

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURÓ STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1023

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

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Witness

William Keane,
3 Beau Street,
Waterford.

Identity.

Vice-Comd't. East Waterford Brigade,
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STATEMENT OF WILLIAM KEANE

3 Beau St., Waterford.

I was born in Dunhill, Co. Waterford, in the year 1895. My people were farm labourers and I was one of a family of twelve children. We received the ordinary National School education.

In 1915, when I was a member of the local hurling and football team, we used to get an occasional copy of a little national paper called "The Spark" which was edited, I think, by Sean MacDiarmada, a signatory of the Proclamation of Easter Week, 1916. This little paper was, I might say, my first contact with a national movement of independence. We used sit around the fire at nights discussing the articles written in "The Spark" and I believe that what I read in it was responsible for any little bit of work I afterwards did in the fight for our freedom against the British.

Although there was a company of National Volunteers (Redmond's Volunteers) in Dunhill in 1915, I didn't feel like joining; but, instead, a couple of us bought a .22 rifle and ammunition and used to have target practice on our own. We were really opposed to the National Volunteers even before the split in the Volunteer movement came in 1915, because we were always of the opinion that John Redmond, the M.P. for Waterford and head of the Volunteers, was no good and that, under his leadership, the National Volunteers would never put up a fight for our freedom.

We kept our little group of eight men or so together up to the time of the insurrection of 1916, all the time practising with the .22 rifle, but we took no part at all in the Rising, for the simple reason that we never heard a word about it coming off until the Tuesday of Easter Week, 1916. Even then, we weren't at all sure of what was happening and it was well

over by the time we realised what was really happening. In any case there wasn't much we could do to help because we had only an odd shotgun or two between the lot of us.

Following the Rising, we started to organise the company in about June of 1916. About 30 men from the Dunhill area enrolled and we started drilling. Our captain was Jimmy Power of Ballycraddock. We had two parades a week and the use of the .22 for practice on Sundays. Nearly all the lads in the company belonged to the local G.A.A. hurling and football clubs. This went on until early in 1917 when it was decided to make a few pikes as we were terribly short of arms. The pikes were made by a local blacksmith named Tomasín Bocht - Tom Power. Tom was an old Fenian himself. The pike-heads were made of steel, brought to a razor edge by Tomasín and fitted with spruce handles which made them very light to use. They had an 18-inch blade and were far superior to any bayonet. About 100 of these pikes were made and were intended for use in close quarter work against the British military. We drilled with the pikes and practised bayonet charging with them, but I'm sorry to say we never got an opportunity afterwards to use them on the enemy because we never got close enough to them to give them a taste of poor old Tom Power's weapons.

In or around this time - the Spring of 1917 - I remember and that Jim Norris, a lieutenant of our company, and myself attended a Sinn Fein Convention which was held in Will Cullinane's barn in Newtown, Kilmacthomas, Co. Waterford. I believe that this was the first Sinn Fein Convention held in the county.

Some time in the summer of 1917, Jimmy Power ('Jimmy Tomasín') of Ballycraddock, who was O/C. of the battalion, was in touch with Sean Matthews of Waterford about the I.R.B. Sean was, I believe, the head of the I.R.B. in Waterford then. Jimmy spoke to me about joining. I agreed to join, so myself and Jimmy McGrath, another Dunhill man, were sworn in by Sean Matthews in a house at Ballycraddock.

We used meet about once a month in Jimmy Power's house at Ballycraddock where we discussed the articles written in the papers "Nationality" and "The Spark" and had a talk about what new members we should enrol in the I.R.B. and the question of how we could get hold of a few guns.

At the end of 1917, we had organised the company to a strength of about forty men and we were active in drilling and training generally. I suppose we would have about a dozen shotguns in the company at that time. I remember well the first public parade of the company in late 1917. Four men from the Kilmacthomas area were being released from gaol after serving a sentence of a month for dumping a British recruiting sergeant into the Mahon river at Kilmacthomas and they were greeted by large crowds on their return home. The Dunhill Company did not carry any arms on the occasion and no opposition was offered by the local R.I.C. In any case the lads didn't need any weapons as one Dunhill man could break any two R.I.C. men in halves with his bare hands.

In February of 1918 the Dunhill Volunteers were ordered into Waterford city to help in the election campaign of Doctor Whyte, the Sinn Fein candidate, on instructions from a man named O'Kelly from Dublin who was in charge of Volunteers on duty for this election in Waterford. The man opposing Dr. Whyte was Willie Redmond, a brother of John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Party in the British House of Commons. The situation in Waterford at the time was simply shocking. The Redmondite mobs, mainly composed of ex-British soldiers and their wives - and the pig buyers from the Ballybricken district of Waterford city, carried on in a most blackguardly fashion. Anybody connected with Sinn Fein were brutally assaulted with sticks, bottles, etc. and it was impossible for Sinn Fein speakers to give election addresses or for canvassers to do any work. As a result, it was decided to call in Volunteers from the

neighbouring counties to help to protect our people in Waterford city.

The police in Waterford did nothing to help keep any sort of order; in fact, they openly encouraged attacks on republicans and stood by and laughed when republicans were being brutally beaten up by gangs of Redmondite followers, who, more often than not, were in the majority of twenty to one. When, however, a few republicans went to fight back, the police then went in with their batons, not on the Redmondite mob, but on the few republicans who were hopelessly outnumbered always.

