

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURQ STAIRE MILITIA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1079

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

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Witness

Patrick P. Fitzgerald,  
Spa Road,  
Tralee,  
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

Captain Fenit Company  
Irish Volunteers, Co. Kerry;  
Brigade Staff Officer Kerry I Brigade.

Subject.

National activities Fenit-Tralee, Co. Kerry,  
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STATEMENT OF PATRICK PAUL FITZGERALD

Spa Road, Tralee, Co. Kerry.

I was born on 29th June 1896, in Tralee. I was sent to the local National School until I was 15 years of age. When I left school I was apprenticed to the bakery trade.

On the formation of the Volunteers in Tralee in the latter end of 1913 or early 1914, I became a member. The drill instructors at the time were John Roche and Ned Leen, both ex-British soldiers. In all, there were four companies in the town of Tralee, A, B, C and D. The total strength was about 400 men. We paraded and drilled with wooden rifles throughout the year 1914.

After John Redmond's speech at Woodenbridge in Co. Wicklow calling on the Volunteers to join the British army to defend the shores of Ireland, there was a split in the local battalion. A, B and D companies were opposed to Redmond's policy, but C Company were in favour and broke away from the battalion and ceased to take any further part in the activities of the Volunteers. We continued our parades and drills during the year 1915. Among the members of the Battalion Council at this time were Austin Stack, P.J. Cahill, Dan Healy and Fr. Joe Breen.

The spring of 1916 was a continuation of drilling and parading carried out the previous year. About the month of January or early February of this year I was accepted into the I.R.B. by Alfie Cotton and Michael J. O'Connor. Cotton was the Tralee I.R.B. Circle Centre then. Other members were Paddy Garvey, Joe Melinn and Eamon O'Connor.

On the last Sunday of February 1916, on the invitation of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (Irish American Alliance), Patrick Pearse visited Tralee to deliver a lecture on the "Principles of Freedom". Earlier in the day he inspected the Volunteers in the sports field and made a short speech

in which he called on the Volunteers to prepare and be ready to drive the British garrison out of Ireland. He delivered the lecture that night at the Rink, the headquarters of the Volunteers. Among the battalion staff present at the lecture were Austin Stack, P.J. Cahill, Fr. Breen and Fr. Brennan.

On the feast day of the National Apostle the battalion paraded through the town. Every man in the battalion which now numbered about 600 men turned out for the parade.

On Tuesday of Holy Week a meeting of the I.R.B. was held at which Cotton, the centre, presided. He informed the meeting that the Easter manoeuvres which had been called for Easter Week were, in fact, for the purpose of a general attack on the British forces in the country.

On Good Friday a conference of I.R.B. leaders was being held at the Rink some time in the evening at which Austin Stack presided. While the meeting was in progress Stack was informed that a man named Con Collins, who had been sent from Dublin to contact Roger Casement and the arms ship a day or two earlier, had been arrested. Stack had been told that Collins wanted to see him at the R.I.C. Barracks, where he was detained. Stack left the meeting and went to the barracks. After an hour or two we learned that Stack was also detained at the barracks. Upon hearing this, Cahill, who was next in command, mobilised the battalion at the Rink. All the men were armed with either rifles (Martini Henrys), shotguns or revolvers. After some consultation amongst senior officers, the battalion, under P.J. Cahill and Dan Healy, was paraded through the town and back to the Rink where the men were dismissed. After being dismissed I, with other members of the I.R.B., went to the A.O.H. rooms at 4, The Square, Tralee, where we learned that a third prisoner who had been arrested by the Ardfert R.I.C. had been taken into Tralee R.I.C. Barracks. The prisoner, we discovered soon after, was Roger Casement.

Early on the following morning, Saturday, I learned that Casement had been removed by the 10 o'clock train from Tralee under military escort.

On Saturday evening the battalion was again mobilised, armed guards were posted at the Rink. Late that night, Monteith, who had been with Casement, arrived at the Rink in company with three or four Volunteers. Monteith at the time was going under the name of Murray. Outside the I.R.B. few of the Volunteers knew his real name. When he arrived, the guard at the Rink was strengthened.

On Easter Sunday morning I was sent by Dan Healy, Battn. O/C. with a verbal message to the O/C., Castleisland - Dan Mahony - to the effect that all manoeuvres which had been ordered for that day had been cancelled. I delivered the message to Mahony, after which I returned to Volunteer H.Q. and reported to Dan Healy.

On Easter Sunday night the battalion was mobilised again. The Rink was closely guarded all that day. After a while Monteith took a place in the ranks. We got the order 'quick march' and proceeded to the 'Mile Height' where we were halted. Here Monteith was handed over to the Ballymacelligott Company who had come to meet us. After some little time we were marched back to the Rink. We remained at the Rink until 5 a.m. on Monday morning when we were dismissed. In the course of Easter Week we were mobilised several times awaiting instructions which never came.

On Saturday of Easter Week the officers, P.J. Cahill and Dan Healy, met the Dean of St. John's - Dean O'Sullivan - when it was agreed between them to surrender all arms in the battalion. That night the arms were collected and subsequently broken at the Rink, after which they were loaded on a donkey cart and sent by two Volunteers to the R.I.C. barracks.

