound him but not to kill him, as a deterrent. We put seventy grains of shot into him, cutting the sinews of his leg and making him unfit for service. The British took him away and later he was appointed to the position of a warder in an English prison. The R.I.C. were now boycotted and goods would not be supplied to them, and they had to commandeer their supplies. No one would speak or associate with them and they became very sullen and bitter.

The barracks at Cullagh was evacuated by the police and we immediately burned it down. Strokestown now became

a very strong garrison centre for the R.I.C. They continued to garrison their barracks at Tarmonbarry and Rooskey which controlled important points commanding the road crossings of the Shannon. The Volunteers now took over the policing of the country in co-operation with the Sinn Féin Courts which were everywhere operating very successfully. From now on there was never a Court held under British jurisdiction in Strokestown. An enormous amount of work now was thrown on the Volunteers and, as well as ordinary police duties, they were responsible for making arrests and detentions and giving effect to the decrees of the Courts as well as protecting the Courts while they were in session, and it must be always remembered that the Volunteers were only part-time soldiers - nearly all of them had their ordinary every-day work of life to perform. They received no pay and, in many cases, were out of pocket to pay incidental expenses. The co-operation and good will of the people was their award and all that they expected. It is still stated that the Sinn Féin Courts were the best judicial system this country ever experienced. The people had easy inexpensive access to justice without the long drawn out and costly litigation usually associated with such matters. The decisions of the Courts were remarkable for their simplicity, brevity and justice. In a case decided on in this locality two cousins disputed the division of a farm. One wanted the best of the farm as well as a right of way through the half he proposed the other man should get. The decision of the court was that he should divide the farm as he thought it should be divided and then give his cousin choice of which half he would take.

The general raid for arms was carried out in this

area as in all other parts of the country. Very little opposition was encountered and there was no necessity in any district to resort to the use of arms. Only a lot of shotguns and some cartridges were obtained and a big number of the guns were unserviceable. The local Catholic curate, who was hostile to the Volunteers, had some arms in his house. While he was saying Mass, we raided his house and secured a .38 revolver and some thirty or forty shotgun cartridges, and a shotgun and a bayonet. We obtained a good supply of shotgun cartridges as a result of these operations and we got a machine for filling cartridges and filled these with buckshot.

The North Roscommon Brigade was now organised with James Ryan of Strokestown as O/C and Seán Clancy as Brigade Adjutant. The Brigade comprised the following Battalions: 1st, Boyle; 2nd, Elphin; 3rd, Strokestown or Scramogue; 4th, Crossna or Arigna; 5th, Drumsna. The local Battalion, which was the 3rd, remained the same. Strokestown still excepted, which remained inactive up to the Truce.

When the Dáil Loan was floated, we collected £800 or £900 in the area which was a remarkable indication of the feeling of the people who were prepared to put their small savings into a fund from which few ever expected to get any return. No compulsion was put on any person to become a subscriber. Father Roddy, who was then in Strokestown, acted as receiving agent for the money.

I should have mentioned that, after the Plunkett election, a plebiscite was held to really determine whether the people wanted separation from England and a Republic for the thirty-two counties, or not. The British

authorities in their propaganda were stating that the Volunteers were only a crowd of hooligans, murderers and robbers and had no authority from the people to act as they did. Each Company Captain of Volunteers had to visit every voter in his area and ascertain and record their views. The result of this plebiscite, which was ordered by G.H.Q., was excellent and it gave G.H.Q. a great insight into the result of the forthcoming elections, and also put them in a position to counteract the British propaganda and the Volunteers to engage in warfare with the enemy forces.

The 1920 general election was a walk-over for Sinn Féin and no opposition was encountered from any source. Training of the Volunteers was now intensified and regular Battalion and Company Council meetings were held, but very little addition to our armament was received. Towards the end of 1920 an active service unit or Column was established in the Battalion area under the command of Martin Fallon. This comprised about twenty-seven or twenty-eight men who were mostly on the run - avoiding arrest. There were three or four service rifles available for the Column and the rest were armed with shotguns and a few old revolvers. The men billeted and lived on the people, mostly in the Scramogue area.