On the eve of the polling in February 1918, the Dunhill company marched the 10 miles into Waterford headed by their fife and drum band and reported to the Volunteer Hall in Thomas St., Waterford, at 10 a.m. on polling day. We had a few revolvers in the party. I myself had a .38 revolver and the remainder of the company of about 40 men carried hurleys as weapons of defence. We received instructions from Mr. O'Kelly - the Dublin man in charge - to proceed to the polling station at Henry St., Waterford, and to remain on duty there until the station closed for the polling at 9 p.m. that same night. We were also ordered to provide an escort for the ballot boxes going from the station to the Waterford Courthouse. We did as we were ordered and returned about 10 p.m. to the Metropole Hotel (near the bridge at the Quay, Waterford) which was being used as a headquarters by the Sinn Fein election workers.

When we arrived at the Metropole, we found it being mobbed by a crowd of Redmond's supporters from Ballybricken who were trying to burn the place. Amongst those in the hotel were Eamon de Valera, Arthur Griffith, Sean Milroy and Darrel Figgis. There were three roads leading to the Metropole. The Dunhill Company of Volunteers were drawn four deep across Bridge Street. The Dungarvan, Co. Waterford, Company under Pax Whelan were across Mary St., and a company from Bagenalstown were placed

across the quay about five yards from the Metropole Hotel and in front of it.

At about 11.30 on that night of the polling, Inspector Mansfield of the R.I.C. ordered a baton charge on our company but we stood up to it and didn't break ranks. We did not use guns on the police; we took them on with our fists and hurleys. About midnight I remember a Volunteer captain named Cuddihy of Fermoy, Co. Cork, taking charge of our company. He was dressed in full Volunteer officer's uniform and carried a revolver in a holster.

The Mayor of Waterford at the time, Alderman David McDonnell, and the High Sheriff, Mr. Thomas Donnelly, came on the scene about this time with a view to settling matters between the Volunteers and the R.I.C. in case of further bloodshed. The R.I.C. wanted all Volunteers removed off the streets but Commander O'Kelly refused to agree to this. While the talks were going on, the R.I.C. were drawn up in lines facing each Volunteer unit in the vicinity of the Metropole Hotel. No agreement was come to, with the result that the Dunhill Company remained in position until the early hours of the following morning when the R.I.C. withdrew.

About 4 o'clock in the morning a telephone message was received in the Waterford Post Office to the effect that a British Regiment, the Scottish Borderers, were coming on by special train from the Curragh, Co. Kildare. This message was passed on to Comdt. O'Kelly in the Metropole by a man named Joe Neilan of Dunmore, Co. Waterford, a telephone official and a strong republican. Comdt. O'Kelly then gave orders that the country Volunteers, who were drafted into the city to help in the elections, should be sent out of town immediately. All Volunteers then set out to get to the nearest railway station in the county en route to their homes. Those who couldn't get home split up into small parties and were distributed in

friendly houses all over the city. The Dunhill company marched back home accompanied by their band and dispersed.

During the summer, autumn and winter of 1918 I was engaged in the usual drilling and training activities of the company. I and others of the company were detailed for duty in Waterford city on the occasion of the General Election of December 1918. This election was fought out on similar lines to the by-election in February of the same year. Dr. Whyte was again the Sinn Fein candidate and the same blackguardism was carried on by the Redmondite mobs. As a man from a flying column said to me years afterwards, he had tougher fighting in Waterford during these elections than ever he had with the 'column'.

I remained with the Dunhill Company until October 1919 when I got a job with the Waterford Corporation and came into the city where I joined D/Company of the Volunteers. Sean Matthews of Waterford was commandant of the battalion (3rd Bn.) the late J.D. Walsh was Vice-Commandant; the late Paddy Brazil, Town Clerk of Waterford, was battalion adjutant, and Michael O'Neill, a railway clerk, was our company captain.

I helped to organise the company which had fallen away a bit in numbers and we succeeded in bringing the strength up to about 30 or 40 men and I held no rank at this time.

My first active service with D/Company, 3rd Battalion, East Waterford Brigade, took place in the month of July 1920. On the orders of the Battalion O/C., Sean Matthews, we were instructed to destroy three vacated R.I.C. Barracks at Callaghane (4 miles east of Waterford), Holycross (3 miles north of Waterford) and Slieverue, Co. Kilkenny (4 miles north east of Waterford). All the attacks were to take place on a particular Saturday night.

On that night I was asked by "Baker" Morrissey, captain of the Ferrybank (Waterford) Company, to help in destroying

the new police barracks at Slieverue. The barracks was recently built and it was expected that a strong force of R.I.C. would take up duty there any day. As the Ferrybank men had no experience of handling explosives and as I had, because of the work I had done blasting in quarries for the Co. Council, I agreed to give a hand although the district was outside my company area. I got about 5 lbs of gelignite from a County Council quarry and brought it across the River Suir to the Ferrybank Lads, about 10 of whom were assembled under "Baker" Morrissey, their captain. I put five charges in the barracks at Slieverue and soaked some sacking in paraffin oil which they had brought along. I set the five fuses off in each of the four corners of the building and one in the main entrance. The explosion blew the main walls right out into the street and when the fire started the barrack was left a complete wreck. Myself and about eight of the Ferrybank boys were armed with revolvers that night, but no enemy forces appeared and we didn't have to use them.

I returned to the city by boat across the River Suir and, at about midnight the same night, I met John Creed, the Q.M. of C/Coy. of the 3rd (City) Battalion, who told me that the attempt to destroy Callaghane police barracks earlier that night had been a failure. We arranged to meet at 5 a.m. that morning (Sunday) when the two of us cycled out to Callaghane about 4 miles from the city on the Dunmore East road. We brought petrol with us and in no time we had the building in flames. This barracks was evacuated a short time previously by the R.I.C. as it was the policy of the British authorities at the time to bringⁱⁿ to the city the small outposts of R.I.C. from places such as Callaghane and Holycross for fear of attack.