With the exception of Alfie Cotton, the I.R.B. centre,

all the prominent Volunteers in the area were arrested the week following Easter Week. Cotton was a native of Derry and a civil servant employed at the Employment Exchange. He left Tralee that week and went to live in the north of Ireland. I have never seen him since.

Things remained slack until the end of 1916, but we kept together during the period and held several meetings of the I.R.B.

Early in 1917, at a special meeting for the purpose, election of new officers took place. Michael Doyle became battalion commandant, Dan Jeffers became company captain of B/Company - my company. Tom Sharkey, 1st Lieut. and Denis Keane, 2nd Lieutenant. The strength of B.Company at this time was 70 men. C/Company was reformed at this time. A. and D. Companies also had elections for officers at the same time.

Some time later that year all of the men arrested after Easter Week were released. From then to the end of the year drilling, route marching and practice in the use of the rifle was general.

Shortly after Stack's release, he called a general battalion meeting at Spa Road, Ballyricard. After the meeting he appointed me organiser and sent me to Fenit seven miles from Tralee to form a company there. I got together 50 men at Fenit. I became company captain, Jerh. Sullivan became 1st Lieutenant, Thomas Walsh, 2nd Lieutenant, and Michael Flynn, adjutant. We immediately got down to drilling, parading and practice in the handling of rifles.

In about the month of August 1917, all Volunteers in the town of Tralee and surrounding districts of Blennerville, Curraheen, Ballyroe, Ballyseedy and Fenit assembled at the Sports field, Tralee and marched to Casement's Fort where we were addressed by Stack, Thomas Ashe, Fionan Lynch and P.J. Cahill. All of these districts outside the town of Tralee had,

by this time, been absorbed in the Tralee Battalion. The general tone of the speeches by the officers on the occasion was the necessity for intensive organisation and the practice in the use of arms.

Early in 1918 during the conscription scare I, with other members of the Volunteers, addressed meetings after Mass on Sundays, saying we were determined to resist conscription. We appealed to young men to join the Volunteers. The strength of the Fenit Company increased in the period to 150 men, while the entire battalion strength exceeded 1,000 men. At this period I, with other Volunteers, collected a number of shotguns in the area. After the scare of conscription was ended, most of the new Volunteers remained with their companies.

At the end of the year at least 50 Volunteers from the town of Tralee went to Waterford to assist the Waterford Volunteers in the election campaign there in support of the Sinn Fein candidate. Our candidate in Kerry had been returned unopposed.

The year 1919 saw the usual route marches with surprise mobilisations from time to time. During the year I was appointed collector for the Dáil Éireann loan and collected in Spa parish. At the end of the year all shotguns in the battalion area in civilian hands were collected/<sup>and</sup> in every case were surrendered without any grumbles.

The brigade staff under Paddy Canill planned an attack on Camp R.I.C. barracks for 19th February 1920. Men from the four Tralee companies, as well as men from Castlegregory and Camp Companies, were selected for the attack. In all, there were about 40 men in the actual attack; they were armed with either rifles, shotguns or revolvers, while about 20 men were on outpost duty. I did not take part in the attack and cannot give details, but as company captain of Fenit Company, I received orders from the battalion O/C., Mick Doyle, to cut

telegraph wires and block all roads in my area. This order I carried out with the help of the company.

The attack was carried out on the night of the 19th February. Dan Jeffers, captain of B/Company, was in charge. The attack lasted a couple of hours after which the I.R.A. withdrew. On the following day Camp barracks was evacuated by the R.I.C.

Early in April of this year I took part in a raid on the Income Tax offices in Tralee. Paddy Cahill, brigade O/C. was in charge. With the help of an official of the Tax Office, who was a member of the I.R.A., we had no difficulty in gaining an entry. All loose documents were carried out and burned in the yard adjoining the offices. I carried out all heavy ledgers which were placed in a pony cart and taken to Strand where they were destroyed. Some of the men who took part in this job were Joe Griffin, excise officer, Billy Mullins, Tommy Sharkey, Jeremiah O'Connor and John Sullivan.

Some time at the latter end of May 1920, Cahill issued instructions for an attack on Fenit R.I.C. barracks. The garrison strength of Fenit barracks was approximately 8 men, made up of 6 R.I.C. and 2 Tans who had arrived earlier in the month. As Fenit was my company area I discussed the matter with Cahill and members of the brigade and battalion staffs. Eventually Cahill outlined a plan of attack and ordered me to take charge.

The pier, which was a wooden structure, was situated partially in front of the barracks. At the end of the pier was a British sloop manned by Marines; the distance between the sloop and the barracks was approximately 400 yards. Situated on the same road as the barracks was the Fenit Custom House, 80 yards away, which was manned by an armed guard of 10 Customs men.

The attack took place on the night of 2nd June 1920.

In all, 60 armed men took part in the attack, of which 32 were armed with rifles, the remainder being armed with shot-guns. Of the 60 men engaged, 30 were in the actual attack while the other 30 were on outpost duty. In addition, a further 30 or 40 men were engaged in trenching and blocking roads in the neighbourhood, while the Fianna under their O/C., Mike O'Leary assisted as scouts.