On the 5th January, 1921, Fallon took a portion of the Column to Tarmonbarry with the intention of ambushing a patrol of police there. They could not find a patrol, so they attacked the barracks there and wounded two R.I.C. men. The garrison was strengthened by Black and Tans who were in large numbers in the country by now. The Column had no casualties. On the same night the remainder of the Column



went into Strokestown under the Battalion O/C, Doherty, and I accompanied this force. It was our intention to hit up a lorry load of enemy who usually went out of barracks and would be returning about this time. We had information that the lorry was out and expected to have a crack at it. We posted our men in the different streets and also men to go into the publichouses and shoot the British that might be in them and collect what arms they had on them. We had only just arrived in the town when the lorry arrived before our men could get into position. We opened fire on it as it went through, but I doubt with any effect. Sergeant McArdle of the R.I.C. lived next door to the R.I.C. barracks and apparently, on hearing the firing, left his house to enter the barracks. As he had his hand on the barrack door, one of our lads went up to him and shot him. We now had to get out of the town as quickly as possible. Had the military lorry been three minutes later, it would have made all the difference.

Next day the Auxiliaries, military and Tans and R.I.C. raided the area around here. They arrested two Volunteers whom they abused badly. They broke all their teeth and kicked them and beat them up so much that they had to be taken to hospital for treatment. The Demesne in Strokestown at this time was occupied by a hundred of the 9th Lancers, a very crack regiment, and fifty of the East York Regiment, and there were about sixty R.I.C. and Tans in the Police Barracks. Captain Peck was in charge of the garrison in the Demesne and, in fact, in charge of all British forces in Strokestown. He was a highly resourceful officer, very efficient and capable of making quick decisions and acting rapidly. We raided the mails and found therein a letter from Capt. Peck to his wife in

England in which he stated that things were well under control in that area, and all the Shinnars of any note had been picked up, and that Mason, Fallon and I had left that area. He also enclosed for her a copy of his "Will". We sent the letter back to Capt. Peck through the post and told him we were glad to see he had his affairs settled up. On another occasion, on raiding the mails, we found an order to the Depot from Sergeant Hopkins of the R.I.C. for a new uniform and giving his measurements. We returned the letter to him telling him we would provide him with a wooden one.

Capt. Peck took some of his Lancers out to Scramogue which is only a short distance from Strokestown and, after searching around, publicly announced at the Post Office there that, if any of his men were shot or molested, he would burn every house in Scramogue. Some time previous to the ambush at Scramogue we picked up in the mail a communication from Lieut. Tennant, who was also one of the garrison in Strokestown, a reply to what was apparently a communication from the British Director of Intelligence in Dublin, asking for a report on what was considered to be likely ambush positions on the road between Longford and Strokestown. Lieut. Tennant, who was the Intelligence Officer in Strokestown, stated that the only ambush position on the road was at the Post Office in Scramogue. He stated that they had no knowledge of any ambushes being planned and did not anticipate any. The Post Office mentioned is about half a mile on the Longford side of where the ambush was carried out and is not a very suitable site. The military had examined this spot very carefully some time previously and had paid great attention to a hen-house. This hen-house had loopholes for allowing the hens access

to the woods close by. They apparently thought it had been designed purposely that way to facilitate ambushing.

Some time towards the end of 1920 we also raided the mails which were conveyed in a horse van. I took up a position at a point on the road about 300 yards on the Longford side of the Post Office at Scramogue and put a man at the Post Office to give a warning if there was any danger. The mail car had a cycle escort this evening but I was unaware of that. The escort waited outside the Post Office while the local mail was being dealt with there. The escort delayed at the Post Office and allowed the van to proceed on its own for some distance, as they could catch up with it very quickly. When the van reached my position - still unaware that there was an escort down the road - I stopped it and took three mail bags off it. The driver of the van said to me, "You are caught at last. They are behind me." This was my first indication of danger. I got into the wood, bringing the mail bags with me, and the escort passed along the road on their cycles.