On the same Sunday evening, accompanied by Michael Cooper, the captain of C/Company, 3rd Battalion, East Waterford (City) Brigade, we went by bicycle to Holycross as I had been informed that the attempt to destroy this barracks on the previous night was a failure. We brought along some paraffin and gelignite

and completely destroyed the building.

On the Saturday night following the Holycross burning, at the request of some Volunteers from South Kilkenny, I went by bicycle to the village of Pilltown, Co. Kilkenny, situated on the main Limerick road and fifteen miles north of Waterford. There I met eight men of the Mooncoin, Co. Kilkenny, Company of the Volunteers, all of whom were armed with revolvers. They wanted me to help in the burning of the Courthouse at Pilltown. There was no R.I.C. Barracks in that village; the nearest being at Fiddown, three miles away to the south. It was considered very necessary to destroy the Courthouse at Pilltown because all the court registers for South Kilkenny were kept there and it was thought that the British would be very greatly hampered in their administration if these records were destroyed. We got to work on the building with paraffin, petrol and gelignite and in a very short time the place was a burning wreck. Before actually setting fire to the Courthouse, we collected all registers and papers into a pile in the main room. These, of course, went up in smoke with the rest of the building. Strangely enough, there was no sign of any of the enemy, although the flames from the burning building could be seen for many miles around and, as I have said, the R.I.C. garrison in Fiddown Barracks was only three miles away. When the job was complete (about midnight) I returned to Waterford.

All the time we were constantly on the lookout for arms of which we had very few and, as the result of information received from a friendly servant, I heard that there was a service rifle and ammunition in the house of a man named Shanahan, at Coolfin, a district about 12 miles north west of Waterford city. I decided to raid the place. This Shanahan was just after leaving the British army where he held a commission in the South Irish Horse regiment and he had the reputation of being a tough man.

Accompanied by two Volunteers named Duignan, a guard on the Great Southern Railway, and a chap named Michael Darmody, a member of C/Company, Co. Waterford City Battalion, and a draper's assistant, we cycled out to Coolfin one Sunday evening shortly after the Piltown burning. Each of us was armed with a loaded revolver. Approaching the house, we saw Shanahan standing at a gate in front of the building, so we left our bikes with Darmody. Duignan and I went on foot into a field near the house to look at some calves there. Shanahan was watching us. After examining the calves we walked up to him and I asked him if he had any of the calves for sale (this was a 'blind' to put him off the scent). As he made to reply, I whipped out my revolver and gave him 'hands up', adding: "and be quick about it or I'll let you have it". He immediately raised his hands and I instructed Duignan to tie him up with a rope I had brought with me. I then left him with Duignan and went into the house through the open door. There were three ladies inside whom I locked in a diningroom. I went upstairs to search for the rifle and, on looking into a wardrobe, I found concealed up the two legs of a trousers two Lee Enfield rifles in perfect condition. I also found two bandoliers loaded with ammunition and a pair of field glasses. I took away all the stuff, went outside and warned Shanahan not to leave his position for 20 minutes or I'd shoot him dead from the road. We wrapped the guns in sacking, got on our bikes and took the back roads to Waterford where I handed over the capture to the late D.J. Walsh who was, I think, the Q.M. of the battalion at the time (August 1920).

The Saturday night following this incident I took part in a raid for arms with five men of my own D/Company on the premises of Major Carew (an ex-British army major) who lived about four miles from Waterford on the main Tramore-Waterford road. Armed with revolvers, we walked out to Major Carew's

house, knocked at the door and when it was opened we all entered the hall. Major Carew came along and we told him we wanted the rifle he had. He denied he had any gun, so we placed him in a room in charge of two armed Volunteers and went upstairs to make a search. In his wardrobe we discovered one Lee Enfield rifle and some ammunition, a double-barreled shotgun and cartridges. We then left the building after warning Major Carew not to leave for an hour.

We went then to a Colonel Carew's house nearby. We made him prisoner as we did with Major Carew (his cousin) and after a search found an old fashioned rifle, two shotguns and plenty of shotgun ammunition. It was about 12 midnight when we left Colonel Carew's house. We carried the guns back to the Mental Hospital grounds, Waterford, where they were placed in a dump in a haybarn there and looked after by one of the lieutenants of my company who was a member of the staff of the Mental Hospital. I might mention here that upwards of 15 members of the staff were members of D/Company and all of them were active Volunteers.

About a week afterwards I went with about 12 of the Dunhill Volunteers under Jimmy Power of Ballycraddock to raid for arms at Major Congreve's house, Kilmeadon, Co. Waterford. The raid took place about 10 or 11 p.m. The Dunhill men were armed with shotguns. I carried a revolver. When we knocked at the door of the house we were answered from the inside by Major Congreve who point blank refused to admit us. We then told him that if he wasn't going to admit us peaceably we would have to force our way in. He replied that he would shoot without hesitation the first man who came in. On the instructions of the officer in charge, Jimmy Power, four large windows were shattered with shotguns and the boys poured into the house through the broken windows. The O/C. and other Volunteers held up Major Congreve while I and four others went upstairs

to search for the arms which a friendly servant had previously told us were up there.