Attached to the barracks was the private house of a man named Mahony and his family. I first ordered one section of 10 men under Michael O'Connor to occupy a position behind a cement wall at the rear of the barracks. I placed another 10 men under the battalion O/C. of Ardfert, Paddy Sheehan, behind a low wall directly in front. In the meantime, I ordered three men named Patrick O'Connor, Tommy Sharkey and Eugene Hogan to go into Mahony's and remove the children, who numbered about four, to safety. When these three men had taken the children to a friend's house some distance away they returned and occupied Mahony's house. I now placed 10 men under James King on a railway siding covering the pier, having previously covered the pier with straw and saturated both pier and straw with petrol and paraffin.

Everything is ready for the attack. I send a man to Mahony's house to the three men there, to proceed with their orders. Eugene Hogan, one of the men in Mahony's, was a builder, and it was he who had built the barracks some years previously. He and the other two men break through the roof of Mahony's and get on to the roof of the barracks which they proceed to strip of slates. After a few minutes they succeed in making an opening into which they pour petrol and paraffin followed by hand grenades which set fire to the building.

The three men then returned to the safety of Mahony's and later rejoin their comrades. I now give the order to open fire and, at the same time, call on the enemy to surrend-



to which they reply with rifle fire. In the meantime, James King and his men at the railway siding have set fire to the straw and pier. The sloop, with powerful headlights directed on the scene of the attack, immediately opens fire sending up shells which start bursting in the field opposite the barracks where I am located with Paddy Sheehan and his men. The Marines now approach the burning pier but are forced to retreat to their sloop under the fire of King and his men. Just then the guard on the Custom House also open fire on our positions in the field opposite the barracks. Our men reply to this fire and manage to confine the guard to the building itself. Firing had been in progress for two hours when our scouts inform us that reinforcements are on their way from Tralee military barracks. I decided to call off the attack and ordered our men to disengage. As we left, the barracks and adjoining house, as well as the pier, are a mass of flames. The following day we learned that two of the enemy had been wounded and that they and their six companions had been transferred to Tralee R.I.C. barracks. This was the finish of the R.I.C. in Fenit.

Among the other men who took part in this engagement were Patrick McKenna, J.J. O'Sullivan, David Walsh, William Cronin, Dan Jeffers, Patrick Hogan, Michael Kearns, Mike O'Leary, Jeremiah Sullivan, Michael Moriarty and James Carmody.

Some time after the attack on Fenit R.I.C. barracks, I was appointed Training Officer on brigade staff. Up to 27th July, nobody had replaced me as company captain in Fenit. When I received word that a Swedish ship was at Fenit Pier carrying arms I took 12 men armed with revolvers and proceeded to the ship which we raided. We succeeded in capturing five rifles and 5,000 rounds of ammunition for same. The captain of the ship protested saying they were neutral and that they carried the arms for the purpose of exploding floating mines.

He reported the incident to our G.H.Q. in Dublin with the result that our Brigade O/C., Paddy Cahill, received an order from G.H.Q. to return the 'stuff' to the Swedish captain. Cahill produced the order and issued instructions for the return of the stuff immediately. I, with the help of a few men took the five rifles and ammunition back to the ship and apologised to the captain for the inconvenience caused.

About the month of August, I took a number of men to the townland of Ballydunlea where a military rifle range was located and destroyed the metal bullseyes and other fixtures connected with the range,

In the last week of October the Brigade O/C. sent me with a verbal message to the Battalion O/C. of Listowel, James Sugrue, and to the Battalion O/C. of Lixnaw, Steve Grady, with instructions to carry out an attack on the R.I.C. barracks or on a Tan patrol in each battalion area on November Eve. This, I understand, was a general order to all battalions in the brigade area. Having delivered the messages, I returned to Tralee that night.

Michael Doyle, Battalion O/C. Tralee, had received a similar order from the Brigade O/C. On November night each of the four companies in the town were mobilised and took up positions in various parts of the town armed with revolvers, shotguns or rifles. The Fianna, under Mike C'Leary, being placed at various points around the town as well as at the No.1 R.I.C. Barracks, Ballymullen military barracks and in the vicinity of three other buildings occupied by either Tans or Auxiliaries.

I was allotted a position with seven men at Gas Terrace. Shortly after taking up my position I received word from one of the Fianna that two Tans were standing at the corner of New Road in conversation with two women. A man named Patrick O'Connor and I approached the two Tans with revolvers drawn.

I called on them to put up their hands; they complied at once. We took them prisoners and handed them over to a section of our men located near the Dingle-Tralee railway tracks, after which we returned to our post at the corner of Gas Terrace.

Just as I got back to Gas Terrace I received word from one of the scouts that a Tan patrol was approaching our positions from Rock St. area. We had received instructions not to open fire until 9.30 p.m. As it happened, no patrol appeared up to that time. It was 10 o'clock, however, when word was received of the approach of the patrol from Rock St.