The postman driver was dismissed the next day and replaced by a new man, an ex British army soldier, incidentally, named Leavy. I had a man in the Post Office the following evening when this man arrived to hear what would be said. Leavy severely criticised McCann, the previous driver, for losing the mail and stated that he would not be held up as he would use his gun, and blew off a lot about what he would do with the so-and-so's if they tried to hold him up. Five evenings later we held up Leavy. This time the cycles had been dispensed with and an escort on a lorry was substituted. This lorry, of necessity, had to stop and move in bounds after the horse van. During one of its stops we held up the van, took

Leavy off it and brought him up a narrow lane. We searched him but found nothing, and we then gave him a good hiding for what he had said in the Post Office in Scramogue. We had taken the mails off the van and now got away across country. The tender or lorry escort had now come up to join the van and, on learning what had happened, they tried to follow us across country, but it was no use as we had excellent cover for our getaway. It seemed very foolish, but then the British were noted for doing foolish things, to be escorting a horse van with a lorry when they could have put the mails on the lorry <sup>INSTEAD OF</sup> ~~and~~ providing us with facilities to make a laugh of them and play cat-and-mouse with them.

Seán Connolly of the North Longford Brigade had been sent by G.H.Q. to Roscommon to re-organise and generally buck up that area. Connolly was undoubtedly one of the great guerilla leaders that the I.R.A. had so far produced, and his sojourn in Roscommon had borne good fruit. The Battalions had been re-organised and he had instilled a high sense of morale, including confidence in their officers, into the men and had helped to get together at last a small supply of armament to start offensive operations. After re-organising Roscommon, Connolly was transferred for the same duty to Leitrim. He had asked me to apply to G.H.Q. to have him sent back to Roscommon, but said to me, when he was taking his leave of me, that he had a strong presentiment that we would never meet again. Some time after going to Leitrim, he was dead as well as five of his comrades. He and his comrades, sad to relate, had been betrayed to the enemy. One of his betrayers was promptly executed and the other made good his escape to England where he did not survive his treachery long. He was crushed to death at his own doorway by a runaway lorry.

The Roscommon I.R.A. were anxious to avenge his death and, in addition to this, it was imperative that something in the nature of immediate action should take place in the County to divert enemy attention from Longford and Leitrim areas where the enemy pressure was extremely heavy at the time. Seán McKeon had given the enemy in Longford a heavy hammering and the people and the Volunteers there were under continual pressure.

Michael Dockery, who was now O/C of the North Roscommon Brigade, called a conference to discuss ways and means of doing this. At the conference he offered £50 for the purchase of arms to the Battalion that first submitted a feasible plan for attack on the enemy and then carried it out. He also promised to stage another ambush immediately after the first in another area to call off enemy pressure. Both of these promises he fulfilled.

Following this conference I called together the officers of the 3rd Battalion, of which I was now O/C, and laid before them plans which had already been formulated for an ambush at Scramogue some two miles east of Strokestown on the Longford-Strokestown road. The ground was well known to me, as it was within eighty yards of my own home. In fact, it was unlikely that the house would survive the ambush for more than a couple of hours, as was pointed out to me at the Brigade conference. The ambush position was approved by the officers of the Battalion, and it was suggested that the 3rd Battalion of the South Roscommon Brigade, which was a neighbouring unit, be asked to take part in the ambush.