In a wardrobe we discovered two shotguns (silver-mounted) and some cartridges. Meanwhile, Jimmy Power was explaining to the Major that our object in raiding his house for arms was to make certain that we should get them before they fell into the hands of the British military authorities who were, at that time, calling in all the guns held by British loyalists in the county. Major Congreve said that so far as he was concerned he would not report the raid or the taking of the guns if the Volunteers would give him a promise to return the shotguns when all the trouble was over. He added that the two guns we got were very valuable and were also of sentimental value to him. Jimmy Power gave him the promise to return the guns and, as a matter of fact, did return them in perfect condition to their owner after the Civil War in 1923.

Early in the summer of 1920, we had a visit from Leo Henderson, an organising officer on the staff of G.H.Q. in Dublin. His visit came about following the rounding-up and arrest of some of the principal officers on the East Waterford Brigade. Amongst those arrested were Sean Matthews, O/C., Paddy Brazil, brigade adjutant, Liam Rafter, brigade quartermaster, and J.D. Walsh, brigade vice-commandant. As a result of Leo Henderson's visit I was appointed vice-officer commanding of the brigade and Liam Walsh was appointed O/C. Prior to my own appointment I held no officer rank at all in the Volunteers. I was just an ordinary 'private'.

Together with Liam Walsh, I immediately set about reorganisation work in the areas Passage East, Dunmore East, Callaghane and Ballymacaw. These areas comprised the 3rd Battalion, East Waterford Brigade. In all, we had a strength of about 180 men when the reorganisation was complete. There was about a dozen revolvers and sixty shotguns in this battalio

During the late summer of 1920 I engaged in many raids for arms on houses in Waterford city and suburbs. I took about a half-dozen men with me on those raids and we were always armed with revolvers. We met no active opposition at any time, but in some instances the occupants of houses were very reluctant to part with any guns they had, they being good British loyalists of course, and not at all friendly to I.R.A. men. In some cases sympathisers of ours sent us word to come and collect the shotguns before the British got hold of them.

Any arms captured in these raids were handed over to the respective quartermasters of the areas in which the raid took place and the guns and ammunition were then placed in dumps previously prepared. Four of the dumps in Waterford city and suburbs were (1) at Grace Dieu, (2) in a vacant stable in Spring Garden Alley off the Mall, Waterford, (3) in the haybarn of Waterford Mental Hospital and (4) in a garage in Thomas St. Waterford, owned by Messrs. Woodman, Matheson & Co., Hide and Skin Merchants. John Creed, the Q.M. of C/Company, was a lorry driver in Woodman Matheson & Co. and he had the keys of the garage where the stuff was dumped.

In or about the month of August 1920, information reached us from Waterford Gaol that two I.R.A. prisoners who were captured with arms at Sevenhouses, Co. Kilkenny, were in danger of being executed and it was suggested that an attempt be made to rescue them. The brigade staff discussed the question of the rescue and when it was decided to make the attempt the plan was sent in to the prisoners by a friendly jailer and I was selected to take charge of the men engaged on the job.

The plan was, that at 10.30 a.m. on a certain Saturday (Saturday was considered the best day as there would be many people shopping in the city) a weighted line with a rope ladder attached would be thrown over by us over the wall of the gaol at a point where the prisoners would be out at

exercise at the particular time. It was also understood that the British sentries inside the jail walls would be changed about the same time and that the chances of escape would be better while the change-over was taking place.

So far as I can remember now, eight volunteers armed with revolvers, with myself in charge similarly armed, took part in the affair. Two men were placed at a point about 100 yds. south of the rescue point, two more about 50 yards north, two others about 50 yards west. Myself, Tom Brennan of D/Coy. and another man whose name I cannot recall went towards the gaol wall to the point of rescue at 10.30 a.m. on that Saturday. We carried the weighted line and the rope ladder attached to it.

It was previously arranged that the prisoners would send a message written on paper and attached to a rubber ball which would be bounced over the gaol wall to us at half-past ten. The message would indicate whether or not it was safe to attempt the rescue. At the appointed time a ball came from over the gaol wall bearing a message on paper, which told us that the rescue attempt was called off (by the prisoners). It was subsequently learned that the military guards did not change over at the time as was anticipated; the prisoners, therefore, considered that the rescue attempt would be absolutely useless and would more than likely have caused the death of many of the prisoners out at exercise who were in view of the military sentries and who would be shot down in dozens if the attempted rescue was spotted. In the circumstances, therefore, having read the message attached to the ball, I was reluctantly compelled to call off all the men in my charge on the job. I am glad to say that the two men we hoped to rescue on that occasion were not executed. They were saved by the Truce of July 1921.

In the early autumn of 1920, about half a dozen raids were made on trains carrying materials, foodstuffs etc. to military

barracks west of Waterford. The general plan was to hold up the west-bound trains by putting the signals against them at a point about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the city where a railway bridge crosses the River Suir. We knew previously from sympathetic employees on the railway the times the trains were due, the location of the wagons containing the military stores and whether any military guard was provided or not.

About a dozen men armed with revolvers took part in those jobs. The trains were stopped, the particular wagons smashed open and the goods dumped into the river. These raids took place mainly at night, but we brought off a few during daylight as well, without interference from the enemy. The British 'tumbled' to what we were at after a time and used to place heavily armed guards on trains carrying military supplies. Although these raids weren't of much account they had a certain nuisance value in as much as they 'tied up' British troops for escort duty who might be otherwise engaged.

In the month of September 1920, I was told by Paddy Paul, the Brigade O/C. at the time, of his intention to attack Kill police barracks. Kill is a village about $12\frac{1}{2}$ miles south west of Waterford on main Waterford-Bonmahon road. The barracks was a stone building with a slated roof. It was occupied by an R.I.C. sergeant and eight men and had steel shutters on the windows. It stood in its own ground about 40 yards south of the village proper.