We let the patrol pass out our positions and for a distance of 40 yards when I gave the order 'Open fire'. We fired immediately; two Tans were wounded and with the rest of the patrol ran for the barracks. Our orders were to retreat after firing; this we did; The remainder of our men in other parts of the town were then called off. By this time the streets were clear of Tans as they all made for their different barracks after the attack.

Later that night at about 10.30 p.m. we all met at a place called the Brickfields which was just inside the town. Here the Brigade O/C., after a few minutes discussion on the night's operations, dismissed us for the night. Before being dismissed, one of the Fianna, who had been acting as scout, reported to Cahill that he had overheard a Tan say to one of his comrades that Abbeydorney R.I.C. barracks was being attacked by the I.R.A. This attack was actually taking place at Abbeydorney, which is about 10 miles from Tralee, while we were engaged in the attack on the Tralee patrol. Some time later that night the two captured Tans were executed by order of the Brigade O/C. by men of 'B' or Strand St. Company.

The streets as I have said were clear of Tans after the attack. We later discovered the reason for this. It appears a call had come through from Abbeydorney R.I.C. barracks to

the Tralee Tans for help, for, a short time after we had attacked the patrol, three lorry loads of Tans left Tralee for Abbeydorney and left the streets of Tralee deserted.

The town was not long kept waiting for an explanation of this uneasy quiet. After about two hours the Tans returned from Abbeydorney, after which followed a week of terror which will live in the memory of those who went through it until the day they die.

Immediately on their return the Tans appeared to have gone mad; they burned, shot and plundered all around them. They burned down the Town Hall, the old Town Hall which at the time had been leased to Paddy Cahill as a cinema; the public-house of Tom Slattery in Rock St.; the publichouse of Talbot's in Nelson St. - now called Ashe Street - and the 1916 shop of Thomas Clifford in Castle St.

The following day, Monday 1st November 1920, they went through the streets shooting all around them. Among those killed were two men named John Conway and Thomas Wall, while several civilians were wounded. That night they went to Kilfenora, which is about five miles from Tralee, and burned down the Volunteer Hall there.

During the terror that Monday night Paddy Cahill mobilised B/Company (Strand St.) again at a place known as the 'grove'. His intention in calling the company together was to attack the Tans if they continued the burning of the town. After 'standing to' for several hours he dismissed the company as, by this time the military had taken over the town from the Tans. The military were under the control of a Captain O'Malley and it appears he had let it be known that he would not have any more burnings. I was with my old company 'B' that night all of which still retained the arms handed to them for the engagement on November night, 31 October 1920.

On Tuesday night, 2nd November, 'E' Company was mobilised

again, our arms were collected and taken to a dump in Clahane district.

On Wednesday, 3rd November, I mobilised Fenit Company and took them to Spa, three miles from Tralee. In all, I had about 30 men armed with rifles and shotguns. I had been informed that the Tans would be coming to Spa district on patrol on this particular day. We occupied positions in extended formation on high ground on one side of the road between Tralee and Spa. We were in positions for four hours after which I called off the preparations as the Tans never showed up. On this particular day the Tans went to Ardfert instead, where they shot at civilians wounding a number of them.

During this week all prominent I.R.A. in Tralee had to leave and go on the run. Cahill, the O/C., kept them fully armed and, at the same time, formed an active service unit which later became the flying column. I had to leave with the others and went to the Castlegregory Battalion area, where I joined up with Tadhg Brosnan, O/C. of the battalion, which was known as the 4th Battalion.

December 8th, being a holy day, I, with Michael McMahon, Mick Moriarty, Michael Duhig, Dan Rohan and Tadhg Brosnan, attended Mass in Castlegregory Church. Some time after Mass was over, while in a publichouse in the village, I heard the church bell ringing. This was a signal that the Tans were coming and had been in operation for some time, although I was not aware of it at the time. I, with other members of the 4th Battalion, dashed out of the pub and made for the dump where we had left our arms which we collected.

A fortnight previously the Tans had come to Castlegregory and burned down portion of T. Brosnan's house at the same time firing shots all around. Brosnan, in anticipation of another visit by the Tans, had prepared a plan of attack in the village and had laid some land mines opposite Castlegregory railway station in the centre of the road. These land mines were found in Clahane,

Castlegregory R.I.C. Barracks after its evacuation by the Tans in about February 1920.

As was now the custom, all of the men in the village left when the church bell rang. Three lorry loads of Tans arrived and immediately opened fire in the street, firing at least 5,000 rounds. They had heard the ringing of the bell and were now aware of what it meant. During the firing one young boy was wounded. The odds against <sup>us</sup> were too great to attempt an attack and after about an hour the Tans left for Dingle <sup>from</sup> whence they had come.

I remained billeted around Castlegregory area for a couple of weeks after the above incident when Cahill sent me to Tralee to assist men of the Tralee Battalion in a proposed attack on a Tan guard which had been placed on a Judge of the Quarter Sessions. The judge was staying at the residence of a man named Quinlan, of Kerrys, Tralee. Quinlan was secretary of Kerry  
// Co. Council. An armed guard of four Tans was placed on Quinlan's residence and the Tralee men were anxious to carry out an attack on the guard. Through a misunderstanding there was nobody to meet me at Ballyricard, Spa Road, on the night appointed. It appears the local I.R.A. had called off the attack which was to have taken place on the same night - Monday - that I arrived at Ballyricard. I returned to the Castlegregory district next day.