Martin Fallon, who was in charge of our Column, and

I arranged a conference with Pat Madden and Luke Duffy of the 3rd South Roscommon Battalion which took place at my house. It was at this conference that the proposal received final approval and plans were made for a joint attack by both Battalions. Scramogue lay almost on the boundary between the two Brigade areas and was as easy of access to the men from the 3rd South as it was to the men from the northern area. The area consists of wide rolling plains devoid of all cover, the large fields separated only by low stone walls and banks that afforded very little cover from view and none to concentrated enemy fire. The first essential of a successful guerilla action is the ability to break off the action as you require and a covered line of retreat to get away. The terrain around Roscommon Town, with its big open plains and facilities for long range fire, did not provide these facilities. Nevertheless this did not prevent the 3rd South Battalion from carrying out an ambush at Four-Mile-House.

One of the problems which usually confronted a commander when planning an ambush was missing in regard to Scramogue - that of finding a target - would the enemy come that way? The road through Scramogue was one of the main highways for military traffic from the garrison town of Longford to North and West Mayo, crossing the Shannon at Tarmonbarry five miles south-east of the ambush position. Military lorries passed at almost hourly intervals but, owing to the nature of the terrain, only traffic going eastwards could be attacked with any hope of success.

The ambush position chosen was in itself a strong one and the great danger to the attackers lay in the proximity of enemy reinforcements which were at hand barely a mile away in Strokestown. There were also police and

Tans in Elphin, and large garrisons in Roscommon Town, Tarmonbarry, Rooskey and Longford, while Athlone had a huge garrison of all arms - all within easy access of Scramogue by motor transport. The Lancers in Strokestown offered the greatest potential menace. A well-officered cavalry could play havoc with the withdrawal of the I.R.A. Columns across country, particularly as most of our men were only armed with shotguns and short-range weapons. The Lancers were commanded by Captain Sir Alfred Peek, Bart., D.S.O., a capable and vigorous soldier, of an arrogant and bullying disposition, who had declared that, if one of his men were injured, he would not leave a house standing within five miles.

It was decided to mount the attack in the early hours of Spy Wednesday, March 23rd, 1921. The Column from the South area was picked and armed by Luke Duffy, Frank Simons and Pat Madden and came in small numbers to the assembly area between 2 a.m. and 6.30 a.m. The men of the North Roscommon, picked by Martin Fallon and myself, assembled about the same time, and food was provided by my parents and by James Early and his sister. The total strength of all ranks contributed fairly evenly by the two Battalions was thirty-nine. The armament consisted of seventeen rifles, two or three revolvers and twenty shotguns with slugged cartridges. All the Companies had been alerted and, during the early hours, all roads leading to the ambush position were blocked except those leading through Strokestown to Sligo via Elphin and to Ballina via Tulsk.

The approach to Scramogue from Strokestown is along a straight lowlying road with level marshy fields on either side. At Scramogue the road ascends the northern flank

of Slieve Bawn in a double bend. The place was a known danger point, but captured documents revealed that the enemy considered the most likely ambush position to be the wooded area at Scramogue Post Office, some five hundred yards or so on the Longford side. The ambush position chosen was at the road junction just north of the T in Treanacreeve on the half-inch Ordnance Survey Map of the area. To the east of this the land rises rapidly and, as will be seen by the map, the road takes a sharp turn to the north-east so that an approaching motor vehicle would have to reduce speed considerably. On the bye road running south-west from the junction there were a number of houses, including my own and Early's. The ones near the junction were on much higher ground and gave a good commanding view of the road from Strokestown. On the south side of the road junction the fence was considerably higher than the main carriageway, consisting of an earthen bank. Inside this bank was a ditch or trench which provided excellent cover and a good firing position. A house on the east or same side of the road at this point, through front and back doors, gave access to a sunken lane which ran roughly eastwards and leads to the lower slopes of Slieve Bawn. This laneway was fenced on either sides by high banks topped by hedges, and the entrance to it was completely hidden from the main road by the house mentioned. The house near the road junction and on the east side of the bye road and which commanded the main road from Strokestown was suitably loopholed and in it there were posted ten shotguns, and in the trench previously mentioned there were six riflemen. A sketch of the ambush area can be found in the book - "With the I.R.A. in the Fight for Freedom".