I walked out to the house of Jimmy Power, Ballycraddock, (about 5 miles from Kill) and, having armed myself with a Lee Enfield rifle which I got from Jimmy Power, I went across country with himself and Paddy Paul to a place about 500 yards from the village of Kill. We arrived there about 8 p.m. and waited about an hour for the Volunteers taking part in the attack to assemble. Roughly about 25 men in all, the majority armed with shotguns, turned up for the fight. Before beginning the attack it was decided to send four men into the village

as a scouting party to intercept and take prisoner any R.I.C. man, or men, who might be out of barracks. It was hoped that some of the R.I.C. men in the barracks might come out to look for their missing comrades when they, too, could be overpowered the barracks rushed and made easy for capture.

About 9 p.m. Paddy Paul, Jimmy Power and two other Volunteers, all armed with revolvers, entered the village, while the main body of the volunteers drew closer to the barracks. Shortly, we heard Jimmy Power shouting "hands up". He had held up one R.I.C. man who was in the village street. This man was taken prisoner and placed under an armed guard in Cummins's publichouse in Kill.

The general plan of the attack was that fire should be opened with shotguns and rifles on the barracks, whilst, at the same time, a ladder would be placed against the side wall of the building to enable some men to climb on to the roof and remove a few slates. When the slates were removed, a mixture of paraffin and petrol was to be pumped into the hole in the roof and the roof set on fire forcing the garrison to evacuate the building. It was also intended to throw some mud bombs on to the roof. These would stick there and explode causing further damage. These mud bombs were composed of a short steel tube about 4 inches in diameter. The tube was filled with bits of broken metal and gelignite. It was fitted with a detonator and fuse and covered with a whitish soft clay called 'pudlow'. This clay is got mostly in bogland and is not unlike putty in texture. It is generally used for lining the stonework of reservoirs to prevent any seepage of water.

At about 9.30 p.m. the attack was opened by our shotgun and rifle men who directed a heavy fire on the barracks at a range of about 40-50 yards. So far as I can remember, about 10 shotgun men and 6 riflemen took part. The remainder were on outpost duty. The garrison replied with rifle fire through slits in

the steel shutters of the windows and commenced sending up Verey lights to summon assistance. Meanwhile, some of the Volunteers got on to the roof and dislodged a few slates while the pump was being got ready to pump the mixture on to the roof. It was then discovered that the handle of the pump was missing and try as I could I failed to fix up some sort of a handle which would enable the pump to be worked. I should add here that the pump was of a type used by Co. Council workers for pumping water into tanks. We tried all we could to get the thing working, but it was no use, we just couldn't pump the mixture any height at all, so that the weapon we hoped would be most helpful to us was out of action.

All this time spasmodic firing was kept up by our men to which the R.I.C. men replied continuously, at the same time sending up Verey lights at intervals of about 10 minutes. This went on till about 11 p.m. until our riflemen reported that a large force of British military were coming up on the rear side of their position across a large field about 100 yds. from the barracks.

The first indication that something was wrong came to the notice of one of our riflemen when he heard the neighing of horses in the field behind the ditch against which he and his comrades were lying in a firing position. The horses seemed to be approaching the ditch in a group across the field. Occasionally they stopped and then they came on a short distance and stopped again. Thinking this rather queer at such a late hour, the rifleman left his position and crawled a distance in the grass towards the horses. Suddenly, by the light of a Verey light from the barracks, he spotted what appeared to be a large force of British military advancing towards his position in extended formation and by short stages.

When word of what was happening was sent to Paddy Paul and Jimmy Power, they ordered an immediate withdrawal to a

place about a mile from the village of Kill in the direction opposite to that of the approaching British military. The withdrawal was effected quickly and silently, with the result that the British failed to make contact with us and our lads dispersed through the darkness without any trouble as they were well acquainted with the countryside and knew every boreen around the place. I consider we were very lucky that night, because, were it not for the sense of the Volunteer who was worried by the neighing of the horses, it is likely that we would have suffered heavy casualties, as our ammunition was running very low and we would be hopelessly outnumbered by the much better armed enemy, who would have the added advantage of taking us by surprise.

After the engagement, I went with Jimmy Power and about 10 men to Jimmy's place at Ballycraddock where we dumped our arms in a dump on his land and the men dispersed to their homes after having some food. I walked back to Waterford city a cross country and reported for work the following morning.

In late September or early October 1920, I was asked by some men of the South Kilkenny Brigade I.R.A. to help them out in an attack they were making on the occupied R.I.C. barracks at Mullinavat, Co. Kilkenny. I was asked to supply six rifle-men (who were also armed with revolvers) to hold a position on the main New Ross-Waterford-Mullinavat road in case of a flanking attack by the British coming up from New Ross. Mullinavat is about 8 miles due north of Waterford city on the main Waterford-Kilkenny road.

At about 9 p.m. our party of six, with myself in charge, crossed over to the Wexford side of the River Suir by boat and made our way to the position selected by me. The place selected is known as "The Pink Rock" and is a rocky pile about 30 feet over the road which runs alongside the River Barrow and about 11 miles from Waterford on the road to New Ross. We erected

a barricade of trees which we felled across the road and took up position on the rock about 11 p.m. or so. We knew from the Kilkenny men that the attack on Mullinavat barracks was timed for 11.30 p.m. or thereabouts (I cannot now remember the times exactly) and we were asked to hold our position until 2 a.m.