In February 1921, a man named Byrne from G.H.Q., Dublin, visited the area for the purpose of forming a flying column. The column had, in fact, been formed by Cahill some months earlier, but it appears Byrne wanted to meet the officers and men of the brigade staff and to put the column on an official footing. The meeting took place at Upper Camp. Each battalion in the brigade was represented. The North Kerry, or No. 1, Brigade consisted of seven battalions; they were Castlegregory, Dingle, Tralee, Lixnaw, Listowel, Ardfert and

Killorglin. I attended this meeting as a member of the brigade staff. The strength of the entire brigade at this time was around 7,000 men.

About this time I, with a number of other members of the I.R.A. including Dan Jeffers, who was company captain of B/Company, Tralee, were billeted in the homes of Hugh Daly and people by the name of Fitzgerald at Brandon. Jeffers was suffering from pneumonia. An armed guard had been placed on the two houses by the battalion O/C., T. Brosnan.

The Brigade I.O., T. Kennedy, had obtained information from one of the sergeants of the R.I.C. that the Tans were about to raid ~~the~~ Daly's house and that they were aware that Jeffers and several I.R.A. were located there. Kennedy conveyed the information to Sean Brosnan, company captain of Castlegregory, who was a brother of T. Brosnan. Sean passed the information on to Brandon by one of the men of his company - Thomas Duhig - who travelled the 14 miles between Castlegregory and Brandon on horseback. A man by the name of Brendan Brick was on guard that night when he gave the alarm that the Tans were coming. We immediately retreated to Brandon Point and had <sup>left</sup> only/Daly's and Fitzgerald's about an hour when the two houses were surrounded by the Tans. Having surrounded the two houses and, aware that their intelligence was correct, they called on the occupants to surrender, having in the meantime fired several shots in the air. Eventually they raided the two houses, as well as a number of other houses in the area, and subjected the families to brutal illtreatment in their disappointment at finding that we had escaped.

Some time at the end of January 1921, the Battalion O/C., Tadhg Brosnan, got a local girl to write to the District Inspector, R.I.C. Dingle, to inform him that a Sinn Féin Court was about to be held at Ballyduff Schoolhouse and that

she was summoned to appear on a certain charge which was, of course, just fictitious. The object of the letter was to draw the Tans to Ballyduff on a certain day, where an ambush had been prepared. The Tans fell for the letter and turned out on the appointed day, which was 20th February 1921. In the meantime, Brosnan had mobilised the battalion which had taken up positions when the Tans arrived. The strength of the attacking party was about 50 men, six of whom had rifles while the remainder had shotguns. The position chosen was on high ground one side of the road at a place called Coum Caoc (the crooked bend) on Connor Pass which was about one mile from the schoolhouse at Ballyduff.

The Tans were conveyed from Dingle by lorry. The lorry pulled up at the peak of the pass about half a mile from the ambush position, that is, about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles from the schoolhouse. The Tans dismounted, taking with them a number of bikes off the lorry. Having mounted the bikes they proceeded to cycle into the ambush position. The lorry with machine gun mounted remained at the top of the pass in charge of about three Tans. I, with three or four men, was located about 30 yards from the roadside. My instructions from Brosnan, who was in charge, was to open fire on the patrol in the first instance as it passed my position. When I looked out I saw two Tans pushing their bikes about 200 yards behind the main cycle patrol. At the same time I observed the machine gun mounted on the lorry directly above me.

When the cycle patrol reached a bridge alongside our position, they dismounted and awaited their two comrades whose bikes were obviously out of order. My reason for not opening fire was that I anticipated that the full patrol, once they reached the schoolhouse, would have to return again when we would be able to ambush them in a more compact body. Apart from this, the lorry on the brow of the pass was



overlooking our positions and could easily have wiped us out with machine gunfire as we were located on lower ground, though not in full view. As it was, the machine gun did open fire, but not at anyone or anything in particular.

After being joined by their two comrades, the patrol proceeded to the schoolhouse which they raided, as well as the house and forge of an I.R.A. man named Sean Brosnan. Having done so they proceeded to Castlegregory, about eight miles from the schoolhouse, where they went to the railway station with the object of procuring a train back to Dingle. As it happened, the train which they meant to catch had already left. After their visit to the station they spent five or six hours around Castlegregory. In the meantime, our scouts were active and kept us informed of the position. As the patrol was raiding the schoolhouse the lorry, with machine gun, reversed and returned to Dingle.

At last our scouts informed us that the patrol were about to leave Castlegregory and were about to return to Dingle the same way as they had come.