To cover our flanks, four men with rifles were placed at a point where the bye road and the sunken lane meet, while two men with rifles took up position at the bend on



the sunken lane on higher ground. This protected our ~~right~~<sup>LEFT</sup> flank which was our line of retreat. We were not concerned about our right flank because, even if the enemy did encroach there, it would not be of much advantage to them and would not interfere with our withdrawal, and was well blinded from our line of retirement. The people were evacuated from the houses which would be in the combat area and placed in Early's house down the bye road under guard of two men. The main road just short of the ambush area was bounded by low stone walls which would prove an obstruction to ~~an~~ enemy, should he be halted at this point, and affording him no cover as they ran at right-angles to our firing position.

With the coming of daylight everything was in readiness. The men had been fed and were in good spirit. Final orders were issued and combat positions were occupied. Arrangements had been made to guard and block the main road from Longford which ran at our rear to safeguard against surprise from that direction. No one knew what target would appear, but the orders were clear and every man knew precisely the circumstances under which they were to open fire.

Meanwhile things in Strokestown garrison were early astir, as we learned afterwards. Captain Peek had ordered the Black and Tans, between whom and the military, relations were none too good, to provide a lorry and escort at 7 a.m. to bring two Tans, who were under arrest for smashing the windows of Elphin Church, to Longford for courtmartial. The Tans had 'phoned to say they could not start the lorry, and Captain Peek decided to provide his own escort and transport, and in a few minutes they were ready - a sergeant and four men of the Lancers and the

two prisoners, who were in civilian attire, and the driver. Captain Peek decided to travel on the tender himself and also took with him Lieutenant Tennant who was Acting Intelligence Officer. As they were about to start, the Tans in their lorry turned up and Captain Peek decided to take them also. It was about 7 a.m. when the two lorries left Strokestown, the Tan lorry leading but pulling very badly, and Captain Peek's lorry now took the lead and was followed by the Tans about six hundred yards behind. When the first, or Captain Peek's lorry, had reached a point some short distance from our ambush position, fire was opened on it by all arms. The lorry proceeded a short distance and then crashed into the wall on the side of the road. A hotchkiss machine gunner on the lorry got off a few ineffective bursts of fire before he was put out of action. In a few minutes it was all over. Lieutenant Tennant received a fearful abdominal wound from which he died the same day. Captain Peek succeeded in staggering some hundred yards before he collapsed and died on the road. The only men to escape being hit were the two prisoners, which was extraordinary. The hotchkiss gunner was severely wounded, as were one or two others, while the remainder were dead or dying. Meanwhile our riflemen higher up on the hill at our rear engaged the Tan lorry which had halted about six hundred yards or so on the road back towards Strokestown. In a short time the engine of this lorry came to life and, turning around on the road, made with all the speed it could muster back to Strokestown instead of coming to the aid of Captain Peek and his men and, on reaching Strokestown, made hasty calls for aid to Roscommon and Athlone.

The brief action had been a complete success, with no I.R.A. casualties. The enemy force had been

practically wiped out and we had captured some valuable booty which included five rifles, two revolvers and, greatest of all, a hotchkiss gun with ammunition. Unfortunately none of the Volunteers, not even some ex-British Army servicemen amongst us, were able to operate the gun. All the enemy arms were collected and the damaged tender or lorry was sprinkled with petrol and set on fire, and our withdrawal began. The Tans in Strokestown showed no inclination to enter the fray again and the Lancers did not appear, probably because Captain Peek, when he took Lieut. Tennant with him, had deprived them of the only officer capable of taking decisive action in his absence. Whatever the reason, troops and police from Roscommon travelling via Tulsk and via Killeeran, Ballagh and Carraghroe were on the scene as soon as the local troops, and we had thus gained a valuable half-hour's grace. British troops coming from Longford had been unable to pass our road blocks. I had gone back to check on the blocks on the Longford road some short time before the ambush started and so swift had been the action and clearing up that it was almost over by the time I got back.