Somewhere about midnight, or maybe a bit later, we heard the purring of a lorry from the direction of New Ross and then saw its lights approaching. As it came to the barricade we opened heavy fire. Immediately the lorry put into reverse and backed away out of sight with lights out. It tore back in the direction of New Ross and, although we held our position until the time appointed previously for our withdrawal, no other enemy force appeared. We then returned to Waterford again, crossing the River Suir by boat without any enemy interference.

I should perhaps mention here that the bridge spanning the Suir in Waterford city was opened up by some of the Waterford Volunteers to prevent the military crossing over by lorry to go to the help of the R.I.C. garrison in Mullinavat barracks.

During the latter part of the year 1920 I was mostly engaged raiding houses for arms in the city and eastern part of County Waterford. Organisation of companies was stepped up and general training intensified in my area.

I remember about this time being told of an order from I.R.A. H.Q., Dublin, to raid all post offices for money and stamps. I was in charge of a raid on the G.P.O., The Quay, Waterford. I took five men with me, all armed with revolvers, and carried out the raid one Saturday afternoon. The staff was held up and all monies and stamps removed as instructed. There was no opposition from the police or military who were quite unaware of what was going on. The proceeds of the raid were handed up to our Brigade Q.M. for (I understand) dispatch to Dublin.

I would like to mention here about a bomb factory we got going in Waterford in late 1920. The situation of this factory

was in a small iron foundry near the Adelphi Wharf off the Quay, Waterford. Some of the lads who worked in the foundry by day used return late at night and use the machinery for bomb making. A few land mines were made there too. These were made up from engine plates which we got in the nearby railway yards. The casing for the bombs was made of similar material. I believe that all the bombs/^{made}were sent to Dublin. I know that none of them were kept in Waterford.

Early in January 1921 - on 6th January to be exact - I received word from Paddy Paul, our Brigade O/C., that I should bring along 20 men from the No. 1 East Waterford Brigade, fully armed, and have them at the Metal Bridge about a half mile on the Waterford side of Tramore on the main Waterford-Tramore road, at 8 p.m. the following night, 7th January 1921. At the time I had no idea as to what was to be done. I had no notion that an ambush was planned for that particular spot on the night of 7th January. As Brigade Vice-Commandant, I might be expected to know something of the forthcoming ambush, but I had no such information, nor had any of the men I mobilised. I make this statement, because, after the ambush - known as the Tramore ambush - it was widely said in Waterford city that quite a few people knew of the proposed attack the evening before it came off. I failed, absolutely, to find any justification for these remarks.

The men selected by me were paraded in the grounds of the Mental Hospital, Waterford, at about 7 p.m. on January 6th 1921, and I issued to each man a shotgun and about 40 cartridge. I myself was armed with a Webley .45 revolver and about thirty rounds of ammunition. On reconsideration, I now recall handing out about six Lee Enfield rifles which would make our strength 14 shotguns and 6 rifles.

The party proceeded in the darkness on foot across the fields towards Tramore, guided by Tom Brennan of D/Company, Waterford City Battalion, who knew the district very well. Tom

went ahead about 200 yards and used a whistle imitating a curlew to lead us along. We eventually reached our destination at the time appointed. When we arrived, I met Paddy Paul, O/C. No. 1 East Waterford Brigade, and Pax Whelan of Dungarvan, O/C. Waterford No. 2, West Waterford Brigade. They then told me that it was planned to ambush the British military near that spot later that night. The idea was to make a feint attack with a few I.R.A. men on the R.I.C. barracks in Tramore with the view to drawing out the military from Waterford city to relieve the barracks. The military would then be attacked at a point near the Metal Bridge, situated about half a mile east of Tramore town on the main Waterford-Tramore road where the main body of I.R.A. were stationed.

It was about 11 o'clock at night when our party reached the vicinity of the Metal Bridge. The night was dark; there was no moon and it was fine and dry, but very cold. After some general conversation with Paddy Paul and Pax Whelan about the plan of attack and the placing of our men in their various positions, I was detailed with three or four men to prepare a road block about 30 yards on the west (Tramore) side of the Metal Bridge. We went to a few farmhouses and got four farm carts which we turned over on the road securing them together with chains. This formed a perfect barricade, sufficiently strong to prevent a lorry passing through it.

Meanwhile, Pax Whelan inspected the guns and ammunition of the men from the East Waterford Brigade and placed them in position for attack. George Lennon, Vice-Commandant of the West Waterford Brigade, was also there and I remember him inspecting the guns of the Dunhill Company before putting them into position. So far as I can remember now, the following are the details of the I.R.A. and their positions on that night of 7.1.1921, when what is known as the Tramore ambush took place:

The West Waterford Brigade had about 20 men under Pax Whelan, their Brigade O/C., and George Lennon, Brigade V/Comdt. These men were all armed with Lee Enfield rifles and were stationed along the Glen Road on high ground south west of the Metal Bridge looking down right on to the bridge and to the barricade I had erected. These were the only men on the Tramore (south west) side of the bridge.

The Dunhill Company of about 12 shotgun men were placed on the railway line about 50 to 100 yards east of the bridge, facing the main Waterford-Tramore main road and about 20 yards from the road (on the west side of the road). On the Ballynattor road which is about 150 yards east of the Metal Bridge, and runs in an easterly direction to high ground overlooking the bridge, but out of sight of the barricade, were placed 12 shotgun men about 40 yards up from the main road on its eastern side. About 30 yards further up on the Ballynattor were 6 riflemen of whom I was one. There were men from the Dunhill, Co. Waterford, Company under their commandant, Jimmy Power of Ballycraddock. There were also, I believe, six men with rifles situated at the junction of the Old and New Tramore Roads, i.e., on the main Tramore Road where the Ballynattor road commences. These men were about 200 yards north east of the Metal Bridge and were facing it (see sketch attached).