It was now very dark as the patrol appeared, coming towards the ambush position pushing their bikes. As they approached all I could see was the glow of cigarettes which they were smoking. This being my only target, I, as instructed, gave the order 'open fire'. I and the men with me opened fire to which the Tans replied. Immediately firing became general. After about quarter of an hour the Tans broke off the engagement. We advanced to the pass and there we collected 9 rifles and 9 bikes abandoned by the enemy, after which we returned to our billets taking our captured bikes and rifles with us.

In the course of the shooting that night I happened to say to a man named Kelly from Tralee, who was beside me: "Kelly, go down nearer the road" which it appears the Tans

overheard, for, that same night after arriving back in Dingle, they burned down the house of a Dingle Volunteer named Kelly under the impression that he was the Kelly involved. I subsequently heard that the Tans, later that night, commandeered some local farmers to guide them back to Dingle.

On the following Sunday, <sup>2</sup>2nd February 1921, we mobilised again at Ballyduff, thinking there would be reprisals. The Tans did not show up that day at Ballyduff, but 11 lorry loads of them arrived at Ohalasla, about 10 miles from the scene of the ambush where they shot dead a civilian by the name of Cronin.

On Tuesday morning following we got word that 40 Tans had gone by train from Tralee to Dingle. Brosnan decided to ambush the train on its way back that evening at a point near the railway station of Camp, Castlegregory. In the meantime he sent word to the Brigade O/C., Paddy Cahill, asking at the same time for men to assist in the attack. Cahill had by this time a headquarters established at Keel which was known as the 'Hut'. The 'Hut' was a large wooden building built into the mountainside behind a formation of rocks. It overlooked Dingle Peninsula and Castlemaine Bay. The column or any men on the run, as well as Cahill himself, could always be located at the 'Hut'.

Cahill sent 14 men. Reinforcements also arrived from Curraheen and Derrymore companies. Our total strength was 60 men all of whom were armed with rifles.

Having taken up positions near Camp railway station on one side of the railway embankment, we were awaiting the approach of the train. Brosnan received a wire that three nuns were travelling on the same train as the Tans. After the receipt of this information he decided to call off the ambush.

A short time afterwards I came to Ballygarron, Spa, to the house of a man named Rail. There I was informed that a

woman named Mrs. Walpole was found that morning shot dead on the side of the road with a label on her chest which read 'shot as a spy'. I knew this could not be correct as I had stayed at her house several times since I first went on the run. I investigated the matter and discovered that the shooting was the result of a family row.

On Sunday morning, 20th March 1921, members of the flying column from Castlegregory, Dingle and Killorglin Battalions took up positions at Lispole on either side of the road with the intention of ambushing three lorry loads of Tans which usually travelled or patrolled the road from Dingle to Annascaul and back. I was located about 50 yards off the road in charge of 7 men beside a railway siding which was situated several feet below the level of the road. Seven other men in charge of Michael Duhig were located in a cottage on the same side of the road. The cottage was alongside the road, but more on the Annascaul or Tralee side. On the opposite side, about 20 yards off the road and almost opposite the cottage, but on ground which was a lot higher than the road, 10 men in charge of Dan Mulvihill or James Cronin - I am not sure which - occupied an old schoolhouse with a good view of any approaching enemy. Behind the schoolhouse, on still higher ground, ran a boreen which was almost parallel to the road but not quite, in which 30 men in extended formation were located behind a raised bank of earth. This boreen afforded an excellent view of approaching traffic as well as the schoolhouse. At the side of the schoolhouse a punt gun in charge of Patrick Kennedy, Annascaul Company, had been mounted and was directed on to the road.

We remained in position all that day until about 5 p.m. when we retired for the night. On the following day, which was Monday, we again occupied similar positions as on the

previous day and again retired that night at about the same time without seeing any sign of the awaited patrol.

On Tuesday, 22nd March 1921, at 10 a.m. we again took up our positions. Shortly after doing so, one of our men came out of the old schoolhouse and tripped over a length of cord attached to the punt gun outside with the result that the punt gun went off with a bang. About an hour later another of our men, located in the boreen, accidentally discharged a rifle wounding a man beside him, named Fitzgerald. The man in charge of this section sent seven of his men to carry the wounded man away to his home which was situated a few miles behind the height on which they were located.

At 2 p.m. we got a signal that the Tans were coming. We were waiting for the lorries to come through in the ordinary way; instead, the three lorries pulled up at the new schoolhouse about one mile from the ambush position where about 10 Tans got out and proceeded up the hill at the back of the positions held by our men in the boreen and the schoolhouse. Having got above those positions, the Tans opened fire on the seven men who had taken the wounded Fitzgerald to his home and were just then returning to their positions. These seven men were unarmed at the time. As the 10 Tans made for the high ground above the boreen, another group of about 7 Tans with a machine gun crossed into a field on the low ground behind my position, while, at the same time, the main body of Tans advanced on foot to within 100 yards of the ambush position. The encircling movement of the Tans was so swift that it caused some confusion. As the 10 Tans on the height opened fire on our 7 unarmed men, the Tans in the field behind me and the main body of Tans on the road opened fire with the machine gun and rifles on the old schoolhouse. The machine gun in the field was firing over our heads, the fire from this section of Tans, as well as the

fire from the main body was concentrated on the old schoolhouse only.