The dispersal of our force proceeded according to plan. Most of the North Roscommon men dispersed to their homes, while the South Roscommon men moved off by the sunken lane in the direction of the Shannon. It was only then that it was discovered that the two unwounded men in civilian dress, who had been captured from the lorry, were in fact Black and Tans under arrest. The military at Strokestown had at this time a number of I.R.A. and civilian prisoners in their camp there, and at first it was thought that the two men might be some of them. Unfortunately for them, these men had seen the faces and learned the names of many of our men in the Column so that, should they escape or be released, the life of every man

in the Columns would be in their hands if captured by the enemy. The British shot or hanged every soldier of the Republic found in arms against them, and this refusal of the British to observe the rules of war was to cost the two unfortunate Tans their lives. No responsible commander could expose his men to such terrible risks and, accordingly, the two men were shot. It was a hard decision to make, but there was no alternative. In justice to the men, it must be recorded that they met their deaths bravely.

When the troops from Roscommon arrived on the scene the usual intensive comb-out of the district took place. Two members of the North Roscommon - B. Nangle and P. Mullooly - had, contrary to orders, delayed in the vicinity of Carraghroe and were captured while emerging from a publichouse where they had gone. Isolated groups of I.R.A. men, trying to make good their own escape, heard the shots fired at the men but were powerless to intervene. The two men were conveyed to Strokestown military barracks and subsequently to Athlone. In both places they were severely beaten up, but they remained staunch and gave away no information, but documents captured on one of them revealed that his brother was an officer of the I.R.A. Both of them also were in possession of revolvers when caught. The brother of the Pat Mullooly mentioned was taken out of his house the next day by R.I.C. and Tans from Roscommon and shot dead after interrogation. This was the only casualty the I.R.A. suffered as a result of the ambush.

On the night of the ambush the Coffeys, Murphys, Treacys and Earlys, with my parents and other members of my family, were arrested and taken to Strokestown military barracks where they were interrogated and kept overnight

in an open shed. Next day they were conveyed to Athlone barracks where they were again interrogated. Needless to say, they all proved faithful to the I.R.A.

The Scramogue ambush had far-reaching consequences. First of all, the very peculiar behaviour of the Black and Tan lorry on that morning convinced the military that, in some way, the Tans had suspected an ambush and had let Captain Peek and his men go to their death. No one will ever know the truth of this but, on the face of it, it seems unlikely, but the military firmly believed it and, as a result, relations between them, which as I already mentioned were none too good, became strained to breaking point, to our great advantage who fostered this dissension by every means in our power. We wrote to the Officer Commanding the Military in Strokestown, sympathising with them on the death of the two officers and men and stating that it was unfortunate that they had come under the circumstances they did, as it was the Black and Tans we were really after. The military suspected treachery on the part of the Tans and for some time it was unsafe for the Tans to appear on the streets in Strokestown when the military were out of their camp. The two men of ours who were captured were Mullooly and Nangle. Mullooly was charged with murder but succeeded in escaping from Athlone barracks before being brought to trial. Nangle was charged also of some lesser offence and received a sentence of I think eighteen months. Contrary to Captain Peek's vaunted threats to burn every house around the area as stated previously, no reprisals were carried out by the British forces other than the shooting of Mullooly's brother.

Scramogue was followed by another blow which well

and truly shook the already low morale of the Crown forces. Death sentence had already been passed on a local man who was working for the British as a secret service agent and the order confirming his execution had already been received from our G.H.Q. some days before the Scramogue affair. In order not to draw attention on the area and to show our contempt for them, we deliberately postponed the execution until after the ambush had taken place, and then it was carried out almost on the spot where the ambush took place. The lesson was taken to heart by the enemy and no officer was found to order reprisals. Even my own house remained immune. Again, the British acted foolishly. They took the body of the dead agent and gave him a military funeral, thus confirming in the people's mind that the man was a spy and working for the British.