When I had finished with the erection of the barricade, as already described, I was sent up on to the Ballynattor road on instructions from Pax Whelan. I got orders from him that, when the military lorries came, I was to hold fire until the first lorry met the barricade and the second and other lorries pulled up shortly behind it. When (as it was expected) the British soldiers would get out of their lorries to remove the barricade, then Pax Whelan's men on the Glen Road would open fire. This was to be the signal for a general attack by all our men placed on the Waterford city side of the Metal Bridge.

The Dunhill shotgun men would open up on any lorries stopped opposite their position, whilst the shotgun and rifle men on the Ballynatton Road, together with the riflemen at the junction of the Old and New Tramore-Waterford Roads, would pour their fire on the lorries at the Metal Bridge.

When the feint attack on the R.I.C. Barracks began about 11.30 p.m. or so on that night of January 7th, 1921, we could see the Verey lights being sent up by the garrison and, about midnight, we saw the headlights of military lorries coming along the main road from Waterford city. I immediately passed word to the rifle-and shotgun men on the Ballynatton road to wait until the first and second lorries ran up to the barricade at the Metal Bridge before opening fire. When the first lorry had just reached the bridge, but before the following one had come to 100 yards of the bridge, a shot was fired by one of our men. (I think it came from the Dunhill shotgun men on the railway line, but I am not at all certain of this). Immediately the lorries (about four, I believe, but I only saw two of them) pulled up and the military got out. As a result the British never came under fire from the West Waterford men on the Lismore side of the bridge, as originally planned. What happened was this: The Dunhill men on the railway blazed away at the military who moved away from them towards us on the Ballynatton road, and we, in turn, together with the men at the junction of the main road, also opened fire.

The British now deployed into the sloping field beside the Ballynatton and advanced under the ditch on the side of that road, occasionally throwing bursts of fire from machine guns and rifles on to the road. After about a quarter of an hour or so it was obvious that the British plan was to advance under the shelter of the boundary ditch and come out on the Ballynatton road well above our positions, thereby outflanking

us and forcing us either down on to the main road where we would meet their heavier enemy forces, or up the steep hill on the eastern side of the Ballynatton road, where we would be a perfect target in the light of their Verey lights.

After about 20 minutes or so a comrade of mine named Mick Wyley of Waterford city was badly wounded in the legs as he stood beside me against the ditch. He told me he was unable to stand and asked for my help. I got hold of Wyley, slung him over my shoulder and carried him over the ditch on the eastern side of the Ballynatton road under heavy fire from the British on the opposite side. He tried to crawl away up the hill but when I saw he couldn't do it I picked him up again and carried him up over the top of the hill and out of the line of fire.

When I reached the top of the hill I found to my surprise that Brigade O/C. Paddy Paul, Comdt. Jimmy Power and Commandant Morrissey of the Waterford City Battalion were all up there and off the Ballynatton Road, where fighting was still going on and very heavy fighting at that. I asked them why they weren't down on the road and how about the men who were left on the road and were still fighting it out. The only one who replied was a man named Michael Bishop who was also up on the hill. Bishop was Vice-Comdt. of the No. 2 Battalion, East Waterford Brigade. He said that he would go down and get the men off the road. He did go down for this purpose, but I cannot say how many men he did take off, but I do know we had two men killed, viz: Tom O'Brien, captain of the Dunhill Coy. the No. 1 rifleman, and Michael McGrath of the Waterford City Battalion - a shotgun man. Both these men were fighting on the Ballynatton road. It is believed that they were taken prisoner and shot out of hand, but I cannot vouch for the accuracy of this.

The time was now 12.30 a.m. or maybe about 1 a.m. I

helped to make a stretcher out of a wooden gate to carry Mick Wyley who was in great pain. We carried him, still under fire, across the fields and ditches eastwards for about two miles to the house of a man named Cheasty who was a sympathiser of ours. We left Mick Wyley there after giving him what first-aid treatment we could and proceeded across country eastwards toward Waterford city. There were about six of us in my party. We put our guns in the dump in the grounds of the Waterford Mental Hospital and I got home to my place in the city about 6 a.m. on 8th January 1921.

Before going to my home I should have mentioned that, in company with Jerry Cronin of the Waterford City Battalion, I went to the house of Dr. Purcell of Parnell St., Waterford, and told him about Mick Wyley being wounded and hiding in Cheasty's house. The doctor immediately got out his car, went out to Mick Wyley, fixed him up temporarily and then brought him (for safety) to the Waterford Mental Hospital, where it was unlikely that the British would look for him. Dr. Purcell was very friendly towards the I.R.A. and took a great risk going out the country at an early hour in the direction of the ambush which had taken place a few hours previously.

Nicholas Whittle, a member of D/Coy. Waterford City Battn., who was a shotgun man on the Ballynatton Road, was very badly wounded there and was actually left for dead by the British who found him lying unconscious. He eventually crawled his way about three miles from the scene of the ambush and was taken in to a house of (what turned out to be) a cousin of his. Word was sent in to us about Whittle and I made arrangements with Dr. Fitzgerald of the Waterford Mental Hospital to have him taken in there for treatment. We went out in a pony and trap for Whittle on the night of January 9th, 1921, and brought him safely into the hospital. Dr. Fitzgerald extracted the bullets from Wyley and Whittle except one which, I believe, Whittle still carries in his body. Both men subsequently recovered from their wounds.