As our men in the old schoolhouse and the boreen had not by this time replied to the fire of the 10 Tans above them or to the section of Tans behind me, or to the section on the road, I assumed that they had evacuated their positions and that they were about to surround or get behind the 10 Tans above them. I ordered my men to retreat and, if possible to get at the back of the machine gun crew and Tans behind us. In this manoeuvre I was successful.

Having got behind the Tans to the back of us I then discovered that our men in the schoolhouse and the boreen were still in their original positions and that the latter section were now engaging the 10 Tans who had come in above them and had them almost surrounded. These 10 Tans had, by this time, captured four of our men located in the boreen. In the meantime, the machine gun crew and Tans with them continued to concentrate on the schoolhouse, but once our men opened fire in the boreen they left their positions in the low ground and returned to the road.

Shortly after the start of the battle two of the lorries returned to Dingle for reinforcements and brought back with them about 20 Marines. The fight had been in progress for about two hours when the Marines arrived. As they arrived the 10 Tans who had captured the prisoners made for the road which they succeeded in reaching, leaving behind the four prisoners. By now, our men in the boreen and schoolhouse had effected a retreat. The entire body of Tans and Marines decided at the same time to break off the engagement and, mounting the lorries, they returned to Dingle.

I sent word to Cahill that the Tans were on their way back to Dingle and suggested to him that we should follow them back to Dingle. He replied that as he had a number of

wounded men we could not do so. The wounded men were:-  
 Thomas Ashe, Thomas <sup>W</sup>Haley and James Daly. Thomas Ashe died  
 the following day and Thomas <sup>W</sup>Haley six weeks later.

About a fortnight prior to 26th April 1921, Cahill detailed a Fianna'boy named O'Connor to go to Glenbeigh to observe the movements of the enemy in that area. Cahill was aware that a party of military, which was known as a ration party, usually travelled from Glenbeigh to Tralee. The train, after leaving Carriveen, picked up the military at Glenbeigh where they were stationed in a building some short distance from the railway station and which overlooked the station. O'Connor returned to Cahill with full details of the procedure of the military when about to board the train.

The party usually numbered 15 armed with rifles and a machine gun and arrived at the station some time before the train was due. When they got there they always stacked their rifles against a low wall while waiting to board the train at 8 a.m. Having got this information, Cahill decided to capture the arms.

At this time I, with Cahill and 20 other men, were in our headquarters at the 'Hut' at Keel. At 1 a.m. on 26th April 1921, we started for Glenbeigh railway station. When we reached Inch Strand we procured two boats and rowed across the bay to Crumaun strand on the other side and from there proceeded to Glencar bridge where we were met by Dan Mulvihill <sup>and Tom O'Connor</sup> with about 40 men. Glencar bridge was approx. two miles from our objective. We got on to the railway line and made along the line to Glenbeigh station where we arrived at 7 a.m., one hour before the train was due. We had travelled a distance of approximately 20 miles, six of which was along the strand. Twenty of the men were armed with rifles; the remainder had shotguns;

Cahill was in charge. He posted about 7 men in the waiting room; about 20 in two or three railway wagons standing in a siding and about 15 behind an embankment alongside the station. A further 10 or 11 men were placed on outpost duty further back from the station. I was then ordered by Cahill to take seven men and occupy the signal cabin. Having done so, I returned to Cahill and told him that there was no room for seven men in the cabin and that it would be dangerous to have so many men in such a wooden structure. Cahill agreed and told me to leave one man in the cabin and to take the other six men to a position near the stationmaster's house. As I was doing so, a dog at the stationmaster's house started to bark and, looking round, I saw the military approach they could not, however, see me. I had no time to take up the position indicated by Cahill, but instead, I and the six men crossed the railway line and took up a position behind an embankment which ran parallel to the tracks. This embankment was in line with the embankment occupied by the fifteen men earlier. We were, however, separated from the 15 men by a main road on which railway gates were situated.

In the meantime, a number of railway passengers including some women arrived at the station and proceeded to the waiting room where our 7 men were located. One of these women, seeing the armed men in the waiting room, became hysterical and started to scream. Our men tried to restrain her, but she broke away and ran out on the platform followed by one of the men - Jeremiah O'Connor - armed with a rifle. He wanted to take her back for her own safety. As he grabbed at the woman, the military, who were all whistling a tune of some sort, were entering the station. The military, seeing the armed man, stopped dead in their tracks. Cahill, who was with the 15 men behind the embankment, seeing the situation, immediately opened fire; at the same time the men in the wagons opened fire.

The military, without firing a shot, dropped the machine gun and a number of rifles and ran for cover behind a nearby low wall on the opposite side of the station. From behind the low wall they retreated uphill towards their barracks, taking with them three of their men who had been wounded. Having gone a distance of about 300 yards they returned our fire with what rifles they now possessed which numbered about four. We continued to fire until they had reached the barracks.

As the military left the station our men in the waiting room emerged and collected the abandoned arms which consisted of one machine gun, two pans of ammunition and 10 rifles fully loaded.