The Brigade O/C was true to his word and paid over the fifty pounds promised to the 3rd Battalion. It was used to purchase four Lee Enfield rifles and a case of bombs from G.H.Q. Three days after Scramogue the second and promised ambush took place near Keadue, dealing another blow to the enemy and relieving the pressure on the Scramogue and 3rd Battalion area. Soon after this, the Brigade O/C was himself captured and taken to Boyle military barracks, which was then garrisoned by three Companies of the Bedfordshire Regiment. He subsequently escaped from there, with the aid of Corporal McGlackin, a member of the garrison who was friendly with Miss Maggie Judge, a member of the Cumann na mBan in Boyle and who lived in Main Street. McGlackin was taken to England and courtmartialled and, although they failed to prove a case against him, he was kept in prison for about six months and then discharged from the army. He returned to Boyle

in the Spring of 1922 and married a girl from there, and still lives near Boyle. Incidentally, Sergeant Hopkins of the R.I.C., mentioned previously in regard to the "wooden suit", escaped at Scramogue by being in the second or Black and Tan lorry.

A patrol of Tans from the barracks in Tarmonbarry were in the habit of leaving barracks and proceeding a few miles in the direction of Strokestown, and we decided to hit up this patrol. Fallon and I decided that we would take up a position so as to get between the patrol and the barracks, thus ensuring that they could not escape back to barracks when fired on, while a small party would keep reinforcements from leaving the barracks. On the night that we went into position the patrol, instead of coming towards Strokestown as expected, crossed over the Shannon and into Longford, thus putting us completely "off-side". The position was now different from what we had expected it to be, and we had to "about face" to meet them. We opened fire on them when they came into range and succeeded in wounding two of them. The remainder escaped.

An R.I.C. man from Rooskey began keeping company with a girl in Slatta. At this time the British had ordered that all I.R.A. men captured under arms were to be shot, and Mick Collins countered this by issuing instructions to the I.R.A. that any member of the British forces captured, armed or otherwise, was likewise to be shot. We placed two men in Slatta to intercept this R.I.C. man. They successfully held him up but, on being searched, the only arms he had on him was a bomb. We brought him to South Roscommon and handed him over to the I.R.A. there, pending instructions from our G.H.Q. as to his disposal. We reserved the right to say yes or no, as to whether he

would be executed. The South Roscommon men executed this man the next day without waiting for confirmation. We were severely rapped on the knuckles by G.H.Q. over this.

Thomas McGowan of Tarmonbarry, who was not a Volunteer, was shot by some of our men on the 4th July, 1921. He was being commandeered by them for the purpose of blocking roads. I instructed inquiries immediately and discovered that it was the outcome of a local family feud. I had the two men courtmartialled, which sentenced them to deportation. They were deported to England from where they went later to America. I went to McGowan's people and apologised to them for what had happened and explained to them what action we had taken and, although it was small recompense for the dead man, they were satisfied.

I took over charge of the 3rd Battalion, North Roscommon Brigade, in January, 1921. Sean Connolly at that time was re-organising the Roscommon area, and it was he who appointed me to be Battalion O/C. Michael Dockery was appointed Brigade O/C, James Murphy, Brigade Adjutant, and James Casey, Brigade Quartermaster. For two years and nine months I was on the run and slept most of that time in dug-outs. When the Truce came on the 11th July, 1921, I was glad for the respite, although none of us expected that it would hold for long. We had been too long accustomed to England and her treachery to believe that she would deal fairly with us now. How <sup>did</sup> they ever consent~~ed~~ to withdraw their forces from the country - and this was particularly brought home to me afterwards when we were taking over Strokestown and Athlone Barracks from them. There was the spick and span might of an Empire handing over its institutions to a ragged, poorly trained



and, above all, very poorly armed force as ours was. I doubt if the Truce had broken that we could have continued to oppose them for very long. There did not seem to be any hope of getting arms, and what ammunition we had would have been expended in a very short while with very little hope of replacement. Despite all this, the Truce found our men in great spirit and the whole drawback was lack of arms and ammunition.