About a month after the Tramore ambush my lodgings was raided by a party of the Devonshire Regiment and I was taken prisoner. While the raiding was still going on, Captain McNamara of the 'Devons' took me some distance away from the raiding party and I said to myself: "You are going to get it now Willie". I was sure he was going to shoot me. To my great surprise he told me that some of my 'friendly' neighbours had informed the military about me and that I should get away from the district and stay away; with that, he told me to slip off as quickly as I could. I need scarcely say that I did what he told me.

In the Spring of 1921, things were getting very hot around Waterford and, amongst those who were in danger of their lives was Dr. Whyte who was then Mayor of Waterford. Dr. Whyte had stood as Sinn Fein candidate in the famous elections of 1918, and was a marked man because of his Republican sympathies. It was after the murder of Lord Mayor McCurtain of Cork that Dr. Whyte received an anonymous letter threatening his life. As a result, it was decided to place an armed I.R.A. guard in his house in case of an attempt to murder him. I did night duty on this guard for many weeks but the carrying out of the threat to murder the doctor was not attempted.

During this period the British were very active raiding houses of known or suspected I.R.A. men. In addition, patrols of military on the city searched, and very often, beat up men and women in their search for arms or documents of a republican nature. One of the worst blackguards was a Lieutenant in the Devonshire Regiment by the name of Veo. This fellow specialised in beating up innocent people with the butt of his revolver and it was decided to shoot him at the first possible opportunity. We waited for him night after night in the vicinity of the Imperial Hotel, Waterford, where he often went with other officers for drink and cards, but, strangely enough,

he never turned up on the nights we waited. He used to play golf occasionally, so, as I got fed up waiting at nights for him, I decided to go up to the local golf links in the morning and lie in wait for him until darkness came on. For one whole month I did this, but believe it or not, Veo never turned up for a game of golf. The next we heard was that he was left the city altogether, and I often wonder was he 'tipped off' by someone as to what was coming to him.

As I am on the subject of 'tipping off' I would like to pay tribute to the memory of Sergeant Greene of the R.I.C. Waterford. This man was one of our best friends 'on the inside'. Many a time he sent out word of raids about to come off and, consequently, a lot of our lads escaped jail and probably worse, thanks to Sergeant Greene. I give one example:

When Tom Brennan, a Lieutenant in D/Company, Waterford, City Battalion, was arrested in May 1921, he had papers on him summoning a brigade meeting at Gleeson's, O'Connell Street, Waterford. Sergeant Greene got to hear of this and sent word at once to a chap named Sean Ivory who worked in a shop near the R.I.C. Barracks where Sergeant Greene was stationed. Ivory passed the news to me and, with the help of my wife, we contacted each of the Brigade officers and warned them on no account to turn up at Gleeson's for the meeting that night. Sure enough, at the time appointed for the meeting, a large force of British military with machine guns mounted raided Gleeson's and it was clear from the behaviour of the British officers that they were mystified at finding no I.R.A. men there.

A day or so after this happening Sergeant Greene's body was found shot a short distance away from his barracks. A rumour was spread around Waterford that he had been implicated in some way in the murder of Lord Mayor McCurtain of Cork and had committed suicide, but there is no doubt in the minds of those of us who were connected with the Waterford I.R.A. that poor Sergeant Greene was suspected of giving away information

to us and that he was murdered, as a result, by his own comrades in the Black and Tans. It is only fair to this man's memory that this should be recorded, as I myself know what a true Irishman Sergeant Greene was, even if he did wear a policeman's uniform.

Sometime in the month of June 1921, on the instructions of the Brigade O/C., Paddy Paul, I took a party of ten men from the city battalion to a position on what is known as the "Ballinaclough Road" about 3 miles north of Tramore and 5 miles west of Waterford city on the Tramore-Clonmel road. The men were armed with shotguns and a couple of rifles. The same evening, other parties of I.R.A. from the East Waterford Bde. were engaged in blocking roads by felling trees and blowing up bridges. An area of about 15 miles covered these operations which were carried out with the idea of hampering movements of British military who were, at that particular time, very active raiding farmhouses and arresting people whom they considered to be republican sympathisers.

The men under my charge remained in position to attack any British force which might come along from 10 p.m. until 4 a.m. the following morning. We were unlucky in as much as the British didn't come near our particular district that night. They did, however, come out to Holycross about 3 miles west of Waterford city where some of our men were engaged in road demolition, and they shot Tom O'Rourke of the Waterford City Battalion. O'Rourke died in the early hours of the following morning while he was being carried on an improvised stretcher across the country to a safe place for treatment.

Many I.R.A. men from here had to go on the run about this time (June 1921). I didn't leave Waterford, but I changed my 'digs' very often and so avoided arrest up to the time of the Truce in July 1921, when I was appointed O/C. of the republican police in Waterford city.

Before concluding this statement I would like, again, to refer to friendly members of the R.I.C. and to put on record the fact that a man named Neligan of the Waterford City R.I.C. was very helpful in passing on information to us. Were it not for him, both Nicholas Whittle and Mick Wyley who were brought wounded to the Mental Hospital, Waterford, after the Tramore ambush in January 1921, would have been captured. Neligan send me word that the hospital was to be raided for Wyley and Whittle and, that particular evening, a few of us moved out our two men at 10.30 p.m. to another house some miles outside the city. At 11 p.m. that same night the hospital was raided and thoroughly searched for Wyley and Whittle. I think it is only fair that the actions of men like Neligan and Greene, whom I have previously mentioned, should be recorded for history.

Signed: William Keane

(William Keane)

Date: 11-10-54

11.10.54

Witness: T. O'Gorman

(T. O'Gorman)

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