As I and a number of the men engaged in the operation were retreating, the train arrived at the station and later passed us as we were proceeding through a field adjacent to the railway line.

When we arrived at Glencar bridge on our way from the scene of the attack, horses and carts were provided by people in the locality which took Cahill and me, as well as the rest of his men to Crumaun Strand, where we got into two boats and returned across the Bay to Inch Strand and eventually to the 'Hut' at Keel.

Among the men in this operation were Tadhg Brosnan, Michael Euhag, Michael McMahon, Eugene Hogan, Mike O'Leary, Tom O'Connor (known as 'Nuts'), Sean Moran, William Mullins, Jerry Miles, Jeremiah Connor, Dan Jeffers, Tom O'Connor, Battalion Commandant of the area (Killorglin), and Dan Mulvihill, Battalion Adjutant (Killorglin). This operation took place on 26th April 1921.

About the end of May 1921, Cahill at the 'Hut' received a report that a cycle patrol of Tans had passed through Castlemaine on their way to Tralee from Killorglin. There were no Tans or military located in Castlemaine at this time.



The battalion staff of Killorglin were very anxious to ambush this patrol of Tans and had asked Cahill for his opinion in the matter. Cahill sent me to meet the battalion staff - Tom Connor, Dan Mulvihill, Jack Flynn and James Cronin. Cahill thought that the object of the patrol might be a plan to trap the I.R.A. and told me to advise the men to call off the attack for this particular day and to wait and see if they would travel again at a later date. To this suggestion the men agreed.

A week later on 1st June 1921, Cahill was informed again by the battalion staff, Killorglin, that the Tans had travelled once again to Tralee. We met the Killorglin men near Milltown on the Killorglin side of Castlemaine, and arranged our positions. Killorglin Battalion had 30 men on the job, which made a total of 44 men. Twenty of the men were armed with rifles, while the remainder had shotguns.

We took up positions in extended formation of 400 yards on one side of the road. We were in our positions for approximately two hours when we were informed by our scouts that the Tans had arrived back in the village of Castlemaine where they spent half an hour in a publichouse. After leaving the publichouse the Tans mounted their bikes and, led by a District Inspector and Sergeant, cycled into the ambush position. As they approached I observed a man driving a horse and cart some 100 yards in front of the patrol. I beckoned to him to move on. He lashed up his horse and drove off furiously. As he did so, I saw the District Inspector and Sergeant standing on the pedals of their bikes trying to get a view of the road in front over the horse and cart. By this time the Tans behind the D.I. and sergeant had closed up in close formation and were not extended as we had expected.

Tom Connor, battalion commandant, who was in charge, had issued instructions for me and the men beside me to open fire in the first place as soon as the patrol arrived at the point where I was located behind the ditch.

When the patrol was directly opposite my position, I and the men alongside me fired the first volley as arranged, after which the other men in the attack opened fire. The shooting was swift and all over in a few minutes. The Tans did not reply to the fire. The patrol had consisted of nine men; seven of these were shot dead, while two escaped. We crossed the ditch to the road and collected seven rifles and a revolver, the property of the D.I.

We searched the D.I. and sergeant and found on the D.I. several dispatches and maps including one of the Dingle Peninsula together with a reference to a proposed large scale round-up of the Peninsula itself. On the sergeant we found £100 in notes - presumably the pay of the patrol which he had drawn in Tralee. In his haversack we found a document which contained a reference to the capture of Sean Moylan and the capture of Moylan of a cheque for about £140 of I.R.A. funds. We left the dead men on the roadside. I and the 14 men who had assisted in the attack returned to the 'Hut' at Keel. One of our men - Jerry Miles - was accidentally wounded during the attack. The £100 found on the sergeant was used to buy food and clothing for the column. I subsequently heard that the patrol were informed of our presence in the vicinity while they were in the pub in the village. The D.I., it appears, treated the information with contempt as he was heard to say that he was not afraid of 'Shinners'.

A week or ten days before the Castlemaine ambush, Paddy Cahill had been suspended by order of G.H.Q. Dublin. We, however, did not agree with his dismissal and continued to regard him as Brigade O/C.

A brigade meeting was held at Derrymore, around the end of May 1921. The meeting was attended by Commandant Price of G.H.Q. and Liam Lynch, O/C. 1st Southern Division. It was at this meeting that Cahill was suspended on the grounds of

inactivity. I was not at this meeting as Cahill had sent me to Castlegregory at the time in connection with a proposed attack on a Tan patrol there. A man named Andy Cooney became acting brigade O/C. after Cahill's suspension.

A fortnight before the truce we received word of a large scale round-up of the Dingle Peninsula by the enemy. The 'Hut' had been closed on the orders of G.H.Q. at the time of Cahill's suspension. Cahill advised me and a number of other men to go to the Castlegregory district. We took refuge in some large caves in the mountainside and waited for the round-up to pass over. The round-up did not take place.

During the truce I attended training camps at Derrymore, Barro and Tubrid.

Signed: Patrick P. Fitzgerald  
(Patrick P. Fitzgerald)

Date: 9 Feb 1955

Witness: John J. Daly (John J. Daly)

Investigator

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