Intelligence sections were organised and operating in the Battalion and Companies prior to the Truce. A complete check was kept on all enemy movements and individuals in the area, and a complete verbal file could be obtained on any individual within a short space of time. We had the Post Office in Rooskey tapped, and Mrs. Cullen there supplied us with copies of all telegrams coming from Dublin to Elphin and vice versa to the enemy garrisons. Such messages were always in code and, as we had not the key for deciphering them, they were always forwarded on to Mick Collins in Dublin. We tried to get the same done in the Post Office in Strokestown but could not get anyone to take the risk there, although they were willing to do so after the Truce. We also got an R.I.C. man in the barracks there to work for us. Doherty was his name, and he had been detailed by his own O.C. to perform the same sort of work for them.

There was only one spy dealt with in the area. This was the man previously mentioned. Our Intelligence section kept him under observation for some considerable time and recorded all his movements and contacts. He passed his information to a bank agent in Strokestown. Collins sanctioned the spy's execution. He had means of finding out about such men which were unknown to us at the time. During the Truce I was one day in Strokestown and standing on the footpath. The bank agent came along

on his bicycle and, whether he thought I was waiting for him or not, he fell off the cycle at my feet and cried out, "Have mercy on me. Don't shoot!" I had no intention of shooting him but it showed his guilty mind was annoying him. He was agent for the Northern Bank in Strokestown and it was there that the British officers kept their accounts and, in this way, he had an ideal cover for his activities.

We were suspicious that a man from Slatta was a British Intelligence agent. We dressed two men in British Army uniforms and sent them to him. They staged a bit of a raid in the area and generally conducted themselves in an objectionable manner before proceeding to him. His was the last house visited. They acted nicely to him and asked him if he would work for them. He agreed to do so and they fixed up details with him. We reported the matter to Collins who ordered him to be shot. The man disappeared the following day after our men visited him and we could not trace him. He apparently suspected that we were trying to trap him. He was never heard of again.

The British tried to work the same thing on us. On one occasion three men, dressed in civilian attire and leggings like the dress of a lot of men who were in Flying Columns, visited my home looking for me. They told my mother they had an important despatch for me and that it was imperative that they should get in touch with me. I had warned my mother to be on her guard against this sort of thing, and indeed it was seldom she knew of my whereabouts. She was suspicious and told them she had no knowledge of where I was. They tried by every plausible means to get the information and, on realising that it was no use, they abused her, using very filthy language which confirmed her suspicions. When they had left, she heard a lorry start down the road and drive away.

On another occasion I had arranged to meet my sister who was bringing some change of laundry to me. After giving me the stuff, a patrol of R.I.C. saw her and got down and fired at her, but did not hit her. They followed her into the house and were amazed that she had not been hit.

We had a small circle of I.R.B., about twenty-five, in the Brigade area. They were all Volunteers. The principal work of the circle was to hold the Volunteers together for the I.R.B. principals and to get I.R.B. men into all the key positions in the Volunteers and civilian appointments where this was feasible, such as, the Local Government Councils, etc. Meetings of the circle were usually held after Brigade Council meetings.

The only munitions made locally were buckshot for loading into shotgun cartridges and concrete mines. Very little explosive was available in the area. We had three good size dug-outs constructed in the area, capable of holding about twelve men each. For beds we used straw laid on boards. They were, of course, very damp and it was amazing how we did not contract rheumatism and other such complaints from sleeping in them. The best site for a dug-out was on the bank of a stream with the exit through the water. In this way you did not make tracks and it was not so easily traced.

SIGNED:

Sean Leavy

DATE:

2<sup>nd</sup> June 54

(Sean Leavy)

2nd June 54.

WITNESS:

Matthew Barry Comd't

Matthew Barry, Comd't.

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